Mistakes and Second Chances

by lisbeth00

Summary

I took a flying leap through the Veil of Death. Gonna' be honest, not the smartest thing I've ever done. It doesn't help that Death seems to be a bit of a prick... and what's this about me being sent back in time?

Notes

Re-uploaded from FFN.
A/N: Just a little disclaimer I'd like to put up here.

The first dozen or so chapters of this story aren't the greatest by any means. I started writing this when I had just first begun reading fanfiction, and the only reference I had to draw on at the time was the most popular stories I had read. Those mainly being Robst's work and Methods of Rationality.

So, due to this, the story uses some annoying cliches through those chapters, cliches that I've done my best to subvert. If I couldn't subvert them, I made them as believable as possible via backstory and characterization.

This story really grows into its own by chapter 14, but this disclaimer is primarily for having written and poorly handled the topic of sexual assault in the 11th chapter. If I wasn't horribly busy with school I would go back and rewrite it all, but unfortunately I don't have the time to.

Happy reading
- lisbeth00

"As Sirius Black fell into the veil, the only sign that he recognized his demise was a fleeting smile… an apology he couldn't quite voice. It was utterly and completely blank. No shock. No fear. Not even a hint of anger. Just a simple request for forgiveness. Unfortunately, cortisol and other hormones make people do things they wouldn't otherwise do, like taking a bullet for a stranger. They may do something even more foolhardy than that, for example, jumping into a magical portal purported to be a window to the land of the dead in some hare-brained attempt to save someone who was, and is, very much dead. Well, here you are Potter. You're in my world, my domain, much earlier than you're supposed to be. What have you got to say for yourself?"

I look up at Death, at least that's who I'm assuming it is. A tall, horrendously lanky and frightfully imposing man who seems to be poured into a skin tight black three-piece suit, complete with a silver tie pin in the shape of a scythe, and a small brass sundial adorning his left wrist. He runs his terribly long, almost skeletal fingers through black hair that shines like oil, slicked back in a way that's slightly reminiscent of Draco's regular quiff. His skin is wrapped tight to the bones of his face, with sallow cheeks forming a gaunt, yet handsome demeanor.

The truly, truly eerie part about him is the eyes. Pitch black. Darker than any night, blacker than black, greedily swallowing up the light around them. I don't even know if the word him, he, or even it can define Death. Them? Who? I guess I'll have the rest of eternity to figure it out, along with wondering why in the hell I'm being lectured by him.
People die all the time! Really! I certainly didn't expect Death to be this verbose. You'd expect him to understand that occasionally shit happens, and people may once in a while have a freak accident involving portals to the underworld. Honestly, he is an immortal being. I imagine he's seen every manner of death one can think of.

Looking around a bit, I take in my surroundings, trying to get a cursory glance of what the afterlife is like. I shake my head in confusion at what I see, wondering why the afterlife is represented by Platform 9 & ¾ for some godforsaken reason, complete with the Hogwarts express shining in all of its garish glory. It's a bit different than the light at the end of the tunnel I've been told to expect, although I guess it's a little hard for someone to really come back and give you a proper story about the afterlife, what with necromancy being a relatively volatile field of work.

A voice cuts through again, strained and rattling in his throat like he hasn't spoken in many years. “Potter, I know I have eternity to get a reply out of you, but I'd prefer not to wait that long, are you done with your musings?”

Oh yeah, Death. "I'm sorry, er… Death, sir. What was the question again?" I ask, looking down at the ethereal cobblestone trying not to brood, considering there's not exactly anything left for me to brood over.

“What have you got to say for yourself? Why are you here?”

“I fell through the veil?” I say, shrugging tiredly, although I don't know why I can shrug tiredly when I'm dead. Adjectives involving one’s state of body and mind don’t seem like they should apply here. “I fucked up, alright? I panicked when I saw Sirius die, and before I realized what I was doing I had run in after him.”

Death cocks his head to the side, studying me. “Yes, you did fuck up as you so eloquently put it.”

I put my hand over my mouth, holding back the anger building inside of me. It wouldn’t do me well to tell Death to stick it where the sun doesn’t shine. “So, do I get to see my parents finally? Dying may be a bit of an improvement over life,” I state morosely. He shakes his head at that.

What? Why did he shake his head? What does that mean? Was he just shaking his head for the sake of it? Was it because of what I said? Do I not get to see my parents?

Well… fuck, does that mean I'm going to hell? Did my parents and Sirius go to hell!? "No, nothing as serious or as simple as that Mr. Potter” he states, frowning at me. How did he- oh, of course Death can read minds. Of course he’s been listening in on me mentally rattle on about him. “Why how kind of you to notice Mr. Potter, it certainly makes my job quite a bit easier. Now let's ignore my omniscience for the moment and focus on the problem at hand.” He pauses, quirking one eyebrow at me. “Trust me, I’ve heard much worse over the years. That you believe I would be offended by your thoughts is quite amusing to me.”

With a quick gesture from him, a table and chairs appear between the two of us, made of what looks to be ebony, plain, smooth as marble, and completely unmarred by any knots or contortions in the grain. He waves his hand at the chairs, so I take a seat. May as well get this judgement business over with.

Hands steepled in front of him, elbows on the table Death stares at me with those creepy, creepy eyes. At least, I think he's staring at me, it's really hard to tell without pupils. This is certainly more imposing than St. Peter at the Pearly Gates. Death rolls his eyes, I think… still not so sure. Okay he's raised one eyebrow, he's definitely rolling his eyes now.
With a snap he conjures up a large and ancient leather tome, licking one finger and leafing through it like one of my primary teachers once did, running his finger along the pages and muttering all the while. "Potten, Potteo... ah! Potter! There you are," Death announces, pausing as he looks at the book. He pulls it up to his face, sticking his nose deep into the pages, squinting his eyes so tight they nearly close. He suddenly drops the book, sending it crashing to the table, frustration in his features. "Book says I'm not supposed to get you for another hundred odd years or so, why'd you have to go and muck that up? You know I'll have to rectify this, right?"

Muck it up? I'm supposed to live over a hundred? I guess that's not so unusual for the wizarding world Dumbledore looks to be pushing one hundred and thirty, give or take a couple decades. Hey! Wait a tic! "Rectify? I'm sorry I don't really get what you mean by rectify?"

Death rolls his eyes again before leaning forward, the book disappearing as he holds his hands out in front of him. "Yes Potter, rectify, fix, glue it all back together. Ah! No interruptions!" he cries as I open my mouth, his finger raised pointedly in the air. "By rectify I mean to right this wrong of you stepping through my doors many, many decades too early. There's rules in place for these things! You can't just go dying before you're supposed to."

He runs his fingers through his hair in exasperation. “This will be a touch complicated as I've only had to do this a couple times before. Who was the first... what was his name? Jehovah? No... Jesus, yes, that Jesus fellow, and that was quite a while ago, and people made a very, very big deal of it. I'm sure you've read or at least heard of his book,” Death adds, waving his hands lazily. Yeah, Jesus. Not a big deal. “Thankfully being all powerful makes this job a lot less stressful,” he notes, studying his knuckles, as if bringing someone back into the world of the living is just a regular Tuesday sort of gig.

“Now of course, I'm going to have to pull some strings, since you won't be able to jump back into your world exactly where you left off, rules and such you know,” he explains, waving his hands once more, punctuating his every word with a quick chop. “What do you think about a week before your eleventh birthday? Not as you were when you died though!” He emphasizes this, raising finger now even higher in the air than before, as if to stress the importance of his statement via the height of his finger pointing. "That would raise too many questions and I don't enjoy people prying into my world before their time is due, like I said, that whole fiasco with Mr. Christ made my life very difficult for the next few centuries. So many wars, so much reaping, so little time," he muses aloud. He shrugs laboriously. "Physically, you will be ten, but with a little bit of elbow grease on my part I believe we can work something out."

"Huh," I add. Shakespearean, I know, but what the hell should I say when I win a Darwin award and Death itself decided to send me back because of red tape. Not to mention the fact that I learned that Jesus, even if I never read the damn book, had to deal with the same thing. Not that often one gets to be compared with someone of that calibre.

"I mean, yeah that sounds like a great idea. But what about my friends, what about Sirius, the prophecy? What's going to happen to them, or Voldemort? Will it have never happened?" I challenge, curious but also a little bit terrified at the prospect of potentially being dead in another reality and simply transplanting myself into another. What would happen to everyone in my original universe? I’ve read enough sci-fi novellas to know that this is probably a terrible idea.

"Something similar, Potter, the timeline will cease to exist... at least in a way of sorts. It's not something you can wrap your head around while you're only mostly dead, you must be all dead to understand what I am about to do," he grins, before looking at the sundial on his wrist, tapping it with the same slender finger that was just reaching for the heavens.
“The Princess Bride? Really?”

"It’s a fantastic film,” Death shrugs, before looking pointedly at his sundial, smiling dangerously. “The most important part is that you do not need to worry about all of this, as I am about to send you back right about… now."

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I shoot up out of bed, smacking my head and cursing loudly, "Fuck me running that stings!" I gasp, clutching at my forehead and massaging at the ache that's now steadily growing. What a god-awful dream that was! Even for me with my lovely ‘visions’ of Voldemort, up to whatever gets his jollies off. Torture, murder... you know, the usual. But a dream about Death? Sirius falling through the veil? I must be losing it.

Suddenly, light is everywhere, stinging my eyes as a massive meaty hand grabs my ankle and drags me out of bed. "What did I just hear you saying you ruddy freak!?" Oh. Wow. I am losing it.

"Huh? Vernon? It's not the summer… what am I even doing here? Why am I in the cupboard, and how did I even fit in that cupboard? Did you renovate?" I cough, rubbing my eyes and looking up at Vernon… Christ! Did he grow three feet since I last saw him? What the hell is going on?

"I don't know what kind of freakishness you're talking about boy, but I won't have it in my house! Especially the cursing! I don't want my Dudley catching your sick!" He smacks me in the back of the head, trundling off to the kitchen table and falling into his seat, the wood squealing in protest as all twenty stone of him comes crashing down onto it (give or take a few stone for the cats and dogs in the neighbourhood he may have snacked on earlier in the week). Across from him, Petunia turns to see the commotion I’ve apparently caused, sniffing loudly and sending a glare down the hallway, an unspoken threat in her eyes. Dazed by Vernon’s strike, I pull myself up onto my feet and look around, everything in the house looking much, much larger than it's supposed to.

I squint curiously at the living room, the TV blaring loudly and Dudley bouncing excitedly in his seat childishly. Didn't I break that chair break two years ago? I could swear that I did... and Dudley? Why is he wearing that stupid little outfit? It looks remarkably similar to the one he wore before my eleventh birthday.

Oh… woah.

I pinch my cheek, hissing at the slight sting it brings. I pinch it again, puffing my cheeks out as the situation I’ve landed myself in becomes much more pressing. I really did go back in time, either that or the Dursley's started taking HGH and decided to get a little nostalgic.

Going with the flow, or as much as you can go with the flow when Death has just torn time and space in twain because of a bureaucratic error. Really? Due in about a hundred years? I mean, I'm not about to complain but that is shoddy reasoning at best. Anyways, I stroll into the kitchen and get cracking on breakfast, I can worry about my situation while cooking. Turning on the stove I start hashing things over, running through the checklist.

One, I've gone back in time. Wow.

Two, Sirius is alive. Good.

Three, Voldemort hasn't been revived yet in this timeline. That means that I need to get a head start on training and studying. I could barely hold my own against Lucius and the other Death Eaters in the battle at the ministry, and I'm pretty sure they're a piss in the rain compared to Voldemort in terms
of knowledge, let alone raw power.

I'm weak. Sirius died because of my inability. He died because I allowed my self to be tricked, to be manipulated, and I won't let anyone else die again. Especially Sirius… I can't let him die again, otherwise I may be forced to go to Death for another chat, and I doubt a third mulligan will be on the table that time around. This time though, I won't make the same mistakes, I won't be the weak Harry Potter, the doormat, the archetypal Gryffindor. I can't afford to be that Harry Potter, too many people may die. Apparently, it's up to me to pick up the slack that the ministry and, regretfully, Dumbledore have left for me. Be that through incompetence, a severe lack of effort, or by completely ignoring their responsibilities, those in a position of power in this world have left people to suffer, especially me.

Seriously! The ministry ignoring the return of Voldemort, Dumbledore allowing me to be tortured by Umbridge, like he didn’t know that she was carving my hand open every damned night. Hell! Dumbledore is apparently the only man that Voldemort fears! Why was he spending his time stopping people from sending me mail instead of hunting Death Eaters!? Looks like I have a lot to mull over and plan if I'm going to get things to go more smoothly in this timeline. It makes me feel a little unsettled to go against Dumbledore in such a way, even though he has the best of intentions and has never really done me wrong. I just feel that he falls short a lot of the time, juggling so many important things at once.

After handing plates of sausage, eggs and toast to the Dursleys, I take my own meagre portion with me to the cupboard, or at least what the Dursleys believe to be a meagre portion, considering I've stuffed a couple extra sausages in my pockets. These pockets have been through worse from what I've seen of Dudley's snack hoarding habits, don't judge me for just following tradition.

After finishing my breakfast, washing up the dishes, and serving tea and biscuits to Vernon and Petunia, who seem to be particularly confused about me today, as I'm behaving like a three-star maître d' and not the scared, abused orphan they've spent so much time horribly mistreating, I hear a rattling from the front door.

Suddenly it clicks. Dudley’s outfit, he wore that in late July, bragging about how he was going to beat the hell out of me with his Smelting’s stick. Damn, it's not just late July, it’s the 24th! The day I get my letter to Hogwarts! I almost bounce on my heels in excitement, being able to relive such a monumental part of my life. Well let's just make sure this goes better than the disaster that occurred last time round. I’d prefer not to visit that awful shack in the middle of the sea. Seriously, who the hell built that thing? It’s like a little ramshackle Azkaban, sans-dementors.

"Boy! Get the mail!" Vernon grunts as he munches on his eighth digestive.

"Yes Sir!" I shout, confusing Vernon and making my way over to collect the mail, the pudgy man staring daggers into my back. If I’m going to have to relive my life, I’m going to have fun doing it. Why not start that by messing with the minds of my doting relatives? I don't recall signing a contract with Death stating to not invoke havoc. His mistake, not mine. Grabbing the mail, I tuck my Hogwarts letter into my back pocket, not worried about it being noticed due to the sheer size of the shirt, or what would be more aptly described as a small a tent that I'm wearing. Damn Dudley is a big kid, I should check and see if he's broken a world record some time. "Here you go sir, all of your mail. Mostly bills I'm afraid" I announce, snapping off an awkward salute before making my way back into the cupboard.

If I'm recalling correctly, Vernon and Petunia had plans today last time around and the Hogwarts letter put a stopper in those. I decide to wait in the cupboard until the horse and the elephant decide to leave with their small imitation of a planet in tow, that way I can get to Diagon Alley, get my school
supplies, and send off a letter without them knowing. I could probably rent a room at the Cauldron while I'm down there. There's no real point in coming back to this hell-hole if I can get Sirius out of Azkaban by the time the school year is out.

What should I do? How would I go about getting Sirius free so soon? I could maybe convince the twins to give me the map, grab the rat, march off to Dumbledore's office, maybe send off a letter or two to every magical newspaper in Britain to make sure that the Ministry can't pull one over on me. I really don't know what goes on in Fudge’s mind, and I’m sure that if I ever got a peek into it I would be forever changed. I’d rather not reduce myself to a gibbering mess similar to that embarrassing excuse for a man.

Well, I was supposed to be put into Slytherin according to the Sorting Hat. It's time to exercise my cunning a little more, flex my brain instead of running headfirst into danger every time it pokes its head out. A little less doing, a bit more thinking I should say. Looking back on things, I’m surprised I didn’t die earlier. Really, I didn’t plan anything at all, from homework to my ridiculous adventures, I always went in half-cocked.

I doze off momentarily, an hour or so going by before I hear the front door slam closed, and a few moments later the quiet puttering of the Dursleys car leaving the driveway, off to who knows where. Time to get cracking.

I make my way upstairs and grab a couple quid off Vernon and Petunia's dresser, enough to take the train to London and find my way over to the Leaky Cauldron. I stop as I start to leave the room, doubling back to snatch a few more notes, just to be safe of course. I head back downstairs and throw on my trainers and get ready to leave.

I pause again, remembering all the times that Vernon struck me, how he would catch me unawares, clipping me in the side of the head with the flat of his hand, laughing boisterously as my brain shook and my throat swelled in fear. How he found it absolutely hilarious to treat a child, an orphan no less, like a punching toy. Like an object.

I remember all the moments when Petunia belittled me, her nephew. How she spewed her vitriol, her screeches detailing my worthlessness, how unwanted and unloved I was, poisoning my mind and stirring up a self loathing that still rears its ugly head today.

Dudley? I don’t really hold anything against him, but unfortunately my idea for revenge against the pieces of shit that he calls parents will affect him. Hopefully this brings a bit of humility to their lives.

I mentally steel myself, running into the kitchen and grabbing a couple handfuls of loose paper, a box of matches, and some lighter fluid that was hidden away under the grill out back. I march back into the house, shredding and tossing the paper around the living room, moving on to scatter the impromptu kindling throughout the rest of the house. I douse it all liberally with the lighter fluid, the trail leading to the cupboard that was my prison for the better part of ten years.

I stand still, surveying my work. I strike the match, watching as the flame flickers playfully, unaware of the destruction it’s about to bring. With a jump in my heart, I toss the match on the carpet, admiring the trail of fire as it grows rapidly, racing into the living room, splitting off halfway and racing towards the stairs and kitchen. I turn around to leave, and as I stride out the front door the crackling and hissing behind me tells me that my work is done. I turn my head, taking a glance at the house as flames begin to lick at the windows, some beginning to crack from the swelling wood, the plastering on the side of the house splitting as its stretched over growing studs and joists. I smile morosely at the sight, saying the only thing that comes to mind.

"Good fucking riddance."
I decided to spread the love, and bring my story to AO3. I'll be posting a chapter every week, but if you'd like to read everything I've got so far, the rest of the story is available on FFN under the same name.
Hopping off the bus I march up to the Leaky Cauldron, taking care to make sure that my fringe covers my scar. I'd prefer not to be noticed by anyone quite yet and deal with the incessant badgering and hero-worship that often surfaces when I find myself in the wizarding public. I shudder, remembering how terrified I was when I was first brought to Diagon Alley by Hagrid, and how people just swarmed me. Bloody disrespectful.

Lacing my way through the crowded bar and popping out the back door, I'm lucky enough that someone is already heading into Diagon Alley in front of me. Convenient, as it saves the need to wait for someone to open the way for me. Tends to be a touch difficult to open a magic doorway without a wand. At least, I think you have to have a wand to open the pathway.

Speaking of which, I do need a wand. Hell, I probably need two knowing my tendency to lose it when things go south. The attacks at the world cup, the incident at the graveyard, even the fight at the ministry. All are life threatening situations in which a second wand could have made the ensuing fights much, much easier. Additionally, I'll be able to circumvent that whole brother wand deal with old Voldy when it inevitably comes around again. Maybe I could throw a curse at him with one wand while the Priori Incantatem is in effect? Is it even possible to use two wands at once? Regardless, I need money for my school supplies first.

Winding through the alley and slipping through the throngs of shoppers littering the path I finally find myself climbing the marble steps to Gringotts. I push open the door, groaning under the effort it takes to so much as make it budge. Damn these doors are bloody heavy! Either Goblins are surprisingly strong, or I am terribly, terribly weak. Well, I do have an eleven-year-old's body… I really have to start getting used to that.

Striding (or as close to striding as an eleven-year-old can) towards the nearest teller, I notice to my chagrin that my head is barely flush with the countertop of the teller’s desk. Ignoring my current vertical challenge, I greet the Goblin. “Hello! I was wondering if I could access my vault” I announce. The Goblin pokes his head out over the counter attempting to figure out where my voice is coming from, before noticing little old me. "Vault key?" he demands, sticking out a gnarled hand expectantly. Shite, I forgot about the key.

"I'm sorry, I don't have a key," I gasp, doing my best to look like I’m not trying to break into Gringotts. I know I’m physically a child, but I wouldn’t put it past the Goblins to not be suspicious of anything. Just pretend I have no idea what I’m doing, and hopefully nothing bad will happen.

The Goblin rolls his eyes, obviously frustrated that he has to deal with some clueless child. Looks like I’m not being hanged as a thief today or killed in whichever gruesome way Goblins deal with those who have wronged them. "Exactly who might you be, boy?" He growls, causing me to flinch. Damn do I hate that word.

"I'm Harry Potter," I reply, meeting his gaze with my own. The Goblin waves his hand, presumably ushering over a manager who struts up and inclines his head at me, immediately turning back towards the door he entered the lobby from without waiting for me to follow. I amble on behind him musing about how funny a change it is to be the same height as a Goblin. The manager leads me through a spacious corridor that winds throughout the bank, not uttering a word as he reaches a room
and beckons me inside.

The room itself is quite imposing; crown mouldings made up of gold and silver adorn the walls, intricate patterns and runes etched upon them, most likely showcasing the sheer extent of the warding that Gringotts is under. A large mahogany desk with a tall throne resting behind it is placed towards the back of the room, lavishly decorated with precious metals and gems on the rim and joints, rubies and opals shining from their settings forged of rich, polished gold. Evidently the Goblins enjoy going all out in letting the Wizarding nation know of their iron grip on the worlds gold.

The manager takes his place on the throne, pointing towards a much plainer seat across from him that I notice slightly resembles the one that Death offered me. The Goblins very much enjoy flaunting their wealth it seems. Snapping his fingers, a plain stone bowl appears on the table, with a simple silver potioneer's knife resting beside it.

"Now, in case you really are Mister Potter, as you say, there should be no difficulties in us procuring your vault key and aiding you in your business today," the Goblin promises, narrowing his eyes as he continues. "Be assured, that if you are not Mister Potter, I will be very, very displeased."

"I imagine you get that a lot?" I reply, wondering about how many people must have vied for my money, remembering Ron previously mentioning (very jealously, at that. Shame he was such a berk in fourth year) that my family was to be considered quite well off, along with the impressive stack of gold that greeted me the first time I visited Gringotts. The Goblin makes a strange, strangled hissing noise, while shaking his head. Wow is that what a Goblin laughing sounds like? Jeez, it's as if a snake got thrown into a wood chipper.

"You have no idea how often we have people come into the bank stating that they are Harry Potter. My personal favourite is a young man who tried to carve a lightning bolt into his forehead. He should have read Cinderella to learn that self mutilation does not pave the road to wealth," he smiles maliciously, sharp teeth gleaming. "Now, what I need you to do is quite simple." He pushes the knife and bowl towards me, which I now notice has a thick, pearlescent turquoise liquid in it, presumably a potion of some sort.

"You need to let a bit of your blood into the bowl; if it turns green then you are indeed Mister Potter, as you say. If it turns orange, then I will be forced to deduct a sum from you and your parents accounts for wasting my precious time. Be glad we do not execute thief’s anymore."

Gulping, I grab the knife and slice into my palm, the Goblin simply raising one eyebrow when I don't flinch away from the blade. I shrug mentally, after I received multiple doses of Voldemort’s cruciatus curse, its taken a lot of pain to phase me. Turning my hand over the bowl and squeezing it, I allow the blood now ebbing out of my hand to drip into the bowl, smiling slightly as it very quickly turns a vivid seafoam green. The Goblin, now sporting a very shark-like grin waves his hand over my palm, sealing the wound, and then produces a sheaf of parchment along with a very expensive looking fountain pen from his vest.

"I'm very glad that you've now decided to come to Gringotts Mister Potter, your family have always been important customers here and we were beginning to worry that you were disinterested in your family's assets." He clears his throat and waves his hand lackadaisically. "Before we continue, I'd like to formally introduce myself. My name is Rockseeker and I am the manager in charge of your family's account and investments here at Gringotts. Essentially, I am an accountant although I am more inclined towards being an investments specialist."

Well I didn't know about that last time. I've got a personal accountant? Why did Dumbledore keep this from me?
"I'm sorry Rockseeker, but I wasn't aware that I had someone in charge of my money apart from my guardians, in fact, I wasn't aware that I had multiple vaults. The only vault in my possession that I am aware of is Vault 687." At this Rockseeker's hands tighten into fists, knuckles white as he grimaces dangerously. He curses loudly, nearly slamming his fist on the table but quickly stopping himself before it connects, clenching and unclenching his hand repeatedly.

"I'm quite disappointed to find that you've not been told of your financial situation. Not disappointed in you of course," he clarifies, noticing as my shoulders tense at his outburst. "Your guardians should be keeping you informed of all of this information, regardless of your age, as the heir of an Ancient and Noble House you must be kept up to date on your financial happenings."

"Ancient and Noble House?" I ask tentatively. Rockseeker face drops, his eyebrows knotting in a mix of confusion and anger.

"You don't know?" He whispers, his voice strained, eyes lit up dangerously.

"I'm afraid I don't."

Rockseeker grabs the knife and drives it into the table, launching himself from his chair with a shout and turning to face the wall. This, of course, causes me to jump back and fall out of my seat, terrified that I'm about to get killed by a Goblin. I've heard stories of Goblin fury and it doesn't sound like the nicest way to go. I'm sure Death wouldn't find it amusing for me to last less than one day after being brought back to life. Pulling myself up from my knees I notice Rockseeker is now pacing the room, furious.

"Caragu ruks!" He cries, turning his eyes towards me. He pauses his pacing, closing his eyes and taking a few deep breaths, before speaking in a quiet and controlled manner. "Mister Potter I understand that your living situation is being kept confidential by the Ministry, but whoever you are living with, or whoever deigned to place you within that home is directly sabotaging you, and in effect, us, here at Gringotts." Rockseeker spins back to the throne, sitting in it once again and exhaling heavily through his nose.

I gulp, very shaken, yet pleased that I have not yet been gutted by an angry goblin. "Well, I live with muggles, my cousins specifically. If I recall correctly, Dumbledore was responsible for placing me with them, if that helps."

Rockseeker cradles his head in his hands, cursing harshly under his breath in Goblin. "That explains quite a bit Mister Potter, we at Gringotts have never seen eye to eye with Dumbledore," he deadpans, reining in his anger. "To explain matters quickly… in layman's terms you are nobility. Now, the Potter's aren't extraordinarily rich by any means, but they are quite wealthy and are considered to be one of the more important families politically. That is what I believe to be one of the primary reasons Voldemort was so interested in your family in the previous war… you know who Voldemort was, of course?" I nod as he rattles on, slightly mollified that I'm at least aware of Voldemort.

"Now, for some inexplicable reason Dumbledore deemed it acceptable to deny you all that your parents left for you, and from what I can tell by your state of dress and complexion," he observes, gesturing at Dudley's ratty second-hand clothing and my unmistakably malnourished body. "You have been mistreated… or are at the least not living to an acceptable standard, regardless of social status."

I nod again, internally rejoicing that someone, anyone finally had the bollocks to state out loud how horrendous things have been for me, while seething at the fact that it took a Goblin that I have never met before in my life, or any life at that to notice it. "So, what does this mean for me?" I question, excited at the prospect that I may actually get a real head start on changing things for the better in this
"What that means Mister Potter is I think we need to dust off some old documents and see what in Uruk's name went wrong."

Rockseeker snaps his fingers and a moment later a Goblin rushes in with two cups of tea. The two whisper back and forth before the attending Goblin runs off and returns with a piece of parchment, handing it to me. "This is the last will and testament of your parents, James and Lily Potter," Rockseeker intones, sipping on his tea and leaning his head forward, motioning for me to read.

Hands trembling, I set down my cup and study the sheet, eyes darting all over in an attempt to absorb all of the information laying in front of me, obsessively drinking up the sight of what appears to be my Mother’s handwriting; beautifully thin, tidy penmanship decorated with tight flourishes and serifs in a deep purple ink. Before I know it, I start to tear up at finally being able to see something that carries an essence of my parents, a truly tangible bit of proof that they lived and breathed, I wipe away the tears from my eyes, sniffing slightly as I focus on the will.

The will itself is quite simple, a generous amount of money made out to each of the Marauders, Pettigrew included, unfortunately, along with money being set aside for my tuition at Hogwarts, while everything else, be it property or money is left to me. Thankfully, nothing was set aside for Petunia. The most glaring part of the will is the guardians listed within, as well as a snippet of information that confuses me deeply.

In the event of our death, our daughter Helene Lily Potter shall be placed with the Longbottom family, namely Alice and Frank Longbottom. If they are unable to care for Helene, then she shall be placed with the Bones family, namely Genevieve and Philip Bones. Additionally, if both the Longbottom Bones families are unable to care for Helene, she shall be placed with the Greengrass family, namely Octavius and Terra Greengrass. We note that in no situation whatsoever should Helene be placed with my sister Petunia and her family.

I stop to dwell on the deeply confusing part. Does this sheet really say daughter? I read it over again, the wording not changing on my second pass. "What the fuck?" I murmur to myself, reading it yet again. Rubbing my eyes, I simply start at those five words: 'our daughter Helene Lily Potter.' After the umpteenth check I realize my eyes aren't playing tricks on me and peer up at Rockseeker, who is obviously concerned, eyebrows cocked and his clothing looking a little tousled as a small hurricane whips around the room.

I quickly realize that I've lost control of my magic and rein my emotions in, breathing deeply and attempting to stifle the tenseness in my chest. "So… I wasn't supposed to be placed in the house I'm currently in. My parents blatantly said so in the will.” I cough, trying to figure out how to phrase what I've just learned to Rockseeker. He inclines his head, an unspoken question written in his face. "I uh… I've just learned something that changes a lot about... well, everything. I'm not sure how to make sense of it." I take another deep breath, holding back the rushing thoughts and panic flooding through my mind.

Freak! Unnatural! Boy!

Is my hate of that word simply because of Vernon's attempts at classical conditioning or is it subconscious? Am I trying to tell myself something? Was I really born a girl? Unable to wrap my head around this revelation I slump back into my seat and stare blankly at the wall, lost in my thoughts. A sharp knocking brings me back to Earth, focusing my eyes on Rockseeker as he raps his fist across the tabletop.

"I've read the will Mister Potter. In fact, I was the notary. I do not understand why you've come to
me as Mister Potter today and I had assumed you being named the boy-who-lived was a result of the terrible standard of journalism in this country. That is not the name I met you under a decade ago, although I doubt you remember our encounter, you were quite young at the time," he states, clasping his hands together, leaning forward on his elbows. "Now, I will refer to you as Mister Potter unless you so wish to make a change regarding how you are referred to, but this brings to light the sheer extent to how much your life has been meddled with."

Mister Potter. Funnily enough, it sounds a bit… well, odd for me to hear that now. The words jarring and uncomfortable as they grace my ears, like they weren’t ever meant to be spoken when referring to me. I lick my lips nervously, wondering whether this changes anything. I mean, I’m still me, right? Even if I have a different body? I don’t know, but this is… it’s monumental. Whatever decision I make today, it’s going to change the rest of my life. Fuck, and all I wanted to do today was figure out what my finances were like.

"Would you like me to be blunt with you, Mister Potter?" He queries, eyes alight with suppressed fury. Resigned to the situation I nod for him to continue, shoulders still slumped dejectedly under the weight of all I’ve learned today, mind still swimming with confused thoughts about my identity. "I believe your magic has been locked away," he begins, nostrils flaring dangerously. "I have strong reason to believe it was Dumbledore who did this, considering his role in the placement of you with your relatives and not with one of the families your parents had chosen." Pausing at my confusion he elaborates. "To understand the lock on your magic, I have to explain how magic works at a raw level."

"You've heard the saying, 'the wand chooses the wizard,' correct?" I tilt my head in response, wondering where he’s going with this. "Well, each wizard or witches magic is specific to their own self. Every magical being in existence has their own magical signature that is unique to them, and them alone. Like a fingerprint, no one signature is alike. One cannot forcibly change someone’s magic or reliably lock it away without them withering away and dying as a result."

He pauses before continuing his explanation, his expression darkening considerably. "But, if one were to make the vessel incompatible with its magic," he pointedly motions towards me, my eyes widening in understanding. "That person’s magic will then be in conflict with themselves, making it difficult to draw on, use, and control. At the same time this would make it more difficult for them to function in general. It slows down their thoughts and makes it more difficult to think and respond to the world around them, simply because they’re having a hard time processing themselves, let alone the outside world.

I sink even further into my chair, running everything over in my mind and attempting to relate it to my own experiences. I guess I could say that I’ve had issues with magic. I’ve had moments where I felt powerful, but those are far and few between. They felt like… like a bit of me was sneaking out, an unknown part of me rearing its head. "I've never specifically had difficulty casting a spell though Rockseeker," I say, figuring out how to phrase my thoughts adequately. "I mean, it can take me a little bit longer than some people to pick them up in the first place but once I master it I can cast it better than most."

Rockseeker tilts his head questioningly. "I'm sorry Mister Potter, but are you saying that you are already learning spells and are in contact with others who are as well? Notably, outside of Hogwarts?" He holds his hands out in a calming manner. "If I am to be blunt with you, I will ask you to be blunt with me. What are you hiding?"

I exhale deeply. God damnit! Me and my big bloody mouth!

Should I tell him? Will that do me any good? I’ve barely come to terms with my resurrection,
considering it’s only been about… four, maybe four and a half hours since I woke up in this time. Although if there’s anyone who can help me… it’s risky, but I might as well put all my chips in considering Rockseeker has been more helpful to me in the last half hour than most people have been in my entire life.

"Time travel," I state succinctly.

Leaning back in his chair, Rockseeker cocks his eyebrows and crosses his arms across his chest. "Well aren't you full of surprises Mister Potter. How old are you really?"

"About fifteen, nearly sixteen. A magical accident threw me back in time to my old body"

"That is truly, truly interesting," he marvels, rubbing his chin, astonishment written over his features, yet relatively nonplussed all things considered, to discover that I'm an inadvertent time traveler. I'm slightly shocked to find that he's not staring at me incredulously or laughing in my face. I'd imagine most people would respond with a simple uttering of the word, ‘bullshit,’ at least, I know I would.

"So, tell me, you said you had no real difficulty learning and mastering the required spells in your syllabus?"

"No, at least not the ones for Defense, but I've always had a bit of a problem learning transfiguration. I just can't get it to work the way I want to."

"Well that's explained by the lock Mister Potter," he admits, picking some unseen debris out from under one of his long claws. "Transfiguration requires a great deal of control over your mind and magic to use effectively. Most of the field involves picturing something and using your magic to mould an object into whatever is currently being envisioned in your mind, therefore largely based on control. I'm going to assume you also have great difficulty with healing magic as well?"

"Yes, in fact I'd say I'm absolute bollocks at healing magic. I can barely cast Episkey to be honest," I reply sheepishly, slightly ashamed of my inability to cast such a simple spell. "It’s incredibly frustrating, especially with how accident prone I am."

"Well, then that just confirms my beliefs about your magical block. From what I can glean, you are not necessarily without power, as you have not had difficulty with spells that do not require a focused mind. But, this block has destroyed your control, and if you wish, I could remove this block. It’s a large commitment for you,” he adds, waving his hand meaningfully at my body. "It will require you to make a great change, considering you’ve had sixteen years to become accustomed to your body and magic. Do understand that I highly recommend seeing this through, and having the block removed. I have seen it done in the past for purebloods who were trapped into the wrong body by their parents in the hope that they may garner an heir.” His top lip pulls upwards, disgusted to even be speaking of such a practice. “All of these witches or wizards, all of them, came out of that ritual indefinitely happier and more comfortable with themselves than they were before.”

I sigh deeply, casting my eyes to the ceiling and trying to tame my raging mind. This is a huge decision for me to make, but I feel like it must be made now. I chuckle quietly, finding the absurdity of all of this slightly amusing. I remember Sirius once saying to me that there are some decisions in life that ‘you need to grab by the balls and never let go, or else you’ll always regret it.’ Not the most well-spoken man, but it cuts straight to the point.

“I've always wondered why I couldn't change a bloody matchstick into a needle, while I could easily, and I mean easily, set something on fire or blow it up if I so much as felt like it,” I muse, the words awkwardly tumbling out of my mouth as I allow my thoughts to be heard. “It just didn't make sense that so many fields of magic were so damned hard while I could pick up destructive spells with
no problem, they're basically point and shoot, no complexity at all.”

I pause, the severity of the situation slowly making itself clear. Dumbledore… how much has he meddled in my life? Why did he meddle with my life? I just… I don’t get it. He’s always been there for me since my first year, backing me up when I needed it, being there when I needed to talk with someone, to vent and let loose. Was it all a lie? Was it just some sick façade? I don’t… I don’t get it.

I shut my eyes tightly, blinking away the tears that are threatening to spill, my chest clenched from the pain of my newly realized betrayal. The man that I looked up to, the man I regarded as my own family… he did this to me? He’s the reason my life is so… so shit? I breathe in deeply, sucking the air through my teeth as I open my eyes, looking up towards Rockseeker.

“Why are you doing this for me?” I ask him shakily, still not entirely believing the whole situation. “What’s in it for you?”

“Thinking like a Goblin, are you?” Rockseeker replies approvingly. “What’s in it for us, you say? Well, the Potter account is one of our largest. If you die, we may lose that account.” He explains his reasons in a detached manner, almost robotically. “If we do what we can to make sure that you stay alive… well, it’s much more likely for us to hold onto those accounts.”

“Makes sense.” I agree with him, really. I’m not faulting him for the business focused attitude, also taking into account the fact that he’s a goblin, not a human. There’s got to be some differences between the two species on some level, and that’s evidenced by the way that goblins can detach themselves from what’s going on around them, not allowing their emotions to affect their decisions.


_Caragu ruks: Orc shit. (Dwarven, The Lord of the Rings. Thanks Tolkien.)_
"Fix it. Please, just fix it."

Simple words, right? Oh yeah, I'm going to conveniently ignore the fact that apparently, I'm not Harry and am actually Helene. That’s going to take a while to get used to.

I find it funny how being chased down by a psychotic Dark Lord for five years can put how absolutely ridiculous the other parts of life are into perspective. You know, like finding out that I was born a girl, and that the person I looked up to as a mentor, my grandfather in all but blood, a man who is practically worshipped by half the populace is actively meddling with my life. Yeah. Funny. I guess Malfoy was right all along… Dumbledore isn’t all he’s made out to be. Sure, I’ll never admit that out loud, but I find it frightfully ironic that he was so spot on.

"Mister Potter… Mister Potter? Hello?"

Huh? Shit, I completely forgot about Rockseeker. "Yes?" I reply awkwardly, unsure if I should ask him to address me as Miss, instead of Mister. I'll worry about it later.

"Please, follow me,” he says, snapping his fingers and calling the attending Goblin back into the room. The Goblin quickly enters, collecting everything from the table as Rockseeker steps towards the door and beckons for me to follow. I hop out of my seat and follow him back through the corridor, but instead of moving to our right, back towards the lobby, he leads to the left, deeper into the bank. We wind through the halls for a few minutes, going further into the bank than I imagine any human has in a long time, before coming to a dead end. There's an etching in the wall, but it's quite dissimilar to the ones that I saw earlier in the meeting room.

This is more of a carving, simple and unassuming. An image of a gateway engraved into the rock, with chiseled branches twisting around its pillars. Runic script adorns the top of the gate, but they're runes I've never seen before. I mean, I didn't take the class, but these don't look Nordic, Egyptian, or Sumerian to me. I squint at the artwork. For some reason it's oddly familiar, but I can't quite place where I've seen it.

"Ah, if you're wondering Mister Potter, I do believe a fiction writer known to the muggle world as Tolkien found this work of magic quite inspiring," Rockseeker explains, nodding at my smile of understanding. I remember reading the first two books in his trilogy and enjoying them immensely. Maybe I should get the third some time soon?

"Do not worry, there are no Balrogs waiting beyond these doors. They have not been seen in many a millennium." He chuckles as he drags a clawed finger down the centre of the etching, his whispering in Goblin barely heard over the shrill squeal of his claw on stone. The lines carved into the wall begin to suffuse with a turquoise glow as the wall opens up, inviting us in.

"Speak friend and enter?"

"Yes, although it would be bad for security if it was quite that simple,” Rockseeker quips. “Only a Goblin of high standing can open that door. If one of lesser repute attempts to do so… well, let’s say that the results would be quite messy.”
I grimace at that, having forgotten momentarily the war-faring and vengeance prone nature of the Goblin race due to Rockseeker’s remarkably human-like kindness. I study the room as we enter it, finding it just as unassuming as the doorway. In fact, spartan doesn't begin to cover how incredibly bare it is. Ancient stone walls surround me, weathered, yet emanating a nearly tangible strength, very much alike the aura of magic that is home to Hogwarts. I can’t see anything, but I can feel the presence of old and very powerful magic, the room is practically swimming in it. What appears to be a pensieve is the only object to be found within, resting on a small dais. There are no tables, bookcases, or remnants of anything even remotely resembling furniture. The room is completely barren.

"Now, Mister Potter… what I am about to do will be incredibly unpleasant for you, even with your pain tolerance. I've heard it to be quite horrendous to be honest. If you do not wish for me to remove this lock upon your magic immediately, or if you'd like to take time to ponder it or prepare, please let me know."

I look to Rockseeker and sigh. I'm starting to really wonder if I will ever have a truly normal life someday. At least, this should hopefully be the first steps on my path towards a semblance of normalcy, although the change will be massive. I knew on some level after waking up to this new life that there would large changes, but I don't think I really realized the sheer extent of them and how sudden they would be. Helene Potter. To be honest, it does have a nice ring to it.

I feel my stomach clench in nervousness, but also in anticipation, like I’ve been waiting for this moment my whole life. Excitable anxiety courses through me, the tips of my fingers and toes tingling as I realize that I’m about to turn myself into a woman, or more specifically, a girl. I feel like I’m diving into the deep end of a pool, unsure of what to expect, but this just feels like something I absolutely have to do. It looks like I’m going to have to forgo my Slytherin revival for a short while.

"No, it's fine. Honestly this isn't the craziest thing to have happened in my life. I traveled through time five hours ago, this should be a walk in the park," I jokingly concede, working over the thought in my head. Helene Potter. Miss Potter.

... Lady Potter?

Something about it just- I don’t know, it clicks. I steel myself for what is to come. “Let’s do this.”

Rockseeker moves over to the pensieve, which upon closer inspection looks to be quite different from the one that I’ve seen in Dumbledore’s office. I wince in remembrance, my feelings towards Dumbledore muddled, my fond memories of the past twisted by the revelations of todays meeting. I push the thoughts from my mind, instead focusing on the here and now. There are no runes scrawled into the side of the bowl, nor any liquid memories swirling within. It's simply a large stone bowl, like a birdfeeder hewn out of the mountain in a way that suggests it may have just fallen during a rockslide and happened to conveniently resemble a bowl.

Rockseeker reaches underneath the bowl and removes a knife, handing it to me. I grasp the blade tightly, fingers slipping comfortably into well-worn grooves that have been worked into the leather handle over the years, the handle shining in a way that leads me to presume that it's made of dragonhide. The knife looks to be as old as the room itself, the marbling in the metal shifting playfully in the meagre light, like a silver river slowly treading along its path.

"Now, what we are about to do here is not strictly legal within the wizarding world.” Rockseeker looks at me pointedly. “I will be leading you through a blood magic ritual to release the binds on your magic and body that have been plaguing you. I will need you to bleed once again," he says, motioning towards the bowl. "I will infuse the knife in your blood and use it to carve the necessary runes onto you for the ritual. I regretfully cannot provide you with a numbing potion as it will
interfere with the magic involved in the ritual."

Well, this sounds worse than I thought it would be. Why does that always have to happen? "So, you're going to carve me up? Won't that scar something awful?" I protest, not terribly excited to get any more scars now that I've gotten rid of all the old ones, apart from the lightning bolt on my forehead. I don't particularly want to earn scars by choice, and especially ones that may be recognized for their use in illegal blood magic rituals.

"No, thankfully the magic involved in the ritual will heal those wounds. There is no need to worry about any permanent cosmetic damage. Although, you don't particularly strike me as vain Mister Potter."

I stick my hands up in protest. "Oh! No, I was more worried about having visual evidence of an illegal ritual carved into my body!" I smirk at his assumption. I've only had fifteen minutes to get used to the idea of being a woman and I'm already making sure that I'm blemish free. Maybe I should keep some scars later down the line if they look interesting. Like Sirius said, 'chicks dig scars,' and maybe women who like women will as well.

God! I really am adjusting to this quickly!

"A wise precaution Mister Potter. Now, if you are ready to begin, please remove your clothes."

Rockseeker doesn't even bothering to turn around, simply casting his gaze to the ceiling, his hands held behind his back. Well, he is about to carve runes into my naked body, I guess now is not the time to worry about modesty. No point in keeping the vain-train going.

I quickly strip down, tossing my old rumpled clothes to the side of the room before making my way over to the bowl. I clench my jaw as I prepare myself, running through a series of breathing exercises to calm myself down. I slash my palm open abruptly, choosing to think of it as an advanced form of ripping off a band aid. I hold my hand over the bowl, allowing my blood to flow freely into its craggy interior. Rockseeker stands next to me, watching the crimson stream pour thickly from my now clenched fist until it reaches a level he deems acceptable, waving his hand over mine and sealing the wound. He removes the knife from my hand, letting the blade soak in the bowls contents. Leading me to a depression in the floor, he has me rest on my knees, back straight and away from the dais. The frigid stone scrapes against my legs, making me groan mentally. This isn't going to be comfortable in the slightest. Like a softened floor would interfere with the ritual? Bloody Goblins.

"I am going to begin Mister Potter, but you must do your best to not move during the ritual. If one rune connects to another in the middle of this, it will be catastrophic. You will be a living bomb until I am finished," he commands, looking much more like a Goblin warlord than an accountant in that moment.

I nod in response, continuing with my exercises. In through the nose, out through the mouth. Slow and steady. I'm still tense, but hopefully the breathing exercises should make things easier. Of course, there's a small niggling voice in the back of my head telling me that I'm about to die of a thousand cuts, but if I can keep Voldemort out of my head for a couple minutes I can definitely ignore the rational side of my psyche for a while longer. Really, it should be much easier considering I've ignored it for the better part of five years.

Rockseeker begins the ritual, taking the knife from me before starting at my forehead. The knife is frighteningly cold, the sharp sting of the skin on my forehead splitting open causes me to grit my teeth reflexively. As a small trickle of blood snakes its way down the bridge of my nose I wonder at how little the ritual actually hurts, but I know this is just the beginning. Rockseeker continues to work his way down, etching runes along my cheekbones, over my jaw, the base of my skull. Slowly
but surely, he makes his way past my neck, proceeding on to my shoulders and collarbones.

Okay, the pain is absolutely fucking terrible. One rune, not so bad. Fifty and counting? That's a level of pain that's only a couple steps below the cruciatus curse. I just have to suck it up as best as I can and deal with the pain as it comes. My arms are held rigid, trembling, yet not making contact with the other runes on my body and in turn transforming Gringotts and most of Diagon Alley into a blast crater. Rockseeker is working on my ribs now, making me lift my arms up and out of the way, hissing as the pain starts to get to me. All I can feel is the cold sting of air over raw, flayed skin. Every inch of my body screaming in protest against its own willful desecration.

By the time Rockseeker makes it to my legs, I'm practically bathed in my own blood, rivulets of it pouring down my body from head to toe, pooling around my knees as I hold on for dear life. I have my eyes slammed shut and a grimace plastered across my face. My arms are still held perpendicular to me, the muscles damn near close to giving out, begging me to just simply let them down and end it. I'm worried my teeth may shatter in my skull due to how hard my jaw is clenched, the ache in my jaw a slight distraction from the butchery still taking place.

I hear muttering now. The knife has stopped, and Rockseeker is beginning to chant in an ancient language, not Latin, maybe Ancient Greek? It's not Goblin, and I'm too fucked up at the moment to tell what it is.

Suddenly I can feel it, magic flowing around me, through me. The magic is so strong I can taste it, like burnt iron on my tongue. It’s just there. The air is crackling within the room, making my hair stand on end. My blood is still flowing, but backwards, climbing across my body and slithering up and into my veins, seeking out its home as the wounds close behind the coursing blood, infusing me with pure unadulterated magic so thick it hurts.

The pain begins anew, the magic is seeking out my core, twisting and tearing at the bindings placed upon me, Dumbledore's lock fighting bitterly against the Goblin blood magics coursing through my veins. It's like some horrendous creature is trying to wrench open my soul, clawed hands ripping and tearing at my gut, teeth gnashing at my heart, fire rushing through my veins. Screaming, I fall onto my back, cracking my head against the stone. Writhing against the floor I curl in on myself, my throat blistering and turning raw in my protests. All I can think of is how incredible a gift death would be in this moment, before my mind gives into my body and I pass out.

-:-

Bleary eyed and aching all over I pry my eyes apart, gummy and full of sleep. Looking around I notice I'm still in Gringotts, apparently in their own private medical ward judging by the Goblin peering at me over my cot who is dressed exactly like Madame Pomfrey. Yes, I can scarcely believe it myself. A female Goblin (at least I think that it's a female Goblin, it's a lot less ugly than the other Goblin's I've seen) kitted head to toe in what appears to be a World War II nurses uniform.

"Hello Miss Potter," she hums, passing her hand over my body as she runs a diagnostic test, multicoloured lights dancing across her finger tips. "Everything appears to be in fine working order, although you will need to take this pain potion if you would like to get anything done today."
Handing the potion to me she smiles expectantly. Jeez, I know she's being nice and all, but I really, really don't think I'll ever get used to Goblin's smiling. They look like some sort of constipated shark when they grin, with their beady black eyes and sharp white teeth.

Tossing the pain potion back, I sigh in relief as I feel it begin to act. I sink into the surprisingly comfortable cot, allowing the potion to work its magic. "How long do I have to wait before I'm cleared to go?" I ask, running on autopilot due to my many appearances in the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts. Surprisingly, my voice isn't too different from that of my eleven-year-old boys self, from
what I can recall of how I once used to sound. Forever a late bloomer I guess.

The nurse tilts her head to one side, in an almost Luna-esque fashion as she replies. "Why, you can leave whenever you'd like now that you've taken your medicine! Of course, Rockseeker would like to see you before you go, he has your money.” She tuts quietly as she remembers something. “Also, I'm sure you'd like to take a good look at yourself and get used to the changes from the ritual," she chirps, passing me a hand mirror before returning to her work.

"Thank you!” I pipe back, grabbing the mirror and taking a look at the new me.

Damn! I look like a tiny clone of my mum!

I tentatively reach up at the springy red hair that frames my face, thick waves and curls coming down to my chin and sticking out in every which direction. I awkwardly run my fingers through my hair, surprised at how pleasantly soft it is. I peer at the mirror, studying the way the locks fall, pleased that it looks like it'll be a little easier to deal with than my old raggedy mop. I look at the blinking, bright green doe eyes that stare back at me, peeking out from underneath my fringe. I cheer internally when I realize that I've got the same eyes as before.

I lift my hand up to my face to readjust my glasses and gasp in shock. Wait! What? No glasses! I'm not wearing glasses and I can bloody see!

“This is incredible!”

I whoop loudly, jumping up and down on the bed, rejoicing my newly fixed eyesight. The nurse looks back, smirking at my antics. I calm down slightly, remembering I'm in a medical ward and peer back at the mirror, still bubbling underneath the surface with unbridled excitement.

I study the rest of my features, noting that my nose has thinned out a lot, looking more like a little ski slope than the slight beak it was before. Along with that, my lips have gotten thicker. My face is more angular, high cheekbones and a jaw cutting down into a sharp V.

All in all, I'd say I'm a devilishly cute kid! I grin at my reflection, happiness building up inside me as I realize that this is a good change. No, a great change. I just feel so bloody right now, like something was missing my whole life and I just now found it again. Christ. I can’t believe I was worried about this!

I jump out of the cot, surprisingly sprightly for someone who was very literally on deaths door recently, stumbling a bit as my feet hit the ground much sooner than I thought they would. Who'da thunk it? I'm taller as a girl!

Wait… aw shite, never mind. Goblin sized beds, not people sized beds. Realizing I have no idea where I'm going I quickly ask the nurse for directions and she simply points to the right. Shrugging, I place the hand mirror back on the side-table and walk out the door to find myself in the same corridor that the meeting room was in. Happy to recognize my surroundings, I make my way over there, assuming I'll find Rockseeker waiting for me.

Cracking the door open I peer into the room, my assumption correct as I see Rockseeker seated in the small throne, poring over a sheet of parchment. He glances up and nods at me to enter, his lips turned up in a tight smile. Okay, toothless smiles from Goblins I can do. I just can’t stomach when they bare their teeth at me.

"It's very good to see you up and about Miss Potter, you've been out for the last day recuperating,” he greets me, grabbing a coin pouch as he gets out of his seat, handing it over. "I'm happy to see you
healthy, you reacted much more strongly to the ritual than I imagined you would, the lock on your magic was quite powerful."

I scratch my head at that, curious. "The lock was quite strong? But wouldn't I have had much more difficulty with my magic if it was?" I wonder how there can be a difference in gender locks. It’s not like I was an incredibly manly man, the epitome of all things testosterone. In fact, I’d say I was quite an effeminate looking boy.

"Why yes, it was very strong, but you seem to be quite the powerful witch. By the look of things, you retained your developed magical core when you traveled through time, so in essence you are already quite close to that of a magically mature adult. The most interesting part of all that though, is that your magic will still continue to mature.” He pauses at my clueless expression. Magic matures during puberty you see.”

Wide eyed I sputter back, "Wait! You're saying that I'm going to keep growing magically?"

"Yes. You are."

"Christ on a pogo stick," I gasp.

If I was already considered powerful in my last life, and I’ve now carried that over and had it unlocked, adding that magic to the amount that I have and will grow in this life… I’m shit at maths, but the only thing that adequately describes that amount of power is the succinct statement of, “Holy fuck.”

"Hmm, I think people would pay to see such a thing. Do you want me to trademark that for you?" Rockseeker grins. Okay, I can get used to Rockseeker smiling. The guy… guy? Yeah, sure. The guy has a brilliantly dry sense of humour.

"If you believe we won’t be labeled as blasphemers then by all means please do, I think it would make a great toy," I reply, grinning back at him. "Thank you so much Rockseeker. You've been more helpful to me than anyone ever has been, and that's including my last life."

"Thank you, Miss Potter, but I'm just doing my job.” He waves me off, although his voice holds a hint of pride. "It would be a disservice to the Goblin Nation to allow you, and in turn us to be run over roughshod by Dumbledore. Now, if you have anything more that you need from Gringotts I will be happy to assist you, but I do believe you have some errands to run."

"Yes, I do have all of my school supplies to purchase, along with finding an old friend." I smile, happy to be reunited with Hedwig. "I do have one question for you though, are there any wand shops apart from Ollivanders? Something a bit more… under the table. I'm interested in finding a wand that doesn't carry the trace."

"Yes, of course, you’ll need to go to Knockturn Alley to find the shop. There's a wandsmiths in the alley near Borgin & Burkes. The shop is called 'Sayre's Smithy,' after the founder of Ilvermorny. When you go there, let them know I sent you. We’ve had deals in the past with Sayre’s."

"Absolutely, and… thank you again Rockseeker, you've been an incredible help."

"Like I said Ms. Potter, I'm just doing my job." He stands up to shake my hand. I thank him again, popping out and making my way back through the lobby of Gringotts with a skip in my step. I’m excited to meet the day for the first time in a long time, and ecstatic to walk into a fresh new world.

I head to Madam Malkin's first, wanting to get my clothes immediately. I never really treated myself to any nice clothing in the original timeline, considering Dudley would have just stolen them. It's
going to be a bit difficult for him to take anything from me as I won’t be living in that house anymore. It also helps that the house is probably a pile of smoldering ashes now.

Popping into the shop I’m pleased to notice that I won’t be running into Malfoy, as I’m a couple days early compared to when I originally came to Diagon Alley. I order a large assortment of casual clothes for myself, deciding to stick with t-shirts, jeans, trousers, and other muggle styled clothing. Much to my chagrin, a skirt is part of the uniform for girls. It’s not that I don’t want to wear one, it’s just that I’m not used to one and I’m unsure of the etiquette involved in wearing a skirt. I remember seeing Hermione go through little rituals every time she sat down, fluffing and preening the clothing to make sure everything settled correctly.

I am quite happy to notice that the pouch Rockseeker gave me is a money bag attuned to me and my vault, I simply have to request what I need, and it draws it from my account automatically. Very convenient.

After putting on my new clothes and getting my purchases shrunk, I pop them in my pocket and make my way into Knockturn Alley, pulling the hood up on my robes and striding with confidence into the dank underbelly of the shopping district. Not too far into the alley I see Borgin & Burkes, and a couple doors down from that the shop I’m looking for, Sayre’s Smithy. I’m pleased to see that it looks a lot less dilapidated compared to its neighbours, a promising sign. Fresh paint works wonders for a first impression.

A bell chimes as I open the door, gazing around. The story is very different from Ollivanders, as it’s not as dim, nor coated in a thin layer in dust. I’m quite surprised to find how well lit it is, looking nothing like my previous, albeit brief experience in Knockturn Alley. There shop differs greatly from Ollivanders, as the walls are not covered with cubbies, haphazardly secured and filled with precariously stacked wand boxes. Instead it looks like a homely workshop.

A woman is sitting behind the counter at the front of the shop reading the Daily Prophet. Behind her, cabinets are arrayed under a plain black countertop that stretches around the back of the store, labeled with the names of different woods. Above the countertop, jars with core ingredients line the wall. A workstation is in the centre of the room, accompanied by small unfamiliar tools and a series of magnifying glasses mounted onto the wood. Everything looks to be quite organized, almost like an old watchmaker’s shop had a lovechild with a Wickes DIY.

The woman looks up from her reading, rich brown eyes peeking out behind thin rectangular frames, steel gray hair framing her face in a tight bob. She looks to be quite young though, maybe in her mid-thirties, and her gray hair cuts a striking contrast against her tanned, heart shaped face. I’m assuming it’s dyed that way.

"Hello. Is there anything I can do for you?" She says, her voice deep and rich as peers at me over her paper.

"Yes. Rockseeker sent me here. I need a wand," I reply, glancing around the shop once more.

This catches her attention. She immediately sets her paper down, and then walks up to the door to turn the open sign to closed before leading me into the shop, setting a portable cabinet onto the workstation. She pulls a tray out of the cabinet containing different blocks of wood, and others containing what I imagine are the cores, recognizing a phoenix feather and a preserved length of dragon heartstring. A third tray contains different gemstones, something I’ve never seen before in a wand, maybe they’re just not normally visible? It would make sense to use a gem as a focus, although I don’t know if magic functions the same as light. The woman pulls up two stools and brings one over for me, sitting down on the other across the table and pushing the tray full of wood in my direction.
"Miss…?"

"Potter. Ha- er- Helene Potter."

"Not Harry?" She inquires, cocking her eyebrows at me.

"I'm afraid the newspapers were quite wrong in calling me the boy who lived, Miss?"

"McCann. Tracey McCann," she replies in a business-like fashion, curt and to the point. I appreciate that she immediately cuts to the chase, ignoring the small revelation of my mistaken gender. "Miss Potter please pass your hands over each block of wood, and pick the one, or two that feel most 'right' to you."

I run my hand over the tray, passing back and forth over the wood. I can feel some of them practically hissing at me, screaming at me not to pick them, and I can tell intrinsically that they would be terrible choices for my wand. A couple stand out, almost tugging at my hand, but not quite enough. I take a minute to pass over the woods once again and see which ones feel the best to me, basing it on how strong of a tug I get before selecting two blocks and handing them to McCann. One of the blocks is an incredibly dark gray, nearly black, the wood looking similar to Death’s ebony table. The other is pale white, almost like sun bleached bone.

"Interesting. Very interesting. Blackthorn and Yew," she mutters quietly, holding the two blocks of wood with a curious expression. "Blackthorn makes for a warrior’s wand, yet Yew is associated with life and death. This is a very powerful combination. You're going to be quite the famous and notorious witch, not that you aren't already quite famous."

I shrug in reply, grimacing as I realize the waves my physical changes are going to make on the world. "Unfortunately, there's nothing I can do about being famous or infamous, as much as I detest it. I'm just a kid who got lucky."

"Wise words from such a young person," she approves, taking the tray of cores and handing it to me to repeat the process. Passing my hand over the bits of sinew, hair, and bone, I feel immediately drawn to the phoenix feather. I guess some things don't change. I'm also drawn to what looks like a tiny ram's horn, glittering unnaturally even whilst in the shadow of my palm. As I move my hand back and away from the tray I feel another tug, one towards a length of silvery hair.

"The phoenix feather, that horn, and that hair," I point towards the miscellaneous bits of magical animal. McCann curses quietly under her breath, pulling the cores back towards her before pushing the tray of gemstones towards me.

"You're making my job very difficult Miss Potter. Very interesting, but very difficult," she complains, thinly veiled frustration hiding behind her curt professionalism.

"I'm sorry! I didn't know that I did something wrong. Is it that unusual to have two cores?"

"No, you didn't do anything wrong." She sighs, running her fingers through her hair. "I just didn't imagine I'd have such a difficult wand to fashion today. I normally get a special order like this well in advance, although for you I can make an exception, considering who you are and knowing that you can easily pay for the wand. I know you’re good for it. Just know that if you need a job like this done again, warn me in advance. Please," she asserts, wagging her finger playfully.

"Phoenix feather is incredibly finicky when combined with horned serpent ivory, they're essentially magical opposites. At least the thestral hair balances it all out…” She absentmindedly details the wand making process, her mouth moving silently as she ponders how to approach the difficult
project. "It's going to take a lot of coaxing on my part to fashion this wand and get all the materials to work in harmony. The Blackthorn and Yew is already a pain on its own."

She gestures at the gems and crosses her arms over her chest, looking at me pointedly. "Now, same deal with the gemstones, but I swear to Morgana that if you select a gemstone that doesn't pair with the rest of the wand I'm going to have a fit."

I wave my hand over the gemstones, immediately drawn to a deep black chunk of rock. Sighing in relief I notice that none of the other gems have a pull on me. In fact, it's almost as if the other stones are physically repelling me, like trying to stick a magnet together the wrong way around. "That one there, the black one," I point out, slightly worried that I'm going to have my new wand stuck where the sun doesn't shine by the time this transaction is done.

"Onyx. A gem very closely associated with death. You are a very peculiar witch Miss Potter." McCann is visibly perplexed, yet there’s a hint of anticipation in her voice. "Crafting this is going to take most of the day, so I would recommend you find somewhere to spend the next couple hours. Be back around six, six thirty-ish with one hundred galleons," she intones, dismissing me and getting up and rapidly moving about the shop to collect the materials needed for the wand, already focused solely on her work.

I quietly pop out of Sayre's and go off to complete the rest of purchases for school, buying my books, potions supplies, and my original wand from Ollivander's. Dear God, that man is creepy. He really should not be selling wands to kids, or even be around kids. Somehow, he just knew who I was! Something is genuinely unnatural about that man, and I'm saying that.

Making sure I've accounted for everything I need, I go to collect Hedwig, extraordinarily happy to see my old friend even if she doesn't recognize me, before heading back to the Leaky Cauldron. I rent out a room until the first of September and load off all of my shopping onto the bed before heading down into the pub for dinner. I may be a girl now, but a full day of shopping is still horrible! There’s just too many choices, too many people all in one place. I don't believe I'm ever going to understand how women enjoy shopping, and honestly, I don't think they understand it either. It must be one of the great mysteries of life.

A nice full meal of steak and kidney pie, a couple butterbeers, and a healthy helping of treacle tart later and I'm off to return to Sayre's and collect my wand. Marching back through Knockturn, I head into the shop to see McCann putting the finishing touches on the wand, polishing it smooth and checking it over underneath a large magnifying glass. She looks up at the door chime before turning back to her inspection. Sitting across from her I wait and watch her work for a few minutes, admiring the show of craftsmanship before she hands the wand over to me without a word.

The wand is beautiful yet imposing. The two woods marbled and entwined, the deep rich Blackthorn laced around bright and Milky yew, ending in a solid round point, a blunted yet polished bit of onyx shining out of the end of the wand. The handle curves slightly towards the bottom, with what looks like the scales of a snake etched into the grip. A hissing occamy’s head is masterfully carved into the pommel completing the wand, feathers bristling out in incredible detail.

"It's incredible," I gasp, waving the wand and watching as a burst of sparks shower out of it. Shockingly, the sparks are not red this time, but a mix of the piercing white of a star as well as black sparks, more like an absence of light fluttering in the air. Something which should be impossible but, well, magic.

The truly magical part is the sheer power and control I feel holding the wand. I can grasp and mould the raw magic coursing through me much more easily. It's infinitely more comfortable than my old Holly and Phoenix feather one, feeling like it belongs in my hand, like it's a part of me, rather than a
McCann leans back, smirking at me as I continue to stare at the wand, absolutely in awe of her craftsmanship. "Glad you like it, it's definitely one of my best," she boasts, sticking her hand out, palm up. "The hundred galleons?" She asks, one eyebrow quirked in challenge.

Grinning widely, I grab my coin pouch and pull out her payment, handing over the coins. "Thank you, it's worth every knut." I marvel at the intricately carved wand resting in my hand, completely in awe of the incredible work she's done. I find myself unable to peel my eyes away from it, feeling a stronger bond to her creation than I ever did with my holly and phoenix feather wand. Screw Ollivanders! This lady is a bloody artist!

"It's what I do Miss Potter. It's what my mum did, and her dad before her, and so on so forth. You paid, you get a wand. It's as simple as that."

"You're the second person today who's told me that they're just 'doing their job,'" I smirk, wondering how far she and Rockseeker go back. "If I'm ever in need of your services again I'll make sure to owl you beforehand."

"Be mindful that you do," she says, a spark in her eyes letting me know that I will definitely not get away with throwing a large job at her out of the blue again.

I slot the wand into a holster that I bought earlier, one of two enchanted to be invisible and respond only to me, something that will come in handy later down the line. The primary holster is on my right wrist, containing my new wand, while the other is on my right ankle, containing my original wand. Doesn't hurt to be prepared in case shit hits the fan.

Before I know it I'm back at the Cauldron, climbing the stairs and heading to my room. Throwing myself into bed, I don't even bother to change into pyjamas, too exhausted to do anything but crawl under the covers and surrender to Morpheus.
Day One

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this belong to me.

The week passes by quickly, with me spending my time poring over my textbooks, teaching myself introductory NEWT level spells and making sure Snape can't make my life miserable on my first day of potions. Monkshood and Wolfsbane? Same damned thing. Bezoar? You can find it in the belly of a goat. I'm not going to fall behind this time and I want to make sure I'm being the best I can be. I'm unfortunately limited in what I can learn at the current moment, due to my only source of information being Flourish and Blotts. Not very easy to find tomes detailing the more damaging and creative aspects of combat magic in a public book store.

Thankfully, due to my magic being carried over from my previous life, I'm having an incredibly easy time picking up new spells as I'm not working with an eleven-year old's magic. That, and the lock removal has worked wonders for my new academic passion. I can focus, actually focus long enough to study for once in my life, retaining important facts and other information for more than ten minutes makes me feel like I've gained some sort of super power. It’s like someone poured extra brains into my head. Not really a good analogy, but it’s the best I’ve got at the moment.

The only downside to the week is my embarrassment at having to get used to my new… hardware. After nearly sixteen years of being male, there's a very large learning curve.

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Soon enough, it's Sunday, September 1st. It's time to head to school. Grabbing my things and running down the stairs into the pub I place a sickle on the counter and ask Tom for some floo powder. He hands a pinch to me and I march through the fireplace after tossing the powder in and calling out "Platform Nine and Three Quarters." I shut my eyes tight in preparation, stepping awkwardly into the fire, feeling my head and guts spin from the terribly nausea inducing method of transportation.

Shocked, I find myself standing on my own two feet after coming through the floo, mouth agape as I stand in the middle of the station. I think that's the first time I've not tumbled onto my arse when using the floo! Finally! A nice small change! No greater conspiracy that seeks to shake my world view to it's foundations. Giggling to myself I stop and admire the view, eyes locked onto the bright red train looming in front of me. It looks a lot better in real life than in the land of the dead.

I climb onto the train, grabbing the first empty compartment I come across, unshrinking my trunk and floating it into the cubbies. Hedwig has already left ahead of me, meeting up with the other owls at Hogwarts and probably getting up to no good. I swear that owl is smarter than most people. I wonder if I should teach her any tricks?

Pulling out my copy of Occlumency, the Art of Mind Magics and You, I sit back and continue where I left off, reading over different meditative techniques to aid in clearing and sorting my thoughts. See, last time no one told me that Occlumency can make it easier to learn things, control your emotions, or even get a better handle on your magic. Instead I had to deal with Snape screaming at me to clear my mind before smashing into my brain like a ten-tonne sledgehammer. Fuck, that man is a git. Why was he ever allowed near children? It'd be like asking Hitler to teach an arts class, sure he could paint, but the guy is still Hitler.
I'm so enraptured by my book that I don't notice the train leaving the station, nor a couple of first years piling in around me, completely unaware that they asked me about three times if it was okay to sit in the compartment before muttering "eh, whatever" and taking their seats. A loud pop to the left startles me, pulling my attention away from the book to see my new companions playing a game of exploding snap.

Setting my book down I lean back and see who's joined me. There are two girls in my compartment, one of them is quite lanky, her face all points and edges framed by long black hair that settles into a tight braid that hangs off her shoulder. The other is sportier looking, her light brown hair cut short into a tidy pixie, a light dusting freckles across her nose and a wide smile crossing her face as she sets down a card, causing the other girl to scowl. It takes me a second to recognize the two as they weren't in Gryffindor, realizing that it's Daphne Greengrass and Tracey Davis. I don't think I ever saw Greengrass do so much as eat without being incredibly prim and proper, so her playing a game that gets your hands dirty? Colour me surprised. I watch the game for a little while before Tracey whoops in victory as Daphne's last card bursts in her hands.

"Yes!" Tracey claps loudly, doing a small sitting victory jig while Daphne looks over in my direction. Tracey’s head snaps over and her mouth opens in surprise. "Oh! We're so sorry for interrupting your reading, we didn't think this would bother you," she gasps in embarrassment, gathering up the remaining cards. "You didn't hear us come in, so we thought it was okay."

I smile back at her, letting her know that I'm not bothered. "It's fine! It's fine. Honestly, it's not a big deal," I assure her, reaching out to shake her hand. "My names Helene, Helene Potter… and you are?"

Her eyes light up in shock, but quickly narrow in confusion, obviously recognizing the name Potter but not Helene. "My name is Tracey Davis." She introduces herself, waving her hand towards Daphne, "and this is my friend, Daphne Greengrass."

"It's a pleasure to meet you both." I try to channel a touch of pureblood prestige into my voice. Just enough to make an impression on Daphne as she seems to be a bit traditional, but not so much as to come across as a posh snob with a stick up my arse, cough Malfoy cough. I should get to know Daphne, considering her family was placed on the list of potential guardians in my parents will.

"Excuse me, but are you from the Potter family?" Daphne inquires, leaning forward slightly in her seat, fingers clasped over her lap.

"The Potter family? As in Lily and James? Yes, I'm their daughter." I laugh internally at her confused look.

"But they had a son named Harry, did they not?" She asks, squinting slightly as she tries to figure out the mystery that is me.

"A misconception, nothing more," I reply, waving my hand regally. "You can't trust everything you read in the papers you know."

Nodding her head at what seems to be a sage statement, she relaxes a touch. She decides not to push her line of questioning and is seemingly satisfied with my answer, leaning back into her seat with casual grace. At least, as much casual grace as an eleven-year-old can muster. Meanwhile Tracey just looks even more confused than before.

"So, you're not Harry?" She blurts, trying to wrap head around what I've said.

I laugh in reply, biting my lip as I think of how to phrase my answer. "There is and never was a
Harry Potter. Just Helene. All of the books and newspaper articles you've read that would tell you otherwise were written without my knowledge or consent."

"Well that's rude of them," she huffs, arms crossed.

"Very." I agree. "I think I'm going to have to get in touch with a solicitor and see if there's any money I can get out of people who've been selling my name. Consent and all that."

"That's a good idea Potter," Greengrass says, nodding her head in approval. It mystifies me that I'm currently speaking to an eleven-year-old, and not a sixteen-year-old heiress from the Victorian era. Could have fooled me with the way Daphne speaks. "My father is a solicitor and I could get you in touch with him if you'd like."

Well, that's awful convenient.

Hey, who said Slytherins were all dark and evil? I mean yeah, her dad is a solicitor which is just one step below being a Dark Lord, but it's not like everyone in Slytherin is brimming with magical power and has a hankering for Dark Arts. At least they're not drooling over me being the boy-who-lived. Whoops- girl-who-lived. Going to take a little to get used to that.

"That would be fantastic! Would you be able to owl him when we get to the castle?"

"Of course," she curtly replies.

Apparently now that the necessary introductions and schemes are out of the way, Tracey and Daphne slip back into being kids, chatting and giggling excitedly about what they think Hogwarts is going to be like. I open my book again, eyes flitting over the page to find my spot before looking up and noticing Daphne spying the title on the spine, her eyes glinting approvingly. Well that explains the ice queen persona, she must be, or will be, an accomplished occlumens. Although she does at least have training at a very young age, judging by how reserved she was. Must be a pureblood thing. Have to keep the family secrets and all that.

The train ride passes by leisurely, with me studying over my books and occasionally jumping in on Daphne and Tracey's conversations. We talk about everything and nothing at the same time, with me trying to subtly study the nuances of ‘girl-talk’ so that I don't make an absolute arse of myself. It's going to take a little bit of getting used to the spit-fire questioning that's occurring, but it's nice to be able to just sit back and chat with new people without them going star struck around me. The normalcy is a breath of fresh air.

After a short nap, I'm woken up by the announcement that we're getting close to Hogsmeade, and I march over to the bathroom with a change of clothes. No chance in hell I'm changing in front of kids, fucking hell that would be reprehensible. It's not like I'm Ollivander or anything. Trust me, something's wrong with that guy.

Slightly distracted by my skirt swishing around my knees, I head back to the compartment to meet up with Tracey and Daphne before we hop off the train. Skirts are something I could get used to! No wonder Scots wore kilts. It's so freeing! Although, I'm not looking forward to wearing a skirt in the winter, so I'll have to check the dress code and see if trousers are allowed in the colder seasons. I'm pretty confident they are, seeing as I remember Hermione wearing trousers or jeans quite often in the winter.

The three of us step off the train and are greeted by the enormous sight of Hagrid. Christ, I forgot how tall that guy is. I guess it’s just become more evident now that I’ve shrunk. What is he, nine feet tall? Thinking about it, how in the hell does he fit in his cabin? It can't be more than a hundred square
feet at the most. The wonders of magic I guess, somebody must have expanded it.

Following Hagrid’s calls of "Firs' years! Firs' years over here!" We make our way over to the boats, treading dangerously over the stone pathway leading to the lake. Climbing in and setting off with the rest of the first years I remember something important. I didn't get to re-meet Ron and Hermione on the train! Fingers crossed that our friendship doesn't get demolished due to my rebirth and time travel. Well, Hermione's at least. I've had a relatively strained relationship with Ron since the Triwizard Tournament, and I don't think he's ever really going to grow out of his jealousy. Now that I’m a girl… I remember the ways that he treated Hermione, how he spoke to other women like they were a piece of meat.

I cringe internally remembering his spat with Hermione at the Yule Ball, how he always tended to let his jealousy get the better of him.

No, I don’t think a friendship between him and me would work out in this timeline.

Soon enough the castle is in sight. I blink in confusion as I feel myself passing through the wards, long before I notice the turrets and towers of Hogwarts brushing their noses against the clouds. A shiver runs through my spine as I re-acclimatize to the incredible presence of magic flooding off of the castle. I guess this has to do with my lock being removed and being more in tune with magic, but I can almost see the magic coursing through the air. It's like there's a thin sheen layered into the air, an ethereal fog, and the walls of the castle are practically shining with power.

I reach out at the magic floating in front of me, poking at it curiously. I marvel at how it responds to my touch, shimmering and distorting as my finger touches it. I really can see it. I can feel it. There's a slight static, a tingling shock bouncing from my fingertips to the magic as I push it away from me. I'm going to have to read up about this later and see if I can somehow use it. I've never heard of someone seeing magic before, nor interacting with it in such a way.

Torches light the path ahead as we come up to the docks, the dinghy shuddering to a halt. I climb out and onto dry land, helping Daphne and Tracey out of the boat and following the teeming mass of first years into the castle. I laugh as the ghosts scare the ever-loving hell out most of the new students as we wait in the entrance hall for McGonagall to come and collect us. For some reason the ghosts halt, staring at me with empty eyes before they nod and continue on their path. That probably has something to do with me having died. I hope they don’t go and rat me out to anyone.

The sounds of a scuffle catch my attention, and I turn to my left to see Ron and Draco getting into a fist fight before the term has even begun. I shake my head in amusement as McGonagall breaks up the miniature brawl, huffing loudly in annoyance. She separates the two, the both of them glaring venomously as they’re dragged apart.

McGonagall is so flustered by the fight that she forgets to give us the introductory spiel about our houses being our homes and such, instead announcing, "First years! Please come with me to be sorted!" Hagrid trundles over to her, a downcast expression on his face as he whispers something in her ear. Her eyes widen, and she quickly beckons everyone over and does a quick headcount, worry and confusion passing over her features before she collects herself, putting on her usual stern mask and leading us into the Great Hall.

I stifle a laugh as I march in with the rest of the new students. Who gets to say they've been sorted at Hogwarts twice? Hopefully the Sorting Hat doesn't announce my incredibly rare circumstances to the school, although I imagine he, it… whatever you call a sentient hat, would probably find it all just as funny as I do. It has been around for a thousand years, so I’m sure the hat gets quite bored.

McGonagall makes a half-hearted attempt to line us up, tutting in frustration as the throng of eleven-
year-olds do their best to make sure that they’re not standing in any apparent order. She gives up, making her way up to the stool and drawing out a long list. "Hannah Abbot!" She cries out, and I see a much smaller Hannah lace her way through the mass of first years and nervously walk up to the stool. The Sorting Hat rests on her head for less than a second before bellowing, "Hufflepuff!"

McGonagall runs through the names, as far as I can tell everyone is sorted into the same house they were last time. Although, I’ve always been awful with names, so I may be misremembering one or two. Hermione is the first combo breaker that I notice, and it’s not a surprise to me that she’s placed into Ravenclaw. I guess I must have had some influence on her joining Gryffindor. Well, I know if I get sorted into Ravenclaw this time I won't be hurting for a friend.

"Harry Potter!"

Well, looks like it's time to face the music.

McGonagall stares down at me as I saunter over to her, a bewildered expression plastered over her face. "I'm sorry dear, but I believe I called for Harry Potter," she whispers, leaning down on one knee and looking the true image of the mama-bear of Hogwarts as she tries to stop me from embarrassing myself.

"Well there’s been a mistake," I murmur, back of my hand against my mouth like I’m sharing some sort of grand conspiracy. "I'm Helene Potter. It's a common mix up apparently. For some reason everyone in the wizarding world thinks I'm a boy. Someone I ran into in the Alley said it has something to do with the newspapers around here? At least, that’s what the other girls on the train said as well," I muse, shrugging at her.

Her face changes from perplexed to mild understanding as she notices that I'm the spitting image of my mother, and with a quick nod she stands back up. "I was worried that you weren't here today Miss Potter, it's good to know you've arrived safe and sound," she states, not sounding as assured as she normally does. I think I may have broken her.

She stops for a moment, pondering what to do before turning to the now whispering crowd and calling for their attention, the hall quieting considerably under her stern stare. "There appears to be a bit of confusion and misinformation being printed in regard to Miss Potter here," she announces, motioning for me to take my seat. "Apparently the Daily Prophet and other publishers have been lacking in their research, and have unfortunately dubbed Miss Potter, Mister, much to her chagrin."

A few students chuckle at that jab.

Clambering onto the stool (the thing is bloody tall! They really should invest in a first-year sized one) I take my spot and feel McGonagall place the Sorting Hat on me. I don't fail to notice Dumbledore frowning in my direction as I climb onto the seat. I throw up my rudimentary occlumency shields reflexively, audibly sighing in relief when he doesn’t make an attempt to read me.

“Interesting, very interesting… Mister, or should I say, Miss Potter, you’ve been sorted once before,” the Sorting Hat begins, it’s voice full of anticipation.

“Yeah but as you can see I sort of died,” I mention, feeling the Sorting Hat rummaging around in my head. Not like I can keep a secret from a millennium old artifact that reads my mind as easily as Hermione reads books.

“Mmhm… Good thing you got better,” it deadpans back. Cheeky bugger.

“Hey! I heard that!”
“Shite, sorry.” I apologize, feeling a touch sheepish. I literally just had the thought that he can read my mind more easily than most people see. So much for my attempts at controlling my mind.

“No need to apologize, this is much more entertaining than running through some snot nosed eleven-year-old’s head.”

“Damn, I never thought of that, you must be pretty bloody bored,” I reply, feeling genuinely sorry for the poor Hat.

“You have no idea. I had much more fun with Godric. I got to see war every damned day! Great and terrible battles fought all over this country before I got stuck in this godforsaken gig. When you go from a couple beheadings a week to watching a chicken blow itself up once every couple of years, life loses its luster very quickly.”

“Yeah I can see how that would shake things up. Maybe you should ask Dumbledore to let you out of his office some time? Old man is a bit of a prick, but he may allow you to teach History. You are older than Binns.”

The Hat pauses for a moment, wondering whether that’s actually a good idea or not. “I think I’d spend most of the lecture telling the students to pull their heads out of their asses, but that sounds a lot more fun than watching that ancient git mutter over Godric knows what,” the Hat complains. “I’ll see if I can make it work though, nobody has ever suggested that. Now, onto the sorting. You were in Gryffindor before… you know you really should have gone into Slytherin?’

“Maybe I could give it a shot this time?”

“That’s a good idea, although you’d have difficulty operating under Dumbledore’s nose if I place you in the house of snakes. I can see the resentment you hold for him and being in Slytherin would just focus his attention directly on you. That, and I don’t believe you would get along with Severus, or should I say Snivellus. God, I love that nickname, tell your Dad I say thanks for that one when you snuff it.” The Hat laughs, sighing deeply before he continues.

Wait, sighing deeply? He doesn’t have lungs!

Ignoring my questions regarding the Hats missing anatomy, it carries on with its train of thought. “Hufflepuff would just stunt your growth no matter how friendly the house is, and you’d probably go insane living with the badgers. They’re a touch too uptight for you. Gryffindor is off the table seeing how that went the last time... you know that you probably would have lived quite a bit longer if you were placed into any other house? Only a Gryffindor would dive into a portal to Hades. That only leaves one other option! Better be…”

"Ravenclaw!"

I tear the Sorting Hat off my head, handing it back to McGonagall who smiles at me, a smidgen of regret gracing her features as she was evidently expecting me to be placed into Gryffindor. Just because I’m a Potter doesn’t mean I’m going to follow exactly in my parent’s foot steps. I mean really, I never even knew them.

I leap from the stool and jog over to the Ravenclaw table, the residents of which are providing me with a standing ovation, ecstatic to see the now properly dubbed girl-who-lived placed into their house. I drop heavily into the seat next to Hermione who smiles up at me shyly before focusing her attention on the remainder of the sorting.

Dumbledore steps up to give his usual announcements, letting the student body know that they
should avoid the third-floor corridor and the aptly named forbidden forest, otherwise they may die a horrible and painful death. Really, who the hell tells children not to go somewhere, especially if it's dangerous? That's a sure-fire way to get them to go and poke their nose into it! I think the whole of the student body knew there was a Cerberus guarding the third-floor corridor by the middle of the year last time around. I mentally shake my head, beginning to wonder why I ever held Dumbledore in such high regard.

Ignoring the rest of Dumbledore’s announcements, I look around the hall, my gaze passing over Quirrel quickly, an annoying twinge of pain breaking out on my scar. I ignore the urge to rub my scalp, my eyes flicking over to Flitwick who is currently beaming down at me, looking like he won the lottery grand prize. I always liked Flitwick, and I'm looking forward to him being my new head of house. I continue to look over the staff table before my gaze rests on Snape. What in the holy ever-loving shite is he smiling? Snape… smiling? Oh my god. I didn't even know he was physically capable of smiling! Fuck me, is he smiling at me? This is going to be a weird year. I think hell just froze over.

Tearing my eyes away from the blood curdling image of a grinning Severus Snape, I turn back to the table just as the food appears. Quelling all horrendous thoughts of how hideously normal he looked I focus on my meal, piling food onto my plate before digging in.

The table around me immediately erupts with questions. "Where have you been the last decade?" "Do you really have a scar?" "Why aren't you a boy?" "Can you sign my chest?"

Looking up at the statement, "Can you sign my chest?" I see the Weasley twins standing over me, beaming madly and waving a large felt pen in my face. It takes everything in me not to fall over laughing as they tear off their shirts and I sign my name with a quick flourish on Fred and George's chests before they leave back to their seats, shit eating grins plastered on their faces as they pat me on the back, announcing loudly that the 'girl-who-lived is everything they'd ever dreamed of.' I guess pranking all of Britain on your first day to school is enough to win their admiration.

"Why on earth did you do that?" I hear, Hermione whispering beside me, a confused and mildly horrified look on her face.

"Because it was bloody hilarious is why," I reply, the same mischievous grin as the twins gracing my features. "Gotta' have fun every once in a while, you know?"

Hermione inclines her head, still not understanding why I would sign the ginger twin’s chests but nonplussed as long as rules aren't broken. I forgot how much of a stickler she was, hopefully I can prevent the whole incident with the troll and get her to lighten up earlier in life. All work and no play makes Hermione a dull girl.

I’m looking forward to seeing the resurgence of the confident Hermione. The one that punches Malfoy in the face and doesn’t blink, instead telling me that it felt good. The one that traps Rita Skeeter in a jar for a whole week and doesn’t recognize how terribly fucked up that is because she’s so focused on the idea of revenge. Because I know that that Hermione will always have my back, as well as occasionally do something just ever so slightly bordering on sociopathic behaviour that I will find incredibly entertaining.

"I'm sorry, I'm being rude," I apologize, offering my hand to Hermione, much to her shock. "My name is Helene Potter, and you are?"

Blushing slightly, she takes my hand and shakes it weakly, unsure of how to respond. "My name is Hermione Granger," she replies, nervously chewing her bottom lip. I forgot how terribly shy she was. But, I know that look all too well. I guess it's time for the inquisition.
She takes a deep breath before firing off her standard line of questioning. "You know you're in The Rise and Fall of Dark Wizards, right? Actually, you're in a couple of books! I've read all of them but now I'm not so sure how right they were considering they called you Harry and you're actually Helene. I thought it was illegal to print something that was wrong! Isn't it so infuriating that they would do such a thing? I know I would be furious. It's so-

"Hermione, it's okay!" I interrupt her, laughing at what is such a completely and utterly Hermione display. "I'm aware that I'm mentioned in a few books, but I haven't read them or been interviewed for them so I'm unsure of how truthful they may be. There's no need to worry about that though, I think I'd rather forget about that and enjoy my meal with a friend, wouldn't you?"

Wide eyed she smiles back at me, her lips closed tight. Shame she's so insecure about her teeth, Hermione has always had a lovely smile, even with her slightly large teeth, and nobody ever knew until she got a little confidence in her. Obviously pleased though, she goes back to her food and we chat amongst ourselves. Hermione babbling about her parent’s dentist’s office and how excited she is to study magic (like I said, some things never change. The girl is definitely a born Ravenclaw), with me listening patiently and replying every once in a while, discussing different spells that she may be interested in learning.

I briefly think about letting Hermione know about the whole time-travel incident, before I remember that while I may know her, she doesn't know me. I don't think it would be a good idea to drop the bomb of ‘hey I've actually known you most of my life and we're best friends, I actually died and got sent back in time because Death didn't feel like doing paperwork,’ on an eleven-year-old who's just been introduced to a world she didn’t even know exists. Knowing Hermione, even if she did believe such an outlandish story, she'd still have a conniption knowing that even Death breaks the rules sometimes.

Eventually the meal finishes up, and we're escorted by the Prefects to the Ravenclaw common room. We take a side route up to the fifth floor before hiking up the stairs to the top of the one of the towers, greeted by a bare wooden door with an eagle knocker fused to it.

"What has roots as nobody sees, is taller than trees, up, up it goes, and yet never grows?" The knocker asks, metallic eyes planted on the Prefect leading the group.

The Prefect stops for a moment, pondering the answer. "A mountain," another girl replies, the door swinging open at her statement and greeting us with a view of the incredible, and I mean incredible Ravenclaw common room. Gryffindor may be homely but it's damned garish in comparison to this! As much as I loved the red and gold, it really was too much. There has to be some variety.

Blue and bronze tapestries adorn the walls, and the room itself is decked out in Ravenclaw colours, but it's tastefully done and not an eyesore compared to the furnishings of the Gryffindor or Slytherin common rooms. A large fireplace occupies the right side of the room, a statue of Rowena Ravenclaw resting beside it, with a half circle of couches and love seats placed around the fireplace. There are two staircases on either side of the room, leading upwards into the turrets shooting off the side of the tower. Unsurprisingly, there’s a series of tables lined up along the left side of the room, obviously placed there for students to study, and large bookshelves are arrayed behind the tables, presumably containing duplicates of many of the books located in the Hogwarts library. I definitely chose the right house this time around.

The prefect and his companion turn to address us, running through the usual first year spiel. What catches my attention is the two of them explaining that whenever we want to enter the common room we must answer a riddle, and that if we cannot answer we have to wait for another student to let us in. Shit I might have chosen the wrong house, I'm pants at riddles.
We're quickly gathered up and led to our sleeping quarters, girls to the left and boys to the right. I have to catch myself before I accidentally follow the boys up to their quarters and slip into line behind Hermione as we make our way up to our bedrooms.

Okay, forget about the riddles, I absolutely and unequivocally chose the correct house. Instead of the usual four or five to a dormitory that I'm used to from Gryffindor, each student in Ravenclaw gets to share a dormitory with one other student. The dormitories look closer to what I imagine a muggle universities dorm rooms would. The quarters are quite simple, with two beds on either side of the room facing the door, accompanied by two small tables placed behind them, resting underneath a large window overlooking the Hogwarts grounds. Best part of the equation though? En-suite bathrooms. Yes, bathrooms. Plural. Hell yeah! No fighting for a shower in this timeline!

It's hard to make anything out at this time of night but I assume the windows will provide me with a fantastic view of the lake and forest judging by the towers position in the castle. Looking over I sigh with relief as I notice that Hermione has joined me in the dormitory and will be my flatmate for this year, and hopefully for the remainder of my time here at Hogwarts if I have anything to say about it. I'm not interested in sharing a room with Padma Patil. I know she's not the gossip that her sister is, and I'd prefer to hang about with her rather than Pavarti, but I don't really know her all that well considering the house segregation and would rather stay with someone I'm already comfortable with.

Grabbing my pyjamas out of my trunk I slink off to the bathroom to change, coming back and climbing into bed. I fall asleep with a book on my lap and a smile on my face, content with my new and even crazier life. Life is much better when you get to make the rules.

*I absolutely adore Tolkien's riddles.*
Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

Waking up in the Ravenclaw tower has got to be one of the most picturesque experiences of my entire life. When I thought the view from my new bedroom would be magnificent my imagination didn't even come close to doing it justice. While the Gryffindor common room has a lovely view of the grounds and quidditch pitch, the view from the Ravenclaw tower looks more like a nature tours advertisement brochure.

A little bit of everything is caught in that picture, dead centre is the great expanse of the lake stretching off into the distance, mountains peeping up behind it like Gaia's castle walls. The forbidden forest lays to the right, giving the whole scene a very 'Mirkwood and the Misty Mountains’ vibe. Yeah, screw Gryffindor, Ravenclaw is where it's at.

After a quick shower I nip down to the Great Hall for breakfast and plant myself next to Hermione. She looks up and smiles a bit once she recognizes me. She's looking a bit peaky though. Slightly prominent bags under her eyes, a mild pallor to her skin. I’m going to try and remedy that.

"Hey Hermione! How did you sleep last night?" Scraping some eggs onto my plate, I smile cheerily as I subtly interrogate her.

"I slept alright," She replies, blushing and going back to her toast. "I just had a bit of a hard time getting to sleep. This is all so… crazy, isn't it? Not that it's bad!" She adds fervently, putting her hands up in mild surrender. "I just never imagined I would be going to boarding school, let alone a magical one."

I nod my head sagely, placing a finger on my cheek as I comfort her. "Yeah I completely understand what you mean. I may not seem like it, but this is a whole new world to me as well," I confide, her eyebrows rising at that. "I was raised with my muggle cousins for the last ten years, I honestly didn't even know about the wizarding world until about a week ago. I'm just really good at faking it!" I laugh, poking her in the ribs and earning a shy giggle in response.

Hermione playfully slaps me on the arm in return, grinning all the while. "Well I'm glad we're both new at this together!"

"Yep! I'm happy I've already found a friend here!" I reply, watching Hermione's eyes shine at that simple statement. A little bit of me breaks when I see that. My old friend looking so surprised, awed that someone would want to be her friend.

"Me too," she whispers sheepishly, picking at her food.

"Five points to Ravenclaw Miss Potter for helping a new student."

I immediately recognize the distinctive chirp of Professor Flitwick. I twist around to see him, startled as he nonchalantly hands over two pieces of parchment to us. "Here are your course schedules, and I would like to remind you two that I expect the best from you and all my other Ravens! I'd like to see Exceeds Expectations at the lowest. ". Looks like Flitwick takes the brainy reputation of Ravenclaw quite seriously. “But, I have faith you two will do the house proud.”

I have to give it to him, that’s a great way to motivate your new students. Pushy, yet comforting.
Hermione nods her head furiously, causing me to smirk at her unintentionally fantastic Dobby impression. “Absolutely Professor! I wouldn't dream of getting a lower grade!” She excitedly declares, the little academic solider that she is. The only thing that would complete this picture would be the two of them saluting one another before Flitwick leaves. I take this chance to do just that.

Snapping off an RAF salute that would make the Queen proud, I grin cheekily at Flitwick. "We will do the house proud, Sir. You have our word."

Chuckling to himself he salutes me back, crying out in his squeaky little voice, "At ease soldier! You do the Claws proud!" Chuckling at my antics, he continues with his task of handing out the class schedules, cheerily greeting the rest of the now thoroughly entertained Ravenclaws.

"Why hello Miss Potter, I don't believe we've been introduced yet."

Oh, for fucks sake. That better not be who I think it is. I slowly turn around, praying that I'm not about to deal with Draco Malfoy before noon. Of course, life is never so easy. I sigh in resignation as I lock eyes on the blond wonder.

"No, I don't believe we have," I demur, not even bothering to shake his currently extended hand. That should send a message his way, although I doubt he'll recognize it. Even if he does, he’s not the type to listen.

He awkwardly pulls his hand away, hastily tucking it inside his robe as he tries to figure out how to approach me. His face screws up a bit in thought before he begins a very nostalgic spiel. "My name is Draco Malfoy, you'll soon find out that some wizarding families are better than others Miss Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort," he simpers, inclining his head with as much subtlety as a drunken toddler towards Hermione.

"Ah, I was afraid you were one of those types," I frigidly reply, placing my hand protectively on Hermione’s shoulder. She knows that Malfoy has said something derogatory about her, but she still looks at me in confusion, most of the conversation completely going over her head. "See, I'd much rather spend time with the lovely Miss Granger here than with someone whose whole claim to fame is that their ex-Death Eater Daddy is disgustingly rich."

Draco’s face devolves from patient anticipation to undisguised fury, his upper lip curling into a familiar sneer, followed by his rebuttal of, “Well I never!”

“Please, leave me and my friend alone,” I state, my voice tense and strained as I try not to say anything too rude. I mean, the kid is eleven for Gods sake. He pisses me off like it’s his life’s calling, but it not like he knows any better. “I’m not interested in being your friend, but I’m not interested in being your enemy either. I ignore you, you ignore me, alright?” I turn back to my meal, squeezing Hermione’s shoulder comfortingly and whispering, “I’ll explain what he was so rudely saying later, just ignore him,” in her ear.

Just as I move to take a bite of the scrambled eggs that I have been lusting for since I dragged myself out of bed this morning, I feel a violent tug on my shoulder, a small hand roughly pulling me off of my seat and onto the ground. “How dare you,” Malfoy growls, the statement much less intimidating than I would have once found it at this age.

I pull myself up to my feet, cursing under my breath at the level of entitlement the little shit has. What kind of person thinks that that’s anything close to acceptable behaviour? “Look, piss off now and we can forget this ever happened, alright?” I spit, staring him in the eyes and begging him to simply leave. I don’t want to put up with this stupid rivalry again.
Draco bites his lip in thought, before sticking out his jaw and drawing his wand, aggressively pointing it at my throat. I react instantly, smacking the wand away and striking him in the stomach, causing him to double over and empty his lungs with a shuddering hiss. He falls over to the ground dramatically, whimpering loudly and muttering something about half-bloods and temperamental redheads.

There’s a rough stomping of feet behind me, announcing the entrance of whichever concerned professors have decided to intervene. "What in Merlin’s name is going on here?" A familiar drawl demands. I stare in undisguised shock as Snape looks down at Malfoy with derision, sporting his patented scowl. That’s just… wow. I never thought I’d see the day.

Flitwick clears his throat, beckoning for my attention. "I would like to know as well, Miss Potter, I would be extremely ashamed to find that you instigated this."

"Mr. Malfoy here insulted my friend's heritage before sticking his wand in my face,” I explain, gritting my teeth at the sheer stupidity of someone, particularly someone who really should know better, pointing a weapon at another’s face. “Considering we’re first years and our magic is unpredictable, I felt the need to respond with force.”

"Twenty points from Slytherin and detention tonight Mr. Malfoy,” Flitwick snaps, turning his gaze towards Snape, expecting an argument.

"I couldn't agree more Filius," Snape sneers, much to my and Flitwick’s surprise. Again, I never thought I’d see the day. "I'll take care of the detention, I'm sure my godson will understand the severity of his actions when I'm through with him."

Holy fuck. Did Severus goddamn Snape just assign Draco Malfoy detention?

I've never been so glad to have died. Death never told me that this would be so cathartic! Maybe this time Malfoy will get it and just leave me alone. It's a pipe dream, but it's my pipe dream, damn it.

"Miss Potter I'm sorry to have rushed to conclusions, are you alright?" Flitwick sighs, looking a smidge dejected due to his snap decision. "You’re the spitting image of your mother and she was quite the fireball back in her day, when I saw Mister Malfoy on the ground I expected the worst. Are you hurt in any way?" I have to prevent myself from smiling winningly at his explanation. The fastest way to my heart is to tell me something new about my parents.

"It's alright Professor, I'm fine, just a little frustrated. You don't need to apologize as well. You were just doing your job. If it was me on the ground and Malfoy standing over me I'd expect you to act the exact same."

"I'm glad you understand, I'm happy to see that you inherited the more righteous aspect of your mother’s temper, just make sure to send it in the right direction."

Rubbing at my shoulder I sit back down and dig back into my meal, oblivious to the stares around me. A tapping on my arm makes me turn to Hermione, who's eyeing me curiously now. "What was that all about? The right people? The wrong sort? What did he mean? Was he talking about me?" She asks, firing off a thousand questions at once.

I raise my hand, asking her to stop so that I can explain. She puckers her lips, doing her best to halt her nervous interrogation. “Draco is… from an old family. They have this idea that since they can trace their family back for hundreds of years they're better than anyone who can’t. To be more specific, they look down on witches and wizards like you, muggleborn or muggle-raised who are completely new to the wizarding world,” I explain, raising a single finger to stop her from starting
another line of questioning. “Trust me, I don’t share those bigoted opinions and I never will. My mother was muggleborn, and I’m muggle-raised. To be honest, most people don’t share those opinions either,” I add, a slight bit of relief washing over her features. “Unfortunately, the ones who do are quite vocal about it.”

Hermione nods faintly, chewing her cheek nervously. “So… they’re like racists, aren’t they? They hate people because of something they can’t control.”

“Yeah, in a nut shell,” I reply, lifting my head back up and peering around the table I frown. Damn it all. Everyone is still staring at me and a couple of people sitting nearby are trying to shuffle away inconspicuously.

“Oh, for God’s sake, I’m not about to fight any of you too,” I growl in exasperation, shaking my head at the fearful looks.

Padma Patil, surprisingly enough, reaches across the table and pats me on the hand. "It's alright Helene, I think people are just shocked to see such a thing so early in the morning. I didn’t know that Hogwarts offers a show with breakfast,” she giggles. Poking her seatmate with her elbow and nodding in my direction. "Say sorry, Lisa."

Lisa bashfully apologizes, muttering something about 'scary red heads.' I guess I just pulled off a display of ginger rage that would make Molly Weasley envious. Shuddering at the idea of an angry Molly I thank Lisa and apologize to her in return for being downright terrifying.

"By the way, my name is Padma Patil. It's nice to finally meet you Helene.” She smiles, offering her hand.

I give her hand a quick shake and offer mine to Lisa, who responds the same.

"I'm really sorry about all that. I guess that's a hell of a way to make an impression on my first day."

"You have no idea."

"I think I do," I respond as I notice Dumbledore looming over me, a genial smile on his face and his eyes twinkling merrily. Does he do that eye thing on purpose? That has to be a cantrip of some sort.

"Miss Potter, would you be able to have a word with me before lunch in my office? Just ask your Professor to take you there after class. I believe you have charms with Filius that block," he says, wandering out of the Great Hall, sparkling lilac robes swishing behind him.

Classes pass by quickly, although they are mind-numbingly boring considering I learned the syllabus four years ago. I do have to deal with the usual stares and whispers during the day, but I’ve been used to that for a long time. I really can’t catch a break, can I?

The shining moment of my morning is potions going off without a hitch. No interrogations, no harassment, and best of all, no Slytherins. The Slytherins are delegated to the Gryffindor class, leaving ours paired up with the Hufflepuffs, making the working environment much more conducive to a healthy education. Funnily enough, Snape didn’t loom over me as well. In fact, he kept his distance and watched me complete a perfect hiccoughing potion in our lecture, proudly marking it with an O before sending me off to my next class. The world is a strange and wonderful place. I don’t think I’m ever going to like the man, but I do feel a little bit bad about carrying on the name Snivellus. Just a little bit.
After charms, Flitwick escorts me to Dumbledore's office, chirping out the password and leaving me to climb up the spiral staircase. I watch as the massive gargoyle jumps aside, walking past it and taking the magical escalator up towards the Headmaster's office. I feel my stomach knot uncomfortably, anxiety plaguing my mind as I prepare myself for a conversation with a man that I once idolized and have now relegated to the category of 'untrustworthy and highly dangerous.'

I hear Dumbledore speak from the other side of the door before I even have a chance to knock.

“Please, come in.”

I open it up and enter into his office. The place looks identical to the last time I was here, apart from the Sword of Gryffindor being mounted above the sorting hat. I don’t know why I expected it to look any differently since I went back in time, but I did all the same.

"Take a seat Miss Potter, please," Dumbledore says, conjuring a very comfy looking armchair in front of his desk. I stop myself from raising one eyebrow questioningly, wondering why Dumbledore has begun this conversation with a show of power. Well, if I was mentally eleven, I would have found that to be quite impressive. I sink into my seat, cordially rejecting Dumbledore's offer of sweets before he cuts to the chase.

“So, how are you enjoying Hogwarts so far my dear? I hope that you’re enjoying your classes,” he begins, smiling at me from underneath his bushy mustache.

“It’s… fantastic. I love it here,” I gush excitedly, completely genuine as I proclaim my love of Hogwarts. “I think I enjoy charms with Professor Flitwick the most, and potions was really interesting.”

Dumbledore raises his eyebrows in surprise at my statement, obviously perplexed that I would find potions of all classes interesting. Looks like he assumed that Snape would be treating me terribly. Really Dumbledore? You expected the man to treat me spitefully?

He steeples his fingers, his friendly demeanor harshening ever so slightly, an attempt to get me to spill my mind like the scared eleven-year-old he expects me to be. “Forgive me for bringing this up, but I am curious to find that you are Helene Potter, and not Harry Potter.” His thick eyebrows pull into a small frown. “In fact, I believe most of the wizarding world will find themselves curious. Could you tell me anything about that?”

“Well, I’ve always been a girl?” I hesitate, putting on the mask of a perplexed child. “I don’t know why everyone thinks I’m a boy or was supposed to be a boy. I’ve always been Helene.” I shrug emphatically as I throw up my occlumency shields, tense and prepared for the worst-case scenario in the event that he attempts to invade my mind.

Dumbledore’s frown deepens, unsure of how to take my reply. He licks his lips, before drumming his fingers over the top of his desk for a few moments. “I guess it was all a big misunderstanding,” he reasons, his frown quickly morphing into a forced smile. “I’ve heard you’re quite the eager student, and talented to boot.”

“Oh, no. I’m sure I’ve just been lucky,” I say, downplaying my knowledge. “I’m sure you heard that from Professor McGonagall after I managed to transfigure the matchstick. I think it was just a fluke.”

"Really? You shouldn’t be so humble my dear, although that's very good to hear that you hold your Professors to such high esteem Miss Potter.” He reaches across his desk and shuffles a stack of parchment, drawing out a quill and sucking on the end before delicately placing it in an inkpot. “Don't let an old man like me take up all of your time, I believe there's a large lunch waiting for you
downstairs,” he says, nodding towards the door, telling me in a very polite manner to jog on.

I pop out of my seat and head out, practically running to the great hall and stifling a nervous laugh. I can’t believe I managed to get out of that! I felt so anxious I was afraid I was going to be sick then and there!

I pause on my way to the Great Hall, stopping to take a breather and settle my nerves, resting near one of the many suits of armour in the castle. I grit my teeth, my insides twisting in mild anguish as I fully realize that Dumbledore wasn’t the man I thought he was, and never will be. I can’t believe he tried to wheedle such personal information out of me, especially after he was the one to trap me in that body. Did Death transport me into some bizarre world instead of my own? Is that the real Dumbledore?

I shake my head awkwardly, trying not to look like a maniac and mutter to myself as I head to lunch, wishing that my impressions of Dumbledore are wrong. Wishing that he’s not the seemingly Machiavellian liar that I was just subtly interrogated by.

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The weeks steadily breeze by, most notably with Daphne helping me open up a line of contact with her father Octavius, as promised. I quickly hired him as my solicitor after mentioning his place as my potential guardian, along with glossing over my treatment at the Dursleys. From what I can tell that threw him through a loop, as the next letter I received was scrawled quite hastily and far less professionally than the previous ones.

Miss Potter

I am quite displeased to hear about the treatment you received by the Guardians you were placed with so many years ago, as me and my wife have always been quite curious regarding your whereabouts. My wife Terra was a steadfast friend of your Mother and Father, while I was well acquainted with the two of them from Hogwarts. We were under the impression that you would become our ward in the case of the unimaginable.

I will be making inquiries into the ministry as to your cousins and treatment forthwith and am offering you an invitation to spend the winter holidays in my family's home. I understand that this may be considered a step out of bounds as your solicitor, but due to the circumstances I'm sure any comments or worries towards my professionalism will be quashed immediately.

I will do as you have asked and make sure that others do not go poking their noses into my investigation, specifically those involved with your placement on that fateful night.

Sincerely

Octavius Greengrass

Yeah, that's less professional than his previous letters. Bloody lawyers, bunch of hard asses they are. Anyways, school has been going swimmingly for the past month and a bit, the only wave on the horizon being tonight's Halloween feast, but I've made sure Hermione has a good group of friends and will hopefully not go running off to the bathrooms this time around. I'd really prefer not to fight a troll a month after my rebirth. Although, it would be good practice if I could tackle it without anyone being around to see it.

Speaking of Hermione, she's been an even better friend in this timeline! It's amazing how much she's thriving with the rest of the Claws. Our peers in the house very quickly pulled her aside after the first
day of classes and explained what could result of her behaviour in class, specifically her burgeoning need to answer any and all questions posed by the Professors. She was instantly mollified when she understood that the teachers were asking questions so that students who didn’t know the answer could try and work it out themselves. I wish I tried that one on her before, considering it worked better than a confundus charm.

The Halloween feast itself goes by just about the same, a fainting Quirrel, Dumbledore sending the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs back to their dormitories located in the dungeons, even Quirrel just announced that the troll is already there. I’m just absolutely mystified how I’m only now seeing the man for what he truly is. How did I not notice his behaviour before?

Unfortunately, Ron found himself in the bathroom this time, as his incredible lack of social skills (even worse than most other eleven-year-olds) landed him between a troll and a hard place. Apparently, he had insulted Lavender Brown for practicing with makeup and was met with a healthy dose of slaps from her and Pavarti. I like Ron, really, but he is a complete and utter prat. I hope he grows out of that, or his brothers manage to get his arse in line.

So, because of Ron having a spat with the two Gryffindor girls, I’m now finding myself toe to toe with a mountain troll. Again.

I barge into the boy’s loo, following the putrid stench of the troll like a bloodhound. I spot the vaguely humanoid creature bellowing in Ron’s direction, viscous strings of spit flying from its rotten mouth. I nearly snap off a blasting hex at the troll’s head, stopping myself quickly as I realize that I would give myself away much too soon if I did just that.

I think as quickly as I can, wondering what spell to use to dispatch the troll before settling on an old favourite. "Wingardium Leviosa!" I shout, snatching the club from the troll’s meaty grip and slamming it into its forehead a few times, quickly knocking it out and causing it to careen into the bathroom wall, taking a good amount of porcelain fixtures with it on its journey. Streams of water begin gushing out of the walls, the floor slowly beginning to pool with the clear liquid.

I march through the growing puddles towards Ron, bending down on one knee and checking him for any injuries. I smile reassuringly when I see that he’s clean, extending my hand towards him.

"Bloody hell mate! Where’d you learn how to do that!?” Ron chokes out as he grabs my hand. I yank him off of the ground, helping him to his feet.

"Charms class, you Gryffes are on the same schedule as us, aren't you?"

"Yeah I guess. Bloody hell though. You just took out a troll!” He mutters in astonishment, staring dumbly at the slow rise and fall of the unconscious beast’s chest. He stumbles towards it, poking the rough, gnarled skin tentatively with his wand, cursing quite fluently under his breath.

"It seems I did," I respond, surveying my handiwork. Much cleaner than last round. No troll snot, nor torn robes. Apart from the environmental damage, I think I did alright. The real difference is the newfound control over my magic. The changes have been incredible, considering I would have had difficulty defeating that in fifth year, let alone how I somehow managed to in my first. Must have been obscenely good luck.

Clattering echoing from the halls and perfectly synchronized gasps alert me to the flood of teachers now standing outside the washroom. "What on earth happened here?" McGonagall explodes, rushing over to me and Ron and casting a flurry of diagnostic spells, sighing in relief when she realizes we're both unhurt.

"Well, apparently a troll happened," I respond, pointing at my partner in crime. "Ron here got
trapped by the troll and I did the first thing I could think of and levitated the trolls club into its face."

"Fifty points to Ravenclaw for quick thinking and stellar use of a simple charm Miss Potter," Flitwick squeaks nervously, taking me gently by the arm and leading me out of the washroom.

The other Professors are looking on dumbly at the warzone, gaping incredulously at the unconscious troll. Quirrel has yet again slumped into the corner, faking catalepsy. I hold back a sneer, watching as Dumbledore quickly collects himself and waves his wand about, restoring the room to its previous condition before patting me on the back and proclaiming, "Fantastic charms work Miss Potter, you take after your mother."

"Thank you, Headmaster, I just cast the first spell I thought of."

"Nonsense, I would have been hard pressed to do better myself."

Even Snape looks impressed at the scene in front of him, wide eyed, he nods at me respectfully before leaving to check on his snakes. Eugh, that’s not the best way to phrase that. Snape and his snakes? Sounds like the name of a cheap porno.

Flitwick quickly escorts me back to Ravenclaw tower before heading back to his rooms with a quick statement of, "If you are ever interested in charms tutoring please let me know, I'd be happy to show you the ropes outside of class."

I beam at that. Learning charms first-hand from a former dueling champion? People would kill, or at least main to be tutored by Flitwick.

As I make it back to the common room, I toss myself onto one of the love seats, basking in the warmth of the dormitories roaring fire before Hedwig swoops into the room. She settles carefully on my shoulder, crooning quietly as she rests her head on mine.

"Have you got a letter for me love? Let's see what Mister Greengrass has to say about my latest message," I muse aloud, running my fingers over Hedwig’s soft feathers, absentmindedly handing her a treat. Unfurling the parchment, I scan it quickly, an even bigger smile creeping over my face with every word.

Miss Potter

I'm extraordinarily surprised to hear that Sirius Black has never received a trial for his betrayal of your parent's and the consequent murders that occurred when he fled. I understand that you would like to personally see justice done, and I will be opening an inquiry into the DMLE regarding the trial of Sirius Black. Hopefully he gets his just desserts and a trial may shed some light on the happenings of that terrible evening.

I will be in touch.

Octavius Greengrass

"Yes!" I whoop, punching a fist into the air and scaring the hell out of everyone in the common room.

"Helene what's got you so excited?" Hermione asks, appearing out of nowhere. "Did something happen?

“Sort of? It’s a bit personal,” I deflect. “Sorry, I’m just unsure how to talk about it.”
Slumping into the seat next to me, Hermione continues, "So what's got your attention tonight? Is it a letter from a boy?" She blushes awkwardly, embarrassed that she would even make an attempt to have such a stereotypically ‘girly’ conversation.

"Oh god no. I'm too young to even think about that." Not to mention much too young physically to even approach someone who would be interested in dating. If I'm even going to consider dating, I'm going to wait until I'm old enough, as well as only see someone who’s in the upper years, preferably seventh. "No, I'm much too young. Not to mention, I'm not really interested in boys anyways," I add, wondering why she would even think that I would be getting a message from a boy of all people.

Hermione looks at me curiously, lips pursed in thought. “So… you don’t like boys?”

“No, I don’t like them. Why would you assume that?”

“You… you like girls then?”

I nod slowly, wondering what about my statement is so difficult to understand. “Yeah. I do? Why?”

“I’ve never had a gay friend,” Hermione blurts, quickly slapping her hand over her mouth, eyes widened comically. “Oh! I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to say it that way! You’re not an object or anything, you know? I just… I never had a friend to begin with, but I never thought my first would be gay. Not that there’s anything wrong with that!” she stammers, hands held up in apology.

“Gay? What did I say about being gay?” I vacillate, confused beyond belief. Gay? Where the hell did she get that id-

“Oh goddammit.”


“Yeah, I guess I am.”

“It’s alright, I don’t think any differently of you,” she vows, squeezing my arm. “I won’t tell anyone, alright? I’m sure you want to keep it a secret.”

I nod shyly, mystified that Hermione could immediately jump to the conclusion that I’m gay, instead of finding boys ‘icky’ like all other children her age would. I’m also mystified that I just confirmed her thoughts. Why? Why would I do that? What could that possibly gain me? What happened to being a Slytherin, using my brain instead of my muscles?

“If you don’t mind me asking… who’s the letter from?”

"I got a letter from my solicitor telling me that the man who betrayed my parents will be getting a trial. He didn't get one when he was originally incarcerated for some odd reason. Looks like I'll be able to see true justice done and really figure out what happened ten years ago."

"I'm happy and sad to hear that Helene. I'm sorry you've had such a hard go of it, but it's good to get closure.” Her eyes light up dangerously, her obsession with studying rearing its head. “But don't think you can use that as an excuse to get out of homework Miss Potter! You've still got a few inches left on your Defence essay, let's get to it!"

I grab my incomplete essay out of my bag, along with a quill and ink pot, mockingly pouting as I get to work.

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The next day I find myself knocking on the door to the charms classroom, a high pitched, "Come in!" greeting me as I slide into the room. I stop and smile at the familiar sight, the tremulous tower of books stacked all around Flitwick’s desk. It’s so… unwieldy, yet it adds to the charm. Apt, considering he’s the charms professor.

"I'm assuming you're here to take me up on my offer Miss Potter?" Flitwick inquires, looking out over his desk with an eyebrow cocked.

"Absolutely Professor. I don't think I'd be a true Claw if I said no to extra work," I reply, grinning in excitement.

"Truer words have never been spoken," he approves, climbing down from his seat and strolling over to me. "I know you've been reading ahead Miss Potter, but I'd like to run you through a drill and see where you're at before I teach you anything. We don't want to get ahead of ourselves or be too far behind, correct?"

"Yeah, I understand. What would you like me to start off with?"

Flitwick scratches his chin before snapping his fingers (sadly unaccompanied by the declaration of 'Eureka!'). Producing his wand out of his sleeve, he lights the end, "This is the lighting charm, lumos. I know we've gone over this a few weeks ago, but there is a derivative with the incantation, lumos sollem, which instead of producing a light at the tip of your wand," he states, nodding pointedly at his wand as it shoots a solid line of light from the tip. "Lumos sollem creates a beam instead, which you can direct and point much like a muggle torch. Go ahead and give it a try, there are no motions necessary."

I quickly fire off a Lumos, along with its variant before looking back at Flitwick and saluting him yet again. "Got anything harder Sergeant?"

Flitwick jokingly wipes an invisible tear from his eye before saluting back. "You bet your buttocks I've got some harder spells for you to try!"

We quickly dash through the lot of the first-year curriculum, Flitwick praising me all the while as we continue our little army routine. We make our way up to a cheering charm before Flitwick jumps for joy and rushes to his desk, books and paper flying through the air as he rummages around. A few minutes later, he’s shouting excitedly and sprinting back, carrying a tome nearly as large as he is.

"Miss Potter you're a genuine prodigy and I'd love for us to continue our lessons. If you're half as good at transfiguration as you are at charms I know Minerva- sorry, Professor McGonagall would be ecstatic to provide you lessons as well," he proclaims, his voice brimming with pride as he hands me the tome. "I hope that you’ll tear through most of this before your time at Hogwarts is up Miss Potter. Do the Claws proud!"

I look down in wonder at the gift he’s given me, my mind racing at the possibilities this book may bring. Such a valuable thing for Flitwick to give to a first-year student. I flick my eyes back up to Flitwick, snapping off another joking salute, I cry out "Sir, Yes Sir!"

"Now go, off with you! I have grading to do!" Flitwick orders, frantically ushering me out of the room and chuckling all the while.

I love being a Ravenclaw.
Winter break is here in a flash, with me excitedly clambering onto the Express, looking forward to my first real Christmas holiday. Who knew a trip to the bank could change so much? I find myself in a compartment accompanied by Daphne and Tracey, as well as Hermione, Padma, and Lisa, all of us chatting about our plans for the break.

"Helene, I heard you're staying with Daphne over the break?" Tracey inquires, one eyebrow raised surreptitiously.

"Yep! Turns out our families go way back, and our parents were good friends," I respond, smiling widely. "I'm assuming I'll see you on Christmas day?"

"You can bet on that Potter!" She replies, grinning at me and punching Daphne in the arm, who scowls back at her. Looks like she’s in another ‘no fun allowed’ mood. I find the disparity in personality between the two friends incredibly entertaining, like some sort of old comedy skit. It brings Abbot and Costello to mind. "You couldn't tear me away from my Daphne even if you cast a blasting hex!"

Everyone laughs at this, although we're all quickly interrupted by the compartment door sliding open to reveal the famous blond bastard sporting his usual sneer. "Hello Potty, spending time with the dykes I see? It's all bad breeding that leads to your perversions," he spits, crossing his arms and attempting to look intimidating as his brainless compatriots poke their heads out from behind him.


"Why should I listen to a halfblood like you?" He smirks, looking as if he's won the argument. I sigh, dragging my fingers through my hair dramatically.

"Malfoy fuck off, you inbred little git."

"Why- you insufferable- When my father hears about this!"

"He's going to cry himself silly and cuddle the ewe that shares his quarters. I thought your family was French, not Welsh, yeah? I know it's encouraged to assimilate into a new culture when you move to another country, but daddy dearest took it a little too far." I smile maliciously at him, my temper getting the better of me.

"You bitch!" Malfoy cries, drawing his wand before I wave my hand reflexively, slamming the door shut on his fist. He quickly draws back, screeching in pain. He cries out some nonsense about blood traitors and what his father will do to me, or some other meaningless rubbish. I ignore him, flicking my hand again and closing the door behind him, taking out my wand and casting a silencing charm for good measure.

Huh, the train is really quiet now. I guess the silencing charm was a bit too powerful.

"Can you guys hear me?" I ask, looking over everyone. The whole compartment is now staring at me wide eyed. Weird. I tap myself on the head, noting that I can still hear. I snap my fingers as well, the sound registering fine. “You alright?’"

"Mother of God! What the hell Helene! That was wandless magic!” Daphne shouts, jumping to her feet and grabbing onto my shoulders, shaking me vigorously. “Wandless magic!" She repeats loudly, eyes bugging out hysterically.
"Wa-a-a-a-as i-i-it?" I reply in short stutters as I’m aggressively tossed about. “I didn’t know I could do that.”

"That was genuine wandless magic!" She marvels. She blinks as she looks down at her hands, clasped tightly to my shoulders. Coughing, she releases me and sits back down, staring at the ground as her mind races. “I knew you were powerful for a first year but that's something on an entirely different level! Have you always been able to do that?”

"Uh, yeah. I didn't think it was a big deal, I just imagine what I want and try hard enough,” I guess, shrugging my shoulders. “Combine the two and… poof, I make it so. I thought everyone could do simple things like that. All I did was shut the door."

"You didn't just shut the door. You sealed it!” She says frantically, pointedly poking at the side of the door. I look closely and realize that the frame has now joined with the door itself, blending together seamlessly. “That's OWL level work that you just did with no wand! I knew you were a bookworm, but how far have you studied ahead?"

"Erm- I try to read everything but I'm currently on some of the NEWT spell work, but only the simple stuff like the bubble-head charm... “

"Circe."

"Who?"

"Never mind," she mutters, a slow breath hissing between her teeth. "You're going to have to talk to my father about this when we get back to the manor."

"I'd really like to not call attention to myself if I can help it Daphne," I argue, looking over the rest of the group who are staring at me with a mix of awe and confusion. "I'd prefer for this to not get out at all. I don't really like attention, if you haven't noticed."

Hermione nods in agreement, doing yet another fervent Dobby impression.

"Helene did you even look at the contract my father sent you?" Daphne exclaims.

"No, I didn't. I mean, I glossed over it, but it seemed pretty standard. Why?"

Putting her head in her hands Daphne falls into her seat and moans. "You're smart but at the same time you're a bloody idiot, Helene. Always, and I mean always read a magical contract all the way through before signing it! You could have written away all of your rights and doomed yourself to servitude if that contract was from the wrong person!” She exclaims the last part loudly, stressing the danger of signing an unknown sheet of parchment. “Contracts in our world aren't just legally binding, they're magically binding! If you break it, then you lose your magic! You can even die due to a breach of contract if the breaking clause states such a thing!"

Oh okay, that sounds quite important. I really should know better after the fiasco with the Goblet of Fire. I’ve already had bad experiences with magical contracts, so how could I forget that?

"Shite," I whisper. "Good thing your dad is a stand-up guy, right?"

"Yes, it's a very good thing he is," she rasps, rubbing at her forehead while the rest of the compartment is simply aghast at what I almost did to myself. Hermione is shaking her head in disappointment, while Padma and Lisa just look relieved that I haven’t dropped dead right in front of them due to my own stupidity.
"So, what's so important about the contract?"

"There's a confidentiality agreement that's a part of the contract. You can basically tell my father anything, as long as you’re about to hurt someone, yourself, break a law, or have broken a law. He won’t be able to tell anyone else about it unless you allow him to. You can confide in him, I'm sure he'd be happy if you did. It's all very similar to a healer's oath."

I sigh in relief. Looks like I may have found my first potential ally. If I can tell Octavius anything (within reason) and he can't spread any of my secrets, that means I can talk to him about the whole time-travel fiasco, as well as the meet and greet with Death. Hopefully he can give me a second opinion on what to do about Dumbledore, whether I should lay low or make an attempt to fight back in some way.

"Alright, I get what you're saying now," I note, echoing Daphne's exhausted gesture and kneading away my growing headache. This is a lot to take in. "Thanks for letting me know Daphne, sorry for scaring the hell out of everyone… again."That little quip lightens up the mood, everyone slowly going back to their discussions; complaining about Quirrel, bickering excitedly over what the best track is on the new Weird Sisters album, you know, regular kid stuff. Sinking back into my seat next to Hermione I pull out my advanced charms lexicon and hunker down for the rest of the trip.
Dragging my trunk down the steps of the Hogwarts Express I thank every god known and forgotten that I asked for wheels on the bottom of the damned thing. Even with a featherweight charm, trunks are horribly unwieldy. Why has the wizarding world never thought of using rucksacks with space expanding charms? Or any bag that’s not a purse or satchel.

I say a quick goodbye to Hermione, Padma, and Lisa, as me and Tracey are hitching a ride with Daphne back to Greengrass Manor for the holidays. Daphne and Tracey lead me through the heaving crowd, expertly sidestepping clueless parents reuniting with their children as we avoid getting clubbed in the head by the luggage being tossed around us. Damned trunks.

“There he is! Hey daddy!” Daphne cries, dropping her trunk and rushing who I guess is Octavius, a wide and imposing man with short cropped black hair and a tidy goatee, practically leaping into his arms as she hugs the life out of him. Smiling widely, he sets her back to the ground before grabbing her trunk and introducing himself.

“Good to see you Tracey! I can’t believe it’s only been four months! I was hoping that I’d finally gotten rid of you,” he jibes, laughing as Tracey scowls back at him, crossing her arms over her chest and huffing loudly.

“You couldn’t get rid of me if you tried Occy. Daphne would sick Terra on you.” She scoffs, giggling at his expression of horror. Quickly composing himself he turns to me and offers his hand.

“It’s good to finally meet you Miss Potter and put a face to the name. You look just like your mother did at your age.”

“Thank you Lord Greengrass, it’s a pleasure to meet you as well. I’ve heard the same from my Professors,” I reply, setting down my luggage to shake his hand.

“You don’t need to call me Lord Greengrass, any friend of my daughters can call me Octavius.”

“Thank you, Octavius. Call me Helene.”

“Now then, girls are you all ready? Just grab hold and we’ll be back home before you can say Yule.”

Following the other two I snatch a fistful of Octavius’ robes before the world turns in on itself, pressing down on me as if I’m being squeezed through a small pipe before reality comes back from it’s short vacation and I find myself in an opulent entrance hall, decked out in a tasteful mint green accompanied by rich cherry walls. Twin stairs on either side of us curve up towards a second level, decorated in the same fashion. I would have noticed this initially, but I very quickly find myself painting the very lovely hardwood floors with my breakfast.

“Oh dear,” Octavius gasps, vanishing my sick and kneeling in front of me. “You’ve never apparated before, have you? That was incredibly inconsiderate of me, are you alright?”

Meekly nodding my head as I quell my raging stomach I croak out, “so that’s what apparition is like,
huh?”

“Yes, one second please. Tricksy! I need a nausea potion!” he shouts, a pop announcing the house elf’s arrival as Tricksy hands him the potion. “Thank you Tricksy. Please drink this if you would Helene. You should feel right as rain.”

Thanking him I toss back the concoction, grimacing slightly at the thick, bitter liquid racing down my throat, but happy to feel my stomach calming down.

“Daphne, would you and Tracey be able to show Miss Potter to her room? Tricksy has already brought her trunk upstairs.”

“Yes daddy,” she says, grabbing me by the hand and racing to the second level, Tracey having no trouble keeping up with Daphne’s sudden burst of energy, and me doing my best not to trip up on the stairs and break my nose. Daphne drags me down the left hallway before she’s tackled by a small blonde missile.

“Tori! It’s so good to see you!” she cries, hugging a small clone of herself before introducing the little doppelganger. “Helene this is my sister Astoria, Astoria, this is my friend Helene Potter.”

Wide eyed, Astoria, or Tori, runs up and hugs me as well. “Hi Helene! I didn’t know you and Daphne were friends! She doesn’t send me letters which really sucks,” she babbles, glaring at her sister. “It’s really brilliant to meet you! What house are you in? Did you really fight a dragon in Germany? What about the vampires in Norfolk?”

“Astoria, calm down,” I snicker, a bit annoyed at having another fangirl, but at least this one has some attitude and doesn’t squeak and run away when she sees me, *cough* Ginny *cough*. “It’s lovely to meet you too, and to answer your questions; Ravenclaw, no, and no. Any books you’ve read about me are untrue.”

“Well that’s a load of tosh,” she grumbles, stamping her foot. “Why would they write them then?”

“Probably to make a quick galleon,” I muse. “Doesn’t really matter though, your dad is going to help me sue those guys who lied about me and get my money from them.”

“Okay now, shoo Tori, I’ve got to give Helene the tour, I’ll see you at dinner okay sis’?” Daphne says, hands on her hips as she stares down Astoria.

“Aaaaasaaaaallright,” she sulks. “After dinner we’ll play though, promise?”

“Promise,” Daphne replies. “Now go! We have to unpack!”

Giggling, Astoria races back towards the stairs, the sounds of her feet loudly thumping through the house as Daphne leads me the opposite way, ending up at a door situated towards the end of the hallway.

“Helene, this is your room. You can find Tracey directly across the hall, and if you need me or my dad and mum we’re in the family quarters off on the other side. My room is the first on the right,” she explains, pointing back past the stairs. Drawing herself up taller and pointing high to the ceiling she exclaims, “tonight though, we’re going to have… a sleepover in my room!”

Oh no. I can deal with rooming up with Hermione, as we’re both pretty academically focused, or I am now at least. I don’t have to worry about anything too overtly girlish, Merlin forbid, but this? I never signed up for sleepovers! Saints preserve us! I swear that if there’s anything remotely resembling a makeover I’m going to head straight back to Hogwarts.
I walk into my room for the holidays, amazed at the size of it. A large four poster bed rests against the right wall, made of the same cherry hardwood as the rest of the house, there’s a door set opposite to the bed, leading to an en suite bathroom. Large windows make up most of the far wall, providing a view of the gardens behind the manor, while a wardrobe is set up beside me, adjacent to the bed.

“Daphne! Would I be able to speak to your friend Helene? It’s regarding her family business,” Octavius shouts from downstairs.

Sighing, Daphne gives me leave before letting me know that I will not, quote, “by any means attempt to weasel my way out of our sleepover.” I guess she could see the fear written on my face when she made her announcement. Damnit. That girl is scarier than Hermione when she wants to get her way, and that’s saying she’s down right terrifying.

I make my way downstairs and follow Octavius’ voice, taking a right through a pair of imposing French doors and finding myself in what I imagine is the Manor’s sitting room. Two large couches are set up in the centre of the room, a coffee table situated between them. Bookcases line the walls, along with a large liquor cabinet and a fireplace set up between tall stained-glass windows overlooking the Manor’s grounds. All in all, it’s incredibly impressive yet not overly lavish. This must be reserved for friends as opposed to guests.

“Please, Helene, take a seat,” Octavius drawls, apparently in ‘lawyer-mode,’ as he lays out parchment over the table. “I’d like to go over all of the documents pertaining to your family. Specifically, we will go over any land that your family owns, the extent of their assets, any outstanding contracts or debts, along with your parent’s final will and testament.”

Nodding at him I sit back and observe as he explains the necessary steps to properly claim my properties, those being Potter Manor, the cottage in Godric’s Hollow, along with a vacation home located near Marseilles. Apparently, I must claim my place as the Head of House Potter, something I can go over with another day at Gringotts. Additionally, if (and when) I do ratify myself as House Head I will immediately be emancipated and recognized as an adult, something that will be quite helpful for me when I want to start making major waves. I should get that done before the hols is over just to be on the safe side.

Secondly, I’m quite wealthy. I know Rockseeker told me that when I made my trip to Gringotts a couple months ago, but he didn’t really explain the sheer extent of that wealth.

“You have multiple family vaults Helene, one is solely used for British Galleons, Dragots, and other physical currencies. You have a second vault set aside for family heirlooms and artifacts, along with a third vault, that one being your trust vault. All of your cash wealth converted into galleons would amount to… four hundred and fifty-seven million galleons, give or take a few sickles. Additionally, you have controlling shares of the Daily Prophet, under which you control their subsidiaries, Witch Weekly and Teen Witch Weekly. You have stocks spread out amongst other companies, those being Nimbus, Cleansweep, and Descartes Potions Ltd.”

Holy shit.

“Excuse me Helene?”

“Did I say that out loud?”

“Yes, yes you did,” Octavius replies, stifling a laugh. “If I may continue?”

“Yes, sorry! Please go ahead! Sorry about that!” I stammer.
“It’s alright, I would probably say the same in your shoes, just don’t let Terra catch you talking like that,” he grins at me before continuing. “You also own the Leaky Cauldron, Gambol and Japes, as well as the plot of land in Hogsmeade that Scrivenshaft’s is built on. I won’t go into the muggle stocks that your mother invested in as I’m not familiar with muggle financials, but they seem to be doing quite well. Especially this one in… Mick-ro-soft. I’m not sure if I’m pronouncing that correctly, regardless, financially you’re to be considered one of the wealthiest in Britain. Are you ready to go over contracts and other related matters or would you like a minute?”

“If I could have some tea that would be fantastic.”

“Absolutely, Tricksy? Could you please get us both some tea?”

Tricksy quickly pops over with a tray laden with biscuits and a large teapot before we return to work and cover everything else. Much to my relief, all the outstanding contracts and debts are quite simple to sort through, nothing so daunting as a betrothal or end-of-line clause due to me being the only Potter left. I will admit that I was sweating a bit when Octavius mentioned that there may be a possible betrothal contract, but it only applied to a first-born son, as opposed to a daughter. Thank Merlin.

After about two hours of having gone over the paperwork and two more cups of tea we make it to the will.

“The infamous will, the final piece to our little puzzle,” Octavius muses, pulling up the document and scanning it quickly. “Now, I understand that you had questions regarding the legality of you being placed with your cousins ten years ago, so that will be the most important thing that we’ll cover. As far as the financials go, we’ve covered those extensively and from what I can tell by looking at the will everything is ship shape on that end compared to our previous conversation.”

A second scan over the will causes him to look deeply concerned. “The will clearly states here that you were to not be placed with your cousins in any circumstances, so that lines up with your ideas in the first letter you sent me. Something is not quite right here.”

Sipping from his cup he then picks up another piece of parchment.

“As I’m your solicitor I’m able to request any documents regarding you Miss Potter, and what I found extremely interesting is that the ministries copy of your parents will was sealed by Albus Dumbledore, who placed you with your cousins so many years ago. Evidently, he saw fit to shoehorn himself in as your magical guardian according to these papers,” he states, hand shaking slightly as he passes over the sheet of parchment.

“This is all highly illegal and under the table, and if I may say, absolutely reprehensible,” Octavius spits. “There’s no feasible way that Dumbledore would have been able to accomplish this without his powers as Chief Warlock, and either way, what he’s done is illegal. If he used his authority as Chief Warlock that will be considered extreme misuse of his position, and if he didn’t use that authority he must have confounded or obliviated the employees who processed the will.”

“Merlin.”

“I agree.”

“So, you’re saying Dumbledore illegally placed me with my cousins and basically cheated his way into preventing you or the Longbottom’s from adopting me?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. Give me one second please. I need a drink,” Octavius growls,
striding over to the liquor cabinet and pouring himself a shot of firewhisky, quickly downing it before returning to the table with the glass and bottle.

I think now is as best a time as any to lay all my cards on the table and let Octavius know what’s going on, considering he’s already broken out the hard liquor.

“Octavius… I haven’t been exactly straight with you since we started talking.”

“Oh, don’t worry, my daughter already told me about that. We may be considered a dark family by many, but my politics are more on the gray side, even gray-light. We’re not bigoted by any means.”

“Huh? No this isn’t about who I fancy Octavius! I’m saying I’ve been keeping secrets.”

“And what child does not keep secrets?” he inquires as he pours himself another drink.

“Shit. Okay this is going to take me a little while to explain, but I trust you and I know due to our contract you can’t tell anyone about what I say unless I give you permission.”

Eyebrows cocked, Octavius leans back into his seat, waiting for me to continue.

I wandlessly cast silencing and privacy charms on the room, as well as a notice-me-not. Octavius almost drops his glass as he realizes what I’m doing. Screw it, might as well let it all out.

“I’m sorry if this places you in a bad spot, but I have to tell someone,” I confess, steeling myself and drawing up a touch of Gryffindor courage.

“I’m a time traveler.”

“What!” he gasps, rushing to his feet and dropping his drink, the glass shattering over the floor as he pulls out his wand. “Tell me now before I carve you to pieces. Are you really Helene Potter?”

“Would it help if I swore an oath?” I squeak, staring down the wand that’s now pointed at my neck, expecting to get my head cut off any second.

Octavius nods, but keeps his wand trained on me as I take mine out of the wrist holster and declare, “I swear on my life and magic that I am Helene Lily Potter, I am originally from the year 1996, and I do not wish any harm upon Octavius Greengrass and his family, so I swear, so mote it be.”

Light flares brightly from the end of my wand and Octavius relaxes when I don’t immediately drop dead, signifying that I actually am back from the future. Hmm, that sounds kind of catchy, back from the future. That would make a good band name.

“So… you’re what. Fifteen, sixteen years old?” he challenges, still a touch skeptical as he repairs and summons the broken glass, cleaning up the spilled liquor.

“I was sent back in mid June, I think it was the 16th or the 17th. I was… would be? Fifteen years old at the time. I arrived here on July 24th.”

“Sorry, you said sent back? This wasn’t an accident with a time turner?”

“Yes, sent back. I think it would be best if I explained everything from the start.”

Resigned to the situation, Octavius fixes himself yet another glass of firewhiskey, much larger than the last, as well as conjuring another glass before pouring a few fingers of firewhisky into it and forcing it into my hand.
Shocked I stare down at the liquor and look back at him, “I’ve never drank before,” I say, perplexed.

“Well, a situation like this is the best time to start. Cheers,” he replies, taking a healthy swig.

Shrugging, I toss back the firewhisky, coughing as the liquor burns my throat before belching out a small tongue of flame.

After another bout of coughing I start with my story, beginning with my upbringing with the Dursleys, before talking about my life at Hogwarts (ignoring the fact that I wasn’t always a girl, as I think he would be none too pleased to have me in his house if he was aware of that). Octavius curses loudly when I tell him about the Philosophers Stone being placed at Hogwarts, and blanching when I explain that Voldemort isn’t quite as dead as the world thinks he is. I continue, describing the events of my second year with the Chamber of Secrets and the revelation of Voldemort’s origins, as well as third year’s fiasco involving Sirius’s escape from Azkaban along with the reveal of Pettigrew as my family’s betrayer.

I discuss the whole fiasco involved with the Tri-wizard Tournament, as well as Voldemort’s revival, when Octavius takes out a notepad and jots down the wording used for the ritual, explaining that it could be sabotaged by vanishing all of the graves in Little Hangleton. I smack myself in the head for not thinking of that. What’s the use in traveling through time and space if you’re not going to disrupt an evil ritual! Merlin I’m an idiot!

I end off detailing my torture under Umbridge, the battle in the Department of Mysteries, the unknown prophecy, and my subsequent brush with Death, Octavius almost falls off the sofa when I explain that my time travel is a result of me dying too early and how much of a pencil pusher Death is. He’s just as shocked as I was to find out that Death is pretty much a surprisingly likeable version of Cornelius Fudge.

“So, you went through fifteen years of absolute hell, died, and got sent back to have a second stab at things because of red tape?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“Wow… that’s something,” Octavius says, finishing his drink that was left untouched during my story and subsequently falling back into his seat.

“Let’s set some facts straight. First off, Dumbledore should in no way hold any political seat, let alone be Headmaster of Hogwarts after what he’s done, or to be more specific, shall do,” he asserts, scribbling onto his notepad. “Dumbledore has left an artifact in the school to tempt Riddle that has been set behind traps that a trio of first years can break through. In the year to come, he will ignore the rumours and allegations towards you being named the Heir of Slytherin and will do absolutely nothing in regard to a thousand-year-old basilisk roaming about the school.”

Clearing his throat, he continues. “I never quite understood why people were so quick to name Sirius as your parent’s betrayer, considering he and your father were practically brothers in all but blood. If Sirius has been placed in Azkaban for all these years and Pettigrew has been right under Dumbledore’s crooked nose, that means that again, Dumbledore has ignored what is going on right in front of him. I have serious doubts that he is not aware of Pettigrew being an unregistered animagus and is keeping him around, and Sirius in prison for some unknown reason, probably in some way related to the prophecy you mentioned.”

“So, is Dumbledore practically a sleeping Dark Lord or the like?”

“He bloody well could be considering everything you’ve told me. So, fourth year, you were
unknowingly placed into the Tri-wizard Tournament. Dumbledore could have easily verified if you had placed your name into the goblet, as well as prevented you from competing since he’s your current magical guardian. Regardless of what he said, that contract is not actually unbreakable, and anyone can discover that with a little research. Additionally, there’s no chance at all that he was unaware of Crouch impersonating Moody, Dumbledore has known Moody since he attended Hogwarts and they’ve been steadfast companions since Moody’s graduation. Finally, in your fifth year he either allowed, or again, ignored Umbridge torturing students as well as running her own illegal secret police within the school. He’s the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, saying he has no power over the situation is a blatant lie.”

“Merlin, I always thought he was just old and making mistakes. I mean, no one can be completely infallible, and he is getting on in years.”

“Considering how you were raised, it makes complete and utter sense that you weren’t able to work out that he was allowing these things to happen. Helene, don’t get me wrong, you’re a smart and powerful witch according to what you’ve told me, but you came into our world an abused and broken child. It’s no wonder that you immediately latched on to the first person to extend you some semblance of kindness, even if it is faux.”

“I know hindsight is 20-20, oh, muggle phrase, sorry,” I explain at Octavius’ confusion. “I just can’t believe how horribly obvious this all is after telling somebody about what happened, and them looking over my life objectively.”

“Honestly Helene, I’m surprised you’ve still come out of this as composed and well-adjusted as you are. Most people would come out of your trials a gibbering mess. You’re definitely made of stronger stuff.”

“Thank you, Octavius. That means a lot to me.”

“It’s fine Helene. If you would like, I have some ideas on how to approach things from here on out and change this world for the better. Taking down Dumbledore will be difficult, but he seems to have orchestrated every disaster in your life. If I may hazard a guess, Tom Riddle taking up the moniker of Voldemort may have been the fallout of his meddling as well. Is it not curious that Riddle would have been about your age at the time that Grindelwald was at the height of his power?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean Riddle may have been placed into the same situations you were, and was left utterly broken as a result,” Octavius explains, putting his hand up as I begin to protest. “I am not saying that you two are similar, and I am not at all condoning his horrible, inhumane actions over the course of his miserable life. What I am trying to say, is that Riddle may have been groomed by Dumbledore to fight Grindelwald in the same way that Dumbledore has groomed you to fight Riddle.”

“Holy shit.”

“I agree. If you were not as strong a person as you are, I believe you may have resorted to learning dark magic in secret just as Riddle did. I mean truly dark magic. Black magic. Not what the Ministry purports as dark due to the spells being complicated or obscure, but malicious and evil spells, as well as sacrificial rituals and the like. If we want to take down Dumbledore, we need to somehow make it known to the world how deep these manipulations go. You said you had issues with Rita Skeeter in your fourth year, and that she’s an unregistered animagus? A water beetle to be exact?”

“Yeah, she was a pretty ruthless gossip monger that year, and I believe she was still working during fifth year when the Ministry started a smear campaign on me and Dumbledore, even though
“Excellent, I believe she will be incredibly important if we want to destroy Dumbledore’s public image. She can easily use her animagus form to collect sensitive information on him. Best of all, you’re technically her employer, so we can feed her information regarding the negligent goings-on at Hogwarts, starting with the trapped corridor and the Philosophers Stone. I’ll send a tip to the DMLE when you’re back at school. With all the students there it will be impossible to sweep under the rug, as they’ll most likely time their investigation during lunch or dinner. A confrontation between Amelia Bones and Dumbledore in front of the staff and students will make our argument iron-clad.”

“So… we’re going to use the sheep against the shepherd?”

“Exactly. I also think that we should get you emancipated as soon as possible and have you take up your place as Head of House Potter. This will provide you with political safety as well as remove any financial influence Dumbledore has on you.”

I reach over the tabletop and pour myself another bit of firewhisky, downing it before continuing.

“That all makes sense, but what about Riddle? He’s got sixty years of experience on me, and because of the prophecy he’s going to keep coming after me.”

“Well, that’s going to be a bit more straightforward. All we have to do is train you. The first step in your training will be getting Sirius freed from Azkaban. He deserves his freedom, and you both deserve to be around family, someone you can trust. Sirius was a phenomenal auror during the last wizarding war and will be able to show you the ropes and teach you how to duel, and more importantly, how to fight.”

A sharp crack announces Tricksy’s arrival, quietly letting us know that dinner is ready before another crack signals her departure. Rubbing at my eyes I get up and follow Octavius to the dining room, where we’re immediately interrogated by Daphne and Tracey as to why we’ve taken so long.

“I’m sorry dear, there was a lot of complications and paperwork to go over with Helene and we got carried away. Don’t worry, me and Helene are done with our work and won’t be kept away from you any longer,” he apologizes, patting her on the shoulder before taking his seat at the table.

Daphne sniffs at this, as Terra enters the room and jokingly scolds Octavius for ‘stealing Daphne’s friend away.’ Terra is a beautiful woman, and I can see clearly what Daphne will eventually grow to look like. Terra is quite tall, with an athletic build and long silky blonde hair that rests on her shoulders, loosely framing a very sharp yet stunning face.

“Now dear, I know you love your work, but I don’t believe that eleven year old’s are as enthusiastic as you when it comes to old and outdated laws,” she mocks.

“I’d have to argue with you on that one love. Helene, did you enjoy our conversation?” he replies.

“It was definitely enlightening,” I cajole, giggling (yeah, I giggle now, might as well go all in on this whole being a girl deal) as I carry on. “I never knew solicitors were allowed to be relaxed or have fun. Every other one I’ve met has been scarily uptight.”

Terra snickers at this while Octavius makes a face at me, before laughing himself.

Dinner is a casual affair, with Terra and Octavius asking all of us how we’re enjoying Hogwarts so far, what our favourite classes are, and whether we need any help or not with the more difficult courses, particularly potions and transfiguration. I have to stop myself from tearing up at the homely feel of the meal, and what an actual loving family acts like. Sure, I’ve spent time at the Weasley’s...
before, but it’s always raucous and chaotic there, with everyone shouting over one another to get a word in and constantly bickering. Here though, I can see that Terra and Octavius truly love Daphne and Astoria, and extend that same love to Tracey. Images flash through my mind of what could have been. Me, my Dad and Mum sitting around a small dinner table in Godrics Hollow, maybe even siblings with us as we enjoy our meal. Mum sitting down with me when I run into any trouble, Dad teaching me magic, vacations, everything that I’ve missed out on due to a raging psychopath and a manipulative old man.

Octavius notices this and a worried frown crosses over his face, causing me to break into tears. Terra is like lightning, immediately sliding out of her chair and appearing next to me, cooing softly in my ear and holding me as I shake and sob, Daphne and the rest of the other kids drop their cutlery, sitting there dumbly and staring at me in shock before Octavius shoos them out of the dining room.

“Helene dear, is everything alright,” Terra consoles, turning me to look at her, motherly concern etched in her features. “If you don’t want to say anything you don’t have to, but if I can help I will.”

This just serves to turn me into a blubbering mess, eyes puffy and red as tears pour down my face. Great painful sobs coursing through me as I wail unintelligibly. Terra picks me up and takes me back into the sitting room, pulling me into her lap on one of the couches as Octavius returns with some hot chocolate.

“I’m sorry,” I mutter, wiping the tears from my eyes as I try to get myself under control. “I’ve never… I’ve never really seen what a family is like, you know? It all hit me at once.”

“Helene, it’s okay, we’re here and we can help,” she frets, running her fingers through my hair as she looks questioningly to Octavius.

He pulls up next to her and whispers into her ear, telling her about the Dursleys and my upbringing. Anger flashes across her face momentarily before she regains her confidence, passing me a mug of hot chocolate before she returns to stroking my hair and cradling me in her lap. I fall asleep wound up yet at the same time, strangely calm. I could get used to having a mother in my life.
The days went off without interruption after my breakdown, thanks to Terra and Octavius taking the time to sit aside with me after my little incident. Both of them are absolutely fantastic people, and I now understand why they were named as one of my choices as adoptive parents. Terra is almost how I like to imagine my mother would be. Loving yet stern, and with a biting sense of humour. She finds a perfect balance between showing compassion or cracking down on her children, and her parenting is far from the overbearing method I'm familiar with that Molly Weasley practices. I swear those hugs would break a dragon's spine. Octavius is a bit of a joker and isn’t normally the 'main one in charge' of the relationship, but that doesn’t mean the relationship isn't equal. Octavius tends to be the one who makes the big familial decisions, and he has that fierce protective side that I was introduced to in the sitting room. According to the duelling trophies I noticed he can back up that fierce side with action.

The sleepover wasn't as terrible as I thought it would be, to be honest, it was pretty much the same as the train ride apart from the setting. We were camped out in Daphne's room wearing our pyjamas. Really. That’s it. No talking about boys, no pillow fights, none of that shit that the guys in the dorm used to talk about. Either the stories I've heard about the terrors of a sleepover are greatly exaggerated, or they turn into some sort of horror show once hormones are in the mix. I’m praying that the latter isn’t the case.

It's Christmas today, and for the first time I'm genuinely excited to celebrate. Sure, celebrating with Sirius at Grimmauld Place was fantastic, but the circumstances surrounding it and the whole problem with being trapped in that horrible waste of a building put a damper on the celebrations. It's hard to enjoy Christmas when you're in a prison disguised as a home and your best friend’s dad is on deaths door.

Christmas with a family, even if it isn't really ‘mine’ is something to look forward to, and it's looking to be a white Christmas judging by the view out my window. It's snowed a bit over the last few days, but it looks like we got a decent two feet overnight. I was confused to see the garden untouched, but I'm assuming there's a stasis field left over it so that the plants don't die out during the off season. Massive redwoods surround the gardens cloaked in snow, their branches bowed under the weight and occasionally snapping and shuffling as the powder slides off to the ground below. It’s an incredible sight, rivaling that of a Hogwarts Christmas.

A bang alerts me to my door suddenly flying open, the blonde flash that is Astoria flying into the room, leaping onto my bed and screaming for all the world to hear, "It's Christmas!"

I laugh at her antics, deciding to have a bit of fun with her. "Really? I thought it was Easter? Oh no! That means I forgot to get you a present!" I gasp, staring at her in mock horror.

"No!" She yelps, collapsing to the bed dramatically, clutching at her heart. "If I don't get any presents. I... I'll die!" She gargles pitifully, one hand reaching up to the sky, grasping at nothing. Little actress in training that one is.

"Oh, that's all? I'm sure Daphne would give me a prize for getting rid of you."

"You're evil," she says, snapping her head up and glaring at me, cheeks puffed out angrily.
"No, you're evil. I never knew brushing hair could be a form of torture until I met you, I think you'd scare off a dementor if you ran at it with a brush.” I retort, chuckling at her offended expression.

"It's not my fault you never brush your hair, mum would have had to cut it all off if you let it knot any more,” she shoots back, jumping off my bed and waving her arms back and forth excitedly. I guess regularly brushing my hair is one of those girl things I’ve got to learn. My hair is less temperamental than it used to be, but I actually have to take care of it now. One step forward, two steps back.

Astoria races forward, grabbing onto my hand and stampeding toward the stairs, leading me down to the sitting room where we find the rest of the family waiting on us. Wow, did I sleep in? The Dursleys beat military hours into me, so I never normally wake up past six in the morning.

"Alright Astoria, calm down," Terra chides playfully, pulling her youngest daughter into a quick hug, Astoria squealing in embarrassment as she kisses her forehead.

"But Mum! It's Christmas!"

"And the day isn't going anywhere honey. Where are we starting?" Terra asks, turning towards Octavius. "Oldest or youngest?"

Astoria and Octavius cry out their answers in unison, "Oldest!", "Youngest!"

"Hey!" They both shout. I look on in wonder as they stare each other down menacingly, inching closer and closer like wild dogs. I think I can hear them growling. Octavius blinks, and Astoria whoops loudly, jumping up and punching the air excitedly.

"Yes! Take that! I win today!" She cheers, laughing in her dad’s face. Octavius pouts childishly, looking towards his wife to back him up.

"Honey," he calls, tilting his head to the side and doing his best to look like an overgrown puppy.

"Yes dear?"

"Let me go first."

"Or what?"

"When I get into bed I'll put cooling charms on my feet."

"You wouldn't dare," she growls, eyes narrowed.

"I would," he hesitates, looking very unsure of himself.

After another staring contest between Terra and Octavius, he huffs and grabs a present for Astoria, mumbling about traitors as he passes it over to her, while Daphne and Tracey giggle openly at him. I feel a bit bad for him. Poor guy is outnumbered four to two… no. Five to one. Four months and I'm still not used to this. Funny how its taking me forever to adjust, even though I feel better. Odd how the brain works.

Astoria tears into her gift like a wild animal, wrapping paper flying around the room like the way an antelope’s innards would fly as a lion devours it. I put a quick stop to that train of thought when bits and pieces of wrapping paper get stuck in my hair, feeling a touch squeamish to compare the decorative parchment to viscera. Astoria squeals, leaping onto Octavius and wrapping her arms around him before flying at Terra and hugging the life out of her as well. Wow, that's a more
aggressive hug than Hermione and Miss Weasley's put together. I'm surprised Octavius' head didn't pop off like a stuffed animal.

"Thank you so much Daddy!" She shouts, excitedly showing off her new Nimbus 2000, Tracey oohing and aahing over the broom while Daphne simply smiles at her sister. I guess I know who the Quidditch fans are in the family.

We take turns unwrapping our gifts, everyone going for the bigger or more expensive looking ones first. Daphne was beaming when she pulled out a pair of silver earrings inset with small emeralds, raving about how well they would pair with her school robes. Tracey squeals in excitement, pulling Octavius and Terra into another aggressive hug when she unwrapped her own new broom, her and Astoria chomping at the bit to get out and fly around on their new toys. Terra receives a lovely blue satin dress from Octavius, as well as a reservation to an upscale magical restaurant in Paris, scheduled for the night when we get sent back to Hogwarts. Octavius in turn receives a few pairs of extremely garish socks, the most notable being a neon pink pair with images of Saint Nick puttering around on his sleigh, laughing when he notices season tickets to the Balleycastle Bats tucked into one of them.

I sit back throughout this, watching everyone going through their gifts, their eyes lighting up at the sentimental presents, frowning in confusion at the joke gifts, followed by laughter once they realized what it was. Eventually it came to me to open up my gifts, even though I'd been putting it off to watch the rest of the family enjoy their day. I grin and pull Daphne and Tracey into a rough embrace, them having gotten me a top of the line broom servicing kit, and Astoria providing me with a stash of candy. Octavius and Terra, they went above and beyond.

Terra looks at Octavius, nodding knowingly and pulling out a small folder from behind her back. "Helene, after talking with Octavius we decided to give you something a bit more unconventional for Christmas," Terra starts, glancing over at her husband again.

"Please forgive us if we're being presumptuous, but after our discussion on your first day here I went to the Ministry and raised hell." Octavius laughs as Terra smacks him on the arm. "Owch! Okay, I almost burnt the place to the ground," he confesses, rubbing his arm sheepishly. He turns back to me, a growing smile on his face. "What we were wanting to know, is whether you would like for us to be your guardians… it's not exactly what your parents hoped for, but we'd like you to be part of our ragtag little team." He hands the folder over to me, and I take it with shaking hands.

Holy shit.

"Language Helene!"

"Sorry!" I shout reflexively, staring in awe at the folder in front of me.

Christ on a pogo stick! They just handed me adoption papers! Adoption. Papers. For me. They want me!? "Oh god, I better not break down again," I whisper to myself, blinking awkwardly. "But why? Y- You barely know me," I murmur hoarsely, addressing Octavius and Terra. Damnit, here comes the waterworks. "I- I… I don't know what to say… what about my headship? I thought we were going to Gringotts soon?"

Octavius leans over and puts his hand on my shoulder. "This isn't going to change that. You'll still be a Potter. This'll allow you to officially be a part of the family, our family, even if you've got a different last name. I also think that us barely knowing you is one of the main reasons Helene." A flash of anger crosses his features, although it's quickly washed away by a flood of compassion. "We were supposed to know you, we were supposed to have a third daughter." He pulls his hand back and looks me in the eyes. "You don't have to answer now, I know you may have someone else that
you're hoping to be your guardian, but if you ever feel like joining the family, all you have to do is sign."

Sobbing, I rush over and grab onto Octavius, hugging him with all my might as he falls back in shock before returning the hug, rubbing small circles into my back. "I don't know if I can answer you now," I croak, wiping the tears away with my shirt sleeve. "But... I'm so happy to know that you guys care. This is the best present I've ever gotten."

"That's all that matters to us Helene," Terra hums, smiling at the scene in front of her. I let go of Octavius and hug her as well, but much more gently than Octavius'. "Take all the time you need, alright?"

"You're okay with this?" I quietly ask, turning towards Daphne and Astoria. Astoria grins back at me, nodding fervently. I glance towards Tracey and see her staring at the papers in my hand, looking up at me before immediately averting her eyes, looking slightly confused.

"Of course!" Daphne replies, looking offended that I would even ask her such a question. "Why would we not be okay with it? You were supposed to be my sister, so what if it happens a little late?"

Nodding in affirmation I release Terra and run up to Daphne, pulling her into another embrace, this one much more wet than before, my tears running trails down her pajamas. "Okay, enough with me crying," I laugh, wiping the tears from my eyes and trying to defuse the situation. "Who wants to go for a fly?"

Astoria and Tracey grab their brooms immediately, although Tracey follows at a more sedate pace as Astoria races off to go and find her shoes, not even bothering to change clothes. Groaning, Daphne gets up to follow us outside, Terra throwing a quick warming charm on all of us before we kick off and race each other over the manor grounds.

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Octavius and I find ourselves on the steps of Gringotts. I've only been in this 'new' world for a short while, but I think I can start taking steps to change things now that I've got Octavius' support. "You ready to start the show Helene?" He smirks, looking over at me, an excited gleam in his eyes.

"Damn straight," I reply, grinning at him as we march into the bank and up to the closest open teller. "Hello, is Rockseeker busy at the moment? I'm here to speak to him regarding Potter family matters." I ask.

The Goblin looks down at me snidely for a moment before recognition crosses his face. Nodding, he motions to the back door that leads to the Gringotts offices and meeting rooms, allowing us entry. Bowing my head, I lead Octavius through to Rockseeker's office, knocking before I hear him call for us to enter.

Striding into the office with Octavius in tow we take our seats in front of Rockseeker, who's looking on at us inquisitively, reclining slightly to the side with one sharp claw resting on his cheek. "Hello Miss Potter, what brings you in today? And who is your companion, if I may ask?" he inquires.

"This is Octavius Greengrass, I'm sure you remember his name from my parents will," I state, Rockseeker nodding in acknowledgement. "I was curious if I could seek my emancipation today, as I'm the last member of a Noble and Most Ancient House I was under the assumption that being the last of my line would be enough to grant me that request."

"You do understand the risks involved in that Miss Potter, you are after all only eleven years old," he
cautions, his eyes flitting over Octavius for just a moment, enough to let me understand what he means.

I give Octavius a pointed look before explaining, "Rockseeker, Octavius knows about my travels. He was the one who recommended I get the emancipation done and over with as quickly as possible so that any meddlers don't make my life any more difficult."

"Aaah," he chuckles, smiling at us in that horrendous way that only a goblin can, fangs glinting in the magical candlelight. I like Rockseeker, and he's the only goblin I don't really mind smiling, but it's still unnerving. It's just too… predatory. "That changes things. I'm assuming you're taking steps against Gamilturg?" he asks, one eyebrow raised questioningly.

"Who?"

"Old Beard, us Goblins little moniker for Dumbledore," Rockseeker deadpans, smiling yet again as Octavius laughs out loud, wheezing a bit at Rockseeker's bland delivery.

"That's absolutely perfect, Helene, I love your Vault Keeper," he croaks, slapping himself on the chest.

"Why thank you Lord Greengrass. Do you know what my favourite part about that name is?" he asks, cocking his eyebrows.

"No, please, do tell."

"The bastard thinks it's a compliment!" he roars, slapping the table and barking in laughter. "A bloody compliment! Like we Goblins would ever name someone like him a warrior."

Octavius of course slaps his chair repeatedly, pinching his nose and giggling in a very feminine way. I watch in amusement as two normally stern people cackle like schoolchildren. Composing himself, Octavius smooths out his robes, still chuckling quietly while Rockseeker is wearing an incredible smirk.

"Miss Potter, we at Gringotts would be happy to aid you with your emancipation, give me one moment please," he says, snapping his fingers. A minute later a Goblin rushes in with a small, plain stone box that is absolutely glowing with magic. Familial protections are nothing to scoff at I guess. Reaching over, I go to pry open the lid of the box, but as soon as I make contact with it I feel a sting. I pull my hand back quickly and notice a small drop of blood sink into the stone, seemingly absorbed by the box.

"Blood Recognition Wards, in case you were wondering," Rockseeker explains, gesturing towards the small indent in the box. "We wouldn't want someone trying to commit line theft on a Noble house, would we not?"

"Makes sense to me," I reply, lifting the lid of the box and peering inside. A small gold ring rests on top of plush red suede, decorated with a roaring griffin on one side of a sharply cut, brightly polished ruby. A thestral in flight adorns the ring opposite the griffin, wings spread wide and wrapped around the outside of the jewelry. I tentatively reach out and take hold of the ring, sliding it on to my right middle finger where it shines for a moment and shrinks to fit, snug, yet not uncomfortable.

"May I congratulate you on your coming of age Lady Potter," Rockseeker comments, inclining his head in respect. "I think you'll also be pleased to know that the ring will detect poisons and love potions if any are near you, a precautionary measure that most Head of House jewelry contains. Line theft and assassinations were once much more common than they are now."
"Thank you very much Rockseeker, the enchantments sound fantastically useful," I echo, agreeing with him wholeheartedly. "Would you be able to send the required documents to the ministry to notify them of my coming of age when you have the chance? That, as well as naming Lord Greengrass here as my proxy for the Potter seat," I announce, smiling at a wide-eyed Octavius.

"Helene! You didn't tell me you were going to do that!" he marvels, perplexed at my decision.

"Octavius, you're the best person I know for the job right now. You've already gone out of your way to make my life better even though you don't know me, and from the research I've done over the break, I know our politics are in line judging by your own voting history," I effuse, waving away his concerns. "I think you're the perfect person for the job, seeing as Sirius is still locked away."

I reach out to shake Octavius’s hand, sealing the deal. "Octavius, it's time to start making some changes, and I think you're the man for the job."

Smirking he returns the gesture, grasping my hand smoothly. "Let's shake things up kid."

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The trip back to Hogwarts was teeming with bubbly and babbling students, all eager to share and revel in their holidays. My compartment was packed full of sugar first-years, making it absolutely bloody impossible to study, even with my new-found talent of occlumency. I'd spent a good portion of the hols fashioning a mindscape. Sort of like an imaginary setting, full of traps, monsters, and whatever else I can come up with to defend my secrets. Snape, of course, never told me anything about how to develop occlumency defences and instead decided to scream at me before ravaging my mind, dredging up every horrid and embarrassing memory I've ever had. Worst part is, according to my books, that's a sure-fire way to absolutely demolish any budding occlumency defences. Prick.

The chattering though, the non-stop, endless, chattering. My God do girls talk. What's even more interesting, is I'm jabbering along with them! I think it’s the effects of estrogen slowly working away on my mind, awakening little bits and pieces of me that were once kept hidden. We’ve been discussing Christmas presents, and I just told the other girls of the gift Octavius and Terra offered me.

"They want to adopt you!? Oh my God that's amazing Helene!" Hermione gasps, clutching my arm excitedly.

"I know! It's a lot to take in, but it'll be a while before I come to a decision. It's a big step to take, you know?" I smile widely at her as she holds onto my arm for dear life, beaming like she was the orphan who just got an adoption offer.

"It is a big decision," Padma agrees, nodding her head. "What do you think about all of it Daphne? Excited to maybe have a new sister?"

"My parents told me about it a bit before Christmas, and they wanted to know what me and Tori thought before they asked Helene," Daphne replies. "I still hold to what I said, you'd make a fantastic sister Helene. It’s just taken us longer than we should have to bring you into the family."

"Thank you so much," I reply, sighing in exasperation as Malfoy throws open the compartment door. Why oh why does this always happen to me?

"Hello blood-traitors, mudblood," he sneers, tilting his head and spinning his wand aggressively. "I didn't know this train was made to transport filth and rubbi-.

"Fuck off already Malfoy," I interrupt, Hermione reflexively scolding me for censor, looking for all the world like she wants to be the one to tell him to fuck off. "Why in the name of sanity do you
even bother us? Seriously, I really don't get it. The only thing I could possibly think of, is that you have a crush on one of us,” I add, hoping to embarrass him into leaving. “Wouldn’t your father be disappointed to find you’re chasing after scum?”

"Wouldn't you like that, blood-traitor?" Malfoy sputters, his cheeks slowly reddening under a blush. Oh no. He really does have a crush on one of us. Please don't be me, please don’t be me. I don’t think I’d be able to handle that. I just… no.

"How dare you!" Malfoy hisses, his face screwed up in fury. Damn it! Why can’t this kid just leave?

"Oh. I said that out loud, didn't I?" I whisper, looking towards Hermione who shrugs at me. Christ.

"Yes, you did Helene," Tracey adds, holding her hand in front of her mouth to stifle a laugh, her eyes lit up in glee.

"I really have to break that habit."

"Hey! I'm right here!"

"I said fuck off Malfoy!"

Waving my hand, I slam the door shut on him, his eyes almost popping out of his head as he's thrown out of the compartment. Was it immature of me to send him out that way? Was it immature of me to swear at him like that? God, I don’t even know. I’m just so bloody tired of his antics.

I knead my forehead tirely. "So, enough of that git," I say, Hermione slapping me on the knee. "Hey! I'll argue that fuck- ow! Is a perfectly useful word! Really! It’s one of the most versatile words in the English language!"

"It doesn't matter!" She chides, wagging her finger. “You should watch your language! Were you raised in a barn?"

"No, I was raised in a cupboard, thank you very much," I spill, slapping a hand over my mouth as I recognize what I'm saying.

"What?" Hermione whispers, immediately forgetting my abuse of four letter words.

"Nothing. Don’t worry about it, just a slip of the tongue," I say, waving her off. Don’t needle me about this now, please.

Hermione opens her mouth to speak but is immediately hushed by Daphne, who gives her a serious look until she clamps her jaw shut and turns to me imploringly. She hisses quietly in disappointment when I don’t sate her curiosity, and pulls a copy of Hogwarts: A History out of her bag.

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The meal upon returning to Hogwarts went well, and I managed to fill myself up on a massive helping of turkey and mash. I guess even Hogwarts gets Christmas leftovers. I start to head back with the rest of the students to our common rooms when Flitwick interrupts me, quietly pulling me aside.

"Miss Potter, the Headmaster was wanting to see you in his office," he says, gesturing for me to come with him. "If you would follow me, I can take you there."

Nodding, but confused, I follow Flitwick to Dumbledore's office, finding myself in the very familiar and far less distracting room. What happened to all of his little gadgets? None of them are whirring.
spitting, twirling, or hissing anywhere in the room. All his knick-knacks are lying inert except for one lonesome chunk of ochre glass that occasionally pulses a deep red to some unknown rhythm. I take my seat, noticing that the headmaster has no usual twinkle in his eyes, and is looking quite grim.

"Miss Potter, my dear, where did you go over the holidays?" He quietly asks, his fingers steepled in front of him and his head bowed, an unmentioned challenge on the tip of his tongue.

I feign confusion, looking the headmaster in the eye as I reply. "I'm sorry Headmaster but I don't understand how where I went over the holidays is necessary for you to know. You're my Headmaster, not my guardian."

"The location of such is important to me when I find that your home has been burnt to the ground," he denies. "I'm curious about where you stayed, when you currently have no home to spend your time at."

Aah. I knew I forgot about something. Looking back on that, it was a bit rash of me to blow up the Dursley’s home. Well, not rash. I feel they got off easy, but it wasn't exactly well thought out. "What do you mean Headmaster?"

Sighing, he leans forward, resting his elbows on the tabletop and holding his hands out imploringly. "The Dursley's home, your home, was burnt to a crisp over the summer. I visited them over the winter break when I noticed that you weren’t at Hogwarts. I was surprised when they mentioned to me that they haven't seen hide nor hair of you since the fire. It's very important that you spend your time with them outside of the castle, you know how dangerous the world can be, especially for a runaway."

"Dangerous?" I reply, frowning at him. He's worried about me being in danger after putting me into that abusive hellhole? Really? "How could the world be more dangerous than living with my cousins, if that's what you're asking? Because that house is very dangerous. Not to mention the fact that they no longer have a home. Where would I stay?"

"I would easily be able to work out an arrangement with a wizarding construction company to recreate Number 4, and I have hired one," he demurs, his tone turning questioning. "But, Miss Potter, please clarify for me. You're saying that your home is dangerous? Because I must repeat myself and say that it is in fact, very safe. I put the wards up myself."

"Yes, it's unsafe. Wards or not. I'd also like to clarify that it's not a home, Headmaster. It's simply a place I lived in for the last ten years," I spit, feeling the anger build up in me. "They treated me like an indentured servant. That house was not safe."

Dumbledore narrows his eyes in confusion. "Miss Potter! It is unseemly of you to speak ill of your family! Where in Merlin’s name is this attitude coming from? Is it due to spending your break with the Greengrasses?" he declares, no longer holding the tone and demeanor of a kindly grandfather, instead beginning to look and sound a lot more like the man who defeated Grindelwald. Really? You’re going to intimidate an eleven-year-old? "I fear that the Greengrasses may be turning you against your own blood," he continues, vacillating between thinly disguised anger and concern.

"Unseemly of me? First off, how did you find out where I stayed over the holidays? Second, you believe the Greengrasses are turning me against my family?" I retort, frowning incredulously at Dumbledore’s affirming look. "Really Headmaster? They're the least dark family I've met in my entire life! How dare you speak of my family that way? Because the Greengrasses are the closest thing I have to family!" I burst, anger brimming dangerously, threatening to spill over. I breathe deeply, trying to slow my racing thoughts. I look to Fawkes who tilts his head curiously, not so much as trilling to calm me down. Odd. You’d think Fawkes would sing just a little bit, he always tried to
comfort me when I was stressed.

“The Dursleys are no family of mine, never have been, never will be,” I continue, turning my head away from the phoenix, my voice strained and tremulous. "The Greengrasses have shown me more respect and love than anyone in my life ever has, and I will never consider Number 4 Privet Drive my home."

The pulsing glass chunk suddenly bursts, bits of glass shooting out across the room as Dumbledore rushes over to it, stumbling over the shards and tearing the fabric of his robes. He crouches down on one knee, scanning the remains with his wand before turning to me, fear and fury in his eyes. “Do you realize what you’ve just done? You just destroy the blood wards on your home! Blood wards that have protected you for your entire life!”

"Destroyed the wards? How could I have destroyed words wards without a spell? That home, as you call it? That's an abusive hell hole!” I rage shrilly, my temper flying away from me. "If your wards are so damned weak as to burst when they're so much as sneezed at, it doesn’t look like they were very effective.”

Unbeknownst to me, parchment starts flying around the room, carried on an invisible current. Books flip open, their pages crinkling loudly as they flutter wildly, turning over this way and that, the air around me beginning to shake and shimmer like a heat mirage. Damnit! Dumbledore must be senile to think that I was anything close to safe with those savages! Wards? Like they did anything at all! “Who gives a shit about what's outside when the danger is inside,” I hiss, jabbing a finger into my palm. “Those bastards beat me almost every goddamn day! They starved me! How did you not know this was going on!?” I bark, fury consuming me. "You left me there! You're the one who never checked up on me! You're the reason those wards have fallen!"

Flicking my eyes over to Dumbledore's desk I see the invisibility cloak lying on top of it in a heap, the familiar ethereal silver flowing like a calm river, unaffected by the magic in the air. Throwing my hand out, I summon the cloak, snatching it aggressively before turning back to a furious yet shocked Dumbledore. "I'm taking my father's cloak back," I spit, his eyes widening in confusion. I point at him aggressively, jabbing my finger towards his chest. “I want you to think on what you've done, Dumbledore. You left me to an abusive family, one that starved, beat, and neglected me since I could so much as walk. You did.”

I march over to the exit and move to open it, the door getting yanked off it's hinges with a simple flick of my wrist. It crashed into the wall with a might bang, the ancient wood splintering from the impact. I ignore the veritable artifact that I've just destroyed, not even glancing at its remains as I walk swiftly down the stairs and back through the castle to the Ravenclaw common room. I pass through the halls in a blur, vaguely recognizing the eagle knocker as I stride towards it. The door slams open on its own as I barge into the tower, somehow aware of my fury and allowing me to bypass the usual riddle. I continue on my path, eyes set straight ahead, not even bothering to stop and say goodnight to Hermione and Padma who are sitting by the fire, staring up at me in silent shock. I keep marching until I get to my dorm, climbing into bed, sealing the curtains shut. I pause, taking the moment to silence them for good measure.

"God fucking damnit!" I growl, banging my hands against the wall. That son of a bitch has the nerve to tell me that I'm safer at the Dursleys? Like he doesn't know what I've gone through? What he sentenced me to? Then he has the gall to go out and try and blame my behaviour on the Greengrasses? If I was eleven I probably would have just gone along with whatever he was saying, just like everyone else in this bloody school. How in the hell is Dumbledore allowed near children? Is the world so blind as to not see how he tries to turn people against each other like that? It's just like the summer after Cedric's death.
Dumbledore knows what he's doing Harry.

We can't write to you in-case Voldemort finds out, Harry.

He's just doing what's best for you Harry!

He's a great man that Dumbledore. Didja' know that Harry? Only wizard Voldemort ever feared!

This incident just makes his shortcomings even more glaring. Dumbledore is the enemy as much as Voldemort is. No wonder Voldemort fears the man! Dumbledore ruined his fucking life! Yes, Riddle is a rabid dog, someone I'm probably destined to put down thanks to that bloody prophecy… whatever the damned thing says. Dumbledore though? He’s so narrowminded it’s incredible. He’s a danger to everyone simply because of the positions he holds.

A knocking against my bed posts gets my attention. Not that I can hear it through the silencing charm, but I can feel the reverberations in the wood. Sighing, I unseal my bed and open the drapes to see Hermione standing in front of me, a worried look on her face.

"Helene, is everything alright?" She asks, sitting down on the bed opposite me, legs crossed tidily underneath her.

"Yeah… things are alright. I just- I got into an argument… a huge argument." I exhale slowly, running my fingers through my hair as I try to calm down. No matter how mad I am, I'm not going to take it out on her. "It's something I can't really tell you about. I'm sorry Hermione. I'm alright though, okay?"

Concern still written over her features she goes to speak but stops herself, thinking better of it. Closing her mouth, she nods her head and sticks her hand out.

"Come on, Padma's saved us a seat by the fire," she says, a weak smile tugging at her lips.

After a moment I smile back, taking her hand and following her back to the warmth of the common room.
A/N: Dumbledore POV at the beginning of this chapter.

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Albus Dumbledore, the Leader of the Light, Supreme Mugwump of the ICW, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was sitting in his office wondering where the hell it all went wrong.

He was mystified, shocked, flummoxed. That the boy—no, the girl would speak to him in such a way. Helene, not Harry, he corrected himself, had just invited every single free Death Eater in existence to wipe her from the face off the Earth. He couldn’t understand why she would do such a thing, why she would destroy the wards (forgetting the fact that it was done unintentionally) when they were the only thing keeping her truly safe. After everything Dumbledore had done for her, she would go and spit on it like it never even mattered.

Surely, he mused, her living conditions may not have been the best, but they weren’t terrible, were they? She’d have grown up humble, understanding and empathetic towards the downtrodden of society. The lost and forgotten. She would recognize the need for redemption, that everyone deserves a second chance.

Well, she would have understood all of that if she didn’t blow up the wards, he mentally fumed.

Dumbledore believed the Greengrasses to be the source of her rebellion. Filling her head with mistaken ideas, telling her that she was abused or some other such nonsense. Not to mention the political power that she’d lost, just by becoming a she. A girl as the wizarding world’s saviour? Ridiculous, he thought. It’s the powerful wizards that make the history books, not the witches. It was Merlin, not Merlinia, who is still remembered today. Morgana? She went down as a destroyer, a Dark Lady for the ages.

No, a powerful witch would never go over well in wizarding Britain, a country so mired in prejudice and deceit. They’d never stand a chance.

The shattered blood ward stone, or whatever scarce remnants of the rare artifact that Dumbledore could reclaim lay on his desk, silently taunting him, a reminder of his shortcomings with the Potter girl. He’d long since tucked away the remainder of the tracking tools and other assorted monitoring devices he once had scattered around his office, emitting the errant puff of coloured smoke, or whirring and chirping in a myriad of different ways. They were no longer of use to him, as they were tied to Harry Potter, not Helene Potter.

He had no chance of recasting the spells required to attune the devices to the young girl, not unless he tried to attain her permission, and even Dumbledore was not so oblivious to believe that she would allow him to do such a thing.
What in the world is that girl doing? He wondered. Should he reveal to her his plans? How he wishes to guide her to be the best of the best? To rise up above the rest of her peers and take her rightful place as his heir? The future Leader of the Light? He scratched his wrinkled head, frowning at the few snowy flakes of dandruff that fluttered slowly to his desk. He added a change in shampoo to his mental checklist for the week. The stress of his many positions was starting to become even more of a nuisance for him than it used to be, and he felt as if he’d aged a decade over the last couple of years.

The future return of Voldemort, the incompetence of Cornelius Fudge, the hen-like nattering of the Wizengamot and their ridiculously nonsensical laws, how they squabbled like trophy wives over the smallest of issues or perceived slights. He was getting much too old for all of that.

He paused, returning to the idea of revealing to the Potter girl his plans, to explain all. Well, not all. She obviously couldn’t know about the festering sore she carried on her forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt. The lightning bolt was an apt symbol for such a thing. The sign of cataclysm, destruction, causing ruin in the blink of an eye.

Thoughts of the elements caused Dumbledore to look back on the conversation-turned-argument he’d had with the girl, marveling at her display of powerful wandless magic. She’d commanded the wind, and while unintentional it was still a feat of power and control over magic that even he would be hard pressed to accomplish even whilst completely focused. Perhaps that could be the power he knows not? He speculated, still unsure of the specifics behind the prophecy.

Fawkes crooned, a low yet happy note, attempting to pull up the spirits of his bonded, the wizard he tied himself too so many years ago.

“I’m at a loss my friend,” Dumbledore responded, sadly gazing up at his long-time companion.

Fawkes tilted his head, singing once more before flying off, leaving the wizened Headmaster to his own devices.

Dumbledore thought about contacting McGonagall to keep an eye on the girl, to make sure that she doesn’t stray too far from her path. Of course, McGonagall would not be aware of the true reason behind her observances, she’d never give him the time of day if she was told why he wanted her watched. He sighed and leaned back in his seat, absentmindedly grazing his hands across the armrest of his throne, fingernails scratching lightly against the thin veneer that coated it.

He hopped out of his seat, shoes clicking quietly against the stone floor of his office, worn smooth over the centuries. He strode towards his private fireplace, grabbing a pinch of greenish sandy powder and tossing it into the flames. Sticking his head through the now emerald fire, he called for Minerva, requesting her presence.

“Give me a moment please,” she replied, hidden out of sight. He could still hear the muffled shuffling of parchment and familiar sound of sliding drawers as she finished whatever she was working on. Albus felt a pang of nostalgia, missing for a moment the act of teaching, along with how much simpler and easier the parchmentwork was.

After a few moments McGonagall stepped through the flames, quickly taking her usual seat and cocking her eyebrow, wondering what Dumbledore needed her for. It was not very often that she or any of her peers were called away from their work, normally left to their own devices and self-managed.

Albus began his request, detailing his worries for Helene and his hope that McGonagall may be able to watch her in the hopes that if anything went wrong with her, be it homesickness or the inability to
cope with such a sudden suite of changes in her life, that McGonagall would come to him.

She accepted his request without complaint, understanding of the need to make sure that the girl adjusted to the new world she found herself in. After the two old friends spent an hour or so chatting absentmindedly over a pot of tea, McGonagall returned to her office, unaware that she had just been drafted to spy on a girl who simply wished to live her own life as she saw fit.

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I run through my mental checklist, going through the steps I’ll need to take to make absolutely sure Sirius is home free by the end of the school year.

First, I need to get the Marauders map from the twins. I’m sure I can manage it through a quick name drop, telling them that I’m the daughter of Prongs, come to claim my birthright or some other such nonsense. The grander I describe it, the better. Those two live for that kind of shit.

Second, I need to nab Pettigrew, stun the little bastard, and find a way to get into contact with the DMLE immediately after I have him contained. I know that they should be here some time soon, as Octavius is going to have them investigate the third-floor corridor, and unless the ministry is even more corrupt than I know them to be, that should provide the ticket to freedom that Sirius needs.

Third, I should start working on my plan to reveal Quirrel and his hitchhiker. I can hopefully kill two birds with one stone and get that done when the aurors sweep through Hogwarts on Octavius’ tip. I’ll have to find a way to start a confrontation with him, although I could probably just mention to the aurors that he helped me find Pettigrew, go up to shake his hand, and watch the guy melt into a puddle in the middle of the Great Hall.

Sounds like an excellent plan. I can see the Daily Prophet headlines now. Voldemort Vanquished (Again)! Vaporized by Girl-Who-Lived! Doubtful that they would say it was Voldemort though. Even with my stakes in the newspaper, the controlling shares are split between the Ministry and Lucius Malfoy, and they would never allow that to be printed.

Fourth…ly? I don’t know. I have to figure out what the hell is up with my wandless magic abilities. Ever since the boat ride to Hogwarts I’ve been able to actually feel and control the flow of magic around me. I don’t know if it’s some sort of glorified telekinesis or if it could be something more, but I’m going to have to head to the Room of Requirement when I have the chance and tinker around with this as it looks to be quite destructive. I can’t exactly relegate my training to an abandoned classroom and then have half the school showing up wondering why I blew a hole in the castle walls. Looking back on things, that outburst in Dumbledore’s office was absolutely beyond me, and even he looked flummoxed to see such a display.

Ever since that little incident, McGonagall has been practically stalking me and it’s making it impossible to get any work done. Not school work of course, that’s a walk in the park. Hell, I’m not even talking about work at all. I just find it absolutely infuriating that she’s constantly breathing down my neck about this and that. She never showed this much concern the last time I was in first-year. I blame Dumbledore. I assume it was him that requested she keep an eye on me. I feel bad for her, she probably thinks she’s just watching me to make sure that I’m enjoying my first year at Hogwarts, yet she’s been forced into becoming an unknowing spy for the man in the ivory tower. Looks like I’m not going to be approaching her for transfiguration tutoring.

To be honest, this year would be the absolute duldest experience in the world if it wasn’t for my new drive to study and live up to the legend of the girl-who-lived. The extra-curricular lessons with
Flitwick are fantastic. Blew the little guys mind last week with my patronus, and I told him I'd been practicing in my spare time. I swear he was about to have a heart attack when he saw the thestral leap out of my wand, I know I nearly did.

It hurt me quite deeply to see my patronus change. I always held onto the stag as a connection to my dad, a remnant of his love that I could always carry with me. The thestral is more… apt for who I am now, but I’ll still always miss the stag.

I catch a sudden glance of bright red hair bobbing through the halls out of the corner of my eye, spinning to chase down the twins. "Hey, you two!" I shout, quickly glancing over my shoulder in the off chance that McGonagall is near by, before running over to Fred and George, smiling at them.

"Helene, my dear Helene. To what do we owe the pleasure?" George replies in a cheery manner, while Fred bows deeply, getting a chuckle out of me.

"Well, I have a proposition for you. If you're interested of course," I say, biting my lip when Fred and George both frown at me.

Fred looks to his brother, who shrugs confusedly. Fred returns a shrug of his own, leaning towards me, hand held to his mouth like he’s sharing a conspiracy. "A proposition? Now what would this little firstie be offering us two lovely gentlemen?" he inquires, motioning towards himself and his brother.

“Well, I thought two gentlemen such as yourselves would be interested in one day learning from the best pranksters that have ever graced the halls of Hogwarts,” I begin, my words thick with emphasis and grandiose to the point of absurdity. “These men were legends, are legends, the pinnacle of all things prank, the gallant Gods of…I haven’t got a word that starts with G,” I laugh, scratching my head.

“Gibes?” Fred asks.

“I believe that works,” George adds.

"Step back a second, my dear brother. Does she mean who I think she means?"

"Yes brother, I do believe she does."

Beaming at each other they turn back to me, their noses nearly scraping the floor as they both bow deeply yet again.

Giggling I tell them to get up and stop making a scene. Unfortunately, that makes them cause an even bigger scene, George mockingly sobbing on Fred's shoulder, while Fred loudly announces to the world what a joyous day it is. I grab Fred by the arm and lead him into an empty classroom George following behind him. I look at the room for a moment, taking in the sparse furnishings, two old and weathered couches arrayed near the windows and a few long-forgotten desks stacked against the far wall. I take a seat, beckoning for them to as well.

"So, are you two interested?" I ask, crossing my arms and settling into a business-like manner.

"One hundred and ten percent my little friend," Fred jests. George turns towards his brother to argue. "One hundred and twenty is closer to the mark Fred."

"Should we settle on one hundred and fifteen George?"

"Good enough for me. Now, Miss Potter, me and my brother do wish to know who these legends
you’re speaking of are," he inquires excitedly, eyes shining in anticipation. "I believe you’re speaking of the Marauders, perhaps?"


The two share a knowing glance, picking up the one marauder I’ve intentionally left out of the discussion, but choosing not to mention it. “Who are they?” George blurts, Fred exaggeratedly rolling his eyes at his brother.

“Severe lack of tact there, George.”

“Oi!”

“Hey, quit your squabbling,” I interrupt, smirking at their offended look. "I'll let you know after I get what I need from you two, specifically, I need the map.” I feel a touch of relief when they look surprised, but don’t start arguing with me. "I can tell you who Moony and Prongs are immediately, but you'll find out in a very public way soon after I receive the map who Padfoot is. I imagine you'll be very shocked when it all comes out."

The two begin to whisper, deliberating back and forth over whether or not to provide me with the map. They quietly argue, and I only catch the tail end of a few words that slip through their conversation. They pause, George hesitantly reaching into his pocket and handing over a ratty looking blank piece of parchment.

"Well, we already know all the secret passageways by heart, and it would be pretty rude of us to keep a family heirloom away from you," George laughs, casting a vaguely pained glance at the map as I take it from him.

"Please remember to introduce us to the Marauders after you wreak your havoc," Fred notes, a pleading look on his face as he continues. "You wouldn't want to double cross the terrible two? The most feared twins of all time? Would you dear Helene?"

Jokingly gasping in horror, I hold my hand over my heart. "Why I would never cross the second coming of the Marauders dear Fred. Wouldn't dream of it! I would have nightmares for weeks imagining what kind of revenge you two would come up with."

Snickering, the two of them get up go to shake my hand, Fred contorting his arm through George’s elbow and under his wrist. Smiling at their antics I take both of their hands in each of my own and shake them excitedly.

"If you'll excuse me, I have to go and put this map to good use," I announce, sharing a knowing smile with them as I exit the room, my feet taking me through the castle towards Flitwick’s office. I don't want to leave waiting for the DMLE to chance, as Pettigrew may jump ship if aurors suddenly show up at the school. I've got to take care of things right now, and Flitwick is the Professor I trust the most to help me with this.

I knock on his office door excitedly, hearing Flitwick’s high-pitched voice crying out, “Please come in!” I open the door, knees nearly quivering in anticipation as I stride towards Flitwick’s desk, map in hand. "Miss Potter! What brings you here today? I wasn't expecting you for another couple of days for our charms lessons," he asks, moving the pile of papers that he’s grading aside, waving for me to join him.

I put my hand up, denying the invitation. "Professor Flitwick, I've discovered an old heirloom of my fathers, and I think you'd appreciate the charms work. More importantly, I think you'd be very
curious to see what I found on it,” I ramble, walking over to his side of the desk. I take the map out of my pocket, muttering, “I solemnly swear I am up to no good,” quietly under my breath before showing him the map.

Flitwick scans it, his expression pinched in confusion as he tries to work out what he’s looking at. He suddenly makes an odd strangled noise, his eyes bugging out as he recognizes that he’s got an interactive map of Hogwarts sitting in front of him. "What in the… this- this is absolutely incredible!” He gapes, pulling the map so close to his face his nose brushes against it. He stares a hole into it, studying every inch of the sheet, eyes flitting back and forth wildly. "You said your father made this?” he asks quietly, his gaze turned back to me.

"My father and his friends, Lupin, Black, and Pettigrew, back when they were at Hogwarts.”

"Ah, yes. The famous Marauders,” he drawls thoughtfully, scratching at his broad chin. "What were you saying? That I would find something curious? I can't imagine anything more curious than this wonderful little invention. You said that you found something on the map?”

"Yes, something very important. Before I show you, do know that the map cannot lie," I caution. Flitwick leans inward, smiling at me in reassurance. "Show me Peter Pettigrew.”

Instantly, the map shifts. The tiny words and blots of ink that make up the map frantically racing across the sheet like startled ants. The letters crawl and twist over one another, rapidly zeroing in on the Gryffindor tower, specifically, the first-year boy's dormitory. The name Peter Pettigrew blinks slowly on the parchment, four tiny paws marking his location.

"Oh my,” Flitwick breathes, his mouth agape. His eyes flick towards his fireplace. Quickly standing up, he races over, throwing some floo powder in and announcing, "Amelia Bones, Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

A woman's face appears in the flames, a mixture of concern and vague confusion making for a stern image. "Filius, what's going on over there?” She asks, the tone of her voice not matching with her hardened visage, so deep that its nearly contralto, yet distinctly effeminate.

"Amelia, could you please come through with two other aurors? Bring along the magic-suppression cuffs," he responds, having noticed the four paws marking Pettigrew as opposed to two shoes.

Raising an eyebrow questioningly she asks, "Minerva's lost it finally, hasn't she? Did she kill the Weasley twins?"

"No, nothing of the sort," Flitwick replies genially, gesturing to me. "My student, Miss Potter here, has discovered something extremely important.” He pauses, his normally cheery voice strained and heavy. “She’s discovered a wizard that we've long believed dead is not as dead as we thought.”

Amelia nods briskly, her face disappearing from the flames for a minute before she strides through with two aurors in tow. I immediately notice the imposing form of Shacklebolt, not recognizing the other auror, an athletic looking man with a broad chin and short, messy brown hair.

"Hello Miss Potter, it's good to meet you,” Amelia greets me, stepping forward to introduce herself and shake my hand. I stop to look at her, her name ringing a bell. My eyebrows raise imperceptibly when I recognize her as the woman who stood up for me at my farce of a trial before fifth-year. Her salt and pepper hair is cut to her chin, parted into a trim bob that’s tucked neatly behind her ears. I’m suddenly very aware of how close she is to me, unable to stop a blush from rising to my cheeks. What a way to find out I have a thing for taller women. "What brings us here today?"
I cough awkwardly, hiding my face as I take the map back from Flitwick and present it to her, gaze locked to the ground as I explain how it works. I point out Pettigrew’s name on the paper, and I can hear Amelia's jaw drop, looking up to see her paling face as she realizes what's going on.

"Robards, Shacklebolt, you're coming with me. Miss Potter, do you mind if I take that map with me?" She asks gently, yet assertively. I quickly accept, handing her the map without fuss.

"Please give that back to me when you're done with it, it was my father's." I hesitate, chewing the inside of my lip.

"Absolutely, although I would be curious if Filius here could attempt to replicate this map," she comments, crossing her arms and glancing at the Professor. "It's an incredible piece of work, and it would be quite helpful for the DMLE if we could have one or two copies in our possession."

"I'll see what I can do, as long as Helene here says it's alright," he inquires, looking over to me.

"I trust you Professor Flitwick. I'll let you take a look at it when Madame Bones and her associates here are done apprehending Pettigrew."

Amelia uncrosses her arms, making a complicated gesture with her right hand as she leaves the office. Shacklebolt, Robards, and Flitwick following close behind her, leaving me to wait on my own.

I sit and fidget for the next twenty minutes, waiting anxiously for the party to return.

I jump, startled as the door nearly flies off its hinges, banging loudly against the wall as the group rushes back into the office, Pettigrew floating behind them unconscious. It takes everything in me not to reflexively throw a curse at the bastard. Amelia recognizes my look of pain and anger, walking over to me and patting me on the back reassuringly.

She stoops down to her knees, looking me in the eyes as she hands the map back to me. "You've done the wizarding world a great service today Miss Potter. We're going to be taking Pettigrew back to headquarters. She gestures behind herself at the rat, wearing a mild look of disgust. "Thank you for bringing this to our attention, if there's nothing else that you need from us we'll be going now."

"A- anytime Madam Bones," I stutter, trying to hold back yet another blush. Christ! Hold it together Helene!

Amelia inclines her head and motions for the aurors to follow her, tossing some powder into the fireplace and marching back through to the DMLE.

"Well, that wasn't on my itinerary today, but you always manage to find a way to surprise me Miss Potter," Flitwick smirks, squeezing my arm. "Unfortunately, I can't give you any extra credit for helping apprehend a man long thought dead… but I'm sure the ministry will be able to work something out."

"I think I can live without the extra credit Professor," I laugh, smiling weakly. "I'm just happy to know that that rat is probably going to Azkaban for the rest of his life."

"What do you mean by that?" Flitwick asks, one bushy eyebrow raised high in the air.

"Isn't it obvious? If Pettigrew has been living in hiding for the last… what? Eleven years? That means Sirius Black is probably innocent. It means that Pettigrew is the piece of shit who betrayed my parents," I articulate, the last few words coming out in a low growl.
"Language, Miss Potter," he admonishes me, a grim look settling over his face. "If your guess is correct, there's been a serious miscarriage of justice."

"Yeah. Do you know who oversaw Sirius' trial?"

Flitwick thinks for a moment, humming quietly. "If I recall correctly it would have been Barty Crouch and the Headmaster. Yes, since Crouch was head of the DMLE, and Dumbledore is Chief Warlock, they would be the ones who would overseeing the trial." He purses his lips at that thought. "That can't be right, I've never known Albus to make such a serious mistake. Convicting an innocent man?"

"The Headmaster not making a serious mistake?" I say, pretending to be confused. "He's only human, it's not as if he's infallible, right? Nobody is," I admit, shoulders slumped. "I mean, he's the one who put me with the wrong guardians after my parent's death."

"What do you mean the wrong family?"

"Well, I've been living with my aunt for the last ten years, her muggle sister."

"Excuse me? You're living with Petunia, your mother's sister?" He frowns.

"You know her?" I exclaim, Flitwick tilting his head in response.

"I know her, although it's been a very long time since we last met."

"Well, apparently I was supposed to be taken in by the Greengrasses, since the Longbottoms weren't able to raise me." I rub my cheek, palming my jaw as I remember the circumstances behind that. "Not with their... condition. I only discovered over the holidays that my parents were good friends of the Greengrasses."

Shaking his head, Flitwick collapses into his seat. "I've met your mother's sister before, forgive me for asking you this. She isn't the most... affectionate person, is she?"

"Not particularly," I confirm. "Bit of a bint if you ask me, my uncle isn't much better."

Ignoring my description of Petunia, Flitwick continues, "And Albus was responsible for your living arrangements?"

"That's what he told me. I got into a bit of an argument with him the other day over it all. He was trying to ask me where I spent my holidays, although I thought it was a bit out of line for him to ask me that. He's the Headmaster, not my guardian. I don't really understand why he was so concerned over where I celebrate Christmas."

"He shouldn't be. If anyone should be concerned it would be me, as your head of house," Flitwick responds, before lightly smacking the desk and getting out of his seat. "Miss Potter, I'm going to go have a word with the Headmaster later this evening on your behalf." He glances at a large clock hanging from his wall. "I believe dinner will be starting soon, you should make your way to the Great Hall."

"Sure thing Professor, I'll see you for our lessons tomorrow?"

"That sounds excellent. I'll see you tomorrow Miss Potter," he sighs before smiling lightly at me.

Waving goodbye, I almost skip excitedly as I head towards dinner. There's a bit of a commotion in the Great Hall as I grab an open seat next to Hermione. "Hey Helene! Did you see the aurors earlier?
I heard someone say that there was an upcoming Dark Lord in the school!" She rambles, poking away at her food, refusing to take a bite. "First the troll, and now there's aurors in the school. Is the wizarding world this dangerous all the time?"

"I don't really know, but I don't think that it's normal for a troll to be in a school," I consider. "Maybe the aurors found out how the troll got in and arrested someone for negligence?"

"I hope so. Maybe Professor Dumbledore or McGonagall will make an announcement?"

"Who knows, but here comes Dumbledore, maybe we'll find out?"

Dumbledore walks through the hall, wrapping around the staff table and standing in front of his throne. He picks up a fork and taps on his goblet, a few clear notes ringing through the hall to get the students attention.

"Good evening everyone, my apologies for interrupting your dinner," he begins, a sonorous charm carrying his voice to each and every student. "I'm sure all of you are curious as to why Hogwarts hosted a small group of aurors earlier today, and rest assured that nothing untoward has happened within the castle walls. I cannot tell you what has occurred at the current moment, and I would like to reassure all of you that you are in no danger. I'm confident that the information will be in tomorrow's copy of the Prophet. You may return to your meal."

Dumbledore takes his seat, sending a suspicious look in my direction, before digging into his meal. Scoffing quietly at his glare, I reassure Hermione that nothing dangerous is going on. "Even if something did happen to put you at risk, I've got your back. I'm not about to leave a friend to deal with things on their own."

Beaming at me, Hermione finally starts to eat instead of playing with her food, her stress long forgotten.

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"Black, you've got a visitor," a voice slowly drawled, carrying eerily through the prison. It reflected its surroundings, steeped in misery and anguish.

The broken and weary Sirius Black lifted his head, unsure of whether he’d finally lost his mind or not. He peered through limp, greasy hair at the bars of his cell. "A visitor, huh?" he croaked, his voice raw and cracked from disuse. "Since when do I get visitors?"

The guard shrugged his shoulders, the gesture barely noticeable, as if the prison itself was weighing down on him, preventing him from lifting them any further. "I dunno’, but Bones is here to see you," he coughed, wiping spittle from his mouth. "No funny business, alright?"

Black, too tired to move, grunted in response, wondering what Amelia Bones would be doing in Azkaban of all places, let alone visiting him. He suddenly tilted his head, ears perked up in a manner reminiscent of his animagus form, listening attentively as the sound of boots cracking loudly against the stone echoed off the walls. He smirked at the idea that such a normally imposing sound was much easier on the ears than the usual din of anguished moaning and occasional hysterics. Lovely place, Azkaban, he mused.

“Sirius.”

He glanced up, almost not recognizing his old friend. “Amelia,” he murmured awkwardly. “Long time no see, huh? How have uh… how have things been?”
“Same as always,” she deflected, rifling through her robe pocket. She drew a set of keys from it, fingers passing over them until she came across one much less worn than the rest of its companions, having been seldom used during her tenure at the DMLE. She slid the key into the lock, the iron squealing shrilly as the door was opened. “You’re coming with me.”

Sirius bit his lip in consternation, wondering what was going on. He prayed that she wasn’t there to give him a very specific type of kiss, not that he’d particularly mind his guess was wrong and she was the one doing the kissing.

“I’m afraid these legs of mine don’t work as well as they used to,” he grimaced, motioning towards the thin and brittle limbs. “Don’t suppose you could lend a hand?”

Amelia stopped for just a second, studying her friend-turned-convict, before reaching over and dragging him to his feet, cringing mentally at the low creaks his bones gave out, protesting their neglect. Sirius paused, steadying himself against the wall for a moment, stretching and twisting his ankles to make sure that everything was still functioning as intended. Reassured that he wasn’t about to fall to pieces, he followed her through the dreary halls.

They came up to an ancient stone fireplace, what would normally be cheery crackles tainted by the environment they found themselves in. Amelia tossed a pinch of familiar powder into the stone cubby, drawing Sirius through and into a new room.

He blinked rapidly at the new source of light, his eyes watering in pain due to his momentary blindness. “What’s going on?” he rasped, finding himself in the lower wards of the Ministry, located near the courtrooms that were used during the blood war. “The Minister finally putting this old dog to sleep?”

Amelia shook her head not saying a word in response. She took a hold of his arm again, forcing him down the halls and through an imposing courtroom door.

Sirius gasped.

He gazed at the intimidating sight. The entire Wizengamot was assembled, staring down at him as he was planted in a rickety wooden chair, great chains leaping out of thin air and shackling him to the seat. Well, looks like this is how I go, he thought, sneering contemptuously at the audience, likening his presence to a more refined form of blood sport, drawn out of his cell to be leered at one last time before they cut his throat for good.

“Why hello everyone!” he cried with false enthusiasm, sarcasm dripping from every word as he gave a wave with one heavily restrained hand. “I thought you’d all forgotten about little old me! You know, I’ve been waiting an awful long time to get here. It’s been… what?” he asked, counting on his fingers. “Oh my! Nearly ten years now! Ten years, and you cunts haven’t even questioned me once? I know bureaucrats work slowly, but wow has it been a long time.”

The crowd murmured loudly, decrying his use of language and seeming instability as Amelia strode up a short flight of stairs, taking her spot at a lectern and firing off a loud bang from her wand. The now jeering crowd quieted instantly, her display startling them and drawing them back to the task at hand.

“This emergency session of the Wizengamot will now come to order!” she declared, silencing the few stragglers who were still whispering amongst themselves. “It has come to my attention, quite recently, that Sirius Black has been locked away in Azkaban this entire time without a trial having ever occurred.” She paused, sweeping her steeled gaze across the courtroom. “We at the DMLE have recently discovered evidence that sheds new light on the massacre involving Sirius Black and
Peter Pettigrew a decade ago.” She then turned to Sirius. “Before we proceed, do you, Sirius Orion Black, consent to the application of veritaserum during this trial?”

“Yes, I do,” he immediately replied, his stomach roiling in anticipation. Freedom, he thought, tasting the word as it flitted through his mind. Freedom was everything he ever wanted, everything he ever dreamed of, even from his time as a child, freedom was his goal. Now, he mused, I may finally have it.

Amelia nodded to his assertion, waving for an auror to administer the truth serum. One walked over to Sirius, aggressively prying his mouth open and dumping the infinitesimal contents of the vial down his throat.

Sirius’ eyes clouded over nearly immediately, his head lolling slightly as the potion began to act, its roots spreading throughout his mind.

“What is your name?” Amelia asked.

“Sirius Orion Black,” he responded in a daze, his voice light and airy.

“What is your date of birth?”

“The third of November, 1959.”

Amelia steeled herself for a moment, taking a deep breath before she continued. “Were you the Potters secret keeper?”

“No, James and Lily thought it would be too obvious if it was me,” he replied, the crowd gasping in chorus at his admission. Amelia fired off another loud bang from her wand, silencing the unruly court.

“Who was the Potter’s secret keeper?” She growled, furious beyond belief that it had taken ten long years to ask Sirius these few simple questions.

“Peter Pettigrew,” he said, the crowd once again crying out in shock.

“Did you kill Peter Pettigrew, along with a dozen muggles on the first of November, 1981?”

“No, Peter killed them. He shouted that I’d betrayed James and Lily, and then cast an exploding hex at a gas main. After that, he cut off his finger and escaped down a storm drain in his animagus form.”

Amelia wiped the sweat from her brow, her heart thundering in righteous anger. “That will be enough. Robards, please administer the antidote,” she commanded.

The same auror that provided the veritaserum made his way forward, releasing the shackles and opening Sirius’ mouth, much more gently than before, quickly pouring a small vial of antidote into his throat. Coughing and spluttering as his mind came back to him, Sirius began to sob. He cried out, his scream laced with both happiness and anguish. He began to quietly chuckle at the idea that he, Sirius Black, was crying like a baby in the middle of a courtroom. Fingers crossed this doesn’t end up in the papers, he hoped.

A loud rapping brought his attention back to Amelia. He strained his neck to look back up at her, awkwardly wiping the tears away from his face on the decrepit prison rags that hung from his wrists.

“Due to the evidence provided here today, I declare Sirius Orion Black a free man,” Amelia loudly declared. “You will receive reparations from the Ministry to compensate for your time spent
unlawfully in the prison of Azkaban.”

Sirius’ ears perked up once again, hearing a frightened squealing from behind him. He twisted around to look at the source of the noise, eyes widening in anger as he locked eyes on the pudgy and disheveled man that had him locked in prison in the first place. He watched as his old friend Peter stumbled forward, an auror yanking sharply on a chain in response, a chain attached to manacles that were locked tight around Peter’s wrists. The watery eyed man’s bare feet scraped inaudibly across the floor as he was dragged into the courtroom.

“Peter, you son of a bitch! You killed them! You betrayed them!” Sirius roared, instantly forgetting his tears as he got up to lunge at the man. The auror Robards reacted quickly, grabbing onto his shoulders and holding him back before he could leap at the rat-like man and tear his throat out.

“Don’t go doing anything brash,” Robards whispered in his ear. “I don’t think it would make you look very good in the eye of the court if you beat a man to death in front of them, no matter how much of a piece of shit he is.”

Growling, Sirius nodded, unhappy but understanding of Robards reasoning. “Where are we going?” he asked as he was led out of the courtroom, glancing frantically behind him, struggling to slip away and run back. “I want to see that bastard get what’s coming to him!”

“Amelia is going to give him life in Azkaban, sending him to live in your old cell,” Robards responded, bodily moving Sirius towards the floo that Amelia brought him in through. “Black, what you need is a hot bath, a warm meal, and a goddamn mind healer. You’re off to Saint Mungo’s for the next couple of weeks. No arguments about that, am I clear?”

Sighing, Sirius shrugged and followed him, excitement beginning to build. “I’m free… I’m finally free!” He whispered to himself, the situation beginning to set in. He almost did a little jig right then and there, looking forward to seeing his old friends and family. Andromeda, Remus, Octavius… Helene!

Grinning like a madman, which was probably quite apt considering his time spent near dementors, Sirius Black walked into Saint Mungo’s a free man.
I'd like to think I'd get used to how easily the wizarding world switch from nearly euphoric, to hateful, and back again in the blink of an eye. It's not often that I see it this bipolar attitude happening to someone other than me. Well, I don’t think I've ever seen it. I've never been able to escape the constant, infuriating attention that comes with being famous.

Just as Dumbledore said during his announcement, the information was in the Prophet, and amazingly, the Prophet delivered. The reporter, whoever they were since I really wasn't paying attention, pulled no punches. They threw heavy shots at Crouch, Bagnold, and even Dumbledore for allowing such a horrible miscarriage of justice to occur right under their noses. The surprising quality of research behind it might be due to the fact that Skeeter may not be working there at the moment, and hopefully this gives the Prophet the kick in the arse it needs to not devolve into a gossip rag.

The news has torn through the school faster than any petty, hateful rumour ever could. Nearly every student quietly, or not so quietly murmuring amongst themselves about the revelations printed for the last couple of weeks. Classes have been constantly interrupted by whispered conversations involving the trial of Sirius Black, notorious ‘mass murderer,’ and an innocent man. I know that they're students, and I know they're young, but it pisses me off to no end that they only focus on how Pettigrew was named to be the real betrayer. Just a few weeks ago these same people would condemn Sirius. They would have cried for his blood if he escaped the prison like he did in the last timeline, baying to see his head on a pike.

Now? They discuss what a shame it was for him to be locked away for so long. What a shame. Like that even begins to cover what he's gone through. Shame my ass. They gloss over the fact that he's been tortured for decades, imprisoned for crimes he didn't commit, trapped with demons that would feed on his thoughts and very soul. I remember discussing with him how what hurt him the most was being vilified. Being vilified by the same world that created Pettigrew and all the other monsters of his ilk, and then had the nerve to ask how ‘such a thing could happen’ in the only country that these mass murders regularly occur. The rat that dared to do something so incredibly despicable, to sell out his brother in all but blood. Not even to save his own skin, since he was never in any real danger, but just for the sake of selling him out.

No, that only receives a passing mention in the paper or the school's discussions. Sirius was destroyed, mind body and soul, and all he's gotten in return was a pat on the back, a bag of gold, and an official declaration of ‘well, we’re awful sorry.’

I encounter a few curious looks from the staff, as well as any students who took the time to read about what Sirius was allegedly imprisoned for, but they're nothing compared to what I've had to deal with in the past. To be honest, it doesn’t really phase me. I'm too excited to finally see Sirius get what he always wanted. Freedom.

It's been exhausting spending the last few weeks counting down the days until he’s is released from Saint Mungo’s. I’m genuinely happy to hear that he's getting the help he so badly needs, and I'm ecstatic to finally have the chance to build a friendship with him without having to do it in the shadows. No more spending time with him in a decrepit house, reeking of dark magic, the constant threat of dementors lurking around every corner.
I set my fork down, quickly forgetting about my meal as I purple robes out of the corner of my eye. I take a deep breath as I watch Quirrel take his usual path out of the Great Hall, walking between the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables. Walking on my side of the tables. I run over my plan. Well, it’s more of an idea than a plan, but it’s a plan all the same. Fall out of my seat, grab Quirrel, and hold on for dear life. I feel a knot in my stomach, feeling guilty that I’m about to kill a man, even though I’ve done it once before. Even though he’s a dead man walking due to the hitchhiker on the back of his head.

I clench my hands nervously, keeping track of Quirrel out of the corner of my eye. I smell garlic before I see him, the severe odour of the plant emanating strongly from his turban. Eyes watering, I pretend to stumble out of my seat, reaching out to grab him as I fall, snatching his hand and ‘accidentally’ pulling him down with me.

He starts to scream the instant I make contact with him, his hand disintegrating in my grasp. I grit my teeth through the insurmountable pain of touching Voldemort, even through the medium of a possessed professor. Everyone in the hall jumps at the sickening noise, Quirrel’s voice cracking shrilly as he continues to scream in pain, writhing uncontrollably and watching in horror as his skin crumbles to ashes. Dumbledore rushes out of his seat towards us, his robes billowing impressively behind him. Noticing his approach, I quickly brush my hand along Quirrel's face, pretending to check and see what’s wrong with him. I fall back in faux shock, screaming for someone to help as fissures run across his cheek, smoke rising from his eroding skull.

In the few seconds it takes Dumbledore to run over, Quirrel is already dead. His body has turned to a pile of smoking ashes, the blackened wraith of Voldemort erupting from his remains and spinning round the room before locking eyes with me

With an empty scream, it cries as it rushes towards me.

I quickly throw myself to the ground and dodge the wraith, rolling over as it doubles back and flies at me again, a smoky trail in its wake, carrying a feeling of wrongness, a tangible sense that the wraith should not be on this earth. Dumbledore quickly snaps off a spell, banishing Voldemort through the doors of the Great Hall and presumably sending him off the school grounds, the wraith continuing to shriek as it disappears.

"Oh my god! What was that?" I cry, resting on my elbows and glancing wildly around the room, watching the now screaming students attempt to climb over each other to escape. I grimace internally at the fact that I’ve probably just scarred most of them for life. Hopefully I don’t have to pay the healers bills.

A bang erupts from Dumbledore's wand as he calls for the students to calm down, ordering them to their seats. "Everybody calm down! Prefects, escort your houses to their common rooms immediately," he orders, turning towards me. “Miss Potter, stay here,” he adds, scanning his wand rapidly over Quirrel’s empty robes.

Madame Pomfrey appears out of the blue, pushing her way through the teeming mass of students attempting to leave the hall, gasping loudly as she lays her eyes on the scene in front of her. "I was notified by the wards that someone had been severely hurt… are those Quirrel's robes Albus?" Her gaze locks on the purple turban. “What happened here? Is he… is it too late?"

Nodding solemnly at her he continues to mutter spells and wave his wand over the empty clothing, frowning deeply at whatever he's found, or failed to find. "It seems that Professor Quirrel was possessed by a dark spirit," he announces, the staff now crowded around us inhaling sharply at the confirmation.
"Well, what was it that flew out of his head? All I saw was bright red eyes," I comment, ignoring the muted gasps as I awkwardly pull myself up, grimacing in distaste as I discretely brush Quirrel dust off of my robes.

"Bright red eyes, Miss Potter?" McGonagall stammers fearfully.

"Yeah, bright red eyes. It looked… snakish, if that's a good word to describe its features." I rejoice internally at the knowing looks and harsh whispers being passed around by the Professors.

"I can confirm that Miss Potter is telling the truth," Dumbledore says, frowning almost imperceptibly as his eyes pass over me. "I believe that was the wraith of Voldemort."

The Professors hiss in chorus at the cursed name, Snape visibly recoiling at the mention of his previous master, a momentarily terrified look flashing over his normally dour features.

"Minerva would you please contact the DMLE immediately? Poppy, could you check over Miss Potter here and make sure she's unscathed? I'll be back in a moment, I'm going to go to the gates to bring in Amelia," Dumbledore orders, briskly striding out of the Hall.

McGonagall inclines her head and sends off a patronus, a small tabby cat bursting out of her wand and disappearing through the southern walls. Madame Pomfrey quietly shuffles over and begins to pass her wand over me, murmuring quietly. She continues to scan me for a few minutes, lights of every colour flashing from the tip of her wand before she pauses, her breath hitching in her throat. She re-casts her spell a few times, her eyes nearly bursting out of her head as she continues to repeat it. After a couple of repetitions, along with a few other scans, her features become more and more confused.

With a brooding look on her face, she stoops down in front of me, lifting my chin with one finger and looking me in the eyes. "Miss Potter, I'm going to touch your neck for a moment to check your pulse, is that alright with you?" I agree, and she moves her hand underneath my jaw, pressing two fingers against my neck. She frowns deeply, motioning for Flitwick to join us, giving me another scan before hurriedly pulling Flitwick aside and whispering in his ear.

What the hell is going on here? I follow suit and repeat Pomfrey's actions, pulling my hand up to my neck and checking my pulse, horrified as I realize what has her so confused. "I've got no pulse!" I whisper, almost falling over myself as I quickly check my wrist and then ankle to see if I could feel it from there. I haven't got a bloody pulse!

I cry out loud when I realize that everything around me has stopped. Not stopped, as in halted, everyone pausing what they're doing. No, I mean stopped, like a goddamn movie. Flitwick and Pomfrey stand frozen in the middle of their conversation, Pomfrey’s hand held to her mouth in a recognizable expression of worry. I turn to see McGonagall standing behind me wearing a concerned look, her cheeks sucked into her mouth and her eyes locked on Pomfrey and Flitwick’s conversation. Glancing around I realize everything has stopped around me, except for one familiar, terrifying figure perched upon the staff table, one leg crossed over the other and looking over the scene with absolute disinterest.

"Death?"

"Yes, that would be me, Miss Potter," he drawls, tapping one long finger against his knee. "I was wondering when you would find out about the whole… half dead issue."

He hops off his seat, impossibly long legs carrying him easily, his steps completely silent. "Half dead?" I ask, watching as he meanders over to Pomfrey, poking her on the cheek a couple times.
"Well yes, you've died once before, so you can't come back completely alive. It just wouldn't make any sense for you to come back completely alive, now would it?"

Inaudibly stammering, I stare at Death in confusion. Questions course through my mind. What does that mean, *half dead*? Is it bad? Is it good? In what way will it affect me? Does that mean that I won't live as long as I should have?

…why the hell couldn't things ever be *simple* for once?

"One thing I've learned watching you over the years is that things are never quite simple in your life Miss Potter."

Oh yeah, that whole mind reading thing.

"Yes, that whole mind reading thing," Death mocks playfully, one spindly finger now jabbing at Flitwick's midsection. "Like I said the last time we met, the mind reading makes my job much, much easier." He turns towards me, forgetting whatever experiment he was running on the charms professor and tilting his head. "I assume you have questions?"

"Yeah, although I don't know where to start…"

I scratch my head as I try to think. What the hell was I just asking myself? "I guess I want to know what this whole half dead thing means? Am I a vampire or a zombie or something? My life is crazy enough as it is, so that wouldn't exactly surprise me,” I inquire, remembering my self-imposed line of questioning.

Chuckling wryly he shakes his head. I note that not a single hair falls out of place as he does so. "Nothing quite so simple, no. You, my dear. You are half dead," he explains, wagging his poking finger as I nearly interrupt him. "Ah! Let me finish! Half dead means half *death*, Miss Potter."

He pauses, a thoughtful look on his face. “Have you ever read the Tales of Beedle the Bard? Wait, no, I know you haven't. That was *supposed* to happen in your seventh year on a... camping trip of sorts, but you had to go and muck all that up, didn't you?"

"The Tales of Beedle the Bard?"

"Wizarding children's stories, mostly based in truth. Within that book there is a story of three brothers. Three brothers who apparently trick *me*, Death, into giving them artifacts of great power.” He clasps his hands together, shaking them in my direction. “This never happened of course, nobody could ever trick *Death*, why- even the thought of it," he complains, huffing aggressively and running his hand through his hair.

"Excuse me, that story makes me out to be a bit of a buffoon and it gets me quite riled up,” he apologizes, looking as sheepish as Death can look. Not very sheepish, evidently. “Essentially, two of the three brothers die terribly, and one 'escapes' my grasp for a number of years before willingly submitting himself to me. Apparently, we wander off as friends and have a great big get together in Elysium.” As he says this he does a little tap dance, as if he’s walking down the yellow brick road.

"In reality, these three artifacts; a greatly powerful wand, a stone that makes necromantic rituals much more… *cost effective*, and an invisibility cloak made out of my old, frightfully unfashionable robes were placed on your plane of existence by *me* to make *my* existence a little bit more entertaining."

“You put those… artifacts on Earth so that people could die?”
Waving his hand lackadaisically, Death sighs. "Humans have been killing one another constantly. Ever since your species started to act on want instead of need, you've constantly been at each others' throats. So, I decided to give humanity a little gift one day and sat back to watch the fun. Fortunately, or unfortunately for you, you're half dead. What that means, is that you're quite a bit more dead than anything else on this rock that still has some form of mental function," he explains, sighing at my perplexed expression. "No, vampires, inferi, zombies, none of those count. You have to have entered my realm and come back in one piece to be truly half dead."

"So… what does this all mean for me? I'm half death? As in, Death capitalized? You?"

"Right in one Miss Potter! You're actually doing some thinking now!" Death exclaims, leaping towards me, skipping a few times on his approach and tapping me on the side of the head. Death skips? "You're half death, yes, as in me. No, you're not a God or some other insanity," he expresses, shaking his head dramatically. "Did you think this was a story or something? Additionally, yes, I do skip. It's much easier to get around by skipping. Half way between walking and running, it really should catch on a bit more." He pauses, looking slightly dazed. "Well, ignoring your delusions of grandeur, let's cut to the chase. You, being half dead, own those three artefacts in full. Funnily enough, the cloak is already in your possession."

"My dad's invisibility cloak!? That's yours?"

"No, it's God's nightie," he jibes, before cuffing my ear sharply. "Of course, it's mine you fool! It's got my bloody signature on it!" Snapping his fingers, the cloak to appear in his hands. He holds it out in front of me, pointing at a small symbol that has been stitched into the fabric. I squint at it, studying the triangle, circle, and line all neatly stacked on top of one another. I never noticed those before.

"Now, things won't be so simple as to have you ask for them and the damned things just pop into your hands. Actually, I don't think you should even go looking for them for a while, you'll just get yourself killed again and I'm not interested in filling out the paperwork to fix things up a second time," he complains. "Don't worry, you'll get them eventually, and they'll aid you in your little mission to not die a terrible death. I simply thought I'd stop by today and clear the air a bit, set the record straight so to say."

Death holds his hands together as if in prayer, leaning inward as he continues. "I've noticed you've been doing close to nothing to fix things up and make sure that you don't die again, so would you mind if I gave you some advice?"

"Uh, yeah sure," I answer dejectedly. "What have I been doing wrong?"

Death taps the side of his head mockingly. "Hmm… let me think. You've been pissing away most of your time skiving off and reading all these useless books on self defense and other brain melting little pamphlets, instead of learning things that will actually help you in your eventual fight against Riddle."

Pausing, Death rolls his eyes at me. "Yes, I see your look, you have to fight him. I know you that you know you'll eventually fight him, but I have to stress that this is preordained."

“Like a prophecy?”

“Exactly like a prophecy. No, the wording doesn't matter one bloody bit,” he stresses, answering my unasked question. "If you're really intent on knowing, I'll tell you right now. I know it'll definitely rub your Headmaster the wrong way if you drop that bomb on him one day, and I'd absolutely love to watch that."
I rub tiredly at my eyes, wondering why my life is just so goddamn weird. So… I’m half dead, which apparently grants me mystical powers of some sort. Additionally, studying charms and self-defence in the way that I have apparently counts for nothing. "What should I be learning?” I demand, getting a bit irritated with Death’s constantly condescending attitude. “And that prophecy would be useful to know even if you don’t think it is. I'd like to know why the hell my life is such a mess." 

Death snaps his fingers, a chair flying underneath him, shuddering to a halt as it meets his legs. He settles into it, tidily crossing his knees and clapping his hands over top of his thighs in a regal manner. "You should be learning useful things that are suited to someone of your talents. Since you’re half dead, you’re the only person on this Earth that can become a necromancer. To top it off, you’re a natural prodigy with Blood Magics. Did you know that?"

I shake my head, feeling a bit sick to hear Death explaining to me that the magics that I should specialize in are the closest thing to evil that I can think of.

“Oh hush,” he states sardonically. “These are good things to learn when you're half dead. Don't go and get your knickers in a twist! You people are so stuck up about dark magics and the like, it's so incredibly embarrassing! They're perfectly safe branches of magic if you're born with an affinity for them, Necromancy in particular.” Not as if there’s any personal bias there, him being Death and all. “The field of Necromancy is only volatile if you’re completely alive. The only reason people believe it's dangerous is because of a bunch of idiots dotted all over wizarding history who got it into their heads that they could mess with my realm. That didn’t work, of course, and the dunces blew themselves up.” Death cocks his eyebrows at me, shrugging as he stands up. “By the way, since you’re so interested in learning it, this is the prophecy.”

Lifting his hands in the air dramatically, Death throws his head back and begins to speak in a heavy, foreboding voice. "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 the Dark Lord will mark them as his equal, but they will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Straightening his tie, Death coughs lightly. "See why it doesn't matter? The thing is so vague it's not worth the air used to recite it. I've never understood why Fate has to make every one of those things a long-winded riddle. She just makes them so ridiculous complicated," he argues to himself smiling slightly. He purses his lips when he realizes that he’s gone off on another tangent. “Anyways,” he says, waving his hand. “What I'm here to say is: go learn something useful and stop being so damned thick. I know that there's plenty of useful books in Hogwarts, so go find the bloody things and start doing something important for once."

Winking at me, Death continues. "Also, I would try to explain away your lack of pulse as a side-effect of surviving the killing curse. I’d also like to recommend pairing it with an adequately powered confounding charm.” Smirking, Death snaps his fingers, disappearing in a chaotic whirl of nothingness as the world around me resumes its motions. I smack myself on the cheeks to get my brain started up again, walking up to Madame Pomfrey and Flitwick, fingering my wand beneath my sleeve.

"Miss Potter,” Pomfrey begins, casting a quick glance towards Flitwick. “For some odd reason you don't have any pulse at all. In fact, by all accounts, you're technically... well- not dead, but your heart isn't pumping any blood through your body.”

"Umm, I was hit by the killing curse when I was a baby wasn't I?” I reason, silently casting the recommended confundus at both her and Flitwick, thankful that the spell isn’t visible in any way
when cast. “Maybe this is just a side effect or something? I don't think I've ever had a real medical checkup before, so this hasn't ever come up.”

The two Hogwarts staff members eyes glaze over, confirming that my charm worked. "Hmm… it could be. Nobody else in history has ever survived the killing curse except for you," she adds, more for her own sake than mine, eyebrows furrowing in thought. "Make sure you come and visit me at the start of every month for a check up, so I can monitor if there are any changes in your physiology. As far as I can tell you're perfectly fine, apart from your current, er- heart condition."

I jump in fright as the doors to the Great Hall fly open with a thunderous crash, Dumbledore striding into the hall with a group of aurors following behind him, Madam Bones matching his pace step for step. "What's with all the ruckus this year Albus? Never before have I had to make two calls to Hogwarts in one semester," she complains, her eyes stopping on mine for just a moment, shining in recognition.

"We seem to have had a bit of excitement in our halls the last few months Amelia, my apologies,” he begins, his tone even and apologetic. "Unfortunately, there's been a very frightful and terribly public death, as well as some incredibly important news being brought to my attention.”

Frowning, Amelia looks down on the robes lying upon the floor, the ashes scattered about the room from the bustle and confusion. "Forgive me if I'm wrong, but judging by the ashes I imagine there was either a vampire slain in the halls, or a victim of possession?"

"The latter I'm afraid," Dumbledore clarifies, his beard bristling in embarrassment. "By the look of it, our dear Professor Quirrel was possessed by none other than Voldemort himself."

Amelia's eyebrows shoot up in shock, her monocle comically falling off. "You-Know-Who? He died ten years ago Albus, did he not?"

"I'm afraid not Amelia, if you'd like I can provide a memory of his wraith attempting to attack young Miss Potter here."

Amelia frowns slightly. "You appear to be a magnet for trouble Miss Potter. Can you tell me what happened here?"

Glancing at Flitwick, he nods at me to reply. "I was trying to get out of my seat when my robes got caught and I fell over. I accidentally grabbed onto Professor Quirrel when I was falling, and he started screaming and then fell on top of me," I stutter, wide eyed. "I tried to help him up because I thought I'd hurt him and he just… he just started screaming more, and then… then he was falling to pieces! He turned into ashes like he was burned alive!"

Flitwick quickly sweeps over and places his hand on my shoulder. "If you'll excuse us, I think I should take Miss Potter to the infirmary, I believe it would be good to get her away from this terrible scene. I'm sure you've gotten everything you need Amelia?"

"Yes, thank you Filius,” she says contritely, wearing an expression highly reminiscent of a worried Terra as she walks over to me, patting me on the shoulder. “Please take care Miss Potter, know that this is not your fault, alright?” She stoops over, lowering herself to my level. "Professor Quirrel was already long gone, what happened here was an accident Miss Potter, you're not in any trouble."

Smiling weakly at her, I follow Flitwick to the infirmary, eagerly taking the opportunity to steal a quick nap. I rest without issue, the tumultuous feelings that were once plaguing me about my imminent homicide long forgotten in the rush of things. As I’m leaving the Great Hall, Amelia’s voice trails over, tinged with restrained fury.
“Now Albus, tell me about the goddamn Cerberus on the third-floor.”

-B---

Blinking away the sleep from gummy eyes, I hop out of the infirmary cot and quickly check in with Madame Pomfrey to let her know that I’m feeling better, taking an offered calming potion from her. I tuck it into my robes surreptitiously, know that I don’t need it right now, but I may need it some time in the near future.

I meander back to the Ravenclaw Tower, quickly answering the riddle and walking into the common room and nabbing a comfortable rocking chair that’s tucked off to the side, one that’s often unused by the other students. I pull my knees up to my chest, wrapping my arms around my ankles as I think on the days events.

“Half dead, huh,” I whisper, picking a bit of fluff off of my knee, watching as it slowly drifts to the ground, disappearing and reappearing as it passes through segmented rays of light, cutting across the room from a nearby window. Dust motes float absently in its wake, blinking in and out of existence.

I’m half dead. What does that really mean though? I know Death told me that it’s important, that I can use magics that no others can. But why should I use them? Just because a deity told me to? Is that reason enough to delve into long forbidden magics, ones that have made their mark on history via bloodshed and destruction?

How will Blood Magics even work, when my heart no longer beats? How do I even work, when my heart no longer beats?

I softly rest my hand on my neck, searching for the feeling that I know is long gone. A feeling that marks me as human. Something that marks me as alive, something real. Will I still age? Will I still die? Is all of this some sort of sick joke being played on me by a deity with too much time on its hands?

I’ve read the Greek and Nordic mythos, and I know the lengths some Gods will go to for a bit of fun- and considering Death explicitly mentioned Fate with a capital F, I can assume that some of those Gods exist. At least, they may exist as an idea of sorts, Gods with no real name or following; Death, Fate, Destiny, these primordial spirits that humans have unknowingly worshipped, that humans have given names of their own. Odin, Zeus, Jupiter, Huitzilopochtli, they may all be referring to the same Gods, just through the lens of a different culture.

I’m going on a tangent here.

I’m not sure how things are going to be from here on out. I’m not gifted with the ability of the sight, there being a severe lack of seer blood running through my veins… if there even is blood running through my veins.

Glancing at my wrist, I ponder checking to see if I still carry the liquid of life. I lift my head and take a quick peek behind me, scanning over the common room. Most students are huddled together, quietly discussing the happenings of the day and Quirrel’s incredibly gruesome public demise. I guess that’ll take their attention off of Sirius for a few weeks.

Reassured that nobody is going to sneak up on me, I pull out my wand and cast an underpowered diffindo at my wrist, hissing in pain as my skin splits open.

…”

Nothing.
Well, not nothing, but barely anything. There’s just a hint of crimson leaking out of the wound, a miserably tiny amount compared to how much I should be bleeding. I wave my wand over the cut, healing it quickly with a murmured *episkey*, watching in morbid fascination as the dry wound knits itself shut, skin reaching out across the tiny cavern in my wrist to grasp the hand of its neighbour, pulling itself tight.

I feel a tapping on my shoulder, turning to see Padma and Lisa wearing doleful expressions. Hermione tags along behind them, her arms crossed as she stares at the ground. “Is everything alright?” I ask them, concerned to see them looking so stressed. Quirrel did die right across from them. I breathe sharply, realizing that in addition to scarring many of the students at Hogwarts, I also scarred the three students that I’m the closest to. The three students that are my friends.

Lisa shakes her head spasmodically, her hand gripped tight around Padma’s wrist. “We’re… we’re not okay,” she murmurs, eyes downcast.

“We wanted to ask… are- are you okay?” Padma interrupts, blurt out the last few words. Hermione lifts her head at that, averting her gaze when I look into her eyes. I smile at the three of them. They’re terrified, absolutely terrified after seeing such a horrible thing, and they come to me to make sure that I’m alright?

“Thank you, all of you.” I stretch out my legs and get up to my feet. I put my hand on Lisa and Hermione’s shoulders, catching Padma between the two of them as I drag all three into a hug. “I want to make sure that you three are alright, yeah? What happened today… excuse my language Hermione, but it was completely and utterly fucked beyond belief,” I admit, a smile tugging at Hermione’s lips.

I release the three of them, taking a step back. I’m going to give them a talk that I should have received in my first year from Dumbledore. No trite comments about love, forgiveness, or vague discussions of concepts that would fly over any eleven-year-olds head. I’m not going to leave them high and dry.

I lick my lips nervously, hoping that the talk I’m about to give them helps. “I’m… I’m going to be fine. I’m not a stranger to death,” I say, musing silently that I’m not a stranger to Death either. “I’ve come to terms with things like… this a long time ago, what with the circumstances of my fame. You three need to understand that it’s alright to be scared, it’s alright to feel sick, and it's alright to not understand what happened today.”

The girls brighten up ever so slightly. I notice it in how they were holding themselves. Their sagging shoulders raise by millimetres, their eyes brighten just a bit. It’s a nearly invisible change, but it’s still a change for the better. “I imagine a lot of people are going to have to do this, but go and see Madame Pomfrey if you have any trouble, okay?” I instruct, making eye contact with them. “You can talk to me if you need to, but Madame Pomfrey is a professional, and she knows how to help people with situations like this.”

“Like a psychologist?” Hermione pipes up.

“Exactly like a psychologist,” I affirm, Lisa and Padma looking vaguely lost, not understanding the muggle profession. “A psychologist is a muggle mind-healer,” I explain to the two, both of them nodding in unison.

“But… I’m not mad,” Lisa whimpers, looking scared all of a sudden. She begins to cry, her shoulders shaking violently as tears rush down her face, her voice raising in pitch. “I’m not mad, so I don’t need to see a mind-healer, right? *Right?*"
“Lisa, Lisa, hey- look at me.” I comfort her, reaching out and tapping her lightly on the arm before she breaks into hysterics, bringing her back down to Earth. I draw her into another hug, cradling her head in the crook of my neck.

I feel terrible for her. Such an honestly friendly and unassuming child, one that seems to have been shielded from the dangers of this world. It’s not a surprise that she’s affected the most by what happened today. I pull back slightly, tipping her chin up and looking her in the eye. “You’re not mad, not at all. You don’t need to be mad to see a mind-healer. In fact, most people who see one aren’t mad. Stuff like this… what happened with Quirrel, it affects you in a way that you can’t see. It affects your thoughts,” I say, tapping the side of my head. “Mind-healers are there to help you understand your feelings and thoughts. It’s their job to make sure that this,” I continue, tapping my head once more before tapping my heart. “And this, both work as they’re supposed to, and they don’t work properly when you’re trying to deal with bad memories.”


“Any time, alright? That goes to you two as well,” I add, inclining my head towards Hermione and Padma. “Now, who wants to get some hot chocolate?” I grab Lisa by the hands, dragging the girls off to the kitchens for a quick dopamine boost.

A few days have passed since Quirrel’s passing. A suite of healers from Saint Mungo’s have taken up residence at the school to deal with the influx of traumatized students. I’m happy to see their health being taken seriously for once, considering the fact that last time, half a dozen students were petrified in my second year and they were left to stew because ‘the mandrakes weren’t ready yet.’ Like the school couldn’t have ordered a bloody restorative potion.

In addition to the healers, aurors have been inconspicuously investigating the school. It’s all been very hush hush, but I noticed very distinct marks in the stone up by the third-floor corridor. Marks that look surprisingly like gouges that a dog’s claws would make, if that dog happened to be four metres tall and dangerous as hell. Looks like Fluffy has been removed from the school. Thank fucking God. I just hope that Dumbledore learns from this and doesn’t go about turning the school into a death trap in the next few years.

Doubtful, but I can always hope for the best.

I jog off to the Room of Requirement to tinker around with my newfound wandless abilities. I’ve been putting that off for the last couple weeks and really need to hunker down and start figuring things out, lest I get smacked in the head by Death again.

Who knew that an immortal being could be so bloody patronizing?

…and did he really need to cuff me?

Quickly racing up the endless flights of moving stairs, I find myself in front of the painting of Barnabas the Barmy. I pace in front of the entrance to the room, repeating the thought, ‘I need a place to practice my wandless magic, I need a place to practice my wandless magic, I need a place to practice my wandless magic.’

Noticing the appearance of the door out of the corner of my eye, I throw it open and enter the Room. The sight that greets me is confusing. There’s no walls, training dummies, or duelling platforms that
I’d expect in a training room. Instead I’m met with what appears to be a mish mash of different terrains. A grassy field bordered by a cliff face of rough stone on it’s right, rolling sand dunes opposite the field stretching off into another sheer cliff that stretches much higher than the ceiling should. What does this have to do with wandless magic?

Perplexed, I focus in on what I’m seeing, searching for the waves and flow of magic in the air around me. It takes me a few minutes before I notice the shimmer in the air, the same faint shimmer that caught my eye on the boats. I reflexively reach out to grasp it, pulling at the magic like a thread. The air itself begins to move, following along my hand and wrapping around my arms, gently flowing around me and tousling my robes on its path.

Smiling widely, I jab my hand forward, pushing a bit of my magic into the thrust. My assumption was correct, and a sharp gust of air blasts towards the dunes, pulling the tiny grains along with it and producing a small localized storm. Suddenly I can feel a catch as my magic strikes the sand, almost as if the magic changed when it made contact with it. What the hell was that?

Narrowing my eyes, I reach out and attempt to grab at the sand instead of the air, studying for a moment before I make an attempt to control it, if I even can control it. I instinctively close my eyes, feeling the magic in the sand and the earth around it. I get a different reaction out of the earth than the air. It has an indomitable aura to it, it's roots running thick and deep as if it refuses to budge an inch. Switching back to the air, I compare the two. The air feels more... free, maybe even whimsical. The magic is flighty, like it wants to simply move no matter what, incapable of staying still. I can feel it dancing and flowing around me, lightly playing upon everything it touches and practically begging to be let go. I'm assuming the earth must be strictly controlled, whereas the air has to be directed.

Shaking my head and focusing on the task at hand, I flare out my magic, pulling at the sand and watching as a fountain of it begins to pour out over the grass in front of me. “Huh,” I murmur. I wonder if I could do something more... creative with it? Clenching my hand, I attempt to bind the sand, forcing my will upon it. I grin as it compacts, the grains hissing as they shudder against one another, compressing into a tight ball. Interesting.

Moving my fingers like some sort of demented puppeteer, I contort and twist the sand, shaping it clumsily into a simple faceless statue. Holy shit, that took a lot more out of me than simply moving it. Panting at the effort, I release my hold on my magic, the figure immediately disintegrating and collapsing to the ground. I grimace at the sands resemblance to Quirrel as it falls to pieces.

“Damnit!” I curse, waving my hand angrily and scattering the pile of sand. I killed a man.

I fucking killed a man.

Cradling my head, I think back on the incident in the Great Hall. Was there any way I could have done something different? Done any research to try and unbind Voldemort’s spirit from Quirrel’s body without harming the host?

I mean, yes, he was already dead according to what Dumbledore told me in my first year, and Madam Bones confirmed that again for me today. Yes, I have killed him once before, that doesn't exactly change how I feel about it though. Yes, I was going to confront him one day regardless, considering I'd never let him get close to the stone. Voldemort being resurrected in my first year would destroy any chance I have at an even fight with him. The only advantage I might have had if he did come back so soon would be that he would underestimate me, but I'm not arrogant enough to believe that I could defeat him now.

It still feels horrible though, and it doesn't matter how I rationalize it. How the hell am I going to get used to this? To killing someone? Should I even get used to it? I know this isn't the last life I'm going
to have to take seeing as I'll eventually have to fight and kill Voldemort. If Death itself says it's preordained, I don't really have much room to argue.

How many people am I going to end up hurting or killing? How many am I going to kill on purpose? I know I'll end up killing Bellatrix given the chance, considering how she slaughtered Sirius in the last timeline along with all of the other lives she's ruined. Lucius deserves to go as well. The piece of shit gives Ginny a dark artifact containing a fragment of Riddle next year, and he must have known what the consequences of that would be! Unleashing Slytherin's monster on the students of Hogwarts? A school that his son attends? Absolutely despicable.

Maybe even McNair? He did take a bit too much pleasure in being Buckbeaks executioner...

*For fuck's sake,* I can't be like him. I can't be like the Death Eaters... like Voldemort. Am I honestly considering this? Becoming an executioner? Am I seriously entertaining the idea of killing these people for crimes they haven't even committed yet? I guess they've atrocities already, knowing that they're marked Death Eaters. I'd imagine there's some sort of sick ritual they have to go through to be part of that special club. Why is it that I must be the one to do all of this? Goddamn prophecies and psychotic Dark Lords.

Sighing I lie down in the grass, trying to ignore my stemming headache as the Room shimmers around me, changing to suit my subconscious needs. The grass suddenly becomes as soft as a pillow beneath me, cradling me as an artificial sun beats down above my head, not hot, but just right. Staring off into the distance I distract myself by playing with my new-found talents, slowly becoming familiar with the feeling of manipulating the air, guiding it as I spin and twist the open space in front of me into miscellaneous shapes.

I slowly drift off to sleep in the false meadow, my nightmares returning with a vengeance. Images of slaughter flashing before my eyes. Not just any slaughter, *my* slaughter. My own personal deliverance of blood, terror, *revenge*. Visions of fresh corpses tearing at the masses of Death Eaters, their own companions ripping them to pieces. Long forgotten skeletons held up by threads of necromantic magic shuffling and rattling forward with disturbing speed as they claw at the masked figures, gore flying in every which direction from their deadly grasp. Unbeknownst to me, the Room changes yet again to match my thoughts.

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I wake up in a daze, the nightmares becoming too much to deal with as I roll over and crack my head against the stone floor, shaking and soaked in a cold sweat. I dry heave remembering nightmarish images that were just coursing through my mind, cursing quietly at my unsettled stomach. I look around and find myself in a grim, weathered chamber. Looks like the Room of Requirement is trying to help me with my other magics.

The walls look to be made of cracked obsidian, soaking in the light emanating from the few barren lanterns situated around the room. Ancient bookcases line the walls, shelves bowed underneath the weight of their contents. A familiar looking ritual bowl is set upon a dais in the centre of the chamber, and a workspace rests to my left. The workspace itself contains what I imagine are shelves of borderline, or completely illegal potions ingredients. I squint, looking closer at the ingredients.

“Oh Christ,” I groan, noticing a jar of preserved eyes staring back at me. *Human* eyes. My stomach heaves as I see what I recognize other body parts and organs, sealed in glass jars that are arrayed and sorted along the shelves. I quickly move my gaze from the morbid sight, eyeing the ritual knives that are strung up along the wall, hanging above a table that is empty apart from a large, ratty tome resting upon it.
I assume this is what Death meant by Necromancy and Blood Magics. Lovely how my life turns out. I have to kill people, destroy the most feared Dark Lord in centuries, and apparently practice the darkest, most reviled magics known to the world directly under the nose of Albus-Fucking-Dumbledore. Yeah, Death is right, my life is never that simple.

Resigned to the situation and how incredibly ridiculous my life is. “If I’m going to do this, I need to be drugged,” I groan, chugging down the calming potion I received from Madame Pomfrey, blinking slowly as I feel it begin to work and walk over to the table.

I take a seat and read the title of the tome in front of me, *Et Necromantium Periti Artium*. Damnit! Only the bloody title better be in Latin, otherwise I’m going to be having a much harder time learning this… whatever the hell this nightmarish magic is. Taking a deep breath, I pry open the book, relieved to find that it doesn't scream at me. It's the small things in life that make it worth it.

Oh for… yep. I sigh in relief as I look at perfectly understandable English. The syntax is a bit dated, but it’s still legible. It probably would help if I had a better understanding of Latin though, considering it’s the basis of most spell work.

“Holy shit!” I cry, falling out of my chair when another book appears in front of me. Cursing, I climb back up and take my seat again. Bloody Room of Requirement, I bet the damned room is self aware and is loving every second that it tortures me.

Rubbing my face, I crack open *Beginning Wizards Guide to Latin*, mentally asking the room for some writing materials. Thankfully, a quill and a few sheets of parchment pop into existence. The room may have a sick sense of humour, but at least it's incredibly convenient. I crack my knuckles, waggling my fingers to get the blood flowing. Time for the new and improved Helene Potter to crack down and study! Even if that studying involves ancient languages and the most godforsaken, disgusting magics ever created!

Why is it always me?
Throughout the last few weeks I've been working my arse off getting a handle on my wandless magic. Experimentation and tinkering in the Room of Requirement has taught me that it's not so much casting as it is controlling. I have to want the magic to do what I require and then push my own at it, changing it into what I need. It's sort of like crossing your fingers and then asking the universe to do what you tell it to.

Charms, conjuration, and hexes don't come easily this way, if at all. I've found that those fields are too... strict for wandless magic. They require an additional focus like a wand to fashion the spell into something specific and rigid. The wandless magics on the other hand, they're free. I like to think of it as incredibly dangerous sculpting.

The most interesting thing I've discovered is that I may be able to control a spell that's already been cast, pushing it away or directing it if it misses its target. The sheer possibilities of redirecting or guiding a spell is just incredible. Miss an opponent with a curse? Pull it back at them from behind before it fizzes out. Want to spread out a spell? Stretch it after it's cast so that it hits a wider area. Stop a spell in its entirety? Still working that one out, but I've noticed that I can slow down hexes shot at me from the training dummies in the Room to a noticeable degree. My leg still smarts from being struck by a couple of the hexes though. Goddamn Room.

What's throwing me off though, is the magics that Death all but ordered me to go out and learn. I'm really starting to understand just exactly why Necromancy and Blood Magics are restricted or outright banned by the Ministry. It's not due to how dark they are, well- I mean, they are pretty bloody dark. They're also pretty bloody complicated. What's the worst that can happen if you misfire a leg locking jinx? Someone stumbles and breaks their jaw. Big deal, easy fix in the wizarding world.

Fuck up blood magic? Well, now you're an especially unattractive pile of meat and you've blown up your house to boot. Bit of a difference.

Most of the Blood Magics are theoretically simple, rituals near identical to the one Rockseeker carried out on me. Carving runes into one's body to augment it in different ways depending on the ritual. The ones that have so far caught my eye are relatively simple: increased endurance, near superhuman strength, or even immunity to poisons.

The downside to the poison immunity is that I'd never be able to get drunk. I may not have ever gotten drunk per se, but I don't want to really write out a whole future of potentially hilarious bad decisions.

The complicated Blood Magics involve sacrifices, give up your life blood, do something cool and incredibly dangerous with it. The most useful spells I've come across manipulate an enemies blood, causing strokes, aneurysms, and other fantastically terrible ways to die.

The problem with those spells is that I need to have some of that person's blood and use it for the spell. Ignoring the difficulties involved in simply procuring that blood, it would make it incredibly convenient to... how should I say this? Take someone out of the equation? Yeah that works. It'd make it a lot easier to eliminate some poor Death Eater at any time without having to even be near
the guy. I'm starting to get uncomfortably comfortable with the idea of killing people. I'm sure when it comes down to it I'll probably panic, but after five years of fighting for my life in some insane excuse for a 'premier school of magic,' my morals have taken a decent hit.

Maybe it doesn't even have anything to do with the school. Really, anyone who was raised by the Dursleys would probably lack in some way, particularly when it comes to something like hurting others. I was never taught how to understand my own emotions and others, so its not so surprising to find that I don't particularly mind the idea of making Lucius Malfoy choke to death on his own tongue.

Forgetting my growing antisocial tendencies, I'm going to have to hunker down and start pouring over some ancient runes books so that I can get cracking on those augmentation rituals, which might be easier to understand now that I have a passable handling on Latin. I've heard that learning a second language makes it much easier to learn a third, then a fourth, and so on. I wonder if being a parselmouth counts towards that?

Necromancy on the other hand, that's where it gets gritty. From the few chapters I've been able to translate, it's not for the faint of heart. I thought Blood Magics were going to make me sick, but they have nothing on Necromancy. Sure, you technically have to bathe in your own blood for an extended period of time and then suck it all back up into your body like some demented magical silly straw. Necromancy though?

A lot of the 'art' involves planning, and I'm using the term art incredibly loosely.

The not so aptly named art involves the act of creating and composing an undead army and then binding it to yourself so that it may be summoned when you require. I don't know the how or why of the summoning yet, so I'm going to say that it's magic, although that saying defeats the purpose in a magical world.

The creating and composing (or decomposing) aspect of it doesn't sound to be pleasant in the slightest, as it's going to involve a lot, and I mean a lot of graverobbing. I'm going to look and see if there's a digging charm somewhere so that I don't have to mine for corpses with magical explosions.

There are massive benefits to living at Hogwarts though. It's an old castle, and what happens at castles? Battles. Lots of them. After surreptitiously casting a few spells to see if there were any nearby 'resources' on the school grounds that I could work on in the future, I was overwhelmed.

Thousands of bodies, from every which race you could think of are buried around Hogwarts and I imagine, up into Hogsmeade. Humans, Goblins, Giants, Elves, Dwarves, and everything else under the sun has apparently died at this castle. I'm going to have no trouble finding enough bodies to animate.

Thankfully, Necromancy isn't just limited to corpse hunting and psychological warfare. Apart from giving your enemies severe PTSD, there's plenty of lovely spells involving rots, blights, and other methods of inflicting necrosis. Spells to turn a limb gangrenous, crush their organs to mush from the inside out, even a spell that looks like its effects would be remarkably similar to the face melting scene that happened in Raiders of the Lost Ark. You know, real tasteful and friendly magics.

I've finally been able to open up communications with Sirius these last few weeks as well, and it seems Azkaban did even more of a number on him than I thought it did originally. The poor guy has been stuck with mind healers for the last month and a half since his release, trying to recover from whatever hell he's gone through. It doesn't look like I'm going to be able to see him until the summer, but the letters have helped a lot. Here's hoping he comes out a lot healthier than he did last time. Sirius has been through a hell of a lot and I'd love to see him happy and healthy, both physically and
mentally.

As long as he comes out of it even close to as healthy as he did last time, I imagine things are going to go pretty well.

Unfortunately, the Ministry has somehow, and I don't even know how they did this, covered up Voldemort's wraith wreaking havoc in the school in the middle of lunch. A statement in the paper from Fudge detailed how a 'malicious spirit' somehow invaded the school and was promptly taken care of by the authorities. I hate bureaucrats. A lot. Bureaucracy is an insidious, quiet type of evil that should be eliminated in it's entirety so that we don't doom yet another generation to the challenges of loopholes, lobbying, and brown nosing.

I will swear until my dying day that Fudge is the unfortunate love child of an impotent Dark Lord and a mentally deficient yes-man. Hell, I'll probably carve that into his grave when he eventually kicks the bucket, even if I'm the one who eventually kills him out of sheer exasperation.

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The last few months don't rush on by. Christ, they're the most bored I've ever been in my life. Even with my impromptu dark magic studies taking up my time the school year dragged on by.

I really should have asked Death if I could come back, I don't know, during my third year? That would make a bit more sense. I'd be able to attain Sirius' freedom, nab Pettigrew, and start planning and preparing for the fight with Voldemort in my fourth year instead of having to wait for four goddamn years to fight the guy. Yeah sure, I'd be less prepared, but the waiting is absolutely dreadful!

Damnit.

I blame it on hormones. I'm not used to this whole estrogen thing. That must be what's driving me crazy. Was I like this in the last life? I was probably worse to be honest. All that brooding, fussing, and whining. Hell! Looking back on it, I spent my whole fifth year bitching and moaning until I accidentally killed myself.

You know what, this doesn't seem that bad in comparison.

Thankfully, apart from things being terribly, terribly boring, life has been good. Without Quirrel stuttering his way through Defence Against the Dark Arts the class was slightly enjoyable, as Dumbledore stepped in to teach for the remainder of the year. As much as I loathe the man for what he's done to me I must admit he's a fantastic teacher. Even though I'm completely familiar with everything covered he offered some different insights into topics that I never would have thought of before. Not that often that someone can put a few surprisingly creative uses of a stinging hex.

Looking around the compartment I smile seeing the new gang laughing and joking amongst each other. Never thought I would ever end up becoming good friends with two Slytherins, let alone Daphne and Tracey, as well as Hermione become good friends of theirs as well. The group works together fantastically, Padma and Lisa's boisterousness bouncing off Daphne and Tracey's very, very dry senses of humour, with me and Hermione in the centre to balance it all out.

Okay I sort of fall more on the uncomfortably sarcastic side of things, but Hermione is there to reign me in.

The ride back goes by quickly, the conversation flowing freely as we all plan our summers out. Things are going to be interesting, as Sirius is going to be staying with the Greengrasses and myself
over the summer, with Hermione, Padma, and Lisa visiting for a week or two. We're a diverse little group and I'm excited to see where things go over the next couple years, we could really do some good to the divide in the wizarding world if we're all still chummy after graduation.

Shouts and banging on the compartment door cause us all to snap our heads up at the commotion, Tracey opening the blinds to peer outside and figure out what's going on.

"It's just Draco out there," she chuckles, closing the blinds.

"Good thing I sealed the compartment earlier, otherwise the git would probably be in here getting himself embarrassed again," I respond.

"Being friends with the famous Helene Potter does come with it perks," Daphne says, a small smile tugging at her lips. "Just don't get too full of yourself, alright Potter?"

"Me! Full of myself? Why I never!" I gasp in faux horror. "I'm quite the humble person, I'd have you know. Have I ever bragged about anything?"

"Not from what I've seen, but it doesn't hurt to nip it in the bud and prevent any future head swelling."

"Pfft. I wouldn't look for fame if my life depended on it. Okay, only if my life depended on it. You wouldn't catch me acting like that snob Lockhart."

"What do you mean by snob Helene? He's an accomplished wizard! Why... his fights with the vampire colonies, they're outright incredible!" Hermione interrupts.

Putting my hand over my mouth to stop myself from laughing out loud at Hermione, I clench my fist and take a deep breath. "Hermione... don't take what I'm about to say the wrong way, alright?"

Her features turn stern momentarily, before she nods, still frowning.

"Lockhart, well. Lockhart is a fraud. Read over his books again when you have the chance. He'd have to be in four places at once to accomplish the feats he said he did. Additionally, the way he defeated the vampires is completely outlandish. Garlic? That's an old superstition, vampires can only be killed by beheading them, or by completely destroying their body with magical fire."

"But... why would he... oh come on! Is every author in the wizarding world a liar or fraudster?" She shouts, waving her hands in the air. "I'm getting a return on those books as soon as I can, as well as the books that are about the 'Famous Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived.' I'm sure mum and dad will be happy to get their money back after I tell them about it... why, they'd have a heart attack knowing how ridiculous wizarding publishing is! The nerve! When I get to Flourish Botts I'm going to show them just what it means to- to- desecrate books that wa- "

Slapping my hand over her mouth, I send a knowing look over to Padma and Lisa.

"Hermione. Breathe, okay? From what I've seen there's not exactly too much investigation that takes place in the wizarding world. If you really feel it's important, send a letter off to the Daily Prophet detailing why you think Lockhart is full of it and maybe they'll write an exposé. Actually, you know what? They'll definitely write an exposé. I can guarantee they will. That paper lives for that kind of thing."

Taking a deep breath, Hermione settles herself. Slightly calmed down, she crosses her legs, one foot tapping quietly against the floor. Wait shit, did I just inadvertently turn the Prophet into a gossip rag with my suggestion? The evil you know and all that rubbish. Let's hope that doesn't blow up in my
"I don't like it one bit, but if that's what it takes to let people know that he's a liar then that's what I'll do. I just hate it when people lie to get famous! I thought it was bad enough seeing psychics and people like that on TV, but I have to deal with it in a world where there's actually psychics? He's taking advantage of people and lying to them!"

"I know, but there's nothing we can do while we're sitting here on the train. Take care of it when you get home if you have to, alright Hermione?"

Still frowning, she nods her affirmation and slumps into the seat, pulling out a book. I smile as I notice her foot slowly stops tapping as she becomes more and more engrossed in the novel.

Sirius cradles his face in his hands, sighing in exasperation. "So… you died and came back in time after I got myself killed?"

"Yes."

"And Dumbledore may be genuinely insane, evil, senile, completely uncaring, or all of the above?"

"Yes."

"And nobody in a position of power believed you when you said Voldemort came back?"

"Ye- well. Not nobody. There were a couple people like Dumbledore or McGonagall, but he doesn't really count and she's a school teacher. So yeah, I guess nobody incredibly important believed me."

"Well fuck."

"Exactly what I thought Sirius," Octavius intones, pouring out a glass of brandy for him, which Sirius tosses back unceremoniously before grabbing the bottle and taking a swig. "Hey! Don't disrespect my liquor!"

"I've been wrongfully imprisoned for over a decade and it turns out my goddaughter is a suicidal time traveler who only died because of my own ego, I'm going to drink however the hell I want Octavius."

"Not in front of her you won't!"

"I am technically sixteen," I interject.

"Doesn't matter, my house, my rules. Sirius, give me the Merlin be damned bottle."

Sirius being the rational, completely sane and in no way emotionally damaged man child that he is holds tightly to the bottle before jumping out of his chair and running out of the sitting room, squealing in fright.

"I think Azkaban really did a number on him," Octavius mutters, watching as he tucks tail and runs.

I scratch my head, wondering why he's so different from how I remember him. "Yeah, he wasn't this… well. He wasn't like that last time around. I think the extra two years he spent in Azkaban in my last life may have given him a personality update. Is that what he was like at Hogwarts?"

Octavius laughs, wiping something unseen from the corner of his eye. "Gods no. He was even worse
then. Honestly that wasn't all that bad, I'd put it at a six on the scale. I just didn't expect him to drink brandy. He's always hated brandy. Poor man must have been through hell."

"Wow. You know what, I love Sirius, but thank god he didn't actually adopt me last time."

"Wait, he was going to adopt you?" He asks incredulously.

"Yeah, could you imagine what a nightmare I would have been? Snape's head would have exploded on my first day back to Hogwarts. The poor guy would have probably hung himself in his laboratory by winter break."

"Although you probably would have done much better during the Tri-Wizard Tournament with his back up. Honestly, trying to out fly a dragon? If you weren't obscenely lucky you would have been eaten, right then and there."

"That tactic was recommended to me by Moody. I mean, he was fake Moody, but I didn't really know at the time."

"Fair enough. I should probably go fetch Sirius and make sure he's not trying to burn the house down."

"Does he set things on fire when he drinks?"

"He tends to set things on fire regardless of how inebriated he is. I'll see you at dinner Helene."

"Good luck!"

--

June sweeps by in a flurry of pranks, hijinks, and general tomfoolery. Sirius, untrue to his name, decides to use the summer as an additional stage of his recuperation via complete and utter immaturity. After the fifth time my hair is dyed pink and ram's horns sprout out of my forehead I begin to, how do you say it? Lose my shit.

"Sirius, you childish son of a bitch get over here!" I shout as I chase after the giggling madman. "This has to stop! You're driving the whole bloody house insane!"

"It's just a little fun Helene! Marauders promise!"

Snapping out my wand I fire a binding hex at Sirius, watching it catch him around the ankles as he tries to dash around a corner, his legs flying into the air as he slides into the ground. I hear a muffled cry of, "Nice shot!" Sirius' legs kicking furiously as he tries to get up.

"How the mighty have fallen! Why Padfoot, it looks like you got caught by a child!" I cackle, sparks flying from my wand as I stare down at him and conjure more ropes, tying him securely.

"You're full grown evil packed into a little body! That's cheating and you know it!"

"All's fair in pranks and war my friend, now hold still or this is going to hurt."

A couple of quick spells and Sirius is now sporting a lovely neon green mullet, antlers, an eye patch, as well as a terribly scruffy beard in the same enchanting shade as his new haircut. Firing off a mobilicorpus, I levitate Sirius into the dining room and pin him to the table.

"Hey! Uh, you think you'd be able to give your godfather the benefit of the doubt and let me go?" He begs, tugging uselessly against his restraints. "Just this once? Huh? What do you say?"
Scratching my chin, I pretend to think deeply before flicking Sirius on the nose, summoning an apple that I immediately stuff into his mouth.

A quick sonorous charm and an announcement of, "Dinner is ready!" and the dining hall quickly fills up. Astoria immediately falls over squealing in laughter and clutching at her sides at the sight of a stuffed, neon Sirius stuck to the table, while Daphne tries her damndest not to smirk at the poor man.

Octavius on the other hand has already conjured a brush and is doodling a mustache on Sirius' face.

"Sirius, I told you not to mess with Helene, she's a bona fide pranking expert. You've got to leave things up to the next generation old man," Terra says beratingly, smirking all the while.

"Hmm-mmmhm!"

"What was that Sirius?"

"Mmmmm!"

"I'm sorry I didn't quite catch that. What were you trying to say?"

Sirius angrily mumbles through the apple before chomping a bite through it, bits of fruit flying through the air as he screams "I give up! These kids are downright evil!"

"It's about time you figured it out Padfoot, like Terra said, it's time to pass on the torch," I laugh, dispelling the charms and bindings on him.

Giggling he rolls off the table and reaches over, letting Octavius haul him back up to his feet before patting me on the back.

"Bloody good one kid, you’d do your father proud.” He congratulates me, patting me on the back.

I smile at him, loving the praise. "Thanks Sirius! Although I'd imagine mum is having a fit if she's watching us right now."

"Nah, your mum would probably have high fived you for that one. Speaking of dinner though, I'm hungry as hell. Octavius, what's cookin'?"

-:-

"Okay so what the hell was the plan again?" Sirius whispers, stooping down uncomfortably.

"Arthur is going to get into a fist fight with Malfoy. Before the fight happens, he's going to try and drop a diary into Ginny's cauldron. It's a little plain thing, black leather. During the commotion I'm going to steal the thing."

"What do we do after we get the diary?"

"Tell Lockhart he's a stuck-up smarmy shit, then we get out of here. I don't want to cause too much of a scene, and I already bought my school supplies last week. I don't know why everyone waits until the last bloody minute to get theirs considering Diagon Alley is a nightmare this time of year."

Sirius nods excitedly, ready to cause some mayhem. "Sounds good pup, let's fuck shit up."

"Sirius stop saying that, otherwise we're never going to the movies again,” I chide, pinching my nose tiredly.
"But it sounds so cool!"

"Not if you say it three hundred goddamn times."

Sighing, Sirius pouts a bit before we see the scuffle begin, Arthur taking a swing at Lucius after his inane and derogatory comments towards the Weasleys impoverished status. No wonder Draco is such an obnoxious little git, he's basically a clone of his father.

"Mission is a go. Let's do this, you break up the fight, I grab the diary," I say, locking eyes with Sirius. Smirking, the two of us move in. I sneak past the scuffle, going unnoticed as I tip toe through the crowd. Meanwhile, Sirius quickly and confidently pushes through the jeering crowd, grabbing both men by the scruff of the neck and pulling them apart.

"What the hell are you two doing? Act like adults, not petty teens getting into a schoolyard scrap!"

Stopping myself from giggling at the hypocrisy I sneak up and pocket the diary in Ginny's cauldron, walking up to Sirius and tugging on his sleeve. "Let's get out of here," I whisper surreptitiously.

Smiling wickedly, he releases Arthur and Lucius, the two of them straightening out their robes as they stare daggers at one another, Lucius huffing loudly as he leaves the store with Draco tailing him obediently.

As if he's been waiting for his queue, Gilderoy strides over, chest puffed out and a conceited grin plastered on his face, robes billowing behind him. "Now now, everyone! Let's not fight!" He lectures, hands spread wide like an American preacher. "Life is too short to allow these rivalries to divide us- why, it reminds me of my new book, Magical Me! I don't want to give too much away, but let me give you a sneak peek and tell you of how I united two quarrelling Veela colonies with nothing but a few charms and a quick smile!" Of course, the largely single and post-menopausal crowd is now swooning at the gibbering idiot.

I grimace as Lockhart's eyes widen comically as his gaze sweeps over me. "My oh my! Is it? Could it be? Helene Potter!" He pushes through the crowd and grabs me by the shoulder, aggressively hauling me to the stage. I squeak quietly in shock, Lockhart being much pushier than he was last time. Before Sirius or I can protest, I'm pulled on stage as cameras flash blindingly in my face, my eyes tearing up and stinging at the offensive fireworks show. His hand on my shoulder lowers uncomfortably, tracing down my arm and cradling me uncomfortably around the waist, fingers digging into my side as he yanks me closer towards him. Damnit! I can't believe I forgot about the git noticing me last time!

"Smile Helene, you and I will make the front page," he says, beaming over the squealing crowd, the sensation of his thumb rubbing over my back making me want to retch. The bastards hand lowers even more, letting go of my waist and moving towards my backside.

"Get your filthy hands off my goddaughter you bastard!"

Before I can even react, Sirius has leapt onto the stage and is unceremoniously beating the tar out of Lockhart. The coiffed bastard screams in pain and fright, the dull thud of Sirius' fist echoing throughout the now silent shop.

The cameras begin firing at an incredible speed, a machine gun of paparazzi capturing the incredible display of ex-convict, now famous bachelor Sirius Black knocking the pieces out of Gilderoy Lockhart's famous smile.

I curse under my breath for allowing the man to get so close to me, deeply unsettled by the way that
he touched me. “Beat the shit out of him Sirius!” I cry, aching to get revenge on the circumspect man.

With a smile that promises pain and suffering, Sirius does just that, one good swing to the solar plexus and Lockhart is painting the photographers and his fans with his lunch, the crowd of ancient women diving out of the way to avoid the oncoming stream of what looks to be mostly digested shepherds pie. I sincerely hope the photographers got that picture, as Lockhart deserves any embarrassment he can get.

Grabbing Sirius and yanking him off of the now comatose Gilderoy, we push our way through the crowd and dash back to the apparition point, before popping back to the Greengrasses.

"Helene did you really attack Gilderoy Lockhart at his book signing? I know I said I don't like him but wasn't that a bit too much?"

Hermione is staring me down over the newspaper headlines, such a classic sight. The blend of concern, frustration, and that little hint of self righteousness? She’s slowly growing into the woman she’ll eventually be, and I feel a little bit proud to see her steady evolution.

"I didn't, Sirius did. Anyways, the guy was getting disgustingly handsy with me. I'm still pissed that he's teaching at Hogwarts after the articles that I imagine you had a hand in," I reply, smirking as she tries to look innocent.

"It's absolutely disgusting that that man is allowed near children," Tracey scoffs, Padma nodding furiously at her statement.

"After last years teacher a creepy bastard is probably a smidge better," I add, weighing the two cons in my head. I’d prefer a sleazy middle-aged washout over the Dark Lord who’s been out for my blood since I was an infant. "I mean, the wraith of Voldemort was our teacher of most of the year."

"Didn't the Prophet just say that it was a wandering spirit?" Lisa asks, confused.

"The Prophet doesn't know up from down unless Fudge tells them where to point, I saw the so called ‘spirit’ get banished through the atrium when we were being evacuated," Daphne reasons, nodding her head towards me. "Not to mention Helene was the one who was the closest. I distinctly remember hearing Dumbledore proclaim that it was You-Know-Who’s wraith."

“How did you hear that?” I ask.

Daphne smiles. "I was hiding just outside the doors of the Great Hall, leaving them cracked open. Dumbledore was quite loud, and nobody remembered to put up a silencing charm."

"Well, not too much to argue about there."

Reclining into my seat I start to plan ahead for the next school year.

I've got an ancient basilisk to either convince to be friendly, or heroically kill some time within the next ten months. In addition to that, I've got to get rid of the diary and I imagine its going to be a tough artefact to break. Sirius and I tried to set the thing on fire, stab it, crush it- hell, we’d try and drown it if we could. I'm going to try some more creative methods when I get back to Hogwarts.

You know, at least things are looking up for me. Sirius is out of prison and even though he's genuinely insane I love the madman to bits. The Greengrasses have been absolutely fantastic, and I'm
really enjoying my time with them all.

I smile to myself, realizing that I've actually got a family now. As much as said family resembles a terrible sitcom, it's *my* family, and there's no chance in hell I'm letting anything come in the way of that.

I mentally smack myself in the head. Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Practice combat magics, wandless magics, as well as offensively dark and disturbing rituals so that I can defeat Voldemort in just over two years.

If I have to kill the basilisk can I animate it?
Chapter Eleven | Dazed and Confused

Chapter Notes

Note: To clarify, the ideas and methods for blood magic in this fic come from Miranda Flairgold’s story “A Second Chance at Life” crossed with a bit of Dragon Age. I love Miranda’s ritualistic take of what could have been an incredibly interesting method of magic in the HP universe and wanted to bring it into my own. Just wanted to give credit where credit is due.

Warning! Mentions of sexual assault in this chapter.

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

The sorting ceremony went by quite quickly, although there were some surprises. I found myself quite surprised to see Ginny somehow find her way into Ravenclaw, much to the dismay of the rest of the flock of red-heads. She dropped down right next at the table to me to say hello, rushing her words slightly as she did so, but in a much more understandable way than she used to speak before we became friends. It's a lot easier to keep up a conversation with someone without the whole pain in the ass of dealing with her blushing and running away a second afterwards. Little victories.

I wonder how she's going to turn out now that she won't have to go through a horrid year being half possessed by that godforsaken diary? Hopefully she comes out of first year better adjusted, considering she must have gone through some stressful and horrific shit the last time round. I can’t imagine how horrible it would be to be eleven-years-old and not understand why you have memory blanks, why you’ve woken up covered in blood and feathers and have no idea how you’ve gotten there.

The ever-entertaining and ever-confusing Luna Lovegood is of course, sorted into Ravenclaw yet again. I'm going to go out of my way and make sure the poor girl isn't bullied and harassed for her conspiracy theories and quirky outlook on life in this timeline, which means I'll most likely have to scare the hell out of the older Ravenclaw girls with some form or another of bodily threats. After getting to know her in fifth-year I found her to be an absolutely delightful person to be around, and it’s a terrible shame that people bullied her for simply being a bit different.

Lockhart, of course, spent the whole meal leering over the students, basking in their attentive and worshipping looks. Somehow the git managed to avoid the hit to his fame after getting the stuffing beaten out of him last week. Must have spun it as a publicity stunt or the like, probably a preliminary defence lesson or some other bullshit excuse for assaulting his aging group of fans with half-digested pub food.

The most important thing for me to sort out right now is going through my yearly check list. After I organized things last year I figured that an itinerary of sorts makes meddling with the timeline a lot easier.

So… I've got to deal with the basilisk somehow. Either by making friends with it as I did with a few of the snakes that made their home in Petunias garden, or by killing the ancient creature in some way
Well, it'd have to be a horrific way, considering my very limited experience with battle magic as well as the animals innate resistance to most spells. I'd most likely have to rot the thing from the inside out with a well-placed spell, as I'm not too eager to go at the behemoth with just a sword, hat, and a very flamboyant bird once more. I didn't come out of that feeling too peachy the last time. I wonder if it's only a basilisk's hide that's resistant to magic? What would happen if I snagged it in the mouth with a curse if it took a lunge at me?

I might as well get some hands-on experience casting said terribly deadly spells, as well as tack on, "Research basilisks and their weaknesses," before I execute plan, "Deal with aforementioned basilisk." Additionally, "Learn more magic. Preferably dangerous, grandiose, and incredibly useful." I can't limit myself into only learning War Magics, Necromancy, and Blood Magics. I have to be well rounded. Transfiguration is an incredibly useful field, and it's why Dumbledore is such a feared dueler. The longer the fight goes on, the more debris and rubble he has to use in his attacks.

Going forward, I know Death said to hunker down and look at the darker side of magic, and I understand his justification considering that I'm the only person who can even work with half of the spells or rituals without exploding into meaty giblets, but I still don't like it one bit.

Sure, I'm coming to terms with the idea that I'll have to kill at some point or another, as there most likely will be a war in my future, and I'll be caught up in some skirmishes. I would just prefer to cast a diffindo at some poor sap's jugular instead of choking them to death with their own intestines while their Death Eater buddy shits out his heart. Seriously, I've started to delve pretty deep into the Necromancy book the Room provided, and the magic he wants me to learn is incredibly macabre and horrific in every way. I know that Death is the premier source of information on methods to kill an enemy considering he's, you know, Death, I just don't see the point in putting all my eggs in one basket. Especially if that basket is full of eldritch horrors. I'm going to continue on with my research into Blood Magic, but I'm going to forgo the undead side of his recommendation for the time being.

I just find it so damn hard to wrap my head around everything that's happened in the last year. My death, un-death, Dumbledore's obsession with me, probably because of that damned prophecy, and carrying the weight of the whole bloody world on my shoulders.

I'm still having a hard time coming to terms with the idea that my honorary grandfather has been methodically destroying my life ever since he placed me with the Dursleys. It's just so incredibly painful to realize that someone that I loved, someone that I thought loved me, didn't care for me one bit. I was, and am, just a weapon to him.

Going back to the weight of the world problem, yes, it's been foretold that at some point Voldemort and I will fight, and one of us will die. I'm just having a difficult time understanding how I'm going to even come close to defeating one of the most powerful, and not to mention, knowledgeable Dark Lords to have ever existed. Honestly, if the guy took me seriously in our little spat in the graveyard I would have probably ended up as a bloody mess on the side of his father's headstone.

Let's add on to the yearly itinerary. I want to study and practice duelling, fighting, and any other assortment of magic related to combat. I'm not always going to have the option of casting some ridiculously complex spell in the middle of a fight, and I imagine most of the spells that I'm learning are going to be incredibly taxing once I get around to practicing the bloody things. Not to mention that I don't want to publicly come out as a potential Dark Lady. I'm sure Dumbledore would have a field day with that, and I'd be summarily executed by the ministry if they even caught a whiff of my necromantic skills.

Of course, speaking of bloody things, I've been planning on executing some enhancement rituals. I'm going to need every edge I can get on Voldemort. Although I'm confident he's done many of the
rituals I'd like to do, I'm thankfully not going to suffer from whatever horrid side effects normally come with an enhancement ritual, those being the usual 'sacrifice one trait for another' kind of deal. Often one's sanity and general mental well being is the first to go. Either that, or I'd have to deal with something similar to the whole 'snake face' fiasco that happened to Voldemort's mug. I'd prefer to go through life looking human and not having to depend on glamours to go out in public.

So that's why I now find myself sitting here in the Room of Requirement after having snuck out of the Ravenclaw dorms. First day of school and I'm already breaking rules, I guess I'm a born troublemaker. I blame my dad for that, it's obviously a genetic problem.

Grimacing at the cold, I strip down and grab a wickedly curved ceremonial knife off the rack. The ritual I'm about to undertake is focused on bodily strength, and if all goes well it should give me one hell of a right hook. I'm going to have to do a stamina and control ritual, as well as one to boost my respiratory system later down the line so that I don't pass out utilizing my newfound strength. That, and I don't want to accidentally crush someone's spine if I give them a hug.

I walk into the centre of the room, promptly kneeling onto the frigid stone. I can't believe it's only September and the school is already freezing.

I realized since I still bleed, even if it's just a bit, I can still use Blood Magics. It doesn't necessarily have to be my blood that I use in the rituals, but attaining blood from someone else for it would be much more difficult than simply using what's already readily accessible. So, I've been collecting my own blood for the last few weeks to make sure that I have enough ready, pouring the preserved jars of deep red liquid around my knees, letting it sink into the depression in the floor.

Focusing on my magic, I push the air around me, levitating the knife and directing it to the back of my neck. Breathing deeply, I brace myself before beginning the process, letting the deadly sharp tip of the blade sink into my flesh, slowly and carefully slicing the elder futhark characters over my spine.

Who knew that I'd one day find myself performing ancient ritualistic magic so that I could defeat a Dark Lord without getting blown up in the process. Hopefully this goes about the same as the ritual I undertook with Rockseeker, although I would enjoy it if it was much less painful than that one.

Mentally shrugging, as it's a little hard to physically shrug when you're carving yourself open, I direct the knife down my arms, making sure to place the runes in such a way that I can add on to my current set with other rituals later in my life.

To be more specific, apart from having to worry about making sure there's enough 'canvas' left for future work, the size and placement of the runes is vitally important to the ritual.

Too large and I'll end up snapping my bones whenever I so much as flex, too small and I might as well just forgo the whole ritual as it'll end up doing fuck all apart from hurting like crazy. Even though I'm blessed with a ridiculous pain tolerance (which was most likely built up over years of having the shit kicked out of me by Dudley and his friends), this isn't exactly a pleasant ordeal, even though I've gone through a similar one last year. I don't think anyone regularly goes out for a spot of tea with a small side of biscuits and voluntary self mutilation.

I'm going on a tangent here. So, getting back on topic- if the runes are too close or far apart, there won't be a decent enough spread of magic when I infuse them, making the whole thing terribly inconsistent as well as frightfully dangerous, as I may rip my muscles apart due to the power not being spread equally throughout my body.

To say I'm nervous is an understatement. I'm goddamn terrified of botching this.
Worst case scenario, I turn this room into a very grim, and eventually quite smelly Jackson Pollock painting. Best case scenario, I'm going to be a world class high jump champion.

Struggling with my magic against the ever-increasing fatigue brought on by the ever-increasing pain, I bring the knife down to my thighs, continuing the cuts across them to the crook of flesh behind my knees, and then along that path to my ankles and the bottom of my foot. I flinch as the blade tickles the soles of my feet, cursing at the fact that I nearly ruined the whole ritual.

With a slight shudder I focus on the slowly growing pool of blood that I'm kneeling in and throw my magic at it, drawing it back into me. The blood rushes back up my body, the warm liquid flowing along my skin and forcing its way through the open wounds and back into its home, cradled and snug in the highway of veins and capillaries that were just a moment ago emptying onto the floor.

Gasping as I feel the magic rush through me, I remember why people rarely, if ever, practice Blood Magic. It fucking hurts. My body is on fire, absolutely burning with pain, putting the cruciatus curse to shame as the runes glow, imprinting their effects upon my muscles, shredding them down to nothing. I collapse in an empty heap, nearly smacking my head against the ground as my skin hangs loose against now barren bones. Before I can react, my muscles begin to reform, wrapping themselves around naked joints and cartilage.

I pass out screaming.

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Dumbledore flew out of bed, feeling a blast of magic slam against the school’s wards. He clenched his fists as the wards gave a mighty shudder, sighing audibly in relief as they absorbed the sudden rush of power and integrated it into the greater ward stone and its reservoirs.

“What in Merlin’s name could that have been?” He wondered aloud, rushing into his office.

He drew up a visual of the ward scheme, checking to see where in the school the influx came. A few murmured incantations and passwords later, and a rotating model of the school appeared over his desk, translucent and shining with a low turquoise glow. He glanced over it, noticing a suffusion of red over the seventh floor, the colour darker towards the south end of the school. That has to be where the surge originated, he thought.

Having forgotten how to read the ward scheme and the colours associated with it, Dumbledore rummaged around his desk, looking for the Headmasters manual, a tome passed on from each Headmaster to another. The tome contained the cumulative knowledge of the school’s leaders, educators, and protectors throughout the ages.

He smacked himself playfully on the head when he realized he could have simply summoned the manual, chuckling as he flicked his wand. A gray leather-bound tome soared off one of his many bookshelves and into his waiting hands. A cursory glance over the tome brought him to the required page. Dumbledore clapped excitedly and laid his index finger over the paragraph.

Ward Display – Coloured Alerts and their Meanings.

Turquoise: Normal status, no change in the ward scheme.

Purple: Location of conflict.

Dark Green: Summoning; hostile.

Lime Green: Summoning; non-hostile.
He marveled at how far the world had come, laughing aloud at the idea of non-hostile dark magic. *What kind of nonsense is that?* He mused, shaking his head. *We’ve certainly come a long way since this book was created.*

He couldn’t possibly imagine a time in which magicals thought of dark magics as anything but hostile or destructive. It’s simply in the nature of the magic, he reasoned. Dark takes away, light gives. Taking something away can never be good.

Pausing, he tugged on his beard thoughtfully, surveying the wards yet again. Red, ritual magics. “Very curious,” he said quietly. Whatever it was, it was by no means a small feat. The level of magic required to make the wards react in the way they did would have to be absolutely immense. Who could have possibly done that?

Dumbledore ran through a mental checklist, wondering who amongst his staff, since no student could have possibly unleashed such an amount of magic, would be dabbling with rituals.

Severus possibly. He was a clever man, but he would never dabble in rituals within the confines of the school and would always confide in Dumbledore before attempting such a thing.

Minerva was right out. She lost her husband a few decades ago to a ritual gone wrong. A disaster involving a venomous tentacula and a poorly timed equinox ritual. No, she would never again touch the field of rituals, let alone make mention of it.

Filius? Maybe, but Dumbledore recalled his days of experimenting with such magics to be long over.

He snapped his fingers, having remembered that Gilderoy Lockhart was now teaching at the school. Dumbledore believed that the man must be undergoing a ritual of some sort to aid him in his future exploits, otherwise, how on Earth would he have been able to wrestle a wendigo or wrangle a werewolf? Making a mental note to check in with the man and have a discussion with him, Dumbledore began to wander back to his chambers.

“Oh, Gilderoy,” he chuckled, pulling his blanket up to his chin, resting his beard over top of the covers. “A true Slytherin through and through. How clever of you to get yourself sorted into Ravenclaw and hide your true talents!”

Oh, how he wished that more students in Severus’ house were like that man. Smart, and ambitious, yet not an evil or bigoted bone in their body. For the man to go on to be one of the most famous warlocks of their time was just a testament to his wit and skill. Dumbledore mused that it was a
shame that he wasn’t born towards the end of July, that his parents weren’t involved in the war effort, nor was he ever targeted by Voldemort.

Lockhart would have made an excellent chosen one, considering the attitude of Helene Potter.

Dumbledore frowned, his good mood forgotten. The Potter girl. He’d kept his distance from her, wanting to see if she would grow and flourish on her own, with him making his presence known indirectly, speaking with her professors instead of her directly to see how things were coming along.

She was the top of her class, clever beyond belief, powerful as well if what Filius said was true. A corporeal patronus at eleven? Absolutely inconceivable. No, he shook his head. There’s no possible way that an eleven-year-old could cast such a spell, not to mention a corporeal patronus. Why, Dumbledore himself only mastered it at the age of fifteen.

He did curse the fact that the Greengrasses had torn her away from her family and had tried to argue with Octavius about the need to place her with the Dursley’s. While the blood wards may be long destroyed, it would still be good for the girl to understand what a blessing it was to have a living and loving family. Dumbledore felt his stomach twist in remembrance of his sister, Ariana.

He thought it was such a shame that Helene didn’t want to spend time with her family, as you only get one. He wondered momentarily if what the girl said about the Dursley’s was true, but Dumbledore shook his head in disgust. No one could ever treat their family that way. No one. It just wasn’t possible. He remembered his frustrating conversation with Filius, how the small man argued incessantly that the circumstances behind the girl being placed with her family were horribly unprofessional. How furious he was to have Filius question him in such a way. Did he not understand that he did everything for the betterment of others? That he made the hard decisions, so they did not have to?

For all of magical Britain was his kingdom, he believed, and everyone in it his children. Dumbledore was there to guide them, to mould them to be the best they can be. Regrettably, a few misguided souls didn’t understand that and fought tooth and nail so that they could make disastrous choices. Every once in a while, Dumbledore had to bring a child back in line, and he would do his best to make sure that none of them strayed as far as Tom Riddle once did.

Unfortunately, he didn’t understand that magical and non-magical brains worked a bit differently from one another, and that influenced the likelihood of child abuse. One of the most important distinctions between the two minds was the imprinted emphasis on family that a magical brain carries, how the bond of blood was much more sacred between magicals and non-magicals. Child abuse was exceedingly rare in the magical world, almost unheard of for that matter. Only a few rare cases, such as Severus Snape or Tracey Davis were known to Dumbledore, so the idea that the Dursleys abused young Helene was quite absurd to him.

Yes, he would allow her free reign for the time being, and as long as her behaviour wasn’t concerning he would leave her to her own devices. If something happened, he could always step in.

I wake up in the Room of Requirement covered in a thin layer of sweat. Shakily, I climb to my feet, flexing my arms and sighing in relief as my bones don’t shatter the moment I strain my muscles. I quickly ask the room to provide weights so that I can test out my newfound strength.

In an instant, a series of barbells and dumbbells are lined out across the room. I test them out, working my way through the weights and marvelling at how easy it is to lift them. After about a half an hour of casually working out I figure out my limits regarding how much I can pick up.
Apparently, I can now pick up seventy kilos with one arm without hurting myself. Watch out Arnie here I come!

I throw my forgotten robes on and sneak back to the Ravenclaw common room, dashing into the showers and then quickly heading to the Great Hall for breakfast. After destroying a large plate of bacon and eggs I attend my morning classes, starting off with transfiguration.

Thankfully, McGonagall seems to have calmed down a bit and is no longer hanging over my shoulder to see what I'm doing throughout the whole class. I guess Dumbledore told her to lay off. Either that, or she's already forgotten her (what I assume are) orders to stalk me.

The ringing clock tower announces the end of class and I quickly pack up my bags while checking over my schedule to see my next course.

Shit.

Defence Against the Dark Arts.

Cursing whatever terrible god has seen fit to ruin my life I take my time meandering through the halls before coming up to the dreaded Defence session. Walking into the classroom, I'm wondering about how I'm going to survive the coming year. Sure, basilisks are scary and all, but Lockhart is a danger in and of himself. What was the 'spell' he cast against the pixies before? Peski Piksipestornomi? What in the hell is that supposed to do? It's not even real Latin! It's a bloody play on words! This is going to be a long bloody year if I can't get rid of the creepy, walking accident waiting to happen within the next few months.

Pushing my mental whinging out of the way, I make sure to nab a seat towards the back of the room as it begins to fill up, Hermione taking the spot next to me, complaining about our seat placement and chiding me on my evident lack of work ethic due to said seat placement. I just smirk at her and ask her if she really wants to sit so close to the 'Great Gilderoy Lockhart' while Lisa and Padma sidle up at the table in front of us.

In a wave of pompous glory, Lockhart floats into the room, eyes twinkling and teeth sparkling as he poses in front of the class. God damnit why can this school never hire a relatively sane Defence teacher?

After dealing with the usual spiel about his incredibly glorious life and achievements, Lockhart distributes his poor excuse for a pop-quiz. I might as well have a little bit of fun with this. Peering down at the sheet I laugh out loud at the ridiculous questions he's posed to the class. I can't believe I forgot about this! What a self-centred shit!

What is Gilderoy Lockharts favourite colour?

I pause, before scribbling, ‘The sickly false gold of his garish toupee.’

What is Gilderoy Lockharts secret ambition?

To deceive every aging spinster in Britain.

What is Gilderoy Lockharts greatest achievement to date?

Successfully tricking the public into believing he's a great wizard.

On and on I write the snarkiest answers I can to his abomination of a quiz, smirking to myself after Lockhart scans over the hand outs and looks as if someone has punched him in the gut as he reaches
mine. Lockhart quickly collects himself, although I do notice a furious grimace as he bends over to grab something underneath his desk. Palming my wand, I prepare for the insanity that is about to occur.

I feel like I'm watching a car crash in slow motion as he sweeps the sheet off the bird cage he has removed from behind his desk, revealing the furiously hyperactive Cornish Pixies rattling against the side of their tiny prison.

Grinning like a loon, he unlatches the cage and is quickly dispatched by the little pranksters after his failed 'spell,' screaming like a scared child as he retreats to his office, sans-wand. I guess I have to do all the work. Again.

Snapping off a wide area stunner, I catch the largest group of the pixies before they can cause any psychological damage to the now terrified gaggle of second years surrounding me. The flock of pixies quickly notices my attack and rush in to retaliate, squealing and chirping loudly as they dive at me like some sort of demented neon blue paratrooper squad.

Twitching my hand slightly, thankfully hidden due to the confusion in the classroom, I push the wind around the pixies and condense it, slamming them all together into a knotted cluster before firing off another stunner and banishing the lot of them back into their cage.

"Everybody! Hey! Stop freaking out, the pixies are taken care of!" I shout, catching the attention of the students who are still running around the room in a frenzied panic. The students who noticed the quick dispatch of the pixies that I just dished out are looking on at me in undisguised awe. Honestly, second years are so easily impressed it's ridiculous. Shit, any of them could have stunned the little devils instead of having me do the job all on my own while they ran around terrified.

I see a glimpse of blond out of the corner of my eye as Lockhart pokes his dopey head through the door, giving the room a quick once over. Strutting back out of hiding like he owns the place, he sits on top of his desk and claps once to get the attention of the class.

"Fantastic work Miss Potter! I wouldn't expect any less from the Girl-Who-Lived!" He preens excitedly, eyeing me like I'm a particularly delicious steak. I shudder under his gaze, turning my eyes away. "Would everyone in the room please give Miss Potter a round of applause! Absolutely stellar work my dear!"

Damnit.

Sending off a meek smile and wave to the cheering and clapping class, I sit back down and wait for Lockhart to continue the 'lesson,' or whatever passes for a lesson in his eyes.

After a particularly gruelling half hour of narcissism, which I largely block out as I daydream about interesting ways to humiliate Lockhart and get him fired, we're finally released from the hell that is Defence Against the Dark Arts as taught by the Golden Fop.

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Slowly and slowly the days go by, intermittent periods of actual entertainment caught up between the drag of going to a class I've already attended. I'm looking forward to next year at the least, I'll actually have an opportunity to study something new when I take Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. There's no chance in hell I'm attending Divination again and dealing with the drunken psychic wonder remind me of my own mortality, and as much as I love Hagrid, he's really not the best choice for a teacher. Most importantly, he's not the best choice for a teacher involved in making sure there's a safe learning environment working with a very deadly assortment of creatures. I mean, Blast-Ended
Skrewts? Isn't it illegal to crossbreed most creatures, not to mention crossbreeding a goddamn *manticore* and a fire crab? Manticore being the operative word considering they're one of the most dangerous creatures to have ever existed. Yeah, nice and fluffy.

My studies with Flitwick have still been going swimmingly, and I absolutely adore the little guy. I'm actually quite happy that I got sorted into Ravenclaw this time around. Although there's one thing I'm going to have to remedy soon. Luna Lovegood. I know she got bullied relentlessly before, and I'd like to make sure that she doesn't have to deal with the harassment this time, especially from her own house. It'd be bad enough if other houses were mistreating the poor girl, but to have your own 'Hogwarts Family' treat you terribly? Absolutely horrible.

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"Hey! What're you reading?" I ask as I plant myself down next to Luna. I finally found her in the library, either hiding away from the rest of her peers or following the calling of all Ravenclaws and delving deep into a new book, searching for clues to some future homework problem.

Curious wide gray eyes pass over me, almost looking through me as she gazes dreamily.

"The Quibbler," she replies airily. "It's my daddy's paper you see. He's the owner, editor, publisher, and writer."

I smile at her. "Yeah? That must be a ton of work for one man! I've never heard of it myself, but do you maybe have an extra copy I could read?"

She frowns as much as Luna could ever frown, which is not very much. Nearly invisible blond eyebrows flex slightly as she tilts her head sideways. I feel my stomach clench when I realize that she’s not very trusting of me. I forgot how bad things were for her. Luna’s suffered through so much at such a young age.

"Not at the moment, but if you'd like I could talk to him and get you a subscription?"

"I think that would be lovely." I pause, extending my hand. "I'm sorry, I didn't get your name, but I remember you from the sorting feast. You are?"

"Lovegood. Luna Lovegood," she says, lips twisted slightly in a smile as she takes my hand and shakes it softly yet firmly.

"Great to meet you Luna. I'm Potter, Helene Potter," I beam, taking her hand and shaking it softly. "So, tell me a little bit about yourself Luna."

She grins widely, her normally dreamy gaze brightening and becoming much more aware, more focused. "Have you ever heard of the Crumple-Horned Snorcack?" She asks, nearly quivering in excitement.

“No, I haven’t.”

Her slightly protruding eyes widen even more, a look of delight spreading across her face. “They’re this *fantastic* creature that me and my daddy have been looking for.

“Hey, Helene! There you are, we were looking all over for you,” Lisa interrupts, noisily sliding into the seat next to me and garnering a wicked stare from Pince. She wilts under the pointed gaze of the librarian, sheepishly apologizing.

Padma quietly takes a seat next to Luna, smiling at her and introducing herself. “Hi! I’m Padma, I’m
afraid we haven’t met yet. You are?”

“Luna Lovegood,” she replies shyly, unsure of how to act around so many new people. She blushes as Daphne, Hermione, and Tracey show up, the four seated table becoming extremely crowded.

“Hey everyone! Who’s the new girl?” Tracey asks, resting her elbows on my back, her chin nestled on top of my head.

“Luna Lovegood,” she repeats, head flitting back and forth like a nervous bird, looking for an escape.

“Hey, everyone, give her some breathing room,” I say, raising my hands. I smile apologetically at Luna. “Sorry Luna, I didn’t expect for you to be bombarded by every single friend of mine.”

Tracey blushes in embarrassment. “Sorry about that,” she apologizes. “I can be a bit loud sometimes, but Daphne balances things out for me,” she adds, gesturing towards my soon-to-be sister. Daphne nods in reply, shooting a playful glare at Tracey.

The girls take turns introducing themselves, informally inducting Luna into the group. I grin as she excitedly chats back and forth with the group, getting along surprisingly well with Daphne, the two hitting it off immediately. I’m happy that Luna has a group of friends to back her up now, and judging by the look on Daphne’s face, the friendship is going to last.

Yet again, I’m in a rush to get to the Defence class. I really don’t understand how I keep ending up nearly late for it. Maybe I have some subconscious need to ignore Lockhart’s incessant narcissism? That would probably explain a lot, a natural aversion to gits and foppishness.

Quietly, I sneak into the classroom a moment after the bell rings.

"Miss Potter, five points from Ravenclaw for being late," Lockhart announces snidely as I enter the room.

Shit.

"Yes Professor," I half-heartedly call out as I sit down next to Hermione, who begins to quietly chide me for showing up late.

"Hey, I'm sorry I'm late, it won't happen again," I whisper, pulling my books out of my satchel bag and placing them carefully on the desk so as to not make any noise. I rummage through the bag looking for parchment and my quill, lining those out as well.

"Just don't make a habit of it," she murmurs back, looking a bit sheepish. "I know I'm being bossy, but it's not hard to show up on time."

"Yes Mum."

Giggling, she slaps me on the arm.

"Another five points from Ravenclaw for disrupting the class Miss Potter. Please see me after the bell."

Groaning, I nod and turn to my book, ignoring the 'lecture' as I study more of the charms lexicon that Flitwick provided me with. I notice a few furtive glances directed my way by Lockhart, but put them
out of my mind, instead focusing on doing anything but focus.

Soon enough, the bell rings and I lazily pack away my bag, making sure I don’t flatten my spare parchment as I organize my books. I notice that I’m missing one of my useless Lockhart textbooks and tell Hermione, Padma, and Lisa that I’ll meet them in the Great Hall in a few minutes, sending them off ahead.

I glance under and around my desk, huffing in frustrating when I can’t find the book. I was hoping to get a refund on that when I reveal Lockhart as a fraud. I’m sure Flourish & Blotts couldn’t deny me a return if that occurred. I hear a curious tapping as the last student leaves the room, and I look up from my search only to be blinded a bright flash of red light.

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"Miss Potter? Miss Potter are you listening?" A voice asks, muffled and concerned.

"Huh! What?" I gasp, bleary eyed as I look around the classroom. What?

That’s weird, everyone’s already left. When did I fall asleep? I don’t normally zone out like that anymore after learning occlumency. I blink tiredly, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. I yawn deeply, turning towards Lockhart with a mildly embarrassed look on my face.

Lockhart crosses his arms, tutting loudly. "Miss Potter, you fell asleep. Quite frustrating for me I'm afraid, not even my tale of the Grimm of Gwynedd could keep you awake!"

"Huh, I didn't realize I even nodded off. Long night last night I guess," I explain as concisely as I can. I just want to get out of here and go eat, so I don't want to say anything to encourage the guy. "What time is it? I didn't even notice the class leave."

He glances towards the clock on the far wall. "It's about five to twelve right now, I forgot to wake you up and I'm afraid you may have missed the start of lunch."

"Well, I'll be off if that's the case."

Grabbing my bag, I get up to my feet before crashing back down onto my seat in pain. I grit my teeth, one hand over my stomach and hips. Christ! What the hell was that?! Did I overdo that ritual a couple weeks back? I'm pretty sure I did everything correctly from what I can tell, I haven't been dealing with any weird muscle aches or pain since.

Wait, did he say that it's five to twelve? I try to do the math in my head, still dazed. After a few moments I work it out. Odd. Class ended almost half an hour ago. Why the hell did Lockhart not wake me up?

I attempt to stand up again, my knees shaking. I wince again as my pelvis throbs and aches. “What in the hell,” I whisper in frustration. Why would my pelvis-

I immediately think of the worst-case scenario, the dots connecting in my head.

Oh my god. No, he couldn’t have possible done that.

I freeze, trying to stop my hands from trembling as I clench onto the desk for dear life. I look up in horror at Lockhart, and everything starts to click. He'd never miss a lunch, no, there's not a chance in the world. He lives for that kind of attention, thrives on it. Sitting up at the front of the school and basking in whatever kind of glory he can eke out of the students is his lifeline, and it's probably the only reason he even came here to teach.
Could he have?

The memory of him grabbing a hold of my waist at Flourish & Blotts springs to my mind, how possessive it felt. How predatory it felt. No, not even just holding my waist. He tried to grab my arse, no doubt about it.

No. I can’t believe it… he- what the fuck. There’s no way. He’s just a creepy guy, right? That’s all there is to it. Just one creepy mother fucker, who really shouldn’t even be near children let alone teaching them. He couldn’t have. It’s not possible. He’d never go that far, would he? Oh god no. No no no… holy fuck no.

The trembling turns to tremors, my whole body clamouring to escape, to just get out of here. Nausea rushes over me in a sickening wave, and I attempt to hold back the bile threatening to spill out of my throat. I gag, a thick wet hiccupping noise, tasting the bitter tinge of sick as I empty my stomach all over the floor.

I crumple, knees colliding painfully with the floor. I feel the warm puddle of vomit soak into my robes as I search for my wand, fingers scrambling uselessly at my wrist.

He raped me.

Freak.

Worthless.

Disgusting.

He raped me.

Lockhart looms over me, twirling my blackthorn and yew wand playfully in one hand. "Now, now Miss Potter. We can't have you making a mess all over the place. Can we?" He coos quietly into my ear, closing the distance between the two of us as I try to stumble back to my feet, my body seizing up in shock. His eyes glitter dangerously as he runs them over me, molesting me with them. He grins that same disgusting grin, that awfully narcissistic gesture no longer looking idiotic. This sneer is much more monstrous.

"I don't think we need you going around telling everyone about our little foray. You know I have to punish students who act out, especially ones that are so terribly rude," he complains, arms spread wide. He clicks his tongue against the roof of his mouth, rolling his eyes dramatically. "I mean, after your response to my day one quiz I knew I had to reprimand you." He smiles lecherously at that, his eyes glinting dangerously. "Honesty, I'm surprised you managed to throw off that first obliviate. Just close your eyes and this'll all be over in a jiffy."

He raises his wand, and I panicking, moving to blast him away with a gust of air. As I’m doing that, I remember my spare wand, holstered at my ankle and reach out for it. I cry out as I slip on the pool of vomit I'm lying in, gritting my teeth as I crack my elbow on the stone floor. There's a flash of white light, and then next thing I know, I know nothing.

-:-:

Dazed, I find myself in the Great Hall. When the hell did I get here?

I shrug ineffectually. Must have wandered off on auto-pilot after that horribly boring Defence class. God, I can't stand Lockhart.
"Helene, are you okay? You look a little peaked," Padma asks, a touch of concern lacing her words. She reaches out and presses the back of her hand to my forehead, checking my temperature. “No fever,” she murmurs quietly.

"Yeah, I'm fine… just feeling a bit tired is all," I reply, smiling weakly as I start digging into my food. “It's just been a bit of a long day, you know?"

She nods at my remark, and I frown as I notice an acrid tinge in the back of my throat. Eugh, I think just sicked up a bit in my mouth. This is going to be a long goddamn day I guess.

-::-

Exhausted, I climb into bed.

I'm feeling incredibly unsure about how my day went. Something just seems… off about it all, and I can't quite put my finger on it. There's just something missing and no matter how hard I think about it, nothing comes up. It's driving me absolutely insane.

I've also been feeling achy and sick ever since lunch, not to mention that I've managed to fix myself up with a nice dose of self loathing for some unknown reason. I haven't felt this bad since, well—since Cedric was murdered. That same tinge of regret, that intense self hatred. But why? Why am I feeling this all of a sudden? I felt it for that brief moment before I followed Sirius into the veil as well. So why do I feel it now? What happened?

I can't remember the last time I've even felt sick to be honest. I'm pretty sure that magical folk don't get sick the same way muggles do, although the few illnesses we do have are terrible compared to the 'regular' ones. Common cold? Vaccinated via Pepper-up. Toss back a vial of the stuff and you'll never get a cold again. Lycanthropy? Tough shit, you've got it for life. Best part about Lycanthropy is it's a package deal. Just in case the terrible physical and mental pain you've got to endure every month isn't enough, the wizarding world will disown you to boot. Poor Remus, I should try and get in touch with him if Sirius hasn't already.

A sudden flash of disgust sends me stumbling to my feet and into the washroom. I barely make it to the toilet before I'm retching and spitting bits of my dinner into the porcelain tank. What the hell is going on today?

I rinse my mouth out in the sink, wiping the last bits of filth from my lips. I lurch back to my bed, practically falling over as I climb back in and clumsily shut the curtains behind me.

I have nightmares for the first time in a while. Bursts and flickers of terrible, mocking grins, and an irrevocable sense of revulsion flitting across my mind.
Chapter Twelve | Letting Go

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

“Miss Potter, please stay behind.”

I grumble quietly as I pack my bags, avoiding McGonagall’s gaze as she looks at me worriedly. “Was there anything you needed Professor?” I ask, slinging my bag over my shoulder.

She fidgets nervously with her cloak for just a moment, almost short enough for most to not notice. I notice though, wondering what has my previous Head of House so tense. “I was wanting to check in with you and make sure that you’re well.” She hesitates for a split second, her lips drawing tight in a familiar expression. “The quality of your work in the last week has dropped considerably. I was curious if there were any issues you were having with the syllabus, maybe outside of class?”

I tilt my head, hiding my rising shock behind a blank face.

Things have been confusing for me lately. I haven't a clue why, but they have been. It's been a long time since I've had nightmares, and normally they're quite, well- explicit. Voldemort killing me, my friends and family, and everyone I hold dear is the usual fare. They stand out in how horrific they are. I remember the details, the fine points of the dream. These nightmares though? Haven't a goddamn clue.

All I can really pinpoint is a smile. A smile of all things. I don't understand it, I don't understand why a smile is what is important to me, as opposed to something insidious, something gory or violent. It's not a pleasant smile, to be honest. It's more… malicious. Hateful is probably the best word to describe it. I just don’t understand why the hell I’m having nightmares about a smile. I can’t put my bloody finger on it.

I haven't really slept a wink for the last couple of weeks because of these nightmares. God knows McGonagall has noticed it and that’s why I’m being questioned. I thought she didn't particularly give a shit about her students after the desperate conversation I had with her about the stone in the last timeline. She's probably back on Dumbledore's orders to hound me everywhere I go. Make sure I'm not turning dark. Pfft. Apparently, that’s too late.

“I’m fine,” I reply as I look her in the eye, my gaze unwavering. “Everything is fine, thank you for asking.”

I readjust the strap on my bag, letting it slide a little closer to the floor. McGonagall frowns subtly, her mouth opening a crack in protest.

“She nods, staring at my mouth, not making eye contact. She doesn’t anything as she gestures for me to leave, and I comply, doing my best to ignore her oddly morose attitude as I make my way to my potions lecture.

Potions.

That’s what’s really concerning. Things have gotten bad enough that Snape has been looking at me in concern. Severus Bloody Snape. I know he's a bit different this time round, although I'm assuming
it's because I don't look like a carbon copy of my Dad. I understand that he was bullied relentlessly by the Marauders, but it was so incredibly petty of Snape to be to resentful of me for simply looking like my Dad. I can't honestly imagine what he expected, it's not as if I wasn't going to look like my parents. I'm not necessarily complaining now, I know he was bullied by them, but taking out a fifteen-year-old grudge on a student, his student, is pretty damn low.

I make it to class on time, taking my seat as Snape swoops into the room. I get why the other students compare him to a bat, but no bat is that loud, visually and audibly. Bats don’t make an impression, they’re there and gone before you can even blink.

I keep feeling him sending out legilimency probes as I unscrew my ink pot, putting it off to the side before sharpening the end of a blunted quill. The probes are slight, but they're there. I don't know what he’s trying to do but there's no chance in hell I'm letting him take a peek into my head.

God, that'd cause a shit storm even I couldn't luck myself out of. I can't even imagine what he would think if he found out that I'm a time traveler, not to mention our less than friendly history. The sheer hatred the two of us held for each other was nearly palpable.

I sigh, looking up at the board, noting that today's lecture is on theory. Specifically, theory involving potions that act like self-transfiguration, morphing the body in different ways be it for healing, or for a more utility focused purpose.

I absentmindedly scribble down my notes. Hopefully things lighten up for me and I can manage to get a decent night’s sleep soon. It's going to be ridiculously difficult for me to take care of a sixty-foot basilisk when I'm running on fumes. Shite, it's going to be pretty much impossible to take care of it even if I’m at my peak.

"Miss Potter, what would I get if I added boomslang skin to steeped lacewing flies?"

Glancing up from my desk I realize I've started to nod off again. Can't sleep during the night, can't sleep during the day. Fuck me.

"That would be… Polyjuice Potion, Professor Snape," I answer tiredly, eyebrows raised in an attempt to keep my eyes open. Nodding, he sends a sharp look my way, along with a slightly more forceful legilimency probe. God damnit.

I groan in frustration, and instinctually retaliate, pushing back his mental attack with my own. Snape staggers awkwardly, colliding noisily with his desk just as the bell rings. Flustered, he supports himself with one hand, his stern gaze sweeping over the class and silencing them immediately, preventing any concerned questions.

"Class is dismissed, I want papers on the uses and interactions of boomslang skin by next class. Miss Potter, stay behind," he intones, locking eyes with me.

Sighing, I slowly pack up my notes. What a day.

"Please, take a seat Miss Potter," Snape says, his voice quiet yet stern. "I'd like to discuss some things with you."

I bitch and moan under my breath as I take my spot in front of Snape's desk, slouching into the chair and trying my best not to pass out.

God I'm tired.

Snape raises an eyebrow inquisitively, his steady drawl sounding remarkably tense. "Are you there,
"Miss Potter? You're looking quite tired."

"Yeah, yeah. Just tired," I reply, waving him off. "What did you need Professor?"

Frowning, he runs his gaze over me, taking in the sallow cheeks, and sunken tired eyes. "Is everything alright? I know I'm not your head of house, but I hope if there was anything going on that you'd be able to speak to me." He bites his lip, looking slightly flustered. I'm too tired to even register that he's showing an emotion other than contempt. "You're looking quite frightful Helene."

"I'm just tired is all. It's not the end of the world," I jibe, rolling my eyes surreptitiously. "There's nothing to talk about." I stand up, taking one last glance at him. "If that was everything Professor, I do have to get to charms."

Snape moves to say something but stops himself. Blinking slowly, he taps his fingers on his desk. "You're an accomplished occlumens," he comments.

I blink, wondering why he would mention that when he knows the legality of legilimancing a minor. "Thanks for noticing. I would prefer if you didn't attack my mind in the middle of class, seems to me that's highly unprofessional, not to mention against the law."

He has the decency to look ashamed as he replies, "I was concerned. I find students are often too afraid to speak up when they're in a tight spot. I occasionally use... more on hand techniques to ascertain whether or not the require help or are simply being gloomy children."

Huh.

I turn back to him, wondering what to do. I almost break out laughing at the idea of Severus Snape of all people being concerned for me, going out of his way to help me. "So. You think I'm in a tight spot?"

"Yes, because I've seen that look. I know the look you're giving me right this moment."

"What look would that be?"

"The look of someone who's dealing with something terrible," he admits, his face unreadable. "I used to see it in the mirror every single day. Still do on occasion."

My breath hitches. I have to keep myself from starting in shock, instead choosing to keep my features steeled and not react externally. "It's just nightmares Professor, everyone gets them, I just get them a little more often," I concede, extending an olive branch. I wave my hand lazily. "I'll be fine. They go away after a while."

Lips pursed, he nods again. "Know that you can come and talk to me any time if you require, my door is always open. I hope you feel better soon."

"Thank you... Professor."

I leave the classroom even more confused than when I entered.

-::-

I'm getting worse.

I can't sleep at night. I can't stay awake during the day. I can't think. I can't function. I can't feel. I can't live.
Every day is the same.

I wake up before the sun has risen, vomit on my bed and tears in my eyes. I brush my teeth much longer than I should, the enamel sloughing off as I scrub the filth from my mouth, doing my damndest to wash away the acrid aftertaste of sick. I shower, the water so hot as to burn my skin, cleansing me of all impurities seen and unseen.

I still don’t feel clean.

I don’t know why I feel this way. Why I feel so filthy. Why my days are a blur, a torrid mess of well-meaning professors and concerned friends all clamouring to make sure I’m alright. Why I keep telling everyone that everything is fine. Yeah, I’m just peachy, thanks.

Everything is fine, that’s the fucking problem.

Nothing is wrong in my life. There’s been no assassination attempts from Voldemort, no attacks from ancient basilisks, no falsified magical contracts, nothing. Life is so painfully normal.

Is that why I hurt? Am I so unused to normalcy that I reject it so completely and utterly as to no longer function, that I just become a shell of myself?

I’m losing weight, and rapidly. My once healthy and athletic body is now wasted away, skin clinging to sharply protruding bones, hidden beneath baggy robes and thick sweaters. I look like Death, quite literally.

The cycle has continued for a while. Snape pulls me aside, I tell him that nothing is wrong, we agree to disagree, etcetera etcetera. He’s watching me even more, sending worried looks over his beak-like nose during meals. Watching me pick away at my food, pushing it around the plate and taking a few small bites here and there.

Frustrated, I do my best to avoid him outside of classes. I leave his classroom quickly after the bell has rung so that I can avoid him calling for me to stay afterwards and chat. Death’s cloak does me well as I use it to get from lecture to lecture, noticing him slinking around the halls, watching for me. He’s practically stalking me at this point.

Clearing my thoughts, I rush on my way to Defence, fingers crossed that I won’t be late. Luckily, I manage to make it just in time, nabbing a seat towards the back of the class as it starts to fill up.

I flinch when Lockhart enters, grinning at me. I feel repulsed just being in the same room as him. A shiver runs down my spine, my whole body crying out for me to just leave. I push it down, confused and worried, averting my gaze from Lockhart’s and doing my best to go unnoticed.

I take out a copy of Warfare Magic: Tactics and Spells that I’ve glamoured to look like one of his tell all autobiographies, kicking back and studying over it for the length of the class. I occasionally glance up to respond to some trite question or stifle a laugh when I'm distracted by one of Lockhart's little re-enactments.

I still have this niggling feeling of nausea and fear tickling at the back of my mind. It only happens when I’m in Lockhart’s class, and for the life of me I can’t figure out why.

-::-

"Miss Potter, a word if I may."

I roll my eyes, turning to see Snape. I wipe the sleep from my eyes, yawning widely. "Yes,
Professor? What can I do for you?"

He motions for me to follow him, and I comply, our path taking us through the corridors back down to his office in the dungeons. I tag behind him in silence, walking into his office where he offers me a seat and puts a kettle on.

I sit and watch as he makes the tea, asking me how I take it before handing me a mug and sitting down in front of me. "Is everything alright with you Miss Potter? You still look a bit under the weather. I'd recommend you go and see Madame Pomfrey when you have the chance. Whatever you're dealing with isn't going away."

Sipping at my drink I consider his words. It's a bit hard for me to trust Snape, especially after all the conflicts we went through in my last life. I can't exactly up and forgive the man for making my school life absolutely miserable, or the times when he took out his anger on other students. He really was, and I guess, is, a spiteful man.

I mull it over for a while, wondering what to do or say. "I don't know if I can trust you," I state after a few minutes, my hands tight around the hot mug of tea. "I've heard how you treat other students, and I don't know if I can confide in someone who is so… cold to people who are too young to know better."

Eyebrows cocked, he looks at me inquisitively. He sighs suddenly, setting his mug down and resting his arms on the table, thinking quietly. "I will admit that I'm not exactly the most… friendly educator that Hogwarts hosts."

An understatement if I've ever heard one.

"Have you ever seen me treat students in the way that you say I do?"

I stop myself from responding immediately, telling him that I'm one of the students he's harassed, verbally abused, and taunted in his lectures. I imagine it would be a tad confusing when he's treated me cordially since I started in this life. I chose my words before replying. "I understand that there's tension between your house and Gryffindor," I observe, Snape nodding in response, not denying my statement. "Regardless of whether or not there is reason behind that tension, you are a teacher. You should be above the student's squabbles. I do want to thank you for backing me up during my altercation with Malfoy last year, but I believe that's the only time I've seen you back someone from outside of your house."

Fiddling with my cup, I look him in the eye.

"Why me?"

Snape sighs deeply, fingers drumming over his mug of tea. He stares down into it, watching the steam rise from the drink. "Because I was good friends with your mother, once upon a time," he remarks, looking at me with surprising kindness in his eyes. "I see a lot of you in her. Your passion for learning, how you treat your friends, and most notably how you treat your enemies." He chuckles wryly, a sad look on his face. "I deeply regret the day her and I grew apart, as it was all my fault. Not a day goes by that I don't wish I could apologize for what I said."

I don't reply immediately, studying Snape in a whole new light. "I never knew that," I murmur. Well… the man has just bared his soul to who he imagines is a twelve-year-old, might as well give him a little something in return. Hopefully he can actually help me.

"I've been having nightmares. I know I said that to you the last time we spoke, but these ones are
especially vivid. All I see is a… a smile, at least- that’s all that I remember. The smile isn’t pleasant. It's terrifying, to be honest. I don't know why it is. It just is." I splay my hands in confusion, shaking my head. “It’s becoming more and more evident that it’s bothering me, isn’t it?”

Snape stands up, pouring himself a second cup of tea before returning to his spot.

"If you’d like, I could look into your mind and try to figure out the why of those dreams," he queries, tapping his fingers on the table. "I understand the need for privacy, and if you don't want me to look then I won't. I will say, I've personally found my dreams are often based in real life. A cause and effect if you will."

Sounds a bit like Freud, but wasn’t he a bit of a hack? Maybe magic changes things.

I stare at the floor, weighing his offer. "I'm not exactly comfortable with that. Maybe if this doesn't go away in a couple of weeks I'll come to you. But do know that I'm going to need an oath from you not to reveal anything you see,” I answer honestly, not sure that now is the best time for Snape to go looking through my mind.

He nods approvingly. "I would have offered to take an oath anyways. I would not be able to tell anyone of what I see unless I come across explicit information that causes me to believe that you may be a danger to yourself or others."

Hmm. I'd have to really focus to make sure he couldn’t see my experimentation in the more esoteric sides of magic. That and the whole time travel fiasco.

Would I feel comfortable having Snape know about my time hopping? I'll have to find out soon if I want to get a decent night's sleep. "Give me some time Professor, I'll come to you when I'm comfortable. I am considering the offer though. Thank you."

"Just Severus please, as long as we're in private. I do have a reputation to uphold," he smirks playfully, showing a normally unseen side of himself.

Smiling back, I accept and leave.

-::- 

I retch, my disgusted moans echoing all around my head as tonight’s dinner comes flooding out of my throat, spattering noisily against the porcelain walls of the toilet seat. Spitting, I wipe the last remnants of vomit from my lips, exhausted beyond belief.

I slump over, lying on my back and staring at the bathroom ceiling. I count the miniscule cracks in the stone, at least, I try to. I’m too tired to pay attention to what I’m doing, distracted by my burning throat and my watery eyes. I turn over to my side, running my fingers through the bath mat next to me, absentmindedly twisting the shaggy tendrils that spring up from it.

Just my luck, nothing’s changed.

These past few weeks leaving October and entering November have gone by in a tired blur. I laugh morosely, realizing what a depressing sight I must be right now. Fuck, the only reason I'm not failing any of my courses is because of my previous knowledge carrying me through them.

I haven't had time to study and practice the magic I want to, which with my attention span being that of a goldfish. Insomnia, of course. The dangers involved in attempting new magic whilst in the wrong state of mind is too high of a risk for me, and I’m not so arrogant as to believe that I could undertake another ritual with the way I am right now.
"I can’t keep living like this," I croak, talking to myself. I blink slowly, my whole body moving at a snail’s pace, everything lagging behind by a second. I think I need to see Snape.

I enter my mindscape and begin to tuck away any memories I wouldn't feel comfortable having him see, locking them away in a trunk that I bury under the stone floor of the castle I've constructed in my head. I scour over the memories for an hour or two, double checking everything to make sure that I haven't missed a revealing memory. I pause in confusion as I come across a blank spot.

“Oh, I whisper. I walk up to it, an empty cubby on what should be a full book shelf. I pull out the book immediately to the left of where the missing one should be, cracking it open and looking over it. I go over that days events, noting that I had herbology in the morning, followed by transfiguration. I put my finger on the page, leafing through the book quickly, wondering where it gets cut off.

I start in shock as I reach the end. Defence Against the Dark Arts? Why would I be missing a-

I curse, smacking myself on the head. How could I be so stupid?

Lockhart.

I was obliviated. I was fucking obliviated.

I clench my fists, fury raging through me as I pace a furrow into the floor. At least, there would be a furrow there if I wasn’t currently in my own mind. “That blond, self-absorbed, narcissistic, arse-licking fucking cunt! He obliviated me!” I shout, my voice echoing off imagined walls. “God fucking damnit!”

But what the hell did he remove from my mind? What could possibly have been so important that he would risk obliterating a student?

Did I embarrass him that much? No, that couldn't be it. What in the hell would he feel warrants the need to wipe my mind? Whatever it is, it surely would explain why I find him so bloody scary. It makes sense. Something about his smile is setting me off, something about the way he just leers at me. But why is it causing me insomnia? Why is… whatever it is, slowly ruining me?

Shivering slightly, I slide the book back into place, exiting my mind and racing back into the conscious world. I scramble to my feet, running on weak and shaking knees towards Snape's office. He can help me with this. He already offered, he’s just going to be doing a bit more than he would have expected in the first place.

I knock frantically on the door, almost falling over when it's swung open to reveal a very grumpy potions master, who instantly softens up as he sees who's tearing him away from his work.

"Please, come in," he says, gesturing for me to make myself at home. "Would you like any tea?"

Shaking my head, I reply "No, but I will need that oath from you."

Eyebrows raised, he takes out his wand and recites, "I Severus Tobias Snape, do swear that I will keep all that Helene Lily Potter tells me in confidence secret, and will not reveal her secrets unless they put her or another student in danger."

A light flash from his wand signifies the oath taking place.

"I think Lockhart has obliviated me," I hiss, immediately cutting to the chase. "I was looking through my mindscape and came to a blank spot immediately preceding my Defence class a month ago."
I take a deep breath, reining in my magic. It tends to get away with me when I'm downright fucking furious. "I want to know why that son of a bitch obliviated me, and I want your help. I know you're an excellent legilimens, and the only reason you haven't gotten into my head is because you didn't truly want to."

Sufficiently shocked, Severus opens a cabinet behind his desk. He takes out a bottle of Ogden's and pours himself a small glass, quickly taking a discrete sip.

"I had my worries about that narcissistic prick, but I never thought he would ever do anything to the students." He takes another sip, noisily swishing the liquor in his mouth. "You say he obliviated you?"

I nod, Severus' features tightening in fury. "I can't imagine why he would…" he trails off, his face twisting into a look of abject horror. He tosses the rest of his drink back, slamming the glass on his desk. "I have my fears about what we may find if I dredge up this memory, so if you want me to obliviate you of it when we're done, I will make sure to do a thorough job so that it doesn't effect you in the future."

I pause, nausea once again rearing its ugly head. "You're not saying that he-"

Severus raises one hand, asking me to pause. "I'm not saying anything, but I will admit that I'm quite worried," he admits softly.

He readies his wand immediately, staring me in the eyes. "Do I have your permission to look into your mind?"

“Yes. Do what you have to do."

His gaze hardens, and he flicks his wand, loudly incanting legilimens. I flinch reflexively as he throws himself into my mind.

Dazed, I can feel him pushing through my thoughts and memories.

- 

*I wave the Blackthorn and Yew wand, watching in amazement as black sparks shoot from the tip. A nature defying stunt for an impossibly perfect wand.*

*Incredible is the only thing running through my mind.*

- 

*I wave the Blackthorn and Yew wand, watching in amazement as black sparks shoot from the tip. A nature defying stunt for an impossibly perfect wand.*

*Incredible is the only thing running through my mind.*

- 

*The Holly and Phoenix Feather wand burns in my hand, but not in a painful manner. It’s comforting, like the warmth of a fireplace on a cold winter day. I stare dumbly at the red and gold fireworks bursting from what seems to be such a normal looking stick.*

*“Brilliant,” I whisper, excited to see this new and amazing magical world.*

- 

*Daphne shrieks as Tracey sneaks up behind her, pinching her hips. She turns around and smacks her playfully, trying her best to hold back the laughter that threatens shake her normally impassive mood. “How dare you do that, Tracey Davis!” She smirks, unable to keep herself from giggling. I laugh, startling her again. “Circe! Why do the two of you always startle me?”*
“What’s going on?” Hermione asks, carrying a large stack of books as she walks into the room.

“Tracey scared the piss out of Daphne again,” I snicker, jabbing my thumb in their direction.

“Oh, grow up Tracey,” Hermione chides playfully, the corners of her lips tugging upwards. “And Daphne, you really need to have a bit more fun.”

Daphne stares at her in shock, mouth agape. “Hermione Granger just told me to have a bit more fun? The world must be ending,” she announces, sticking her head out the window.

-“Harry, mate! Wait up a tic!”

Hermione and I stop, waiting for Ron to catch up with us. “Divination was bloody mental today, wasn’t it?” He laughs, rolling his eyes. “The grim! The grim! Like we don’t run into something crazy every year, yeah?”

I chuckle, shaking my head. “No. Not unless you count Voldemort, a Basilisk, and a swarm of soul sucking demons.”

Hermione tries to look stern but fails miserably. “You shouldn’t make fun of Professor Trelawney like that,” she tuts, her jaw set tightly as she attempts to stifle a laugh. She gives up quite quickly, her bushy hair bouncing as she laughs. “But really, the grim? I agree Ron, it’d be a surprise if Harry didn’t see the grim in the bottom of his tea cup.”

- Sirius smiles impossibly wide as he pulls me up and off my feet into a massive spine crushing hug. “Helene! Dear God, Helene it’s so good to finally see you!” He jabbers excitedly, wiping stubborn tears from his eyes. “I’m so sorry I haven’t been here for you.” He sets me down, kneeling and hugging me more sedately. I hiccup awkwardly, holding back tears of my own. “I’m not going anywhere Helene, I’m not going anywhere.”

- “You mean I can really live with you?” I whisper, catching a glimpse of Sirius’ rotten teeth as he flashes a wild grin.

“Of course, you can, of course you can,” he says, placing his hand on my shoulder. I flinch at his touch, playing it off as being repulsed by the stench of Azkaban.

I wave my hand in front of my nose playfully. “You really stink, Padfoot.”

He smiles again, but it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. He pulls his hand back, index finger and thumb rubbing together nervously. “Really? I thought eau’d’Azkaban was in this season.”

I shake my head, hiding a smirk. “Not really the best line of cologne.”

- I can feel Severus flinch at the memories, curiosity and confusion rolling off of him in waves. He’s nothing but professional though, sticking to the task at hand and driving past the memories to find the blank spot. I know I can expect to be interrogated after he gets out of my head.

I guess I was planning on telling him anyways, as it would help to have someone on my side who
answers directly to Dumbledore. Not to mention the fact that he’s under oath.

I grimace as he comes across the day I had my mind wiped. Whatever he’s doing to pull up an
obliterated memory doesn’t exactly feel pleasant, like a growing itch in the back of my skull as he
excavates my psyche to try and recover what was lost.

- 

*I’m sitting in Defence class, ignoring Lockhart’s annoying, incessant droning. On and on and on
about some lie or another, mindlessly boasting to a group of school children. What an impressive
man he must be to spend so much of his time scrabbling for the attention of teenagers.*

*I don’t notice the way he looks at the girls in class, the way he looks at me. How he frowns just a
little bit when his eyes pass over me, or how he gets this smile creeping along his face, like he knows
something that I don’t*

*I don’t notice anything until a bright red light fills my vision as the last student leaves the room.*

- 

*I scramble uselessly, elbow cracking painlessly against the floor as I try to get away from Lockhart.*

*He looms over me, the most disgusting expression on his face. The word leer can’t begin to describe
the lecherous grin he wears, the manic glint in his eyes that tells me he enjoys what he’s done. That
he enjoys breaking people, ruining them, defiling them.*

*My fingers slide across the puddle of sick, and I fling my hands in front of my face, a desperate
attempt to stop what’s about to happen, but I can’t.*

*There’s a flash of white, and I suddenly find myself staring dumbly at my attacker, listening
attentively as he explains what I’m going to forget, how I’m going to walk into to the Great Hall and
pretend that nothing ever happened.*

- 

*My head spinning, I throw Severus out of my mind. The tears flood out, the dam broken. I cry, great
shakes wracking my body. I hold myself up on a chair, the wood creaking loudly as I grip it tightly. I
don’t even notice as snot trickles from my nose and down my chin, a thick string of it hanging from
my jaw. I wipe my face, smearing the mess over my cheeks and nose, my hand quivering as I choke
and sob.*

*Severus stares at the floor, hands in his hair as he bares his teeth in a feral grin. “Dear God,” he
whispers. He staggers as he moves to his seat, taking a swig directly from the bottle. He emits a
growl, low in his throat, fingers flexing, strangling some unseen victim. “I’m going to kill that man. I
swear to Merlin that I’m going to kill him.”*

*“No,” I sniff, casting a quick cleaning charm on my face and wiping my eyes clean more, doing my
best to rein in the tremors. “I’m going to kill the son of a bitch.”*

*Snape stands up, pointing angrily towards me. “Not on your life young woman. There’s no way I’m
letting you near that… that… that piece of filth! Lower than dirt! He ‘ought to rot in a cell for the rest
of his life!” he snarls, waving his hands wildly. “No! Prison is a mercy for that kind of scum. Death
is the only way to keep other children safe! Who knows how many students he’s attacked?”*

*Spinning around, he stares at me accusingly, “First off, you're going to have to explain to me what I*
saw when I was in your head. What was with those parallel memories? Who was in those memories. An older Granger and Weasley, a small clone of your father…” he pauses, breathing deeply through his nose. “Who was that?”

"It was me, before I died," I reply, a wry smile crossing my face as Snape’s eyes bug out in shock.

"You? You what?"

I shrug emphatically. "I died. Although, I didn't die, die. I got sent back. Death wasn’t too happy that I kicked the bucket before I was supposed to."

"You… you died? That was you?" he exclaims, eyes narrowed.

I raise my wand, taking care to point it at the ceiling and nowhere near Severus. "I swear on my life and magic that I, Helene Lily Potter, have told nothing but the truth regarding my previous life, death, and resurrection,” I intone, Severus frowning even further when the light signifies my oath as true.

"Who the hell are you?" he demands.

"I'm Helene Lily Potter, previously Harry James Potter."

Flustered, Snape starts pacing the room, murmuring under his breath as he tries to comprehend what I've just told him.

I follow him with my eyes, remembering to tell him that I don’t want anyone to learn about me. "As you can imagine, I'd like to keep that a secret, and your oath will prevent you from telling anyone as I'm no danger to myself or others for simply having a little mishap with time and space."

He throws his hands up in frustration, gesticulating wildly as he rants at me. "What about paradoxes! The time streams! There's a reason people don't dabble in time travel anymore, it could destroy reality as we know it!"

"Death himself sent me back. Death. I distinctly remember him saying that the old stream was wiped out, and this one will overwrite it. No paradoxes, no mess,” I explain, emphasizing that I was sent back in time by a God.

Severus nods shakily, slowly lowering himself back into his seat. "Well, that's a small mercy," he mutters loudly, not intending for me to hear it. "As you can imagine, I'd like to keep that a secret, and your oath will prevent you from telling anyone as I'm no danger to myself or others for simply having a little mishap with time and space."

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Severus nods shakily, slowly lowering himself back into his seat. “Well, that’s a small mercy,” he mutters loudly, not intending for me to hear it. "So, Helene… Harry, whatever you want me to call you. What makes you think you fight and kill an adult wizard.” He holds his head in one hand, massaging his temples. "I'm not inclined to believe you have the skill or know-how to take down an adult, even a buffoon like Lockhart can be dangerous."

Sighing, I flick my hand and compress the air around me, solidifying it so that it's visible to Snape. He watches in fascination as my fingers dance, fashioning the air into numerous weapons: axes, swords, maces, arrows, before sending a bullet of air into his desk.

He eyes the neat hole now in the centre of his desk and looks underneath it, cursing loudly as he notices that the hole continues through the desk and chips into the stone floor below him.

"That would work," he remarks, eyes nearly popping out of his head as he tries to figure out what kind of spell I just used. "How in Circe’s name did you do that? I've never seen elemental magic like that. No incantation, no wand?"

"I've still got my own secrets to keep Severus," I retort, challenging him to keep the questions to a
minimum. "And, I prefer to go by Helene. Harry Potter is long dead." I gesture towards myself, smiling genuinely. "I much prefer this body over the last. I always felt like an imposter when I was Harry… Helene- Helene just feels right."

"Odder things have happened," he considers, thankfully not pressing any further. "If you need an alibi for your… removal of Lockhart, I'll be happy to provide one." He pauses, pointing at me aggressively. "I'm also telling you, not asking, telling you to come to me over the next few weeks so we can discuss what happened to you. I'm not letting you go through something like this on your own."

I laugh, marveling at the absurdity of it all. Severus Snape and James Potters child getting along? Textbook insanity. "It seems every time we meet I have to thank you for something. I never imagined that we would have a rapport like this… you and I didn't exactly see eye to eye in my last life."

I have to stifle another chuckle, wondering how deeply Hell has frozen over.

He inclines his head in understanding, looking slightly ashamed. "It most likely would have been impossible for me to treat you well, with you looking so much like your father," Snape replies, putting his hand up as I open my mouth to argue. "It's nothing against you, trust me. It's immature of me. To be quite honest, it's downright terrible of me, and I understand how much you probably resent me for it. But… you have no idea what your father made me go through when we were students."

"I have an idea of how bad things were, I saw the memory of when you and my mum split ways. There's no excuse for my Dad and Sirius' behaviour, but there's no excuse for how you treated me as well."

"I was wondering why you brought that up when I approached you a couple of weeks ago," Snape muses, before lightly rapping his knuckles against the table. "I promise not to treat you as terribly as my future… past? I'm not sure how to phrase it. As my alternate self?" He subtly nods at that moniker. "Yes, as my alternate self once treated you. Do try to be quick with your errand, and don't be stupid and leave a trace, alright?"

I stand up, smoothing out my robes. "Can do Severus. I'm no longer a Gryffindor, no charging in for this girl," I retort, turning back to smile at him. "You know I was supposed to be in Slytherin, right?"

I smirk at his thinly veiled frustration as I leave his office, my feet carrying me towards my dorms. I laugh again, startling a portrait as I walk past it. You'd think that he wanted me to be in Slytherin!

-I--

I can feel my every muscle tense as I put the cloak on. I clench my jaw, stopping my teeth from rattling. Fucking adrenaline. I dance on the balls of my feet, stretching my legs in preparation of the fight to come.

Fucking Lockhart. I'm going to cut off his balls with a plastic spoon and feed them to him raw.

I creep down the stairs and exit the common room, tiptoeing as I make my way through the halls so that I don't alert any prefects. Thank fuck I spent five years sneaking out of my dorms after curfew before.

After a few minutes and a close call with Filch and Mrs. Norris, I quietly enter the Defence classroom, silencing the door as I close it so as to not alert anyone. Although, I imagine Lockhart
wouldn't even notice the door slamming as he spends most of his time basking in his narcissistic shrine, taking in the gaze of his dozens of portraits and photographs.

I slowly creep up the stairs to the office, repeating my spells on the door as I slip through the crack and into Lockhart's quarters.

I inhale deeply through my nose, the breath leaving my body in a great shudder. It takes everything in me to not immediately _crucio_ the son of a bitch. I stand there and watch in silence as he sits at his desk, feet propped on top of it as he works through a pile of letters sent from his vapid fans, jotting off an autograph with a quick flourish and tucking it away into a separate stack.

I stand there for a while, just watching him.

After a few minutes, I steel myself. I blink long and hard, in through the nose, out through the mouth. _In_ a flash of red, I stun Lockhart, conjuring ropes and binding him tightly enough to cut off blood flow. I prop him up in his chair, head lolling behind him over the backrest.

Glancing down at his fallen wand, I pick it up and snap it over my knee, making sure to leave the pieces in view as I _enervate_ him.

He shakes his head, blinking slowly. "Wha- what's going on?" he babbles. He tries to move his hands, eyes widening in shock as he notices they're bound behind him. He struggles uselessly against the ropes, head darting left and right as he looks for me. "Who's there!?"

I whip the cloak off, baring my teeth in a feral grin.

His mouth opens in confusion, forming a tiny ‘o.’ He stares at me quizzically, before understanding washes over him.

I get up into his face, grimacing at the flowery scent that bombards me. "You didn't think your obliviate would work forever, did you?" I hiss, allowing a bit of parseltongue to creep into my voice. Lockhart shudders in horror at the inhuman sound, squeaking in fright. "You didn't think you could actually get away with what you did to me? _Did you!?"

He begins to rock in his seat, trying his best to escape. Frantically, Lockhart starts to grovel, "Miss Potter, dear, no hard feelings, right? It was discipline! Discipline!" He begs, sweat beginning to drip down his forehead. He blinks rapidly, licking his lips as his eyes dart about the room. "Nobody has ever recovered from one of my obliviates before, er- what I mean is, you wouldn't be in pain if you didn't throw it off! I can obliviate you again and this will be all over, no hard feelings!"

I growl low and guttural as I spit in his face, sneering angrily, "No hard feelings? _No hard feelings?_" I cry hysterically, magical winds whipping at my hair. "Where the _fuck_ do you get off thinking that? You putrid, foul, _disgusting_ pile of shit. You absolute waste of skin! _No hard feelings?_" I burst into maddening laughter, the crazed sound echoing eerily off the walls.

"No hard feelings he says. No. Hard. Feelings. Do you say that to all of your victims?" I inquire, eyebrow raised. "Oh, I’m so _sorry_ that I violated you. I’m so terribly sorry that I raped you, body and mind. That’s not going to cut it today Lockhart. Today is the day I kill you.”

He pales dramatically, his face turning to the same porcelain shade as the toilets I’ve baptized this past month. "K-k- kill!!" He squeals, pleading and groveling for his life. "You- you wouldn't kill me, w- would you? G- Gilderoy Lockhart? I- I've done so much for the world! Saved so many people!"

I laugh harshly. "You mean stealing the tales from the real heroes and then obliterating them until they're vegetative?" I bark, watching as he pales even more. "Not a chance in hell, Gilderoy."
"Go to hell you fucking scumbag," I snarl. I pepper him with a few air bullets, grimacing at his cries of pain. I realize quickly that I don’t have the stomach for torture, slashing my hand down and slicing his body with a sharp gust of air, watching as it cleaves through him, a squeak of fear slipping out of his mouth as his head is removed from its shoulders.

I have to hold back a retch as blood sprays profusely from the empty stump, his head striking the floor with a heavy thud. I nudge it with my foot, turning it over to see his face. Wide eyed, mouth open, a few flecks of sweat and grime on his forehead. Terrified, and for good reason. My stomach knots and twists as I stare dumbly at his disembodied head, and it stares back at me.

I stand there for who knows how long, just gazing into those empty blue eyes. I watch as the blood drains from his neck and his face turns ashen pale, devoid of life.

I lift my hand to my face, noticing that it’s shaking wildly. I pat myself on the arms, head and legs. I’m shaking all over. My knee is bouncing relentlessly, the floorboards beneath me quivering under its nervous onslaught.

I look at the body again, and I start to panic. Thinking quickly, I vanish everything, casting countless scouring and sanitization charms to make sure that everything is taken care of, double checking to make sure there’s no trace of my ‘work.’

I throw my cloak on, terrified that I’m about to be caught. I rush back to my dorm room, dashing through the halls and doing my best not to knock into a patrol in my frantic sprint. I watch the whole while out of the corner of my eye, expecting Dumbledore to leap out in front of me, crying out to the world my misdeeds and sins.

I breathe a deep sigh of relief as I make it back to my room safely, having not run into Filch, Dumbledore, or any of the Professors.

I cast a silencing charm on the bathroom, turning the shower on and crawling into it, propping myself up against the cold tiled wall.

I never wanted this.

I never wanted this life… I never wanted to have to do these things. Did I- did I even have to do what I did tonight? Was it necessary? Was this some sort of step towards healing, or am I just trying to convince myself that it’s okay to murder someone, even if they’ve violated me or others? Is this disgust… this anger, is it because of Dumbledore’s teachings?

Second chances above all else, and the golden rule: stunners only. No killing, no maiming, no dismembering. Is this my own disgust, or is it his?

I close my eyes, trying to ignore the pounding in my head.

I guess I could have let Snape go after him. He did offer… but I wanted to be the one to do it. I wanted to put him down, for him to know it was me. What the hell does that make me? What the hell am I going to do in the future if there’s a war? How am I… how am I going to get used to this?

What am I turning into?
I’ve noticed that Hogwarts has been surprisingly quiet since the disappearance of Lockhart, due in fact to most of the students realizing what a fraud the man is (or was, to be exact). The most popular rumour going around is one that says he simply ran away when the pressure of the job became too much. The reasoning being, you can only lie for so long, right? Apparently, tricking a vast portion of Wizarding Britain into believing you’re some sort of wizard slash demi-god is more difficult than convincing a room full of teenagers that you’re not full of shit. Goes to show what an underappreciated job teaching is. No wonder the unions are always complaining.

The quiet doesn’t quite reflect my mental state. My mind has been anything but quiet. Killing Lockhart was, well. It was revenge. I can’t describe it as anything else. I killed him because he fucked with me, because he attacked me. That was it. Sure, many would find it justified, I know I do… at least, I think I do.

Quirrel for example, was a necessary evil. The man was already dead, he just wasn't aware of it yet. That, and the stuttering prick had Voldemort stuck to the back of his head. I’m not going to lose sleep killing a husk of a man.

Lockhart?

Fuck. That just… it’s changed me. I’m colder, more distant from my friends. They know something is different about me, but they’re probably just blaming it on the rash of hormones that comes along with being our age. Really, the thing I’m most terrified about is that I’m going to end up like Voldemort, pushed and pushed until I crack and go on some mad homicidal spree. I know its unlikely, but before he was Voldemort, Tom must have had some amount of kindness in him, no matter how infinitesimal. He wasn’t just born Voldemort, that had to have been created. Childhood doesn’t take place in a vacuum.

Much to my awe, Severus has been there for me. Apparently, the man is a licensed mind-healer. I guess it’s true what they say about psychologists, you either start crazy or end up crazy. Severus has also vehemently insisted that I never call him by his first name in front of the other students. Says he has a reputation to uphold. I say he’s a big softie, but he’d probably use me as potions ingredients if he heard that.

I've found that it… it helps to talk, something I never really tried before. I spent most of my time in my last life brooding and bottling everything up, hoping that the problem would eventually go away. Of course, it never went away, but I could always hope, right?

I think what made things so hard in my last life, was that nobody ever really offered to listen to me. Whenever I said something, people would look at me like I was telling some sort of fantastical story. Yes, I was beaten by the Dursleys and locked away in a cupboard under the stairs for the majority of my childhood. Did people really think I would joke about that, or did they just not give a shit?

It reminds me of Dumbledore sending me back to the Dursley’s without so much as a talking to after Cedric’s death. We became friends while competing in that gladiatorial bullshit they called a tournament. Bonded in battle, so to say. So when he died, how was sending me back to an abusive family supposed to help me grieve? I'm sure Dumbledore would have done the same if I didn't
stumble in after Sirius and land myself here.

I’ve found my talks with Severus to be quite interesting. Oddly enough, at least, I find it odd, Severus must know what he’s doing. We're not discussing Lockhart. No, we're discussing my childhood, specifically my previous life and the angsty, confusing hell that it was. But when he discovered where I spent my childhood... well, I think that was the first time I ever saw lose his cool, considering how well he took the whole revelation of my time hopping.

“Wait, one second please,” Severus says, holding his hand up for me to pause. “You said you live with the Dursleys... Vernon and Petunia Dursley?”

I nod, wondering where he’s going with his line of questioning. “Yeah? I thought you knew that.”

He stands up, fury emanating off him, the air becoming thick with magic. “Petunia. Dursley,” he growls, clenching his fists. “Albus sent you to live with Petunia Dursley!?”

“Yes?”

He roars, scattering papers across the room, a few vials that weren’t spelled unbreakable shattering loudly from the burst of magic. “That... conniving, pig-headed, twinkling eyed bastard! How dare he! He knew how they would treat you!” He places his face in his hands, breathing deeply. “He knew!”

“What do you mean, he knew how they would treat me?”

Severus pinches the bridge of his nose, his eyes shut tight. “He knew how they would beat you, starve you, emotionally abuse you... he knew sending you there would break you. There’s no way he wouldn’t. I knew Petunia would be vile even as a child. Always jealous, always derisive, she never had a good thing to say about anyone. Not her parents, not her friends, and especially not her sister,” he explains, counting off on his fingers. “Her sisters child? She would do everything but kill it if given the chance. That’s the only line she wouldn’t cross.”

I sit there in shock. I know that Dumbledore is manipulating me, or at least, trying to manipulate me. But to knowingly send someone into an abusive home? I just... how could he justify that? What possible reason could he have to do that to another person?

- 

It has been a great help to speak with him. Nothing major, nothing so... important has been discussed, and I try to keep details a bit vague so that he doesn’t try to change the future on me. I've still got some major events I've got to get through, and if the Tri-Wizard Tournament is somehow cancelled then I'll have to rethink my whole confrontation with Voldemort. So yeah, we've just talked about snippets, moments that I feel (or Severus feels) have had a large impact on my life, moments that I know have happened already or would have occurred, but I know no longer will.

When Vernon broke my arm because I dropped a glass, shattering it across the kitchen tiles.

The first time I'd ever been embraced, a shy and terrified eleven-year-old, just moments before I went on to kill a man in self-defence.

How I was shunned and sequestered away from the school in my second year, the rumours flowing about the castle proclaiming me to be the Heir of Slytherin.
To speak more on rumours, the bipolar state of the wizarding world. How I can be revered one minute, the hero of the hour, and denounced the next, a teenager being mercilessly attacked and run over roughshod by the Daily Prophet. How many times was I called a potential Dark Lord by that rag? How many times did they decry me to be insane, an attention seeking prick with an inflated head? Honestly, once is too much.

What's funny though, is due to the talks with Severus I've been looking back on everything, and I've realize how silly some of it was. Well, not the child abuse or manslaughter. No, the hummingbird-like temperament of Wizarding Britain, flitting from one thing to another whenever it interests them, taking a sip of gossip here before moving to the next character assassination over there. I should have been taught how to play the media and avoid, or at least skirt around the issues that I faced. Ironically, Lockhart was the only person who ever tried to educate me on how to use and abuse my fame.

I'm starting to realize that I can use my fame to my own benefit if I can get past how much as I detest it. It's one of the cards I've been dealt, why should I not play it?

I'm still not comfortable talking to Severus about my experimentation with necromancy and blood magic, although hopefully in the future we can begin to discuss it. Not quite sure how I'm going to open up that line of questioning. I don't want him to teach me anything, I just want to get a better understanding of all of this from someone who I know has experience with the darker side of magic. I mean, he's an ex-Death Eater, I'd be surprised if he didn't have any input on the subject.

-:-:-

I shoot up out of bed panting, sweat dripping from my forehead as I burst into tears, torn from my nightmare.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck fuckfuckfuckfuck,” I murmur frantically, gripping my head, fingers painfully tangled in my hair.

I can't get it out of my head. I can’t

I can't get him out of my head.

I take a deep shuddering breath, trying to calm myself down. Severus obliviated my memories of the rape, quietly cutting them away like a surgeon, deftly slicing and removing the torrid mass of disgust and self-hatred that clung to my mind like a cancer.

No. I can't get my actions out of my head.

I knew I'd have to kill. I always knew it, even before I died. I knew it since I first year, to some degree. Who wouldn’t think that they’d have to kill one day, when they’re told that the scar on their head was given to them by the same man who killed their parents. Who wouldn’t think that they’d have to kill one day, when they meet the spectre of that man at the tender age of eleven.

No, I always knew that I would end up taking a life. There's a war going on and the rest of the world just doesn't know it yet. It's happening on the sidelines, in dark alleys and the hidden corners of the Ministry.

But… Lockhart wasn't involved, and never would have been. If things went as they did before, he would be sitting in the Janus Thickey ward signing autographs with a purple crayon.

Is it worse that I killed him, or is it better? Is it more acceptable to consign a man to life in a mental prison, his mind reverted to that of a child? Or, is it more acceptable to simply kill him outright?
What about a third option? Doing neither and having him sent to Azkaban to live the rest of his days in abject horror, tortured by dementors until the day he dies?

I don’t know, and I don’t think I ever will.

Did I kill him to sate some personal need? Some deep-seated desire to see my one-off torturer, the man who violated me removed from the Earth? Was it out of necessity? Was it the only way in which I could begin to heal? Was it just for revenge? I'm not quite sure. All I know is that it's done and cannot be undone.

My dreams are all the same. Lockhart begging, crying for me to let him go, terrified. Me cutting him in two, removing his head from its shoulders, the horrid spray of blood, a crimson stream pouring from an empty stump.

How I just stood there and stared at his disembodied head for an hour. Just staring.

Fuck. What happens from here on out?

Exhausted, I blindly reaching for my wand. After a few seconds of scrambling in the dark, I finally grasp onto it, flicking it and casting a quick tempus to check the time. Just past four in the morning.

Grumbling, I try to fall back asleep, pulling the covers over my head and staring at the wall. After an hour of tossing and turning underneath the sheets I crawl out and shamble towards the washroom. Ignoring the rising bile in my throat, I jump into the blazing hot shower. It seems to soak through my tired bones, removing the ache I wasn't aware of and bringing some semblance of normality to my very early morning.

The day rushes past in a blur, the shapes and sounds of other students milling about the school just a passing distraction as I go through the motions, functioning on auto-pilot. Hermione and Padma try to start a conversation with me during lunch, but it goes nowhere, the lot of us sitting uncomfortably silent around the Ravenclaw table. I'm brooding again, I know. But everything is starting to catch up to me. The gravity of the situation I've been placed into, the ability to knowingly change the future.

Things are already so different, and it's due to my actions. There is one less person in this world, due to my actions. Yes, Lockhart was disgusting, lower than pond scum, but it was still a life. A life I felt so brazen enough to take into my own hands and crush. Helene Potter, the Girl-Who-Lived and premeditated murderer.

Ignoring the happenings around me, I make my way to Severus' office for one of our regular chats. Yeah, me talking with Severus Snape on the regular? I must be losing my mind.

Knocking on his office door, I'm greeted by the surly potions master who immediately indicates for me to enter. A cup of tea is placed in front of me as I sit down, a builder’s brew. I'm surprised he remembers how I prefer it, but it is a simple drink.

Severus leans to the side, his elbow resting on the arm of his chair and his head propped up by his fist, à la The Thinker. "I was wondering if we could discuss more recent occurrences today," he drawls, cutting to the chase.

A tight knot of fear erupts inside of me. I suck in a deep breath as my stomach clenches and twists. Severus notices the change in my demeanor, hesitantly reaching out to grab my hand and quirking the corner of his lips in an awkward smile.

"If you're okay with that, that is."
Sighing, I rub at my eyes. "Yeah, I'm okay with it," I mutter tiredly. It’s hard to think when I haven’t gotten a good night’s rest since the… attack. "I’m just having a hard time getting my thoughts together, you know? I… I've not been well since,” I leave the last bit hanging in the air, waving my hand lazily.

Nodding solemnly, he squeezes my hand firmly and slumps into his seat, shoulders sagging under a sudden weight. "I know exactly what you mean."

We sit in silence for a few minutes, neither of us eager to speak first, letting the somber quiet do the talking instead. Evidently uncomfortable, Severus shakily opens his mouth.

"I've been through what you're going through, a long time ago," he begins, eyebrows knotted as he stares deeply into his ignored cup, steam no longer wafting from the cooling tea. "I did some horrible things in my past, as you well know," he continues, gesturing at his left arm with disdain.

"I was- well, I still am, a bitter man.” He chuckles wryly at that admission, as if he expected to never say it out loud. “As much as it pains me to say it, it's the truth. I held onto that bitterness, that hatred and contempt. That roil in my gut reminding me of my sins every day. I held onto it and I never let it go, not even to this day.”

Taking a moment, he flicks his wand at his tea, heating it up before taking a sip.

"I've killed… on more than one occasion. I took that anger, all those terrible feelings and directed them outwards, taking it out on other people," he snorts, lip curled in his patented sneer. For once, his sneer isn’t directed at anyone else, instead reserved only for himself. He wipes the grimace from his face and looks up at me. "You do the same."

Shocked, I reel back slightly.

"What do you mean? I don't take my anger out on anyone!"

"You don’t do it in the same way that I do, but you do take it out on yourself, and, to a degree, you take it out on others.”

"What are you talking about?" I retort, wondering where the conversation is going.

"You brood, constantly. Well, not brooding per se, but you hide yourself away. I can see the concern in your friends faces, I can see the way you distance yourself from them.”

"I don't understand. Where are you going with this?"

"You’re going to lose them if you keep acting that way. Trust me, I did the same.” He bites his lip, both of us understanding his referral to my Mother, how much he regrets insulting her and destroying their friendship. “Don’t do what I did. Don’t hold onto that pain, because you’ll just direct it outwards and your friends will end up suffering along with you.”

"I- well… shit."

God damnit. "I didn't realize. Fuck," I blurt, kneading at my temples. I really have been turning them away, haven’t I? I thought nothing of it, I knew was turning them away. But… could it really destroy our friendship? Hermione’s friendship? This budding sisterhood with Daphne?

I go back a second, remembering what Severus said. “I don’t think you should blame yourself as much as you do about scaring my mother off. With the way my father and his friends acted… you weren’t justified in what you did, but I understand it, if that makes sense.”
Now it's Severus' turn to be surprised, although the only way he shows it is by the very slight rise of his eyebrows.

"Thank you," he responds quietly. "Did you know about the time Sirius tried to kill me?"

"He what!?" I gasp, incredulous.

"Sirius once convinced me to visit the shrieking shack on the night of the full moon," he seethes, his well schooled features cracking for just a moment. "I was nearly killed by Remus, as wolfsbane was still relatively new at the time, and he couldn’t afford it."

I gape at him. "Are you- why in the hell would he do that?"

"Because I was good friends with your Mother. Adding in the tense relationship between the me and the Marauders as well as James’ infatuation with Lily, something may have made Sirius feel the need to split us apart." He shrugs in resignation, obviously unsure of why Sirius would do such a thing. "Maybe he did it in some misguided attempt to get James closer to her… maybe he did it purely out of spite. I'm not sure I'll ever know or want to know to be honest."

"I can't believe Sirius would do such a thing..." I croak, shocked beyond belief. Sirius Black? The class clown attempting to murder someone? "That's no prank, that's absolutely horrid!"

"It is, and it was." He stops to think for a moment, evidently pondering whether he should say something. He hesitates briefly before speaking, "I would also like to know what's going on between you and my godson, Draco,’ he asks, emphasizing the godson part.

I cross my arms. "I've told him to piss off a couple times," I admit, looking up at the ceiling as I try to remember if I've done anything that wasn’t warranted. "What has he been telling you?"

"He's come to me numerous times detailing how you have taunted and attacked him on the Hogwarts Express," Severus explains, clasping his hands in front of him. "The last time it happened I had to treat him for a broken wrist, skele-gro and all, after it had been crushed by you with the compartment door."

"That broke his wrist?" I feel a tinge of regret, but then I remember he drew his wand on me and my friends. "Well, he did brandish his wand in my direction, again, I might add. I have no interest in speaking to him, and I’ve asked him multiple times to simply leave me and my friends alone.” I hold my hands out, palms to the ceiling. "What am I supposed to do when he points his wand at me in anger? Nothing? I know what magic can do, considering I've died already, I'm not too keen on getting killed by a pissed off tween."

Severus nods in understanding. "I also heard that instead of simply shutting the door on him immediately, you kept him around and goaded him."

"Well, I did insult him," I concede.

"Did you need to?"

"No, not really."

"Next time just shut the door on him immediately, understand? You’re four years older than him, and nobody at Hogwarts knows that except for the two of us. What you’re doing is bullying, a mild form, but bullying nonetheless."

I guess I did lead him along there, riling him up for the sake of riling him up. I groan mentally,
realizing that even if Draco’s being a prick, I am *much* older than him. If I was in seventh year and he was in first and acted that way, would I be justified in slamming the door on his wrist? No, not a chance. “I never really thought of it in that context. I forgot that he’s a child, and not the Draco that I had to deal with for five long years.”

Severus inclines his head, understanding that I’ve made a simple mistake in how I’ve approached the problem child that is Draco Malfoy. “Hate begets hate. Yet… it only takes one person to break the cycle. It took me a long time to realize that and I’ve never quite acted on it,” he admits. At least the man understands his own shortcomings and is willing to recognize them. "What I'm trying to say, in a very roundabout way, is that you should do as I say, and not as I do. Treat your friends better and be reasonable in the way that you treat my godson.”

Stretching laboriously, he rests his hands in his lap and peers over at me. "Let's get to the point of this visit, enough lecturing on my part. Now… how are you coping?"

I groan audibly, hoping to have skirted around the difficult part of the discussion. "Not well, to be honest," I shrug emphatically. "I'm having nightmares about it. I can barely function anymore… all I see is his eyes before I- before… before I killed him." My breath hitches as I see his face staring back at me once more. “He was terrified. Absolutely and c- completely t- t- terrified. Did you know I just stood there for a while? I just stood there and stared at his c- c- cor- fuck!”

Trembling, I hold back the tears that threaten to spill out. I reach for my tea with shaky hands and slowly bring it up to my lips, the bittersweet tang of bergamot washing over my tongue.

I wipe my eyes on my sleeve, sniffing quietly. "D- did I do the right thing? Was it just revenge? Wha- what happens to me now? I'm a… I'm a murderer. I murdered him, and I just stared at his fucking corpse!"

"You are a murderer," Severus echoes, sticking his hand out and placing one calloused finger underneath my chin, lifting my head and forcing me to look into his eyes. "Many people are murderers. Most of the staff here at Hogwarts are murderers in one way or another. Would you fault Flitwick for accidentally killing a competitor during a duel? Would you fault Babbling for killing her abusive mother in self-defence? So, in turn, would you fault someone for killing the person that molested them? Or would you fault someone for killing the person that molested their child?”

Severus lets that hang in the air for a moment, forcing me to think on it. "Yes? Well, no. I mean, I wouldn't blame them at all, but it's not something that I would feel comfortable openly supporting. Does that make sense?” I hesitate, unsure of how to explain myself. “What happened to Flitwick was an accident… and what happened to Professor Babbling was, well, nobody should have to go through that.” I pause for a moment, thinking over his last question. “I wouldn’t blame someone for killing a child molester either.”

"It does make sense. So why do you hold onto your shame? Why do you feel so much remorse for your actions? I'm not condoning what you did by any means, but I'm not condemning you either. These are questions that will follow you for the rest of your life, so be prepared to answer them, if just for your own sake."

I set my mug down, shuddering slightly. "I… I killed someone. It doesn't matter what he did. Well, it *does*, but it doesn't give me reason to be his executioner. It's all so confusing.” I push the mug around absentely, listening as it slides across the desk. “I feel terrible for what I did, but at the same time I feel relieved knowing that he can't hurt anyone ever again.”

"That, Helene, that makes you human," he intones, staring at me over his hooked nose. "You'll find in situations like this that there really is no right answer.”
The weeks continue to rush on by, classes divided by a smattering of meetings with Severus, letters
to Sirius and Octavius, and plenty of studying with Hermione and the rest of our rag-tag group. I’m
happy to find that the relationship between Ravenclaw and Slytherin is a lot less hostile than that of
Gryffindor and the latter, which thankfully means that Daphne and Tracey are at no risk of being
harassed by their housemates. I assumed at the beginning of last year that we were being given
leeway since we were first years, but it turns out that the fighting only occurs between the Lions and
Snakes.

I can’t imagine how difficult it would be to spend time with the two of them if we were constantly
being harangued about associating with each other. I know Ron would have been furious with me
for spending time with those ‘goddamned snakes.’ It just doesn’t make sense now that I think about
it. It’s not like the house rivalries happen after school, right? How the hell would anything get done
in this country if people didn’t trust others because of who they lived with between the ages of
eleven to seventeen?

That sort of leads in to the thinking that I’ve been doing after my talks with Severus. After a lot of
reflection, I’ve realized some things about myself.

First, I can be an absolute **idiot**. I never take the high road, ignoring conflict and trying to be the
better person simply by avoiding the situation. Doing that doesn’t make me the better person, it just
makes me lazy.

Another thing, the one that I find is a great realization, is that I’ve never felt so comfortable in my
own skin. It’s slightly confusing how I got used to the change so quickly, considering I lived ninety
percent of my life as a man and only just recently returned to my original body. I’m still perplexed by
Sirius not reacting to me being Helene instead of Harry, when in the last timeline he acted as if I’d
always been Harry. He’d completely forgotten the fact that he held me soon after I was born, and I
certainly wasn’t Harry then. Wouldn’t he be confused in this timeline or the previous upon first
meeting me? Is Death pulling strings to make my life easier, or did Dumbledore somehow get a hold
of him after he’d escaped Azkaban and fiddled with his memories?

Speaking of Sirius, I need to have a… **tense** conversation with him and Octavius.

I poke my head into Octavius’ study, seeing him reading quietly by the fire, bare feet resting on an
ottoman. "Hey, Octavius? Can I talk to you for a second? If you could get Sirius for me- uh, that
would be great."

"Absolutely, just give me a moment," Octavius says, setting his book down, looking momentarily
concerned. "Is everything alright?"

I shake my head. "No, not really. Can you get Sirius first? Please?"

Lips pursed, he nods and leaves the room, coming back upstairs a few minutes later with a slightly
flustered looking Sirius. "Everything good Helene?" Sirius asks, looking like he just crawled out of
bed. Knowing him, he probably did.

"No," I reply, fists clenched tight and pressed into my thighs as I stare at the carpet. "Nothing is
good."

In an instant Sirius is on his knees at my feet, hands resting on his knees as he looks up at me.
"What's going on? Are you alright?" He asks frantically, snapping his fingers rapidly in worry. “I’m
here for you Helene, I’m always here for you.”
"I… shit," I croak, my voice thick. "Things haven't been good, they haven't been good at all."

"I can't do anything if you don't tell me," he babbles, fear in his eyes. "Please, tell me so I can help."

Octavius sits down next to me, the sofa dipping slightly as he sinks into the cushions. "We're here for you Helene, whatever it is," he consoles, placing his hand on my arm gently.

I flinch away from his touch, startling Octavius as I shrink into myself at his gesture.

"Sorry! Sorry!" I gasp, trying to pass off the flinch. "You scared me!"

Eyes dark, he pulls his hands back and rests it in his lap, taking care not to touch me. "Someone hurt you," he hisses through clenched teeth.

"What!" Sirius barks, sharing a look with Octavius as fury begins to work over his features.

"Someone hurt you."

I can feel my fingernails digging into my palms, muscles rigid and tense as I try to control myself. Deep breaths only serve to make things worse, my mouth dry and the rattle in my throat growing louder. I can hear the pounding in my ears as I shut my eyes tight, doing everything I can to just stay in control.

"It's o- okay," I stutter quietly. "I... I- I killed him. He can't h- hurt anyone anymore."

Suddenly I'm held tightly in Sirius' arms, cradling me against his chest as he rocks me back and forth. "I've got you, I've got you," he whispers, hand planted firmly against my back as he clutches me for dear life. "I've got you Helene, it's okay now. Everything is okay."

Sobbing, I clutch fistfuls of his robes like my life depends on it, my head buried in his chest as I break down. "He- he raped me," I whimper, weak and strained. I sound like I'm falling apart.

I probably am.

"He raped me."

Cradling me, Sirius picks me up and takes me to my room as he quietly whispers reassurances.

I've got you. I've got you. It's alright. You're okay.

"I'm not okay."

A pitiful whine sneaks out of Sirius’ mouth, the grim inside him begging to be let free. "You'll be okay, not now, but some day.” He tries to reassure me, his voice wavering. "Time helps, it helps a lot."

I snort childishly, nestling my head in the crook of his arm. "Is that what you say to yourself? …To get through it all?"

"Every day," he quietly confesses. "Every day."

"Talk to me."

Jaw set tight, he rests me gently on my bed and sits down next to me, staring at the wall as he sorts through his thoughts. "I'm not so sure that's a good idea.” He turns to look at me. I notice the fear he tries to hide away, how he doesn’t look directly at me, the way his hands are still trembling. "I think
we should talk about you, what you're going through."

"After you," I demand, staring him down.

His throat bobs as he gulps deeply, biting his lip tight, turning it white as he cuts off blood flow. "I forget sometimes," he murmurs, his haunted voice trembling. "I forget that… I forget that James and Lily are gone. I see her when I see you, you know? You look so much like her," he continues, wiping at his eyes.

"I forget that I spent so long in that hell-hole… Azkaban." His hands ball into fists, and he pushes them forward, kneading the flesh of his thighs. "It's a blight, a scar. It shouldn't exist. Eleven years there… it blurs things, pushes them together in a way that I can't really sort it all out."

I reach out, placing my hand on his forearm and squeezing lightly. He looks over to me and smirks slightly, eyes fresh with tears. "It was bad there, very bad. I can't quite put into words what kind of torture it is to be imprisoned there, let alone knowing I'm innocent. I wake up sometimes thinking it was all some terrible nightmare, that I'll be resting on the couch in Godric's Hollow and see you putter out crying for your 'pa' foot.' Some days… some days it feels like I'm not even here."

I chuckle morosely, understanding him completely. "I sort of get what you mean. I feel distant, like I'm not really part of the flow of life, if that makes any sense.' I fidget, twiddling my fingers as I mull over my thoughts. "I don't know if it's because I've been through so much and that was the final straw, if I've finally reached my limit. I don't know if it's because of… what happened to me, or what I did to him."

Sirius wraps his arm around my shoulder, pulling me in tight even as I instinctively flinch away. "Nobody will ever hurt you again, not if I have any say in it," he growls.

"Thanks," I sniff, wiping my runny nose. "I'm just trying to come to terms with it all. What happened to me, what happened to him. I feel so… violated. I feel used. Broken. Like an old toy cast aside and forgotten."

"You are not broken in any way shape or form; do you hear me?" He objects, grabbing me by the shoulders and holding me out in front of him, staring me in the eyes. He smiles widely, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. "Helene Lily Potter, you are a wonderful young girl, and you are one of the most whole people I have ever met. The things you've gone through, the stories you told me… you're strong. You know I admire you?"

I blink in confusion. "Huh?"

Sirius laughs, a proper laugh. Not his hysterical bark, nor some forced chuckle to make me feel better. It's an honest, humble laugh. It's a laugh that, for just a moment, makes me feel like everything is okay. "Yeah, your rapscallion of a godfather admires you, little ol' you," he smiles, poking my cheek playfully. "You're a fighter. More of a fighter than I ever have been. Hell, you're more of a fighter than me, your dad and your mum combined. If they saw you now, you know what they would say?"

I shake my head softly, perplexed as I stare up at Sirius.

"They'd be damn proud of the woman you're becoming. They're looking down on you right now and probably saying to each other 'look at her, look at how incredible our daughter is.'"

I bite my lip as I hold back a fresh wave of tears, snuggling in tight under Sirius' arm.

"I think you should get some rest," he says, moving to let go of me.
"No!" I shout. "Don't go! Please… please stay. Stay as Padfoot."

Sirius quickly shifts, curling up next to me as I crawl under the covers.

"Thank you, Sirius. I…. I love you."

A quiet snuffle and shove of his snout is all the response I need.

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Christmas day comes quickly, and the Greengrasses are as frantic as they were last year, Astoria rushing around in an excited frenzy, bursting at the seams as she bounces around at the mention of presents. Sirius of course, is no better. The man can go from worldly and mature to emotionally stunted man-child in the blink of an eye, and I love him for it. Although, it can be a bit concerning when he refuses to act like an adult.

I peer at the gift I have ready for the Greengrasses and my stomach flips. I feel a bit bad about accepting their offer and forgoing Sirius, but I spoke with him and he understands my decision.

-:

"I don't fault you for it, honestly," he remarks.

I stare down at my hands, one thumb tracing along my palm nervously. "Are you sure? You're my godfather, I know how much this means to you."

Sirius sighs, his voice steady and controlled as he explains himself. "I can't be much of a godfather when I'm dealing with my own demons can I? I'll always be involved in your life Helene, I'll always be there for you, I just don't know how long it will be until I can really be there."

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I bounce lightly on the balls of my feet, psyching myself up for what I'm about to do. I march into the sitting room and join the rest of the family as they crowd around the tree, Daphne smirking at Astoria's antics as she and Octavius get into another argument on who gets to open presents first. Tracey sits off to the side, completely in her element and accustomed to the holiday induced high that afflicts the Greengrasses around Christmas.

Ignoring everyone, Sirius dives through the crowd and begins to tear into one of his gifts excitedly, squealing loudly when he pulls out a necklace with charms of a grim, stag, and wolf hanging from it.

"I love it! Thank you, Helene!" He gasps as he pulls me into a tight embrace.

"I'm glad you like it Sirius," I manage to choke out, smothered by him. "Could you let me breathe?"

Laughing, he lets go of me and grabs a box, tossing it to Astoria to open up, which she does with exuberance.

We go around the group, a pile of gift wrap slowly building up around us as we progress through the presents until we come to me.

I bite my lip nervously, apprehension plaguing me. "Octavius? Terra? I've got something for the two of you."

Terra smiles at me, waving her hand. "You didn't have to get us anything Helene, it's alright!"
"Shh, what if it's a really fantastic present?" Octavius argues, jaw slack as he stares at his wife refusing a present of all things.

"I wouldn't say it's a present per se," I mumble, working up the courage. "It's more of a response?"

Terra squeaks, her eyes widening when she understands what I’m saying. I pull the papers out from behind my back, shakily handing them to her. Octavius grins widely as he looks over it. I turn to look at Daphne and Astoria, and they’re smiling excitedly at me, Astoria practically vibrating with glee. Tracey looks on blankly, causing me to frown momentarily. I wonder if she’s alright?

"We didn't think you would sign," Terra sniffs, daintily wiping away a tear. "I love it, thank you Helene."

Octavius reaches over and pulls me into a bear hug. I manage not to flinch, having expected it. "I think it's an absolutely fantastic present my dear! I'd like to give you the official welcome to the Greengrass family!"

I look over his shoulder at Daphne and Astoria again, and I sigh in relief as they continue to smile back at me. "Are you two okay with this?"

"You kidding me? You're pretty much already my sister, I was waiting for you to sign the bloody thing," Daphne quips, shaking her head in amusement.

"Language!"

"Sorry Mum!"

Giggling, Astoria jumps over the pile of gift wrap and tackles me to the ground, tearing me out of Octavius’ arms. "You're going to be a much better sister than Daphne," she jokes, dragging out the 'u' in much as she sticks her tongue out at her sister. "You're actually fun to be around, unlike Miss Perfect over there."

"Hey! I'm fun!" Daphne argues, cheeks puffed out angrily.

"Nope!"

"No more arguing!" Sirius shouts, everyone snapping their head to look at him as he poses regally.

"I'm obviously the most fun," he declares, hands on his hips and chin in the air.

"Why the ego of you!" Terra argues, rolling her eyes. "Obviously I'm the most fun!"

"I'm afraid I have you beat dear," Octavius says, stepping up and placing a solemn hand on his wife's shoulder. "I'm sorry I have to be the one to let you down, but I'm the most fun member of this family."

"Circe, the adults in this family are more immature than us," Daphne whispers, Astoria putting a hand over her mouth and giggling not so subtly.

"I heard that!"

Giggling, Astoria grabs my hand and drags me out of the sitting room, I look back quickly, noticing Tracey staring at me silently, an odd look on her face.

"Come on sis' let's get out of here and hit the pitch, these guys are boring me."
"Hey!"

I follow her out of the house, finding myself even more confused when Tracey doesn’t get up to follow us, instead leaving with Daphne to the garden, the two of them having a quiet yet heated discussion.
"Helene, could I pop in here for a moment?" Sirius asks, poking his head into my room.

"Yeah, that's alright," I reply, marking my page and setting my book down. "You hiding from Terra again?"

"No, not today," he replies, smirking. "I actually wanted to talk with you, if you're not too busy that is?"

"I uh, I wanted to talk to you about what happened the other day," he says, a glimmer of fear in his eyes. "What you told me and Octavius."

Shutting my eyes, I blink tightly and pinch my nose. This was bound to happen sooner or later. "What specifically did you want to talk about Sirius?" I ask quietly, my stomach clenching as the words slip out of my mouth.

"You've gone through something horrid, absolutely fucking horrid," he begins, tentatively placing his hand on my shoulder and smiling slightly when I don't recoil. "I'm here for you, I always will be. Same goes with Octavius and Terra. We haven't told her what's happened, and are respecting your privacy, but I think it would be good if you told her at some point. We'll always be here for you, but Terra is a little bit better with these serious talks, no matter how much my name may sway you to believe otherwise," he finishes with a smirk.

Sirius fidgets nervously, staring at his hands. "We never have to discuss details, that should be saved for a mind-healer. There's no way in hell I'm qualified to have that sort of discussion. What I'd like to talk about, if you're willing of course, is when you mentioned that you… you er… you killed the man who attacked you." He says the last part quietly, hesitantly. Like he doesn't want to voice the fact that I killed a man.

"Ah," I reply, staring at the wall and hoping for the life of me that it'll open up and transport me to some place where I don't have to have this conversation. Unfortunately, walls are inanimate and respond as any other inanimate object would. By doing fuck all. "Yeah, I killed him." Detached is the best way to describe how I feel now. Distanced from the problem. Hiding from it. Can't have nightmares if you block it out of your head, right?

I let out a nervous huff, like when someone wants to laugh but they’re unsure if it’s appropriate. "I cut his head off. Just a stump was left. He was shocked, you know? His face frozen that way, mouth agape, eyes wide, sweat still dripping from his forehead. Just… just frozen that way, like he didn't know he was dead yet."

I can feel my nails digging into the skin of my thigh, the sharp bite of pain keeping me together as I regurgitate my thoughts, baring my soul to Sirius.

"At first I couldn't quite believe that I did it. Like I was going to wake up an instant later and find it was some weird, stupidly gory dream. It was Lockhart." I scratch my nose, resting one finger on my
lips, biting it as I think. “Funny how I should have seen it coming. How you had to fight him off me at Flourish & Blotts. The looks he gave me in class, like I was some sort of… trophy? He looked at me like I was prey, something to hunt.”

I shake my head. Yeah, I should have seen it coming. “I don’t really know why I didn’t see it, or if I just chose not to recognize what was right in front of me. Hindsight is 20/20, and there’s nothing I can do about it now. All I can do is just try and get by a day at a time, come to terms with it, at least that’s what Severus tells me.”

"Severus? Severus Snape?" Sirius asks, a spark of anger flashing across his face.

I close my eyes and clench my fist in front of my mouth, wagging one finger. "Yes, that Severus Snape. Don’t get started, alright? He’s been incredibly helpful with all this mess and is completely aware of what happened. In fact, he’s the one who removed the obliviate from my mind so that I could figure out what in the hell actually happened to me.” I drill even further, hoping to nip Sirius’ aggression in the bud. "Know what? He’s a mind healer as well, and he hasn’t charge me a fucking thing for the last month that I’ve been seeing him. So don’t you dare say anything.”

I look on as Sirius grimaces, his jaw stubbornly set forward as he wrestles with the idea of Severus Goddamn Snape helping James Potters daughter of all people. It’s easier to understand when people realize that I’m just as much Lily Potters child, not to mention I’m pretty much a carbon copy of her. You know, save for the apparent homicidal tendencies.

"I… I imagine you know how I feel about you being anywhere near that man, let alone having him look through your mind," he growls with a shake of his head. "I can’t say that I feel great about him being that close to you, but if it helps, it helps. You do know he used to be a Death-Eater, right?"

"Yes Sirius, I’m perfectly aware of his past. I’m also perfectly aware of how you and my dad treated him at Hogwarts.”

"The greasy shit had it coming! He was practicing dark magic!"

"Yeah?" I ask, laughing harshly. “Did he ever hurt anyone?"

"No! But he was still practicing dark fucking magic Helene!"

I grit my teeth, spitting out the next few words. "Did. He. Hurt. Anyone?"

"Does it matter?" he argues, an incredulous look on his face. He really can’t understand why I’m backing Severus up, does he? "He was bound to one day! Always slinking around the school leering at everyone! Not to mention the way he looked at Lily! The disgusting little bastard couldn’t wait to sink his claws into her!"

I throw my hands up in frustration. "Who gives a shit? Did that give you a right to attack him? Because what you did was bullying Sirius. I saw the memory of him calling mum a mudblood- hey! Don’t interrupt me!" I clip, staring daggers at Sirius. "Let me finish what I’m saying for Christs sake! You publicly humiliated him! I was downright fucking ashamed to see what you and my dad did in that memory and I won’t hear any excuses about how he was practicing dark magic, because it doesn’t matter! Honestly, you tried to kill him by sending him off to Remus on the full moon! You nearly murdered another student and used Remus as the tool! Do you think that’s even remotely acceptable?"

I hold one finger up aggressively. "And piss off with the dark magic complaint, you can kill someone with a levitating charm just as easily as you can with an organ expelling curse!"
"I didn't try to kill him!" Sirius pauses, one eyebrow cocked as he frowns at me “...where did you learn about that anyways? Did he tell you? Do you think that I don't regret what I did? It was phenomenally stupid of me to send Snape off to Remus and I tried to make it up to him! I tried so many times!"

Sirius looks genuinely ashamed as he continues, "He never even let me get a word in for an apology without trying to hex me! You have no idea how many times I tried to make it up to him. Also, going back a second,” he says, leaning forward and crossing his arms. “Where the hell did you read about an organ expelling curse? What kind of books have you been looking at?"

Slamming my mouth shut tight, I look away from Sirius. Shit, of course I had to let slip my little foray into the dark. I don't think I can keep this conversation focused on Severus and avoid a confrontation. "Restricted section, I happened across it," I deadpan, the lie slipping through gritted teeth.

"No, there's no way that would ever be found there," he says, cutting me off. "What in the hell have you gotten yourself into Helene?"

"Something that will give me any chance against one of the darkest and most feared wizards of the last three centuries," I spit, daring him to argue.

"You've got to be kidding me," he breathes, eyes wide. "I know he's got his sights set on you, but you don't need to learn stuff like that Helene. You don't need to stoop to his level. Bone breakers work fine, cutting curses, simple spells can be just as effective."

"No," I argue, waving him away. "Not yet at least. Look, I'm not saying I'm the next Dark Lady in training, but there are fields that I'm starting to believe I have to learn… magics I have to become proficient in. Shit, I've got to learn how to fight, not duel, but really fight if I want to live past fourteen."

"The graveyard?"

"Yes, the graveyard. That's my chance to take the son of a bitch out once and for all, and I'm not going to miss that chance no matter what anyone says."

Letting my head fall back, I look up, studying the crystal chandelier hanging from the middle of the ceiling. I'm quiet for a moment as I ponder what to do, what to say. The steady light streams in from the windows, shimmering as it passes through faux gems suspended above me. I focus on the pearlescent flicker of refraction, a soft rainbow caught in the facets and edges. Such a pure thing, light. It's a shame that I'm dark. I wonder if Sirius would hate me if he knew what I was? If he knew the things I'm teaching myself.

"I…"

Closing my eyes, I exhale softly through my nose. Is this something that I really want to tell anyone? I flick my gaze over to Sirius, trying to decipher the look he's giving me. Fear. Confusion. Love.

Fuck it.

"I- I'm… I'm apparently made to practice the more… grim aspects of magic," I blurt, the words tumbling out over my tongue in a mad escape. "Death told me. Encouraged me to practice certain… specific types of magic that aren't too fondly looked upon. Fucking Death told me to. Who am I to say no to what is essentially a God?"

Sirius gapes at me, saying the only word that comes to mind. "Shit."
"Yeah."

"That's… that's got to be some really dark stuff you're getting into there Helene. Fuck, if it's Death it's pretty much the darkest there is." Cursing under his breath, Sirius flops backwards onto my bed, taking his turn at studying the chandelier as he tries to wrap his head around what I've just told him. "Have you- you know, done anything with it? Whatever it is?"

"A bit," I admit, wondering if I should continue.

We sit there in silence for a moment, neither of us eager to continue the conversation, the underlying tension palpable.

"Do you want to know what it is? What I'm learning and practicing?" I ask hesitantly, my mouth dry.

Sirius stays where he is, legs dangling over the side of the bed and his arms thrown back behind him, one hand tugging lightly at his hair. "No. I really don't. I'm sure… I'm sure one day I'll want to know, and you'll want to tell me," he quietly reasons. "I don't think now is the time, although I'm not quite sure when the time ever will be. I just know it's not now."

I flop down beside him, tucking my knees up and pointing them at the ceiling.

"I agree," I whisper. "Just reminding you, you're not getting away with almost murdering Severus and you will apologize to him soon. Properly."

"Damnit. Do I have to?"

I sigh dramatically, turning to look at Sirius. “Both of you were in the wrong, I will admit that. But you tried to kill him, for what? For spending time with my Mum? For learning dark magic? Being dark doesn’t mean you’re evil. Shit, I mean, look at me for example,” I say, pointing towards myself. “I’m a fucking parseltongue, a trait apparently only found in dark wizards and witches, although I sincerely doubt that. Does that make me evil? No. It just means I can have conversations with snakes, who, by the way, are shit conversationalists.”

Sirius laughs at that, a smile breaking out on his face. “I still can’t believe you’re a parseltongue,” he marvels, shaking his head. “Speaking of snakes, there’s no problems with the basilisk over at Hogwarts, yeah?”

“No. Not a peep. Helps that we have Voldemort’s diary under lock and key.”

“True, true,” Sirius says, nodding his head. He frowns slightly, a serious look on his face. “I… I’ll go and talk to Sni- Severus some time soon.” He gives me a playful glare. “But I swear to God, if that bastard doesn’t accept my apology I’m going to be incredibly pissed off.”

“He’ll accept it,” I assert, remembering how hurt Severus looked reminiscing over his years at Hogwarts. “Trust me, he’ll accept it.”

-:-

The instant I set foot back in Hogwarts I muscle my way through the crowd of students, making a bee-line towards the Room of Requirement. I can feel my ankles ache slightly after my rush up seven exceedingly grand flights of stairs. Entering the room, I quietly shut the door tightly behind me and watch to make sure it disappears into the wall.

I quickly flick my eyes across a bookshelf, snatching the copy of *Et Necromantium* before setting myself down on a large love seat the Room has apparently decided to bequeath me.
Scrolling through the pages, I hunker down and start to pore over the book in the hopes that I can find spells that will help me in the off-chance that I piss off a thousand-year-old basilisk in the near future. One can never be too careful.

An hour passes by, and I’m bored to death. No matter how interesting the contents of the book are, it’s still a spell book. Not exactly conducive to interesting reading, well, unless you’re Hermione. I absentmindedly wish that I could at least have a bit of music to listen to.

I jump in fright as the Room of Requirement does just that and provides me music to listen to. Evidently, it knows exactly how I’m feeling, and the excited timber of big band jazz begins to float about the room. Fast, but not too fast. Perfect for studying.

Smiling, I shuffle back into my spot. I note some useful spells as I go along, a few of them cropping up here and there.

By useful, I mean incredibly alarming.

The most distressing spell being one that apparently opens a portal to the underworld. What makes that spell immediately unimpressive is that the only thing that actually comes out of said portal is a cluster of angry undead arms lashing out at everything around them.

Yes. A portal to the goddamn underworld instead of simply transfiguring a group of angry disembodied limbs. I mean, if I’m going for shock and awe, that’s definitely the spell to cast, but I don’t see how it could be remotely useful.

To be honest though, I am curious to find what all the fuss is about.

I climb off of the sofa, transfiguring a conveniently placed stone in front of me into a pig. It snorts, and squeals loudly, scraping its hooves across the floor. Thankfully, it doesn’t run off. I glance back at the book, having already forgotten what the incantation is. Mortuus manibus. Dead grasp? What an oddly succinct spell.

I point my wand at the pig, loudly incanting, “Mortuus manibus.” A sharp jab of my wand later, and I immediately begin to understand the difference between Necromancy and transfiguration.

The air in the room shudders, turning frigid. I rear back in fright, the cold wash of what is unmistakably death floods over me. An empty blackness appears underneath the pig, seemingly swallowing up all the ground around it.

Suddenly, greedy rotting hands burst out of the void and latch onto the animal. I choke on my throat as the pig is rapidly torn to pieces, the hands gripping onto limbs and flesh, ripping it apart bit by bit. I gawk as chunks of muscle and bone fly about unceremoniously, the skeletal fingers picking and prying at the now terrified construct. My nose wrinkles as I register the stench of rot and sulfur emanating from the inky darkness, lingering after the hole of nothing blinks shut, leaving the gory mess of not-pig heaped in its place.

…

Fuck.

Now I get why people don't like Necromancy one bit.

-::-

Albus Dumbledore was sitting in his office when he felt another intense wave of magic burst from
within the school. He drew himself up to his full height, a hint of fear tickling at the back of his mind. He didn’t recognize the feeling of that magic, but he did know that it felt wrong. He grimaced, drawing up the ward scheme of the school yet again, disgusted with how insidious, how sickly the magic felt as it crashed upon the shore of the school’s wards.

“Oh my,” he whispered, shocked to the core.

He saw it. It was faint, but it was there.

Black.

That meant that someone was experimenting with the Dark Arts.

Dumbledore was curious when looking over the Headmasters manual, unsure of how a light could be black. Even with magic the idea of it seemed near impossible, something that should be, for lack of a better word, impossible. He recognized the fact that nothing in magic was truly impossible, but he could not picture a colour that doesn’t exist, just as much as any other person couldn’t. He found that irritating, as he believed a pair of neon robes would be quite lovely.

But, plain as day, there was a black light shining out at him from the wards. Shining wasn’t necessarily the best word, per se, but it was quite apt for the way it somehow, someway, carried brightness. A physical oxymoron, if there could be such a thing.

Dumbledore gasped in horror, covering his mouth with his hand as he spied a flicker of light out of the corner of his eye, hovering over the Defence Against the Dark Arts office.

Brown.

“Gilderoy… poor poor, Gilderoy,” he lamented, a tear coming to his eye. Gilderoy didn’t leave on an adventure, he realized. No, he died. Someone killed him.

But how? Who? Who in the school could have possibly gotten the upper hand against a warlock like Gilderoy Lockhart? Apart from Dumbledore, of course, he believed that no one in the school could have possibly snuck up on the man. It would be an impossible to do such a thing against a wizard who could slay a wendigo with only a well-placed banishing charm and an ashwinder egg.

Dumbledore remembered checking the mans office after he had disappeared and found nothing amiss. There was no sign of a struggle, nor any magical residue that one would find after a duel. It was absolutely spotless.

Albus narrowed his eyes, deciding to investigate the disturbance himself.

With a quick nod to Fawkes, he was down the stairs and out past the gargoyle guarding his office. A hop, skip, and a jump and he found himself digging a furrow into the stone floor as he paced in front of the painting of Barnabus the Barmy.

He could feel it, the hall was awash in dark magic. No, not dark magic, he thought. Nothing so simple. Black magic… Necromancy to be specific, something to be extremely concerned about.

“Curious.”

He was aware that the magic was coming from behind the wall in front of him, but there was no door in sight. He wondered if this was not where he happened across a room full of chamber pots so many years ago. Dumbledore chuckled at the idea of a much-forgotten waste removal apparatus being so awash in black magic. Brown magic, perhaps?
He removed the Deathstick from his robes, casting a series of scans and sensory charms to try and find away to get behind the wall without destroying it. Sighing in frustration, Dumbledore decided he would continue his investigations another night, as it was getting to be quite late and the perpetrator was evidently long gone.

He shuffled tiredly back to his quarters, silently lamenting the fact that he was not as young as he once was.

The few weeks after my return to Hogwarts stretch me to my limit as I study the intricacies of Necromancy. Compared to the corpse arms, as I’m beginning to call the spell, most of the curses and hexes are downright flowery, and I’m beginning to become quite proficient in the casting of a few staple spells of the trade. Many of the spells I’ve become familiar with are darker variations on common combat spells. This seems to be the focus of many necromantic spells. Take something that’s deadly, make it even deadlier and hope it also scars any observers for life.

Example being: A bastardized version of the bone breaking hex causes the bones to splinter and form barbs, as opposed to snap, sending jagged shrapnel flying from within the victim's own body. It’s sort of like a grenade going off, but inside the person.

Incredibly messy, if I do say so myself.

Another variation on a common spell would be the entrail-expelling curse. Well, the entrail-expelling curse isn’t exactly common per se, but it is one of the more well known Dark Arts curses. The necromantic version causes the organs to rot as they're, er- spit up. Because if literally puking your own guts out wasn’t bad to begin with, I might as well dash away any possibility of that person recovering by wasting away their viscera as it happens.

I'm going to avoid any spells that are even remotely similar to corpse arms, because apparently that's still in the middle of the spectrum when it comes to this stuff. How could it get worse, I asked? How could it possibly get worse? Famous last words.

The worst, most vile and generally horrible thing I’ve come across is an augmented fiendfyre. Yes, Augmented fiendfyre. How is it augmented, one may ask? How could one change flames purported to be drawn from Hell itself? By actually drawing them from hell itself. Apparently regular fiendfyre, which is thought of as being drawn from Hell is not actually drawn from hell.

Felfyre on the other hand actually is.

Yeah.

I'm definitely not trying that one out any time soon. Actually, I think I'm never going to try that. Ever…

Never ever.

Apart from my completely and totally tasteful in-depth studies of death and the damned, I've made absolutely zero progress in destroying Tom's diary. Honestly, this thing is damn near impenetrable and nothing that I've done to it has even so much as nicked it. I suppose I could cast felfyre on it, but I'm not going to unless I feel like killing every single inhabitant of Hogwarts when I understandably lose control of the spell.

I've been tearing my hair out over this fucking thing though, and I've checked over the bloody book for wards of every kind and get nothing back. Not a peep. The only thing that I have learned about it
is that it's apparently alive. Yeah, the fucking thing is alive. After casting a frustrated *homenum revelio* the bloody thing lit up like a tonne of fireworks.

So, apparently this book is alive in some form or another, indestructible to everything but basilisk venom (to the best of my knowledge), and I have no idea what to do with it until I can go downstairs and talk to a great big bloody snake. I don't imagine I can just stroll in and say, ‘Hey! Fancy taking a bite out of this here diary? It's full of dietary fibre and other necessary nutrients that fulfill a proper serpents diet!’

Knowing my luck, it'd probably work and then the thing would *still* manage to impale me on one of its fangs and apologize profusely as I slowly die in front if it.

I stare at the book, poking it with repeatedly with one finger. Might as well be worth a shot?

Shrugging mentally, I throw on my cloak and sneak off to the second-floor girls bathroom, doing my best to avoid Myrtle as I hiss at the sink. The grind of stone on stone hurts my ears, and I cast a quick silencing charm. I hesitate, stopping myself from immediately jumping down the pipes.

Sliding down this is actually really scary when I'm not pumped full of cortisol.

“I wonder if?” I whisper aloud, talking to myself. “No, that couldn't possibly work… could it?”

*:Stairs:* I hiss, staring angrily at the pipe as steps fan out of it like someone fanning out a deck of cards.

“Oh, fuck off.”

Horribly embarrassed for my twelve-year-old self's stupidity, I walk down the stairs towards the Chamber, hissing back at the sinks above to close them behind me. Wouldn't do to have someone accidentally come across the famous Chamber of Secrets and find me down there. Dumbledore has managed to ignore me for most of this year, and I don't want to give him an excuse to come after me with some benign worry or another that I'm succumbing to the dark side. I should get a Vader costume just to scare the old man.

Shaking myself out of my angsty teenage musings, I hiss at the final door to the Chamber, double checking to make sure I have my pocket rooster.

I planned ahead this time! What’s the saying? Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong? That’s why I've brought along a rooster that I've transfigured into a wooden cube. Just in case. I really should come up with a different name. Pocket rooster sounds a little too close to- well. *Anatomy*. Not a good name for what is my only lifeline at the moment.

Nervously striding towards the massive, and quite ugly, statue of Salazar Slytherin, I roll my shoulders, wincing as my neck cracks loudly. I finger the handle of my wand, holding it at the ready as I prepare myself for what is either going to be a hell of a conversation or a hell of a fight.

With pinched lips, I command the statue, *:Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four:* The shuddering squeal of grinding stone emits through the Chamber, the maw of Slytherin slowly opening.

Shutting my eyes tight, just in case, I speak out again, *:Greetings, oh great Basilisk of Slytherin. I wish you no harm and wish to speak with you:* I can hear a low growl as the serpent slips through the open mouth of Slytherin, the rasp of it's scales
rubbing against loose stone and gravel.

:Who there?:

What?

:Er- I am Helene Potter, a Speaker. I have come to you with a request:

:Whats you want?:

I frown in confusion, biting my top lip. You know, I thought a thousand-year-old serpent would be a touch more... eloquent in it's speech.

:Before I ask, could you please look away so that I do not fall dead under your gaze? I'd like to open my eyes if possible:

:Gaze? What is... gaze?:

:Your eyes... where you look? I'll die if you look at me:

:Oh! You are speaker! I not hurt you!:

The excitement in the basilisk's voice is slightly unnerving, although the thing sort of sounds like, well- A puppy. Yeah. If I could imagine how a puppy would talk, this would probably be the best example I could ever think of.

I slowly open one eye to see the basilisk staring into my eyes. Panicking for a moment, I relax when I realize that I'm not struck dead. Parselmouths must be immune to the gaze of a basilisk I guess. It would make sense, all things considered, as the only people who would be likely to create a basilisk would be a parselmouth.

I bow my head. :Thank you. Do you have a name that I can refer to you by?:

The basilisk cocks its head slightly towards the ceiling in thought. A couple of minutes go by with it doing nothing apart from waving its head around and murmuring quietly. :My name be's Miss Snakey: it comments after an agonizing amount of time, regally nodding its head.

“Fuck,” I groan, palming my face in exasperation. My god. The poor thing. It's... it's stupid. This is the terror of Hogwarts? Salazar's Monster? Merlin, I'd be able to have a better conversation with a common adder! No wonder I only heard it speak in monosyllabic when it petrified everyone.

:Nice to meet you: I say hesitantly. There’s no chance I’m going to call her Miss Snakey. :Would it be alright if I called you Magna? A mighty name for such a mighty serpent:

She squints, as much as a creature without eyelids can squint. After a few moments she tentatively inclines its head in agreement. I sigh in relief, deeply thankful that I don’t have to call a thousand-year-old basilisk Miss Snakey for the rest of the conversation.

:I've got a request for you, if that's alright. You see, I've got this book that I want to get rid of and for the life of me I can't do anything to destroy it. Fire, acid, a paper shredder, nothing can touch it. Since you've got such strong venom, I was wondering if you could maybe take a bite out of it?:

:Hmm... what in it for Magna?:

Of course the bloody thing wants to barter.
I could... find you a tasty... uh:

I pause. What the hell would she eat? I’m not about to go out and capture an acromantula, which is
the only thing that I really know of that is part of a basilisks regular diet. Hogwarts must have
livestock somewhere, right? :A tasty cow to eat?:

Again, the basi- Magna tilts her head in thought, pondering whether the trade of a cow for the
destruction of a book is worth it. :Magna prefer horse. Horse tastier: she replies matter-of-factly, as
if it’s common knowledge that horse is highly superior to beef. Personally, I haven’t tried horse, so I
can't compare, but I do love a good burger as much as the next girl.

:I can get you a horse instead?: I say, wondering where I’m going to find a horse of all things. A
cow? Sure, I find it incredibly likely that the elves have cows on hand somewhere, as the meat
always tastes quite fresh. But a horse?

:Horse sound good!: Magna chitters excitedly, her tongue flicking out of her mouth. She freezes in
confusion. : ...where is horse?:

:Sorry?:

:I like horse. Where is horse?:

What the hell is she- :Oh! I don’t have it right now, I can go get one if you bite the book though:

Magna shakes her head and snorts loudly. :No horse no bites:

Oh, fuck right off. Well, that plan is out the window. :If I come back with a horse, then will you bite
the book?:

Magna wags her head excitedly, preening at the prospect of sinking her frighteningly large fangs into
a horse. I jump backwards in fright as she flashes her teeth, calming down as I realize she’s smiling.
Basilisks can smile too? That’s absolutely horrifying. Forget what I said about goblins, a basilisk
smile is the worst thing I’ve seen in my entire life.

:Alright uh, Magna. I’ll be back soon. Just stay right there, okay?: I promise, wagging my finger at
her in a passable impression of McGonagall.

Magna agrees readily, :I stays if I gets horse!:

:Excellent!: I hiss, already stealthily exiting the Chamber. :See you soon!:

I shake my head to clear the cobwebs brought about by absolute and total confusion. I find myself
slightly shell-shocked by the incredibly absurd experience of having a conversation with a millennia
old magical creature with the IQ of a particularly stunted basset hound. I march back up the stairs
into Myrtle’s bathroom wondering, once again, where the hell do I find a horse?

Pulling my cloak on, I wander towards the kitchen, thinking furiously.

How am I going to get this thing from the kitchens and back into the chamber?

Wait.

Dobby?

“Fuck!” I curse, startling a nearby portrait, who shrieks in fright and scampers off into her
neighbour’s frame.
I completely forgot about Dobby! The poor guy is probably still living with the Malfoys, getting the shit kicked out of him every day. I remember how upon the first time meeting him he announced that he would stick his ears in the oven for warning me about the chamber and grimace. He's not just getting the shit kicked out of him, he's probably performing self-flagellation every day.

I continue on my course and meander over to the basement, tickling the portrait of the pear and ignoring its coy giggle as I look for a house elf to interrogate. I push the thoughts of Dobby out of my mind, making a mental note to find a way to free him some time soon.

Thankfully, upon entering the room a horde of elves rush up to me with food already in hand, eager to help in any way they can. Looking around, I try to find the most important looking elf, if there's even such a thing.

I sweep my gaze over the teeming mass of gray-green flesh, noticing one elf that towers over the rest of them. By towers, I mean he's roughly four inches taller than the three feet of the average elf, but it is quite a difference compared to his compatriots.

"Hello! I was wondering where I would be able to find a horse," I announce, as if it's the most normal thing in the world for a second-year student to barge into Hogwarts kitchens in the middle of the night and inquire about a hundred and ten stone animal.

"Horse? You hungry enough to eats a horse?" The taller elf asks, one eye squinted tightly as he peers up at me. I take a closer look at the elf, who's done up in a gray suit and vest, albeit a raggedy one.

"Well, not me, but a friend of mine."

Tapping his foot aggressively, the elf squints his eye even tighter, nearly winking at me as he thinks on my request. "Why your friend needs horse?" He demands, arms waving wildly. "Horses be expensive! You thinks horses grow on trees?"

I rear back, wondering how to convince the head elf of my need for a horse. "Woah, woah," I shoot back, putting my hands up defensively. "It's for a really big snake, and she's very hungry. You see, she's been sleeping for fifty years and would like a horse to eat, and I'd prefer she eat a horse instead of one of the students." I cross my fingers behind my back, praying that I've managed to bullshit my way through this. I know that if Magna attempted to go out and eat a student I'd immediately put her down, but I'd really like to see if I can avoid that. Ignoring her lack of intelligence, she's still a basilisk, and that's definitely a strong ally to have on my side.

The elf thinks deeply, cocking his jaw and causing it to crack loudly. "How big is the snake?" He asks, glaring at me over his floppy nose.

I hold out my hands as if to measure Magna. "Uh, about… fifty? No- sixty feet?"

The head elf furrows his brow, chewing on his cheek as he continues to glare at me. "We gets you horse for snake, but only once!" He cries, pointing angrily.

I clap excitedly. "Thank you! You're the best!"

"I knows," he shoots back arrogantly, shouting orders out across the kitchen for the other elves to go and fetch aforementioned horse.

A snap and a flash of light announces the arrival of said horse, landing bound and confused in the middle of the kitchen. Instantly, the horse starts screaming in fear.

Flinching at the terrible noise, I snap off a silencio and put the animal on mute.
Okay, so… time to figure out how to get this back to the Chamber.

I sit for a few minutes, ignoring the cacophony of the elves completing their late-night prep work. Hundreds of knives chop and dice vegetables around me, pots filled with broths and gravies bubble and spit as they’re taken on or off the flame.

I stick my fingers in my ears childishly pushing the sounds out of my head. The only way to get the horse over to the chamber that I can readily think of would be to simply levitate it. Would a mobilicorpus work on a horse though? Only one way to find out.

I wave my wand, cursing loudly when nothing happens. “Son of a bitch!” I cry, grabbing fistfuls of my hair in frustration. It would have probably been easier to just kill the fucking basilisk.

Wondering where the hell my life went wrong, I levitate the horse and begin my trek back to Myrtle’s bathroom. I struggle with the unwieldy load. I don’t lack the power to carry it, by any means, I just don’t have an incredible degree of control over it, like trying to carry a very wide, but light object. One has the tendency to bump into everything along the way.

I finally make it to the second floor, my slow-going travels interrupted by a demanding, nasally voice.

"Excuse me, what… what the hell are you doing?"

Glancing over my shoulder I spy Percy Weasley looking absolutely and completely dumbfounded.

I freeze up. What do I say? Seriously, what do I say? I could stun him I guess. I’ve never particularly liked Percy, especially after he sold his family out so readily in fifth-year. Could I maybe just make a ridiculous excuse and hope that it works?

Cross my fingers mentally, I reply with the horrible, horrible answer of, "Charms homework." I begin to walk off confidently. I just have to pretend like what I’m doing is completely and totally normal and nobody will question me… I hope.

Of course, this doesn't work.

Percy grabs a hold of my arm, twisting me around and causing me to lose concentration on my spell, slamming the horse into the wall before dropping it loudly on the ground. "Look what you made me do!" I cry angrily, gesturing towards the terrified horse that is now lying on the ground, nostrils flared and legs bucking wildly as it struggles against the ropes. "I finally learned how to levitate something over half a ton and you had to go and make me drop it!"

Befuddled, Percy looks at me, then to the horse, then back to me. "Wait… were you not lying when you said you were doing charms homework?" He asks incredulously, a look of confused horror on his face as he stares at the panicking equine.

I smile, deeply happy that he’s taken the bait. "No, I wasn't lying. Professor Flitwick has been tutoring me ahead of the class schedule and this was his idea of a joke," I swear, gesturing angrily towards the frantic horse that is still trying to right itself and failing miserably, hooves scuffing loudly against the floor.

"But… but why are you out after curfew?"

I shrug. "Like I said, his idea of a joke. He thought it would put more stress on me to levitate it under pressure."
Either I’m fantastic at lying, or Percy is the most gullible person I’ve met in my entire life.

Percy rubs his nose, still staring at the horse. He turns to me, squaring his shoulders and trying to regain some semblance of authority. "Er, well. Good luck with your homework… and don't let me catch you out after curfew again young lady!” Percy admonishes, wagging his finger as he wanders off to go question his life, most likely very proud that he got the last word in.

I know I’m going to question where my life is going when this is all finally over with.

Ignoring the terrified horses muted screams, I levitate it again, finding it a little bit easier this time. I continue on my quest to feed Magna, and fortunately, I'm not interrupted again apart from Myrtle crooning excitedly over the now catatonic horse.

It really does make sense that she was a horse girl.

A bit of clever maneuvering, and I squeeze the horse through the doorway to the Chamber. \textit{I'm back!}: I announce excitedly, dropping the animal in front of her. With terrifying speed, she lunges towards the horse, fangs ripping through its hide like it was paper mâché.

I turn away from the grisly sight, instead preferring to study one of the many statues lining the main walkway of the Chamber, admiring the intricate detail of the carved viper.

After a few noisy minutes, I ask Magna, \textit{So, would you be able to bite that book now?:}

She tilts her head towards me and nods tiredly, her first meal in five decades having taken its toll on her. \textit{Too sleepy, no bite. I open my mouths for you?:} She drawls, her voice dragging in exhaustion.

Resigned to the insanity that is my life, I accept her proposition and walk towards her. She opens her mouth wide, and I swiftly impale the diary on one of her lower fangs, taking great care not to nick myself on any of the wickedly sharp teeth. As the diary is driven over her fang, a screaming cloud of black smoke erupts from the newly torn hole in the leather.

I jump backwards in fright, stumbling awkwardly on my hands and feet. Embarrassed, I dust myself off as I stand back up, wondering why that didn't happen last time. I guess the memory didn't have a chance to get out this time round, and since it was still mostly trapped within the diary, it went out with a bit of a bang?

Too tired to even question the differences in diary deaths, I thank Magna for her help and trudge back to the Ravenclaw common room, dead on my feet by the time I reach my bed.

I think my dreams will bring me a bit closer to reality than this day has. Thank God I didn't need my pocket rooster.

Chapter End Notes

Big snake talk like snek. Also, yes, felfyre is going to be green, a la Destruction Warlocks from WoW. What can I say? It is my main class.
Chapter Fifteen | Reconciliation, or Something Close To It

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

I’m currently trying to read. Trying being the operative word. I should be learning runes right now, scouring over a book on elder futhark and the proper syntax to use when utilizing the alphabet for warding.

Instead, I’m pondering why my life is so fucking insane. Honestly, that’s the best way to describe it. Purely and simply insane. I’m sent back in time by a God, I find out that I was never supposed to be a man, I kill two professors, one of them for the second time. To add to all that, just last night I found myself in the middle of a conversation with a thousand-year-old snake that has the mental capacity of a six-year-old and the attitude of a golden retriever.

These aren’t exactly things that I expected to happen in my life, and I don't believe anyone who has ever lived has expected to have them happen as well.

So why the hell does this insanity seem so damned normal to me? My guess is because it’s a constant. My whole life has been a series of ridiculous, absurdly dangerous, or otherwise uncanny events all tied together in a way that makes me remarkably pleased to find that I’m still sane. At least, I think I'm still sane, or as sane as one could be after living through all that.

Is it sane for me to be dabbling with the eldritch? To be so comfortable with the use of Death’s gift when a few months ago I was terrified of even the idea of it, distancing myself from the recommendations and half assed teachings of an actual God? My first thought is no, I'm not particularly sane. My second thought is that I'm doing remarkably well, all things considered.

An evil old wizard hellbent on my destruction? A senile old man attempting to fashion me into some sort of hero? These two leaders of opposing factions pulling me from both ends until it feels like I'm going to split, torn apart like some sickly medieval execution? I think they used to do that at least. Tie a guy to two horses and let them play tug of war? Eugh. Not a great mental image.

I’m thrown out of that line of thought by someone knocking on the side of my head.

“Helene… hey, Helene? You awake in there?”

“Yeah? Daphne? What’s going on?” I ask, looking at her in confusion, closing the book I’ve been ignoring. I notice the worry radiating off of her, everything about her looking pinched. Tracey stands behind Daphne, her eyes crinkled at the edges. She avoids eye contact when I look at her. I wonder what that’s about. “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, yeah, everything is fine,” she deflects, shaking her head. “I just wanted to see how my sister is doing. What are you studying there?” She smiles at me as she points at my book, the curve of her lips not quite reaching her eyes.

“I’m doing great, just studying some runes right now… well, I’m trying,” I say, tilting my head to the side. Should I press the issue? She really doesn’t seem well. “Can’t seem to focus right now for some reason. Daphne… are you sure everything is alright? You’re looking a bit pale. Same with you Tracey, are you both feeling fine?”

Daphne huffs, rolling her eyes in exasperation while Tracey just scowls and doesn’t reply. “It’s
private, alright?” She argues, holding her hand out for me to stop. “Please… just, don’t push the two of us on this, okay? This is our problem to worry about.”

“Alright, alright.” I put my hands up in surrender. “Forget I asked. Just… talk to me if you need to, alright? I’m here for you if you need me.”

Tracey nods, her scowl lightening as Daphne smiles back at me, snorting quietly. “Thanks Helene… I just…” Daphne pauses, staring at her hands as she rubs them together nervously. “Thanks.”

“Any time,” I reply, rubbing her shoulder. “So… how’s uh- you alright?”

“I already answered that.”

I rub the back of my head awkwardly. “Forgot about that.”

We sit for a few moments, staring at the table before Daphne starts to chuckle quietly. Soon enough Tracey and I are laughing along with her, the three of us slowly devolving into a laughing fit, guffawing loudly and startling the other students in the library. Pince angrily hushes us, causing me to have to hold back even more laughter.

Daphne looks up at me, another chuckle sneaking out of her lips as she makes eye contact. She wipes her eyes, grinning like an idiot. “I don’t even know what was funny,” she smirks, holding a hand to her heaving chest.

I rub my sore cheeks. “That’s what makes it funny, is if its not funny at all.”

“That really doesn’t make any sense,” Tracey adds, shaking her head. “It’s not funny, so it is funny?”

“Like laughing at a funeral.”

“Weird analogy, but it makes sense… I think,” she adds, wiping her eyes once more as she leans back in her seat. She rests her hands on her lap, arms crossed lazily.

“What house do you think Astoria is going to end up in next year?” Daphne asks, changing the subject.

“Huh. Well, she’d be a great fit in any house apart from Hufflepuff,” I think aloud, scratching my head. “I’d put it down to Ravenclaw or Slytherin, but there’s a good chance she’d be in Gryffindor.”

Daphne shakes her head. “Astoria in Gryffindor? The Lion’s would lose their minds if a Greengrass was sorted into their house.” She snickers again, pulling my book over and glancing over it, before pushing it back to me. “I’m just excited to have the whole family here. Even if I do have to put up with her in Slytherin,” she adds with a playful grimace. “It’ll be good to have everyone here in one place.”

I turn to look at Tracey, who’s turned silent again. I frown, wondering what’s going on with her. She’s had a bit of an attitude problem lately, but I’m not as close to her as Daphne is, so it would be rude of me to press the subject. “I know what you mean.” I sit back and think for a second, derailing my train of thought and marveling at how quickly I’ve gained so many friends. The extent of my circle in my last life was exclusively Hermione and Ron, with Ginny, Neville, and Luna sort of shoehorning themselves in because of the D.A. Not exactly something to boast about.

How many friends does that make in this timeline? Four from Ravenclaw… two-, no, three in Slytherin. Wait, no, five in Ravenclaw counting Luna. Shit! I just realized I haven’t really chatted
with Ginny. Didn’t she start writing in Voldemort’s diary because she was being ignored by her friends and family?

Alright, making a mental note to approach Ginny and induct her into the group.

“I never imagined I would have so many friends,” I say absentmindedly, the two girls looking at me curiously.

“Why not?”

“Most people want to be friends with the Girl-Who-Lived, not Helene,” I explain, shrugging. Daphne nods in understanding. “It’s pretty frustrating trying to figure out whether someone is interested in being friends with me because they want to get to know me, or if they want to use my status. For me to have such a large group of friends… genuine friends. It’s fantastic.”

“I never thought of it that way…” Daphne trails off, deep in thought. “I can’t imagine how awful that would be. I sort of understand that juggle, trying to find out if someone wants to know me for me because of being heiress, but you must have to deal with the same problem a thousand-fold.”

“So that’s why you don’t talk to the Slytherins outside of the two of us?” Tracey asks, gesturing towards herself and Daphne.

“Pretty much. Most of them are just interested in using me in one way or another. It drives me mad how we’re twelve fucking years old, and people are already politicking.” I shake my head in incredulity. I jab my thumb at Daphne. “I know you know how to have fun, but are all the other purebloods not allowed to enjoy their childhoods or something?”

Daphne blushes at that remark, knowing I’m poking fun at her calm and collected attitude. “Sort of? The really zealous types like Malfoy, Nott, and Parkinson are brought up to act in a certain way when in public. People like me… we’re given a bit more leeway since we’re neutral. It really just depends on how the family wants to present themselves, be it more traditionalist like the Malfoys or more progressive like my family.”

I nod, that does make sense. Doesn’t mean I don’t think it’s stupid.

Our little conversation continues for a while, with Tracey occasionally jumping in to speak, but not too often.

Somethings wrong with her. I don’t know if she’s sick, if she’s stressed, or if she’s mad about something, but something is wrong. Every time I look at her it seems as if she’s holding back a scowl, like she wants to smack me for even being near her. This is all stupidly confusing because she’s probably one of the friendliest people I’ve met in my entire life, and for her to be this mad about something, mad about me, means I’ve probably done something horribly stupid and nobody has told me.

-::-

"Hello Helene. The usual?" Severus greets me in his usual drawl as I take a seat in front of his desk.

"That would be brilliant, thanks," I reply, tentatively sipping at the steaming drink he hands me.

"So, what would you like to discuss today? I feel like we've made good progress in our last couple of talks and want to leave things open to you."

I lean back in my seat to think. What should we talk about today?
I've been feeling better about the whole Lockhart deal lately, not that I feel good about it, but I understand that I did what most others would do in the same situation. Lash out. So, what should we talk about? The biggest problem on the forefront of my mind is my studies into Necromancy and other assorted unmentionables. Would Severus understand? Probably. Would he freak out? Yeah, a little. If anyone can help me understand this, it's him.

"Our oath still holds, correct?"

"Yes, yes it does," Severus replies, one eyebrow raised questioningly. "Why do you ask?"

Sighing quietly, I run my hands over my legs, pulling lightly at my robes. "I've been teaching myself lately," I begin, fidgeting nervously with my hands. "Combat magics and the like. There are other… fields that I've begun to dabble in that I think will be extraordinarily effective in the coming fight against Voldemort. There's a prophecy about me…. it uh- it details how I, and only I will be the one to put an end to him."

Surprisingly, Severus doesn't react rashly to my statement apart from a slight quirk of his eyes and his cheeks being sucked in.

"I… I know of the prophecy," he admits. I raise my eyebrows at that. "Not in it's entirety, but I know the gist of it. It's a terrible burden to bear, and I wouldn't wish it on anyone. I'm sorry you have to deal with such a thing at your age.”

"I am curious. What do you mean when you say, other fields? The only 'fields' I can think of off the top of my head that go past standard combat and warfare spells are Light and Dark magics."

"Light magics?"

"Well, if there is a dark there has to be a light, correct?"

"I guess." I pause to scratch my head. "I never really thought about it before."

"Then I presume we're not discussing the lighter fields, and are instead discussing the dark? Would I be wrong in that assumption?"

"No, you're not wrong at all," I reply, sheepishly averting my eyes from his inquisitive gaze.

"I'm not judging you Helene, I'm not going to condemn you either, I'm simply curious as to how you concluded that the dark is involved in your road to defeating the Dark Lord, as opposed to the light," he says, reaching across the table to lightly grasp my hand. "You can always speak to me. Understand? Always. I just expected you to be a Light Witch, as opposed to a Dark Witch, seeing as you're a Potter."

"What do you mean?" I inquire, genuinely confused as to what he's saying.

"Well, everyone's magic is different." He taps his fingers against his desk as he thinks. "Some are light, some are dark, and a rare few are gray. That simply means that you're naturally inclined to certain fields and practices. I myself am dark, although I imagine you won't find that much of a surprise. The reason I assume you're light, is because your family is renowned as producing only light witches and wizards."

"No, that makes perfect sense," I grin. "Merlin forbid you be a light wizard, the whole school would lose their mind!"

"I do believe that would be the case," he quips, smirking back at me. "Unfortunately, the dark has
long been vilified due to many of the more well-known fields that have a basis in the dark being quite unsavoury. Parselmagics, Blood Magics, all have their roots in the dark. It’s confusing for some people, because dark doesn’t mean dark, in the literal sense. It’s just a way to describe the difference between the two dichotic fields of magic. Light gives, dark takes, and they can both do good and bad in equal measures."

"Really? So… a vanishing spell is the epitome of the Dark Arts?" I ask, Severus shaking his head in reply.

“It’s a dark spell, but it’s not a Dark Art. The Dark Arts are those aforementioned fields that people find unsavoury. Parselmagics, Blood Magics, both of those are dark fields, but they’re also Dark Arts. They perfectly fit the definition of magic intended to maim or kill.”

“Well, that explains a lot. I must be as dark as they come," I scoff, shaking my head.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I’m a parseltongue for one,” I explain, Severus raising his eyebrows as I count down on my fingers. "Not to mention I’m slightly experienced in Blood Magics."

"My, oh my," Severus intones, nearly dropping his mug of tea. "A dark Potter? You learn something new every day." He steels his fingers, a look of consternation on his face. "I will recommend you extend extreme caution towards your practices as a Blood Mage, many a talented witch or wizard has been… snuffed out before their time sticking their nose into impossible rituals."

Not something to worry about on my end. What am I now, Death's apprentice? Not much of a teacher I will admit, but he is one hell of a motivator. 

"I understand, I research every ritual I even so much as think about extensively. The reason I asked you about all of this is because… well- I uh… shite." I scratch my head nervously. How the fuck do I explain this to him?

"It's alright Helene. I can't imagine anything that you say could shock me anymore than my little romp through your mind," Severus says comfortingly. "Not too often that you meet a time traveler."

"You sure?" I ask, relief flooding me when he nods back at me.

"Alright… here goes… I'm a Necromancer," I whisper, so quiet as to be imperceptible.

"Sorry? I didn't catch that,” Severus says, leaning in and frowning.

Fucks sake.

"I'm a Necromancer," I blurt, loudly this time, causing Severus to drop his mug. I instinctively flinch away from the crash and grip the arms of my chair tightly.

"A… a Necromancer?" Severus repeats quietly. "An honest to god Necromancer?"

"Uh… yeah?"

"Circe preserve me," he groans, ignoring the shattered mug at his feet. "A bloody Necromancer she says! Does the impossible mean nothing to you?"

Huh?

"The impossible? I thought it was just, you know- dark magic? How is it impossible?" I flinch,
realizing that I have my hands in my hair, tugging anxiously (and painfully) at the crimson locks.

Severus pinches the bridge of his nose, sighing loudly. "Well, let's gloss over the fact that the last confirmed Necromancer lived somewhere around... I don't know, *a millennium ago*?" He exclaims, arms held up high. "How in Circe's name do you keep surprising me so? I should just expect you to break the laws of magic on a daily basis at this point. *Necromancer* she says!"

"Woah! Wait a minute here! I don't know what the hell you're going on about, so could you please *explain* why you're freaking out?"

Severus places his head in his hands, groaning quietly. "You really don't understand how big a deal this is, do you?" He asks, peering through his fingers.

"I'm afraid I don't. Muggle-raised, remember?" I say, shrugging. "I'm still absolutely clueless when it comes to wizarding history or anything people think I should already know."

"Alright... well. How to begin? Necromancy is a... *touchy* subject, as you can imagine. It's Black, with a capital B, and about as esoteric and morbid as any magic can go since it's directly involved in death. What many people think is Necromancy actually isn't... do you know what an inferius is?"

"No," I say, shaking my head. "Never heard of one."

"An inferius is an animated corpse, created via a very arduous and quite disgusting ritual. The Dark Lord was renowned for using them in the war, flooding small muggle villages with mobs of the creatures and killing the residents without even lifting a finger."

"That sounds horrible," I gasp, imagining the absolute carnage that would be wrought by such a force, no matter how small. "Wouldn't those be zombies though? Corpses that attack people? God, I hope they don't eat brains too."

Severus shakes his head in confusion, probably wondering what in the hell I'm talking about. "What? Brains? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, it's a muggle thing. Horror movies and stuff like that."

"Well, they're not too far off the mark with that," he mutters, grimacing at whatever thought just popped into his head. "No, an inferius isn't a zombie, nowhere close to it. See, an inferius is a construct. A flesh-golem powered by runes. They're not more effective than a regular golem, considering they're made of flesh as opposed to stone, but the psychological effect of facing a corpse in battle is undoubtable effective. A true zombie on the other hand, they're conscious, self aware, they are sapient, *alive* in all but body."

"But they're dead! How can a zombie be alive?"

"Just because its heart is not beating does not mean it's dead. Like I said, it is mentally alive, it has a physical body, it thinks and acts according to it's thoughts, does that not mean it is alive? A zombie is a resurrected human, or other sentient creature, fully aware and cognizant. They have their memories, they have their feelings, they have their body. *That* is the difference between true Necromancy, and what others *believe* to be Necromancy. Necromancy dabbles in life and death, while the practice of creating an inferius and other similar rituals and spells are an imitation."

"Well fuck me," I blurt, my mind racing wildly.

No... it couldn't be possible. Could it?
"Could I bring my parents back? Could I… could I actually bring them back?"

"No!" Severus thunders, shooting out of his seat. "Never, ever try and resurrect your parents, do you hear me? It's torment for someone to be brought out of the afterlife, the worst torture imaginable. Do you know where the muggles brain eating idea comes from?"

"Err, sort of?"

"The undead, the true undead can only abate their pain in the most unwholesome of ways. They feast on the living, and it's documented as bringing momentary respite from whatever hell they have gone through. That is where the idea comes from."

"Holy mother of all fuck," I murmur, horrified at the idea. "How do you know all this?"

"I'm… well educated regarding every kind of magic I can get my hands on. I won't even attempt to cast half of the spells I learn, but it doesn't hurt to have knowledge. I can counter many a curse that others would be lost attempting to heal, as an example. It does help that I was and am, I imagine, well trusted by the Dark Lord. As much as I hate the monster, he does have one of the most incredible libraries I have ever laid my eyes on."

"Well, that changes a lot," I say, trying to wrap my head around everything I've just learned. "So, what does this mean? What can I do as a Necromancer? All I've learned so far is offensive spells, rotting curses and the like."

Scratching his chin, Severus eyes me, obviously mulling over our discussion. This is one hell of a therapy session. "I only know of the primary spells that Necromancy is famous, or rather, infamous for. Resurrection is the focus of the field, but there are many spells to do with control of the underworld. Shadow travel being the most famous one that I can recall."

"The only spell I've cast that has anything to do with the underworld left me feeling a bit… well, a lot queasy," I grimace, vividly remembering the conjured pig being torn to bits. "What's shadow travel?"

"It's a method of travel you dolt, it's in the name," Severus clips. "You know of apparition, correct? Well, shadow travel is similar to apparition, at least the end result is. The method involves the caster moving from one point to another via the afterlife, specifically the underworld."

"Well that sounds absolutely fucking horrid."

"Quite. Unfortunately, that's all I know about the practice."

"Thanks Severus," I say, suddenly becoming very embarrassed. I blush, scratching my forehead sheepishly. "Sorry for uh, throwing all that at you."

"It's quite alright Helene, just try to keep your… more violent talents secret for the time being. I would prefer to not see you burnt at the stake after doing so much to help you. It would be a waste of all my good work."

"Thanks Severus, what would I do without you," I reply snidely, his dry sarcasm beginning to rub off on me. "But honestly, thank you. I was expecting you to burn me at the stake yourself."

"I can't particularly imagine where I gave you that idea. Really, you should expect better of me. I seem to recall you dubbing me a big softy in our last chat."

I laugh, still in disbelief that I got away with calling him such a thing. "Er, sorry about that. I guess
I'm just paranoid is all."

"Even if you're paranoid, that doesn't mean nobody is out to get you," he smirks, yet his tone still quite serious. "Do be careful, alright?"

"Can do Severus," I reply, waving at him as I leave his office.

I stop to lean against the wall a few corridors down, my head swimming.

Wow.

So, that's what all this means huh? I have power over life and death? Actual power over it? Fuck. Me. Running.

What am I supposed to do with this knowledge? This responsibility? Probably blackmail the hell out of some people for one, most likely Fudge, but that's just my inner marauder speaking.

Wow.

Is that really the first thing I can think of? Using my apparent ability to resurrect the dead to blackmail someone? How fucking lame is that? I mean, it's not like I'm about to go out and attempt to conquer Britain, but there's got to be something more interesting that I can do with this.

Could I potentially kill Voldemort outright without ever having to go and fight him in person?

What can I do with this?

That's probably the most important question right now. What is the limit? Where does this power stop and start, what are its weaknesses? I'm going to have to start some experiments... as soon as I'm no longer disgusted by the idea of resurrecting somebody.

“Holy shit, my life is fucking insane,” I whisper quietly, wandering back to the common room.

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January flows into February, which in turn changes to March. The months zip by, the weight of the first semester's traumas slowly diminishing through my talks with Severus.

Sirius has refused to go and apologize to him since our discussion, citing that he has 'no real reason to go and apologize to him now, as Severus will never accept it.' I've sent him numerous letters detailing that this is a ridiculously stupid reason for him to not apologize to Severus, but each letter that he's sent back to me has been more heavily charmed than the rest.

After having my hair dyed neon pink, I've kept to scanning every single letter he sends me to make sure that he hasn’t jinxed the rest in some childish effort to pay me back for requesting that he act like a goddamn adult.

Needless to say, I'm getting incredibly frustrated with Sirius.

Thankfully, the rest of the final term passed by without any fuss. A suite of tests interspersed with my standard training regiment, as well as a couple rituals I deemed important enough to undertake.

The first ritual that I completed should really have been done earlier in the year. Greater resistance to poisons and venoms sounds like it would have come in handy if my talks with Magna, I still can’t believe I almost went with her first idea of 'Miss Snakey', went tits up. Sure, I had a rooster on me, a pocket rooster to be exact, but that’s not something that really provides me comfort. I still haven't
come up with a better name for that. So, the resistance ritual is a bit of a ‘hindsight is 20/20’ gesture, as it would have probably kept me going if I was bitten by Magna. Better safe than sorry though, and I’m happy that I’ve gotten it done.

The second ritual I undertook focuses on physical stamina. Superior strength doesn’t do me any good if I get tuckered out after five minutes of running, jumping, or anything else that's remotely strenuous. Sure, working out would improve stamina, but it would take an inordinate amount of exercise to bring my endurance up to speed with my strength. It’s way simpler to just magically mutilate myself and call it a day.

The year ends on a low note, thank the gods. No mysterious disappearances, no (more) deaths, no possessions, hauntings, attacks, monsters, or any other ridiculous, inane bullshit that tends to follow along in my path. I'm convinced I'm cursed, but at least it knows when to let up for a little while. Everyone needs a little bit of breathing room. Fingers crossed that third year isn't as insane, emotionally scarring, or otherwise terrible as this school year.

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I run my hands through my hair and over my face, groaning in frustration. "Yes Sirius, you have to apologize to him… No! No ifs, ands, or buts about it! You're going to go and apologize to Severus for being a little homicidal monster when you were fifteen! You can't keep putting this off!"

"But Helene!" He whines petulantly, stomping his feet.

I pinch the bridge of my nose, sighing loudly. Gods preserve me, I just may kill this man after literally dying to make sure that he didn’t.

"I don't care about your ego at the moment! Stop acting like a man-child! You've got to at least try making amends with him!"

Scowling through the mirror, Sirius nods childishly, blowing a strand of hair away from his face as he pouts. Petulant mutt.

"Seriously. Hey! No puns! You've got to start growing up a little Sirius," I reprimand, astonished that my godfather can't even understand why he should apologize for nearly killing someone due to a childish feud.

"What do you mean I've got to grow up? I'm an adult!" he argues, hands waving. "I can't believe I'm being chewed out by a teenager!"


Sirius’ childish attitude has been incredibly concerning. First it was funny. The guy runs around, plays a couple practical jokes, everyone laughs, end of discussion. Right?

No. He acts like a pre-teen every fucking day.

I don’t know if this is the result of Azkaban wasting away what was left of his brain cells, or if he was always this way. Octavius says that for the most part, his behaviour is normal, at least, normal for Sirius. That’s what I find concerning, is that his inability to take anything seriously is a sign of something greater. He’s dealing with something, and I don’t know what it is.

I remember him saying to me that things didn’t necessarily feel ‘real’ to him, like what he was experiencing wasn’t actually happening to him. This sort of… disconnect, so to say, can’t be good
for him.

“Sirius, I’m worried for you. Your refusal to apologize, even after you promised me you would apologize, is indicative of a larger problem.”

"I just don't understand what the big deal is!" Sirius argues, deflecting the conversation away from my little intervention. “We were both children, and it happened a long, long time ago. Almost two decades ago Helene! Why does this still matter?"

"It doesn't matter how long ago this happened," I state firmly. Christ, am I his bloody mum? "Listen, I love you to bits Sirius, but you’re acting like a spoiled teenager. You have to realize that stuff like that just doesn't go away on its own. If anyone should understand that, it's you."

"What?" he asks, perplexed.

"How would you react if Severus came up to you this minute and apologized for how he treated you in school?"

"Well, I'd be a bit stunned to be honest," he says, eyebrows knotted together as he thinks. "I'd probably uh, well- I'd probably apologize to him as well," he continues sheepishly, dragging out the 'o' in probably.

He scratches his head, shrugging plaintively. His eyes suddenly bug out as he connects the dots, his expression slowly morphing from embarrassment to mild horror. "Oh shit," he groans, hands knotted in his messy hair.

"Yeah, you get it now?"

"Oh shiiiiiiiiiiiiit," he continues, squatting awkwardly and resting his elbows on his thighs.

"Yeah."

"Fuck."

"Yep."

"God damn, I'm an ass."

"That's exactly what I've been telling you for the last fifteen minutes Sirius."

"Fuck."

"Mnhm," I echo, once again reaffirming that yes, he is an ass.

"So, uh. I guess I better go and apologize to old Sev' huh? Do you know when he's free?"

"Please, for fucks sake, don't call him Sev'. He's likely to render you into potions ingredients right then and there if you even think about calling him that." I clasp my hands together, enunciating every other word with them.

Sirius shakes his head in genuine confusion, making me lose just a little bit more faith in him. "You sure? I used to call him that back in school. At least I'm not calling him Sniv-"

"Yeah, don't call him that either," I sigh, kneading my temples as I try to get through to the stubborn, idiotic, and lovable idiot that is my godfather. "Just… no names, alright? Call him Snape, be respectful, and for the love of all that is holy, do not call him Snivellus."
"Can do, can do," he murmurs, lost in thought again. "Wow, life is weird huh? If you told me when I was fifteen that I was even thinking about apologizing to Snape I would have probably had an aneurysm then and there."

"If you told me that I would be having this conversation with you, I would have probably suffered the same," I reply. "Also, I know Severus is free on Sundays between lunch and dinner, so you can probably get a hold of him then. Try flooing him maybe?"

"Sounds like a good plan kid," Sirius nods emphatically.

"No pranks."

"Aw come on," he whines. "You're no fun at all!"

"No, afraid I'm not," I assert, grinning at him. "Someone here has to act like an adult, and apparently that's me."

"Pfft. You just watch, I'll be so incredibly mature it'll blow even Minnie's mind."

"Don't call her that either."

"Aw, come on."

"Sirius, listen to me for a moment, alright?" I hold one finger up, asking him to be silent. I exhale slowly, not at all anticipating the next part of this conversation.

"Think of this as an intervention. Your behaviour over the last two years has been funny, there's no argument about that. You're a great guy and you've got a wicked sense of humour, but you're too old to act that way all the time." He smiles weakly at me and I return the gesture. At least he's not arguing with me about it. "It's starting to become a problem, and I hate to be the one to come out and lecture you, but I'm sure you'd rather it be me than Octavius, or God forbid, Terra."

"Oh. That would be awful."

"Yeah, she scares the hell out of me too," I say, shuddering at the idea of Terra on a warpath. "Just… your constant Prattish behaviour isn't healthy, and it's not you. Sure, you may act like that occasionally, when the mood fits, but all the time? That's not good for you Sirius, and I'm worried that it's a way for you to distract yourself from something."

Sirius bows his head like a shamed dog, his ears drooping slightly. "Shite… I'll do my best to reign it in. It's a little hard after, well- Azkaban."

"Fuck, I'm sorry," I breathe. "I really shouldn't be so intense with you about all of this. This isn't an attack on you, alright? I love you, and I want to see you get better. I want to see my favourite rapscallion of a godfather grow to be proud of himself. You helped me, I want to help you. Does that sound good?"

"That sounds good to me," he repeats, a smile tugging at his lips. "I think that… I think that I'm going to go back to see the mind healers. They helped me a lot right after my release, and I think they can help me with my current, er- emotional problems." He covers his mouth with his fist, embarrassed that he has to even see a mind healer. He's just like Lisa it seems. He would rather try to deal with things on his own than have others maybe think he's crazy.

"You want me to pencil you in with Severus this weekend?"
"Cheeky little shit!" he objects, grinning briefly before returning to his previous somber mood. "Thanks for the kick up the arse Helene."

"Any time Sirius, just make sure to do the same to me if I need it, alright?"

"Absolutely, you can always count on me to kick you in the arse. I'll make sure to get one or two kicks in a day during the summer. That should keep you on your toes."

"Oh, piss off. We just talked about this."

"Love you too kid."

I leave Sirius and walk over to the gardens, hoping to get a relaxing stroll in to ease my mind after what was a very stressful conversation.

I admire the sheer array of different plants and flowers that are found in the Greengrasses gardens, the impressive display being quite apt for their family name. A myriad of colours shine out at me, from pastels to neon, and every single shade of green under the sun, the back yard more closely resembles an oasis than a greenhouse.

I sit down on soft grass, closing my eyes and sighing, tension leaving my body as I listen to the steady roar of a nearby waterfall. I find that the sound of the rushing water soothes my mind. It’s not a tranquil sound by any means, but the heavy cascade somehow resonates with me, like it reflects my inner thoughts.

My thoughts being a constant turmoil as of late. I’m weighing over different options, approaches for how to tackle my many problems.

What do I do about the current Death Eaters running around Britain? Do I remove the politically or physically, and if I do decide to assassinate them, what consequences will that bring?

Secondly, I now apparently entertain the idea of assassinating my enemies. Killing Lockhart changed me intrinsically. The sheer ease with which I struck his head from his shoulders… it scared me, but I now find that I feel surprisingly comfortable about it. Will I still hesitate when it comes time to kill again? Will I still feel that same rush of self-hatred? The confused anguish that accompanies the ending of another human’s life?

I don’t rightly know, but what I do know is that I need to start pondering what I’m going to do with Dumbledore.

From what I can tell, he’s decided to stand back and see how things play out, ignoring me while having McGonagall check in with him occasionally to make sure that everything is well. I don’t know if I should be worried about his attitude, as I expected him to come down on me hard after our last argument.

Either something has happened to dissuade him from harassing me and carrying on with whatever ridiculous plan he has for me, or he’s been thoroughly distracted. A distracted Dumbledore is good for me, and it’s the most likely, as I doubt he would ever let up in his obsessions with my future.

I frown, tilting my head to the side as I hear people approaching. I open my eyes to see Daphne and Tracey taking a walk together, the two of them chatting amiably, enjoying a warm summers day.

Daphne perks up when she sees me, waving excitedly. She notices my half-asleep, relaxed state, carrying on with her afternoon stroll and leaving me to my imminent nap. Tracey on the other hand, scowls heavily when she notices me.
Seriously, what is that girls problem?

Do people just turn on me when they feel like it? Is it immature for me to be so thoroughly frustrated with a thirteen-year-old girl being inexplicably pissed off at me?

I smile at her, ignoring her deepening grimace as I focus on just trying to kick back and take an after-lunch nap.
Chapter Sixteen | Blood Runs Red

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The summer after second year follows the relatively tame mood that the end of the school year carried. A vacation to the south of France involving Montpellier, Nice, and Bordeaux. All gorgeous cities. I really don't understand why we English hate the French so much. Sure, we've had a touchy history, and they can be very… well, French about a lot of things, but wow do they have some incredible cities! The magic district in Paris alone is what really opened my eyes to how backwards my own country is.

Diagon Alley is just exactly that. An alley. The City of Lights boasts a whole bloody neighbourhood hidden away in the centre of Paris, a hop skip and a jump away from the Arc de Triomphe. A magical quarter hosting every shop and restaurant one could think of, the bustling busy square tucked next to a line of apartments. I spotted Veela, Goblins, Vampires, and even Elves in the thronging crowds rushing every which way to finish their shopping. It really makes me wonder what Beauxbatons looks like. Surely a hell of a lot more welcoming than Hogwarts I'd imagine. Really, as much as I love Hogwarts, it is a little dreary. I'd much rather live in a French palace than an English castle.

What I really want to know is how on Earth is Britain taken seriously by the ICW and the Wizarding World as a whole after seeing the political state of France. Shit. Looks like I'm going to be studying politics this year. Boring, but necessary. Eugh, not looking forward to that.

Daphne and Tracey were unsurprised to see the diversity in the crowds, so I'm assuming that they've visited Paris's magical district before. Lisa and Padma on the other hand were just as shocked as I was, muttering excitedly about how Diagon Alley is 'like, super boring.' Someone please strike me down if I ever talk like that. Please. Hermione on the other hand was absolutely ecstatic to see the show of equality that the French exhibited. Looks like S.P.E.W. is going to start early in this time line, although Hermione will probably know better when she realizes that House Elves require the bond to live.

I still haven't figured out why Tracey has been such an unrighteous bitch in every single interaction I've had with her.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, which should probably be the motto of my life. Either that or the ancient Chinese curse: may you live in interesting times. Fucking Potter luck.

Pettigrew managed to escape from Azkaban. To be honest, I am a little impressed that the rat got out, but I'm still bloody infuriated by it. Apparently, some dumbass, green, fresh from training Auror stationed on the hellish island forgot to put animagus cuffs on him. Twenty galleons say he was bribed by one of the many 'reformed' Death Eaters in the Ministry. Sometimes I really hate this bloody country.

So, it looks like I'm going to have a repeat of my past third-years visitors, the ever beautiful, friendly, and terribly lovely Dementors running around the school grounds supposedly 'protecting the students.' Yeah, if you count an influx of major depression, uncontrollable fear, and an all-round sense that life is inherently meaningless a way to keep students safe. I'm seriously surprised there were no nervous breakdowns or suicide attempts amongst any of the students last time. Well, apart from my nervous breakdown. A yearly conniption is necessary for me, as I find that it builds
character – at least, that’s what I tell myself.

This is why I'm sitting in my train compartment ignoring my friend's conversations, wand at the ready as I peer at the window waiting for the first sign of frost. I'm really not interested in passing out or having my soul eaten. Just a personal preference of mine.

"Helene, you with us?"

"Yeah, yeah, just being my paranoid self," I reply, smiling comfortably at a concerned Hermione.

"Well, that explains everything," she scoffs, smacking me lightly as Astoria giggles quietly.

"You excited to start Hogwarts Astoria?" I ask my adoptive little sister, who's eyes immediately shine with unbridled anticipation.

"Absolutely! I wonder if I'm going to be in Ravenclaw or Slytherin," she babbles excitedly, eyes wide and a finger on her chin. "Either would be good, but I think I'd like to be in Ravenclaw with you, rather than Daphne," she adds, laughing as Daphne shouts her displeasure.

"Of course, chose me over Helene. What am I? Chopped liver?" She complains, forgetting for just a moment that as all big sisters do, she should pretend to be uninterested in being friends with her younger sibling. Daphne can say that she hates her sister until the world ends, but I know that she’ll always dote on her.

"Wow, I didn't know people actually said that," Hermione interjects playfully.

"I do," Daphne huffs, turning back to her book.

Looking over to my left, I'm pleased to see Luna chatting happily with Tracey. Ignoring my current tension with the brunette, I'm happy to see the two of them getting along. They became close friends last year when Luna had been adopted into our little gang. It pleases me to no end that Luna won't be tormented by the 'Claws in this timeline. The girl doesn't have a mean bone in her body, and I'm pretty sure that she has some sort of empathetic abilities. Either that or she's been micro dosing every day since she was four years old. Her pupils are certainly large enough for me to think that she's on something.

The train screeches to a halt, the breaks loudly engaging as we pass over one of the many bridges on the route to Hogwarts. I roll my wand in my fingers, giving it a light spin as I prepare myself for what’s to come. Looks like it's dementor time.

"Why is the train stopped?"

"What's going on?"

"Do you know what's happening?"

"Quiet," I command, hand raised to stop the girls from babbling. "Get behind me, there's dementors on the train."

"Dementors? Seriously?" Daphne curses, nearly tearing a page out of her book in her surprise. "It's not like Pettigrew is on the damned train!"

"They're bloody demons Daphne, do you expect them to pass up a free meal?" I retort.

Furious and scared, Daphne pulls the rest of the girls behind me.
"I don't think that all dementors are bad," Luna announces. "There's got to be some that are friendly, you know?"

"Now is not the time Luna."

"But when is the time? Is it not always the time? Unless you have a time turner of course, but then the time is there as well as here."

"Maybe Luna will confuse the dementors into leaving?"

"Probably," Tracey smirks half-heartedly, ignoring our current spat and hiding her underlying fear. "No hugging the dementors, alright Luna?"

"You're no fun," she pouts, cheeks puffed out angrily, completely oblivious to the panic around her. At least, I think she’s oblivious. I’m of the mind that she’s just constantly having us on and is just as scared as the rest of the girls.

I stop to wonder if my insanity is contagious. That would probably explain the dynamics of this group.

Frost crackles across the shuttered window pane, flecks of ice bursting over the glass in a geometric explosion. The trains walls begin to shudder and creak beneath the oppressive cold washing throughout the carriage, the wood audibly groaning its protests.

Right on queue, a scabbed gray hand peeks through a crack in the sliding door, prying it open. The hooded monstrosity peers out at us sightlessly, the patronus charm on the tip of my wand before the thing speaks.

"Greetings, Child of Death," it rattles, the voice empty and disused, gravelled like a heavy smoker.

"What the fuck," I mutter, staring at the apparition in horror. Why does shit like this always happen to me?

"What are you here for, demon? Leave before I make you leave."

"I am simply here to pay my respects, Child," it replies, inclining its head ever so slightly, its robes drifting errantly in an invisible wind. "My apologies for disturbing you. I will let the others know, so they do not earn your ire."

"Do not feast on any of the residents of the train, nor any of residents of the school once we arrive," I command, just going with the flow, because what else can you do in a situation like this? "They are off limits, and not to be devoured, do you understand me?"

"Understood," it says, the voice a sibilant whisper in my head as the monster shuts the door and drifts off, hopefully to tell its friends to get the fuck off the train.

"He-Helene... did you just talk to a dementor?" Lisa asks, voice trembling, while Astoria stares at me in wonder.

"Uh, yeah. Apparently I did," I gape, blinking at the spot the dementor just occupied. "Can you not tell anyone? I'd prefer not to get any more attention than I normally do."

"What did it say?"

"What do you mean? Did you not hear me?"
"You just sort of growled at it," Padma says, shrugging in confusion.

I feel the sudden urge to tear my hair out. "God damnit! Another bloody magical language?"

"What?"

"Oh, I'm a parselmouth," I say, waving it off casually as if it's completely and utterly normal thing for me to say.

"You- you're a parselmouth? And you're only telling us now?" Daphne shouts, actually beginning to tear her hair out.

"I didn't think it was all that important to be honest, and if it got out I'm sure half the school would have an aneurysm trying to figure out if I'm evil or not. The last time was worse enough."

"Huh? Last time?"

"Oh! Someone caught me talking to a snake in Diagon Alley the first time I visited the menagerie," I spit out awkwardly, having to think on my feet. I smack myself mentally, Me and my big bloody mouth. "Thank Christ they didn't recognize me."

"I bet," Daphne replies. "I'm not judging you for it, it's just- well, unexpected."

"Tell me about it. Probably a holdover from my Black blood."

"You're a Black?"

"My paternal Grandmother," I explain, having to stop to remember what the relation was. It's not easy with the Black family tree being so convoluted. Too much marrying of first cousins does not a healthy mind make. "Honestly, I wish I got the metamorph abilities instead, would make one hell of a party trick."

"Metamorph?" Hermione asks, eyes alight at the prospect of new and untouched knowledge.

"Someone who can change their body at will, sort of like a shapeshifter in muggle fiction. Much, much cooler than talking to snakes. Parselmagic is boring as well," I add, remembering my brief foray into the field.

Most of the spells are simply clones of regular ones, cast by incanting what the user wants, as opposed to the standard tweaking of Latin phrases. Sure, it would help in a duel if I didn’t already know silent casting, but it’s otherwise useless. The only thing to come out of it is that common Latin healing spells spoken in parseltongue, which is a form of mental gymnastics in itself to simply get to work, are much more effective.

Took me about five months to figure out how to incant in Latin while still speaking parsel. Fucking put my mind through the ringer.

"Isn't parselmagic really dark?"

"Not necessarily," I start, trying to figure out how to explain it. "I mean, it is dark, but that doesn't mean it's evil. Really," I pause at their confused looks. "It has more of a focus on healing than it does anything else from what I've read. That's where the Rod of Asclepius comes from," I add, looking at Hermione, as she's probably the only one who'll understand that. "The only offensive spells that I've read about are basically the same as the standard Latin ones, just harder to counter because opponents can’t understand it.”
"Sounds like it would come in handy," Tracey says, adding her two cents. I almost start in shock when she actually speaks directly to me, having to hide my surprise.

"…well, I haven't delved too deep into any of it and have only tried casting a few spells in parseltongue. I should look into it a bit more," I reply awkwardly, unsure of how to speak to her.

"Just don't go and get yourself jailed for it," Luna chirps dreamily. "I'd be very disappointed to have our friendship cut short."

"I'll keep that in mind Luna."

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Dumbledore steepled his fingers, gazing ominously upon the rapidly filling Great Hall. His eyes were locked upon the Ravenclaw table, studying the red-headed girl who held such an iron grip over his dreams and fears.

The future of the world rested upon her shoulders, and he hadn’t the foggiest idea of how to bring her back under his wing. Not that she ever was under his wing, but he liked to think otherwise.

He watched as she bickered good naturedly amongst her friends, a rag tag group of misfits if there ever was one. Sure, they may not be misfits in the sense that they are outcasts, but they wouldn’t fit into any group other than her own, and it was very much her group, not theirs.

A muggleborn bookworm, hailing from a boring upper-middleclass borough of London, having grown up with a boring upper-middleclass family, and attended a boring upper-middleclass primary school. Albus cringed internally at her fervor for social issues whenever it was brought up amongst the staff. He felt no ill will towards muggleborns, but he full well knew that the deck was stacked against them. He could already imagine her horrified reaction after graduating and realizing that she would be lucky to get a job as a bellhop, let alone in the ministry.

He looked to the girl sitting beside her. One born to Indian expatriates, a family that left their home country due to the poor treatment of women. Albus grimaced at the idea of witches being forced into marriages and kept as broodmares regardless of their social stature. Savages, all of them, he thought.

His attention turned to the halfblood girl sitting much too closely to her Indian friend. Albus felt that she was too sheltered by her parents and will most likely be unprepared for the outside world after graduation. A girl who, upon seeing the demise of Professor Quirrel, spent the remainder of the year sleeping in her friend’s bed, too terrified to get to sleep on her own. The only reason he knew of this was because the of a nifty ward that was added to the school a few centuries ago by a radical puritan Headmistress, allowing the Head of the School at the time to be alerted when two students were in one bed after hours.

Albus puzzled over the younger girl, the ditzy blonde from the Lovegood family. He noticed her act, the way she put on a face to avoid getting close to others, or allowing them to get close to her. He remembered her mother, Pandora. A talented woman, incredibly talented, but her brash regard to her own safety led to her demise. Evidently, it also led to her daughter being traumatized after having witnessed her mother’s death. A bright girl, but a broken one.

His gaze carried past her to the Slytherin table, where the two Greengrass daughters were sat, the youngest bubbling excitedly to her older sister while their friend looked on in amusement.

The Greengrasses worried him. He knew that they weren’t dark and were actually one of the few true neutral families in the Wizengamot, but that wasn’t what worried him. What did, was how they
got a hold of the Potter girl before he could, when he should have already had a hold on her considering his placement of the girl with the Dursleys.

That family had no idea of her importance, and no matter how many times he attempted to get into contact with Octavius, he was always rebuffed.

He studied the older girl, the perfect image of a pureblood heiress in public, yet a playful child, almost frightfully immature when on her own. The dichotomy of the two personalities she exhibited was quite typical of a pureblood child. How they rebelled when out of view of their family, removing their mask and putting on another, unable to act their true self even when only in their own company. What confused him about her was the fact that her family didn’t hold traditional values in any regard, so her personality was all of her own creation.

The younger sister seemed to be a regular child. Bubbly, and excitable to a fault. As she had only been in the school for one day, he didn’t exactly have a feel for her yet, and carried on to their halfblood friend.

What a poor, poor girl. Her father had been locked up in Azkaban a few years ago. He didn’t know the specifics of it, but he’d heard that there was a massive fight and that he was taken away by the aurors. He did know that it was one of the few instances in which a muggle was sentenced under wizarding law, so something important must have happened. Albus shook his head sadly, his gut flipping in empathetic pain for the child. No one should live without their parents. He knew that most of all, and still felt the pain of his father’s imprisonment to this day.

Turning his gaze back over to the object of his fascination, his stare didn’t bely his feelings of indecision to the Girl-Who-Lived, who glanced towards him, her green eyes furrowing slightly in anger as they passed over him. He mused that her other title would come with time: The Chosen One… The-Girl-Who-Vanquished, as accorded by the prophecy.

Dumbledore wasn’t sure what to make of her, the girl being so radically different from what he expected. He thought that upon her entering Hogwarts she would be somewhat cowed, like any muggleborn orphan would be when being confronted by the majesty that was the wizarding world. Instead, she was aware of magic already. He had no idea how that was, and he was still attempting to find out the answer to that very mysterious question.

No, instead the girl was bright, clever beyond all means, and incredibly suspicious of anything and everything. She did not trust easily, that was evident. He could see it in the way she now treated his Deputy Head. Where she was once friendly and eager, she was now frosty, bordering on outright antagonistic when interacting with McGonagall. She must have discovered that McGonagall was keeping tabs on her, he realized.

Dumbledore turned his unwilling attention to the sorting, clapping calmly and loudly for each and every new student, although he was a touch more reserved for the ones that made their new home with the family of silver and green. He allowed himself to forget his worries for a moment, instead happy to focus on what was in front of him, beckoning in the next generation of children and taking them under his righteous wing. He commanded the room, his presence indomitable as he stood and greeted his new charges, amazing them with his sweeping gesture, a feast materializing in front of them.

He smiled as he sat down, pleased with the new wave of students coming from far and wide for him to lead them. No one else could lead them. He was absolutely sure of that, for he was the shepherd, and they were his flock.
The first month and a bit of classes is the same old deal. Study some meaningless foundational work, write a bajillion essays of an inane length (seriously, length? The wizarding world really should use word count), practice the wand motions, and then, after all else is done, then you can actually cast the spell.

I’m of the mind that safety is for losers, but it does help that I can reattach a limb if needs be, considering my unique physique. The lack of blood in my system leads me to believe that I may be partly a magical construct, and whether or not that idea was confirmed in my ensuing experiments, I did come to realize that as long as a body part is not eviscerated it can still be put back.

How did I figure this out?

Well, I accidentally cut off my finger and decided to put it back on with a Necromantic healing spell, an old variation off of an Aramaic sewing charm. A bastardized variation for sure, but it still worked incredibly well, and would probably only work on someone like me.

I lament the fact that my life would be so much more entertaining if I still had Seamus in some of my classes. That guy has an incredible talent in which he can cause an explosion with any spell. Any spell. Levitation charm? If he throws enough magic at it, whatever he’s levitating will inevitably burst. Water conjuring? Well, it doesn’t explode, but he did inadvertently make heavy water, which Hermione found incredibly horrifying. I hope beyond all hopes that Seamus never becomes interested in nuclear physics.

The days go by with me roaming the halls with extreme caution. I doubt Pettigrew is going to try to break into Hogwarts the same way Sirius did, it’d be way too risky. The only thing that the rat has going for him is a keen sense of self-preservation, and he'd probably have a nervous fit coming back to the school. No, he can't be that stupid.

I kill time the same way I always kill time at this school; casting obscenely dangerous spells in the Room of Requirement. Of course, I'm back on the Necromancy train that I've been riding for the last year, and the station it's stopped at is resurrection.

Resurrection is sort of a one spell fits all deal, with the caster having to pump more power in to raise and control more, or bigger bodies. So, if I wanted to send a dragon after someone or raise my own personal army, I’d have to make sure I got a good meal in and a couple of strengthening potions beforehand. It’s different from animation in the sense that I’m actually bringing that beings soul back from the dead and placing it in its body, rather than controlling it via ambient magic, which is a life source of its own.

That’s apparently what that wispy stuff I see in the air is. Ambient magic. It’s a non-sentient form of life and energy as far as I can tell, and the closest thing I can compare it to would be what hippies call the life of the Earth. When I animate something, which I have recently tried and found incredibly interesting in a very morbid sort of way, I infuse the bones, or body if there is any left of the being with ambient magic instead of its soul. This allows me to control it much more easily than by animation charms or transfiguration, and it also somewhat strengthens the body.

Still, I haven't actually resurrected anything. It's still too… I don't know the best word to describe it. Wrong? Yeah, that hits the mark. I just have an actual tangible sense of wrongness about the meat and bread of my powers. So… no, I haven't gone and committed any crimes against humanity, sanity, or the order of the universe quite yet. Maybe when I'm fifty I'll give it a try. That sounds like a good age for it. Announcement! The Necromancy train has stopped at resurrection, and it's staying there for the time being!

I think I'm going to focus on shadow travel. That sounds like it should be a lot more fun, and a lot
less psychologically scaring.

You know, speaking of ways to kill time, I haven’t spoken to Severus in a while.

Practically kicking the door down, I waltz into Severus’ office like I own the place. He jumps in fear, and I grin at his hastily fashioned look of fury.

"Scared ya’?" I ask, laying myself down across his sofa.

"I have never been scared once," he demurs. Most would find his tone harsh, but I can hear the underlying playfulness in it. "Never."

"Well, I think I actually just scared the pants off you."

"Not a chance."

"I definitely did."

Huffing, Severus pulls up a chair for himself as I'm taking up the entirety of his sofa.

"So, Helene, what brings you to my office today?"

"Nothing really," I admit, resting my chin on my fist. "Just felt like saying hi. Making your life difficult. You know, the usual."

"Circe preserve me," he curses, crossing his arms. "Can I not have anything nice in my life?"

"What about me! Aren't I something nice in your life?"

"You are a curse, young Helene. A curse," he says, trying to look intimidating but failing when the side of his mouth pulls up in a smile.

"Well, there is one new thing," I confess. "It's pretty weird, just letting you know."

Severus laughs quietly at that, shaking his head in faux dismay. "Is anything ever not odd with you?"

"Not that I'm aware of," I say, scratching my chin thoughtfully. "No, pretty sure things are always odd."

"So… what new and terribly odd thing has happened in your life?"

"Er, well, you know how the dementors are here, right?"

He frowns at that, probably wondering if I’ve hit myself in the head. "Yes, how could I not be aware of their presence? Surely you understand that they would affect someone like me much more than the other residents of the castle?"

I scratch my head awkwardly at his snappy reply. "Sorry about that. I didn’t mean to, well, you know what I mean. So… yeah- apparently I can talk to dementors."

Snape sits in his chair, hands over his face as he groans quietly. "Is anything ever normal with you?" he cries, probably pleading with some wizarding God that I’ve never heard of. "Anything? Why couldn't you just be like your mother? Hell! Even your father! No ancient forbidden magics, no speaking to demons, no… no any of this!"

"No, nothing can ever be normal with me," I say. I really wish things could be normal, but
unfortunately that’s never going to happen as long as Fate keeps having her way with my life. I should ask Death to bring her along next time he meets me so I can give her a good lashing. ”Trust me, I don’t like it at all. Even if I tried to go on vacation and get away from the madness in Britain I’d probably end up saving whichever godforsaken country I travel to.”

"Or destroy it entirely."

"That too."

"So," I begin, lacing my fingers together, derailing the current topic of conversation. "Any news on the Pettigrew front? I’m sort of hoping he's stupid enough to come back to Hogwarts so I can nab him. I think he'd make a great Christmas present to Sirius, all wrapped up and gagged."

"I didn't know the Mutt was into that sort of thing," Severus shoots, grinning at my look of extreme distaste. Ever since Sirius apologized to him they’ve begun spending some time together, hesitantly at first, but I think they’re beginning to find that they’re actually pretty similar people.

They both wear masks. Sirius bears the grin of comedy, while Severus holds the scowl of tragedy. Case in point, their senses of humour. Severus is normally dry and witty, but every once in a while, he lets loose with something horridly raunchy and distasteful, like putting the mental image of Pettigrew bound and gagged in a more sensual manner than normal into my head.

"Oh, ew!" I grimace. That is an awful mental image.

"Joking aside, he's not been spotted anywhere. You said he helped to resurrect the Dark Lord in your fourth year, correct?"

"Yeah, bone of the father and all that good stuff. It is sort of integral that he resurrects old Tom seeing as it's impossibly hard, or just downright impossible to kill a spirit even with my particular skills. It just doesn't feel right, right?"

"I'd suppose so. It would make things quite difficult for him to be killed, truly killed, if he wasn't first resurrected," he puzzles. "The only way to get rid of him as a spirit would be through an exorcism, but you’d need a true White Mage to accomplish such a thing. I sincerely doubt that one has arisen at the same time that you have come into your powers."

"What do you mean?"

"There is a balance to magic," he states, holding his hands out like a pair of scales. "The last time there was a Necromancer, at least a documented one, was just after the time of Merlin when the balance was heavily tilted towards the light. Necromancy is the archetypal dark magic, Black Magic, and most researchers believe that a paragon of the light or dark only shows up when magic is not balanced."

He scribbles something out on a sheet of parchment, finding it easier to work out his thoughts by writing them down. “It fits into the old teachings of the Left-Hand Path and Right-Hand Path, the Left being Black Magics,” he explains, pointing out a hastily drawn picture of a pentagram. He moves the quill, sketching out a trinity knot. I pause, looking at the trinity knot and noticing its incredibly close resemblance to Death’s signature. “The Right is White Magics. They're not necessarily opposed to each other, but the Left-Hand has been vilified ever since the eighteenth century, when a Dark Lady killed nearly two million people with a magically engineered plague.”

I shudder at that horrific statement, and the allusion Severus has made towards my magic being satanic in nature. Left-Hand Path, Pentagram… it’s all a little too biblical for me. I know he’s not
going out of his way to make that comparison, but being brought up by the Dursleys, they tried to put the fear of God into me a little more literally than others would. “So… what would someone call a practiser of White Magic?” I ask, pushing the subject past the discussion of the esoteric occult.

Severus scratches his chin, trying to remember some errant bit of information. “I believe they would be called a Zontanomancer, if we follow the Greek etymology of nekros. If we want to use the French source of nigromancie, we would say Blancomancer. I’m more partial to the Latin use of Albumancer, to denote the use of White Magic as opposed to the emphasis on death that’s used by the traditional nekros.”

My head rattles slightly taking in all of that information. “You like linguistics I guess?”

“Very much so. Etymology has a lot to do with spell development, which is one of my hobbies.”

I nod. It makes sense for such a studious man to have such studious pastimes. With my mind off the conversation, I notice that Severus seems to be a little better dressed than he normally is. His hair, normally limp and slightly greasy from potions fumes is looking fuller, shining healthily in the dim candlelight.

“Severus… are you going out tonight?” I ask, raising an eyebrow.

He raises one in reply, but not before I can catch his mild look of surprise.

"What could you be-" I ask, before staring him in the eyes. "What are you hiding Severus?

"I don't know what you mean," he glowers.

"Honestly, I've bared my soul to you. You can't tell me one little thing?"

"Are you really going to use that card?" he replies, glaring at me.

"Hey, sorry, that was out of line," I apologize. "I was just curious about how you’re dressed,” I say, gesturing towards his tailored robes and surprisingly shampoo model-like hair. “You don’t normally get all done up like this.”

"I don't think I could ever trust you with a matter like this,” he smirks, now smoothing out his expensive looking robes.

"Well, it couldn't be anything that important could it?" I state, thinking out loud. "It's not like you've got a date or anything."

Slightly flustered, Severus glances up at the clock before immediately shooing me from his office. "It's time for you to leave, little she-devil."

"What! Did I guess right?" I cry, fighting half heartedly as he shoves me out of the room. "I'm happy for you Severus!"

A non-committal grunt through the door as it's shut is my goodbye.

Hey, I really am happy for him. I think seeing someone would definitely cheer him up quite a bit. No more glowering and fussing around the students in class.

Smiling, I start making my way to the Hall for dinner. I look around curiously at the masses of students who are heading the same way. I wonder what's going on? We don't really get everyone coming to the Great Hall at the same time unless there's a-
God Damnit.

It's Halloween.

Muttering quiet obscenities under my breath I grab my usual spot next to Hermione, the rest of the group looking at me in quiet understanding. God damn I hate Halloween. What ridiculous, hare-brained scheme is going to happen today? I've already done trolls, as well as skipped the basilisk, and I doubt Sirius is going to show and slash up the Fat Lady just for fun. So, what the hell is going to happen today?

Let's run through the possibilities.

First, Pettigrew may actually be stupid enough to break into the school. Looks like I'm putting a ward net up around my bed tonight just to be safe.

Second, Dumbledore may try something. I don't know what, I don't know where, but he's often been involved in my Halloween mishaps. That, and he hasn't really talked to me since my blow up in first year. I doubt he's not keeping an eye on me, but the last time he didn't speak with me Sirius ended up falling through the bloody veil and I ended up on repeat hour.

Third, nothing happens. Doubtful, but still a possibility. I can only hope, right?

My money is on Dumbledore trying to get back into my good graces. Either that, or yet again professing me to be as dark as they come. Ironically, he's absolutely right. Hell, I'm not dark, I'm a Black Mage for all intents and purposes. Considering what Severus said earlier, I'm the harbinger of the dark side. Maybe I should change my name to Darth Potter? Hmm. Darth Helene?

Important questions in life, these are.

I ignore Dumbledore's yearly speech and praise, scoffing quietly when he mentions my past 'vanquishing' of Voldemort as a toddler. I really am sick and tired of being famous for having not died. No matter how many times I say it no one believes me; my mum obviously did all the work, I wasn't even old enough to speak at the time. I can't imagine how a toddler could somehow defeat one of the most powerful wizards to have ever lived.

I pick away at my food, what should be an incredible feast instead tasting dull and bland as I slowly chew an unidentified piece of roast meat. This is one of the times that I wish I was closer to being an adult. I'm sure if I drank enough firewhisky I'd feel something, and that'd dampen the constant impending sense of doom throughout the day. Either that, or I should have pulled a Severus and gotten out of the feast by nabbing myself a date.

Looking around at the sea of students I ponder whether it would even be worth it for me to enter into a relationship.

It'd have to be someone older. There's no way I'm going after anyone below sixth year. Eugh, that'd be beyond creepy.

Whatever. I shrug mentally. It's probably more trouble than it's worth, and it'd take away too much time from my training. Beefing myself up so I can go toe to toe with Voldemort seems a bit more important than awkwardly chasing after an older woman. I find myself distracted momentarily by an image of Amelia Bones dancing through my mind. I shake my head, startling Lisa as I try to purge my thoughts of any images of the intimidating woman. I feel slightly guilty as I sweep my gaze over Susan Bones, sending a silent and unknown apology to the back of her head. I’d be fine having a crush on someone if they weren’t old enough to be my mum.
But yeah, I must be mad to think I could juggle intensive training and dating. That, and the sheer danger that anyone I see would be in just being around me… no, not going to happen.

"Helene, you alright?" Hermione asks, breaking the tense silence at the table.

"Yeah, I'm alright," I sigh, running my hands through my hair. "Just Halloween, you know? It always gets to me."

"We're here for you if you need us, yeah?" She continues, repeating my words to the three of them last year and patting me on the arm.

"Thanks a bunch Hermione, and the rest of you girls," I say, smiling weakly at Lisa, Padma, and Luna, who smile back at me.

"I know how you feel," Luna confides, sporting a rare look, one of severity. "April third is hard for me as well… that's when my mother passed."

"Hey, same thing goes to you Luna. I'm here if you need me, alright?"

"Th- Thank you Helene," she whispers shyly.

"Anytime Luna, that's what friends are for."

We continue chatting lightly as the meal goes on, the mood getting lighter thanks to Hermione and Luna's efforts. Even in a second life, Hermione still manages to drag me out of my funk. That must be a Granger thing.

The feast wraps up quickly and we make our way back to the common room, where I excuse myself to go to bed early. Hermione thankfully doesn't press it this time, understanding that I need some time alone.

I ward my bed to hell, layers and layers of protections, alarms, and assorted binding and stunning jinxes arrayed in such a way that even Moody would be teeming with pride after seeing them. I keep my wand close, wearing my wrist holster as I climb into bed as a measure of added security. Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get me.

I sink into a restless sleep, waking up occasionally throughout the night to double check my wards and make sure that Hermione is safe as well, peeking through her curtains every time I'm jostled awake by my anxious mind.

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The rat sniffed at the air, familiar, yet unwelcome scents gracing its quivering snout. Its face scrunched up in a surprisingly human expression of disgust as it scampered up the flight of stairs. It poked its nose tentatively at a great wooden door, iron studs dotting its surface and a heavy knocker hanging from the middle of it in place of where one would expect a doorknob. It keened angrily when it noticed that the usual crack in the door, one that it could easily slip through, was no longer there.

Suddenly, the rat transformed. In its place stood a small man, his back hunched not from any defect of sorts, but from many years of bowing his head. He was afraid to be noticed by others, afraid to have attention, be it because he didn’t want to be harassed or did not want others to notice the sadism that he kept so well hidden. So many times, he bowed, that he ended up contorting his body to reflect his own inner self, twisted and broken by his own hand.
Peter Pettigrew opened the door, almost laughing out loud when he noticed there was no locking spells on the door. He marveled at the poor security, poor security that would result in the death of one of the students.

He paced next to the bed of Ronald Weasley, muttering quietly to himself. “Just kill him, that’s what I’ll do, kill the little bastard. He said I was a bad rat, did he? A stupid rat? Fat rat!” He chuckled madly, having the presence of mind to have placed a silencing charm on himself long before entering the school. No sound echoed off the dormitory walls, nothing to alert the slumbering red head to his impending doom.

“Well, fat Ron, stupid Ron, jealous Ron, I bite the hand that feeds me,” he growled dangerously, tearing the curtains open with one hand.

Ron slept on, unaware, so accustomed to the din of living with three other teenage boys that he could easily rest through a siege of the castle. Pettigrew grinned at the sight, waving his wand and whispering the two words that magicals across the world fear the most, “Avada Kedavra.”

The acid green light struck the slumbering form of Ron, his body shuddered once, a feeble protest as his soul was torn asunder, stripped from skin, muscle and bone and sent to its final destination.

Pettigrew smiled as he quietly shut the door behind him, transforming into his true self once more and scuttling off into the darkness, off to reclaim his place of unimportance next to his slaver and master.

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A steady chime from my clock wakes me up. I find myself instantly sitting up with my wand aimed at the curtains of my bed. I inspect all my wards to see if I had a visitor last night, sighing in relief when I see that there wasn't even a peep.

Relaxed, I crawl out of bed and take a quick shower, brush my teeth, and get dressed before sleepily meandering to the Great Hall for breakfast. An odd sight out of the corner of my eye catches my attention.

That's really odd.

The Gryffindor table looks to be damn near empty, only a few students munching away at their meal. I wonder what happened? Maybe they had a huge party last night? I know some of the parties tended to get a little too wild, particularly after a Quidditch win. Poor McGonagall, the lady must be pulling her hair out having to put up with a horde of hungover teenagers.

Shrugging, I make up for last nights lack of food by gorging myself on a healthy pile of bacon, eggs, toast, and fruit. The meal can't be all unhealthy. Gotta' watch my figure, ya' know?

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My classes throughout the day bring up even more questions. What's happened? I'm not sure, and I'm not feeling great about it. All my courses that are shared with the Gryffindors are empty. Not one Lion shows up, and the Professors don't seem to take notice of it, obviously in the know as to what is going on.

What the hell has happened?

I push through the day in the hopes that there'll be an announcement at dinner to let the rest of the students know why a whole house seems to be absent.
As I walk into the Great Hall I begin to understand that something terrible has happened.

The regular banners above the house tables are missing, the regally posing animals that represent each house absent. In their place are banners of pure black, hanging limply.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Someone died. Someone in Gryffindor died.

Please don't let it be someone I know, please don't let it be a friend. Please.

I can feel my heart hammering angrily against my ribs, my breath shallow and quick as I try to calm down.

It's probably just a prank, right? Just a tasteless, terrible prank. Nobody died. Right?

I swallow heavily as Dumbledore waves his hands at the students, a wave of silence passing over the hall as everyone stops their conversations, their confused mutterings and questions.

I'm too afraid to even look at the Gryffindor table.

"Good evening everyone," Dumbledore announces solemnly as he steps out in front of the staff table, a black hat held limply in his hands. "I'm afraid that tragedy has struck our halls last night."

An enormous gasp courses across the room, everyone realizing that the worst has happened.

Fuck.

Please don't be a friend. Please, please, please.

"Last night, Peter Pettigrew infiltrated the school and… killed one of our students," he continues, his voice harsh with emotion.

I feel sick, light headed, as if I'm about to pass out. I can hear my heart clearly now, feel it beating heavily in my skull, the blood pounding in my ears as I try to focus on what's being said in front of me.

"He stole from us," he whispers, magic carrying his voice so that all can still hear his terrible words.

"He stole from us, a young Ronald Weasley in the dead of night. I ask that we have a moment of silence in memory of him, a clever, steadfast Gryffindor through and through. He exemplified the values of the House of Lions. Bravery, loyalty, and a keen sense of compassion. Let us remember Ronald Weasley."

I freeze in my seat, staring dumbly at the Headmaster as he bows his head. The rest of the students follow suit, too shocked to even mutter quietly amongst themselves about what has happened, a grim silence having settled over the Hall.

He… he can't be dead. Ron? Not a chance!

He survived the chess match, the acromantula… he just can't be dead…

Numb, I ignore the meal laid out in front of me and stare ahead, my eyes looking past, looking at nothing.

I make a quiet excuse and get up to leave, stiffly walking towards the Room of Requirement.
He can't be dead.

I pace quickly, marching in as soon as the door appears, slamming it shut behind me.

He can't be dead.

I pay no attention as the Room suits itself to my needs immediately, a rough stone altar appearing in front of me, a simple boulder with a smooth flat top. I do notice when Ron's corpse appears on top of it.

I look down on him. His eyes are closed, his face peaceful. Killing Curse by the looks of it. No signs of a struggle. No torn clothes. Not a spot of damage on him.

Just dead.

I begin to register what I'm doing as I place my hands on his chest, drawing on the magic around me as I prepare to infuse his body with energy. As I prepare to bring him back.

I shut my eyes tight and bare my teeth as I begin to push, forcing the gathering magic inside his empty body, filling the mould.

I reach out with my mind, remembering that sense of wrongness that I encountered when I cast the corpse arms. The cold emptiness, the evident feeling of death itself. As soon as I feel the frigid magic I pull. 

I open my eyes and gasp as I see smoky black tendrils burst from the floor, seemingly coming from nowhere. They climb rapidly over the table towards Ron, looping and twisting as they shoot up towards him. The tendrils pry his mouth open, his body shuddering grotesquely as they force their way inside, his arms flailing and his legs bucking from the surge of power.

Panting at the effort, I collapse to the floor, nearly cracking my tailbone as I strike the ground.

Taking a moment to collect myself I lie on my back, chest heaving as I greedily breathe in the cool air around me. Quiet coughing gets my attention, and I shoot up to make sure that Ron is alright.

I take careful, tentative steps towards him, afraid to see some sort of demon, a monster wearing his skin as some sort of macabre suit.

I smile widely as he squints up at me. "Wha's goin' on?"

"You… there was a terrible… shit," I mutter. How the hell do I explain this? I didn't think this far ahead. "Give me a second, alright?"

Nodding weakly, he sits up, legs dangling over the edge of the table as he takes in the room. He wipes at his eyes in confusion. "Uh, is this some sort of prank or something?" He asks, half awake as he squints at me.

"What?"

"Well, I've woken up in some sort of dark wizard's dungeon, there's knives on the bloody wall, and for some reason you're here," he says, pointing at me. "Did Fred and George put you up to this? I know you get along with those two."

"Well… not exactly," I squeak. Can I just obliviate him? Send him back to… where the hell did he come from in the first place? The Hospital Wing? Does Hogwarts have a morgue? And why is he
not screaming out in evident agony? Maybe he wasn't dead long enough to be dead? I’m going to have to read up on this as soon as possible.

I exhale loudly, running my hands through my hair and over my face. "Okay, fuck it. You died, alright? You died, and I brought you back."

Ron stares dumbly, blinking slowly as he tries to register the absolute insanity I'm currently spitting. "Ha ha, very funny. This is a terrible prank you know?"

"This isn't a goddamn prank," I growl. I didn't think this through at all. "You died Ron. Peter fucking Pettigrew killed you, and now we have to figure out a story as to why you're still alive."

"Wait… you- you're not joking? A- are you?" he croaks, his pupils constricting to pinpoints in his shock.

I look him in the eyes, doing my best to convey how entirely and absolutely serious I am. "No, I'm not joking."

"Shit."

"Yeah."

What to do… what to do…

Oh, it couldn't be that simple could it?

Would Dumbledore fall for such a thing? Would Pomfrey? Would anyone in this school fall for it?

I pace the room, my shoes clicking steadily against the stone.

If it worked for me…

"Obliviate," I whisper, nailing Ron in the chest with the charm. He slumps over dramatically, and I run over and catch him before he can roll off the altar and bang his head against the floor. A concussion plus obliviation would not be a good combination.

"You will not remember our conversation, our meeting, or anything else that has happened since you woke up," I command. "You will wake up outside the Hospital Wing, confused, because you passed out trying to leave so that you could go to dinner."

I stun Ron before he begins to come to, heaving him over my shoulder before taking the invisibility cloak out of my pocket and throwing it over us. A quick silencing charm and I'm dashing towards the Hospital Wing.

I crack the door open, placing Ron gently outside of it in the fetal position. Looks like that's all I can do for him.

I rush to the Ravenclaw common room, a massive grin on my face as I realize that today is different. No death, no destruction.

Looks like there's a new Boy-Who-Lived.
Dumbledore drained the last of his cup, the strong liquor making his eyes water as it rushed down his throat, burning all the way. *Firewhisky is a perfect name for the drink*, he thought, trying to take his mind off of the disastrous happenings of the day.

A student was dead.

One of *his* students was dead.

He poured himself another drink, absentmindedly reading the label on the bottle. Ogden’s Private Distillery: Bottled 1682. The liquor was a gift he received as thanks for defeating and imprisoning his estranged lover and genocidal maniac, Gellert Grindelwald. He chuckled harshly as he took another sip.

“Liquor given for the destruction of life, drunk in remembrance of one,” he whispered, turning his head to look at his long-time friend. Fawkes was silent, his head bowed and staring listlessly at the ground. The phoenix crooned once, before tucking his head under his wing and hiding himself from the world.

Dumbledore took a sip, pondering whether he could have done anything to prevent the murder from happening.

Animagus sensing wards? They would have helped. He made a mental to note to put them up immediately the next day, taking the care to carve and power them himself.

He wondered if he could bar anyone with the Dark Mark from entering the school before quickly discarding that thought as useless. Well, not useless per se, but it would be much too complicated to create such a ward while making an exception clause for Severus, not to mention the uproar that would result if Lucius Malfoy attempted to visit the school. Dumbledore didn’t expect to last five minutes as Headmaster if the man was violently cast out by the wards.

Guards were a possibility, either a group of Hit-Wizards or Aurors to be stationed at the school. Albus added that to his mental checklist as well, making a note to floo Amelia in the morning and request personnel to patrol the school during the night.

“Wha-?”

Dumbledore flinched, dropping his glass, shattering it across the floor and sending its contents spilling into the cracks and grooves of the stone.


He didn’t even take the time to clean up the mess at his feet, tucking his beard into his robes as he sprinted as fast as his feet could carry him over to the seventh-floor corridor, for he *knew* that whatever was happening would be happening there. He paused to catch his breath, leaning against the wall. His lungs were bursting from the sudden exertion and his legs aching from the punishment
he was putting them through.

Dumbledore found himself incredibly frustrated with his age in that moment, thankful that was sprightly, but annoyed that he wasn’t as fit as he should have been. He had gotten soft in his old age, forgoing a standard training regimen to keep himself in shape, and it was now showing.

He furrowed his brow in anger, the fury rolling off him in waves. The corridor was absolutely saturated with the feeling of death, and he could still feel the wall, frigid to the touch, so cold as to cut through the warmth of his robes.

Pacing back and forth, he wondered who could possibly be stooping to such levels. Who amongst his staff or students could fall so far? To succumb to the dark in such a way?

He nearly jumped when a flicker out of the corner of his eye grabbed his attention. There was a door there that wasn’t before, seemingly appearing out of nowhere.

“Interesting.”

He scanned it, sighing audibly when he realized that it wasn’t warded or cursed in any way. Reaching out tentatively, he slowly opened the door and peeked inside, his eyebrows raising dramatically at the sight.

“A ritual chamber in Hogwarts? How have I not heard of this before?” He whispered, stepping into the room.

He grimaced at the feeling of Necromantic magic in the room. It was nearly palpable, an oppressive current of it hanging in the air, bearing down on him like the weight of the Earth on Atlas’ back. *Something terrible happened here tonight,* he deduced, *but what could it have been?*

His knowledge of such things was rudimentary, merely academic at best. Was it arrogance that led him to ignore studying Necromancy, even if only for the knowledge of it? To be able to fight and counter such a rare, yet horrid practice if the need should ever arise?

He shook his head at that thought. He never expected to encounter Necromancy. Nobody would. The sheer rarity of it, only popping up throughout history at monumental points in time. The smattering of Necromancers throughout the ages didn’t make the study a high priority. *Alas, things are never as they seem,* he grumbled.

Whoever he was hoping to catch there had disappeared, off to do who knows what.

Was this person an ally? An enemy? Uninvolved with the upcoming war?

Dumbledore didn’t know, but what he did know was that he needed to find out who it was, and fast. Power over death… it could change the war to come. He wasn’t excited about the prospect by any means and would immediately kill the practitioner when Tom was inevitably vanquished, but they would be a useful ally until that time came. There was not a chance in the world he would allow a Necromancer to roam free, the blight upon the world that they are.

He left the room, following the trail of magic throughout the school like a bloodhound after prey. He found himself in front of the Hospital Wing, staring in horror at the unconscious form of Ronald Weasley. An unconscious Ronald Weasley who by all accounts looked to be completely healthy, if one ignored the fact that he died no more than twenty-four hours ago.

Dumbledore cursed mentally. No, he would not allow this Necromancer to live if they’ve already gone this far. This was a monster that had to be put down. Breaking the laws of life and death for
what? To turn this murdered thirteen-year-old boy into their spy? A weapon of some sort?

“Disgusting,” he stated quietly, his voice empty and devoid of any emotion. Yes, this Necromancer would undoubtably be removed from the world long before Tom fell.

The… creature, on the other hand. The receptacle for whatever demon or spirit decided to inhabit it, the disgusting mockery of a boy that the monster had brought into the world from who knows where could not be allowed to live.

Dumbledore raised his wand, staring down the end of it as he pointed it at the young boy. No, it is a construct, he told himself. This is no child.

“Avada Kedavra.”

The familiar green light struck the body quickly, a slight tremor running through the animated corpse as the spell blasted through it, tearing the unholy soul away from it. Dumbledore levitated the body and brought it back into the private room of the Hospital Wing, tucking it back under the covers.

He stared at the body for a short while, studying the calm and peaceful face of the boy once known as Ron.

“Go on to the next great adventure, my child. May your soul find peace in the afterlife, and may you not be damned for another’s choices,” he whispered, turning away from the macabre sight and making his way back to his chambers.

-::- 

I walk into the Great Hall for breakfast expecting pandemonium. Cheering from the Gryffindor table, drunk with glee as they celebrate a miracle, reporters flocking to the school to interview the second survivor of the killing curse, an ecstatic McGonagall crying in relief that her Lion is not as dead as she believed.

Instead, I’m met with the same brooding silence of yesterday. The downcast looks from the Lions, the Weasleys still missing, evidently pulled out of school to mourn.

Do they not know? Has the news not yet hit the castle?

Frowning, I dig into my meal wondering what the hell has happened. Where is Ron?

-::- 

I’m ready to tear my hair out, cry, and scream all at once.

He doesn’t show up, even a week after I brought him back. Ron is apparently still dead. How the hell did Pettigrew get back into the school and kill him again? No, I doubt he would do something so risky, let alone somehow know that he was brought back to life. Who the hell killed Ron, or did he go and get himself killed somehow?

All I can wonder is what the hell am I going to do? I can’t even get any bloody sleep because of all my worrying.

Someone is onto me. Someone knows Ron was brought back and made him disappear, whether it’s to interrogate him or what, I don’t know.

Fuck.
I guess Ron is dead, for good this time. I'm furious that I'll have to mourn him in private, hidden away so as to not garner any attention. No questions of "did you know him?" and "were you two good friends?" I don't want to come across as one of those who scrabbles for others attention when someone dies, telling the world that they were just oh so close and oh so sad. That's the only way I would come across if people caught me mourning him.

To add to that, I can't answer those questions, not without giving myself away. I have to hide my past friendship, even if it was a fractured one. The Ron I remember was strong, foolhardy, clever, a bit of a flake, but he still stood up for what was right and was there when it mattered.

Okay, ignoring the Tri-Wizard Tournament and the fiasco that it was, he was a good friend when it mattered.

I don't really have time to reminisce.

I pull my blanket up to my chin, rolling over and pondering what to do.

I have to find out who knows, and fast. I can't allow anyone who's not sworn to secrecy to find out about my powers. Christ, the only person who does know is Severus, and the only reason I'm comfortable with that is because he's sworn a magical oath and is one of the strongest occlumens out there. I have no reservations about the fact that the Ministry will execute me faster than I could say, 'but there's a prophecy!' if they found out about me.

I keep the marauders map on me at all times, checking it regularly to see if there's anyone following me. Nothing has come up, so I'm hoping that whoever knows about Ron's very short resurrection is not aware that I'm the Necromancer and is hunting blind.

How the hell do I get myself into these situations?

How the hell do I get myself out of these situations?

"Fuck!" I shout, banging my fist against the wall, nearly waking up Hermione.

"I'm not too sure how you get yourself into these situations, but it is highly entertaining."

I whip around, wand pulled out from under my pillow at the ready and a spell that Severus felt kind enough to teach me on my lips.

"Sectumse-"

Oh.

"Hey Death."

He bows deeply, waving his hand in a slight flourish as I re-holster my wand. It looks extremely odd with him sitting cross-legged at the foot of my bed.

"Hello Miss Potter, it's been a while," he drawls. "How have things been with you?"

I sigh and flex my stinging hand. "Not too well, as you can see," I say. "Apparently someone killed my friend. Twice."

"I noticed," he comments, scratching his chin before turning his gaze towards me. "What are you going to do about it?"

I look at him as if he's lost his mind. What am I going to do about it?
"Kill the bastard who killed my best-old, best mate. What else do you think I would do? Pettigrew is a dead man walking, he just doesn't know it yet."

"Ah ah, ah," he tuts, wagging his finger at me. "Pettigrew can't die yet, not if I have anything to say about it."

I do my best to rein in my temper, clenching my stinging hand tight, my thumb digging sharply into my index. "Why exactly can he not die yet?"

"Why, so that he can bring Mr. Riddle back of course!" he exclaims, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. "He can't die if he doesn't have a body, you already know that. Who do you think is going to bring him back?"

"I'd imagine Crouch Jr. would," I reason. There's no way I'm letting Pettigrew get away. "He escapes next year, finds his way back to Voldemort, doesn't he?"

"Not without Pettigrew's help I'm afraid. No, you're just going to have to make do and wait a year and a bit before you send Peter to me."

I put my face in my hand, kneading at my forehead. No, it could never be so simple.  

No Helene, you can't go out and avenge your friend's death.

Oh? Why not?

Because Death said so.

Why does he have to meddle in this?

"If I didn't meddle, Voldemort would never truly die," he explains, looking at me as if I've grown two heads. "I don't take too kindly to someone… avoiding me."

"Could you please stop reading my mind?"

"I'm afraid I can't. It's not exactly something I can simply turn off," he shrugs, opening my curtains and climbing off of my bed, pacing quietly throughout the room. "You understand that I of all beings know exactly what I am talking about, correct?"

"Yeah, I know, I know," I groan. "Can't exactly argue with a God, can I?"

"You could, but it wouldn't do you any good. I've heard that I'm notoriously stubborn."

"I can imagine."

"Well," he says, lacing his fingers together as he looks about the room. "I imagine you're curious who it is that's… investigating you. I'm quite frustrated with their meddling you see. I could tell you who's sabotaged your very dark act of kindness. Consider it a… what do you call it? Ah, yes. A freebie."

"Really?" I ask. "You're going to just tell me who killed Ron?"

"I just said that, did I not?"

"Well, yeah you did. I just- I didn't expect it is all."

"Apparently not. Do you not trust me, Miss Potter?" he inquires, one eyebrow raised precariously.
"Forgive me if I'm brash, but it's a little hard to completely and utterly trust Death of all things."

"Understandable," he nods, unaffected by my tone. "Perfectly understandable."

"Well, who is it?"

He cocks his head to the side, an eerie smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, his dead, blackened eyes staring right through me.

"Who do you think it is?"

"Dumbledore?" I ask, taking a shot in the dark. He did mention meddling.

"Right in one!" he cries, snapping his fingers. "It looks like you can use your little mortal brain."

"Hey!"

"I'm just stating the obvious Miss Potter. You forget how very, very old I am. I've met many geniuses throughout my life, they do not begin to even touch the sheer depth of knowledge that I have."

"Fuck," I mutter, realizing just who is after me. Albus Fucking Dumbledore. Christ on a pogo-stick I'm done for! He actually killed Ron? He killed a student? For what? I thought he was senile, not evil! "This… this changes everything. Dumbledore killed Ron? Killed him?"

"A bit more succinct than I would have put it myself, but quite an accurate statement."

I begin to actually try tearing my hair out. I curse loudly at my stinging scalp. Why did I just do that? More importantly, what the hell am I going to do?

"Do you not recall the mountain of evidence you have against your Headmaster? His incessant need to stick his nose into everyone's life? That you have a lawyer for a foster parent and an ex-convict with a grudge as a godfather?"

Oh yeah. How the hell did I forget about that? I know I was worrying about what to do about Dumbledore, but I guess that answers my question.

"Yeah, I guess I did forget," I mutter, climbing out of my bed and walking over to my desk, taking out a sheaf of parchment and scribbling down a quick letter to Sirius and Octavius. I make sure not to mention anything about my very rare talents. Don't want to make my two… dads? Yeah, dads-believe that I'm the next up and coming Morgan le Faye. Although Sirius does sort of know already… eh, it's time to start working on removing Dumbledore from Hogwarts, or at least crippling his influence in Britain. The man can get away with apparent murder for fucks sake.

Before rushing out of my room to the owlery I turn to Death.

"Thanks for the info, I'll make sure to use it."

"I can only hope," he replies, bowing again before disappearing.

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Sirius and Octavius get back to me quickly, a letter explaining the steps we're going to take to start whittling away at Dumbledore's positions.

They're terrifyingly devious.
Public opinion in the wizarding world is a fickle thing. The Daily Prophet can dictate how people are seen on a whim, as evidenced by my fifth year in the last timeline. Demonized as some insane trouble-seeking deviant by Fudge and his cronies through a tabloid paper. No one questioned it, they simply ate it up happily and begged for seconds.

They're going to use just that.

Slowly feeding bit by bit of information to bring down the perception of Dumbledore, methodically chipping at the pillar he stands on. It will take patience and timing, pulling the rug out from under him when it's too late for to do anything about it. After that? I'm not too sure to be honest. He's not someone I want as an enemy, but if he's going to go around killing school children I'm going to do my best to take him down. Hard.

They do say the apple doesn't fall far. Tom just learned from his mentor as far as I can tell. Hate begets hate.

One thing that's got me confused this semester is Remus. He's here to teach at Hogwarts, following the schedule of time and space and all that good stuff, but he completely refuses to even acknowledge me inside, and outside of class. I'm pissed that he still hasn't gotten into contact with Sirius, whether that's because of shame for believing he was actually the traitor, or because of some other stupid angsty reason, I don't know. Honestly, he can be a bit of a push over. My guess about his personality is that he's pushed away his wolfish side so much he's become the epitome of an omega wolf, submissive to the nth degree.

So that's why I'm ambushing the guy.

"Professor Lupin, is it alright if I talk to you? I have some questions," I ask as the students tiredly file out of class. We did boggarts today, so most of the students are completely and utterly wiped out. Mine is still a dementor, and to be honest I'm really glad it hasn't changed. I don't know how I'd be able to explain away seeing Death or something of the like.

Remus looks slightly afraid as he accepts, conjuring a seat in front of his desk. "What is it that you wanted to talk about Miss Potter?" he rasps, fidgeting nervously with the lapel on his ratty vest.

"I was just wondering why you haven't gotten into contact with Sirius. He talks about how much he misses you all the time," I say, tilting my head as I look at him. What the hell is he so nervous about?

"That, and I just sort of wanted to talk to who I hear is my unofficial uncle."

"I- I wasn't too sure that you knew who I was," he smiles weakly at me, a bit of his tension bleeding away. "I assumed Sirius was terribly angry at me."

"Well, he's a bit annoyed that you haven't written back to him. The mans probably sent you thirty letters over the last couple years, hasn't he?"

"Yes, yes he has," Remus says, looking extremely ashamed now. "I haven't read any after the first letter he sent me. It was quite… forward."

"You mean insulting?" I add.

"Yes, you could say that. I, well- I assumed the rest were along the same lines and didn't open them. Sirius has been known to hold quite a grudge."

"Well, he did apologize to Severus with a bit of prodding from my part. You'd be surprised at him I think, he's growing up from what I've heard. Octavius is really happy to see Sirius not being a man-child 24/7."
Remus chuckles at that, finally relaxing fully. "It has been a while… I'll write him tonight," he says. "How have you been Helene? Is it alright if I call you that?"

"That's fine, as long as I can call you Uncle outside of class?" I quip, a smile spreading across his face as he nods his acceptance. "And I've been well thanks. Some classes are a bit dull, but what can you do right?"

"Ah! I have heard that you're quite the little magical prodigy," he grins wolfishly, the topic of academia catching his interest. "You would have made your parents extremely proud to see how much you excel in your coursework."

"Thank you. That means a lot… do- do you have any stories of my parents? I've heard a bit from Sirius but it's still quite a sore spot for him. It's almost like he has a decade long gap between when they were attacked to when he was released, it still feels a lot more… recent for him."

Remus claps his hands together, smiling widely as he begins to regale me with watered down tales of pranks and debauchery executed by the Marauders and Co. Apparently, they put on that little addendum after my mum's official entry to the group in their seventh year.

We sit there for an hour or so just chatting back and forth about nothing and everything, recounting my last few years at Hogwarts sans insanity, dark magics, and all other unmentionable things. You know, looking back I really should have at least tried to steal the Philosopher's Stone. That little trinket would terribly bloody useful.

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A week goes by before Sirius and Octavius send me a letter telling me to get ready for the next issue of the Prophet. I grin madly as I read it over, on the edge of my seat I'm so excited to see what kind of written travesty they've cooked up.

Hey kid!

Octavius and I have gotten everything ready to go and have just sent off the required 'forms' to the Daily Prophet. Look forward to the fireworks, and if you can, please please please get a picture of Dumbledore’s face when he reads the paper for me? You'd be my absolute favourite goddaughter if you did that for old Padfoot.

Much love – Sirius

P.S. I'm sure Octavius would appreciate the picture as well.

What a bunch of jerks, holding out on me. I wanted details! Plans of their journalistic escapade! Instead I get this lousy tease of a letter.

I furiously scribble out a reply, reaming Sirius out for leaving me in the dark of what may be his most ambitious prank. Sure, the suspense is probably going to make it all worthwhile, but I really want to know what he's told the Prophet. Even just a nibble, a sneak peak would be enough.

The plights of having Loki for a godfather I guess.

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I'm practically bouncing in my seat as I pay for the Daily Prophet that's delivered to me with dinner, a special second issue being printed today by my least favourite, yet terribly useful reporter.
Finally, I get to see the result of Sirius' work. The last day has been horribly boring just waiting and waiting. I'm of the mind that one is bored not when they're uninterested in what they're doing, but when they're incapable of doing what they want to in that exact moment. So, looking forward to something is my personal definition of boredom.

“Oh my god,” Hermione gasps, snatching the paper from me and holding it out in front of her like it's the holy grail. It might as well be, considering this article may end up being the Watergate of the wizarding world. “You guys have to read this,” she exclaims, ignoring the fact that she just took my paper and shuffling closer to me and laying it out on the table, her eyes held so wide I expect them to start drying out in front of me.

I begin to read the article, a grin rapidly forming on my face, spreading from ear to ear like a maddened Cheshire Cat.

**Happenings at Hogwarts!**

*By Rita Skeeter*

*Just the other day I received a letter detailing some events that have occurred at Hogwarts over the last few years that cast the much-reputed bastion of education in quite the harsh light. My dear readers, I found myself to be deeply shocked at the story it told.*

*A cantankerous cerberus, a possessed professor, and a silenced student are but a few of the dangerous goings on that have occurred within the walls of the castle.*

Yes, you're not misreading that. A cerberus! *One of the guard dogs of Hades itself roaming the halls of Hogwarts,*

*a XXXX classified magical creature placed into a school of all places! The animal was reportedly brought in as a guard of some sort. For what? What in the 'safest place on earth,' as Albus Dumbledore so often describes the school, requires such a beast? I do not know, but I tell you this; I will not rest until I bring why to light. This, I can promise to you dear readers…*

The article continues in the same emphatic, overly dramatic tone that the mud racking bitch is well known for. There's a reason Octavius and Sirius went out of their way to have her write the article. She absolutely tears people apart. No mercy involved whatsoever. I guess it helps when she's a got the moral compass of a functioning psychopath.

She goes on to tear into Dumbledore, suggesting that he is overworked to the point that his stress from such a stretched workload as Headmaster, Chief Warlock, and Supreme Mugwump combined is causing him to rapidly lose his mental faculties. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if that was a contributing factor to his choices.

I look up to the staff table, smiling slightly to myself at the shell-shocked look Dumbledore has plastered over his face. Suck on *that* you murderous cunt.

A soft murmur spreads throughout the Great Hall as the students begin to devour the article themselves. I hear a few of the Ravenclaws curse loudly when they read that a bloody *cerberus* of all animals was kept in the school, as well as the fact that no one outside of Hogwarts knew that a Professor died that year.

Additionally, no one outside of Hogwarts apart from the Weasleys knows that Ron was fucking
murdered. Apparently, Dumbledore saw fit not to notify the DMLE that a student was murdered, instead simply requesting a patrol of aurors without actually telling them why. What a fucking nightmare this school is.

I’m actually genuinely horrified that the DMLE wasn’t told about Ron’s murder, nor was anyone publicly aware of the death of Professor Quirrel, instead only being told that there was a wandering spirit in the school, and the shoddy excuse for an educator had left for ‘bigger and better prospects.’ That’s a pretty sugar-coated way to say the man snuffed it.

Needless to say, I’m no longer grinning.

“I can’t believe no one knew about Ron being killed,” Padma whispers, shock lacing her voice. She shakes her head in disbelief, her eyes locked to the paper. “That’s just… that’s beyond ridiculous.”

Lisa doesn’t speak, instead nodding contritely, unable to put her thoughts into words.

I glance over to the Slytherin table, locking eyes with Daphne. She has a blank look on her face as she inclines her head imperceptibly, letting me know that she’s okay. She tilts her head towards Astoria and flicks her eyes to her younger sister pointedly, letting me know that she’ll be talking to her later.

I don’t bother to check in with Tracey.

Hermione clenches her hands, fists shaking as she stares up at the staff table, not bothering to hide her confusion and anger at the revelations. “I can’t believe it myself. Dumbledore of all people hiding that?” She asks, letting the question hang in the air for a few moments. “It’s just… how could Hogwarts be so unsafe? How could they let something like this happen? How could Dumbledore let this happen?”

I hide my confusion as she leans her head on my shoulder, burrowing into me. I look down and hold back a sneeze as her bushy hair tickles my nose. I can see how worried she is, the fear written over her face as clear as day.

She’s been scared ever since the troll incident, terrified of all the magical things that go bump in the night. I can’t blame her, considering how she was raised in a painfully normal place like Hammersmith. Things like this - dangerous things like this… they aren’t something that one would expect from nearly any background, let alone someone who grew up as an only child in a well-to-do muggle family.

Hermione is someone who, once she’s given her trust, trusts implicitly. To have an authority figure, the authority figure be publicly revealed as fallible has had a noticeable effect on her. She’s wearing her stereotypical look of concentration, a tight frown and pursed lips, blinking rapidly as she tries to work out whatever problem she’s stumped by in her head.

I pull her in to a friendly embrace, rubbing her arm comfortingly. “Everything’s going to be fine, alright?” I whisper, Hermione nodding silently in reply and wrapping one arm around my waist as she snuggles closer to me, ignoring her food.

I sit there for a little while, letting her calm herself down on her own and sort through her thoughts. Tracey looks on sympathetically, while Padma raises an eyebrow at how close the two of us are. I shrug one shoulder subtly in reply, making sure not to jostle Hermione. I don’t really understand her closeness myself, but my guess is that I’m sort of like her unofficial sister. Honestly, we’re all sisters at this point after having spent three happy years at Hogwarts together.
Something about our group just… clicks, is the best way to describe it. There’s a dynamic to it all that lends credence to the phrase ‘well-oiled machine.’ Even with the current tension between Tracey and I, we’re all close friends and won’t allow something like that to interfere with what we have.

We sit there for a little while in silence, allowing the other students around us to voice our worried thoughts. Fears and concerns float in the air, a nearly physical presence of worry and confusion having asserted itself in the Hall. I cast my gaze over the tables, seeing the perplexed expressions of the Gryffindors, unsure of how to take the fact that the Headmaster that they idolize is just as prone to failure as anybody else is.

The other Ravenclaws look like they’ve been confronted with an especially confusing question, hurriedly working through different theories as to why Dumbledore would allow such a thing to happen in his halls. Not to mention the most important question: why Dumbledore wouldn’t immediately take the matter of a murdered student to the DMLE and instead treat it as an internal issue, appointing himself as the investigator to such a sensitive and, to be honest, terrifying issue.

The Hufflepuffs are fearful, casting horrified glances towards the Headmaster. Loyalty is a fickle issue for them what with how highly they hold the attribute, and from what I can remember of my fourth year, it’s something that one can be hard pressed to regain once lost. Dumbledore has evidently just lost that, as well as the trust of a fourth of the school at the minimum, disregarding the fact that he never had sway over the Slytherins anyways.

Speaking of which, the Slytherins look smug. At least, the traditionalist purebloods, the children of Death Eaters look smug. They’re boasting loudly amongst themselves, sardonic grins on their faces as they revel over the great Dumbledore being taken down a notch. They seem to have forgotten for a moment that they’re celebrating this over the aftermath of a fellow student’s death.

The other Slytherins, the neutrals, simply look just as sick as the rest of the students.

I wrap up my dinner, my feeling of victory over Dumbledore quickly leaving me as I remember the circumstances behind my current offensive. I say goodbye to the girls, patting Hermione on the back as the commotion amongst the students begins to pick up. I make my way up to the Room of Requirement and pull out *Et Necromantium*, leafing through the tome towards the section on shadow travel.

Shadow travel looks terribly unfair from what I read. The ability to teleport from place to place as long as it’s dark. What’s terribly unfair about this method of travel is, get this, it completely bypasses apparition and portkey wards. That has got to be one of the most useful skills I’ve ever read about. I could escape from anything as long as there’s a spot of dark and I’m not shackled in suppression cuffs.

Yeah, shadow travel is completely and utterly un-fucking-fair. To be honest, I have pushed the whole ‘travelling through the underworld itself’ bit out of my head.

I crack my neck and back, flexing my arms as I prepare to attempt shadow travel. I have to reach out with my magic and look for that feeling of death, instead of pulling it towards me I pull myself towards it. Simple.

I close my eyes and extend my magic, quickly finding the familiar feeling of what I know now is the underworld and yank.

The cold washes over me, permeating my body and senses entirely. Every bit of my body screams wrong momentarily, before the feeling desists as quickly as it started. I smirk as I open my eyes, finding myself on the other side of the room.
Fuck yeah.

I experiment with it a bit more, working on my speed as I flash- no, flash really isn't the word to use. Uh, I'll just use move for the time being. Move around the room as quickly as I can, working on accustoming myself to the feeling that I get when using the ability.

A loud explosion breaks me away from my practice, the wall where the entrance to the Room is normally found is shuddering under some sort of attack. Panicking, I grab *Et Necromantium* and blink over to my room just as the wall caves in from a siege breaker, catching a glance of deep purple robes that look to be dotted with prancing golden unicorns out of the corner of my eye as I escape.

Breathing heavily, I hold my hand to my chest. "Fuck!" I mutter, gripping tightly at my robes as I calm down.

I should have known he would find out where I was! I'm a bloody idiot for thinking that Albus Dumbledore of all people couldn't find out about the Room of Requirement. Groaning quietly, I tuck the massive book into my trunk, casting a few wards over it to make sure that even if someone does get into my things, they're not going to notice the bloody bible of Necromancy sitting in it.

I lay back in my bed staring at the ceiling, pondering where I'm going to train now. Chamber of Secrets? Probably the best option. I just don't know where I'm going to find a proper ritual chamber now that the Room is under watch.

Cursing quietly under my breath, I realize that I've really kicked the hornets nest now.

Wait a second.

Blink? That sounds like the *perfect* word for shadow travel.
Chapter Eighteen | Fighting Back

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

My alarm causes me to quite literally shoot out of bed, falling out and onto the floor in a mild panic, wand brandished sleepily. I shake my head, clearing the daze from my head as I right myself. I stop and breathe deeply, trying to calm my nerves.

Dumbledore.

First the man sends me to the Dursleys, never bothering to check up on me. Then he has the nerve to allow the most dangerous and insane things to occur in a school of all places just to… to what? Test me? Make sure his little project comes out how he wants it to? Of course, even worse things happen after I fucking die and come back to life! The man is a psychopath! Madder than mad! He killed a student for fucks sake!

I grip my head with both hands, groaning at the oncoming headache.

So, I have to find a way to stay under the radar. He found me last night and I know for a fact that he's keeping tabs on the Room of Requirement. Hell, the Room might not even exist anymore after he blew the wall in. I'd guess that the enchantments that make it function are inscribed into the walls. Fuck! He had to go and destroy the magical holo-deck of all things!

I need to talk with Severus, he'd know what to do.

I go through the motions of the day, eating, pretending to pay attention in class… the usual kind of monotonous day I'm used to. I'm nearly chomping at the bit by the time classes and dinner are over with, stampeding towards the dungeons as fast as my legs can carry me.

I barge through Severus' office door, startling the ever-loving hell out of him.

"Damnit Helene!" he bellows. "I could have been working on something in here! Do you want to see me blown to smithereens so badly?"

I smile sheepishly, going through another breathing exercise to calm myself down. "The shit has hit the fan Severus," I say, pulling out my usual chair and slumping into it. I lean my head back, gazing at the ceiling and counting the cracks in the ancient stonework. "I'm by all rights completely and utterly fucked."

He blinks slowly before quickly pushing away the stack of papers he's marking. "Tell me what happened. Now," he demands, eyebrows furrowed in concern.

I tap my foot nervously, the clicking surprisingly loud as it echoes off of the walls, reverberating throughout the office. "Dumbledore knows there's a necromancer in the school," I say, fidgeting nervously. "He blew in the wall of my training room last night trying to catch me. The only reason I escaped is because I was lucky enough to be practicing shadow travel at the time."

I laugh harshly, nearly crying as I continue, still in disbelief of what happened. "He killed Ron you know. Yeah, well- he didn't kill him the first time. I brought him back, it seems he hadn't been dead long enough to be in any pain. Just, let me explain, alright?" I ask, wiping away Severus' look of revulsion and anger. "There's a time frame in which you're free to toss somebody back into their own
body as long as there's not too much damage done to their body. Since he was done in by the killing curse, there were no problems, but Dumbledore killed him… he just fucking killed him," I mutter the last few words, my fist clenching and nails scratching against my armrest. "Albus Dumbledore murders children."

Severus emits the loud breath that he was holding in. He raps his knuckles over his desk, a habit of his that I've noticed. He sits there for a few minutes, not saying anything. Just thinking. "I'm so sorry," he whispers, so quiet that I almost don't hear it. "I'm sorry that your friend is dead even after all you'd done for him. I can't… I can't say he was my favourite student, but I could… almost see the friend you knew in him, once upon a time."

I smile thankfully at him. That's high praise coming from Severus, especially when directed at someone he really didn't enjoy teaching.

"I'm sorry," he repeats. "Albus has crossed the line. I- I looked up to him for a long time… he was as close to a father figure I could get. Mine was… quite similar to your Uncle in his treatment of me."

I purse my lips, studying Severus as he gives up a bit of himself, the wall he's built chipping ever so slightly.

"I'm sorry," I echo, looking him in the eye and attempting to convey that I understand. Because I do get it, and he knows that the best of anyone. What it's like to be beaten down, to hide one's true self away from others in the fear that you'll be admonished for something you cannot change.

He nods in reply, an unspoken agreement between the two of us to not repeat what has been heard here today.

We sit there for a few minutes in silence, and I'm the first to break the peace.

"What do I do?" I ask, fingers nervously knotted together.

"I haven't a clue," he replies honestly. "Albus isn't someone you can just… take head on. He plans, and he plans, a backup for every situation that he can think of so that things move in the direction he wants them to. He's a general at heart, always moving the pieces." He grimaces, a dark chuckle escaping his lips. "You know, I don't believe he's genuinely evil. I believe that he does what he does because he truly thinks that he is infallible."

I chuckle at that. "Of course he thinks he's infallible! He's the great Albus Dumbledore! Saviour of the Wizarding World! Defeater of Grindelwald!" I cry, the words spilling out like venom. "Really, the fact that he doesn't think he's wrong makes him just as bad as Voldemort. It shows how ridiculously out of touch he is."

I scratch my ear, holding my out, palm to the sky. "I'm already attacking him on one front through the Prophet, but I want to find a way to truly cripple him."

"That was you?" Severus asks, eyes wide, before shaking his head. "How did I not- of course it was you. Who else would know half the things that happened here and be able to report on them with such detail," he continues, smiling grimly. "I think you need to step it up on the propaganda, but I don't believe you'll like my idea."

"And what idea would that be?"

"You give an honest interview on your childhood. The childhood Albus consigned you to."

I swear loudly. Yeah, I really don't like that idea. "I have to admit it would definitely be effective," I
say. "I just- I really don't want people to know, you know? I get enough looks as it is… I could do without the pity being added on to the power-hungry leers."

"I understand," he says. I look at Severus, feeling my stomach knot when I see that he really does understand. He doesn't pity me, he truly empathizes.

I sigh in exasperation, resigned to Severus’ idea. It really is the best we can do at the moment. "Fuck it, I think we should do it." I say, Severus shocked that I would so quickly accept his proposition. I shrug ineffectually. "It's a good idea," I concede. “But, Dumbledore will know that its me that's going through the Prophet."

"From what you've told me, he's not your biggest admirer at the moment anyways."

"I don’t know what his opinions are of me at the moment, but I'm still the child of prophecy. Even if he doesn't like me, he can't change the fact that I'm important to his plans."

"True, very true," Severus admits. "If he calls you up to his office, demand that Filius or I come along with you. I don't want to risk you being trapped alone with him considering his recent dabbling in homicide."

"Thanks for having my back Sev'."

"Any time Helene," he replies, lips curled into a smirk.

-=:-

I can’t stop myself from fidgeting. Be it my tapping knee, my twiddling thumbs, or this nervous tic I seem to be developing where my head twitches like a startled pigeon when someone tries to catch my attention.

The Prophet arrives as usual. I'm not there to see it arrive as I'm too busy hiding in the Chamber where no one can bother me, attempting to extend their half-hearted courtesies, telling me how they're sorry. I'm not too keen on the attention. Yes, I know I'm being incredibly immature.

I’m beginning to realize how much I’ve changed since I killed Lockhart, although it was more of an execution. That… event solidified in my mind how much older I am compared to my friends, my sisters. It’s reminded me how they're completely and utterly unprepared for the coming war.

I realized how cold I can be. How I can switch off when it comes to life and death situations. I guess that’s what happens when one becomes intimately familiar with the rush that comes after nearly dying, especially at such a young age.

Christ, I wasn’t even twelve-years-old when I killed for the first time, and what happened then? A pat on the back, a pile of candy, and empty promises from a false prophet.

I don't want them dragged into everything, not like Ron and Hermione were the last time… not like Neville, Luna and Ginny. All of them could have easily died at the Department of Mysteries, and for all I know some of them did after I fell through the veil. Not that it actually happened, what with that timeline being erased on the whim of Death.

I’ve done my best to keep it separate from everyone, having effectively excluded the girls from the more eventful parts of my life. Well, apart from the Quirrel incident.
Maybe this is all just some exaggerated version of my tendency to brood, my reflex to push people away in the fear that they'll be killed in one of my ridiculous, harebrained adventures. I'm legitimately surprised it took me until fifth year to die on one of them.

Every bit of me screams out to let them go, to ignore them and distance myself for their own safety. A tiny voice in the back of my head whispers in my ear, telling me that they'll all die if I'm involved with them.

I do my best to ignore this voice.

I'm sitting on the cold stone, silently petting Magna's scales. I'm still quite pleased to have avoided calling Miss Snakey all the time. My life may be insane, but it's not so insane that I'll willingly refer to a thousand-year-old basilisk as Miss Fucking Snakey. Thankfully, she still loves the name I chose for her.

She rumbles in discontent as I halt my affections. I just realized I've never really explored this place before. Surely there's got to be more than just the main chamber, right?

I stand up, dusting my robes off and stretching, my leg a little numb from having sat down for so long. I wander the Chamber, following one of the massive pipes immediately to the left of the statue of Salazar. I trail my fingers along the walls, wiping the grime off in disgust and immediately casting periodic scourgy's as I walk ahead.

The pipes split and twist multiple times, different pathways coursing throughout the school. Some go directly up, climbing towards the sky and to the higher floors of the castle. Others wrap into themselves like an ouroboros, I imagine Salazar constructed them that way intentionally. The symbology and all that.

I come across the sigil of a snake at a dead end. Curious, I hiss at it to see what happens. Luckily, I don't get blown up by some parselmagic trap and the sigil instead marks a doorway which swiftly materializes at my command. I slowly open it and peek my head out.

Huh.

Looks like I'm on the fifth floor. I peer around the corner and realize that I'm just a hop, skip, and a jump away from the prefect's bathroom. These pipes are awful convenient.

I close the door and continue on my exploration, organizing the maze of pipes in my head as I march along. I find two doors for each floor in my search, both at opposing ends of one another. My guess is that Salazar set these up this way to allow him to get to anywhere in the castle from his Chamber as quickly as possible. From the sheer amount of bodies buried on the grounds, it looks like Hogwarts lived up to its original function as a castle and the planning was well needed.

I make my way back to the main chamber, my legs free of any aches and pains thanks to the strength and stamina rituals I've undertaken.

That's something I need to find, another ritual room. There's so many other rituals I want to undertake, so many that I need to undertake if I want to stand any chance of going toe to toe with Voldemort come fourth year.

:Magnia, do you know of any ritual chambers within Hogwarts?: I ask the great snake. If anyone would know about a secret ritual chamber, I'd place my bet on it being the ancient snake.

She tilts her head for a moment to think, searching through a thousand years of memories with the brain of a very intelligent golden retriever must be quite difficult. :There one by old master's room:
she states, bobbing her head.

Well, of course Salazar had a room in the castle, and of course it's here in the Chamber. I wonder if there's one for each of the other founders? If I had to guess, the Room of Requirement was probably Rowena's. There's no way it's not hers, I'd eat my hat otherwise… if I wore a hat.

: …and where exactly is that?:

: It my room now: she replies, inclining her massive head towards the open maw of Salazar's statue.

Well I'm an idiot.

I hiss for stairs, smiling when they appear and quickly running up them, taking two steps at a time as I practically leap into Salazar's long lost private quarters.

Salazar's long lost private quarters which are apparently at the end of a very long corridor.

I quell my excitement as I continue to jog towards the door at the far end of the hall, dodging bits and pieces of animal bones and what looks like a few rotting acromantula husks strewn about the corridor. Magna's made her nest here, and not in Salazar's quarters judging by the scaled grooves worn into the sides of the walls. Thank Merlin for that, she'd probably have destroyed everything in his rooms.

I tug the door open, blinking slowly. The room is so- so terribly… normal. Well, it's more of an apartment than a room, but its just so mind numbingly normal! I'm standing in the middle of a small living room bedecked in the green and silver known to the house of Slytherin. There's a fireplace against the far wall, a leather couch and a loveseat, and a few doors leading to what I presume are other terribly normal rooms.

I was expecting something more sinister! The anti-muggleborn manifesto! Instead I get this… this bloody regular old set of quarters and not some incredibly interesting and sinister dungeon!

I huff in a painfully immature way, setting off to explore the rest of the famed Chamber of Secrets.

There isn't much.

Oh, sure there's a ritual room. That's a big plus. But there's no tomes on incredibly dark magic, the methods in which the four founders constructed Hogwarts, or anything actually cool. God damnit.

There's an empty potions lab, kitchen, bedroom, and the aforementioned ritual room.

Looks like Voldemort cleaned out the place the last time he was here. Couldn't leave any incredible ancient books on mysterious and equally incredible and ancient magics for the rest of us huh? Not even a bloody journal to be found.

Well, on the bright side of things, there is a ritual room, and I sincerely doubt that Dumbledore can find me here of all places. If he can… well I'm completely fucked if Dumbledore can get down here.

I stop my (now very bored) surveying of the Chamber and other assorted rooms, making my way back to the Ravenclaw common room through one of the Chambers passages. I don't believe it would be a good idea for me to blink to and from my room, or anywhere near where I normally stay. For all I know, Dumbledore tracked me via my usage of spells. I'm sure he has some sort of dark magic detector within the school, and I've probably been stupid enough to be setting the thing off every day since second year.

I stride into the common room, doing my best to stay unnoticed and rush off to bed when I'm
confronted by most of the ‘Claws. Hell, even the Gray Lady is hovering off to the side sporting her usual blank look.

"H-Helene… why didn't you tell us?" Hermione cries, rushing over and hugging me tightly enough that I feel my spine shudder in protest.

"Hermione, hey, hey, let me breathe for a second," I gasp, rubbing her back. She squeezes me once more before tentatively letting go, her hand tugging at my arm for a moment as she releases me. I look at her for a moment as she retreats and note her swollen eyes. She's been crying. Padma and Lisa walk over to me and hug me as well, whispering apologies in my ear.

"So… I imagine you all have questions?" I say, resigned as I look over just under a hundred concerned and curious students after detaching myself from my friends.

"Well- is it true? What the Prophet said?" One seventh year pipes up. Clearwater, I think. Prefect? Wasn't she Percy's girlfriend?

"Yes," I sigh, running my hands through my hair. "Every word. I didn't have the greatest of childhoods… I wanted people to know the real me, not what they've read in those inane stories that couldn't even get my gender right. I mean, honestly, Harry Potter and the Veela Conclave? I couldn't have been older than nine when that came out!"

The crowd laughs at this, the obvious tension in the room being relieved.

"What about Dumbledore?" Someone shouts, their hand waving over the top of the crowd.

I groan and scratch my head, mulling over how to phrase what could be a catastrophic sentence if it comes out wrong. Dumbledore is still incredibly powerful, both magically and politically, and I don't want to paint too large of a target on my back.

"Dumbledore… the deal with Dumbledore is complicated. He's a great wizard, don't get me wrong, but he's still human. He's not infallible, and the problem with him being so influential is that when he makes a mistake, that mistake can be catastrophic," I explain, some of the Ravenclaws nodding along. "One major mistake he made was placing me with my previous guardians and then never checking up on me. He expects the best out of people, and unfortunately, he expected the best out of my relatives. I know you’re all familiar with the mistakes he made regarding the third-floor corridor. If that Cerberus got loose… well it would be nothing short of a massacre.”

The chorused gasp runs through the crowd as they imagine what could have happened. What a blood bath that would have been.

Fucking Dumbledore.

I walk over to one of the couches and perch on top of it, legs dangling over the end. I clasp my hands together and rest them in my lap, swinging my legs back and forth nervously. "My relatives weren't loving, not by any means. They were selfish, bigoted, hateful, and all around abusive people. It doesn't matter who you are, they'd find a way to hate you. Be it via jealousy, scorn, or a general sense that they were just better than you. The thing they hated the most was magic. My aunt was horribly jealous of my mother when she got her letter, and that jealousy festered until it went from resentment to hate. My uncle was already a spiteful man, and her tales of my freak of a mother just added fuel to the fire."

I hop off the couch, stretching like a cat and yawning loudly. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I really do need to get some rest," I say.
A couple of people shout out very personal questions, but they're quickly silenced by Filius, who gives them a stern look and demands that they leave me alone. I smile gratefully at him as I walk up to my room, brushing my teeth before flopping into bed.

Not too soon after jumping into bed, I hear a knocking on my bed post and poke my head out of the curtains to see Hermione standing there. Her eyes are still slightly swollen, and her usual messy hair is especially bedraggled. She's taken the news a lot worse than I thought she would.

"Hey, you alright?" I ask. She laughs morosely and flicks me on the arm, sitting down next to me on my bed.

"You? You of all people are going to ask me that?" she murmurs, once again leaning on my shoulder. "I really don't get you sometimes Helene."

"Someone's got to look out for our resident librarian, right?"

She chuckles and wraps her arms around me, burying her face in the crook of my shoulder. "I'm so, so sorry," she whispers, her voice shaky. "I- I understand why you didn't tell anyone. I just wish I could have helped my best friend, you know?"

I run my fingers through her hair, holding her close as I console her. "I'm fine, really. I just don't like the attention. I... I came to terms with my abuse a long time ago, and Sirius helped me out with a lot of it over the breaks these last few years."

"Are you sure?" she responds, pulling back to take look at me, her eyes glistening.

"Yeah, I'm sure. Now, if you don't mind I would love to get some rest. As much as I enjoy having a beautiful witch in my lap, I've had a very long day."

She blushes and hides her face, hugging me once more before scampering off to her own bed.

I close my curtains and lay back, pulling the covers up to my chin. I'm going to do my best not to distance myself from my friends. Hermits do tend to go mad after all.

-::-

"Miss Potter, if I may have a word with you in my office?"

I curse mentally. Took him less than a full day to confront me. I'm guessing our discussion is going to devolve into how I'm evidently turning dark, and how I've given away state secrets by telling the world of my true life.

"Could I come after I've finished my meal Headmaster? I'm still quite hungry," I say, gesturing at my lunch.

"Of course, of course," he reasons, nodding his head thoughtfully. "I'll see you soon. The password is nerds, by the way. I've become terribly fond of the sweet, or should I say sour, as of late."

I incline my head in reply, looking up to the staff table to shoot a meaningful glance at Severus. He lifts his goblet slightly in recognition and begins to wrap up his meal, getting ready to leave to leave. I scarf down the rest of my sandwich, saying my goodbyes to my friends before following him out.

"Are you ready for this?" I ask hesitantly, looking towards Severus. "You're sort of picking a side
right now, and I don't want to see you on the Headmasters bad one. He is the one who vouched for you and helped keep you out of Azkaban, right?"

"As ready as I'll ever be," he drawls, his voice surprisingly even. "And yes, although he is the one who vouched for me, I don't particularly care, because if I'm ever brought to trial I'll make sure to drag him into Azkaban with me."

"How would you do that exactly?"

"A few years ago, I developed a potion that provides temporary immunity to veritaserum, about a month long depending on the dosage. Albus of course knows nothing of this," he adds with a feral grin. "I believe myself to be a sufficiently skilled actor considering my years as a double-agent, would you not agree?"

That's… that's absolutely devious.

"You're one terrifying man, you know that Sev'?" I stop at the doors, looking up at him one last time. "… are you sure about this?"

"Of course, I'll do whatever is in my power to help you Helene," he responds, before turning to the griffin statue guarding the stairs to the Headmasters office. "Nerds," he announces. We walk up the stairs at a sedate pace, preparing ourselves for the argument to come.

"Come in," Dumbledore's voice rings through. I glance up at the empty portrait frame above the door and shake my head. Always with the theatrics. I push the door open, striding into the office with all the confidence I can muster.

"Please, sit down. Severus, you may go," he continues, not even looking up from his parchmentwork as he waves his hand at Severus to leave.

Severus doesn't leave, planting himself next to me and crossing his arms, causing the Headmaster to tear his eyes from his work. "I'm afraid I will be staying for this discussion Headmaster, as Helene has requested my presence as one of the Heads of House."

Albus looks askance as he lifts his head, tidying up a stack of parchment and setting it off to the side. "Now, there's no need for that. Me and Helene were just going to have a private chat."

"Forgive me my dear, I do tend to forget some things in my old age. Please, take a seat," he says waving pointedly at the single chair in front of him. I sit down, Severus looming over my shoulder like a very greasy and easily frustrated guardian angel. Turns out the grease is a glamor to make sure that students don't crush awkwardly on him. Apparently, he nearly had to ban a sixth-year girl from his NEWT classes when she kept trying to get him alone, and he's been terrified of lecherous teens ever since. No matter how much Severus complains, working at Hogwarts really is a great job.

"I'm sorry sir, but if Severus doesn't stay then I'll have to request for Sirius or Octavius to attend this meeting. According to the Hogwarts Charter, any meetings with the Headmaster must be attended by either a Head of House or the student's parents or guardians," I interrupt, smirking internally at Albus's look of confusion and mild frustration.

"Now, I was concerned to read of what allegedly occurred to you whilst you were living with your family Helene. You should have conferred with me before releasing such information. It may place your relatives in danger," Dumbledore proclaims, a disappointed look on his face.

"I hold no love for my relatives, Headmaster. I would also like to mention that I take offense that you would believe my testimony to only be allegations," I retort, cocking my head to the side.
questioningly. "Unless you have proof that I was treated differently? Additionally, I was also unaware that personal matters should be taken up with you, my Headmaster, considering my adoptive father is a lawyer and would understand the ramifications of my story being told to the Prophet."

Dumbledore steepled his fingers, not rushing in on the offensive like he did the last time I saw him and ended up destroying a good portion of his office. I shouldn’t have let my magic get away from me then, but, if I do say so myself, that was an impressive way to destroy one's office.

"I'm sorry my dear, I'm not sure you understand the gravity of the situation," he argues plaintively. "Your relatives may be in danger now due to your very public attack on their character."

I lean forward, my eyes narrowed dangerously. "Please, stop call me 'my dear' Headmaster, I find it to be uncomfortably familiar when we've had but three conversations in my time here," I demur, almost giggling at the offended flash in his eyes. "Like I said previously, I hold no love for my relatives and any wrath they incur as a result of their abuse of me. Yes, abuse, Headmaster. They very well deserve what's coming to them."

"You wish death upon your relatives Helene?" he gasps, fingers now splayed in shock.

"Please, refer to me as Miss, as you do every other student," I assert. "And of course not. I never have wished death upon them. What I do wish is repercussions for their disgusting actions towards me as a child, preferably through the justice system."

Dumbledore shakes his head serenely, his beard swaying. "You must learn to forgive He- Miss Potter, it does not do one well to hold onto hate."

"I understand that. A wise man once told me that 'hate begets hate,' and that it only takes one person to break the cycle," I comment, knowing Severus is probably trying to hide a smirk behind me. "I do not hate my relatives. I pity them. I pity them for their hate, their inability to see beyond their small worldview and understand that difference is not something to be reviled or feared- but encouraged."

Dumbledore nods knowingly at this, seemingly content with my answer. I don't quite know what to make of that. "Well, I see that I cannot change your mind Miss Potter. Please, do keep in mind to come and speak with me before you decide to make another rash decision," he says flatly, obviously dismissing us.

I nod politely and get up, Snape following in my wake as we leave. We walk in silence to Severus' office.

"That was… not what I expected," I confess as Severus shuts the door.

"Agreed. He's planning something, but I do not know what."

"That can't be good, can it?"

"No."

-D--D-\n
Dumbledore was concerned, deeply concerned for the fate of the wizarding world. His conversation with Helene Potter lead to him drawing parallels to another student he taught many years ago. Tom Riddle.

He found her disturbingly similar to him. Her controlled cadence, the way she carried herself, how
she could spin a tale and weave verbal circles around a man like him, a man who’d spent most of his life playing the political field in an almost artistic manner with his use of half-truths and misdirection.

It scared him, if he was to be honest with himself. A rarity with Dumbledore.

He stared out of the window, wondering whether her personality was due to a mistake he may have made. Could her relatives really have treated her so poorly? Was that why she did not trust him? He had assumed that upon her entering Hogwarts for the first time she would be mystified, incredulous at the sheer magic of it all. How she would be a humble child.

Instead, she was broken.

He didn’t know if he believed every word of the article. How she was forced to cook and clean from the age of four, beaten and starved of both food and compassion. Yes, he did believe that she may have had a somewhat… less than ideal upbringing, considering the Dursley’s opinions on magic. But they couldn’t have been abusive. Who on Earth would abuse one’s own blood? He wondered in amazement, the idea completely foreign to him. The insanity of it!

“No, everything has been blown out of proportion,” he murmured thoughtfully, dragging a wrinkled hand through his beard. “But what do I do about the girl?”

Should he tell her of the prophecy? She was surely getting closer to an acceptable age for it, and she would be taught occlumency of course. There’s no way he could have such vital information being leaked. Severus could teach the girl.

He paused, his absentminded ruminations halting as he brought his hand out of his beard and up to his chin, resting one finger under his lips as he thought.

Severus. What had happened to him? Dumbledore thought that he would hate Helene for what she represented, the child that he never could have had, Lily’s child. More importantly, James’s child. He never expected the man to become something of a mentor for the girl, if his guess at their current relationship was correct. In fact, he may even see her as something of a niece, dare he even think it, a daughter.

If only she hadn’t broken those bindings, she would have attended Hogwarts as Harry and not had to have fought an uphill battle.

He lamented that. The Wizengamot was just that, the Wizarding court of law. Not the Wiccegamot, not the Magigamot, but Wizengamot. Plans upon plans had been dashed away, and the House of Potter would most likely fade into oblivion if the girls future husband did not allow her to name one of their children as heir. It was quite likely, and he prayed that she didn’t end up marrying into a dark aligned family, for she’d most likely live her life as nothing but a brood mare.

He sighed, sadly remembering that his first choice as a potential partner for her, chosen after realizing that she was very much a her, and not a him, was no longer available. Ronald Weasley, regrettably, had passed on to the next great adventure.

Dumbledore blinked slowly, bringing his tangential thoughts back on course.

As long as he could keep the girl on track, keep her on the path of the light, Britain may come out of the future war much stronger than before. But, something was off about the child. Something terribly sinister.

It wasn’t how much she reminded him of Tom, as Dumbledore had now convinced himself that her similarities were only a coincidence and nothing more.
No. Something felt… _off_ about her magic.

He sighed, tiredly stroking his beard once more as he watched the giant squid play, flicking gouts of water through the air above the lake.

“It’s probably nothing to worry about, just the soul shard in her scar,” he thought aloud, nodding his head. “Yes, nothing to worry about at all.”

Everything would work itself out in the end. Helene would defeat Tom, and she would come out of it cleansed of the darkness of his soul, ready to lead the wizarding world into a new era.

Now, if he could only find out who that damnable Necromancer was…
Dumbledore is paying more attention to me. I can feel the portraits eyes burning a hole in my back as I walk through the halls. The tinned whispers of people long dead reporting my every move, tickling at my ears and reminding me of how long I've been manipulated, how long I've been forced to play a role. I don't know what Dumbledore's end game is, and I'm sure in his mind he feels that he's justified, but it doesn't excuse his actions. The lives he's willingly destroyed in his path to... what? What is his goal?

Voldemort, I understand. No, I don't condone what he's doing in any way. He's a psychopath, a danger to humanity, but I understand why he does what he does. He's lashing out against the world, an angry child in a monsters body throwing a homicidal tantrum. It's always been about power for Voldemort. That's simple, easy to understand. But Dumbledore? All I know is that he has a strict idea of how the world works, how he wants it to work, and he does his best to have it conform to his views. He utilizes his positions to shape and carve the world into his paradise, whereas Voldemort just wants to destroy.

Speaking of, Dumbledore has been on thin ice lately. The ministry is investigating him, along with the goings-on at Hogwarts for the last few years. I’ve noticed Amelia’s familiar face in the halls, and she’s approached me a few times to say hello and check up, obviously concerned after reading the Prophet article. It was embarrassing to have a woman that I admire so much to speak to me with pity in her eyes, but I felt that the pity quickly changed to compassion when she realized that I came out of that mess in one piece.

I’ve caught glimpses of Dumbledore as he traipses through the halls, chin held high and offensively bright robes brushing the ground beneath him. I noticed the well-hidden worry in his eyes. He's stressed, that’s evident, but he thinks he can get out of this. Not on my watch.

Rita has been pulling up dirt on him for the last few years. Octavius has had her working her way towards publishing a book, one that she’s titled The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore, a tell-all biography detailing Dumbledore's childhood and life through young adulthood. Turns out he was quite chummy with Grindelwald back before the war and the both of them coined his term 'For the Greater Good,' Grindelwald's ramshackle justification for his personal genocide against the muggle world.

It's going to launch in a few weeks, as Rita is just putting the finishing touches on it now. She got started on it after my initial meeting with Octavius, the first time I was over at the Greengrasses. I'm looking forward to its release, to seeing the shock and anger written on Dumbledore's face as he notices his world crumbling all around him. His positions, his legend all coming to an end, and the world will see him for what he truly is: a liar and a murderer.

I hear stamping feet behind me, turning around to see Hermione running clumsily towards me with a smile on her face. "Hey! How's your day going?" she gasps, doubling over as she catches her breath.

"It's good! Uh, quick question though. Why are you running through the halls? Isn't that against the rules Hermione?"
She shoots me a half-hearted glare, standing up straight as she recovers from her sprint. "I think you've broken that little part of me that loves rules," she jibes, reaching towards me and balancing herself on my arm as she adjusts one of her socks. She doesn’t mention the impact that the news surrounding Dumbledore has had on her, but I know that its affected her greatly. "I'm corrupted and it's all your fault!"

I laugh, but I feel a touch of guilt hearing those words slipping out of her mouth. I'm worried about inadvertently forcing my friends to grow up before their time like I had to. It's not something I'd wish on someone, especially one that I care about.

"So, what class are you headed to? Don't you have muggle studies soon?" I ask, adjusting my book bag as I follow her through the halls.

"No, divination," she replies, a grimace on her face as if the words are bitter as they pass over her tongue. I guess it's about time that she has her little spat with Trelawney and storms out of the classroom. I wonder if she's still got a time-turner this year? She doesn't look burnt out.

I stick my tongue out, garnering a laugh from her. "Eugh. I'm glad I didn't take that. All I've heard is that Trelawney predicts a few people's deaths every class. Honestly, at the rate she's working half the school will be gone before Winter break."

Hermione giggles, not even reprimanding me for saying Trelawney without the ever-important title of Professor tacked on. "I think I'm going to drop it," she mentions, looking shocked that she even considered the idea. "I haven't learned anything, and they really should mention before we take the class that seers are born, not made." She throws her hands up in the air, a playfully exasperated look on her face. "I mean, really! We're going to predict the future through tea-leaves? What about learning something useful like scrying!? That counts as divination, and you don't need to be a seer to learn that."

I shake my head, smiling at her rebellious display. "Preaching to the choir there Hermione. I didn't take the course for a reason."

"I know, I know," she says, still slightly out of breath. "I just wish we had someone more useful as a Professor for that course. It would be so much more interesting!"

"So… why don't you just skive off? You're going to drop it anyways."

She turns to me, utterly horrified that I would even suggest such a thing. "Helene Lily Potter! You-you… that's an excellent idea!" She grins widely at my shocked look, faux-horror melting away. Wow. I really have corrupted her! "What class have you got right now?"

"Uh… I've got ancient studies right now, why?"

"Because you're skiving off with me!"

I frown and lay my hand against her forehead. "Huh, you're not running a temperature… are you sure you're Hermione and not some sort of long lost twin?"

"No, no," she mutters seriously. "There's no such thing… is there?"

"Not that I know of!" I laugh. "At least, not in the real world. In muggle fiction maybe." I scratch my head, a touch mystified by her behaviour. "So… what did you want to do?"

"I uh… I didn't think that far ahead?" She replies sheepishly, averting her eyes.
"Well, we could always just go down by the lake and read, chat, maybe skip some stones while it's still a touch warm," I offer.

"That sounds great!" She says, already marching off towards the lake.

*What on Earth is going on with her?* I wonder. She's never been so excitable before. Not that I'm complaining, but something about Hermione is different.

We stroll through the empty halls, dodging Filch and stealthily making our way over to the lake. We set up camp next to a tree overlooking most of the grounds, propping myself against it as Hermione settles down next to me, a book already in hand. We stay there for a while, resting in the autumn sun and enjoying one another's silent company.

"So, what's gotten into you today?" I ask, curiosity getting the better of me. "You seem awfully chipper. You get good news or something?"

"No, I haven't. Is it so odd for me to be happy?"

"No! Not at all! I was just curious."

"Well, I've learned some things about myself," she muses, tearing her eyes away from her book and looking out over the pristinely calm lake. She looks almost like her old self for a second, the Hermione I knew in my last life as a light breeze ruffles her hair, curls shining gold and red in the light of the sun. "I've learned some things that, well- to be honest they scared me a bit, but I… accepted them and I'm happier for it." She whispers the last few words, a subtle smile working its way across her face.

I nod, confused, but happy for her. "… and what would those things be?"

"Nothing of consequence," she smirks, crossing her legs and returning to her book. What the hell has gotten into her today? Nothing of consequence? She's talking in riddles! I swear to god if she went on another *Alice in Wonderland* binge like in the last timeline I'm going to lose it. Last time that happened she spoke in psychedelic idioms for a whole week!

I lay there, surprisingly comfortable as I'm caught between the crisp air and warm sun, my eyes drooping lazily as I fall into a light sleep.

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"...hey! Wake up sleepy-head! You there?"

"Huh?" I grumble, confused and disoriented.

"I said wake up! You've been out like a light for the past hour," Hermione says, her voice surprisingly close. Blinking slowly, I go to rub my eyes and realize one arm is caught, the familiar feeling of pins and needles tickling at the deadened limb. I lift my head and realize it's been laying on her shoulder, my arm tucked behind the small of her back and my hand resting on her waist.

"Oh shoot! I'm so sorry!" I babble, reflexively tugging my arm out from behind her and falling over onto the slightly damp grass. She looks almost offended at my retreat, her head tilting to the side as she studies me. I feel a bit embarrassed reacting that way after we've been so close lately, but I didn't mean to jump away from her like that.

"It's nothing to worry about," she murmurs, reaching over and helping me off the ground. "It's almost time for dinner, are you going to stay there or are you coming with me?"
"Huh?" I say, still shaking the daze away from my nap. I flex my arm, the painful tingling beginning to leave. "Yeah, yeah I'll be right there." I grab my bag, quickly falling in line with Hermione as we amble up the hill back towards the castle.

"Are you alright?" I ask, looking her over. She seems stressed now, nothing like her playful self from earlier. Her shoulders stand rigid and one hand is clenched tight over the strap of her book bag, knuckles standing out in sharp relief. She glances up at me, a thoughtful look on her face as she considers my question.

"I… I am and I'm not," she confides. "Can we stop here for a second? I'd like to say something."

"Sure. What is it that you want to talk about?"

"I… I- I think I might…" She paces restlessly, tearing a groove into the well-fed Hogwarts grass. She lifts her hand up to her head, pinching her temple. "Damn it why is this so hard?" She exclaims, stumbling from one word to another as she attempts to string a sentence together. I've never seen her so flustered or worried before. I reach out, squeezing her shoulder.

"It's alright. You don't have to tell me if you're not ready, whatever it is," I reassure her. "Just know that I'd never judge you, alright? I'll always be around to chat. Helps that I'm your room mate," I add, smiling at her.

She returns the smile, her throat bobbing as she swallows heavily, staring at the ground. Her brow furrows dramatically in thought. "Can I talk to you some time this weekend? About… well, what I want to talk to you about." She fidgets nervously with her hands, staring at the ground. "I just need some time to sort things out."

"Like I said, I'm always around."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Now, would you like to go and eat? I'm feeling a bit hungry myself."

"Lead the way," she replies, gesturing forward.

I notice something different as we walk into the Great Hall. Plenty of red hair. Looks like the Weasley family is back. "Give me one second, alright? I need to go and talk with Ginny," I say.

"Ginny Weasley?" She asks, looking over at the girl and licking her lips nervously. "Do you mind if I come with you? I wanted to make sure she's doing alright after… after what happened. I know we don’t know her that well but… I want to talk to her. I don’t think she has many friends."

I cringe at that statement, having forgotten to speak with Ginny last year and induct her into our friend group. "Not at all. I'm sure it'd help for her to be surrounded by friendly faces right now."

I walk over, sitting down next to Ginny, with Hermione taking a seat on her other side. The Ravenclaw table has given her a wide berth, apparently incapable of comforting an emotional young girl. That's the one thing I don't like about Ravenclaw. Hell, I hate it. They constantly compete with one another, sabotaging homework, rampant bullying, the way they segregate themselves from other 'Claws who aren't stereotypically brainy. I guess they're Ravens for a reason.

"Hey Ginny, I murmur, doing my best not to startle her. She doesn't react apart from her fingers tightening around her cutlery, hands trembling as she grips the pieces of silverware. "I know you've probably heard this a million times in the last few days, and you're about to blow a gasket if you hear it again, but I want to say that I'm sorry for your loss. I understand what you're going through, and if
you need someone to talk to, I’ve been told I have a good shoulder to cry on.”

She huffs quietly, scraping and pushing the sparse amount of food around on her plate. "Thank you," she whispers, so quiet I almost don't hear it. "I... thank you."

"I'm here for you as well," Hermione speaks up, placing a calming hand on Ginny's back. "If you need me, either of us, we're here."

Ginny looks up, her eyes glistening and lip quivering, suddenly pulling Hermione into a tight hug. Hermione squeaks in surprise, hands held out awkwardly. She awkwardly wraps her arms around Ginny, cradling her against her shoulder and rubbing small circles into her back. Lisa and Padma sit down across from us, both looking concerned.

"Is she okay?" Lisa mouths, looking back and forth between me and Ginny. I shake my head.

"Not yet, but she'll heal," I whisper surreptitiously. "We'll be there for her."

The two of them nod in unison.

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“Hey… Daphne? Can we talk for a second?”

I’ve managed to corner her after one of the few classes she doesn’t share with Tracey. I’m sick and tired of the hostile attitude that I’ve been getting from the younger girls, and I want to put a stop to it by any means. If I have to use Daphne as an unwilling mediator, I’m going to do that.

She stumbles at my voice, confused. “Hey Helene… what are you doing here? Don’t you have runes with Gryffindor in a few minutes?”

I wave her off. “I’m skipping today, I’ve got something more important to worry about,” I explain, taking her by the arm and leading her to a nearby empty classroom, one of many in Hogwarts.

This school is severely underpopulated. A depressing result of two back to back wars and the near genocide of British muggleborns. In turn, many an abandoned classroom and a severe lack of course choices.

“What’s all this about?” She asks, looking furtively about the room. “Is everything alright with you? You’ve never pulled me aside like this before.”

I blast the dust off of a desk, taking a seat on top of it, my feet scraping the floor as I kick them to and fro. “Everything is alright with me, but not everything is alright with Tracey,” I say, Daphne frowning. “I don’t know why she’s taken such a fervent dislike to me-“

“She has her reasons,” Daphne interrupts.

I close my eyes for a moment, biting my cheek in mild frustration. “Like I said, I don’t know why she’s taken such a dislike to me, but I want to figure out what I did wrong. If I didn’t do anything wrong, I want to know why she’s been such an outrageous bitch to me since last winter.”

Daphne groans, running a hand down her face and pinching her jaw between her forefingers. “It’s not my place to say,” she says, obviously a bit cross with the situation as well. “Like I said, Tracey has her reasons. Trust me when I say that it is her story to tell, and she’s completely justified in her anger. She just shouldn’t be taking it out on you.”
“Well, I’d love to figure out what the fuck is going on and talk with her about – whatever it is,” I clip, sighing quietly when I realize that I’m taking my frustrations on Daphne. “Sorry, I shouldn’t be speaking to you like that. It’s just been driving me crazy having this divide between everyone. I know the tension has been bothering everyone else, and I don’t want this to carry on.”

Daphne nods, a melancholy look on her face. “Agreed. I’ll talk to Tracey, alright? I’ve got a spare block, but you should really get to your runes class. I know how seriously you take it.”

I smile at my sister, readjusting my bag and pulling it up a little higher. “Thanks Daphne. I’ll see you soon, alright? Don’t work too hard!” I order her, jogging towards the sixth floor.

-=:-

"Miss Potter, would I be able to speak with you for a moment?"

God damnit.

"Headmaster, what can I do for you?" I ask cordially, doing my damndest not to spit in the murderous bastards face.

"I was wondering if you would be able to come up to my office, so we may have a quick chat. I have some important information for you that I feel you would like to know," he responds, turning on his little twinkle cantrip. God, how I hate that bloody twinkle.

"I have runes in a few minutes, would there be any way this could wait?"

"I can give you a permission slip. This information isn't something that can wait."

"Well, let me contact Professor Flitwick or Snape and I'll be on my way."

"Hele- Miss Potter, surely you do not need to interrupt one of the Professors classes for this. Do you not trust me?" Dumbledore asks, a half-hearted attempt to guilt me.

"I'm simply following regulations Professor," I say, snapping off a messenger patronus to Severus. I smile at the massive thestral in front of me, ethereal hooves scuffing against the ground and a puff of silvery smoke emitting from its nostrils. "Professor, this is Helene. I have need of you for a meeting at Dumbledore's office," I announce to the patronus, which dips its head and disappears into the wall, off to relay my message.

"Shall we be off?"

"Yes, we shall," Dumbledore replies, unable to hide his astonishment at my patronus. "When did you learn to cast such a spell, let alone the messenger variant? That's highly impressive, even for a full-grown witch."

"I practiced. Then I practiced some more," I explain, not explaining anything at all. "I thought it would be an important spell to learn considering the host of dementors roaming around the grounds this year."

Dumbledore nods mutely, his beard swaying as he leads me to his office. Severus is waiting there, wearing his usual dour mask. Dumbledore makes no move to argue with his presence, inviting him with us up the stairs.

I take the same seat I did last, Severus yet again looming behind me. I cross my legs, resting my clasped hands on top of my knee. "Headmaster, what is so urgent that you pulled me away from one
of my courses?" I inquire, one eyebrow raised.

Dumbledore sighs heavily, looking everything like Atlas, the world resting on his shoulders. He glances up at me with dull eyes. "Miss Potter, I find there is no easy way to say what I must," he proclaims, glancing towards Fawkes who trills lightly, the quiet song of the phoenix tickling at my mind. I clench my teeth at the pain the sound brings, the magic of something so light clashing with my own. Fawkes cocks his head at me, now silent, one eye watching me warily.

"There is… a prophecy. A prophecy told before you were born, detailing that you will be the one to vanquish Lord Voldemort," he continues, unaware of my reaction to the phoenix song. "I wanted to tell you of this when you were older, more prepared for such a burden. I did not want to ruin your childhood, you see."

"I am fully aware of the prophecy Headmaster," I intone, openly smirking at his look of shock. "I understand that I will be the one to put down Voldemort one day. I do not look forward to it, but I know that it's inevitable. Was there anything important that you wanted to tell me?"

"I was… unaware that you already knew of the prophecy. To be quite honest, that shocks me deeply. If I may inquire, who was it that told you?"

"I'm afraid that I cannot divulge that information Headmaster," I deflect, waving my hand lackadaisically. I'm not about to explain to Dumbledore of all people that Death itself told me the prophecy. Hell, I'm not feeling up to explaining anything to him. I feel sick just being in the same room as the old man.

"I assure you Miss Potter, this information must be kept under lock and key, you understand? If Voldemort was to become aware of the prophecy you would be in grave danger," Dumbledore states, looking on at me imploringly.

"I understand, and the prophecy will not find its way into his hands. Now, was there a reason you brought me up here now as opposed to a few years ago? Why you deemed it necessary to withhold such vital information? Why you found an excuse to not supplement my education and train me for the war that I will fight in?"

"I simply wanted to make sure that you had a happy childhood," he argues, hands held out in a calming gesture. "No child should have to deal with such a thing hanging over their head. Nor should they be worked like an animal, training to fight at such a young age."

"Yet I still suffered every day within the oh so loving environment the Dursley's fostered," I spit back. Is this bastard really going to tell me that he wanted me to have a happy childhood? Does he not listen to the words that come out of his mouth? I clench my hand, my nails digging into the flesh of my palm as I glare at Dumbledore with unadulterated contempt. "Do you really believe yourself to be so important? Do you really believe yourself to be infallible? That every choice you make is without consequence? You’ve sat within your ivory tower for so long that you no longer see individuals Dumbledore, you are incapable of seeing the forest for the trees. How dare you sit there and try to bullshit me into believing that you allowed me to be abused for my own good."

"Helene, I did everything for you. I made my decisions for your betterment" he retorts, his magic beginning to condense, his presence stifling. "You are but a child, incapable of understanding the reasons behind the things I do. I do them because I must. I do them to keep you away from the dark. The danger that such power holds!"

He stands up, pacing back and forth, breathing deeply to calm himself down. I look on, disinterested at his display of power. Yes, I know I couldn't fight him right now and stand a chance of winning,
"Is that your fear? To create another Voldemort?" I goad him, my words dripping with venom. "Well, let me tell you something, Headmaster. I will never, never be like him. But, do you want to know something? You could have created another Dark Lord very easily, or should I say Dark Lady? You placed me into an abusive environment, you never checked up on me, you kept family heirlooms away from me in the hopes that by gifting them to a broken child that you would earn their unwavering trust. These are only a few of the things that you have willingly done wrong. You are the one who is dark. No, not in magic, but in your actions," I curse, working myself up into a small frenzy as I rant at the wizened man.

He rears back as if struck, my words hitting their mark. Severus tightens his grip on my chair, the leather near my head cinching under his callused fingers. I stand up, striking my fist on Dumbledore's desk, my aura flashing unintentionally, a deep black dancing around my body, the shadowy silhouette flickering out of existence as I reign my temper back in.

"You believe yourself to be the wisest of all men, standing on your pedestal and attempting to mould the world as you see fit. Sure, you can argue that you have honest, even good intentions, but you forget the lives that you ruin in your path. You do it all for your greater good, don't you? You and Gellert had big plans for the world, did you not?"

Shit. I think I got too carried away.

Fury emanates from Dumbledore, the anger tangible as it rushes off of him, his magic flaring wildly as he looks down on me in a rage. "You… you, young Helene, you remind me of a student I had a long time ago. He was clever, very clever. We argued much the same way that you and I are now. Do you know what happened to him? What he became? Do you?" He booms, his voice echoing off the walls, power laced through his every word.

"Tom Riddle," I clip, jutting my chin out and staring the Headmaster down, unwavering. "You would dare to compare me to him? The man who murdered my family? The man who nearly destroyed this world? You are blind, Headmaster. You… you mur-"

Severus grabs my shoulder, stopping me sort. "Watch yourself," he mutters tensely.

I hiss through gritted teeth, my jaw clenched painfully. I sober up quickly, realizing I almost let myself go there, almost gave myself away as the one Dumbledore is doing his best to hunt and put own. Me and my fucking temper.

"I'm leaving, before this office turns into a warzone," I seethe, the chair spinning out of my way with just a wave as I exit the room, Severus hot on my heels. I take deep, ragged breaths as I try to calm myself down. I march a warpath through the school, pushing my way through the crowds of students who fall over themselves in shock as they're rudely displaced. I quickly find myself in Severus' office, pacing wildly.

"Helene, calm down," Severus calls, grabbing me by the shoulders. "Breathe, alright? In, then out. In, then out."

I shut my eyes tight, in through the nose, out through the mouth. I stand there for a few minutes, my mind still raging, but slowly ebbing away. "I'm… I'm so damned furious," I gasp, slightly shocked at my anger. "I can't believe I blew up like that… I just- damnit, he riles me up without even trying! He thinks he can bring me back over to his side with that offering? He has the nerve to believe he can just walk back into my life and attempt to ruin it another time?"
"Apparently, he does…” Severus observes, his voice strained. "Things got out of hand."

"Understatement of the century," I laugh morosely, my voice heavy with sarcasm. "He saw my aura Severus, he saw my magic. He's going to put two and two together soon."

"Then we put him on the defensive," he states. "We need something to keep him off kilter, something to put him down for good."

"Rita's book isn't coming out for another few weeks," I grunt, resting my head in my hands, massaging my temples as a headache rapidly begins to form, a tense throbbing at the front of my skull. "We can't exactly push her to get it out immediately."

"She could advertise it, put out a teaser. Maybe a chapter or two released into the Prophet before the book launch?"

"That could work… but we want to take him by surprise. He could stop the whole thing before it even gets off the ground."

"Then we publish the teaser under a pseudonym."

Could that… could it be that simple?

"I'll get into contact with Octavius immediately," I say, shooting towards the floo. I cast a quick incendio, the fire roaring to life as a throw a pinch in. "Greengrass Manor," I intone, stepping through.

I vanish the ashes off my robes, dashing through the sitting room and up to Octavius' study. I knock loudly on the door, not even waiting for a response as I walk into the room. Octavius looks up at me in surprise, dropping his quill.

"Helene? What are you doing here? Is- is everything alright?" he asks, standing up and pulling me into a hug.

"There's been a change of plans."

"What do you mean, a change of plans?"

I sigh deeply, stepping back from Octavius and looking him in the eyes. "Dumbledore is becoming more of a problem, we have to start whittling away at his political base now. He’s getting more aggressive when it comes to keeping me under his thumb, and I’m scared to see what lengths he’ll go to."

Octavius nods, having been the one to help me realize how much Dumbledore had tampered in my life. “Is he not busy dealing with the current attacks on his person from the Prophet? That recent article detailing how you were… raised, seems to have made an impact."

“Not enough of an impact,” I say, shaking my head. “I think it’s pushed him to keep his attention focused on me. Dumbledore is big enough that these stories will probably be forgotten in a few months unless there’s a new piece of news released every week, or, something big enough to really knock him off his feet."

“So, what did you have in mind? I thought that Sirius and I had everything well in hand.”

“I think we should publish a teaser of Rita’s biography under a pseudonym. It was Severus’ idea, and I think it would work wonderfully before we can get it fully published.”
Octavius, scratches his chin, nodding along to a line of thought that only he is privy to. “It makes sense, and it would work, even just to get people interested before it’s fully released.” He pauses, taking close look at me. “Why are you so tense, Helene? This isn’t the first time Dumbledore has shown interest in you.”

My breath hitches, remembering the way Octavius spoke of Black Magic, the sheer level of disgust he holds for it. I flinch away from his caring expression, making sure to look anywhere but at him, terrified beyond all belief that if I tell him of my talents I’ll be disowned, kicked out of the family before I’ve even had a chance to enjoy it.

“Helene, Helene look at me,” he says, stooping down to my level and gently holding my chin. I grimace at the feeling of his calloused fingers on my face, the sensation a little too close for comfort and reminding me of Lockhart, ignoring the fact that those memories have been stricken from my mind.

Octavius pulls his hands back, noticing my discomfort. “Helene, no matter what you tell me, I will always be there for you, understand? I know you haven’t said it yet, and I know that I haven’t said it yet, but I’m… I’m your father, and it’s my job to be there for you. Nothing you say can tear me away from you.”

I shut my eyes tight, holding back the tears that threaten to spill over in droves. “I’m… the reason Dumbledore is after me is because… I’m a- I’m a Necromancer,” I stutter, ripping the band aid off as quickly as I can, averting my eyes from Octavius’ most likely horrified face and staring dumbly at the ground.

“Oh.”

I snort, a harsh, choking laugh escaping my lips. “I’m guessing that’s it then, right? I’ll be on my way, and I’ll make sure to find somewhere to stay come summertime. I know I have plenty of properties,” I murmur bitterly, turning around to leave.

I feel a strong hand grasp my shoulder and spin me around, forcing me face to face with Octavius. He looks conflicted. Deeply conflicted. I can see his warring thoughts, the way his eyes flick over me, his brow knitted together in a mix of confusion, love, and horror. “Don’t go anywhere, you hear me?” He whispers, biting his lip. “Because I’m not going anywhere.”

He drags me down to the sitting room, the both of us taking our seats that we took just a few years ago.

We sit there in silence, Octavius digesting the revelations that I’ve made, while I try desperately not to tuck tail and run.

After a few minutes Octavius cuts the tension with a verbal knife. “A Necromancer,” he says, his voice strained. “A real, genuine Necromancer?”

I nod contritely, still refusing to make eye contact. “Yes. Apparently, you have to have been brought back by Death to become one.”

“It makes sense. I don’t like it, but it makes sense.” He pauses thoughtfully, probably studying me, not sure what to make of his malefic adoptive daughter. “I don’t hate you, you know.”

I look up at him, unable to hide my confusion. “Why not? I remember how you spoke of the Black Arts, the way you revile them, the hate that you hold for them. Why would I be any different?”

“Because I know you’re not evil,” he interrupts, holding a hand out to stop me from beginning a
verbal tirade. “After the way you reacted to the vile, vile thing that happened to you last year, I know for a fact that you’re not and never will be evil. You regretted killing the man who violated you, you felt guilt for it. I know I wouldn’t have, I would have been proud to have put the man down. I would have tortured him until he was just a mindless sack of flesh that was once human,” he states emphatically, driving the point home by crashing his fist into his open palm.

“The magic that you may use? Yes, it makes me uncomfortable, and I would prefer to go my whole life without ever seeing it with my own two eyes,” he admits. “But that doesn’t mean that I want to go my whole life without seeing you.”

Octavius stands up, crossing the distance between the two of us and sitting down next to me. “I fought tooth and nail to make you part of this family. I’m not about to let you go now.” He lifts my chin up, forcing me to look into his eyes. “I love you Helene, I love you like my own daughter, because you are my daughter. I won’t lie when I say I don’t like what you’ve told me, but it doesn’t change how I feel about you.”

Sobbing, I clutch onto him for dear life, burying my face in his chest. He holds me for a while, just rocking me back and forth.

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I must have dozed off, because when I open my eyes it’s dark out and Sirius is lying next to me in his animagus form, snoring softly as he rests. I smile at him, running my fingers through his rough fur. He opens one eye lazily, quickly standing up and morphing back into himself when he realizes I’m awake.

He tilts his head awkwardly, his mouth opening and closing as he tries to put his thoughts into words.

“You know?”

“I know,” he echoes, nodding silently. “I knew… I knew that what you were dabbling in was bad, but I didn’t expect it to be the pinnacle.”

I flinch at his words, turning my head away. Sirius… Sirius of all people doesn’t understand it? He doesn’t get it?

It makes sense, what with him running away from his family. If anyone would be a practitioner of the Black Arts I’d assume it would be the Blacks.

“Oh! No, no no no, Helene! I didn’t mean it that way!” He says frantically, looking slightly ashamed. “Trust me, I was just… shit, how do I say this. I just meant that it came as a shock to me that you were studying Necromancy of all things. I would have expected Blood Magic, maybe the standard suite of Dark Arts, but not Necromancy, mainly because it would have been completely unheard of.”

“I get what you mean. I didn’t… I didn’t really expect to be doing it myself, but, the magic just feels natural to me, like I was always meant to use it,” I reply, one hand playing with my hair. “It’s the power that the Dark lord knows not, there’s no way it couldn’t be. I’m the only person in the entire world who’s able to use these spells.”

“The power the Dark Lord knows not?” Sirius inquires.

“The prophecy. There’s a part of it that says, ‘they will have power the Dark Lord knows not.’ I believe Necromancy is that power.”
“Helene, I’m sure Voldemort has read about these things.”

I shake my head. “But has he seen them? Has he felt them? Because trust me, words don’t even begin to cut it when it comes to Necromancy,” I retort, flicking my wand out and conjuring a pig.

Sirius looks on in confusion, although I notice a hint of pride for the ease in which I conjured the pig, not to mention the lack of wand movement or incantation. His look quickly morphs into abject horror when I cast corpse arms, watching in undisguised disgust as the pig is torn to ribbons, bits of flesh flying about the room in a manner disturbingly reminiscent of how Sirius tears open a present.

I vanish the mess, making sure that I haven’t turned my room into a makeshift abattoir, before turning back to Sirius. He simply stares at the spot where the pig once was, a slightly green tinge to his face and his chest heaving from the sudden burst of adrenaline.

“That was…”

“Yes?”

“That was absolutely fucking horrific,” he whispers, his voice raspy. “That’s… that’s one of the more… out there spells, isn’t it? Please tell me that that’s not a normal spell.”

“I regret to say, that is in fact, a normal spell,” I concede, having to prevent myself from laughing at his disgusted expression. “I felt the exact same way the first time I did that. You… you get used to it.”

“I do not want to get used to that,” he says pointedly, still staring at the empty floor.

“That’s fair. It’s a grimy, bloody, horrific field, and if Death itself didn’t tell me to master it I never would have gone within a mile of Necromancy.”

Sirius nods shakily, putting his arm around my shoulder and bringing me in for a sideways hug. “I love you to bits kid, but that was fucking terrifying.”

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Dumbledore was worried, more worried than he could ever remember being.

He was mystified by the girl’s hostile attitude. Did she not know that her anger would lead to her own destruction? Did she not understand that he has the best of intentions for her? That he is the only person qualified to guide her, and that she must listen to his every word and work underneath his tutelage to become a light in the coming darkness?

He flicked his wand, righting the fallen chair and the few scraps of parchment that were tossed about in her fit of anger. What should he do? What could he do to convince her of her folly?

He lost his temper, and that was unacceptable. Dumbledore understood that, but the girl knew things that nobody knows. She had pushed buttons of his that hadn’t been pushed in nearly eighty years. Like how did she know of him and Gellert? Where did she discover the prophecy? Where does she get the idea that he was manipulating her?

Yes, Dumbledore would readily admit that he had attempted to guide her towards her destined path. He had eased the road for her future travels and tasks. But… to manipulate?

No, I do not manipulate, he thought. No, I guide, I forge.
He believed that the horcrux must have been affecting her. Obviously, that was the issue. The magic of it must be leeching into her mind, moulding her into something wrong and twisting her against his benevolent will. She was bitter, much too bitter at the world.

Could her relatives really have treated her so horribly? Surely not. He believed that Petunia would come to love and care for the child as if she were her own. No one can ignore their own blood.

Yes, Petunia may have been a touch strict with Helene, but she never would treat a child in such a manner. Dumbledore had heard of the occurrence of child abuse in the muggle world but was unfamiliar with it as it was such a rare thing to come across in the wizarding one.

He wasn’t aware that magicals were almost incapable of child abuse due to the bond that magic creates between a parent and child. That combined with his tendency to trust the good in people above all else led to him deciding that no, the girl must be deluded. A combination of rampaging hormones and a tainted soul shard was turning her anger towards him.

He paused, wondering about her previous bout of magic. She had glimmered for just a moment when arguing with him. He thought long and hard on that, a visible aura on a thirteen-year-old? That was something completely unheard of for someone her age. The power she wielded must be incredibly, and even though it was there for only a split second it should be enough for him to see what colour it was, to study her magic.

Was it red? That would mean an affinity for fire, a strong sense of justice. Perhaps blue? Water and ice, a controlled temperance? No, that couldn’t be it. Not with her temper.

_Maybe gold?_ He hoped. _A prodigy in transfiguration and light magic like myself, a born leader._

He placed the tip of his wand against his temple, drawing out the silvery memory of their argument and placing it in his pensive, the ethereal liquid settling into the bowl with neither a splash nor a ripple. He plunged into it without hesitation, hoping to learn _something_ from their encounter.

He settled into the blurry environment of the pensieve, the colours muted, yet not black and white, unlike older models of the convenient invention.

He watched over the argument again, studying Helene’s body language. He noted that she was tense for most of it, even before she had sat down. She hid it well, and he didn’t notice her discomfort immediately upon her entering his office. He made a note to keep her obvious dislike of him in mind when it came to future interactions with the girl.

Her features began to crack after he had mentioned her childhood, after he inquired as to _how_ she knew of the prophecy. He wasn’t sure how she found out as he had the orb in the Department of Mysteries heavily tracked and knew for a fact that nobody has touched it since it was placed there. Not that they could, of course, as only the subjects of the prophecy could move it once it had been recorded.

Nobody apart from Severus knew of the prophecy, and he would surely never tell her of it no matter how close they are. He trusted the man above all else, his ever-faithful spy. Severus would never inform her of it, he knew how vital the prophecy was to his plans, not to mention Severus didn’t know the prophecy in full.

Dumbledore watched as her fury built, terrifying him. Such rage, such unbridled hatred in such a young girl, all of it directed towards himself. The horcrux _must_ be affecting her. He would have to look into it as soon as possible and see if there was any way to suppress the soul shard residing within her head, perhaps even cleanse her of it.
He felt his stomach knot.

If only he could rid her of it without a destructive method. His only theory was that Tom’s killing curse would be what inevitably cleansed her soul of his own, a poetic form of justice if there ever was one. It made sense to him, of course. If that was what placed the horcrux there, it must be able to remove it as well. Dumbledore hadn’t bothered to study deeply into the subject, instead having decided that that would be the only way in which the horcrux would be removed. Having decided it was the only way in which the horcrux would be removed.

Suddenly he saw it.

A flash of… what was it? Could that be?

“No.”

No, it couldn’t have been. It’s not… that wasn’t possible.

Her aura was black. Black.

“The Girl-Who-Lived is the Necromancer?”
Chapter Twenty | So Crazy It Just Might Work

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K. Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

Things are tense right now… very tense. I've caught Dumbledore attempting to use legilimency on me at least five or six times an hour at meals, and I can see he's getting more and more frustrated. He knows. There's not a chance in hell he doesn't know, and I don't know what to do. I blew up, got ahead of myself, and I'm probably going to be locked up in Azkaban for the rest of my life for it. Yeah, I'm going to live to a ripe old age while wasting away in prison, because that's obviously what Death meant by me making it past my centennial.

Shit, the whole family is on edge. Sirius and Octavius are doing everything they can to push out Rita's novel as fast as possible in the hopes that it may distract Dumbledore, but I doubt it's going to do any good in terms of protecting my ass. Severus is in a tizzy trying to figure out what he should do, coming up with the most insane plans to put down Dumbledore before he decides to confront me. I think I've got a week at most before the old man comes after me guns blazing.

I'm trying to keep my head on straight, training every free chance I can get in the Chamber. I've blown most of it to bits and repaired it repeatedly over the last couple days, doing my best to stock up on and master every spell I can in the hopes that it'll give me an edge in the fight that I know is to come. But what do I do against someone who has a hundred years of experience on me? What do I do against someone who was fighting in wars long before even my parents were born? What the fuck do I do?

I've done a number of rituals since the confrontation, taking full advantage of Salazar's old chamber. I'm terribly glad that I decided to keep blood on hand in case I needed to undertake some new ones, and I wouldn't have been able to get them done without my little stockpile. I'm doing everything I can to get an edge, regardless of the impact it may have on me later down the line.

My respiratory system has been augmented, leaving me capable of breathing in low oxygen environments, as well as being able to hold my breath for an extended period of time. That should keep me from tiring too much if there's a lot of smoke or debris in the air, as well as allow me to kick ass in the tournament next year, if I manage to live that long. I've also completed a ritual to augment my senses. It's going to take a few days to get used to how overwhelming some things can be right now, namely bright lights and loud sounds, but it'll help me react faster to something I can't see and detect someone who's sneaking up on me. Dumbledore may be old, but he's still an incredibly talented and powerful wizard, not to mention clever as hell. I wouldn't put it past him to ambush me when I least expect it and take me into custody then, if he doesn't murder me immediately.

Fuck.

I'm just so goddamn stressed. I know people are starting to pick up on it. The rings around my eyes, the way I jump at every noise like a scared rat, how I peek around every corner expecting the vivid green of the killing curse to be rushing at me. I'm splitting at the seams holding myself together, and it's only a matter of when, not if, before I snap under the pressure and make another mistake. Hermione's been following me around more, and I'm not really looking forward to our chat tonight. I know I promised to be there for her, but I don't know if I'd be the best emotional support when I'm on the brink of a nervous breakdown my self.
I don't expect myself to come out of this in one piece, because even if I do by some miracle defeat Dumbledore I'll still have to get the fuck out of Hogwarts and lay low somewhere. It's not like one can just kill the most famous wizard in the world and expect to walk away scot-free. Hell, even with my luck I'd be a political refugee at best considering the old man's past. Well, if they even believe what I have to say about him. Why yes officer, the Leader of the Light is a child murdering prick. Oh, you don't believe me? That's unfortunate.

I chuckle morosely, startling Padma, who's sitting across from me. I'm currently holed up in the common room trying to kill time through homework and mindless reading.

"Helene Potter? Laughing? The world must be coming to an end," she says sarcastically. "You feeling a bit better?"

I shake my head. "No, not particularly. I just had a funny thought is all."

"And what would that funny thought be?" She asks, hoping to drag me out of my shell.

"Nothing important," I reply. "Sorry, just having a tough go of it lately, thanks for watching out for me though," I continue, groaning internally when she doesn't look as though she'll let up.

"I don't know what's bothering you, but you can't keep pushing me and everyone else away. You've been a bloody zombie for the last few days Helene, and we're worried about you. What's going on?"

"I- I can't tell you, even if I wanted to. Trust me when I say you're better off not know, alright? Can we leave it alone, so I can focus on my paper?" I snap, instantly feeling guilty at her crestfallen look.

"Just, ugh. I really can't tell you what's going on, alright? I'm sorry that my shitty attitude is bothering everyone so much, but until I figure things out on my own, I'm going to be a bit gloomy."

She nods, unconvinced, and gets up to go chat with Lisa, who looks back at me sadly. I sigh quietly, praying that if everything blows over and I do miraculously come out of this in one piece that I haven't lost my friends in the process. I hunker down, dipping my quill into murky ink and setting it to the page, doing my best to dash through this transfiguration essay without looking too much like a prodigy. Sure, I could top the charts with my future knowledge, and I do to a degree, but I don't want to go so far above and beyond in my work that I start garnering even more attention. God knows that would be awful. Helene Potter, Girl-Who-Lived, Smartest Witch of Her Age and other assorted titles.

I fall into a rhythm, quill flying across the parchment as I work through my essay, my wrist cramping and fingers chafing as I write frantically, throwing myself into my work. I forget my surroundings as I focus myself on the task, finally keeping myself occupied and pushing away my maudlin thoughts. I feel a tap on my shoulder an hour later (an hour which felt terribly short), breaking me out of my fervor and startling me beyond belief. I shriek loudly, smacking my ink pot across the desk and spilling it onto the floor.

"Oh! I'm so sorry!" My attacker gasps, murmuring scourgify and vanishing the mess, the deep black of india ink disappearing from the carpet. Really, whose bright idea was it to put a carpet next to a writing desk, particularly in a school that uses open pots of ink. I would understand its placement if we used fountain pens or something that wasn't terribly messy, but having a carpet there just shows a severe lack of planning.
"It's alright," I breathe, picking up the empty pot from the ground, making sure it's clean before stashing it in my bag. I look around to see who just scared the ever-loving shit out of me.

"Oh, hey Hermione."

"Hey yourself," she says, looking a touch sheepish. "Sorry for scaring you there, I tried calling for you, but you didn't respond."

"I was pretty absorbed in my work," I reply, scratching the back of my neck. "At least my essay is one piece, right? No harm done."

"Yeah, true… still, sorry about that. I know how focused I can get, I'd probably have had a heart attack if you startled me like that."

"You'd have shot through the ceiling."

"Shush you," she chides playfully. "So… were you still up to chat? If you're feeling up to it of course!" she adds hastily.

"I'm up to chat. Where were you wanting to talk? From what I could tell from our last conversation I'm guessing you want this to be a bit more private?"

She nods, blushing slightly. "I'd like that, yes. Um- do you want to go out to the lake again? It's not too cold out," she awkwardly gestures to the exit, tilting her head pointedly.

"Sure, sure. Let me just go get a coat, alright?" I say, jogging off to our dormitory.

"Can you grab one for me as well?"

"Yep!" I call back, dashing up the stairs and rummaging through my trunk, nabbing a black biker jacket as well as one of my woolen jumpers. I throw the jacket on, the leather cold on my neck as I head back down the stairs at a more sedate pace.

"Here, take one of mine," I say, handing Hermione my jumper.

"Thanks," she chirps, grinning widely as she slips it on and walks next to me towards the exit. We stroll silently through the halls, feeling the tension rolling off each other as we slowly trudge down the stairs, strolling out of the castle and onwards to the lake. We sit by the same tree from the other day, a warming charm placed around us to stave off the crisp night air.

"So," I begin, unsure of what to say. I fidget, picking away at a hangnail on my thumb, hissing quietly as my finger slips, a small tear of blood leaking from the miniature wound. The one time I bleed, and it's because of a hangnail, because that makes sense. "I'm not the best at these… emotional talks, but I'll try my best, alright?"

Hermione laughs nervously, but I notice her shoulders relax a bit, a smidge of tension leaving her. "As long as you try your best, that's all that matters," she says, crossing and uncrossing her legs, unsure of how to sit. She settles on sitting lotus, legs interlaced in front of her. "I… I don't really know how to say this," she admits, eyes downcast. "I've been working myself up all week to talk to you, but the words are just stuck in my throat."

I lay my hand on her shoulder comfortingly. "Just know that whatever you say, I won't judge you. Alright?"

"Yeah, yeah," she concedes, still looking a touch doubtful. She scoots over, turning herself towards
me and placing her hands on her legs, her fingers kneading away nervously, rubbing small circles over her knees. "I… I bloody hell."

"I think I'm… I know- God!" She huffs, punching the ground and hissing when she hurts her knuckles. I raise my eyebrows questioningly at her language, unused to her cursing as I cast a quick healing charm over her hand, garnering a smile as thanks. "Why is this so difficult?"

"Hey, it's alright," I reassure her. "I'm not going anywhere, take your time."

She picks away at the grass, tearing small tufts of it from the ground and watching it drift through the air. She does this for a while, murmuring quietly to herself.

Puffing out her chest, she says, "Well, here goes." She lets a slow breath hiss through closed teeth, blinking slowly. "I'm… I'm interested in you Helene. Interested, as in, you know, more than a friend. You know? I… I fancy you."

My brain shorts out. I just stare at her, absolutely unaware of what to do in a situation like this. Hermione fancies me?

Fancies me?

"Oh," I squeak, completely unprepared for this. I blink once… twice, probably wearing the most mystified expression in the world as I try to register what she's just said. "You… fancy me. Me," I drawl, the words unfamiliar on my tongue. "No one's ever fancied me before."

Hermione chews on her lip, the skin turning white under her ruminations. "I should have known," she sniffs, her eyes begging to mist over as she starts to climb to her feet. "I'm just… you could never look at me that way."

"No, no!" I gasp, startling her as I grab her hands to stop her from leaving. "I… I'm flattered, honestly Hermione. You're an absolutely lovely person, beautiful, clever beyond belief."

"I'm sensing a but here," she says sadly, eyes downcast.

I sigh, running a hand through my hair as I try to figure out how to let her down easy. I can't exactly tell her that she's too young for me, right? Well, considering she's physically older than me, that'd probably confuse the hell out of her. But… can I trust her? Of all my friends, would Hermione not be the one I could trust the most? The one person I could tell my secret to?

"Yes, there is a but," I confess, squeezing her hand. "But, it's not for the reason that you imagine it to be."

"…and what would that reason be?" she queries, hope in her eyes.

"I… Christ, I see what you were talking about earlier, this is bloody hard to say," I chuckle, wondering how to begin. "You're going to think I'm absolutely and utterly insane."

"I wouldn't! Ever!" She argues.

"...are you really sure? Because this is going to make absolutely zero sense."

"Absolutely!"

I take out my wand, looking at her pointedly as I wave it through the air, casting a ridiculous amount of silencing and privacy charms. "I swear on my life and magic that I, Helene Lily Potter, am
originally from the year 1996 and traveled backwards through time to this universe, arriving in the year 1991, so I say, so mote it be.” My wand flashes brightly, signifying the oath taking place. Since I don’t drop dead, Hermione stares in shock and confusion, her mind working furiously as she attempts to figure out if this is all just some sort of incredibly elaborate prank.

"…"

She continues to stare at me, absolutely dumbfounded. "You’re… you’re not joking, are you? That was a genuine oath, wasn’t it?"

"No, I'm not joking, and that was a genuine oath," I confirm, squinting one eye as I do the math in my head to figure out how old I really am. "I'm mentally… what would I be- fifteen plus… wow. I'm seventeen years old, mentally."

"How did you travel so many years back? When did you come back? How old were you when you came back?" she fires off, her academic mind immediately chomping at the bit to glean every bit of information she can from me.

"Slow down! Slow down!" I gasp, hands up in surrender. "I came back when I was fifteen, nearly sixteen," I explain. "There as an… accident of sorts. I sort of, well- I died, and ended up back at eleven."

"You… what!?"

"I died."

“I’m so sorry,” she mutters, grabbing my hand and rubbing her thumb over it protectively. “That’s… that’s insane.”

"That's what I said."

She laughs loudly, wiping the tears from her eyes as she tries to restrain herself. "Only you could say that with a straight face," she marvels. "Helene Potter, the Girl-Who-Lived-Twice."

"Please, please don't give me a new title," I beg frantically. "I really could do without the attention. Please?"

"Well, I'm not about to go telling the world that you're some sort of time travelling super witch, am I? I'd be locked up faster than you could say 'bullshit.'"

"Language, Hermione!"

She rolls her eyes dramatically. "Oh, come off it! If I'm going to curse, now is the best time! Jeez, now I get why you're not interested," she laments. "I'd be uncomfortable dating someone four years younger than me as well. I do have to say, this wasn't what I was expecting for a rejection."

"Hermione, if I was four years younger I would have happily said yes," I admit, smiling at her shocked look. "Seriously, the you I know, the you I knew, you're a beautiful person, inside and out."

"Thank you," she breathes. "Huh… so you were my friend in your past life as well?"

"Yeah, it was me, you, and Ron."

"Ron?"

"Ron Weasley," I say, her eyebrows shooting up to her hairline.
"Oh- oh. I'm so sorry Helene."

"It's… it's fine," I mutter doubtfully. "I'm coming to terms with it. I didn't really reconnect with him in this timeline, what with him being in Gryffindor and all."

"So, you were in Gryffindor?"

"All of us were."

"I never would have thought I'd be a Lion," Hermione admits. "The hat offered it to me, but it just didn't feel right. I convinced it to put me in Ravenclaw instead."

"See, I had to have an argument with it last time as well. The thing almost put me in Slytherin. That does remind me, I did promise to see if I could get it a job as the new history teacher…"

"I think the hat would be much better than Binns- and honestly? That doesn't really surprise me. You do have some Slytherin tendencies, not to mention your whole being a parseltongue."

"Hey! That doesn't automatically mean I'm a Slytherin!"

"Really? Having the trait that Slytherin himself was most famous for doesn't make you a shoe-in? That seems a little far fetched to me," she argues.

"You do have a point," I admit. "But yeah, it was the three of us against the world. God, the shit we got up to… absolutely mental."

"What do you mean?" She asks, leaning forward, curiosity shining bright in her brown eyes.

"Oh yeah, none of that stuff happened this time around," I remember, patting myself on the back for having made sure that my friends and family haven't gotten caught up in any of the potentially traumatizing adventures I tend to go on. "Every year we got caught in the middle of something, more often than not it was Voldemort related."

"What!? A bunch of children messing around with something involving Voldemort!?"

"Trust me, our lives here were just one dangerous adventure after another. I've done my best to prevent them in my time here, make sure everyone's safe." I pause, thinking about my imminent confrontation with Dumbledore. Hermione notices my sudden change in demeanor, worriedly clenching my hand, rubbing circles in the crook of my thumb.

"What's going on?"

"I can't explain, you'd be in too much danger," I clip, averting my eyes from her intense gaze. "This isn't something you can get yourself involved in."

"Helene, tell me. If I went through the things I imagine the other me did, I can handle this," she argues, her eyes shining with determination. I purse my lips, looking a bit like McGonagall as I argue with myself. Hermione always did come up with the best plans, and I probably wouldn't have lived past first year without her around…

“That’s the problem Hermione. I don’t want to tell you those things. They… they’re the type of problems that break people.”

She leans forward even closer, enunciating each word emphatically, “Helene, let me help you.”

I groan, knowing that she has me wrapped around her little finger. "I'm telling you this in utmost
confidence, understand? You can tell no one, I mean no one what I am about to tell you."

"Cross my heart and hope to die," she swears, her hand signing across her chest.

I flinch. "Please, don't say that."

"Say wha- oh," she utters, understanding washing over her features. "No, no hoping to die over here- but you understand what I mean, right?"

"I understand. Now… shit- how do I even begin? When I… when I came back, when I was thrown back in time I gained an affinity for the darker forms of magic," I begin, holding my hand up when Hermione's eyes fly wide open in shock. "Just… give me a moment to explain, alright? I died, Hermione. I died. Death itself sent me back, and it turns out that there are a few perks to that. I'm a Necromancer, a true Necromancer. I am the only person in the world who can use any spell that involves the direct manipulation of life and death, sans-killing curse, although most believe that that's a soul spell anyways."

Hermione sits still, a tumultuous battle occurring within her mind. I can see fear and curiosity warring within her unfocused eyes, curiosity eventually winning out. "That's… that's a bit scary to be honest, to have that much power at your fingertips," she deadpans, unsure of how to think about the situation. "So, what does that mean?"

"It means I'm much more powerful than the average wizard, at least in terms of the spells I have access to. I can use magic that hasn't been seen in nearly a millennium, and Dumbledore is probably going to try and kill me some time this week because of it."

"He what!? But- but… what! Why? You haven't done anything… have you?"

I shake my head, staring down at the ground. "I tried to bring Ron back. You have to understand, I couldn't let him die, not when I had the power to stop it, to reverse it. Dumbledore… he found out. He knows it was me… and knowing him, he's going to have me locked away or executed as a monster. I wouldn't put it past him to personally execute me."

"God…" Hermione whispers, absolutely horrified. "Ron didn't come back though, did he? I mean, Ginny is still a wreck, she would be doing fine if he was still alive."

"He was back for all of twenty minutes," I say. Do I tell her who was the one to kill my friend a second time? Do I completely destroy Hermione's trust in authority? God damnit, why do I have to make these decisions?

"Dumbledore killed him," she murmurs, disgust washing over her as she works it out before I can even reply. "Oh my God… Dumbledore killed him?"

"Yep."

"…fuck."

"Took the words right out of my mouth," I echo, leaning back on the tree and closing my eyes. "That's why I've been so stressed lately, why I haven't been talking to you and the rest of the girls. I've been trying to figure out how I'm going to still be alive come next week."

Hermione frowns, her eyes flitting back and forth as she leafs through her mind, drawing up imaginary folders and scanning over them to come up with something. We sit there for an hour, brain storming and arguing over every plan under the sun. Leaving Britain, faking my own death, assassinating Dumbledore, you know, regular plans that thirteen-year-old students make.
"Wait, wait a second," she gasps, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Do you have a book covering the spells you're learning? You know… the-"

"Necromancy?"

"Yeah, that, uh- Necromancy. That one," she says, looking very uncomfortable as the word slips through her lips.

"I do, why?"

"Give me the book," she states, holding her hands out demandingly, like a greedy toddler.

"Are you sure? It's not the most pleasant reading."

"Just give me the damn book," she growls, her hands now shaking insistently.

"Jesus, alright, give me a second," I surrender, rummaging through my book bag and pulling out the massive tome, Hermione lighting up instantly at the sight of five kilos of new reading material. She snatches it out of my hands, flicking through it at light speed, her finger running across the page and her brow furrowed in concentration. She goes over page after page, the sound of fluttering parchment and the worried clicking of her tongue echoing across the empty grounds.

"I think I found something!" She cries, handing the tome over to me and pointing out a ritual that I haven't yet come across, as it's closer to the end of the book.

"Holy shit," I croak, reading the page once, then twice. I read it over and over again, my mouth slowly creeping into a smile as I start to really register what I'm looking at. "Holy shit."

"I know!" Hermione chirps, teeth sparkling as she grins at me.

"This could work!" I burst, standing to my feet and pulling her up with me. She squeaks loudly as I spin her in a circle, my laughter echoing across the school grounds. "This could actually work! If I could just get someone to help me… not you," I add at her pleading look. "There's no fucking chance I'm bringing you to a duel with Albus Goddamn Dumbledore."

She acquiesces, huffing quietly but accepting all the same. "I get it, I just wish I could help a bit more."

"Hermione, you have helped me more than you could ever imagine," I retort, snatching up her hands again. "Trust me, you've just given me a fighting chance. I never would have been able to figure this out without your help. Really, you've been saving my arse since 1991."

"That… that wasn't me though," she denies.

I pull Hermione in and kiss her on the cheek, laughing as she blushing deeply, stammering confusion. "W-w-w- what was that for!?”

"That was for saving my arse, for the umpteenth time. This is you, that was you. You're just as impressive as my old Hermione, hell, you're a bloody saint, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Now… let's get back inside, alright? I've got to go see someone about this," I explain, gesturing at the tome.

"Alright," she sighs, a tiny smile gracing her face. "Thanks for hearing me out tonight."

"Same goes to you," I reply with a smile of my own. "Let's go, it's chilly out."
I draw her into a warm embrace, hugging her tightly and burying my face in her marvellously bushy hair. "Thank you," I murmur. "You're the best friend a girl could ask for."

"Right back at ya'," she sighs, nearly snapping my ribs as she returns the hug. We stumble up the hill back towards the school, our legs tired and numb from sitting for so long. We stop outside the Great Hall, both of us heading off in different directions.

"I'll see you tomorrow, alright? I think I'm going to be out late tonight."

"Stay safe, okay?" Hermione asks, her voice full of worry.

"I promise," I vow. "I've got to go, alright?"

"Goodnight!" She calls, trudging back off to the common room as I sprint towards the dungeons. I knock on Severus' door frantically. The door swings open and I waltz in with a wide grin on my face.

"Have you been practicing cheering charms? Because there should be no possible way that you would be this happy after what has happened," Severus says doubtfully, wondering why I'm practically skipping whilst my head is on the proverbial chopping block.

"Nope! No cheering charms," I hum, swinging my arms at my sides in a very good Luna impression.

"So? What's going on? Do we have a plan?"

I slap Et Necromantium loudly onto the table, its legs rattling under the weight of the massive tome. I flip open to the spell Hermione found, jabbing my finger at it.

"Severus Snape, tonight is the night you're kidnapped by Helene Potter, Dark Lady in training," I cackle.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So, if you're wondering why Hermione is so quick to accept that Helene is a time traveler, disregarding the oath, I'd like to explain. I know it's a trope and it hurts me deeply to use it, but Hermione is still Hermione, and by that, I mean she's a bit starved for attention and love from her peers. She has a gut reflex to trust authority on a whim, as shown in the books numerous times. I think it's entirely believable that a very close friend that she's romantically interested in, who also happens to have a suite of ridiculous powers (eg: Parseltongue, speaking to Dementors, an incredible handle on powerful wandless magics) could potentially convince her that they were a time traveler. Hermione latches on to people and having close friends for the first time in her life won't instantly change her into a confident young woman.
"Are you sure this is going to work?"

"Of course, I'm not bloody sure! But it's the best goddamn chance we have!" I curse, turning my frustrated gaze on Severus. He glares back at me, appearing confident on the surface, but I can tell that he's just as nervous as I am. He keeps clenching his hands over and over, reflexively preparing himself to grab his wand at a moments notice.

"You better be sure of this Helene. Azkaban I can do, but death? I'm not ready for that yet."

"Nobody is dying tonight Severus, at least, not us."

I drag Severus forward, up the stairs from the dungeons towards the second floor. He looks around, confused as we enter Myrtle's bathroom. "What are we doing here? Is this where we lay our trap? A bathroom haunted by the most petulant ghost in the world? Yes! Of course! I see it now, we angst Dumbledore to death!" he complains, gesturing wildly at the slightly destitute lavatory.

"Shut up and watch," I retort, walking confidently towards the tap and hissing at it. The sinks immediately slide over, sinking into the stone floor as if they were never there in the first place, marble stairs jut out of the pipes walls in a tight spiral. I point at the gaping hole in the floor and smirk at Severus. "Welcome to the Chamber of Secrets."

"The… the Chamber of Secrets?" He breathes, eyes wide. "This is the entrance to the famed Chamber?"

"Well, it wouldn't be very secret if it was somewhere obvious, would it?"

"I assume not… but a bloody lavatory of all places?"

"I don't know if it was always a loo, but it is now," I shrug. "Let's move, alright?"

Severus nods shakily, trudging down the steps and grimacing at the thin sheen of scum on the pipe walls. "Have you not cleaned up?" He complains, wiping a hand over the muck and rolling it between his fingers in disgust. "Scourgify," he incants, the mildew and mold vanishing as he waves his wand.

"I haven't had a chance to clean the whole place," I say. "Trust me, it's a big chamber. I've done what I can, but I tend to be too tired by the end of the day when I'm here and forget to clean the entrance."

"Why would you not clean it on your way in?"

"Because I'm lazy."
We walk slowly through the entrance, making it to the main chamber after a few minutes. I drop my bag on the floor, searching through it for my etching set. After a minute of rummaging (damned extension charms without a search function) I find it, pulling out the magically enhanced hammer and chisel, along with a companion set that I hand to Severus.

"I'm going to start carving some runes around here, set some traps to keep Dumbledore busy for when we confront him. If you know any activatable wards start carving and casting," I say, immediately hunkering down to begin my work. The first ward I work on is an apparition trap that functions in two states, allowing someone to enter the area but not to leave, activating as soon as someone appara
tes into it. I was lucky enough to come across an old blood ward preventing phoenix travel and I've fashioned it to work on the same principle. I know the only way that Dumbledore can reliably enter the chamber is via Fawkes, so this should prevent him from escaping if he feels that he won't win the encounter.

It takes me about an hour and a half to finish my carving, a long series of runes crossing throughout the chamber in a wide circle. I cut my palm and place it against the keystone, the centre rune in the scheme and push my magic into it. The rune pulses white, then red, the light flaring and spreading across the chain, circling around the room and running back into the keystone. It blinks white once more before dimming, and I breathe a sigh of relief. If I did that correctly Dumbledore shouldn't be able to escape.

I look over to the entrance and see Severus hard at work on his own ward scheme, setting a stunning charm to go off if Dumbledore attempts to enter or leave through the front door. Dumbledore will easily detect it, but it'll keep him occupied and fenced in, unable to venture over to that part of the room without disarming it first.

I hear the grind of stone on stone as the entrance to Salazar's personal quarters opens, Magna's massive body sliding through the simian maw. :Close your eyes Magna, I have a friend with me: I command, before she can look at Severus and inadvertently kill him. That would put a damper on things.

:Yes Speaker, I close eyes: she replies, slithering towards me and crooning lightly as I pet her snout. :Who friend?:

:This is my Professor, Severus Snape. Remember his scent:

Magna sniffs at the air, head swaying side to side. :I remember: she says. :I no hurt man-bat:

I cackle at that. Severus, meanwhile is standing stock-still behind me, jaw to the floor as he gapes at the massive basilisk in front of him. "This… this is the monster of the chamber?" He croaks, his chisel falling through loose fingers and clattering against the floor.

"Don't worry, she won't hurt you," I reassure him. "She knows you're a friend and won't attack you."

"Could we not use her to fight Albus?" he asks, picking up his fallen tool and wiping the dust off the shining metal. "A basilisk would surely be effective."

"If I fail to ambush him immediately, I'll call Magna in to aid us, she'll be hiding off over there," I say, pointing to my left at one of the pipes. "Dumbledore could probably go toe to toe with her on his own without being in too much danger, but when we team up I don't believe he'd stand a chance."

"Would it not be better for her to be with us immediately?"
"Do you see the size of her?" I ask, raising my hand above my head to the six and a half feet Magna stands when lying down. "She takes up most of the chamber just being here, for her to be moving around when there's two of us would be too dangerous. It'd be way too easy for her to get knocked over by a spell and crush one of us. No, she's going to ambush him if things don't go well. Additionally, with you all 'tied up' you won't be of any immediate help. You're the second wave, alright? Anything goes wrong... if you think I'm about to lose, you jump right in, okay?"

"I understand," Severus admits, peering worriedly at the great snake before turning around. "I'm going to... get back to what I was doing."

We labor over the Chamber for a few more hours, layering ward over ward to give us as much of an advantage as possible. I've put down everything I can think of in terms of traps and annoyances. Sludge pits, ice bombs, and everything else under the sun. I've got the home field advantage and I'm going to use it to the best of my ability.

I wipe the sweat from my brow, walking over to my bag on tired, shaky feet and placing my tools back in it. I look over to Severus, who's resting against the wall and meditating, preparing himself for the fight to come. I go over to him and sit down, closing my eyes and thinking over strategies, refamiliarizing myself with different spells that will be effective, that will catch Dumbledore off guard. My wandless abilities are going to be tested to their breaking point tonight... this morning more like. I open my eyes and flick my wand, whispering "tempus."

4:56 AM.

Well, looks like I'm about to ambush Albus Dumbledore.

"Severus, it's time," I intone, my voice flat and empty. He cracks one eye open, calmly rolling his shoulders and climbing to his feet.

"I'm ready."

I nod, leading him over to Salazar's statue, binding him loosely beside the pool. I make it look as if I've pulled the ropes snug behind him, while leaving his hands free so that he can quickly vanish them and join the fight when the need arises. I walk over to the sleeping Magna, waking her by patting my hand against her flank. :Magna, take your position. Attack the old man when I call for you:

She nods her massive head, slithering towards the pipe and coiling herself against the wall, prepared to launch herself towards Dumbledore at a moments notice. I exhale heavily, my body beginning to tense, anxiety rearing its ugly head. I clench my teeth, stamping down the suffocating feeling of danger and fear. I blink to Dumbledore's office with a sheaf of parchment in hand, startling Fawkes. The Phoenix screeches loudly as I place the sheet on Dumbledore's desk, giving me a splitting headache as I fire off a blasting curse at the wall before blinking back to the chamber. Now all I have to do is wait.

I stretch my arms and legs and begin to pace back and forth, keeping myself moving. Wouldn't do to get a stitch in the middle of a fight, nor would it do me any good to be caught standing still. Constant vigilance.

My head snaps to the centre of the chamber as a fireball bursts out of thin air, loudly announcing Dumbledore's presence as he strides out of the flames unscathed, his eyes devoid of their usual shine. Instead they're dim, emboldened, an old and terrifying strength hidden in their depths.

"I received your letter, Miss Potter," he says flatly, holding out the parchment in front of him. "I
know you're onto me. If you ever want to see your Potions Master again, come to the Chamber of Secrets immediately. You know how to find me."

He crushes the letter in his hand, a puff of smoke emitting from clenched fingers as it bursts into flames. He scatters the ashes across the floor. Fawkes glides off to the side, perching on top of one of the statues lining the Chambers walkway, staring down at me angrily. I scoff at the phoenix, waving mockingly. "Imagine how surprised I was to find that you, the Girl-Who-Lived, is a Necromancer," Dumbledore states thoughtfully, bringing my attention back to him. "I've been searching for you for a while, Helene. Thirteen years old and already a murderer, already dabbling in arts that never should see the light of day. You truly do remind me of Tom Riddle… in fact, I do believe you terrify me more than he ever did."

I cock my head to the side, peering at Dumbledore inquisitively. "I was surprised to find out as well. Turns out I have a real knack for this," I say, transfiguring a loose stone into a close lookalike of Fawkes. I flick my wand, a nauseating gray beam of light shooting from the end of it and striking the conjured animal. It screams as the flesh sloughs off its bones, the feathers decaying rapidly as they flutter slowly to the ground. All that's left is a puddle of avian flesh, a small rib cage and skull balanced precariously on top of the gory pile. "See? I only learned that last week."

Dumbledore shakes his head sadly, arms open wide. "Must we fight Helene? Can you not come back to the light as your parents would wish? You still have a chance at redemption, dear child."

"You have some nerve Albus, bringing my parents into this. Redemption? You're one to speak. Albus Dumbledore, murderer, child abuser, manipulator, and so-called Leader of the Light," I spit through gritted teeth, my voice full of ice and malice as sparks fly dangerously from my wand. "You left me to be abused by the Dursleys. You allowed Voldemort to enter the school in my first year in some harebrained plot to pit me against him. You allowed a dark artefact into the school in second-year, one that would have sicced a goddamn basilisk on the students residing here, placing everyone in danger once again. You grant dementors access to school grounds, monsters that are known to attack without threat or prompting, bestowing a fate worse than death upon their victims. No, Albus Dumbledore. You have long stood away from the light."

Dumbledore shakes his head sadly, his hands held out placatingly. "You are delusional. A child with a broken mind, possessed and twisted by the scar on your forehead," he sighs melodramatically, bowing his head in sadness. He looks up at me, resignation on his wizened face. "Tell me, monster, whatever you are or claim to be. Where is Severus?"

I laugh at that, a bitter, hateful laugh that echoes eerily off the Chamber walls. "Monster? Are you not the one who murdered a boy of only thirteen quite recently? Employed a paedophile in a boarding school without so much as a background check? You call me a monster? Do you not listen to yourself? You've lost your mind Albus," I spit, gesturing behind me at the prone form of Severus, who's putting on a show of struggling weakly against his bindings. "Your esteemed potions master is over there. You do know you'll have to get through me before you have any chance of rescuing him, correct?"

"Albus! Get me out of here! She's mad! You've got to he-"

"Quiet," I growl, flicking my wand lazily and silencing him. "You took him hostage, stole him away in the dead of night and then brought me here with the threat of his life hanging over my head. You are a monster, cut and dry," he reasons, hands held in front of him like a priest directing his followers. "I wished so much for you. For you to carry on as a bastion for the light long after I die, to usher the world into a new era," he states emphatically. "Instead… you fall, you fall into the darkness just as your predecessor did. You disappoint me greatly."
"Disappoint you? Disappoint you?" I roar, blistering fury coursing through me like a poison. My body is raring and rearing to fight, to destroy this blustering madman in front of me. "Do you not take responsibility for your murder of a child? For your heartless killing of Ron Weasley? For allowing my rape at the hands of Lockhart? Do you not take responsibility for destroying any semblance of a childhood I might have had? How you bound my magic and person, attempting to twist me into some boy hero? You are blind Dumbledore, completely and utterly blind. You disgust me, and every fibre of my being is repulsed by the façade you chose to show," I continue, working myself into a righteous fervor, screaming for his blood. "I am a Necromancer not by choice, but by necessity. I died, Dumbledore. I died. I died and was brought back to right this wrong, to rid the world of Voldemort and use the God-given powers bestowed on me. I will not die again, not until I am more wrinkled and ancient than you are, with my sanity more intact than yours ever was."

"You? Of course, you were the one to murder Gilderoy…" Dumbledore says thoughtfully, before understanding washes over his previously quizzical features, the puzzle pieces coming together. "Resurrection," he whispers, his voice carrying across the chamber and echoing off the walls. "Brought back into this world by a demon no doubt… you will have to be put down I'm afraid. I cannot allow such evil to walk this Earth."

Fuck you, old man. The ancient prick is just going to ignore everything I've said! All that I've gone through at his hands? I guess it's time to stop monologuing and put an end to this.

"Then come and rid me of this world," I challenge, arms spread wide, beckoning him forward to fight as I bow my fingers forward, sending blades of air at him from all sides. Dumbledore jumps, leaps much higher than a man of his age should, flying over the ethereal blades and into one of my traps. The floor turns to thick tar beneath him, clawing and dragging at his feet, pulling him into it's depths.

I flick my wand, sending a rotting curse at him followed by another round of elemental cutters, thin bullets of compressed air flying towards him. He destroys the floor beneath him without hesitation, scattering the shining black tar and spattering it over the walls as he deflects the rotting curse. He cries out as he's struck by my second attack, two neat holes appearing in his bright yellow robes, slowly suffusing with the deep crimson of his blood.

"You're strong for a child," he states, whipping his wand around his head and sending a cyclone of fire in my direction, the heat stinging my eyes and scorching away my eyebrows. I throw my arms out, banishing the fire by suffocating it of all air, before clenching my hand and drawing it down, a section of the ceiling forming into a cobbled fist and crushing the ground where Dumbledore was just a moment ago.

:Magna, attack!: I hiss, grinning widely as she flies out of her hiding place, smashing into Dumbledore and sending him flying. He shouts even as he soars through the air, incanting something in a language I've never heard before, his voice thick and guttural, the sound coming out of his mouth nearly inhuman. A pearlescent globe of red shoots towards Magna, bright violet flickering along its edges. It strikes her just short of her head, Magna screeching loudly as it connects, the statues within the Chamber shivering under her cry.

I watch in horror as her hide begins to peel, thick sections sliding off like snow on a mountainside, viscous green blood pouring from the wound, smoking and sputtering as it melts the floor beneath it. Magna opens her eyes, roaring her defiance at Dumbledore as she attempts to subdue him through her gaze. He reacts immediately, shutting his own and sending off a rapid combination of spells, every colour of the rainbow and more rushing headlong towards Magna, booming as they explode upon her flank.
I support her as she bites and hisses at the rabbit-like old man, leaping to and fro about the room, his shoes clicking away like a maddened tap dancer. Jesus Christ the man can move. I clap my hands, two walls of air slamming into Dumbledore and breaking his nose, blood spurting violently from the long and crooked appendage.

He glares at me, eyes lit up in fury. Suddenly he's moving faster than I can even imagine, his arm a blur as spells fly at me at an incredible speed. I can feel them zip by my head as I dodge them, blinking about the room, how they crackle and whistle as they crash into the walls behind me. I move back, steadily retreating under his onslaught, my empty heart skipping at the sight of Magna lying dead, her normally golden eyes dull and pale, chunks of bone and viscera littering the ground near her.

"I'll miss you, you weird fucking sna- fuck!" I hiss in pain as I'm clipped on the shoulder due to my momentary distraction, my robes fraying from the piercing hex. I notice that my injuries beginning to mirror his, finding it slightly amusing even in the thick of battle.

I move to dodge the next spell, cursing as I'm struck in the jaw, a long, jagged cut splitting the skin and knocking out a few of my teeth. I spit the bits of displaced bone to the ground, grinning ferally as I start to lash out with bigger spells, more violent, destructive ones. Deadly ones. I jab my wand viciously, whispering "mortuus manibus." Rotting arms erupt from the ground ripping and tearing at Dumbledore's legs, taking him by surprise. A gout of fire erupts around his feet, burning away the sickening limbs. He presses on after cauterizing the wound, his right leg dragging behind him and a bloodied chunk of muscle lying on the ground, a spattered pool of red slowly growing underneath it.

"It's been a long time since someone challenged me so," he compliments as he fashions a host of growling, spitting wolves out of the rubble, sending them towards me, their slavering jaws wide in anticipation. I punch forward, a wave of stone rolling up and out, spikes impaling the transfigured beasts, who howl and cry in their death throes.

I scream out in pain, watching in horror as my left arm dangles uselessly from my side, almost severed completely by a cutting curse that was sneaked through the barrage of wolves. I clutch at the useless limb, holding it in place and praying it doesn't fall off. I don't know if I could reattach it on my own.

"Avada Kedavra!" I cry, the killing curse rushing headlong towards Dumbledore, his eyes wide in shock. A sudden flash and a burst of fire intercepts the spell, Fawkes exploding into a burst of gold feathers, a small pile of chirping ashes appearing below.

"Really? You're surprised that I'd cast an unforgivable after I just tore bits out of you with an eldritch summoning spell? Stupid fucking man," I crow, taunting him.

Dumbledore roars in fury, his beard flowing about him like a living creature as he advances. I throw up an aegis fortis, reflecting the next wave of spells sent at me before it cracks, a mighty thunder clap erupting from the glimmering shield as it collapses. I can feel Severus behind me, waiting for his moment, his opportunity to take Dumbledore by surprise. I continue to shrink back, deflecting and dodging the fatal beams that head my way.

He's starting to go all out, an outright horde of different transfigured creatures running or flying towards me. I notice a host of griffins screeching as they leap forwards, most of them getting cut in half by blades of air, their innards spilling out onto the floor.

"Holy shit," I breathe, watching as Dumbledore fashions the transfigured organs into a dragon, a Hungarian Horntail to be exact. Jesus fucking Christ. It roars menacingly, swinging its tail towards me. I quickly dive out of the way, eyes widening in horror at the deep furrow its dug into the rock.
If that hits me, I’m fucking dead.

I have to dodge and weave as Dumbledore attempts to pepper me with spells, all the while circling a forty-foot long dragon as it spits massive gouts of flame in my direction, clawing and hissing at me. I bring my hand up, great stone spikes erupting out of the ground and impaling the dragon. It roars in pain, the Chamber shuddering under its death throes.

As it struggles to stay alive, it lunges desperately, blood flying as it rips its chest open upon the rock and thrusts one great clawed wing towards me. I dodge the attack, but another spell gets through, a blasting curse smashing into my gut like a runaway train. I throw up a massive shield of stone as I’m tossed backwards. I catch a glimpse of layer upon layer of marbled rock bursting out of the floor and moulding to the ceiling. I watch as the dragons head is pulled along with the summoned stone. A horrendous crunch accompanies the creatures head bursting violently as its crushed against the ceiling, thick chunks of viscera and gray matter spilling over the wall.

I crash violently into the moat surrounding Salazar's statue. I gasp silently, bubbles flowing from between my lips as I sink into the frigid water. Kicking frantically, I force myself to the surface, desperately heaving myself up and out of the pool, my muscles screaming out for rest.

"Now is the time," I gasp, my lungs burning from my exertions. Even magically augmented limbs can only keep up for so long. Severus nods his head, his chin jutting out and jaw set rigid as he removes his bindings, quickly climbing to his feet. I collapse to the ground, faking unconsciousness, feeling the incredible shocks rush through the stone floor as Dumbledore breaks his way through my wall.

I hear the crash as it collapses, feel the sharp pain of shards of rock cutting through my robes and carving shallow, jagged furrows in my back. I stay still, prone, and for all accounts knocked out, unaware of my surroundings.

"Albus, I got free, I- I stunned her," Severus croaks, his voice thick with faux-relief. "What do we do with her?"

The steady click of Dumbledore's shoes bounces off the walls, the sound eerie and foreboding. "$w_e\, we\, k_i_l_l\, h_e_r\, o_f\, c_{o_u_r_s}_e,"$ he states, his voice even and devoid of all emotion. It takes everything in me not to react to that, how easily he asks one of his teachers to kill a student. What horrifies me the most is his tone. There’s something in the way he speaks that makes it absolutely clear that he expects Severus to accept his order, for it could be nothing else, without question. "$u_n\_l_e_s_s\, y_o_u\, h_a_v_e\, a_n_o_t_h_e_r\, i_d_e_a\, S_e_v_e_r_u_s?"$

"I do Albus," he announces, well hidden anticipation lacing his words.

Dumbledore pauses for a moment, and I can just picture the shock on his face from being denied in such a way. "$w_h_a_t\, w_o_u_l_d\, t_h_a_t\, b_e\, S_e_v_e_r_u_s?"$ He deadpans icily.

"$A_v_a_d_a\, K_e_d_a_v_r_a,$" he intones, the neon green reflecting off the water in front of me, the bright light stinging my eyes. A muted thump from behind tells me the job is done.

It’s over.

I crawl to my knees, supporting myself loosely with my one good arm. Severus scrambles over, pulling me up and cradling me underneath his shoulder.

"You're hurt," he whispers, staring at my arm, which is now hanging on by only a few errant threads of muscle. "$y_o_u'r_e\, n_o_t\, b_l_e_e_d_i_n_g,"$ he breathes, as he notices the absence of liquid crimson.
"Comes with the territory of being resurrected," I explain, running my wand over my arm. "Dabbesra'a sha'aoyat, g'arnea kh'shal" I hiss, the two of us watching (Severus with no small amount of revulsion) as my skin and bone thread back together through the necromantic bastardization of a healing charm, which I’ve decided to dub ‘the flesh forging charm,’ due to its direct translation. I sigh in relief as I flex the limb, making sure my fingers are still functioning properly, tapping my thumb to each one in succession while rolling my wrist.

"Looks like I'm still in one piece," I laugh, groaning as I feel my shattered ribs protest. "Mostly one piece."

"He underestimated you," Severus states, looking towards Dumbledore's slumped over corpse, mouth open in shock, his empty, terrified eyes still wide open as he realizes Severus’ betrayal. "You shouldn't have come out of that in one piece, let alone alive," he marvels, his eyes shining brightly with awe. "You fight incredibly well."

"Thank you for your unwavering support," I laugh, marching past Dumbledore's body and pointing my wand at Fawkes. I strike him with the same rotting curse I did his transfigured clone, the tiny featherless bird melting into a puddle of liquid flesh, a small puff of fire signalling the phoenix's true and final demise. "And that takes care of any avenging fowl," I mutter, striding back, picking up the forgotten chunk of leg and throwing Dumbledore over my shoulder, my muscles aching under his weight. Christ the old man is heavy.

I beckon for Severus to follow, leading him up the conjured stairway through the mouth of Slytherin and onwards towards the ritual room. I toss Dumbledore unceremoniously onto the stone altar, placing the hunk of muscle into its previous place and stitching it back on using another flesh forger. I continue as I go over the rest of his body, sealing his wounds and healing all of the physical damage he took during our fight.

After a few minutes I sit back, wiping my grimy hands off on my robes and yawning loudly, doing my best not to put my gore-soaked digits near my mouth. "Are you ready Severus?" I ask, turning to the potions master.

"As ready as I can be," he states confidently, throwing up a shield between me and him, prepared for a potential ritual backfire.

I place my hands onto Dumbledore's chest, closing my eyes and reaching out with my magic, searching for that familiar sense of ancient, freezing death. I grab hold the instant I feel it, yanking and pulling with all my might. Severus gasps in fright and no small amount of disgust as he sets his eyes on the macabre sight, the smoky, black as ink vines slipping out of the ground, rearing upwards and latching onto Dumbledore. They twist and knot themselves over one another in their mad rush to enter his body, slipping through his open mouth, his body seizing and shaking as they fight their way in.

I grit my teeth, feeling the strain on my magic as I push the ritual further, changing it to my own needs. "Servum meum, veniet ad me," I call, black magic suffocating me as ice crackles along the walls and altar, the room awash in the sharp stench of sulfur. Severus catches me as I fall, hoisting me up and balancing me on shaking legs.

"Did… did it work?" he frets, watching over the now still form in the centre of the room.

"It did," I exclaim, as the once dead Dumbledore slowly raises, climbing to his feet unsteadily. "It fucking worked."

I rush up and snatch the wand out of his quivering hands, held out in fear and confusion. I gasp as I
feel a rush of power, the wand singing to me as I pull it away from Dumbledore.

I'm in awe of the sensation, as it feels like a part of me had been lost and was finally reclaimed. It feels so terribly familiar. I look down at the wand, Deaths wand, I realize. I can sense his magic all over it, the concentrated feeling of something that should not exist in this world all packed into one tiny, fragile wooden container. Dumbledore had this? Ironic that the Leader of the Light's fame was influenced by the blackest of artifacts.

"Dumbledore, stop what you're doing at once," I command, smirking as he does so immediately, freezing in place.

"W- what dark magic is this?" he croaks, throat dry and rough from his very intimate brush with death.

"Necromancy, Dumbledore. Exactly what you came here to end," I explain, laughing openly at his terrified look. "This is what you get for meddling with my life and so many others, trying to twist me as you saw fit. That is over, now and forever. From here on out, you are my… undead servant."

Dumbledore looks as if he's about to vomit, and I chuckle bitterly as I congratulate him, clapping sardonically at his horrified stare. "You will never mention what happened here in this Chamber, nor of the Chambers existence. Our fight, your suspicions of my powers, Severus' betrayal of you, as well as your resurrection… all will be hidden. You will no longer meddle in the lives of others, as well as be incapable of communicating with others about my powers in any way shape or form. You will not be able to write any mention of it down, sign it, hint at it, allow someone to enter your mind, nor speak of it out loud even if there aren't others around."

"Yes, I can," I reply, looking back at Dumbledore. "Well, you heard the man! You can no longer speak ill of me, nor can you make any attempt to convince others that I am dark, dangerous, or otherwise unsavoury, nor can you make any comments that would put me in danger. This also applies to Severus," I recite, tapping my chin thoughtfully. "I can't believe I forgot! You can never attempt to bring or allow harm to come to me, as well as any of the students and staff at this school, be it personally or through outside means."

"More than satisfactory," Severus drawls, stepping up towards Dumbledore and leering at him. "You disgust me Albus. For so long I believed you to be good, that you looked out for me and others who have been in my position. The abused, the downtrodden… we flocked to you and your banner, praying that you would take us under your wing. Me, for my abusive childhood and failings as a young adult. Filius, for his status as a half-breed. Hagrid for the same. I loved you as a son would love a father, trusted you to treat me and others like me right," he spits, fury lacing his every word, his magic flaring dangerously. "Instead, you place the child of prophecy, Helene Potter, Lily's fucking daughter in a household where she was beaten and starved, neglected emotionally and physically. It pleases me to no end that I was the one to destroy you."

I look down at Dumbledore's wand, resting loosely between my fingers. "You will go and get yourself a new wand tomorrow," I state. "You will follow me and Severus out of here and return to your chambers as if nothing of circumstance happened tonight. You will carry on as you normally would without interfering with or ignoring your previous commands."

Dumbledore raises his head proudly, although I can see him attempting to fight the compulsions, the
commands, his eyes shining with anger and fear. "Wipe that scared look off your face, it's unbecoming of you," I finish, smiling as the fight is bodily forced from his eyes.

"Severus, I think it's time we got some rest," I announce, reaching out and bracing myself on his arm, too tired to walk without assistance. Severus grasps my hand and pulls me back in to him, supporting my weight as we leave the Chamber of Secrets. The slave that once was Albus Dumbledore follows in our wake as we skirt around the massive corpse of Magna. I pause to look on at her sadly, bowing my head in respect for a moment before carrying on.

I hear a thud behind me and turn to see Dumbledore having stumbled into one of our traps, lying flat as a board from the body bind ward. Tired beyond belief, I deactivate the trap, freeing him.

I try to keep an eye on him as I limp towards the exit, but I find myself I nearly fall over laughing when Dumbledore stumbles into another trap on the way, stunning himself as he attempts to exit the Chamber.

"I forgot about that one," I chuckle, tiredly wiping a tear from my eye.

"I have to say, it does me well to see that after the tonight's event," Severus agrees, snickering (yes, snickering) under his breath, before returning the deceased Headmaster to consciousness. "Shall we be off?"

"Yes, we shall."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: There we go! Dumbledore is taken care of! I've been working towards this chapter for a while and had a ton of fun writing it. I've never really written an extended fight scene before, so please, please let me know if it was as fun to read as it was to write. Also, if you're wondering what the (probably very poorly translated, my apologies if you've studied these languages) spells earlier mean, here are their (loose) definitions:

Mortus Manibus: Dead grasp. (Latin)

D'abbesra'a sha'aoyat, g'armea kh'shal: Flesh fused, bone forged. (Aramaic)

Servum meum, veniet ad me: My servant, come to me. (Latin)
I look around at my surroundings, finding myself terribly confused. For some reason I'm in the Gryffindor common room. The familiar tapestries of warm red and gold hang from the walls, the fireplace that usually crackles merrily off to the side is devoid of heat, stale charcoal lying behind worn steel bars. The room is frigid, piercing, the cold cutting through to my bones, my muscles quaking and shivering under its onslaught. I walk over to the fireplace, knowing that even if the fire is out it’s still warmer next to the dense stone, pulling my robes tighter around me in an effort to stave off the cold.

"Long time no see."

I whip around, wand at the ready, but I glance down in a panic. No wand. I flick my hand, attempting to conjure animated blades and other weapons from the ground and air. Nothing. I look up to the source of the voice and my stomach knots, bile rising in my throat.

Ron looks back at me, a faint smile on his face as he sits cross legged on the couch. His eyes are empty, rotted away, cavernous voids where they once rested. He grins, his mouth opened wide, giving me a glance of festering teeth dotted with blackened pockets of scum, slowly crumbling away. He waves playfully, his skin yellow and gray.

"You well?" he rasps, his voice as worn as his body, the sound like gravel under a cars tires.

"Ron… what's going on? Is this a dream?" I murmur, staring at him in horror and confusion. I rub my eyes, blinking as I look at him.

He’s still there.

"This is just a dream, just a terrible, terrible dream," I continue in a mild panic, nausea tickling away at my stomach.

"Yes, this is a dream, but… it's very real," he replies, resting his clasped hands on his leg. "I just thought I'd drop by and say thank you for avenging me."

"Avenging you? You mean killing Dumbledore? You know he's not dead, dead, right?"

He cocks his head to the side, eyebrows slightly raised and another terrifying grin on his decomposing visage. "Yes, I know, but it's the thought that counts," he states succinctly. "Crazy awesome fight by the way. I watched the whole thing, bloody impressive that was. Oh yeah! You're probably confused," he says sheepishly. "Death said it would be alright if I came by and said thank you. Sorry about the whole look, you know, probably a bit freaky" he continues, gesturing at himself and shrugging in embarrassment. "Apparently this is how I look if I want to pop into your dreams. Not very attractive if I say so myself."

"You've definitely had better days," I laugh hoarsely, still not believing what I'm seeing. "Is that… is that really you?"
He scratches his head, a tuft of dull red hair getting caught in his fingers and falling to the ground. "Well, I'm not real, right? But I'm not a part of your imagination. It's really hard to explain, so I'm not even going to bother." He shrugs lazily, and I notice the way his robes hang off his body, as if there's only skin and bone underneath. I'm very glad I can't see beneath them.

"Death filled me in on your whole… time travel thing. Pretty crazy if you ask me. Told me how we were best mates in your past life… basically crammed all the memories of the other me into my head. Bit confusing that was," he says, tapping his temple with one finger. "I just wanted to say that I'm glad you tried to bring me back, even though we weren't really friends in this life and I'd probably have pitched a fit for you using dark magic," he laughs, before pursing his lips, his features falling into a sad frown.

"I don't have much time here, so I've got to go soon… but I've got to ask. Could you please look out for Ginny for me? She's taking my death really hard, and I don't want to see her fall to pieces," he requests, smiling morosely at me as I break into tears. "She's my favourite sibling you know? Little Gin-Gin, the baby of the family… just- look out for her, would ya'?"

"I can, and I will, I'll watch after her," I sob, wiping the tears away from my eyes, blinking hard as I try to compose myself. "I'm gonna' miss you mate. I'm gonna' miss you so damn much."

"I'll miss you too. You take it easy alright? I've got an afterlife to get back to. You know, it's the only place I can find someone who can actually beat me in chess? I'll tell your parents you said hello, yeah?"

"Sounds fantastic," I quaver. "I'll uh- see you in a hundred years or so."

"I'll see you then," he grins, waving once more. "Also! Forgot to mention, you look hot as a bird Harry, great genetics there," he laughs, walking out of the common room and back to wherever he came from.

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I wake up crying, sobbing violently. Was that real? Was that just in my head?

"No, that wasn't just in your head."

"Hey Death," I reply glumly, noticing the deity peering down at me. "So… that was real, was it?"

"Yes, every bit of it," he says, nodding his head, his black eyes locked on mine. "I thought I'd do that for you as a favour, considering you reclaimed my wand last night."

"Th-thanks. It was good to get some closure… say goodbye and all that," I sigh, a slight hitch in my breath as I come down from my recent crying session, a good cry Terra would call it. I smirk at that thought. "So… do I give the wand back to you, or do I get to keep it for the time being?"

"Hades no, I wouldn't take that from you," Death says, hands raised to decline the offer. "Just because it's mine doesn't mean I need it. It's yours until the day you come to my realm permanently. If I truly wanted I could take it back at any time, but I get so bored sometimes. That wand you hold is one of the few sources of my entertainment," he smiles dangerously. "So many people fight over it… kill for it. No, that wand will pass from hand to hand until wizards are no longer of this world."

"That doesn't make me feel too confident about using it," I reply, holding the wand out in front of me with pinched fingers, looking at it with disdain as if its about to kill me itself.

"Nonsense. You're half dead already, and I intend to see you live a long and full life. Paperwork,
you know, it'd be a bloody mess if I had to go through the trouble of sending you back again. No, Miss Potter, you will die at a ripe old age in an incredibly boring and unmentionable way."

"...and what way would that be?"

"Old age," Death snarks back, rolling his eyes. Yes, I can tell when he rolls his eyes now. "Something silly like organ failure. What do you expect of someone past a hundred years old? To die in the middle of an orgy at a Veela conclave? Pistols at dawn? No, you'll die a boring regular death."

"Well... that's reassuring," I drawl, unsure of how to take Death's incredibly nonchalant approach to my death. I guess it is his thing to be indifferent about death, still doesn't make me feel too good about it. "The wand is just a very powerful wand? No tricks?"

"Since when have I tricked you? Honestly, you mortals are all so untrusting, it's a wonder you get anything done," he mocks, pinching the bridge of his nose between two spider-like fingers. "There is no deceit, no tricks, no misleading you. I'm nothing like those stories of Zeus or those other deities, self-righteous pricks that they were. I don't meddle with the mortal world unless something goes terribly, terribly wrong, like someone dying a good hundred years before they were supposed to."

I slip the wand back under my pillow, nodding my assertion. "Well, thanks for not meddling with my life."

"Speaking of meddlers, what have you decided to do with the old man? I have to say, I was very entertained to see you put him in his place, as rash and stupid as it was to confront him head on."

"Well, I'm still planning on destroying his reputation," I say thoughtfully, looking up and squinting one eye as I ponder what to do. "I haven't really thought about it to be honest, considering I didn't expect to come out of that fight in one piece. I thought I'd have to flee the country or lay low somewhere. I think I'll use him in the fight to come. Keep him at Hogwarts and directing things where I want them to go. His political reputation is going to be ruined, but that was going to happen at the end of next year anyways after I kill Voldemort."

"A wise plan," Death agrees, twiddling his thumbs childishly. "I would recommend that you make attempts to step into the political scene soon, as I believe your fight will not be truly won until you send not just Tom Riddle, but all of his followers to my door. Your country is embroiled in back-door politics and shady dealings, and I do like to see a bit of peace after war. I like to think of it as a vacation of sorts."

"Thanks for the advice, I'll be sure to keep it in mind," I reply, climbing out of bed and stretching laboriously, working out the kinks and knots from my sleep. "Thank you again for letting me speak with Ron one last time... I never would have expected that, so thank you."

"All part of my job, no need to thank me Miss Potter. I'll be seeing you around, I have a few souls to pick up."

Just as he's about to disappear I stop. "Hey, Death?"

"Yes, Miss Potter?"

"I remember you mentioning Fate one of the first times we talked. I'm assuming that Fate is another God, just like yourself?"

He nods lazily. "Yes, I would say she's a good friend of mine," he admits, and I have to prevent my eyebrows from reaching to my hairline in shock. "Oh, don't be so surprised. I'm an immortal being of horribly immense power. Even I could make a friend after a few millennia. Honestly, you should
meet my wife. I’m still surprise that she spends time with me.”

“W- wife? You have a wife?” I ask, completely incredulous.

Death rolls his eyes once more, looking slightly offended. “Yes, her name is Life, I think you’ve heard of her,” he jibes. “Now, is there anything important that you want to ask me, or may I leave?”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to offend. It just surprised me that Death of all the Gods had a wife. Marrying Life seems nice and poetic though.”

“Thank you, we think that as well. She’ll occasionally accompany me when I’m claiming a lost soul or two and it’s hilarious when they realize who she is.” He laughs at some ancient memory, wiping an unseen tear from his eye. “Anyways, I’ve got a few reapings to attend to. Do try not to get into too much trouble, yes?”

With a snap, Death disappears, and I smile faintly as time returns to its normal pace and I go about my morning routine. Who'd have thought that Death of all the Gods had a wife. Marrying Life seems nice and poetic though.

I trudge down the stairs, greeting Hermione merrily as we head to breakfast.

"How did last night go?" she asks, strolling over and taking her place beside me as we walk, a small frown on her face giving away her worried state.

"Last night was fantastic," I reply, raising my arms above my head and cracking the joints of my wrists noisily. "The old man isn't a problem anymore."

"Really!?" she gasps, faltering slightly as she understands what that means. "Did you… you know?"

"Brought back and very much bound," I breathe, hand cupped to my mouth secretively. "I've got nothing to worry about on that end."

Hermione squeals and pulls me into a hug, blushing furiously as she backs off. "Is it… is it bad of me to be happy you did what you did? For me to be happy that you're safe even though you- well, killed him," she whispers, looking around to make sure no person or portrait is listening in. I throw up a slew of silencing charms, from muffliato to a localized silencio before continuing.

"It is, and it isn’t," I say, clicking my tongue thoughtfully. "What I did shouldn't have been necessary, and it pisses me off that it happened. People shouldn't have to die, especially not those who could have been allies. I'm confident that Dumbledore was either senile or deluded, incapable of trusting other people who don't share his world-view," I reason, thinking it over myself for the umpteenth time. "I don't enjoy killing, not one bit, but in war it's necessary."

I stop, once again realizing I'm not talking to a Hermione that's my age, one that's gone through hell and high water to save my life or be saved in return. I curse quietly under my breath, huffing lightly as I turn to Hermione. "I'm sorry, I really shouldn't be talking about this so blatantly with you," I apologize, hushing Hermione when she opens her mouth to complain. "No, no. You're fourteen Hermione, and you haven't gone through the same things that I have. Hell, even the other you shouldn't have even been involved in half the shit we got up to. I was by all accounts raised to be a soldier, the first time I killed a man was when I was eleven. The first," I state, noting the discomfort in her eyes. "I haven't ever had a childhood, and I won't... but you? You still have your innocence, and I'm not going to let you squander it. I'm happy you helped me, truly, I am. You really pulled my arse out of the fire, but you can't be involved in this sort of stuff."

Hermione wrinkles her nose, a frustrated sneer on her face. "I get it, I guess… I just wish I could
help you somehow," she quietly admits. "The other me… your me, she just sounds so incredible, you know? Like a shield-maiden from an old story. It's all so terribly romantic… I want to be like her. I want to be strong like her."

"You are strong," I chime in, placing my hand on her shoulder comfortingly. "And don't you dare say 'your me,' because you are my Hermione. The one that I knew in the past? She doesn't exist anymore. Everyone I ever knew then… they're gone. You, you," I assert, pointing at Hermione. "You are far more clever, stronger, happier than the Hermione I once knew. Trust me, she would've fought tooth and nail to have the terribly mundane and uneventful life that you do, just as I would."

She smiles crookedly back at me, nodding her head as we stroll towards the Great Hall. I grab a seat next to Ginny, patting her on the arm as I pile waffles onto my plate. I glance towards the head table, grinning maliciously as I lay eyes on Dumbledore, who's going through the motions as usual except for the missing glint in his eyes. Snape raises his glass as we make eye contact, a nearly unnoticeable smile gracing his normally sallow features. I incline my head, raising a finger ever so slightly in reply.

"Hey, Padma, Lisa? I'd like to apologize," I say, turning towards the two girls. "I've been… I've been a right bitch lately. I had some problems I had to work through on my end, but that's no excuse for the way I've treated you two. Same goes to you Luna," I add, catching the sprightly blondes eye. "I shouldn't have ignored any of you, and I hope you can forgive me."

Padma raises her nose, mocking disdain practically emanating from her. "I suppose we can accept that apology, do you not agree my Dear Lisa," she considers, turning towards the brunette on her right.

"I suppose we may, my Dear Padma," she intones, the same haughty air about her. "Apology accepted, Helene." She smirks, the act crumbling as she struggles to hold back her laughter.

"Thank you for apologizing Helene, not many people would," Luna interjects airily as she makes a smiley face out of her bacon and eggs.

"No, thank you," I say to the girls. "I'll make sure it never happens again. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go catch up with my sisters," I continue, cheering internally at that little statement as I scarf down one of my waffles and stride over to the Slytherin table, Astoria shuffling over and opening a seat next to me. I smile at her in thanks and sit down. "Hey Daphne, Astoria, Tracey," I say, looking towards the three of them.

Daphne and Astoria smile at me, while Tracey wrinkles her nose in distaste.

"Where've you been for the last week?" Daphne quizzes, eyebrow raised as she immediately cuts to the chase. "Haven't seen hide nor hair of you anywhere except for classes. Something happen?"

I sigh quietly, giving a slight shrug. "Just had to deal with some personal problems, I'm sorry I was ignoring everyone. How's your first year here going Astoria?"

"It's fantastic!" she exclaims excitedly, hands raised to the sky and nearly knocking over her plate. "I really like astronomy and potions, and we were finally allowed to learn the tickling charm last week!" she adds with a feral gleam in her eyes.

"Hey, no pranking… at least not me or any of the other girls. We're off limits," I warn her, finger raised challengingly.

"Oh, don't worry. I know I wouldn't be able to get a spell off on you, but if Dennis Creevey doesn't
stop bothering me in defence…”

"Creevey is a perfectly acceptable target."

"Awesome!"

"Do you really have to encourage her?" Daphne says, rolling her eyes.

"Chin up Daph, Helene made sure we’re off limits," Tracey sarcastically clarifies, startling me, and evidently startling herself, as she immediately frowns and goes back to poking away at her meal.

I have to hold back a smile at Tracey’s momentarily friendly treatment of me, glad to see a happy side to her for once. I grab a slice of bacon off of Astoria’s plate, laughing loudly at her frustrated cry as I toss it into my mouth. Looks like its smooth sailing from here on out.

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Winter break catches up to me quickly, a slew of exams that I completed a long time ago to mark the passing of time. I can breathe easy this Christmas, with no need to worry about homicidal old men or other unseemly things breaking the short peace that I’m going to enjoy every minute of. The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore launched a few weeks ago to great success, critics lauding Rita’s mud-racking masterpiece for its incredible depth of research and the sheer ‘bravery’ it took her to publish such a divisive thing. Of course, there are those who argue loudly in Dumbledore’s favour, masses of fans and worshippers screaming their disdain for the biography. Hell, there were even a couple of protests out in front of Flourish & Blotts. I heard Molly Weasley was seen front and centre at the picket line, her face as red as her hair as she furiously cried out at the ‘horrible lies.’

Really, I like Molly, but she hasn’t got the best head on her shoulders. There’s a reason she doesn’t have a job, and it’s mostly due to a severe lack of qualifications.

God, I can still remember the faces the girls made when they were reading over my advance copy of the book, lucky enough to have received one a day thanks to Octavius. I’d never before seen such a perfect blend of disgust and excitement represented by facial expression alone, nor the conversation that came along with it.

-“Oh my God… Dumbledore dated Grindelwald?” Padma breathed, absolutely horrified.

“Grindelwald?” Hermione asks. “Wasn’t that the man who started the Global Wizarding War?”

“And the Nazis,” Lisa adds, a tremendous frown on her face. “He put Hitler into power and started World War Two.”

Hermione covers her mouth with one hand, gasping loudly. “Dumbledore… Dumbledore dated him?”

“Lovers in fact,” I add. “If they didn’t have that little spat that ended up killing Dumbledore’s sister they probably would have ended up married.”

“Married?” Padma interjects. “Two wizards can’t get married.”

Both Hermione and I turn to her, asking in unison, “What?”

She turns sheepishly to me, expecting me to go ahead and speak. “No, you’ll probably phrase it
better than I could, you ask her,” I say.

Nodding, she turns back to Padma. “I thought that wizarding law was more acceptable towards same-sex couples.”

“That’s true, but not in Britain,” she says, shaking her head sadly. “We’re one of the only countries in Europe that still boasts about pureblood, so witches or wizards who play chaser for the same team? They’re considered blood traitors for not carrying on the family lines.”

“That’s awful,” Hermione croaks, a horrified expression on her face.

I realize that she’s getting ahead of herself, and unless she wants to come out to Lisa and Padma right this second, I’m going to have to change the subject.

“So… what else is Britain behind on, apart from, well- everything,” I ask, Padma tapping her chin in thought as Hermione casts a thankful glance in my direction.

“Education is fine here, although there’s been no magical research for the last… I don’t know, three decades or so? I don’t know how long it’s actually been, but it’s been a while.”

“Why is that?” Hermione asks.

“Too dangerous,” she shrugs. “At least, that’s what the law says. I wanted to be a spell-crafter when I grow up, but I changed my mind when I realized that there’s no spell-crafters in Britain. I’d like to not have to move out of country for work.”

“That’s fair… so, what other horrifying things has Dumbledore done?”

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"Hey Sirius," I grin, pulling the raggedy man into a crushing hug as I hop through the floo to Greengrass Manor. "Missed you."

"I missed you too," he says, pulling back and smiling at me as he holds me at arms length. "You have no idea how happy I am to see you in one piece."

"What, you think that old man could have gotten the best of me?" I scoff jokingly, one eyebrow raised dangerously. "Oh, ye of little faith."

"Conceited much?"

"You of all people is going to ask me that?"

"Hey! I'm not conceited, I just know how to appreciate myself," Sirius argues, arms crossed, and his nose held high in the air in a passible impression of Narcissa Malfoy. I guess it helps the impression if they're related.

"Hey, lets catch up with Octavius and figure out where thing are going," I say, leading Sirius to the sitting room where Octavius is waiting while Terra fusses over Daphne and Astoria. "Hey Octavius!" I shout, running up and hugging the man.

"I just brought you home not fifteen minutes ago, it's like you haven't seen me for a year," he chuckles, sitting back down and tucking away a few errant pieces of parchment. "So, I'm assuming things went well with the old man?"

"Everything is under control," I reply, stressing the word. Octavius nods, a slight bit of discomfort in
his gesture. "Is everything alright?"

"Yes… everything is fine," he says unconvincingly, sighing quietly as I peer curiously at him, not letting up. "I just- I find your powers to be quite uncomfortable, no offense intended."

I nod in understanding, pursing my lips. "I know, I know… trust me, I wasn't the biggest fan of them either. Now I'm just sort of indifferent to it," I confess, wondering where the conversation is going. "And I thought we had this discussion already? You know I'm not going to go all Dark Lady on you, right? This is sort of the best option I have for defeating Voldemort."

"I understand, but I still don't feel too good about it. When you hear about something being evil, wrong, and utterly terrifying your whole life it tends to stick. Like I said before, I'll never stop loving you, but that doesn't mean that I'm not allowed to dislike some of the things you do."

"That's… understandable. And, you're not wrong on it being utterly terrifying," I admit sheepishly. "Seriously, some of those spells… you know, how about we just not get into that," I deflect, Octavius immediately agreeing to stop the conversation from becoming too in depth. I really do understand why he's uncomfortable about the whole Necromancer deal. Even I am, and I'm the one who has to cast the bloody spells.

"That sounds fine to me. Now, we need to figure out what our 'plan of attack' is, as it were," he begins, pulling out a small folder and opening it up, placing the sheets on the table and spreading them out evenly. "I think it's time to start to really enter the political field, repealing laws that the ex-Death Eaters have been passing since the early 80's, conniving bastards that they are."

"Well, there's not much I can do on that end, considering my lack of knowledge when it comes to politics," I demur, looking to Sirius pointedly. He's the one with the true political brain in this family due to how he was raised, not to mention Octavius' extensive experience with his seat at the Wizengamot. "Octavius already holds my proxy for the Potter seat in addition to his own, but you two should make an announcement of a formal alliance at the next Wizengamot meeting. The Black seat has always been an important vote from what I've heard," I continue, nodding at Octavius to thank him for the wizarding legislature books he lent me.

"The Potter and Black seats have historically been diametrically opposed," Sirius says, brow furrowed in thought as he ponders over the decision. He taps his fingers against his knee, hammering out a silent rhythm. "It would be a grand gesture for the two to stand united, and it would probably form one of the first true neutral voting blocs in… well, a long time."

"Yes, and we can begin working towards repealing the frankly ridiculous laws targeting those labelled creatures and such, while pushing for equal rights for muggleborn as well as halfblood magicals," Octavius adds, scribbling something down. "How long do you suppose we should wait before making big moves towards striking down the old Death Eaters?"

Sirius scratches his chin, smiling sheepishly at me as he realizes I'm in over my head. I shrug, understanding that I'm more of a hands-on kind of person, and by hands-on, I mean violent. What can I say? I'm good at what I do. I fight thing, I win through sheer luck or by pulling the perfect spell out of my ass, thing is no longer a problem. It's worked for the last seven years, why change my methods now?

"I'd say we should start making waves come summer, maybe a little later. Didn't you say that Death Eaters are going to attack the Quidditch World Cup finals in late August, Helene?"

"Yeah, a dozen or so go out for some drunken muggle-baiting, as well as a bit of friendly arson," I confirm, grimacing at the memory. I'll be ready to fight them off and hopefully put down a few of the
bastards. Fingers crossed I run into my old friend Lucius. "I think directly after that would be a good time to stop pulling punches and reveal our hand. Fudge is probably going to throw a fit about it, but he can't do much when we have controlling shares in the Prophet. The only reason he stuck around in my last life was because he was slandering me constantly and pulling attention away from himself."

"I'd like to see him try," Sirius scoffs noisily, his nose flaring. "If the fool tries anything we'll drag him through the dirt. Maybe we should get Rita working on another book? Corruption and Hedonism, the Not So Sweet Life of Cornelius Fudge?"

"An excellent suggestion my friend," Octavius notes, jotting that down with a wide grin as the plan begins to form, no longer a ramshackle series of goals. "I'm sure Rita would be ecstatic to drag another public figure down and allow the public to beat them senseless. I do hope that happens in a very literal manner."

"Brilliant," I say, rubbing my hands together gleefully like a tiny mad scientist. "Do you think we could start dragging Delores Umbridge through the muck at the same time? The lady is a functioning sociopath and I'd like to make sure she doesn't end up 'teaching' at Hogwarts come fifth-year. I like having scar-free hands, and I'd prefer not to have to kill another defence teacher."

"I'll add that to the list. Now, I'm feeling quite peckish, and I assume you two are" Octavius interjects, glancing at his watch. "It looks like its getting close to supper time, so let's wrap this up and get a bite to eat, what do you say?"

"Agreed," me and Sirius chime in unison, stomachs already growling in anticipation.

"If the elves cooked up that roast beef again I'm going to be mighty pleased," Sirius says dreamily, visions of mash and gravy dancing in his head.

"I know. It's even better than the Hogwarts roast."

"I'll let them know you said that, I'm sure they'd be ecstatic to earn such praise," Octavius says as we stroll towards the dining room to enjoy our first family dinner in three months. I don't think I'm ever going to get tired of saying that. Family. It just has a great ring to it, you know?"
Winter break was great, a much-needed vacation after a very tense couple of months. Sirius, Octavius and Astoria fought over who got to open presents first again. Terra broke it up, letting Astoria open hers first. Again. Predictable, but funny every bloody time it happens. Daphne of course sat off to the side stoically, hiding how eager she was to dive into the pile of gifts. She really needs to lighten up a bit, really, Slytherins are much too serious. She should take a note out of Tracey's book, she knows how to balance work and play.

Speaking of Tracey, I tried to talk to her over the break, but every time I was even in the same room as her, she buggered off somewhere. I know Daphne said that she has her reasons, and, quote, ‘she shouldn’t be taking it out on me,’ but this is getting to be incredibly irritating.

She talked to her, and Tracey replied with the ever so friendly answer of ‘fuck off.’

I’m probably going to end up cornering that girl one of these days.

Of course, forgetting the ongoing Tracey problem, there still was a suite of planning happening regarding Sirius and Octavius' steps into the political limelight. One thing I found out from Octavius is that Dumbledore has been voting against any majorly progressive issue since he first landed his Wizengamot seat. Apparently, the guy is a hell of a hypocrite. No, he doesn't hate muggles or practice long forgotten evil magics in secret, I mean really. That wouldn't make any sense at all. Instead, he's done everything he can to keep this world identical to how it looked when he grew up. At the cost of keeping Britain locked into his ideal of 'the golden years,' we're living far behind the rest of the wizarding world in terms of... well, everything. The only wizarding governments that are less tolerant, progressive, or advanced than Britain are Russia and Latvia, and that's only because of the effects the USSR had on their magical communities. No excuses to be had on our part.

Since we're planning on forming a true neutral faction, we need to start convincing the gray leaning members of the light and dark voting blocs to join us. Since I've enslaved Albus, we're going to use him to start dividing the light, getting him to act a more unstable, senile, and publicly incapable of holding his positions, excluding his job as Headmaster. He's too important to not keep at Hogwarts for the time-being, at least until the Tri-Wizard Tournament is done and over with. Additionally, after Rita's incredibly popular attack on the man, his apparent instability should force the members of his bloc to start second guessing their leader and jumping ship. The more fanatical members won't be swayed, no doubt about that, but the vast majority of the voters aren't so zealous, and those are who we're attempting to recruit.

Sure, I could get Dumbledore to force his bloc to vote in line with our new party, but if we want to make true changes years from now after Voldemort has been truly dealt with, we must make sure that we don't alienate anyone from the dark who can be swayed to our side. Riding on the coattails of an aging public figure who's rapidly losing popularity will maybe bring short-term benefit, just because of his name alone. Although too much has been done already to sabotage him for that course
of action to be entirely reliable, but even with that short-term benefit, what happens ten years from now? Twenty? We'll have shunted aside a large portion of the population because we wanted to get a quick leg up on the competition, and that's the fastest way to start another civil war. I'm not interested in fighting one of those immediately after kicking Voldemort's ass.

Now, speaking of Dumbledore, lets see what can be done about him. "Nerds," I announce, quickly making my way up the spiral staircase towards the undead Headmaster's office. I look down in my hand as I open the door, studying the wand I stole from him as I stride in unannounced. No, not Dumbledore's wand- Death's wand. I twirl it lazily in my hand, the artfully pockmarked surface scattering light as the winter sun streaming in from the window glances off of it. It looks remarkably like the bones of a finger, with segmented joints flaring along the length of it. There's a short inscription in some unknown language on its grip, where the forefingers are meant to rest. Those ancient, and I mean ancient runes stand out in sharp contrast against the lightly shaded wood, marked into what looks to be a section of ivory wrapped around the handle. It's far more likely that it's made of human bone.

"What are you doing here?"

I lift my eyes from the wand to Dumbledore, meeting his hateful gaze with my own impassive stare. His face is scrunched up in restrained fury, unable to act on his murderous fantasies, a prisoner in his own body. I smirk at him, loving every minute of his anger. That's what you get for murdering my friend, you geriatric bastard. Stew in it. I wander over to his bookcase, my finger passing over the titles as I idly peruse the shelves. All light magic. Useful, but magic that I'm simply incapable of reliably casting at this point. I've dredged too deep into necromancy, too far into black magic to have any chance of realigning my own into something more neutral, more gray.

Not that that's a bad thing, but it does limit me. It's not as if I'm about to go off the deep end mentally and turn out just like Voldemort (although Dumbledore is absolutely convinced I'm worse than the guy judging by his horrendous expression). Dark magic doesn't work that way, even though Dumbledore loves to say it does. It doesn't pollute your mind, turning the user into a monster that's devoid of all emotion save for the occasional spate of bloodlust.

No, after extensive research I've found that dark magic is simply more into the business of taking, rather than giving, not to mention the majority of well-known dark spells are used in warfare, giving it a bad rap. It'd be more reasonable to describe the two as positive and negative, instead of light and dark. Light gives, even if its for the worse. Dark takes, and it can be for the better.

Half of all healing magic is dark, and it’s why parseltongue is labeled as a trait of dark wizards, because it is. It’s not a Dark Art, but it’s true dark magic in the sense that it’s predominantly for healing. Although the ministry prefers to keep that under wraps. Why is healing dark? It takes away the pain and discomfort that the patient is suffering under. It takes it all away so that the healer can then give back what they were missing. Reforming bone, mending flesh, it's all the same. You must first remove the bad before you can add the good.

Black Magic though? Completely different. Necromancy is true black magic, something that deals directly with death itself. White magic is its polar opposite, or Albumancy as Severus and I have taken to calling it. Although the Albumancy is incredibly similar to Necromancy in that it deals with life, I could make the argument that the two are for the most part identical in their end results. They draw from two completely different sources of power, yet the result is largely the same. Funny how one is idealized while the other is demonized, although it's entirely understandable when one sees Black Magic in practice. Not really for the faint of heart, as evidenced by Sirius' green pallor after seeing that conjured pig turned into pulled pork.
I stop my mental tangent, removing my finger from the smooth leather of whatever random book I've stopped at and turn to face Dumbledore. "Shut the portraits off," I demand as I transfigure the humble seat in front of his desk, fashioning it into a garishly opulent throne that supersedes his own, brass magically polished until it resembles pure gold, shining brightly against the deep and rich tones of polished mahogany. I sit down, hands lazily grazing the arm rests and my knees crossed primly in front of me.

"Why did you bind my magic and body?" I ask, my voice controlled as I question Dumbledore. His lips thin as he makes a momentary attempt to fight the compulsion to answer, but one can never fight a slave bond, especially the one that I used on him. No, Dumbledore is under my thumb until I decide to end his life a second time.

"Because you would have been too powerful, and it would have led to you being headstrong and arrogant," he replies hoarsely, still straining pitifully against his mental bindings. I have to hand it to him, he is impressively stubborn. "I wanted you to succeed me after my eventual death as the Leader of the Light, and a very powerful witch would not be as readily accepted as a moderately powerful wizard."

I still can't believe the man thought I would carry his flag and espouse his little spiel. His 'better dead than red,' kind of preaching has done more harm than good to the wizarding world, stagnating spell research and other advances because of the magics potentially being dark. I mean, rituals as a whole are outlawed because they're 'too powerful,' like that's going to stop someone from actually using one if they set their mind to it. No, you can't regrow your leg through an ancient Greek healing ritual. Why? Because we said so. Fucking unbelievable. Not to mention he personally made it impossible for Padma to get her dream job whilst living in Britain.

"Headstrong and arrogant? Is it better to be downtrodden and abused, Albus? Are you still so headstrong and arrogant as to not believe me when I said that my life with the Dursley's was much worse than you believed it to be? Mind you, you willingly consigned me to what you knew would be far less than ideal an environment. By the way," I add, waving my hand lackadaisically at him. "For this conversation, your replies and answers to my questions or statements must be completely truthful, as well as stated openly and honestly. No skirting around via half-truths and wordplay."

Dumbledore clenches his jaw angrily, mustache bristling as his nose crinkles in distaste. "I didn't believe you and I still don't believe you. Tom said the same to me long ago, and I doubt that things at the orphanage were as bad for him as he made them out to be, just as you've obviously lied about your childhood."

"Really?" I scoff, laughing bitterly at his confused look. Is he serious? How deluded can you be? "Riddle told you he was being abused and you still kept sending him back to the same place? No fucking wonder he turned out to be a genocidal maniac! Do you have any understanding of human psychology? Any at all?"

"No, I've only heard of the study in passing," Dumbledore states through gritted teeth, frustrated by my reply and condescending tone. So much for being a "muggle-loving bastard" as the Slytherins like to call him. The man really hasn't ever heard of one of the most well known, and probably one of the most accessible scientific fields? I roll my eyes, tutting childishly at him. Looks like the ancient educator is in for a lesson.

"Well, it's this fantastic thing that muggle scientists have been looking into; the process of studying the mind, human behaviour, what makes people tick. Questions like that. Want to know something they've been studying nearly the whole time the field has been around? The study of nature versus nurture. Is someone's personality genetic, or is due to their upbringing?" I explain, resting my chin on
my hands. "They found something very interesting in their study of this ancient dilemma. There are genetic traits that one is more likely to inherit, although, I use the word inherit very loosely. A better word to describe it is likelihood."

I pause to take a breath, glancing up at the ceiling and clicking my tongue against the roof of my mouth. "Intelligence, personality, likes and dislikes… they're all influenced in some way or another by genetics. That doesn't mean that someone is immediately locked into being an idiot at birth because their parents were dumb as a pile of bricks, but they will have a stronger likelihood if they aren't raised properly," I continue, Dumbledore nearly forgetting that he's being lectured by his own killer, thinly disguised interest shining behind his dull blue eyes. "If one's father is predisposed to… I don't know- let's say he's predisposed to a short fuse temper, the child of that man can still avoid acting in the same fashion if they're raised and taught to control their anger. This holds true in your case," I say, smiling at Dumbledore's instant switch from intrigue to barely restrained fury. Thanks for that little tidbit in your book Rita, looks like it came in handy.

"You could have easily ended up going around killing muggles just like dear Daddy Dumbledore had, but you didn't, and that shows that even though your father made a very rash decision, one which I fully support him in by the way," I digress, lifting my hand and bowing my head slightly in recognition. I can't fault a father for flying off the handle after such a horrible assault on his only daughter. If the child was my own… well, let's just say that things would have been biblical. "That shows that you were raised to control your temper, and to be frank, as much as I absolutely detest you for all you've done, I do have to say you have the patience of a saint."

I stretch my legs out, knees popping quietly as I uncross and re-cross them the other way, resting my clasped hands on my thigh. I chew the inside of my lip, momentarily forgetting where I was in the very one-sided conversation.

Ah! Yeah, psychology. I snap my fingers as I remember what I was talking about and dive back into it. "So, some people may be more likely to be murderers, Tom being one of them, but it could have easily been avoided- or at the least toned down by simply listening to him and removing him from a toxic environment. What I'm getting at, is that Voldemort is largely of your own making."

He shakes his head, beard swaying slightly as he takes in what I've said. No matter how much I hate the man, he is incredibly intelligent, and it doesn't take an incredibly intelligent mind to work through my little lecture. Never let it be said though, that incredibly intelligent people are incapable of being horribly stubborn. "Tom was born evil, that is a fact," Dumbledore states unequivocally. "I'm quite sure you are the same."

"How fucking stubborn can you be? I'm dark, but I am not evil. Hell, why am I even arguing with you? All I wanted to find out was why you felt it necessary to fuck around with my life," I scowl, mentally smacking myself in the head for letting him get another rise out of me. "Nobody is born evil. Nobody. Tom has what muggles would call 'anti-social personality disorder.' You may know the term as sociopathy, or psychopathy, at least, that's what I'm assuming going off of what you've said. Did you know him from a young age? Before Hogwarts maybe? I know you taught here when he attended."

"Yes, I was the one to deliver his Hogwarts acceptance letter. He bragged of how he had terrified the other orphans, stolen their belongings, and raved about how he could 'make them hurt' if they were mean to him," he says emphatically, looking for all the world like he's won our little argument. How can a dead man be smug? "Like I said previously, Helene. That child was born evil."

I raise my hand for him to stop, one finger pointed to the ceiling. I squint at Dumbledore, my mouth slightly agape in an expression of incredulity as I shake my head. Talking to him is like speaking
with an elderly person that's deeply racist. No matter what you say they find a way to spin the conversation back to their point of view, and nothing at all can sway them from their mindset.

I rub at my eyes tiredly. Why am I still arguing with him? Christ I'm bloody stubborn too. "No, see, if you had him raised properly, placed into a proper home, he'd probably have been a functioning member of society. Well, probably closer to Lucius Malfoy in personality than someone like Arthur Weasley, but a functioning member all the same," I retort. "Yes, there's a probability that he was, like you said, born evil, but you can't assume that of an eleven-year old child who was very evidently bullied. What did you do to convince him that magic was real?"

"I cast an illusion, causing him to believe that his chifforobe containing the other orphans stolen toys was on fire."

I clap, cheering sarcastically at Dumbledore's idiocy. How did he end up a Headmaster at a school that houses young children and teens with that kind of mindset? I mean, I know he grew up in the nineteenth century, but psychologically tormenting an eleven-year old? Really?

"Are you fucking daft? You just came across a child that used his powers to get a leg up on other people that hurt him, something that pretty much any other child would do in his position, and you showed him that that behaviour was perfectly acceptable!?” I groan, kneading my temples. "Do you not understand that you basically solidified his idea that there is only power, and those too weak to seek it? Yeah, instead of chiding him and explaining to him why what he did was wrong, setting boundaries like a responsible adult, all you do is scare the shit out of him? Great job Albus. Great fucking job."

I stand up angrily, returning my chair to its previous plain state with a flick of my wand, pacing the room in frustration. I can't believe Dumbledore really doesn't understand that he had a big hand in turning Tom Riddle into a monster. How deluded can he be? Why am I still arguing with him? Fuck am I ever stubborn!

"You know what, this isn't going to go anywhere," I huff, rubbing my hands together as I think of anything else to ask the old man before I get to the main reason for my visit. Get him to teach me odd and esoteric magic? No, he'll probably find a loop hole to kill me. Same result if I demand that he teach me how to duel. What the hell do I ask him?

Wait.

The Room?

"When you tried to ambush me on the seventh-floor, did you repair the room that you broke into?"

"It repaired itself nearly immediately after destroying the stonework," Albus replies. "What, do you require your ritual room for other horrific deeds you will commit within my school’s walls?"

"Something like that," I mutter, quickly firing off another series of commands. "You're not allowed to go near that room, nor communicate or hint at the existence of the room," I say, making sure he can't lead someone to me when I'm training. I'd hate to have to kill McGonagall. As much as she's been frustrating to deal with in this life, she was my old head of house, and she's probably just highly misled by Dumbledore. The problems of hero worship. Hell, if anyone knows about the consequences of hero worship, it's me."

Why yes Dumbledore, please send me back to my abusive family.

Oh, absolutely Dumbledore, I'll go back in time to save a falsely imprisoned convict.
Of course, Dumbledore, I won't speak with my close friends over the summer after seeing another close friend get murdered by the man who sold out my parents.

I shrug mentally, pushing those thoughts away. No need to think about how thick I was right now. It's time to take care of what Sirius and Octavius requested of me. I turn back to Dumbledore, a sickly smile plastered over my face as I prepare to ruin his life just a little bit more. Well, not a little bit more. This just may be the finishing touches on his coffin. Preparation for his eventual political grave.

"Oh Dumbledore, I have a request for you," I coo, tapping my fingers together rhythmically like some sort of maniacal TV villain. He rears back slightly, eyes alight, apparently buying my whole dark lady shtick. "Get this, really, you're going to love my plan. I want you to do your very best to alienate the Wizengamot members of the light voting blocs by acting like the senile madman that you are," I continue, speaking as if I'm explaining a complex topic to a particularly stupid child.

"You're going to start behaving as if you're incredibly forgetful, suffering from the onset of dementia, unsure of the specifics on important political topics that you should fully understand, playing the part of a stuttering, doddering old fool," I explain, smiling gleefully at his horrific expression. "Don't take things too far of course, I do want you to make sure that you retain your position here as Headmaster. I still have some uses for you, and I believe you'll have a hell of a time watching all of your influence crumble down around you."

"You can't do this!" he shouts, a thunderclap of magic erupting from him, scattering trinkets and parchment throughout the room, his book case shaking under the sudden onslaught. I throw up a quick shield, making sure he doesn't accidentally kill himself by violating his previous orders. I'm not too sure on the logistics of bringing someone back a second time, but to the best of my knowledge there's no mulligans in necromancy. "Everything I've worked for! You would just throw it all away?" he continues, shocked beyond belief.

"Silence," I command, my voice like iron as I shoot him down. "You will be incapable of speech until I leave this room at the end of this discussion."

I pause momentarily, quelling the energy stirring fitfully inside me. Don't want to work myself into too much of a fervor. "Do you believe all you've done to be for the better? Sure, you've done some good things, I'll give you that. Fighting for equal rights for non-pure-bloods, beings, magical creatures, and other downtrodden members of the wizarding world. That's a righteous cause, no doubt about it. Fair taxes and regulations on imports and exports, keeping the economy driving along smoothly. All good things," I confess, tilting my head at his perplexed expression. "What? Did you think I was some fanatical pure-blood bigot who wants to see the world go up in flames? I said it once, and I'll say it again. I am not Tom," I state emphatically, a building fire in my voice. "No, what I want to do is drag this country kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century, and upturn everything you've done to keep it held back, stagnant and rotting. What was once a great country reduced to an embarrassment to the world around it."

I lick my lips, my throat getting slightly dry from the long conversation. I conjure a cup and fill it quickly with a silent _aguamenti_. I sigh in relief as I take a sip, allowing the cool liquid to soothe my parched throat. Much better. "You've had a large hand in having many branches of magic that are incredibly useful and beneficial outlawed. Branches that are legal and acceptable to use in the majority of other countries. Additionally, you've pushed forward laws that place intensive restrictions on spell-crafting and magical research. You're hamstringing wizarding Britain in your attempts to, well, to do what? Make sure everyone is safe? Because that's what you said according to this transcript," I say, drawing a sheaf of parchment from my robes and holding it out in front of me as I begin to read over it, my voice dry and posh like an old barrister.
"Yes, as quoted by one Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Bi-Weekly Wizengamot Meeting occurring on the 12th of August, 1962: 'Research of magic and the new development of spells are both fantastic and incredible pursuits, but we must take precautions so that those studying these fields are free of danger. I propose that we provide a set of rules and regulations to prevent any disasters from occurring in the pursuit of knowledge. It shall be simply this: No dangerous or dark research should be undertaken.' This is what you said when you went on to put a blanket restriction on both those fields," I snort, incinerating the copied transcript and scattering the ashes. "You made it so that any potentially dangerous study was prohibited. Did you know that no real magical research has occurred in Britain since then? At least, none of any consequence? Know why? Because magic is dangerous in and of itself. You have a school full of eleven to eighteen-year-old students here, all of which are carrying a weapon on their person," I say, gesturing to my wand.

"By phrasing your proposal in such a way it prevented nearly all avenues of research. I don't know if you did this intentionally, or if you're just that bloody dull," I clip, my eyes locked on his steeled gaze, his lips pursed so tightly they're pale white. "This country is functioning on values, traditions, and morals that are so incredibly out of date that some of them make the Puritans or Victorians look progressive. This country subjugates those who are considered lesser, like some sort of light wizarding version of Nazism. Advancement is all but halted because people like you, people who are much too old and set in their ways to be making valuable decisions for their country prevent it because it interferes with your traditions. How many students attended Hogwarts fifty years ago? What about fifty before that, when you were attending? From my research, its somewhere in the range of seven hundred and upwards, with your generation boasting an attendance of over one thousand students a year."

I pause for effect, taking another sip of water and running my thumb back and forth along my forefinger, a nervous habit, before placing my hand on the top of my chair, looming down over Dumbledore. "How many attend Hogwarts now? About a hundred, maybe two hundred at the most, correct? Why is that? A series of devastating wars fuelled by those traditions that you hold in such high regard. The first led by the de facto creator of the Nazi's and your ex-lover, Grindelwald, all in the name of 'the Greater Good.' A paltry excuse for bigotry and hate towards those less gifted than us. A second war led only a few decades later by a sick and twisted dark lord that was once a child that you abused, and allowed to be abused, who's name many still fear to speak today. Again, this war was fought for the sake of bigotry and hate in the name of tradition. If you and others in your position made actual steps to rectify the horrifically dated laws and practices of this country, as well as made an example for our neighbours, a few of which are only slightly better than us, we could have been living in a golden era.

Did you know that the muggles economies and populations actually exploded after the second World War? There's a name for people born into that generation: baby boomers. An abundance of growth and progress, people even going so far as to explore the galaxy, begin studying the human genome, and connect the Earth in its entirety through electric screens and a whole lot of ones and zeroes. You can communicate with anyone, anywhere, in the blink of an eye as long as they can afford a computer, which are becoming rapidly more affordable. They've made leaps and bounds forward in their scientific understanding of the world around us and the creation and advancement of new technologies. What have we done since that war?" I ask, letting the question hang in the air, silence permeating the room.

I stare at Dumbledore, daring him to interrupt me. Of course, he can't interrupt me. He's still under my command to stay silent, festering in his anger and frustration. He sits still, either ignoring me or listening intently, I can't tell. Honestly, it doesn't matter. I'm just saying this for my own sake at this point. I never thought I'd be the type to monologue, but it looks like I've been doing a lot more of that lately.
"We've dwindled to a shadow of what we could have been, all because of people like you who decided that they know best. A poor excuse for a government that functions on hereditary seats and who's legislative meetings are host to more petty squabbling than a hen-house. Fuck, people here are still called Lord and Lady, myself being one of them. Because of who my parents were, their parents were, and so on so forth, I have immediate power over everyone in this country simply due to circumstance."

I aggressively push my chair over to the side, sending it clattering noisily onto the floor, Dumbledore jumping slightly in his seat in surprise. I march forward and slam my hands on his desk, feeling it rattle beneath me as I stare intently at the man who's made it his life mission to neglect a world that he had a responsibility to tend to.

"I never wanted to kill you, not really. Trust me, I don't enjoy it one bit. I take no pleasure in what I have done," I grimace, clenching my hands tightly, knuckles white against flushed skin. "I will take pleasure in what will come I wanted to watch you flounder to hold your positions, desperately fighting to keep your influence and oh so important titles. To watch as everything you did to inhibit this countries growth, to make sure that your little world stayed perfect for you, and you alone, falls to pieces around you. To watch as you notice your perfect world change and realize that there's nothing you can do about it."

I smile grimly at him as I get up to leave, offering one final comment as I make my exit. "Oh, you're still going to have to go through all that, don't get me wrong," I explain, a mocking laugh creeping from my lips. "You've got front row tickets to the show Albus. I hope you're ready."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So, now you get to see a glimpse of Helene's end game. Hope you're looking forward to it.
Chapter Twenty-Four | If I Only Had a Brain

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: The rights to the Harry Potter series go to J.K Rowling. All original ideas present in this story belong to me.

I trudge down the stairs towards the Chamber, Severus hot on my heels as we go to inspect the damage done. I haven't visited the Chamber since the battle, and I want to lay Magna to rest. Stupid, childish snake that she was, she was still my snake. I hiss at the great iron door in front of me, the massive carved serpents releasing the locks from their jaws and slithering backwards, the sharp squeal of metal on metal reverberating through the cavernous pipes and causing me to flinch, no thanks in part to my augmented senses. I really should oil that thing.

We head into the Chamber, removing wards, hexes and other assorted traps that we hadn't had a chance to remove before. Magna's broken body rests along the stone walk way, powdered marble from the destroyed statues lining the path scattered about, a thin dusting of rubble resting along her mass. I stride forward, cringing in sympathetic pain as I get a good look at her fatal injuries. Bloodied chunks of hide lay next to her from Dumbledore's ancient cutting curse, bones jut out from the open wound at odd angles, spiderweb fractures littering their pale surface. There's dried blood everywhere, a veritable flood of it congealed across the floor, a murky green pool of ooze running thick trails along the paved stone. I rest my hand on her brow, running it along the smoothed scales as I once did when I would visit her, when I would hide in the Chamber to have a moment to myself, a moment to get away from the constant stares and attention. When she was still alive.

"I'm sorry," I whisper, my fingernails tracing slow lines across her jaw. I'm going to miss her, poor girl.

"A fantastic creature," Severus murmurs, getting a good look at her body for the first time. He pulls a roll of thin leather out of a bag and spreads it out across the ground, an assortment of glinting knives, hooks, what looks to be a hacksaw fashioned from gemstone, and some tools that I can't even begin to guess at the use of laid out neatly in front of him. "Are you sure you want to render her? Can you not bring her back?"

I shake my head sadly, removing my hand from Magna's massive frame. "No, it would take too much magic to bring her back. Even though she's dead, her hide is still magically resistant. I'd end up killing myself before I even got halfway done with the resurrection," I lament, sighing deeply. "No, I'm going to animate her bones after you've rendered her down, and I'm not about to hold out on you when it comes to rare ingredients. It's the least I can do after you helped me with Dumbledore."

"Thank you, and again, I'm sorry for your loss."

I wave my hands as I begin to set the Chamber back into place, repairing the dislodged chunks of stone. I remove the wall that I created to defend myself from Dumbledore’s all out attack, moulding it back into the floor.

It takes about half an hour, but the Chamber looks like its old self, apart from a few missing statues that I don’t have the artistic talent to repair.
Severus silently hands me a large knife that looks like a stretched-out cleaver, the blade curving oddly along its length. I begin my gory task, scoring and measuring out large sections of Magna's hide, before starting the arduous process of skinning a sixty-foot-long snake. Her hide is incredibly tough, and nearly seven inches thick on average, making this job difficult even with my enhanced strength. I turn my head to get a look at Severus, who's now wearing the wizarding equivalent of a hazmat suit as he milks the venom from Magna's fangs, the nearly glowing green liquid dripping into enchanted crystalline flasks. I focus on my own work, my arms already beginning to ache at the joints. This is going to take a while.

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I fall back onto my arse, ignoring the sharp pain flashing through my tailbone and instead reveling in the fact that we're finally finished. After nearly seven hours, we've finally wrapped up the messiest fucking thing I've done in my entire life. I look down on my robes, drenched and spattered in basilisk blood, while bits of viscera and muscle cling to the sodden threads. Christ. Looks like these are getting burnt tonight. No amount of cleaning can get that mess out.

I tiredly throw my head back and stare at the ceiling, admiring the way the water's reflection dances across the stone of the Chamber, eerie, yet beautiful in its own creepy way. Severus lands unceremoniously on the ground beside me, peeling his leather gloves from his hands and grimacing as he shakes the perspiration off his now prune-like fingers. I glance down at my own gloves, having forgotten them. I curse under my breath as I remove them, almost retching as I turn them upside down, watching in morbid fascination as a small pool of sweat pours from the gore-soaked leather.

"That's absolutely fucking disgusting, and I dabble with rotting curses on the weekends," I swear, casting a scourify or twelve at the unpleasant articles, immediately tossing them across the Chamber in revulsion.

"No interest in being a potions mistress anymore?"

"Since when did I want to do that?" I ask incredulously.

"It was a joke," Severus huffs, simply incinerating his own gloves with a focused fiendfyre. I whistle in appreciation at his stellar handling of a very difficult magic. That's mighty impressive. Incredible overkill, but mighty impressive all the same. "Are you turning this heap of bones into something even more terrifying than it was when alive, or can I go to bed now?"

I nod my head in affirmation, groaning as I drag myself to my feet, knees squealing in protest. Time to add magical exhaustion on top of physical and mental.

I walk towards the great skeleton in front of me on shaking legs, placing my hands out in front of me, thumbs touching, and fingers splayed like wings. "Pulvis et cinis, cinis et os, os ad vitae animam," I chant, repeating the incantation on a constant rhythm, the words flowing out in one strong breath. I feel the magic collecting in me as I connect my fingers one by one with each repetition, my hands held together almost in prayer after the fifth chant. I release my hands, holding them palm out towards Magna's empty bones, gasping loudly as the magic bursts out of me, a tangible wave of power rushing forward.

The magic impacts the bones heavily, causing them to shudder and clatter as they seek to contain the new source of life within. Like a sickening marionette, Magna's body raises its head and stares down at me with empty eyes, teeth chittering and clacking to some unknown beat. Somehow it hisses, with no lungs or tongue to project and form the sound.

:Greetings Master. What would you have of me?: 
Stay here and dormant until I have need of you. I will call for you when the time comes: I reply, almost laughing when I turn to see Severus quaking in his gore sodden boots as he stares with unbridled fear at the massive, skeletal monster in front of me. "You alright there Severus?" I call, distracting him from the now deactivating necromantic guardian.

"No matter how many times I see you… work, I'm still horrified by the display," he marvels, blinking slowly as whatever soul that is possessing Magna coils in on itself, resting its head lazily on top of bones tied together by invisible strings.

I smile appreciatively at my work. It wasn't more than four years ago that I was leading a suicide mission in the Department of Mysteries, finding it difficult to cast so much as an overpowered stunner or blasting curse. Now? Animation like this comes easily to me. My handle on the air and earth is as simple as lifting a barbell. I've got a long way to go when it comes to knowledge, having only lived a fraction of the time many greater witches and wizards have, but it makes me feel safe to know that I have enough control and power to go around.

"Thank you, Severus," I reply honestly, giggling at his (still) mildly horrified expression. "I've got another errand to run, so feel free to head out whenever you'd like," I add, helping him collect his tools.

After everything is cleaned, sanitized, and wrapped up nicely we head out, Severus leaving towards his quarters while I make my way towards the History of Magic classroom. I'm met by Professor Binns lecturing to an empty room, completely unaware of the world around him. How on Earth has he been allowed to stay here and teach? I clear my throat loudly, attempting to catch the ghost's attention. I curse when he doesn't notice me, instead carrying on with his recollection of the Goblin Rebellion of 1823, describing the harrowing tale of the legendary Commander Knifetooth's ambushes in painstakingly boring detail. How someone can make history of all subjects dull, I'll never know.

"Professor Binns, could I please have your attention?" I ask, rolling my eyes when he, again, does not notice my presence. "Cuthbert Binns, listen god-damnit!"

His translucent head slowly rolls over as he peers at me out of the corner of one eye. "Yes? Do you have a question, Miss…?"

"No, I don't have a question. What I do have is a letter of notice," I announce, conjuring an archaic looking pink slip and placing it on top of Binns desk. He looks down at it curiously, eyes widening to comical proportions as he reads it over once, then twice. His eyes flip up to me, and then back down to the sheet, before he lifts a hand and pokes curiously at the table in front of him, groaning pitifully when his finger passes through it.

"Oh my," he croaks, dropping his ghostly chalk. Wait, ghostly chalk? Does that mean he died in the middle of a lecture, if the chalk came along with him? Weird. "This says I'm dead," he continues, eyebrows knitted in confusion.

"You've been dead for nearly thirty years, has no one ever told you that?"

"I'm afraid not," he balks, scratching his bald head. "Well, that explains a lot."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I haven't had to use the loo in nearly thirty years," he muses. If I had a mouthful of water I'd have done a spit take at that, so instead I chose to stifle an impressive snort, wondering if what he said was a joke or a simple observation. Knowing Binns? The guy probably hadn't figured out he
was dead and was genuinely confused that he couldn't take a piss.

"So… do you want to carry on to the next world?" I ask tentatively.

"Of course! Always hated teaching," he grumbles, arms held out wide to emphasize how much he truly hates teaching. Judging by the wingspan on him, I'd say he hates it a lot. "Bloody boring gig. Regrettably, it was the only thing I was ever good at." He looks at me questioningly. "Do I follow the light, or what?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe just will yourself onto the next?"

Binns shrugs and shuts his eyes tightly, shoulders quivering, he holds his arms straight against his body, hands balled into fists as he attempts to carry on to the next life. Unfortunately, nothing happens.

"Oh, fuck off," he growls, my eyebrows shooting to my hairline at the elderly ghost's choice of language. "What am I supposed to do?"

I'm all shoulders, unsure myself. I could always try to get a hold of Death, couldn't I? I mean, I can't really do an exorcism as that would purge his spirit completely, removing any chance of him enjoying an afterlife. Those tend to be reserved for the more… interesting spirits, AKA the pricks who go around possessing people and causing general havoc. No, exorcism isn't an option.

"Did you need me for something, Helene?"

"Son of a bitch!" I shriek, falling over and smashing my back against a desk. "What the hell was that for?" I complain loudly, pulling myself up and rubbing my now bruised spine. Death tilts his head to the side, smirking slightly as he watches me grumble.

"It was for entertainment," he states, lips quirked in a facsimile of a smile. "If you'd like, Mr. Binns, I could send you on to the next. It is my job, you know."

"Well, come and get me ya' creepy git," Binns barks in return, eyes closed and arms spread wide, inviting Death to take him. I suck air through my teeth, expecting the worst to come from Binns insulting addressing of Death. Instead, Death laughs. Loudly. Very loudly.

I stare, mouth agape as Death proceeds to cackle like an utter maniac at Binns proclamation, bent over and gripping his knees tightly, his chest heaving. He gasps, small giggles sneaking through his lips as he attempts to pull himself back together, wiping an errant tear away. "Oh my, I haven't been spoken to like that in a very long time," he effuses, grinning unabashedly at my expression. "What? Did you think I didn't have a sense of humor?"

"Well, sort of, yeah."

"When you've been around as long as I have, it's rare to find something funny," he explains, lips drawn oddly as he does his best to hide a fleeting smirk that keeps attempting to appear on his face. "Really, it's probably been… three decades since I've last laughed like that," he continues, counting off the years on his fingers. "Yep, three decades, give or take a couple years."

"Huh."

"Are you going to kill me or what? Get to it!" Binns interrupts.

I grin at that, shaking my head at the ghost and the weight of the stones he must have once carried between his legs. Well, either that or he's a bloody idiot. Probably a little column A, a little column
B. Death rolls his eyes and snaps his fingers, Binns disappearing in a puff of ethereal smoke.

"First time was funny, the second was quite rude," Death complains, placing his hands on his bony hips as he frowns at the empty space that Binns was just occupying.

"Did you damn him to Hell for it?"

"No, that's outside of my jurisdiction, but he is currently waiting in purgatory for me to arrive and drag him off to the Elysium Fields. I think I'm going to let him wait there for a day or two and think about what he's done."

"Well, thanks for taking care of that for me. I wasn't too keen on exorcising him," I say.

"Understandable," he replies, inclining his head. "I don't believe being a dreadfully boring Professor warrants the destruction of one's soul."

"Agreed," I shudder. "So... how've you been?" I ask awkwardly, unsure of how to end the conversation and go on my way. I really need to get some rest. Death snaps his fingers again, magically pulling up a chair and table along with two steaming mugs of tea, steeped to perfection. He waves his hand, beckoning for me to take a seat.

Oh, for fucks sake, I am so bloody tired.

I plop down in my chair, ignoring my creeping exhaustion as I raise the mug to my lips and sip tentatively, sighing in appreciation as the bittersweet liquid runs down my throat. Death does conjure a fantastic cuppa'.

"I've been well, as usual. Although, it hasn't been so long since we last spoke," he considers, two spindly fingers gripping the handle of his own cup, a nearly skeletal pinky stands straight, held regally as he tips his mug back and drinks deeply. "How have things been with you?"

"Alright. I had a bit of a verbal fit with Dumbledore the other day. All my anger sort of... well, spilled out," I begin, holding my hand out and shrugging slightly as if to say, 'what can you do?' "Years and years of frustrations with the man all flooding out at once. I'm surprised I didn't accidentally kill him a second time, considering how frustrated I was with his holier-than-thou bullshit. I half expected to simply blow up his office with him inside it."

"He is the type of person that brings out the worst in others," Death comments, quietly clicking his tongue. "Dumbledore could even frustrate one such as me, and I get frustrated less often than I laugh. Being Death does give one thick skin."

"And how often would that be? You getting frustrated?"

"You've heard of the First World War, correct?"

"Ah... really?"

"Quite."

"What about before that?"

Death scratches his chin thoughtfully, looking off into the distance as he ponders what terrible events coincided with the last time he got well and truly mad. "French Revolution," he confirms. "Although I did get a bit bored towards the end of the 18th century and gave the Americans a little push."
"World changing revolutions happen when you get bored?"

"You do realize, I am Death,' he snidely replies, sticking his chin outchildishly.

"I know, I know, but it's still different hearing it from the source," I acquiesce, shocked at the destruction the God can bring about simply because he's having a slow day. Makes me a bit more nervous that he's got his attention focused on me for the time being.

"Oh, don't be such a spoilsport. You'll still be alive at the end of all your mayhem," Death complains flamboyantly, hands raised high above his head. "Really, you're so shocked to find that Death of all people being interested in you could cause your life to be a bit more… entertaining?"

"…by entertaining, do you mean full of war and suffering?"

"Not specifically, those just happen to coincide with people dying en masse. It's very rare that I see a peaceful mass death."

"That really doesn't make me feel much better about it. At all," I emphasize, taking another sip from my mug.

"Well, it doesn't matter to me how you feel about it. It's not like I'm changing anything," he admits, flicking some unseen debris off of his finger. "I brought you back because you died much too early. That's it. What happens in the future is on your shoulders, not mine. That's what I do. I change one thing," he exclaims, a single finger pointed rigidly towards the ceiling. "One thing, and I see what effect that has on the rest of the world. More often than not, nothing happens. But every once in a while, I get something, or someone like you. Someone who changes the whole path of things. Blazes their own trail."

"That's supposed to make me feel better?" I deadpan.

"No, not particularly," Death opines, taking a bite from a sweat-meal biscuit that wasn't originally there, before offering one to me. I take it and bite into the small treat, enjoying the burst of creamy milk chocolate that covers the top of it, as well as the slightly grainy texture and mild sweetness of the pastry itself. I look inquisitively at Death, suddenly wondering why he's so incredibly English about everything. Actually, he's always been English about everything.

"Because I am deeply familiar with the United Kingdom, the English in particular," Death answers without any prompting, reading my thoughts again.

"You make it sound as if you were once English," I wonder.

"Indeed, I was."

I rear back in shock, mouth opening and closing rapidly as I try to figure out what to say. Death was alive? "You... you were alive once? A mortal? That's... that's... wow."

"Really? You believed that? That was a joke," Death intones, his voice completely flat.

"Fuck off," I groan. "You had me going for a second there."

Death just smiles in his creepy way, waving his hand and causing the tea and biscuits to disappear, the Sorting Hat suddenly appearing between the two of us, the indentations on the leather that mark its eyes blinking in surprise. "I brought the rest of your errand. Have fun Helene!"

"What the hell am I doing here? Who the hell are you?" the Hat barks, twisting to and fro as it
attempts to get a look at its surroundings. "Potter? Is that you? Who the hell was that behind me?"
"Er, yeah. It's me," I reply sheepishly. "And that was Death."

"Death? Sod that, three bloody years you forget about me. Three. Bloody. Years," the Hat fumes, shadows suddenly deepening across its frame as its anger builds. "How dare you get my hopes up like that and then just fucking disappear."

I look up at Death hoping for him to back me up, but to my dismay he's done a runner and has vanished from the room. I swear I can hear him laughing at me. Immortal prick. What was that he said the last time we met about not messing with people? No, he's not like Loki, or Zeus, or any of those other Gods. 'No deceit, no tricks, no misleading you.' Bloody liar.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you, girl!"
"Jesus! Alright, alright!" I swear, holding my hands up in surrender. "I'm sorry, alright? I was trying to stay alive, if you haven't noticed, I had to kill the Headmaster a few weeks ago. Am I not allowed to be busy?"

"Really? One day? You couldn't take one measly day to drop by and just say hello? Selfish brat," it huffs, and would have crossed its arms if it had any to cross with. "So, why have I been woken up and dragged to this classroom?"

"Uh... well, Death here- wherever Death is, just helped me get rid of Binns," I explain, licking my lips nervously. Christ, I'm intimidated by a damned hat. "So, uh, I was hoping to follow up on that promise I made a couple years ago and get you appointed as the History Professor."

"About time," it barks. "I'll need some way to get to and from class, you know?"

"Shit. I completely forgot about that. Of course, the hat would need to get around, how else would it get to the Great Hall to eat? ...Wait, eat? Jesus, I'm tired. "Where would you go? What would you do? Can't you just, you know, stay here instead of in the Headmasters office?"

"Are you insane? Do you know how quickly I would be defaced and turned into some sort of elaborate speaking codpiece? This is a school, and in turn it is full of teenagers," the Hat sasses, leather crinkling into a distasteful frown. "Teenagers are well known to destroy everything they get their hands on. Trust me, I've been watching them for the last millennium. Teenagers are terrible, terrible creatures. I need a way to get around."

I pinch the bridge of my nose, wondering how the hell I keep getting myself into situations like this. God damn you Death. This is your fault.

"I need it done tonight if you want to have a History Professor by tomorrow."

"Shite," I whisper. What to do, what to do... make a golem? No, that'd be ridiculous. Yes, welcome to History of Magic, taught by the Sorting Hat that has been thrown on top of a terribly intimidating stone construct. Not going to fucking happen. It's not like I can turn the hat into a huma-

"That's it!" I exclaim, pulling Et Necromantium out of my bag and shuffling through it, scanning over the pages until I come across the section I need. I tap the page excitedly.

"I'm going to make you a body," I explain, bringing the book over and showing it to the Hat. "Any preferences on gender, age, etcetera?" I ask as it reads it over, looking at the process of creating an
artificial body that can be controlled by an outside soul or mind, possession free. "You're also going to need a name. I don't think it'll work being called 'Professor Hat.'"

"Well of course not. Make me look like Godric then, my voice is his after all," the Hat says, bristling with anticipation. "About… mid thirties, I'd say?"

"Well, I have to know what he looked like."

"Just put me on while you make the body, I can show you what the man looked like."

I nod, placing the Hat on my head, grabbing the book, and blinking to the seventh floor. The Hat, not being a real living object doesn't object to that form of travel.

"I do object to being called 'not real.'"

Whoops.

"Sorry about that. Should have said 'organic' instead."

"You're goddamn right," the Hat huffs. "On with it then!"

I puff my cheeks out in complaint at being ordered around, opening the door to the Room of Requirement and walking in to its ritual room setting. I grab one of the knives off the wall and hang it near the dais, opening *Et Necromantium* again and leafing back to the page of the ritual. It's nothing too difficult, but it does require an adequate amount of magic and a small sacrifice. A small sacrifice being a chunk of skin, muscle and bone. I scroll through the book, looking for a particular healing spell that I'm going to require for this ritual, marking the page with a conjured slip of paper and turning back to the previous section.

"Alrighty," I murmur, setting the book aside and putting away my wand. I grab the ritual knife and place my left hand on the table, steeling myself for what is to come. This is going to be a doozy.

I slash down abruptly, severing my left hand at the wrist, crying out from the sudden blistering pain. I do my best to ignore the horrid burning at the end of my now naked arm, forgoing numbing charms and any other healing spells for the time being as they'll just interfere with the ritual. I extend my (only) hand, palm forward, facing the dismembered limb on the table.

"Give me that image of Godric now, Hat," I say, wincing dramatically as the Hat does just that. "I do not need that much detail," I complain, squinting mentally at the sight of the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, in all of its fleshy wonder. Eugh. Too much information.

"I'd like to get as much experience out of this body as I possibly can, Potter," the Hat chides. "And call me Iolaire."

I do my best to purge the idea of the Sorting Ha- no, Iolaire, whatever the hell he… er, it? He- is, getting up to the more instinctual human proclivities whilst wearing a conjured people suit that has been modeled after the late founder and all-around Wizarding legend, Godric Gryffindor. I can't. I just… no. This isn't just a weird day, it's a weird fucking week. Hell, it's a weird life. How do I go from ambushing one of the most powerful wizards to have ever lived to… this?

"Quit your bitching and get to it Potter."

I have to stop myself from blustering angrily as I begin to chant. "D'abbesra'a d'leh g'armeae, ae'quom ei d'akh'i'ye," I intone, pushing my magic towards my old hand and watching in morbid fascination as the skin bubbles, twisting like clay as it begins to form, slowly beginning to look like the very
detailed image of Gryffindor that Iolaire has seared into my mind. He's tall and stocky, yet not completely made of muscle, sporting thick auburn hair with a few sparse curls to it. He has an unexpectedly narrow jaw, strong roman nose, and thin pursed lips framed by a trim beard, angled down into a sharp point. He looks like a goddamn Viking.

I continue chanting, cursing mentally as I feel the staggering pressure on my magic as the body continues to twist together. I've worked myself too hard today, what with the rendering and re-animation of Magna, having another conversation with Death (which was frankly exhausting, as well as got me into this mess), in addition to making a brand-new human suit for a goddamn sentient hat. I'd be amazed if I managed to even make it to my own bed tonight.

The magic begins to build, the immense weight off it pressing down on me, the stump of my wrist screaming in protest while I carry on with the ritual. "D'abbesra'a d'leh g'armeia, ae'quom ei d'akhi'ye," I repeat, pushing more magic into the spell.

As soon as the magic feels as if its about to explode, I pull back, severing the steady stream of power. "B'khart'aa!" I cry, sighing audibly as I feel the ritual take hold, the body in front of me slowly coming to life. A beating heart, the rise and fall of the chest signifying functioning lungs, everything apart from the tell-tale sign of movement behind the eyelids. It looks remarkably like the victim of a dementors kiss. The lights are on, but nobody is home.

"Well Iolaire, looks like you've got a body," I pant, doing my best to catch my breath. I flick my wand and quickly conjure clothing for him, a standard set of plain robes settling onto the empty body in front of me. I look down at where my hand should be and shrug, I'll get that in the morning. I'm much too tired to make a new hand right now.

I place Iolaire on top of his new vessel, the hat squirming excitedly, like an anxious toddler. As soon as he connects with it, the body suddenly shoots up clumsily, eyes wide and arms flailing wildly. "Merlin!" Iolaire cries, his voice now projected from his new ride. "I have hands! Legs! A real mouth!" he continues, awkwardly rubbing his face and pinching himself in places to make sure that everything is quite real. "I have a body!"

"Looks like it," I reply tiredly, moving to wipe the sweat from my brow, confusedly holding out a dry hand in front of me. Looks like in addition to not bleeding, I don't sweat. Odd. Again, I'll worry about that another time. Iolaire jumps to his feet, stumbling slightly as he moves towards me and pulls me up into a great bear hug, crying out in laughter as I hiss at him. "Let me down!"

"Alright, alright!" he bubbles, setting me down and then dancing a little jig. "I can't believe this! Almost one thousand years, and you've finally given me everything I ever dreamed of! I'm alive, properly alive. If anyone ever gives you trouble about your powers, you show them what you did here today and ask them again if they think necromancy is all bad," he marvels, staring at the back of his hands with unbridled fascination.

"Yes, show them the affront to humanity that is the Sorting Hat come to life, here to burn our world to the ground and hear the lamentations of our women," I snort playfully, chuckling quietly as he turns to look at me in horror.

"Burn the world? There's so much of it to see! Why would I ever do that? Idiots, the whole lot of you," he denies, waving his arm in frustration. "Yes, of course the previously semi-inanimate object would immediately begin warring against humanity after being given life. Not like I'd want to travel outside the goddamn country and see the changes this world has gone through since I was last out of Hogwarts."

"Hey, I'm just being sarcastic," I say, rubbing tiredly at my eyes. "I'm going to get some sleep,
Alright? I've had a long day, but I'll be up tomorrow to see the fireworks when you come strolling into the Great Hall."

"Whatever you say, now shoo, I have some experiments I want to do," Iolaire replies idly, already peeking under his robes as he wanders aimlessly about the room.

I blink back to my own room, throwing my ruined robes out the open window and incinerating them in mid-air, watching as the softly glowing embers slowly drift downwards before disappearing. I take a quick shower, removing the grime and filth that has built up throughout the day before throwing myself into bed, still naked. I'm asleep before I hit the pillow, and the only thought running through my head is 'maybe giving the Sorting Hat a body wasn't my best idea."

Chapter End Notes

The Hat and Golem bit is a reference to jbern's fantastic fic, The Lie I've Lived. The Sorting Hat is fucking stellar in that. Additionally, Google Translate and sufficient searching have led me to these translations. Thank you, wonders of the internet. You make my life so much easier.

Pulvis et cinis, cinis et os, os ad vitae animam: Dust and ash, ash and bone, bone to eternal life. (Latin)

D'abbesra'a d'leh g'armea, ae'quom ei d'akhi'ye: Flesh to bone, rise and live. (Aramaic)

B'khart'aa: End, Finish. (Aramaic)

Iolare: Eagle, pronounced 'Yeh-lar-eh.' (Gaelic)
Buzzing. Incessant, annoying buzzing. Some muffled words, my ears too clogged with sleep to recognize them apart from the demanding tone. "Ugh," I groan pathetically, burrowing deeper under the covers and pulling my pillow over my head to block out the noise of whatever horrid creature is trying to tear me away from my rest. Exhausted, I barely register the fact that I don't feel anything apart from a dull throbbing pain in my left hand, or where my left hand should be, and in turn there is no pillowcase clutched where previously mentioned left hand should be. Wait. No pillowcase?

Hold on a fucking second. The more important question is, no hand?

I flex my right hand, feeling as the fingers roll in their joints and knuckles crack from their sleep induced disuse. I flex my left, feeling absolutely nothing. That's weird.

"Helene, wake up! You're going to miss breakfast," the voice calls, one which I now recognize to be Hermione's. I groan even louder, a low childish whine that I meant to come out as a simple 'let me skip, I'm too bloody tired.' Instead, it comes out as the petulant and immature phrase that is well known to everyone around the world: "five mo' minutes."

I'm met by my duvet being tugged off of me by Hermione, which in turn causes me to squeal in protest.

"Honestly, you never have issues getting up in the morning," she huffs. I can almost hear her crossing her arms as she chides me, either that or I just know her well enough to understand that she's probably got them crossed in frustration right this second. "Up, come on. Breakfast finishes in an hour, and your showers take forever."

"Alright, alright, I'm up," I moan, pulling my left hand up to rub the sleep from my eyes and flinching in confusion when it takes much longer to get to my face than it should, as well as being much stubbier than I remember. I open my eyes, perplexed as I blink at the sight in front of me. No hand. I can't believe I forgot about that.

Hermione screams girlishly, and I spin around to catch the sight of bushy hair suspended in the air, and the thud of her falling onto her arse. Her head pokes up, framed by frazzled curls and eyes as wide as dinner plates as she stares in horror at my (at least for me) minor predicament. "Your- your hands off!!" she cries, pointing at the empty spot at the end of my wrist.

"I've had worse," I quip, frowning in confusion when she doesn't get the joke. "What? Monty
"Now is not the time for that," she spits, stressing each word as she stand back up again, finger still held out towards me, now being brandished like a weapon as she jabs her hand towards me aggressively. "When on Earth did you lose your damned hand?"

I shrug, picking up my wand and waving it over the stump, murmuring the flesh forging charm I used to reattach my arm with a few adjustments, gritting my teeth as my hand reforms. Bones grow and sprout from the stump and click into place loudly. Red muscle and white tendon begin to lace and wind over the bone, the sensation of newly formed muscle uncomfortable as it slides over the bone. Finally, fresh skin melts and stretches out over the raw muscle before shrinking to fit like plastic film in a vacuum sealer.

"See, much better," I say, hoping to comfort her as I wave with my fresh new hand.

"That's absolutely disgusting," she mutters, looking at my brand new (and slightly pink) hand with a look of morbid curiosity blended with revulsion.

"Whatever, don't be impressed by my incredible eldritch talents," I complain, crawling out of bed. I walk past Hermione to go and take the fastest shower of my life.

After a few minutes I'm feeling awake and clean, casting a quick drying charm on my hair as we head down to the Great Hall.

"Hermione," I say, catching her attention.

"Yes?" She asks, tilting her head slightly.

"We have a new History Professor, and I'm sure you're going to love him."

Her brow crinkles as she frowns at me. "New History Professor?" she asks, before her eyes light up in recognition. "The Hat! You managed to give it the job?"

"Him, and his name is Iolaire, at least, that's what he said his first name is going to be. I haven't any clue about the others," I muse, wondering what he's come up with. Probably called himself Gryffindor for all I know. I wouldn't put it past him. "And uh, Binns was exorcised last night, and Iolaire was the best replacement for him."

"Binns was exorcised?"

"Yeah. He's off to the Pearly Gates, or well, Platform Nine and ¾ if his trip to the afterlife is in any way similar to mine."

"You... you went to Platform Nine and ¾ when you died?" Hermione asks incredulously.

I nod and shrug at the same time. "Yeah. I'm guessing it's different for each person. The Hogwarts express is a symbol for me, as it was the mode of transportation to the first place I ever truly called home. I'm pretty sure I recall Death saying everyone sees something different, so obviously Platform 9 and ¾ made a strong impression on me."

Hermione frowns as she thinks, probably wondering what her Pearly Gates would look like.

Soon enough, we make it to the Great Hall and walk in to muted pandemonium. Everyone is staring up at the staff table, where Iolaire has stacked what looks to be half of the food in the entire country on his plate. I rear back in revulsion as I watch him eat like he's been starved his whole life, which
technically he has, but he's never had to eat.

I walk to the end of the Ravenclaw table, the other girls having gotten a seat close to the action.

It reminds me somewhat of a nature documentary, bits of meat and egg flying every which way as he tears into the food in front of him. I find it incredibly impressive that he's managing to eat with two forks as he's only had a body for less than twenty-four hours. The now empty Hat rests on top of his head, hanging limply and swaying with every aggressive bite.

I can see Dumbledore trying to have a discussion with the him, probably to find out who he really is. Meanwhile, Severus is glaring at me because he just knows that his normally quiet morning has been ruined due to something I've done. Because who else would create a body for the Sorting Hat and bypass the usual hiring process apart from me?

Suddenly, the Iolaire stands up, Dumbledore stumbling backwards in surprise. "May I have your attention please?" He shouts. Of course, he's already gotten everybody's attention just being here, so it didn't take much to silence the Hall. "Thank you, thank you. Now, I'm sure you're all wondering who I am," he asks, smiling as he looks over the curious students. "I'm also sure that you recognize my choice in headwear."

A dull roar of affirmatives floods through the hall, and Iolaire spreads his hands once more, requesting silence. "Headmaster Dumbledore was also quite curious as to who I was and why I was sitting in the previously empty chair normally reserved for the History Professor. The reason for that is I, the Sorting Hat, have decided to teach History in Professor Binns absence."

The students cheer raucously, banging their fists against the tables and feet against the ground as they thank every God that has ever been for the change in faculty.

"Now, now, could I have some quiet please," Iolaire asks, hands still raised placatingly. "I will be going by the name Iolaire, or if you truly wish to refer to me professionally, simply call me sir. Do not worry about replacing your textbooks, as I have already taken the liberty of ordering them from Flourish and Blotts and they will be arriving within the next day or two. I will go over any curriculum changes on a class-to-class basis, but if you have any questions please come and speak to me, my office will be on the third floor."

He sits down graciously, the students back to cheering as loudly as they possibly can. Dumbledore fires off a tremendous bang from his wand, commanding the hall. "Silence!" he shouts, the students doing just that. Dumbledore fluffs his robes, tucking away his wand and turning to Iolaire, a genial smile on his face as he begins to interrogates him.

I'm only able to pick up what he's saying due to my augmented senses and how close I'm sitting to the staff table.

"Thank you for your announcement... Iolaire, I was not personally aware of Professor Binns absence, would you be able to tell me about that?"

Iolaire raises his eyebrows, turning an inquisitive eye towards the Headmaster. "He was exorcised the other night," he remarks, shrugging his shoulders. "The only reason I knew was because of the wards telling me."

Dumbledore frowns dramatically. "The wards didn't tell me anything, so that's quite odd." He steeps his fingers, curiosity written all over his face. "If I may ask, would you be able to tell me how you got a body? I've never seen such magic like that."
"Oh! It's something Godric created a thousand years ago before he passed. It's basically just a flesh golem," he explains, gesturing towards his body and thankfully not telling Dumbledore in front of all the other staff that I created the body for him in a Necromantic ritual. "I believe it to be his defining work, especially since it's made in his own image."

Dumbledore smiles at that, casting a glance in my direction letting me know that he knows I did this. I smile at him, a dangerous glint in my eyes reminding him that if he tries to say anything he will die where he stands. It's impossible for him to say anything anyways, considering the slave bond placed on him acts on his very soul.

"That's… he's the Sorting Hat?" Lisa whispers, one eye squinted as she stares at Iolaire. "How does that even… what kind of magic could possibly…" she trails off, her inner Ravenclaw losing its mind.

Padma looks torn between being joyful and terrified at the prospect of a new History teacher. "Could he be worse than Binns? Could anything be worse than Binns?"

"Iolaire was around before Hogwarts even existed, if anyone can teach History it's going to be him," Hermione argues, looking ecstatic to be taught by Iolaire.

"I'm sure it's going to be entertaining," I say, smiling at the girls. "I've had a few conversations with him already and he's… an interesting character to say the least."

"What do you mean by interesting?"

"He's got a dirty sense of humour and his tongue is sharper than most swords. History is not going to be boring with him around. Honestly, it's probably going to be our new favourite class."

Padma's worried expression is quickly replaced by an ecstatic grin. "That's fantastic! I love History and I was so disappointed when I had my first class with Binns," she complains playfully. "I was confident that he was going to bore us to death and we'd end up haunting the classroom with him."

Luna giggles loudly. "I still can't believe it took him so long to be fired."

"Bloody Dumbledore's doing probably," a girl near us pipes up, Nanette something or other I believe, haven't ever really talked to her since she's a year below us.

That garners a chorus of agreement, the other Ravenclaws muttering angrily about their ruined schooling and potential future loss of knowledge. I raise one eyebrow in surprise. I didn't expect the students to start railing against him so quickly. I guess the book had a lot of impact.

I look over to the Slytherin table, wondering if I can catch Tracey unawares with the current kerfuffle involving Iolaire. Fortunately for me it looks like she's getting ready to go to her next class.

I wait for her to get up and leave, saying goodbye to everyone as I take one last bite of eggs, getting out of my seat and following her out of the Great Hall.

She takes the stairs quickly, and I have to keep up with her as covertly as possible until she gets onto a landing. I'm not about to ambush her when she's on a moving staircase. That'd be a disaster waiting to happen.

She gets off at the fourth floor, walking a bit more sedately. I follow closely behind until she gets to a relatively unpopulated area of the castle.

"Hey, Tracey!" I shout, announcing myself.
She whips around, wand at the ready before she realizes it's me, tucking it away and growling at me, "What do you want Helene? Can't you tell that I just want you to leave me alone?"

I shrug placatingly, hands up in the universal sign of 'I'm unarmed.' "I figured that out three months ago. I want to know what the hell I did to make you hate me so much. If I did something to hurt you, I'm genuinely sorry, but I haven't a clue what I've done."

She scowls at me, tentatively fingering the wand in her sleeve. "You really have no idea, do you?" she asks, one eyebrow raised precariously. "Daphne didn't tell you anything?"

I shake my head plaintively. "Daphne told me that it's your story to tell, not hers. I didn't want to push it, and she told me that she'd spoken to you about me, but that was more than a month ago."

Tracey's eyes are downcast as she wrestles with some unknown thought. "She did talk to me, but I sort of told her to… uh- fuck off."

"That, I heard."

"Yeah?" She asks, sheepishly looking up at me. "I just… it's a sensitive subject for me, alright? I thought you knew what with how close you are to Octavius and Terra." She frowns at their names, apparently holding some ill will to my adoptive parents as well. "I expected them to have told you everything if Daphne hadn't."

"Well, nobody's told me nothin'," I joke, trying my best to put on an American Southern accent and failing miserably.

Tracey snorts loudly, holding her hand up to hide the smile creeping across her face, before it's quickly replaced with another scowl. She whispers something, and I step closer to her.

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch that."

She huffs quietly, scrunching her face up as she blinks. "I said… I can't… I can't tell you right now. I'm just- my whole day is gone if I talk about it," she chokes, wiping a tear from her eye. "I'm fine talking about it another time, but only when the day is done and over with."

"That bad, huh?"

She nods, her throat bobbing as she swallows heavily. "Y- yeah. It is."

"You don't… you don't have to tell me if you don't want to. I'm sorry, I should have known better with how you were acting around me. I'm sorry. Just, forget about it, alright? You don't have to tell me anything," I apologize, Tracey chuckling awkwardly at my attempt to comfort her.

"It's fine. Trust me, it's fine," she denies, pinching her nose and sniffing loudly. "I was bound to have this conversation with you some time anyways. Come and talk to me tonight, alright? The password to the Slytherin common room is 'Magna.'"

I frown, my jaw clenching at that name. "Magna, huh," I drawl, realizing that Severus must have changed the password in her honor.

I hold back the tears that threaten to spill over at the mention of my dead friend. Because she was a friend, not a pet. You can't speak to a pet, no matter how rudimentary the conversation is. I remember how excited she would get when I brought her food, especially her favourite: fresh acromantula. There's a reason that spiders are terrified of basilisks, and it's because the biggest and baddest of them are a basilisks primary source of food.
Aw shit.

My dead friend who probably controlled the acromantula population.

"I'll come and see you tonight," I blurt, losing a bit of my composure. "I'm going to go… I'm going to go, yeah?"

"Sounds like a plan, Helene," she replies.

As I'm walking away she calls my name. "Helene! Hey, just… wait up a second."

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry for how I treated you… I shouldn't have taken my anger out on you. It wasn't your fault," she concedes, eyes downcast.

"Tracey, it's alright," I reassure her, much to her shock. Well, I'm not reacting to this like how a thirteen-year-old normally would. My advanced mental age comes in handy in situations like this, since I don't blow up on people like a teenager of my (supposed) age often does. "Just don't do it again, alright? If you have a problem with me, come to me about it. If I'm being a right bitch I'll make sure I stop."

"Sounds good to me," she laughs. "You're a good friend Helene."

"Same to you."

-::- 

It's been a while since I've been in the Slytherin common room. About… six years, give or take. The stone marking the door is only noticeably by the snake etched into its surface, its spitting head reared and ready to strike.

I know I have the password, but I want to try this to see if it works.

:Open: I hiss, patting myself on the back for a job well done when the stone splits down the middle, bricklike chunks of it sliding out of the way a la Diagon Alley as the door opens.

I walk into the room, taking my time to admire the pleasant ambience. I'd have to say that the Slytherin common room rivals Ravenclaw's if only for it's fantastic 'under the sea' vibe. It's tastefully ostentatious, if there's one word to describe it. The furnishings are lavish but not overly so, showing signs of wear from the many years they've been used. The room has a subtle green glow cast over it from the lake, the candles and lanterns providing a comfortable amount of light. I can see a much more well-lit section tucked off to the right, I'm assuming it's for the students to do their coursework.

"What are you doing here?" A Slytherin shouts, shooting off of a couch and striding towards me.

It's moments like this when I realize I'm still short.

Yes, I may be tall(ish) for a girl, but I'm still only a willowy five foot six. This Slytherin on the other hand looks to be nearly six feet tall, and it shows in the way that he looms over me, an outraged sneer on his face.

"Well? Answer me 'Claw!"

I frown at him, shaking my head playfully. "Is this how you greet a guest in the House of Slytherin?" I ask, crossing my arms. "I have to say I'm not impressed."
He growls at me, other students poking their heads out to see what all the commotion is about.

"Potter! What are you doing here?"

"Good to see you too Malfoy," I drawl. "I'm here to see my good friend Tracey, but I'd like to say hello to my sisters while I'm here."

Malfoy scowls at me, obviously not pleased with having a dirty halfblood tainting his cave of pureblood traditionalism. At least, that's what I imagine he's thinking.

"And did they give you the password?"

"Of course they did, how else do you think I got in here?" I scoff.

"Hey, I'm talking to you," the larger boy says, grabbing a fistful of my robes and tugging me towards him.

I react instantly, banishing him wandlessly and watching with poorly disguised glee as he sails across the room, landing violently on a large love seat. A love seat that's inhabited by a Slytherin couple that is attempting to draw each others' tonsils out via their tongues.

The girls shrieks loudly as the seat tilts precariously. It wavers for a second, the girl smiling momentarily at the prospect of not falling on her arse before the seat takes that opportunity to tilt backwards once more, colliding to the ground a loud thud. I laugh at the sight of three sets of legs poking out over the fallen seat, kicking wildly as they attempt to get back to their feet.

"Anybody else who's not happy with my presence, please line up," I announce, gesturing in front of me. "Otherwise, could I see my fucking sisters?"

Severus takes that moment to dash into the room. He must have been alerted by one of his prefects to a Raven invasion. "What on Earth is going on here?" he thunders, cloak billowing dangerously behind him. He sets his eyes on me and scowls. "Miss Potter… what are you doing in my common room?"

The man has a reputation to keep.

"I'm here to visit my close friend Tracey Davis, as well as say hello to my sisters if given the chance."

Severus nods curtly. "That is acceptable. Duststone!" he barks, addressing the taller boy who attempted to fight me just a moment ago. "Do not treat a guest of Slytherin in such an unseemly way ever again, do you hear me? If I hear of such a thing happening once more I will personally contact Lord Duststone and tell him of your folly."

The somewhat woozy looking boy pales considerably, nodding his affirmation and sending me a laughable glare as he scampers back to his quarters, tail tucked between his legs.

"Professor Snape, could you please direct me to Tracey Davis' dorm?"

"I could. Follow me," he commands, his robe sweeping impressively behind him as he opens a door to my left, beckoning for me to come with him.

"Could you make an attempt not to assault my students when you decide to visit your friends?" he drawls jokingly as I pass through the door.
"It was self defence. He grabbed my robes, tugged me towards him quite aggressively. I only responded in kind."

"Keep it to banishing charms, yes? I'd prefer not to tell one of my old associates that their child got themselves killed by attacking the Girl-Who-Lived."

"I can do that."

We walk through the short hallway, Severus rapping on a door marked with a large brass four. "Miss Davis and Miss Greengrass, your sister Miss Potter is here to see you," he announces, nodding at me once more as he leaves.

Daphne opens the door, a tight smile on her face as she beckons me in. "Welcome to Slytherin," she says, hands spread wide.

My mouth drops at the glass wall in front of me, providing a surprisingly well-lit view into the Black Lake. I watch as a group, flock, school, whatever you call multiple grindylow, swimming through the lake, their tentacles shimmering as they pass by. I think I catch a glimpse of a merperson further away, but it could just be my eyes playing tricks on me.

"It's beautiful," I whisper, eyes still glued to the sight in front of me. "I adore the view from my room, but this is like a portal into another world."

"Absolutely amazing, huh?" Daphne laughs at my awe. "It's quite relaxing unless you have a fear of open water. If that's the case… well, good luck in Slytherin."

I shake my head, still smiling. "It's gorgeous." I look around the room, finally spotting Tracey resting lazily on her bed, a book propped up on her lap as she looks up at me, and I note the lack of malice in her eyes. "So… you wanted to talk, and I assumed it was going to be a pretty heavy conversation, so I brought drinks," I say, hoisting up a six pack of butterbeer.

"When did you find time to get that?" Tracey asks, eyes wide.

"Snuck out," I grin.

Daphne giggles loudly. "You snuck out to Hogsmeade? Who sold you the butterbeer?"

"Why, Rosmerta of course. You think she cares one bit about students sneaking out?"

Tracey tilts her head in recognition. Rosmerta is renowned for not caring in the slightest about pretty much everything. As long as you're friendly, anything goes. No fights, no insults, just have a good time. She's practically a hippy in that sense.

I crack three of them open, handing two to the girls as I take a seat on Daphne's bed, sighing at the fantastic taste of the butterbeer as I take a sip from my own bottle. It's like melted butterscotch and ginger beer all wrapped up into one delicious drink.

Tracey dog ears her page and sets her book down on her nightstand. I almost laugh the mental image of Hermione being absolutely appalled to see such mistreatment of a book. She tucks a stray bit of hair behind her ear nervously, closing her eyes as she goes through a breathing exercise.

I recognize the practice, realizing how serious this conversation will be.

"I…” Tracey trails off before she can even get one word in, clutching her butterbeer tightly, knuckles standing out in sharp relief against her skin. She takes a long swig from the bottle, blinking a few
times as she settles her nerves.

"I was abused, for a long time," she starts, her voice cracked. "It started out with my mum… my dad was a muggle. He was a drinker, and he would take his anger out on her when he got home from work. He did this for… well, he did it as long as I could remember."

I have to refrain from crushing my bottle, setting it aside and flexing my hands dangerously. I feel my heart go out to Tracey before she's even really begun her story, knowing full-well how hard it is to grow up in an abusive environment. Knowing how you come to accept it as normal, as if the beatings are warranted, as if you're supposed to be told you're scum. As if you're supposed to feel like you're scum, because it's all you've ever known.

"He used to only beat her. I'd hear her shrieking from upstairs, see when she'd cover up her bruises with a glamour," she murmurs, an errant tear trailing down her cheek. "She was so scared of him that she never used magic to protect herself. She always said that he'd come around, that he'd stop hurting her."

Tracey laughs, the sound harsh and strained, so far and away from the normally jovial sound that it could shatter glass with its bitterness alone. "He never did."

She takes another swig from her bottle, deciding halfway to simply chug it all, tossing the empty bottle aside and cracking open another.

"You know there's not really any alcohol in those, right?" Daphne asks.

Tracey shrugs. "I couldn't give a toss right now."

She takes another deep swig, once more clutching the bottle tightly, her hands resting in her lap. "Well… he never did stop, at least, not entirely. One day my mum got it into her head that she could get out of the beatings with magic. Not stop them, no, she'd never do that. She couldn't possibly hurt dad. The bitch was too soft," she spits, biting her lip.

"No, she just pointed in my direction and let him swing."

I do shatter my bottle this time, the glass cutting into my hand as it's crushed. "Shit!" I hiss in pain, vanishing the broken glass and waving my wand over my hand, healing the sharp slices in my fingers and palm.

"Are you alright?" Tracey, shooting out of her bed and pulling my hand towards her, staring at its unblemished surface.

I chuckle at her question, the chuckle turning into a full-blown belly laugh. It takes a moment for me to collect myself, pinching the bridge of my nose as a few snorts escape me. "You're gonna' ask me if I'm alright? Really? Tracey, you really need to sort out your priorities."

She smirks at me, letting go of my hand and climbing back into her bed. "You did crush that bottle with your bare hand. I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"I didn't know you were proficient with healing spells," Daphne interjects, looking at me curiously.

"Well, after the incident with Quirrel I thought I would pick up a few," I say, shrugging.

"Makes sense."

"So," Tracey interrupts, rolling her eyes at our derailing of an incredibly emotional discussion. She
breathes deeply again, settling back into her story surprisingly quickly. I find myself both impressed and deeply saddened by how easily she speaks of such a traumatic event. "My dad came after me. It started when I was… six, maybe seven. I don't really know the details, as it was a bit of a blur. My mum of course, did nothing. She was just happy to not be the focus of his anger."

She suddenly turns her back to me, lifting her shirt up before I can tell her not to. That there's no need to show me her scars, because I understand.

I gasp in horror at the criss-crossed mess of knotted scar tissue littering her back, the skin raised and cratered grotesquely.

"Tracey," I whisper, walking towards her and placing my hand on her shoulder, tugging her shirt back down and holding her against me. "I get it. I fucking get it. I… I get it, yeah?"

She starts to sob, clutching onto my robes for dear life, burying her head in my chest. "He said I deserved it. He said I was disgusting, that all magicals are disgusting!"

I coo softly, rubbing small circles into her back. I feel a fury build up inside me as my hands pass over the grooves and bumps of her scarred back, feeling every strike of the belt. It's familiar to me, because I once had the same etched into my back, and the only reason it's no longer there is because I crossed through the Veil of Death.

"You're not disgusting," I whisper, running my fingers through her hair.

Her voice breaks, and she burrows even closer to me. "Octavius and Terra… they know. They know and they adopted you," she wails, her tears soaking through my robes. "But Tracey Davis, little Tracey doesn't get adopted, no. No she fucking doesn't."

So that's why.

If I was in her position… I would be furious, more than furious. I know she's grown up around Daphne since she was much younger, probably around the time her dad was still beating her. For Octavius and Terra to not officially bring her in… I'd be absolutely murderous if I was her.

I can't help myself from smiling at her as she breaks down in front of me, admiring the compassion and sheer level of forgiveness she's exhibited just by allowing me here, not to mention telling me her story.

I cradle her against me, kneading her scalp, my mind racing a mile a minute.

If Octavius and Terra could have adopted her, they would have. I have no doubt in my mind about that, so there must be some stipulation preventing them from doing so, or some ridiculous ancient law.

But who could?

I could always invite her into the Potter family, but that wouldn't be what Tracey wants or needs. Who could?

I almost snap my fingers as the idea comes to me. "I'll talk to them, I can promise you that, I will talk to them, and if they truly cannot adopt you, I'll talk to Sirius and see if he can."

"W- what?" she croaks, looking up at me with red, puffy eyes. "You… what?"

"I'm guessing that both of your parents are in Azkaban, yeah?" She nods, blinking the tears from her
eyes. "Well, if Octavius and Terra can't, and I imagine the only reason they haven't is because there's some ridiculous traditionalist law preventing them from doing so. I'm sure Sirius would be ecstatic to adopt you into the Blacks. You know, you and I would really be sisters then?"

"Sisters?"

"Well, I'm the Black Heiress. If you're part of the family, that means you and I are sisters."

Tracey squeals, once again burying her face in my chest and hugging me tightly. "I… that would be amazing," she hums, her voice muffled. "That would be amazing."

I turn my head, looking to Daphne to get her opinion on the matter.

"Dad and mum… I've talked to them about this before, and they never really gave me a straight answer," she admits.

I nod. "I'll talk to them about it as soon as I can."

"But what if Sirius doesn't want me?" Tracey whispers, her worry getting the better for her.

"Sirius will want you, there's no doubt about that," I argue, holding her close. "And if he doesn't, for some bullshit insane reason, I'm going to bring you into the Potter family."

"Can… can you do that?"

"I wouldn't be adopting you, of course, but I could make you a Potter by inducting you into the family. It's a little bit convoluted when it comes to the legal process, but we do have a lawyer in the family."

Tracey nods, her hair brushing against my chin. I can feel her sagging in my arms, slowly drifting off to sleep.

Thinking on my feet, I lie down on the bed, turning her around and cuddling up behind her. I wrap one arm around her waist, propping my head up on my other hand. "I'm not going anywhere until you've gotten to sleep, alright? You need some rest after all that."

She grunts weakly in reply, snuggling up to me.

I just lie there, brushing her hair for who knows how long, watching the slow rise and fall of her chest as she slowly drifts off to sleep.

Her breaths slowly grow longer and longer, her head tilting slightly as her nose is buried into her pillow, her cheeks squashing up against it. Happy to see her finally relaxed and asleep, I slowly remove my hand from her waist, climbing out of her bed and back onto the floor, stretching my legs as I stand up.

"Thanks for taking care of her like that," Daphne whispers, having watched as I helped Tracey to sleep. "Normally I'm there for her, helping her sleep."

"Well, don't think of this as me taking one for the team. I wanted to help her," I say.

"I know that. I'm just… well, I'm just saying that I'm normally the one in her bed."

I raise an eyebrow, smirking at Daphne. "I wouldn't say it that way, Daphne."

She blushes at that, smiling. "Shush, you know what I meant," she laughs, waving me off. "Now go,
you need to get some sleep as well. I'll talk to you tomorrow?"

"Talk to you tomorrow," I echo, waving as I exit their dorm.
Twigs snap without a sound as I tread over them, a well cast silencing charm alerting none of the creatures of the forest to my presence. I pause for a moment, resting one hand on a massive tree as I perk my ears up and listen for any followers.

There's no steady thud that would signal a troop of centaurs, nor the terrifying chittering of the acromantula that I'm hunting.

Well, culling would probably be the better word to describe what I'm here to do.

After realizing the other day that Magna was responsible for keeping the acromantula population in check, I came to the conclusion that I should at least attempt to bargain with the man-eating creatures. If that doesn't work out… well, I'm going to have to wipe them out.

Sorry Hagrid, but while I know Aragog would listen to me if I asked him to stay away from the school, I know for a fact that his children won't. If they'll try to eat a self-aware Ford Anglia, they'll definitely go out to eat the students when the population gets out of control. There's only so much prey in the forest, and I'd rather see an abundance of unicorns and centaurs than man-eating spiders. Just a preference of mine.

I don't recognize the part of the forest I'm in, but once I'm familiar with it I can easily blink back here. Honestly, it's hard to recognize it, considering it all looks the same.

Big bloody tree. What's next to that? Giant mossy boulder. What about after that, could you describe the setting? Oh, yes, of course, it's a whole lot more big bloody trees.

How the hell did I find this goddamn place again? Follow the spiders? Can't really do that when Magna is dead. They're not running anywhere.

Should I be looking for an abundance of spiders? Massive webs? There's no car for me to follow this time.

Actually, now that I think about it, how the hell did that car drive around on its own? It acted like a guard dog when Ron and I were stupid enough to come into the forest looking for the bloody acromantula. What kind of enchantments did Arthur put on it? I've never, and I mean never seen an animated object act like that unless it was being actively controlled, and to the best of my knowledge Arthur isn't an enchanter.

Really, it's an impressive piece of magic. Even if I just looked at the flying and invisibility charms, those are still very complicated to cast, especially on a metal such as iron or steel, which I imagine the vehicle is made of since it was probably manufactured thirty odd years ago. It's difficult to get magic to set into those materials, so for Arthur to have made the car invisible, flying, and self-aware… I may have to speak to the man when I have the chance.

I walk for at least another hour before I stop where I am, the sound of clacking mandibles coming from somewhere above me. Not making any sudden movements, I slowly lift my hand up, pointing
one finger to the sky. With a snap, I fire off a large bludgeoner, a massive gust of air blasting into the
trees above me and sending the now shrieking acromantula to the ground.

Tree branches snap under its weight as it crashes down, its carapace cracking loudly as it strikes the
dense floor of the forest. It lands on its back, legs kicking wildly as it attempts to right itself.

With an errant flick of my wrist, I send a blade of air towards the struggling beast, cleaving it in two
and watching in disgust as its gelatinous innards spill out of its shattered body.

I stay still, hand out and wand at the ready for other acromantula to investigate their siblings dying
screams. Fortunately, or unfortunately, none show up, and I assume I'm far enough away from the
main nest for them to not have heard the, quite frankly, awful keens of the acromantula I just
butchered.

Tentatively, I continue on my path into the forest, the trees growing denser and denser as I get deeper
into its murky depths. Huh, maybe Tolkien named Mirkwood after the Forbidden Forest. It does fit,
at least, if the acromantula have been here since the early 20th century. I don't think Hagrid was the
first person to bring one of those monsters into the forest.

I roll my wand in my fingers, noticing stray bits of webbing here and there, old remnants of the
acromantula's nest I assume. It has to move every once in a while, as they lose or gain territory from
the other creatures in the forest, and the webbing here still looks fairly recent. Not too ragged, but not
too fresh either.

With a skip in my step and a hell of a lot of butterflies in my stomach, I find myself working my way
up a steep hill into what may be the main nest. I look up to the treeline, blinking up to a large, solid
branch that can easily support my weight.

I breathe a sigh of relief when I don't come face to face with a four-foot spider, glancing around
quickly to make sure that they're not sneaking up on me either.

I can see bridges crafted of spider-silk linking the trees together, lacing in and out of the dense
foliage. There's a few shimmering outlines of extraordinarily thin lengths of silk, made to detect any
intruders into the acromantula's territory.

I find myself deeply thankful that the British species of acromantula look to be predominantly
burrowing spiders as opposed to web spinning. It's not that they don't spin webs or reside in high
places, it's that the webs are more there to protect their homes, rather than catch prey. Case in point:
the dome web spun over their home, protecting them from sky-born invaders. Of course, a little thing
like that isn't going to stop me.

Unfortunately, their lack of reliance on traps means that they're skilled hunters.

I blink forward, steadily making my way into the nest, dispatching an acromantula here and there. I
transfigure their corpses into sticks, vanishing them so as to not attract any attention.

If things don't go as planned, and considering my luck they probably won't, I want to take these guys
out as quickly and humanely as possible. Just because they're probably going to try and feast on the
students doesn't mean I need to make them suffer anymore than necessary. They're man-eating
monsters, but they're still sentient.

I quickly disillusion myself, as well as cast a general silencing spell along with a scent masking
charm, making myself almost undetectable. I take a deep breath through my nose, slowly letting it
out of my mouth.
Then I blink into the nest.

I see Aragog immediately, the massive spider twisting and shuffling curiously, his massive span crushing branches as he turns in my direction, obviously sensing something.

Bugger. I probably haven't made the best first impression, but I don't think I would be allowed to use the front door.

"What are you doing in my home, invader?" He growls, spinning his great body around frantically, his legs scuttling loudly as he kicks up a cloud of dust, trying desperately to figure out where I am. "I know you're here. I can feel you."

"Aragog, I've come to speak with you," I say, removing my disillusionment and bowing respectfully. I hope the truck sized spider understands what bowing is, otherwise I just looked very silly.

He clacks his mandibles together loudly, and it takes everything in my not to shudder at the noise. "A puny human… come to speak with me?" He growls, his voice dual toned and terribly inhuman, like a grotesque imitation of speech.

"Yes, I have. If I may cut to the chase, I would like to talk about the ba-," I pause, correcting myself quickly, remembering Aragog's refusal to name the basilisk. "The creature that your kind dare not speak of."

He hisses loudly, limbs quivering in anger. "You dare come to speak with me of that foul beast? Why should I not kill you where you stand? My young are hungry… many of them have not tasted the wonder that is human flesh," he muses, eight oil black eyes glinting dangerously.

I grit my teeth, holding back a growl and doing my best to not attack the sickening creature where it stands. Really, I'm sorry Hagrid, but I don't think this is going to end peacefully. "The basilisk," I sneer, Aragog rearing back from the word as if struck, chittering in fear. "Is dead. She was killed a few weeks ago. I came here to make sure that you keep your young in check. If I find them attempting to eat the residents of Hogwarts or Hogsmeade, I will have to take action."

"A little thing like you, take action? You, a filthy two-legs crawls into my abode, and makes demands of me?" he growls, slowly advancing towards me.

I put my hand up, my fingers ready to tug at the strings of magic and force him back. "Yes, a little thing like me," I echo angrily. "If I didn't respect Hagrid as much as I do, I would never have bothered speaking with you. Do not tempt me." I flex my fingers, pulling up a fist and smiling as one raises out of the ground, mirroring my own.

Aragog studies me for a moment, before suddenly spinning around so that his rear faces me, brushing his hind legs against his… thorax? Whatever the arse end of a spider is called.

Confused, I watch as he flings his legs in the air, eyes widening as the large hairs on his thorax are tossed towards me. I curse loudly as I pull the earthen fist into their path. The fist explodes, shards of stone spraying in every which direction, ducking and rolling, I feel a few of the hairs fly past me, tousling my hair in their wake. I flinch as the hardened projectiles crunch loudly into the tree that was behind me, chunks of bark peppering my back.

Holy shit. I didn't know that acromantula could do that! I didn't even know spiders could do that!

I wave my hand, watching in horror as the massive blade of air glances off of Aragog's carapace, carving a deep furrow into the forest floor.
Looks like blades don't work.

"You dare to come into my home?" Aragog bellows, flexing his legs dangerously and bowing his head forward. "You come into my home and attack me? The King of the Forest?"

He throws his head up, pincers clicking loudly as he proclaims, "Children! Come and eat!"

"Oh fuck, I didn't plan this out at all," I groan, watching in horror as hundreds of acromantula appear out of nowhere, scurrying out of the ground and dropping from the trees above. I wave my arms, hundreds of invisible bullets piercing through the approaching horde of spiders, the creatures shrieking in pain as they're felled, their siblings paying them no heed as they march over their dying bodies.

Thinking quickly, I blink back up to the treeline, watching as the wave of charging acromantula crashes into the centre of the clearing, spilling over one another like a great wave. Scores of them scream shrilly as they're trampled by their brethren, the sickening crunch of their shattered exoskeletons echoing throughout the forest.

I hold both of my hands out, twisting them over each other as I begin to mould the ground.

When I fought Dumbledore, I had to hold back a bit. At least, not use my full repertoire of spells. If I hadn't, I probably would have taken out the foundations of Hogwarts. Either that, or there wouldn't have been enough Dumbledore left for me to bring him back.

But here in the forest, surrounded by nothing but air and earth? I'm quite literally in my element.

The ground beneath the heaving mass of spiders erupts violently, massive clumps of dirt spraying over them and burying the acromantula. I watch as they scrabble desperately, legs kicking as they try to dig themselves out of the upheaved earth. Gritting my teeth, I push down with both hands. The teeming heap shudders for a moment, muffled cries of agony stinging my ears.

I pull back for a brief second, finding the strain on my magic to be immense.

Fuck.

My attack didn't work the first time, hopefully it works the second.

I place one hand over the other, forcing all my power forward as I command the earth to crush.

With a sickening crunch, the spider's tumulus compacts, their death knell a raucous screech as they're pulverized by the incredible weight of the earth. I can hear Aragog roaring in fury as exhaustion washes over me.

I fall back against the tree I'm standing on, fighting the oncoming wave of dizziness. I stumble, losing my footing and falling off the branch. My gut flips for just a moment, the air whistling past my ears. I blink to the ground, fatigued, but still in one piece.

I grimace as I find my feet stuck in the mud. Well, mud that seems to be soaked through with the mulched innards of the man-eating creatures I just ran through an improvised magical trash compactor. I send a silent thank you to whoever invented combat boots as I dredge my feet out of the muck, the gore ridden earth clinging to my boots, surrendering with a wet squelch as I break free.

"God, that's fucking disgusting," I mutter, staring in revulsion at my work, bits and pieces of acromantula scattered about, the only recognizable parts being a few legs poking out of the ground here and there. I watch in morbid fascination as they slowly curl up as the blood drains from them.

I realize very quickly that there's still a few acromantula left.
By a few I mean another hundred or so.

The massive spiders pour out of their warrens that I'm just now noticing, having assumed they were simple burrows.

No, it looks like they run throughout a good portion of the forest like an elephant sized anthill.

I sweep my wand in a circle over my head, a stretched cutting curse spraying out of the tip like a deadly fountain, the red light expanding rapidly and slicing through the younger acromantula in its way.

A large acromantula that I don't recognize dives towards me. I duck, pulling my hands up and forming a makeshift tunnel of earth around me, running to the end of it and rolling out the other side, a blade of air flying from my hands as I turn back to the swarm.

The larger spider keens in pain as a few of its legs are removed from its body, viscous black blood spraying from the severed ends of its limbs. It stumbles as it turns around to face me. If a spider's eyes could widen in shock, this one's would, as its swatted by a massive earthen hand.

It tumbles backwards, dust billowing around it as it rolls into a tree. Struggling, it tries to get up. I can see its remaining legs quivering, unable to support the creatures weight.

With an errant flick of my wrist, the stone hand flies forward, crushing the spider against the tree.

"Mosag!" Aragog screams, his voice so loud I expect it would shatter glass. "Mosag!"

The earthen fist crumbles as he tears away at it, a long mournful scream emanating from the acromantula's king. He scrambles uselessly, pulling her crushed corpse underneath him and staring at it in horror, his children frozen as they watch their father gaze dumbly at the eviscerated body of his mate.

Aragog turns towards me, his eyes shining with unadulterated hatred. Staggering forward, he chitters loudly, his children scampering madly to join ranks with him.

He begins to run forward, and I leap upwards, using the air to push me away from the rampaging horde, Aragog now leading the charge. "I will kill you human!" He bellows, the massive spider leaping in my direction.

Reflexively, I throw up a wall of air, Aragog bouncing violently off of it, crushing scores of his children as the earth craters beneath him.

Glancing around, I notice a mossy boulder and fashion a spike out of it. Aragog's carapace is too dense for me to break it with air, so I have to improvise. I begin to spin the massive projectile, sending it towards Aragog like a gigantic bullet. He's too stunned after being tossed about to react, the great chunk of stone impaling him.

He screeches, the spike trapping him against the ground. Nodding my head, I form another, sending it drilling through Aragog's face. The spike flies out of his thorax, his rear exploding outwards, a trail of gore and thick black blood following in the stones wake as it smashes into a tree.

The tree bursts, splinters and chunks of wood flying about and bouncing off my hastily cast shield. With a loud crack it begins to tilt, slowly careening into the ground, crushing a handful of shocked acromantula. I grimace as viscera bursts out from under the massive Douglas-fir, spattering across the forest floor.
His children screech in horror, the noise like grinding metal, digging into my skull. I grit my teeth in pain as my eardrums shrivel against the horrid sound, desperately holding my hands to my head to block out the noise. Momentarily stunned, I blink back up to the trees so that I'm not attacked by the remaining acromantula.

I watch as the beasts scatter, the few dozen that remain fleeing deeper into the forest, far and away from Hogwarts. It looks like I killed most of them, and it should take them at least a decade to regain their strength if the centaurs don't decide to hunt the creatures to extinction.

Slumping against the massive tree, I stare up through the branches knotted above my head, countless needles blocking out the pale moonlight. I sit there for a while in the shadows, resting comfortably in the darkness.

For someone who grew up in the darkness, one would think that I'd have grown to hate it. What with the being locked in my cupboard and all that. Instead, I've realized that I enjoy it, almost revel in it. It's not like I find the light to be a nuisance either, like the muggle idea of a vampire.

God that was one of the worst things that I realized upon entering the magical world, was that vampires do just fine in sunlight. Scared the pants off me.

I'm getting off topic... maybe my comfort in the dark is all a side effect of being half dead, or maybe it's just my slightly less than sane mind just doing the opposite of what one would expect it to.

Ignoring my shadowy tendencies, I feel a bit strange about this massacre I've just committed.

I don't feel good about what I've done, nor do I feel bad. I find myself to be quite apathetic to be honest. Slaughtering the acromantula... I did what was necessary. If left to their own devices the students would be in grave danger, a constant looming threat of being eaten alive, dismembered, or any other equally horrible ways to die.

Well, sure I feel a little bit guilty about it, considering acromantula are capable of speech and intelligent thought, at least, the big ones are. I just thought I'd feel worse about it.

It probably all comes back down to Lockhart.

After killing him I changed, largely for the worse, but with the possibility of a true war looming in the near future I've realized that my being comfortable with killing isn't necessarily the worst thing.

Thinking back on it, it's odd that I didn't react to that Slytherin boy grabbing my robes in fear. Sure, I smacked the shit out of him, but I didn't really react violently, or as violently as I imagine I would. Is it because he's not that much older than me? Because he's not blond?

Really, who knows. I'm just glad that I didn't have another breakdown.

Tiredly wiping my eyes, I realize that I really should get to bed.

I blink one last time, reappearing in my dorm room and scaring the hell out of Hermione, who shrieks in terror.

"My God Helene! Don't do that!" She smacks me on the arm, grimacing when she pulls her hand back and notices the thick layer of spider guts coating my robes. "What... what the hell is this?"

I drag my fingers through my hair, cursing when they get tangled up, more bits and pieces of acromantula stuck in my curls. "Uh... acromantula?" I awkwardly untangle my fingers, wiping them off on my robes.
"A- acromantula?" She breathes, horrified.

"Yes?"

"Acromantula."

"Yes?"

Hermione moves to pinch the bridge of her nose, stopping herself as she remembers that her hand is currently coated with a potential biohazard. Her lip curled up in distaste, she pinches her nose with her drastically cleaner left hand. "You are currently covered in acromantula guts. Why?"

"Well, Magna, my basilisk, she died," I explain.

"Your basilisk."

"Yes, my basilisk."

"You had a basilisk."

"Yes?"

"Helene what the fuck are you doing?" She groans in exasperation.

I put my hands up placatingly. "Hermione trust me, this is just what happens in my life. The kind of things the other you and I got up to were just as insane, if not more."

"Well, I've never been so glad to have been uninvolved with what kind of adventures you get up to." Her nose flares and she grimaces once again. "You reek."

"That's going to happen when I've just eliminated the entirety of the acromantula population in the Forbidden Forest."

"…and you did this because your basilisk, Magna died?"

"She kept the population in check. I tried to bargain with them, but they weren't too keen on that." I shrug, not too pleased with the events of the evening. Sure, it doesn't necessarily bother me too deeply, but I don't enjoy what I've done. It's not like I woke up today and said to myself, 'hey, it's time for me to go commit an amount of murder so considerable that it borders on genocide.'

"I guess that makes sense…"

"It was the best option that I had when a few hundred dog sized spiders came pouring out of the woodworks in an attempt to get a bite out of me."

Hermione pales. "A few hundred?"

"Give or take. I was too busy fighting them off to count, but it looked like that many."

"That's… wow. How powerful are you?" she gasps, staring at me disbelievingly.

I shrug. "I did come out of a fight with Dumbledore in one piece, but he did drastically underestimate me."

Hermione nods shakily. "That puts it into perspective," she murmurs, shaking her head. "I'm going to go wash this off," she adds, gesturing towards her filthy hand, before pointing at me. "And you need
to burn those clothes and take a shower."

"That was the plan," I say, already walking into the bathroom and dialing up the shower, steam rapidly billows out, filling the room.

After Hermione has scrubbed her hand clean and left, I strip down and step into the shower, basking in its warmth and congratulating myself for a job well done.

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All four of us toss back back a quick breakfast, making our way over to a first period History class. This is my first class with Iolaire, and I just know it's going to be fantastic, judging by the rave reviews the other students have been giving.

As I walk into the classroom, I notice that it now has a personal flair to it. Iolaire has chosen to decorate the barren room, all four house banners hanging up at the far end of the classroom. I study the paintings and photos that he's framed and stuck to the walls. He must have dug them up, as I don't recognize any of them.

All of the paintings are of different historical moments. There's a few battle scenes here and there, Napoleonic landscapes that are illuminated with spellfire, humans, beings, and creatures alike, all fighting across ravaged fields.

I realize that they're all in order, wrapping around the room. The earliest events start at the left of the door, the historical images getting progressively more and more recent as they make their way to the right of it.

The man himself is sitting on his desk, elbows resting on his thighs as he leans forward attentively. "Hello everyone! Please, please, take your seats!" Iolaire announces, clapping his hands excitedly. "Please, correct me if I'm wrong, but I do believe that you were just recently studying one of the many Goblin Wars, specifically the Five-Day-War of 1746?"

The class hums loudly, although a few outliers look about in confusion, obviously having not paid attention to the very easy to ignore lecture that Binns had given.

"Excellent, excellent," he proclaims, pointedly ignoring the students who have no idea what he's talking about as he claps once more. "Now, I trust that you all remember what began that very brief war, yes?"

I hold back a grin as Malfoy pipes up without raising his hand. He's going to be in for it. "Would it not be called a rebellion, sir? Creatures can't war against their betters," he sneers.

Iolaire raises his eyebrows comically, a smile spreading across his face.

This isn't going to be good. Well, not for Malfoy that is.

"Creatures you say? What makes Goblins creatures?"

"They're barbaric, of course. They live to serve us wizards," he replies haughtily.

Iolaire lifts one lonesome finger in the air. "Bzzt! Wrong!" He shouts, leaping from his seat and walking to the back of the class, pulling out a piece of chalk and scribbling something onto the blackboard.

I take a minute to marvel at how quickly he's learned to write.
He titles two lists, one labeled, 'Creature,' and the other, 'Being.' Spinning around to face the class he asks us, "Everyone give me reasons why Goblins can be considered either creatures or beings!" He pauses, beckoning with one hand. "Well, come on. I haven't got all day!"

Students begin to pipe up excitedly, the list for 'being' steadily growing much faster than creature.

After a few minutes, he puts his hands up, asking the class to stop. "I'm sure you're all wondering what the results of our impromptu debate were, but it looks like the list speaks for itself," he smiles, gesturing behind himself at the list. "I was particularly proud of Miss Granger's answer. Yes, Goblins are sentient, sapient, and all in between. They have a mind just as we do, and that immediately makes them beings instead of creatures, regardless of what Mister Malfoy may say."

"Preposterous! They live in caves for Merlin's sake!" Malfoy rudely shouts.

Iolaire doesn't even turn to him as he says, "Mister Malfoy, kindly shut your mouth. You leave your bigotry at the door in my classroom."

The class gasps in unison, a few students already chuckling, much to Malfoy's displeasure.

With a huff, he stands to his feet and marches out of the class, Crabbe, Goyle, and Parkinson following in his wake.

Iolaire shakes his head, smiling widely at the class once more. "Everyone, please forget about him and open your textbooks to page four hundred and twelve," he announces, already back into the swing of things.

Hermione immediately flips through her book, taking a moment to grin at me.

I grin back, this class is going to be fantastic.

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"Albus, you wanted to speak with me?" I ask, walking into the Headmaster's office as if I own the place.

Technically, I do.

The man asked to have a discussion with me earlier at lunch, and I'm curious about what he could have to say to me.

I'm welcomed by the familiar sight of the Headmaster's mustache bristling in anger, his owlish eyebrows furrowed as he attempts to muster his most contemptful stare. "Yes, I did," he states, his fingers steepled as he holds on to every last scrap of authority that he has. "I was curious about Iolaire, or whatever the creature chooses to go by. What is he?"

"The creature?" I ask incredulously, raising an eyebrow. "You do realize that that is the Hat, right? I promised him when I was being sorted that I would try to get him out of your office, he goes stir crazy in here."

"So, you murdered yet another person and forced the Hat's mind into their body?"

I laugh loudly, my cheeks stinging as I wipe a tear from my eye. "Albus, you've got quite the imagination," I snort, stifling another bout of laughter. "I made that body out of my severed hand," I explain, wiggling my still baby-like fingers at him. "I grew another one of course, but that body was just an empty shell before I gave it to Iolaire."
Dumbledore blinks in confusion. "You made a body."

"Yes."

"Is that exclusive to the Blackest Arts, or is it something that you came across in your studies? I've never heard of such a thing," he inquires, too unused to not having all the information.

"Sadly for you, it's a Necromantic ritual. What, were you wanting a fresh new body? Because even if I could make one for you, I wouldn't. You do understand that I despise you, correct?"

"Yes, I do understand that. The feeling is mutual," he retorts through gritted teeth. "I was just… curious."

"Well, you have nothing to worry about with Iolaire." I pause and scratch my head. "Unless you're worried about the students learning some colourful new vocabulary."

Dumbledore shakes his head, apparently not wanting to go down that path. It would surely be a more exciting conversation than speaking about whether or not Iolaire is going to try to eat the students or some other nonsense.

"I spoke to Hagrid the other day, he was quite distraught," Dumbledore suddenly interjects, and I tilt my head questioningly.

"Yes?"

"He told me that he went to visit his old friend Aragog."

Ah. That's what that leads into.

"He found a mass grave in the place of what was once the acromantula's nest. I imagine you had something to do with that?"

I cross my legs, resting my hands on my knee. "I was wondering when you were going to ask me about that. I know nothing really goes on in this school without your knowing." I shrug, gesturing towards myself. "Although in my case I was a bit more slippery than most."

I smile faintly as Dumbledore bites his lip, restraining his anger.

"If you truly are so curious, I will tell you why I killed the acromantula colony," I say, Dumbledore nodding succinctly in reply.

"Well, after you killed Magna. You know, the basilisk? My friend?" I growl out when Dumbledore looks momentarily confused. "I realized that she was probably responsible for keeping the colonies population in check, and I wanted to prevent any instances of death or dismemberment occurring on school grounds. You may think me evil, but I would never willingly allow the death of a student."

Dumbledore doesn't grace me with a reply to my biting comment, instead asking me, "You gave it a name?"

I scoff loudly. What kind of question is that?

"Of course I gave her a fucking name! I could speak with her! Sure, she wasn't the greatest conversationalist, but she had a mind!" I throw my hands up in frustration, shaking my head at the old man. "It… you call an intelligent animal it. Did you refer to Fawkes the same way? Was he never a he, and only some non-entity, some convenient pet that was a little more clever than normal? She
was practically my familiar, Dumbledore. I'm sure you of all people would understand that."

The man has the decency to look mildly ashamed, although I may be mistaken and he's simply mourning the loss of Fawkes as he bows his head.

Most likely the latter.

"Do you have anything important to ask me?"

He shakes his head, a dour look on his face as he stares out the window.

I get up to leave, pausing to stare at the man who I once thought was my grandfather in all but blood.

"I used to love you, you know."

He turns to me, wide eyed, and I have to prevent myself from scoffing again.

"Oh, don't look so surprised. Did you really think that I always hated you? No, I couldn't have. Not before you killed Ron. Your plan worked initially, at least it did in my first life," I explain, taking a moment to collect my thoughts.

This is the man that was responsible for making me, me. He placed me with the Dursley's, and he chose to let the things at Hogwarts occur. Dumbledore created me as much as he created Voldemort.

"I was your little soldier, never questioning, always following. I almost died every year. You almost let me die every year. First, there was Quirrel and the Philosopher's stone, a series of traps set up on the path to the stone that a trio of first years got through with relative ease."

I laugh, realizing that I'm sort of monologuing right now. Whatever, it's not as if the man can tell anyone anything, and I know for a fact that nobody is in the office right now as well as the portraits turning off whenever I enter the room. "I ended up killing him. Eleven-years-old, and I killed a man in self defence. Do you know what that does to someone, Albus? Do you know the effect that has on a child?"

He opens his mouth to say something, but thinks better of it, subtly shaking his head. Looks like he's learning.

I rub my shoulder, looking about the room as I think. I begin to speak again, my voice careful as I put my thoughts into words, venting to the man who fashioned me into who I am today. "I thought myself a monster, and all you did to help me was give me a pat on the back and a few half-assed words of comfort. An abused and broken child who had just taken another man's life, and you simply sent me on my way."

I move back to my chair, transfiguring it to be more comfortable. I laugh quietly. It looks like he's in for a story.

"Do you know what happened in second year? Ginny Weasley accidentally brought a memory of Voldemort into the school, a memory that took control of her and let Magna loose upon the students." I shrug in disbelief, remembering the travesty of a year that was.

How I was considered a monster, the way the other students screamed and ran from my shadow. The hexes in the hallways, Malfoy's biting words…

It wasn't a good year for me. Probably one of the worst.

"It's a miracle that nobody died, and you decided that the school didn't need to be shut down, that
aurors didn't need to investigate. I don't know why you did that, and I never will as you're not the same Dumbledore who made that decision, but it still boggles my mind that you knew what was in the Chamber and allowed Magna to wreak havoc upon the school." I jab my thumb into my chest aggressively. "I had to kill, once again. A sword through the roof of her mouth, and her tooth in my arm. I almost died. I only lived because Fawkes had come to my rescue, and once again, a congratulatory pat on the back from you and I was sent back to the Dursleys to be whipped into submission."

Dumbledore is silent through all this, staring intently at me as I regale him with my tales from a reality that no longer exists. Oddly enough, I find this to be quite cathartic. Must be something to do with verbally abusing the man who engineered so much sorrow in my last and current life.

"Third year… this year in fact, Sirius escaped Azkaban." I chuckle harshly, giving Dumbledore a sardonic grin. "He was still there, you know? An innocent man trapped amongst demons and you put him there," I hiss, a bit of parseltongue creeping into my voice. Dumbledore shudders at the sound, averting his eyes. "So he got out after finding out that Pettigrew was moonlighting as the Weasleys pet rat. He came to Hogwarts to try and protect me, and you nearly let him be kissed. You chose to send me and Hermione back in time three hours to rescue him instead of telling Fudge to fuck off, and the two of us nearly died. Again.

"So, after rescuing Sirius from a swarm of dementors and having Cornelius Fudge throw a bloody fit trying to arrest a man that you knew was innocent, since you sent two students to go and rescue him. Again, what did you do? Absolutely nothing."

I rub my eyes tiredly, taking a deep breath. I can feel myself getting angry, and I'm not about to throw a bloody tantrum again. "My fourth year, the Tri-Wizard Tournament comes to Hogwarts. I'm assuming that happens again?" I ask, Dumbledore nodding mutely.

Well, that's good. It would have put a damper in my plans if the Tournament was cancelled or hosted by another school.

"Alright, so at least that hasn't changed, and it won't change." I say pointedly, raising my eyebrows at Dumbledore. "You will make sure that the Tournament happens at Hogwarts next year, yes?"

Again, he nods, and I clap my hands together in reply. "Excellent. Well, moving on with my lovely story, I was put into the tournament against my will, even after you had put up a half assed bit of protection in the form of an age-line. You didn't do anything to try and get me out of the tournament, one which I was lucky to survive I may add. No, you twiddled your thumbs and allowed me to compete in that farce of a tournament, one which ended in Voldemort's resurrection after I was kidnapped."

I go out of my way not to mention who entered me into the tournament, having need of Barty Crouch Jr. making his way into Hogwarts under the guise of Mad Eye Moody to force me into it once again.

"Resurrection?" Dumbledore asks, eyebrows raised. "He… Voldemort returns at the end of the tournament?"

"Yes, yes he does. And I plan to kill him then, once and for all. I don't think I have to mention that you should not interfere with the Tournament, nor should you pose any investigation to find out who admits my name into the Tournament, as that must happen again."

Dumbledore is forced to nod his assent to my commands, but he doesn't seem to notice this as he's lost in thought. He sits there for a few moments, frowning as he deliberates over some problem unknown to me. After a while, he looks up at me and asks, "After that, what do you plan on doing?
"When you're no longer bound by the prophecy?"

"Honestly? I haven't a clue." I shrug, lifting one hand lazily. "I just wanted to have a normal life. That's all that I ever wanted. I'm sure I'll finish things at Hogwarts and then find a nice quiet job and do my best to avoid anything that's even remotely excitable."

I laugh at Dumbledore's confused look. "What? Did you expect me to say that I'm going to take over the world? That after killing Voldemort I'll take his place? You're mental Albus. After Voldemort is gone, I'm going to probably help the Weasley twins open up a joke shop. That'll keep me busy for a few years. After that? I don't know, but it won't involve any fighting, war, or adventures of any kind."

Dumbledore looks like he's struggling with something as he digests what I've said. I half expect his head to burst as he fails to understand that I don't want to be a Dark Lady.

I stand up, dusting my robes off and walk out the door, leaving Dumbledore with his thoughts.

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The final months of school sweep by in a tizzy, the first half of the semester once again being the most 'excitable,' portion of the year.

To be honest, excitable isn't the right word to use. Really, it's far from it. I think 'so awfully insane that I can't begin to comprehend how insane it truly is,' or 'terribly dangerous for both my body and mind,' would be more apt descriptors, but that's a bit of a mouthful.

I digress.

I spent the remainder of the year pouring over law books both recent and obscure, looking around to find out why Tracey can't be adopted by the Greengrasses, but I've drawn up nothing.

If anyone would know why, it's Octavius, but this isn't something that you discuss via letters unless it pertains to yourself. Since I'm not Tracey, I'm going to have to speak with him about it after I get off the train, which looks to be stopping in just under an hour.

Tracey knows that I'll be speaking with him, and so does Daphne. They both want to be in on this when I speak with Octavius, as Daphne has been attempting to get an honest answer out of him for the last few years and I can't imagine why he wouldn't tell her.

Speaking of Tracey, she looks to be incredibly stressed right now. She hides it well, but I've learned to pick up on a few of her tells. The most notable one is how she thumbs her chin every so often when she's dwelling on something that makes her nervous.

It think this is the hundredth time she's done that, and her chin is now starting to look a bit red.

"Tracey, hey, everything is going to be alright," I whisper comfortably, smiling at her.

She turns her eyes to me, nodding shakily and looking back out the window. She begins to systematically crack her knuckles, another one of her nervous tics.

Hermione raises an eyebrow at me, and I shake my head. She frowns, but she doesn't say anything, understanding that whatever the problem is, it's up to Tracey to tell her.

The carriage is silent as we pull into Platform 9 and ¾, and I help the girls get their luggage out, levitating them to the floor and casting featherweight charms on the trunks so that they don't throw
The girls thank me, and I hug the others goodbye as Tracey, Astoria, Daphne and I head off to find Octavius. I notice that Tracey practically glues herself to Daphne's side as we step into the crowd. I can feel the anxiety radiating off of her as she falters forward, nervously glancing around.

"Found him," Daphne announces, inclining her head forward and pointing out the bulky form of her… *our* dad.

"Hey girls!" Octavius shouts over the crowd, smiling widely. He brings everyone in to a stifling group hug, not noticing Tracey's tense form. "How was school this year?"

"Good, it was good," Daphne interjects. "The tests weren't as awful as I thought they would be, weren't they Helene?"

I nod. "Pretty easy, if I was honest."

"Well, that's because you're a bloody prodigy," she retorts, glaring playfully at me.

I put my hands up in surrender. "Hey, hey. Don't go calling me any names now."

She scoffs lightly, turning back to Octavius. "Home?"

He nods, everyone latching onto his robes as he apparates back to Greengrass Manor. Thankfully, I've gotten used to the sensation and don't end up painting the very lovely hardwood floors with my lunch.

As soon as we land in the house, I turn to him. "Hey, Octavius, can we talk?" I ask, gesturing to Tracey, Daphne and myself.

He quirks an eyebrow but directs us into the sitting room all the same.

"Is everything alright?" He glances between the three of us, tilting his head questioningly.

I look to Tracey and she nods at me, inviting me to go ahead. "Octavius, I… Tracey and I spoke a few months back about her home life." Octavius immediately casts a concerned look at Tracey, worry etched over his features. "She wanted me to talk to you about adoption, specifically why *I* was adopted, and not her. I'm also wondering the same thing."

Octavius looks momentarily offended, and I put my hand up placatingly. "I'm not blaming you for anything, trust me. I know you would adopt her if you could. I was wanting to know why she can't be adopted and if there's anything that can be done about it. I know Sirius would happily take her in, and in the worst-case scenario, I would induct her into the Potter family."

"It's… complicated," he hesitates, clasping his hands and looking sadly at Tracey. "I would adopt you in a heartbeat Tracey. You're my daughter, even if the Ministry doesn't say the same."

She smiles tearily at him. "I know. It's just… it sucks. A lot."

"I know dear. But there's nothing I can do…" He trails off, glancing at me for just a moment. "There's an odd law in place that says that a child cannot be adopted unless their parents are deceased or have given their permission. It was supposed to prevent line theft, stopping families from kidnapping a child and forcibly adopting them," he explains, noticing our confusion. "So, since your birth parents are still situated in Azkaban, very much alive, and they're incapable of signing you away… I can't do anything."
"Wait," I interrupt. "Are they not alive though? Could we not visit and force them to sign?"

Octavius shakes his head. "No, they've been kissed."

"Then they're dead," I state, perplexed. I notice that Tracey doesn't even flinch at the admission of her birth parents current… status.

"No. People who are kissed are still alive, according to the Ministry," Octavius scoffs, obviously displeased with the ridiculous definition.

"That's absolutely mad! They have no soul, how can they be alive?"

"Don't ask me, I didn't write the damnable law."

I shake my head. "No, I meant how can they be alive? Surely they're just empty bodies. Do they not starve to death?"

Octavius looks at Tracey, before sighing loudly, resigned to what he's about to say. "They keep them alive, so that they can still receive their full punishment. It's because Tracey's birth father was a muggle, they decided to get... creative."

What the fuck. I just know that I look absolutely horrified right now. "That's... that's absolutely barbaric!" I cry.

"And that's exactly why I didn't want to tell you about it," Octavius groans.

"Is that why you never told me that Dad? You always made excuses," Daphne pipes up.

"I didn't want to tell Tracey about her birth parents and the nitty gritty details of what happened to them," Octavius answers after a moment of hesitation, casting another sad glance her way. "I'm sorry that you found out this way dear."

Tracey scowls mockingly, waving her hand. "Don't apologize, I'm happy to hear that they got what was coming to them."

Octavius pales slightly, but nods his assent. "I hate to say such a thing about another human being, but I agree with you." He rolls the fabric of his robes between his fingers, looking pointedly at Tracey and Daphne. "Could you girls please leave Helene and me? I'd like to have a discussion with her myself."

They look at each other, slightly confused, but they listen to Octavius all the same.

As soon as the girls are out the door, he gives me a displeased expression. "Why did you have to bring that up? You had to have known that I didn't tell them why I couldn't adopt her for a reason, didn't you?"

"I knew that, but I also knew that keeping the information from the two of them would hurt them more than telling them," I argue. "Do you know how much it was eating Tracey up? To look at me and see this invader? This new girl taking what should have been her place?"

Octavius leans back in his seat, wiping his face. "I know that... I just- I wanted to keep this from them a while longer. It doesn't do to dwell on things that can't be changed."

"And why can't it be changed?" I ask, already having worked out a fix for this particular situation.

Octavius snorts, chuckling wryly. "What could we do? It's not like I could get their two husks
exhumed and destroyed, could I? I may be a powerful man, but I'm not that powerful. It's illegal to have those two put to rest. Supposed to let them suffer longer." He spits out his final sentence, his voice laced with derision.

I have to agree with his disgust. That's absolutely barbaric.

"You forgot about me," I say, raising my hand.

Octavius frowns, before his features grow even more taut as he begins to understand what I mean. He stands up, aggressively wagging his finger in my face. "You will not try to break into Azkaban, do you hear me? The fact that you would even think of that!" He sputters, shaking his head frantically. "Do you not know how incredibly dangerous that is? You could die! The best thing that could happen is you being locked up there for the rest of your life!"

I shoot up off the couch, jutting my chin forward. "I just went toe to toe with Albus Fucking Dumbledore, Octavius. I can talk to dementors. Talk to them. Honest to God communicate with the demons. Breaking into Azkaban would be child's play."

He runs his hands through his hair, torn between frustration, fear, and exasperation. "I don't care! You could die Helene! Do you know how distraught I would be? What about Terra? That would destroy Daphne, not to mention Astoria! Do you not realize how much she dotes on you? How much she admires you? You're her role model!" He lets out a shaky breath, beginning to work himself into a mild panic. "What about your other friends? Hermione, Padma and Lisa? That new girl Luna, or her friend Ginny?"

"This isn't your decision to make!" I shout, flicking my wand and casting a silencing charm upon the room. "I have to fight Voldemort to the death next year, and there's a very good chance that I may not live through that. This? This is just a precursor. If I don't live through that fight, a fight that I cannot avoid for some godforsaken reason, I need to find a way to make sure that all of you are safe! I can easily, and I mean easily take care of the rest of his Death Eaters while I'm at Azkaban. All I have to do is ask the dementors to kiss anyone with a Dark Mark. That's it."

"This is murder you're talking about! Murder!"

I run my hands over my face, pushing my hair back and tangling my fingers in red curls. "Yes, it's murder that I'm talking about. Did you forget about me killing Lockhart in cold blood? What about my very recent murder of Albus Dumbledore? That was what, three, four months ago?"

"That's not the same, and you know it," Octavius argues, pointing aggressively at me, his face flushed. "Lockhart, the degenerate piece of shit that he was, had it coming. If you hadn't have killed him, I would have. Dumbledore? That was just a complicated situation all around, and while I'm not at all pleased about what you did, it was the only thing you could have done."

"This is war, Octavius. You may not see it happening right now, but there is a war on, and I am ground zero. If it's murder to execute a slew of psychopaths that should have been tossed through the veil a decade ago, I will still happily do so. If it's murder to put to rest two empty shells that were once abusive scums, then I will do it with a skip in my step and a smile on my face!"

Octavius' breath hitches, and he swallows deeply, suddenly pulling me into a crushing hug. I squeak in protest and mild fear as he wraps his arms around me, cradling me against his chest. I block out the images of Lockhart that pop up, blinking rapidly as if the motion will stop me from feeling disgust and trepidation.

I guess that reaction does only apply to adult men.
"We can't lose you," he whispers, rocking me back and forth. "Not again."

I gasp quietly, pulling myself away from him and staring into his eyes, noticing the tears that threaten to spill out across his face. My heart freezes, skipping a beat as I realize how distraught he is, how terrified he is at the prospect of losing me.

"I'm not dying any time soon, alright?" I say, backpedalling and placing my hand on Octavius' arm in an attempt to reassure him. "I can be anywhere on the Earth in the blink of an eye as long it's dark and I've been there before, and to the best of my knowledge there are no wards that can stop me. Not to mention, I don't believe Azkaban is very well lit."

He sighs deeply, blinking hard and working his jaw slowly. I hear a loud click as something in his jaw locks into place, causing me to flinch.

"Talk to Sirius about this first, alright?" He asks, his voice strained. "God knows I can't keep you on a leash, but I can do my damndest to keep you safe. If anyone knows the ins and outs of that hell-hole, it's him. Do your research. Plan ahead. I don't want to see my daughter come back home in a coffin."

I gulp loudly, guilt rearing its ugly head. "I'm so sorry," I groan, eyes downcast. "I didn't… I didn't realize how seriously you would take this. I'm so used to doing what I have to do without speaking to anyone about it, and I guess I'm still not used to people being worried about me."

Octavius lifts my chin with one finger, forcing me to look at him. "I care about you. We all care about you. Terra and I love you, Helene. Sirius loves you. Daphne, Astoria, Tracey… all of the girls, they love you. Don't go making suicidal decisions expecting nothing to come of it, because there's a whole lot of people out there that care about you more than you can ever imagine." A sad smirk works its way across his face, and he lets out a quiet breath. "You're getting better, but I want to see you truly happy Helene. I want my daughters, all of you, Tracey included to live a long and healthy life."

"Thank you," I whisper, hugging him back, my head buried in the crook of his arm. "That means the world to me."

He chuckles quietly, the sensation like a calming wave as it echoes through his chest and floods through my body.

I pull back, awkwardly dusting myself off and smiling at Octavius. "I'm glad I can be so open with you."

"I don't know if I can say the same, but I'd prefer knowing everything over not knowing anything," he admits, sighing plaintively. "Just… talk to Sirius, alright?"

"I can do that. Thank you for being honest with me Oct- …dad."

He blinks a few times, not sure if he heard me correctly, before an incredible smile begins to spread over his face, stretching from ear to ear. "Any time dear, any time."
"You can't be fucking serious."

"Trust me, if you can just give me the general layout of the place, I can have the bodies of Tracey's parents destroyed in less than an hour. All I would have to do is blink in there."

Sirius palms his face, slowly rubbing his eyes.

We've had this conversation at least three or four times in the last week, and every time he's turned me away, refusing to give me any information about the prison.

"Helene… that place is like Hell come to Earth, you don't want to go there," he says, sighing in frustration. "Not to mention the danger. What if you're caught? What if you get killed by the guards? What then?"

"Sirius, I know for a fact that dementors don't affect me. I had one close enough to shake my hand last year and I didn't feel a thing. Also, I could beat any of the guards there easily. They're basically cannon fodder. I remember you saying that all of the guards are basically fresh out of training except for the warden."

"Helene, what do I have to do to get you to get this out of your head?"

"There's nothing you can do, Sirius."

He swears loudly, smacking the table and causing me to jump. "Fucks sake… you're just as stubborn as your mother was," he groans, wiping his face again. "Don't bring this up again, do you understand?" he challenges, jabbing his finger in my direction. "I don't want to hear a bloody word of it. I'm not going to have you running off on some suicide mission. I know Tracey isn't doing too well, but you shouldn't put your neck on the line over something like this."

"Fine, I won't bother with it," I grunt, turning away from Sirius and marching through the manor up to my room, shutting the door loudly behind me.

Yes, very mature of me, I know. I blame it on my raging hormones.

I curse under my breath, walking up to my desk and pulling out a sheaf of parchment and a quill. I stir it in the ink absentmindedly as I think of what to do.

I quickly find myself distracted, studying the grain of the wood and the way it flows across the desk in tight swirls, only a few errant scuffs and blemishes marking the surface. I trail one finger over the intricate patterns, enjoying the cool smoothness of the wood. With a grunt, I shake my head as I realize I'm losing focus, quickly turning my attention to the task at hand.

I'm of the mind now that breaking into Azkaban isn't important just because of helping Tracey. As I said to Octavius, there's about a dozen Death Eaters locked up there, along with Voldemort's old lieutenant and outrageously sadistic bitch Bellatrix Lestrange.
It would be child's play for me to ask one of the Dementors to kiss everyone in the prison who has the Dark Mark. All it would take is a few words, and *bam*, there goes a good portion of Voldemort's forces.

But how the hell do I get into Azkaban?

I start to jot down an odd little flowchart on the parchment, putting my thoughts to the page and trying to work out an effective method to breaking into the prison that only one man has broken out of. My ears quirk slightly at the pleasant sound of the quill scratching across parchment.

So, Sirius broke out using his animagus form, as the dementors don't particularly care about animals. *But* since I'm not affected by them and they listen to me I don't think I need to go through the arduous process of becoming an animagus. Sure, it would be a nice little trick and could come in handy in a few niche situations, but it's not currently worth the trouble of stuffing my cheeks full of mandrake leaf and dicking around with one of the most ridiculously complicated rituals I've ever set my eyes on.

So, scratch out animagus training.

First things first, if Sirius won't give me the layout of the prison, how would I get my hands on it?

"The Ministry," I whisper, scribbling that down.

They're sure to have plans of the prison *somewhere*, and if I could break into the fucking *Department of Mysteries*, a department that's so shrouded in secrets that it's workers are called *Unspeakables* in my fifth year, then the rest of the Ministry should be painfully easy.

But isn't Azkaban older than the Ministry itself?

Fuck.

So where would there be blueprints or plans? Do I have to just do this flying by the seat of my pants?

No, this is much too serious for me to simply waltz into the damned place and expect it all to work out just fine. Another question, does the Ministry even have a Department of Infrastructure?

I scratch the back of my head, tapping the quill against my chin. How am I going to figure this out?

I mean, I could always break in and just *see* what happens after that. The Ministry, that is. Like I said, I'm not going to waltz into Azkaban.

What Department would be the most likely to have any information pertaining to Azkaban?

"Aw shit," I groan as the realization hits me.

If anyone is going to have information about the prison, be it general layout, which wings prisoners are kept in, etcetera, it would be the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

That in itself is going to take planning. I know for a fact that there's always a suite of aurors there 24/7, as there's got to be *some sort* of all-hours response team. Even if its just a small team at that, it's still a number of aurors that I have to skirt around.

The sheet in front of me is slowly beginning to look like the ramblings of a schizophrenic bank robber in the midst of a nervous breakdown as I continue to fill it with miscellaneous thoughts, headings connected by messily drawn arrows and a few droplets of ink here and there slowly sinking
into the page. I once again find myself distracted watching the ink spiderweb across the parchment.

Pay attention Helene!

My best bet to getting into the DMLE would be to speak to Amelia Bones so that I can get a tour of the place. I'm sure if I told her that I was interested in one day becoming an auror she would be thrilled to have someone give me a tour.

I pen a quick note to Madam Bones and fold it neatly, placing it inside an envelope and sealing it. I grimace at the feeling of my tongue running over the adhesive, running it along my teeth to get rid of the unpleasant sensation. God, that's worse than nails on a chalkboard.

I hop out of my seat, quickly spelling the mind-bending bit of parchment that I've left on my desk with a notice-me-not charm so that Sirius doesn't get more worried about me busting into Azkaban. Sure, I know he knows that I'm going to break in there regardless, at least, I believe he knows me well enough to have come to that conclusion, but I want to save him the stress. Dogs are known to sniff around, and I wouldn't put it past him to sneak in here and check to see if my room looks like a muggle cop drama, pictures of different Death Eaters pinned to the wall and red string connecting them in a myriad of different indecipherable ways.

After a second check to make sure that I haven't left anything that may be incriminating in my bedroom, I rush off to the Manor Owlery, greeting Hedwig with some gentle scratches under her beak and a hurried, "Hello!"

She chirps excitedly at me, nuzzling into my hand as I tie the letter to her foot.

"Could you get this letter to Amelia Bones?" I ask, knowing that if anyone can deliver a random letter unscathed to the head of the DMLE, it's probably Hedwig.

If an owl could roll its eyes, she would have. Instead, she clucks in annoyance, shaking her little feathered head briefly before spreading her wings and taking to the air, silently leaping through the window and gliding off.

I rub my hands together excitedly, anticipation already building for my future jail break.

-:-:

"Helene! Someone's here to see you!" Terra shouts, her voice carrying all throughout the Manor and startling me.

"Coming!" I shout, dog earing my book and racing through the halls, trudging down the stairs at a mile a minute. I skid to a halt in the foyer where Amelia Bones is standing, trademark monocle hanging from the lapel of her incredibly smart looking suit.

I have to keep myself from trailing my eyes over her striking silhouette, all decked out in a warm gray, a burst of colour in the form of an enchanted pocket square bringing a little originality to the outfit. Jesus, I should hope to look so good at her age.

I shake my head imperceptibly. Damnit. Stop it Helene. Don't ogle women twice your age.

"Hello Madam Bones! Thank you again for getting back to me so quickly!" I smile, reaching out and shaking her hand.

She smiles serenely at me, "It's not a problem at all. What with the happenings at Hogwarts over the last few years, I'd say we've gotten well acquainted." She pauses, tapping her chin thoughtfully.
"I would like to know how on Earth your owl managed to find me, as my home is behind many, many wards."

"She's incredibly clever," I say, as if that explains everything.

I nearly jump in fright as I feel Terra's hand settle on my shoulder. "I thought you were having us on when you said you were getting a tour of the DMLE from Amelia Bones herself," she exclaims, pride in her voice as she smirks at me. "It's good to see you showing an interest in future careers. Just don't get so hung up on one path, alright?"

I have to stop myself from shrinking in on myself at her words, guilt washing over me. I don't like lying to her, Octavius and Sirius, as the whole reason I'm visiting the DMLE is because I plan to do something incredibly foolhardy and dangerous.Honestly, I really do not want to be an auror anymore, what with it being an ultimately thankless job and much too excitable for my tastes.

"Absolutely T-, uh, mum," I stutter, the words still unfamiliar on my lips.

She grins widely, rubbing my back briefly before handing me off to Madam Bones. "Well, don't give Amelia too much trouble. I'll see you later dear!"

I roll my shoulder as Amelia waves ahead of herself. "Now, you're going to have to take my hand if we're going to be flooing directly into my office," she says, taking hold of mine and tossing a pinch into the fire. I feel a blush creeping across my cheeks when she grabs my hand, shaking my head once more, reciting, 'Do not ogle women twice your age,' over and over in my head.

"Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Directors Office," she intones, stepping through the flames with me at her side.

After the brief rollercoaster that is floo travel, we step out into her office. I look around for a moment, taking in her workspace. I don't know if I'm studying it because I'm interested in seeing what a higher up in the Ministries work space looks like, or if I'm casing the joint for later since I may come across some very important files here.

Probably a little column A, a little column B.

The office is quite spartan, a few pictures of her family placed upon a tidy oak desk, a line of expanded filing cabinets tucked into the far corner, as well as a window showcasing a lovely view of the London skyline. Hardwood floors and a few potted plants placed tastefully about the room makes for a homely feel. It's quite an interesting set up for the most powerful woman in Britain.

I glance out the window, putting the fact that we're a few stories underground out of my mind, as magic tends to not give a shit when it comes to something like sense or physics.

"I try not to be as opulent as the other Department Heads," Amelia says, straightening out a photo as she explains away my unanswered question. "It does well for me to stand on more even ground with those working under me."

I nod. "That makes sense."

"Well, if you'll just come with me," she says, gesturing ahead and opening the door for me.

I walk through with a muttered 'thank you,' my jaw dropping as I quickly find myself in the middle of an incredible commotion. Paper airplanes skirt the roof as they fly to their destinations, one bouncing off of one of the many workers heads as they jostle one another in a frantic hurry. I clench my jaw at the sudden cacophony of sound, witches and wizards shouting at each other to get this and
that done, others scribbling furiously as they slave over mountains of parchment work, stacked comically high.

I spy a dishevelled man being led out of one of many side rooms, cordoned off to the side and away from the general tumult of the main office. I assume that someone must have just conducted an interrogation of sorts, judging by the harried look on the man's face as well as the exhausted demeanor of the auror leading him.

"It's a lot to take in, isn't it?" Amelia asks, her voice surprisingly close.

I jump in fright, turning to see her standing quite near to me, surveying her kingdom.

"Yes, it's quite busy," I murmur, just barely audible over the din of the room, once again repeating my mantra.

"An understatement if I've ever heard one," she snorts. "So, what got you interested in becoming an auror, Miss Potter?"

I shrug noncommittally. "I dunno'. It caught my interest, not to mention my dad was an auror. That, and I've had enough run ins with you to get a bit of a feel for it."

She smiles at me once more, my heart skipping dangerously.

*Keep it together Helene!*

"Well, as long as the run ins don't involve me leading you back here in ropes, I'm sure you'd do fine here one day."

I put the uncomfortably appealing idea of her tying me up out of my mind as quickly as I can as she pulls a folder out of the inner breast of her suit jacket, one that should not have been able to fit there, but expansion charms do work wonders. "I've seen your grades," she mentions, opening the folder and running her eyes over the parchment contained within. "Your scores are incredibly impressive, attaining an O average, while hitting well above the mark and earning an O+ in Charms, Transfiguration, and Defence."

"Not in Ravenclaw for nothing Madam."

"It certainly seems so," she remarks, raising an eyebrow. "If you keep up with your marks and manage to stay out of trouble, I'd certainly hope to see you apply here one day." She claps her hands suddenly, rubbing them together as she looks about the room. "Now then, let's begin with our tour. Shall we?"

I nod, the two of us taking the long way around the teeming throng of flying parchment and rushing aurors so that we don't get caught up or tripped in the mob.

"So, you've seen the main office," Amelia says, jabbing her thumb over her shoulder and pointing behind her. "It gets to be a touch mad in there due to us being understaffed, but don't let that intimidate you. Parchmentwork is only a small part of the job, and due to an incredible overstaffing problem when it comes to *clerical staff*, we have people to take care of most of it."

I can't help but notice the derision in her voice, practically spitting out the words *clerical staff*, as if they're dirt in her mouth. Must not be a fan of Fudge's 'budget cuts.'

I apparently lack enough of a filter to mention that.
"Not a fan of Fudge?"

Amelia casts her eyes over me quickly. "No comment," she states drily, her nose wrinkling in distaste.

"Sorry, I shouldn't have asked you that," I apologize sheepishly, rubbing the back of my head.

"It's fine, really. I just hope that you understand that any statement from me regarding something of that nature would be highly unprofessional."

"Noted."

She nods curtly, pointing to her right at the suite of rooms that I noticed earlier. "Those are the interrogation rooms, the ones closest to the entrance are quite a bit cushier than the ones further away. It gives us options with the different suspects that we bring in." She continues on, taking me through a corridor that leads behind the array of rooms, gesturing to a door at the far end. "Temporary holdings cells, mainly for drunkards who need a night to sober up and think about what they've done."

She leads me back out, and I notice another row of doors opposite the interrogation rooms, plaques situated above them. "Those are the offices for the Head Auror, Head Hit-Wizard, as well as the Head Legilimancer."

"Legilimancer?" I ask, Amelia having caught my attention. "I didn't know that there was such a thing."

"Yes. He's only needed quite rarely, but it's a necessary position," she explains. "The Head Legilimancer is a singular role, as there's nobody underneath them. The last time we required Mr. Gibbons' services was during the Blood War. Laws tend to get a bit… lax when there's a civil war going on."

"I wouldn't exactly call it a civil war," I blurt, a hint of derision in my voice. "More a bunch of zealous terrorists trying to pull off a coup."

Amelia's lips twist up in the hint of a smirk. "I couldn't agree more. Unfortunately, many powerful names within our esteemed Wizengamot have officially dubbed it a civil war, giving unneeded credence to Voldemort's unsavoury goals."

I shake my head in disappointment. "Let's change the topic, I don't want to get you into any trouble Madam Bones."

"Agreed, and you don't need to refer to me as Madam Bones, it makes me feel awfully old. I believe we're familiar enough for you to call me Amelia."

"I can do that Amelia," I say, smiling at her.

"You're quite mature for your age, has anyone ever told you that?"

That manages to garner a blush out of me, and I turn my head away in a bout of shyness. "Yeah, plenty of people have. One tends to grow up pretty quickly when they go through what I have."

Amelia looks momentarily ashamed. "That is true. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to dredge up any bad memories."

"No, no, it's fine," I say, waving her off. "You would know if I was bothered by it." I pause, looking
about at the general mayhem in the DMLE. "Is this all the Department is composed of? I know you said that you're understaffed, but this seems awfully small."

Amelia tuts loudly, placing her hands on her hips. "We were much larger a few decades ago, this actually used to be the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures," she explains. "And no, this isn't all the Department is made of, if you would follow me."

I nod, Amelia leading me out of the main office into a small foyer, a table with a few secretarial staff working absently over more large piles of parchmentwork. The entrance to the foyer is shuttered by two massive French doors, both of them set ajar so as to not stymy the flow of people in and out of the offices.

Offices in plural, as there are two more doors, one on the left and one on the right, both leading to two other branches of the DMLE. I read the placards next to the doors, the left door reading *Improper Use of Magic Office*, and the right *Wizengamot Administration Services*. I find it a little odd that the Wizengamot has an office in the DMLE.

"What's the purpose of the Wizengamot offices?" I ask, pointing towards the door. "I understand the Improper Use of Magic, but administration doesn't strike me as being tied into law enforcement."

"It's the magical equivalent of a muggle court registry. It just has a bit of an odd name."

I nod succinctly. That makes sense.

Amelia continues on with our tour, showing off the other two *terribly* boring Sub-Departments. I have to try my best not to scowl at Mafalda Hopkirk when I'm introduced to her, recognizing the stuck-up bint who sent me those two awfully condescending warning letters in my last life.

The tour itself is quite simple, Amelia giving me a quick rundown on the set up of the Department along with the pros and cons of working in each one. She was actually surprisingly unbiased when speaking about the Auror Headquarters, not making an attempt to recruit me by any means as I'd imagined she would. I find it quite refreshing to be treated as just a regular person. A gifted one, yes, but regular all the same.

"Blimey! Is that Helene Potter?" Someone gasps as we head back to Amelia's office.

I look over to see a familiar heart shaped face, ruffled pink hair sticking every which way.

"Yes Tonks, it is," Amelia says, casting a glance my way.

"Tonks?" I ask, attempting to rile Amelia into saying Nymphadora. "Odd name, yeah?"

Tonks scowls almost imperceptibly, her hair flashing red for just a moment. "Yes, *just* Tonks, thank you very much."

"Aren't you Sirius' niece?" I ask, reaching out and shaking her hand.

She pauses for a moment, frowning at me. "Yeah, I am. How'd you know that?"

I shrug. "He's mentioned you and your mum a few times," I say, rummaging through my mind for past conversations that I've had with him. "I think he's planning on reinstating her into the family. Don't tell her I said that though," I add, putting my finger on my lips.

Tonks eyebrows shoot into her hairline. "Really!? Gods, mum would be ecstatic to hear that. I know being kicked out hit her hard."
I put my finger to my lips, leaning in close as if sharing a secret. "Well, remember, I didn't say anything. I think Sirius may be getting into contact with you guys in a few weeks."

Tonks winks not so subtly, extending one eyelash so that it flutters dramatically. "Can do cousin. Hopefully I'll see you around!"

"Same to you!" I say as she waves at me, running off to do whatever she was doing, stumbling on the way and cursing loudly.

"I didn't know the two of you were related," Amelia concedes as she leads me back into her office. "Hopefully she can convince you to join up with us in the future."

I bite my lip as I chuckle quietly. "Looks like you've got your sights set on hiring me."

Amelia inclines her head. "I would be daft not to try to get my hands on you. I think you'd do quite well here. Don't let me pressure you though, as it's your decision to make." She throws a pinch of powder into the fire, the flames bursting green and licking at the polished granite mantel of the fireplace.

"Thanks for taking time out of your day to give me a tour Amelia."

"It was no problem at all. Just keep my Department in mind after graduation, yes?"

"I'll make sure to do that," I laugh, stepping through the fireplace as I say, "Greengrass Manor."

-:--:

"Alright, I've got my cloak, I've got my wands, holsters, expanded pocket bag… everything by the looks of it," I mutter, thinking aloud as I run over the plan.

I'm going to shadow walk into the main office under my cloak. I can't rush into Amelia's first, because I'm sure there's some sort of sensor in there. Even if there's anti-apparition wards over the place, she wouldn't leave her security at just that.

I know that I can bypass most any wards with shadow walking, but I don't want to risk being caught immediately and having the whole plan go up in flames.

I throw the cloak over me, the fabric moulding to my body. Handy, that is. I don't know if it's because I'm half-dead or what, but the cloak fits me like a second skin from head to toe. A flick of my wand, and I've silenced my boots along with masking my scent. If any of the aurors in the office are running under sense augmenting spells I'd be in for a world of trouble if I didn't cast those.

In the blink of an eye, I'm standing in the Auror Headquarters.

The office is eerily quiet, at least compared to the hubbub it was in earlier, although I can still hear the general murmur of the few aurors who're working the night shift. By the sounds of it, they're playing cards. I peek my head around the corner, looking into a break room that I didn't notice on my initial trip.

Yep. They're playing cards.

I walk into the main office, glancing around for anything that may be important.

I notice a few sheets of parchment left out with information pertaining to different cases. Some of them are investigations into ex-Death Eaters, and I copy the forms with a quick *gemino* charm,
folding them neatly and tucking them into my bag.

The sound of a scuffle to my left causes me to freeze up, glancing around to make sure that I haven't been caught.

Two aurors rush out of the break room, throwing their robes over their shoulders as they burst through the door.

"Diagon Alley you said?" One of them asks, a taller man with childish features, soft cheeks and large eyes.

"Yeah, it sounds like a fight from Knockturn spilled out into the rest of the Alley," his partner curses, checking his pockets quickly before pulling out a badge and pinning it to his robes, the other man doing the same.

With a quiet crack, they've disappeared, off to deal with whatever bar fight has made its way into the less seedy parts of Wizarding London.

I give a quiet gasp, inhaling deeply as I realize that I've held my breath all throughout that.

After a moment of making sure that the coast is clear, I take a peek into the Head Aurors office, blinking into it. This workspace is notably more luxurious than Amelia's, Scrimgeour obviously taking his image quite seriously.

There's a very Gryffindorish theme to the office, an abundance of red and gold in the furnishings, most notably in the plush leather seat situated behind a large cherry desk, brass gildings polished until they shine in the dark lining its joints.

Oh, great, he has a portrait of himself behind his seat. If that doesn't scream conceited, I don't know what does.

I check over his cabinets for wards, breathing a sigh of relief when I get nothing back.

Cocky bastard too, it seems.

I rummage through the cabinets, copying anything and everything that looks even mildly important, stuffing the sheets into my bag as I go.

It looks like I've hit a gold mine with this, as the man hasn't placed any protections whatsoever upon his office, not even the standard anti-copying charm that I would imagine anyone important would use on their documents.

Yeah. Conceited, and cocky as all hell.

I spend the next half hour just scouring over everything this man has written down, my eyes popping out of my head when I notice his rigorous documentation of bribes he's received from the likes of Lucius Malfoy, Atticus Goyle, and Walden Macnair.

Conceited, cocky, and a Death Eater sympathizer. Or, at the least, a greedy prick.

I happily copy his little black book, looking forward to dropping it on Amelia's desk later on.

Silently, I pop out of his office and into that of the Head Hit-Wizard.

Hit-Wizards are a funny thing. They're a highly trained militia, yet they tend to be forced into work that more resembles a riot squad or the Pinkertons of old as opposed to doing what they were
originally created for. That being espionage, and operations of a more… sensitive nature.

It's a sad day when the magical equivalent of the MI5 is reduced to a group of bruisers that deal in simple tasks like public unrest or moderating a worker's strike.

Unfortunately for me, whoever leads the Hit-Wizards has taken much better care of his documents. His cabinets are warded, not extensively, but enough to give me pause as I attempt to dismantle them without setting off any alarms.

If I could still bleed, I'm sure a vessel in my nose would have popped by now. Sweat drips from my forehead as I wave my wand, painstakingly siphoning power from the wards and directing it outwards, letting the magic disperse as slowly as possible so as to not set off any alarms.

If there's a large burst of magic, *wham*, I'll have the whole of the auror force coming down on me in less than a minute when the magical sensors detect that.

Finally, after what seems like hours, but is probably much closer to thirty minutes, I bring the wards on his cabinets and desk down.

"Let's see what you went through so much trouble to protect," I murmur, leafing through folder after folder of miscellaneous documents.

I pull out another folder that gives me pause. While it doesn't directly implicate the Head Hit-Wizard in any way, it's very evident from these receipts and other assorted forms that he's receiving bribes in some way or another.

I can drop this off on Amelia's desk, but the worst thing that could happen would be an internal investigation. Like those ever end in anything.

I am confident that Scrimgeour is going to be out on his arse by the end of the week though. The man was brazen enough to keep records of all correspondence between himself and ex-Death Eaters in his own office.

Absolutely insane how this country still manages to run itself.

Absently, I remove the anti-copy charms from any important documents and quickly duplicate them, tucking them safely away.

I blink out of the Head Hit-Wizards office and into the Legilimancers, just in the off chance that there's anything important in there.

Unfortunately, there's fuck all related to Azkaban.

It looks like this guy really hasn't worked since the 80's, and it shows. Every surface in the office is covered in a thin layer of dust, and there's no indication that anyone actually works here due to the complete lack of any personal touch

In the off chance that there's anything remotely important lying around, I check through his folders as well after checking for wards. Thankfully, whatever wards the man once had on his filing cabinets have long since degraded, as he hasn't even been around to give off enough ambient magic to keep them running.

I find the mans documents to be fantastically concise, the mans notetaking methods incredibly succinct and to the point and in a format that's quite easy to read. That's going to make my job much easier.
I continue with my duplication extravaganza, painstakingly copying each and every mildly important looking document that I come across, now finally beginning to feel a drain on my magic after casting so many *gemino* charms.

Finally, I can get to the difficult and incredibly stressful part of my night, breaking into Amelia's office.

I blink out into the main workspace, beginning my task of putting down a silencing ward over her office in the very probably case that alarms go off when I blink in. I have to use a ward, as the magic is subtler and won't lead to me setting off any magic detection alarms that I also believe are used within the whole of the Auror Department. It would be incredibly short sighted for them to *not* have them, and I refuse to run the risk of alerting the Aurors before I've even had a chance to find any papers pertaining to Azkaban.

Fifteen minutes later, and I've painted my temporary wardscheme around Amelia's office, infusing it with magic and watching with satisfaction as the nearly invisible ink shines briefly before blinking out, signifying that the magic has taken hold.

With my fingers crossed and my breath held, I close my eyes tight and blink into Amelia's office, flinching at the sudden alarm bells going off, a magically synthesized voice screaming, *Intruder! Intruder!*

Fuck is that ever loud.

I cast a silencing charm over the room, my ears immediately feeling better as the roaring klaxon stops pounding against my skull. Working as quickly as I can, I tear down the wards on her cabinets and desk with brute force. I leaf through her very well organized folders, muttering as I flick them away one by one.

Azkaban, Azkaban... where's Azkaban?

"Seriously, there fucking better be *something* here," I mutter angrily, continuing to rapidly sort through her folders. "Otherwise I've risked my ass again for *nothing*!"

I wipe the sweat from my forehead, glancing behind me every so often, fully expecting the door to explode inwards and have aurors pile into the room en masse. For all I know they're trying to bust the door down right now.

My eyes flick over a familiar name, a smile spreading across my face as I pick up the folder. "There we go!" I grin as I begin the process of removing the anti-copy charms from everything, having to push a lot more power into it than when I rifled through Scrimgeour's office.

Looks like Amelia is just as much of a powerhouse magically as she is mentally.

Biting my lip, I manage to remove the charms and copy everything, putting the folder back in place and shutting the cabinet just as the door swings open, Amelia herself leading the charge.

"Drop your wand and get to the ground!" She shouts, casting an area stunner immediately, the spell dissipating against a hastily cast shield that quickly gives away my position, even while wearing the cloak. She glances towards the spot where my shield materialized into place, another torrent of spells flying in my direction that reflect harmlessly off of the shining *aegis fortis* that surrounds me.

I push my magic into the cloak and allow it to go visible while still shrouding my face. Putting one hand up in the air, holding the folder containing the evidence of Scrimgeour's wrongdoing above me placatingly, I place my wand to my throat, distorting my voice as I reply, "I'm sorry Director Bones,
but I can't do that."

She growls, flicking her wand aggressively and sending a cutting curse towards me. I roll out of the way, splinters peppering my back and her desk, a thin cloud of sawdust settling slowly through the air.

I glance down at the folder in my hand, wondering again how stupid the man was to keep those records in his own office in the Auror Department of all places.

"I'm not here to fight you, I just needed information, and I'm also giving you some," I state, slowly lower my hand and letting the folder slide onto her desk. "In here are documents that showcase the true extent of corruption within your own office, and a glimpse into the backdoor dealings of the Wizengamot."

Here eyes flick over the folder on her desk before once again casting a barrage of spells in my direction.

Looks like she doesn't want to talk.

Well, I don't need to be asked twice. In a flash, I blink back to my room at home and away from danger, collapsing against my bed as the excitement finally gets the better of me. I hold my hand to my chest, feeling the rapid rise and fall of it as I pant away the adrenaline, wondering why my heart no longer beats yet my sympathetic nervous system still works just fine.

Magic is an odd beast I guess.

Grinning widely, I hold out my ill-gotten gains in front of me, staring in wonder at the files that I just stole from Amelia Fucking Bones herself.

"Wow," I gasp, in awe of how fantastically smooth that went.

Here's hoping Azkaban isn't a shit show.
I've pored over the documents that I stole from the DMLE for the last week, taking in every last scrap of information that I can. Every single detail of Azkaban I've committed to memory.

The prison is set up in five levels, at least, there's five usable levels, and those are all above ground. The higher up you go, the more intensive the security is and there are quite a bit more dementors posted along those floors, evidently to bring every bit of misery they can to the sad sons of bitches locked up there.

I don't feel bad for the Death Eaters and other scum that are imprisoned in Azkaban, but I think that having actual demons float around them 24/7 is the pinnacle of cruel and unusual punishment.

The levels below ground are part of the dementors nests. There are caverns and burrows that twist and turn like dwarven mines deep below the frigid and tumultuous North Sea. They've been lightly explored, but no one has committed to mapping the ant hill of passages due to the stifling presence of dementors. If things go south, I can always retreat there and shelter amongst the cloaked demons.

Going to be honest, that's not a sentence I ever thought I, or anyone for that matter would ever say.

The prison is set up like an old star fort, probably because it once was. There's battlements on the highest level with embrasures spread out along the walls, giving the guards inside an advantageous view of the rocky outcropping that the prison is situated on.

To get in, I'm going to have to take an enchanted boat, since the island is surrounded by anti-flying wards. I'm not too keen on attempting to fly in and then finding myself drenched and stranded in open ocean.

Thinking back on my little Ministry invasion, some good came out of that. Scrimgeour has been publicly hung to dry, Amelia decrying his corruption as, 'disgusting, and not representative of what the Department of Magical Law Enforcement stands for.' He's now off to the magical equivalent of white collar prison, something that doesn't even exist in Britain.

No, he's been pawned off to the French, who actually have a humane correctional system, and has been locked up in some sort of prison situated somewhere in the French Alps. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

Alright, so, looking at these papers, my night is going to be a hell of a lot of fun, and by fun, I mean a night that involves premeditated murder and a whole lot of stress. So… something that's becoming awfully regular for me.

I do another onceover of the ancient mappings of the prison, even the copied parchment hanging limp, its edges slightly tattered from centuries of being shuffled from Department Head to Department Head, resorted and categorized in whichever way they saw fit.
Taking a deep breath, I still myself. I blink to Sumburgh, having taken a trip to the Shetlands earlier this week. The boat that takes someone to Azkaban is situated off of the precarious cliff face that runs the eastern length of the islands.

As soon as my feet touch the ground I can feel the wind whipping at my hair, lifting Death's cloak up and over my head to stave off the frigid sea air. Christ, it must be only three degrees out here with the wind chill cutting through me, and it's the middle of summer.

I look down the edge of the cliff, eyes skirting about for the heavily warded pier that shelters the Azkaban dinghy.

Yes, a goddamn dinghy to take me across the raging North Sea.

Finally noticing a glint of torchlight, I blink down and quickly incapacitate the auror on guard, who lets out a startled squawk as my stunner strikes his chest. I catch him before he tumbles into the drink, quickly binding him and taking his wand, tucking it into my robe pocket as I resuscitate him.

The slight man shakes his head as he comes to, blinking owlishly. "S- s- stay back!" He shouts, suddenly remembering what happened. He attempts to lift his arms, looking down at his constraints as a hopeless expression quickly settles over his features. "What… what do you want with me?" He asks, stuttering pitifully.

I thank Death silently for the incredible disguising abilities of his cloak, my face nestled in shadow as I press my wand to my throat, distorting my voice.

"I want you to take me to Azkaban," I say, the auror frowning, dim gray eyes narrowed in confusion.

"Take you to Azkaban? What in the hells would you want to do that for?"

I shake my head, as if I was going to tell him why. "That doesn't matter. What does, is that you're going to do exactly as I tell you." I twirl my wand, the end sparking dangerously as it passes over his face, his eyes widening in fear. "Otherwise things may not go too well for you."

He nods furiously, gesturing with his head towards the boat. "Well, you uh- you need me in there if we're going to go to Azkaban."

I lift him easily, placing him gently into the boat, the man looking at me in confusion for treating him so delicately. "I'm not an evil person," I explain, turning my shadowed face towards him. "I just have… things I must accomplish tonight. I do not wish to hurt you, nor the guards in the prison, but if I have to fight, I will."

Nodding once more, this time a touch more hesitantly, he wiggles his bound fingers at me. "Can't move the boat without my hands."

I jab my wand in his face, the end glowing briefly. "Don't try anything funny, got that?" I say as I wave it over him, his bonds falling apart.

It's not as if the man can beat me in a contest of raw strength, as I've augmented my body quite a bit over the last few years, nor can he use wandless magic. The only person that I know of that can accomplish such a thing is Dumbledore, and his abilities in the art are simply cantrips, summoning charms and the like. To the best of my knowledge nobody in the world apart from me can cast wandlessly in the way that I do. Not that it's casting, but my control over air and earth is wholly unique.
The auror grabs the rudder with shaky hands, the boat beginning to move swiftly over the churning black water. The smell of salt stings my nostrils, causing them to flare as I inhale deeply, keeping my eyes locked on the wary auror as he glances around nervously, directing the dinghy towards the nightmarish fortress.

The sea begins to roil as we get further out, the tiny craft breaching over great waves, sea water spraying precariously over the bow as they rise and fall. My eyes have been glued to the nervous auror the whole time, but they flick away momentarily as Azkaban begins to come into view.

A massive stone fortress that seems to be hewn out of the rock it stands upon, smooth black walls forming a sheer and indomitable face that almost looks over the heaving ocean that surrounds it, judging us with its presence alone as we approach.

I can feel the Black Magic that fuels its wards as we get closer and closer, the feeling of Death and the decay that comes along with him bearing down on me. It's almost comforting, the familiar sensation of Black Magic as it swims about, tendrils of black only visible to me emanating off of the fortress.

It's like a living, breathing thing. The thick magics reaching out and touching me momentarily, rejoicing at the presence of another Necromancer, as that's who I assume must have crafted this massive body of stone. Only someone with my powers over the earth could have fashioned the rock into the almost sentient prison that faces me. There's a thin mist that settles over the whole island, and I think the only reason that I can't feel it is because it hasn't sunk through Death's cloak.

I focus in on what I thought was a storm cloud just above the prison, noticing the way it seems to pulse and quiver.

Woah. That's a lot of dementors.

So, that answers my question as to who built Azkaban... someone like me.

I chuckle wryly at that thought, startling the auror, who's head snaps up sharply.

"What's so funny?" He asks, his voice shaky.

I shrug plaintively. "Feels like home," I say, not bothering to elaborate, the mans horrified expression garnering another snicker out of me.

With a shudder the dinghy rolls into the Azkaban pier, and I quickly stun the auror once more, setting him down on dry... dryish land. Wouldn't do to have him loudly announce my presence to the prison guards. That would put a damper on my evening.

I find myself squinting at the foreboding walls as I trudge up towards them, the stone so black that it seems to drag in the light around it, lending an even heavier presence to the already imposing prison. My boots slip over the shale that lines the weathered path, the sound of stone on stone crisp over the raging sea.

After a short hike, I stand in front of the gates, surprised to see that they're not stone as well. If my predecessor could create this prison with their own magics alone, could they not have fashioned a stone wall as well?

I assume the Ministry must have broken them down and had them replaced with the great wooden doors that stand in front of me, steel laced throughout the heavy beech. I study the massive iron knocker that's fused to the wood, the likeness of a dementors cloak hanging over the metal rung.
With a smile, I take the knocker and slam it heavily into the door, the bass note reverberating through the wood and echoing off the dreary prison walls.

I can already imagine the guard's confusion, wondering who could possibly be coming by Azkaban without an appointment.

The door swings open, a sullen man with raggedy hair staring at me from underneath his graying fringe, a scowl on his face. I take a moment to sigh internally, wondering why in the hells the man would open the door for someone he doesn't know.

Is this what Amelia has to deal with on a daily basis? That poor, poor woman.

"Who the devil are you?" The man grumbles harshly. "We ain't got no appointments nor prisoner transfers right now, so jog on."

Before he can slam the door in my face, I quickly incant *imperio*, letting the mind control spell wash over the suddenly dazed guard, his eyes fogging up as he stares at me.

"Open the door and let me in," I command, the man quickly allowing me entrance to what should be an impregnable fortress.

Fucking unbelievable. I'm going to have to leave another note for Amelia letting her know how piss-poor security is. Maybe this will help her get a budget increase.

I walk into the entrance of the fortress, and immediately stun the imperiused door guard and tuck him off in the corner, casting a notice-me-not charm over his hiding place and surveying the room, noticing that the inside is just as macabre as the rest. Well, even more so with the gothic interior added to the whole mix.

I'm reminded of a cathedral, although not a regular cathedral. In this case what I imagine the most lavish of satanic churches would be like, if not the devil's own castle. Sharp blind-arcades are carved into the walls, the pillars look like broken spines, oddly asymmetrical as they climb to the arched ceiling.

There's a short desk in front of me, a singular lantern floating above it. The desk is quite messy, covered in a smattering of parchment that looks to be idly tossed about, a dingy mug filled with used quills set off to the side. I'm guessing this is the guards work station.

Quaint.

There's three pathways behind the desk, one leading down and the other up to the other levels of the prison. Dead centre, there's a corridor that cuts directly ahead into the centre of the fortress. I'm assuming that that's where the other guards reside, completely unaware that I'm about to wreak havoc on the place.

The most interesting part of the room is that it's supposed to be well lit, judging by the incredible number of torches fastened to the walls in every which way, an obscene mass of candles floating lazily above me, yet the fortress is still dim. It reminds me of Deaths eyes, how they just drink up the light around them.

That just confirms for me that a Necromancer built this place. Those eyes make an impression on you that one wouldn't soon forget.

Thankfully, although it's just another tick on the 'I can't believe this place manages to run itself' box, there's no other guards in the entrance. It looks like they really do relegate everything to the
dementors. I honestly can't believe nobody else has tried to break out of here, because the first five minutes of this little job of mine have been embarrassingly easy.

…and Sirius was worried about this?

I take the leftmost passage, leading down. The stairs seem to wind in on themselves, twisting impossibly tight as I silently make my way to the lower levels of the prison, my destination being the dementors nest.

If I want to have this taken care of in one fell swoop, pun not intended, they're going to be the ones doing the work for me. A horde of dementors surging through the prison to devour the souls of anyone with a Dark Mark? That's going to make my life so much simpler.

The darkness seems to envelop me, like a mother cradling a long-lost child as I descend deeper into the mildew soaked depths of Azkaban. The steady clink of dripping condensation taking precedence over the now fading roar of the raging North Sea.

After a few minutes I light the end of my wand, blinking at the sudden change, already accustomed to the pitch black of the subterranean cave - because that's what the winding corridor has morphed into. Rough obsidian glistens everywhere around me like black diamond, trudging down clumsily fashioned steps that seem to stagger over one another, a ramshackle tumble of stone that reminds me of a rough mountain pass that has not been tread upon in years.

The cold permeates everything at this depth, an unworldly cold that seems to just pass right over me, licking lightly at the edges of Death's cloak and accepting my presence.

I suddenly realize that the cold I feel is the sensation of passing through the wards. Ancient wards, steeped in Death's Magic.

No wonder no one has ever ventured this deep into the prison. The presence of the dementors alone would incapacitate someone, let alone the immensely powerful wards that guard their nest.

My gut whirling, I stumble suddenly as I step off of the stairs and onto bedrock, having not looked down the whole while. I'm faced with an impossibly long tunnel, sharp black stone slotted together forming old ruinous walls, like those of Mycenae and Ancient Greece. In the distance, I see something darker than dark, an effervescent whirl of that same vivid black that makes up Death's eyes.

I creep slowly forward, the tumbling mass in front of me stilling as I approach, clumps of dementors detaching from the grim, swirling dance. I watch as one by one they separate, one ragged cloak swooping over the ground towards me, a hand held out in invitation.

After a moment of hesitation, I take the rotting, scabbed appendage and am beckoned into the folds of the dementors cloaks, striding on surprisingly confident feet and finding myself in front of a massive throne, hacked into the wall behind it.

One massive dementor rests lazily in its seat, an off kilter beat emanating from long terrible fingers rolling over the shadowed stone.

"My children have spoken of you," it says, after a brief, yet tense silence. "Another Child of Death come to our Unhallowed Halls." It rises slowly, the movement unnaturally smooth as it tilts its empty face, scrutinizing me. "This one is different, it seems. More."

I blink awkwardly, wondering how to take that. "Uh… that's uh… alright," I stutter, not at all expecting that. Something more? What in the fuck does that mean.
The dementor, laughs. It *laughs*. A sharp grating wail that rings off the walls, a sound that should be so terribly horrifying is instead simple to my ears, like I've heard it once before.

"Yes... this one is different." The dementor reaches out, one crooked finger folding towards itself in invitation. "*Come closer, Child. Let me see your face.*"

Knees wobbling, I shamble on, nervous footsteps taking me to this otherworldly Lord, a King amongst Demons.

It extends the same finger, gently lifting my chin so that I'm staring into the barren depths of its hood. With its other hand, it reaches over, drawing back the curtains and revealing to me an empty face.

It's eye sockets are empty, yet unearthly pale skin is drawn tight over what should be their gaping maws, sallow cheeks and sunken, asymmetrical bones frame its gray and rotted features. Thin wisps of cobweb like hair float aimlessly over the bald, smooth skull of the creature, a strand tickling over a ragged hole where it's nose used to be. The creatures horribly wide mouth is bared in a crumbling grin that shows far too many cracked and sordid teeth.

"*It has been many, many years since I have set mine own eyes upon one like you,*" the Lord says quizzically, it's razor thin lips pulling back even further, a grin settling over its face that literally stretches from ear to ear. "*What brings you here, Child of Death?*"

"*I have a... mission of sorts,*" I begin, unsure of how to phrase my question, not having expected there to be any kind of hierarchy that the dementors function under. I had always assumed they were... well, that they just did whatever they felt like. I'm quite sure only Fiendfyre or the like can destroy them, although an Albumancer would probably have plenty of spells in their repertoire to defeat such a thing.

"...*a mission you say?*"

I nod awkwardly. "*Yes, a mission. I came here tonight to rid the world of a number of the patrons here at Azkaban. Specifically, two who have been consumed by your kind, but I came down here...*" I pause, fidgeting with shaking fingers.

I can go toe to toe with Dumbledore, literally laugh *Death* in the face, yet I get tongue-tied and nervous around a race of (understandably terrifying) creatures that I know won't hurt me?

Keep it together Helene!

"*I came down here to request you and your... er- children's aid. If they would provide me with a distraction, that would make my job here tonight much, much safer.*"

The Lord leans forward, resting its knobbly chin on spiderlike fingers. "*What kind of distraction did you have in mind, Child?*"

I breathe out slowly, suddenly debating my reasons for coming down into the dementors nest. Would they really listen to me? I know the dementor that I spoke with on the train was quite... amicable, when it came to my request to keep away from the students and any of the residents of Hogsmeade. But will this leader be the same? Is this just a kindly façade, and he'll react in the same way that Aragog so recently did?

"*I was curious whether your children could sweep through the prison, devouring the souls of any who bear the Dark Mark, that of Lord Voldemort.*"

The Lord smiles once again, putting its fingers together and leaning backwards in thought. It thumbs
its chin, a disturbingly human motion as it considers my question.

"Is that all that you wish for? A distraction, and a distraction alone?" it asks, its empty brow raised.

"What do you mean?"

Laughing once again, the Lord scratches the side of its head, holding its hand out questioningly. "Why simply stop there? A distraction? Why not let us sweep through the countryside, feasting on all those in our path. Such filling and delicious carnage I have not enjoyed in many years. What of the guards within this very fortress? Are they ripe? Their mortal seed aching to be plucked? Is it not their time?"

I can feel my face falling in horror, my disgust plainly shown. Once more, the dementor cackles, clutching its heaving ribs as it devolves into a fit of laughter, the skin around its eyes drawn impossibly tight, squinting as it continues to mock me.

"You find that reprehensible, don't you?" it manages to say between rattling breaths. "The idea of snuffing out so many terribly bright candles? What if it was their time? What if it was necessary? Would you allow them to continue on? Living long past their time, a bastardization, something wrong and unnatural?"

I consider that for a second, before shaking my head. I remember Death's Book, the one that denoted my time of death. Everyone has a time and a place, and it seems that it's pre-ordained.

"Only if it was their time to go, would I accept that. No sooner, no later," I reason, wondering over this sudden philosophical debate. "But if they didn't need to die? They should live, and they should live as long as they're supposed to."

"Yes, an excellent answer," the Lord approves, raising its hand in recognition. "My children will aid you, and they will take the souls of those within these Unhallowed walls marked with the serpentine blasphemer's brand, for their lives were signed away the moment they took his crest."

I bow my head in thanks, the Lord inclining its head in respect, before turning back to see a solitary line of dementors, two walls of them standing at attention like pliable soldiers, their sullen unseen faces staring forward unblinkingly.

I walk, my steps more confident, an unseen power driving me forward as I march through the unholy corridor, the dementors falling behind me in ranks, silently drifting as they follow me back up the winding steps. I find myself muttering, "in their house at Azkaban, dead men wait dreaming," reminded of an old American horror writer.

Almost sped on by the influx of Black Magic, I step back into the prison check-in, the steady stomp of guards thundering down the main hall as they come to investigate the sudden creeping ice that cracks and hisses over the walls.

"Oh… oh my God," one mutters, his voice already wilting under the effects of the dementors, their deadly presence suffocating him.

I turn to see the man who spoke, a fresh-faced twenty something who's mouth is hanging open as he shrinks back, plastering himself against the wall.

His companions stumble in behind him, eyes widening as they set sights on the terrifying collection before them. The aurors let out sharp curses, a few of them feebly attempting to cast a patronus, but failing miserably as the lights from the end of their wands flicker, impotent and unready for the sudden onset of misery and fear radiating off of the host behind me.
"Please, just go back to work and pretend I was never here," I say, bowing my head ever so slightly towards the catatonic aurors.

The same man… boy from before steps forward, his arm trembling as he holds his wand out in front of him, an unconfident sneer on his face.

"N-no! Y-you'll… you'll be staying with us!" he shouts, sounding unsure of himself. "Y-you can't g-go around casting d-dark magic like that and just e-expect to get away with it!"

I shrug apathetically, snapping off a blindingly fast stunner that impacts the aurors chest, knocking him head over heels into his compatriots and bowling them over.

A few have the strength to get back to their feet, a few poorly cast spells sluggishly moving towards me. I bat them away absentmindedly, sending off an area stunner to knock out the remainder of the aurors, the miniature resistance falling in moments.

I quirk my neck to the side, inviting the dementors to follow me. We move upwards, slowly but surely making our way to the top level of the prison. Wails and screams echo off of the walls, the prisoners shrieking their protests at the sudden onslaught of dementors. I cringe at the scent of piss and shit, the whole of the upper floor like a festering wound of rot and bile. I pause briefly, before remembering that these people are monsters, and they would have had their comeuppance eventually.

"Take the ones with the Dark Mark," I command, the dementors silently accepting, their robes billowing in unseen winds as they speed towards their feasts.

I continue forward, scanning for the two empty husks that are Tracey's long forgotten, very much punished birth parents. I listen as the shrieks of the prisoners are gradually cut off, flinching slightly at the horrific sound of their voices being steadily silenced, the others increasing in pitch as they begin to recognize their coming fate.

One voice stands out over the rest, a high-pitched cackling, manic and beyond unhinged.

"Hello Bellatrix," I effuse, turning my eyes towards the maddened woman, her spindly black hair falling in limp curls over her prison rags, bloodshot eyes held wide in reverence.

"My Lord! My Lord! I knew you would come!" she screams, her horribly thin and bony hands wrapped around the bars as she attempts to hold herself up, already having worked herself into a frenzy at the prospect of the return of Voldemort.

"Your Lord? Bellatrix, you must have really lost it haven't you?" I gasp mockingly, placing my hand over my shadowed mouth. I lean forward, malice tinging my voice as I gaze upon the woman who killed my godfather in another life, the one who led me stumbling to my death and rebirth. "Lord Voldemort? The Half-Blood bastard who has you convinced that he's pureblood royalty? No, that's not me, although he would certainly love to be me, I imagine."

She blinks, rearing back, confused. "Who are you?" she growls, fingers gripping the bars much more tightly, her sharp knuckles looking as if they're about to split the skin of her hands. She glances about wildly, all of a sudden taking in the horde of dementors that is currently feasting upon her past comrades in arms in a whole new light. "What are you?"

"Why, a Necromancer of course."

She gasps sharply, pupils shrinking in fear as I raise my wand, waving it in front of her.
"Now, I know this isn't going to make any sense at all, but it doesn't really matter what with the fact that you're going to die in about… I don't know, a minute or so, but I'm going to exact a little bit of revenge for something that hasn't happened yet."

"You're mad… you're mad!" she shrieks, stumbling backwards, getting as far as possible from my now glowing wand, the horrid bright green of the killing curse shining from its tip.

I look at the wand, realizing that I've never quite attempted some of the more interesting facets of Blood Magic, instead having relegated myself to rituals and the like. I ponder for a moment what spell would be best for her.


What to do?

"Ah!" I cry, snapping my fingers. "I've come up with just the thing for you, now, you stay right there, alright?"

Bellatrix shrinks into the corner, before steeling herself and glaring at me, rolling her shoulders as she faces me, head held high. "Do what you must. At least let me die with a little dignity," she spits.

I shrug. "Beggars can't be choosers Bella. You murdered your own blood. Murdered me in fact," I mention, her brow narrowing in confusion. "Well, not yet, but you will if given the chance, so I'm going to let you go out in a perfectly poetic way. You were a Black once, right?"

"Y- yes?"

"Well, what happens if your blood turns black? Maybe a little mud in your blood, if we're feeling biblical," I say, flicking my wand and incanting, "Sanguis et luto."

A nauseatingly orange light strikes her in the gut, her eyes widening in disbelief as her veins begin to thicken with sludge, a capillary in her nose bursting, runny black sediment ebbing out of her nostril. She begins to choke breathlessly, blood no longer carrying oxygen to her lungs, her face paling as she begins to suffocate on nothing.

With a great heaving breath, she collapses to the ground, clawing frantically at her throat as her blood turns to mud. With grim finality, she shudders, one final creaking gasp sneaking out of her lips as she dies.

I let out a slow hissing breath, my gut churning with revulsion at the horrific sight I just witnessed.

Shite, that was way more awful than I thought it would be. Cutting off someone's head is much easier.

Well, that's a sentence I never thought I would think in my entire life.

I quell my suddenly raging stomach, bile rising in my throat as I turn away from the macabre sight, striding forward until I come across a cell that radiates an odd form of magic, the only part of Azkaban that feels like Life instead of Death.

I glance in, instantly recognizing the two emaciated shells that are propped up against the wall in front of me, a magical intravenous drip slowly working away, minds long dead, yet their chests rising and falling at a snail's pace, the only sign that they can be technically considered alive.

I can't tear my eyes away from the vile sight, taking in the bedraggled, greasy hair that hasn't been
cut in many, many years. Lifeless eyes resting in sunken pockets simply gaze ahead, looking at nothing, just staring endlessly.

With utmost disgust, I flick my finger, two bullets of air drilling through their skulls and spattering the wall behind them with gray matter and a few flecks of bone.

No matter what someone's done, they shouldn't be subjected to that kind of insult.

Finally done, I rush up to the nearest window, moulding the bars and pushing them away with an errant wave of my hand as I stick my head out into the cold and breathe in fresh air, gulping it down and relishing in the tinge of salt, momentarily free of the pungent stench of rot and bodily fluids. I can feel my gut still churning from the thick scent, disgust plaguing me as the cloying sensation clings to my throat.

That was... a lot of killing. I don't think I'm ever going to be accustomed to something like that, and I hope I never am.

"Jesus fucking Christ, what a night," I mutter, scratching my cheek and looking out over the tumultuous sea, listening as the dementors begin to make their way back to their abode, their rattling breaths beginning to grow quieter and quieter until they're drowned out by the roaring ocean breeze.

That blood turning spell on Bellatrix was just... well, it was much more... more, than I thought it was going to be. The dementors? I know that was the plan, but man is that ever awful to watch.

"What the fuck," I groan, shaking my head. I really, really wish I could still feel the effects of alcohol right now

I mean, I'm doing better than when I took out Lockhart. But, considering everything I've gone through, I should technically be nearly catatonic right now, a gibbering mess screaming in the corner and begging for her mother after seeing such a thing. I chuckle awkwardly, my eyes still set ahead, watching as waves crash against the prison's shores. I guess that I'm made of much tougher stuff than most.

It's kind of a silly thought... but it sort of makes me wonder if I'm really turning out to be like Voldemort? Is there even a chance, no matter how minute that Dumbledore right? I mean, does this make me any better than him?

God, I need to figure my shit out.

I feel too tired to even jump in fright when I hear a familiar voice demand, "Put your hands up! Show me your wand! Now!"

I slowly turn around, cursing silently as I see Amelia Bones at the end of the hall, a disgusted look on her face as she holds her wand in front of her, the end shining bright green. Shacklebolt and Robards stand behind her, both glancing between me and the massacre they've walked in on.

"You heard me! Show me your wand!"

I put my hands up in false surrender, my Yew and Blackthorn wand hanging lightly between my fingertips.

"Amelia, I wish you no harm… I'm not here to hurt any of you," I announce, as I continue to keep my hands in the air, her eyes locked on me as she hesitantly approaches.

"Wish me no harm? Wish me no harm?" she hisses, gesturing wildly at the subtle carnage around
her. "You killed all these people! Is this why you broke into my office? Is this what you wanted, whoever the fuck you are?"

"Well, I'm not as confident as when I began, but... yes, this is what I wanted," I reply, glancing hesitantly towards the Death Eaters cells, one empty hand thrust out from between the bars, clutching nothing but air. "I originally came here to... well, I would be giving you too many hints as to who I really am if I told you." My breath hitches as I take in her features, cracked lips and wide, furious eyes.

No one should have to see something like this, especially not someone like her who lived and fought through the last war.

"I'm sorry, so deeply sorry that you have to walk in on this... this nightmare of a situation. Just know that what I've done today is necessary."

She throws her hands up in exasperation, forgetting for a moment that she has me at wandpoint as she laughs sardonically. "Necessary? You're a Merlin-be-dammed maniac. What in the seven hells could make this necessary? Why shouldn't I just kill you where you stand?"

"Voldemort," I state succinctly.

"What did you say?" she growls, hackles raised.

"I'm here because of Voldemort-

Before I can finish what I'm saying, Amelia immediately flicks her wand, a vibrant red curse racing towards my head. I reflexively throw up a shield, a rapidly conjured wall of marble shattering as the spell strikes it. She follows up with a frenzy of cutting and rotting curses, a barrage of neon lights sent down the corridor in my direction.

I throw up an *aegis fortis*, feeling the pull on my magic as the spells rain down upon it, the shield flickering underneath the incredible onslaught.

"Voldemort? Voldemort? That monster killed my family! He killed my husband and my sister!" she swears harshly, my eyes widening as she continues to attack me.

Oh God, she thinks I'm with Voldemort!

"No! No! I'm not with Voldemort! I'm fighting him! He's coming back!" I shout in exasperation, feeling terrible for the enraged woman as she rapidly flings spells at me.

"Then who the fuck are you?"

"I can't tell you!" I argue, batting away another incredibly lethal curse. Is she even allowed to cast those? "There's a goddamn war on and nobody knows! He's coming back, and soon! I'm doing everything I can to make sure he's put down for good!"

Amelia continues to batter me with spells, Shacklebolt and Robards struck dumb, glued to the floor as they watch her attack me with a deep-seated fervor, a veritable cloud of every curse under the sun bursting against my shield, some being absorbed while others reflect off of it, taking massive chunks out of the magically reinforced wall and spraying silt across the dingy prison floor.

I can't help but admire her as she pushes forward. Man is she ever one hell of a witch.

I notice an opening in her barrage, desperately sneaking in an *expelliarmus* and nearly cheering as it
strikes her hand, her thin and gnarled wand flying from her grasp and into mine. I hold my hands up placatingly, slowly setting the wand down on the ground and backing away with a hint of trepidation in my steps.

"Like I said, I'm not going to hurt you." I repeat myself, praying that she'll begin to calm down, even just by a bit.

She stands there glaring at me, her fierce gaze burning through Death's cloak, cutting through the immortal fabric like it's not even there, my gut wrenching at the sheer amount of pain reflected in her sharpened pupils.

"I'm so sorry," I mutter, shaking my head. "I'm so, so sorry. I just… god damnit. This wasn't supposed to end like this."

Amelia stares at me like I'm insane. Honestly, I probably am a bit at this point. I wouldn't be surprised "What the hell did you expect to happen?"

"I…"

My breath catches in my throat, and I snort at what I'm about to say. "Well, this I guess. I just didn't expect to see you," I admit.

She shakes her head, waving her hand angrily. "Well, fuck off. Get out of here… Just… piss off."

"Amelia!"

"Shut it Robards! You think we can fight her?" she bellows, jabbing her finger in my direction.

"But… she just…" He trails off, gesturing silently at the corpse filled cells.

"Fuck the Death Eaters," she spits, still frazzled from her emotional outburst, no longer the just the indomitable woman I first met. Instead, I can see that she's not all stern, not just this unbreakable amazon of a woman. No, she's also someone who's gone through more than anyone should, a woman who's lost her home and entire family to a crazed madman with a childish thirst for vengeance. That's going to leave you with a healthy dose of righteous anger, one that she directed at me. "You want to try taking her in when she could just as easily wipe the floor with the two of you as she did with me? Go ahead, be my guest."

Robards looks as if he's about to argue with her, before slamming his mouth shut and shaking his head, grumbling quietly.

Amelia glances back in my direction. "Get out of my sight," she growls.

"I'm sorry." I apologize one last time as I blink out of the prison and back to my room, collapsing into my bed.

I just lie there and stare at the ceiling for a while, running over the events of the night and wondering why on earth I'm second guessing myself so much.

I went there with murder in mind, and it turned into a mass execution.

But I already knew that would happen.

So why? Is it because I don't feel that I did it for a good cause, or not a good enough cause? Was it because it wasn't revenge? I seem to be quite used to that type of murder at this point. Does that
I chuckle harshly, biting my tongue softly as I ponder that. This is a very odd time for me to start wondering about my morals.

My thoughts being, those people were already prisoners, they weren't doing any harm to anyone being locked up there. They would have just rotted away anyways if I go on to defeat Voldemort next year. So, while I felt it necessary to execute them, was that the right choice? I mean, shit, I'm only what? Seventeen, eighteen years old? Since when does someone my age make decisions like this? I'm not really second guessing myself per se, I'm just pissed off that I have to do this sort of thing.

...and *God*, I hate having to do this sort of thing.

"I'd thought you'd be used to it by now."

I groan angrily, rubbing my eyes as I sit up to see Death standing at the foot of my bed, a stunning woman with sheer white hair pulled up in an elaborate braid standing beside him, hand in hand.

I pause to study her, my gaze drawn to the absolute symbol of all things beautiful. Her eyes shine, almost radiating in their brilliance, an equal opposite to deaths murky, impossible black. She smiles kindly at me, yet her eyebrows are pulled back almost in sadness. In pity. Her skin is rich, like polished gold, a healthy dusting of freckles forming a bow over her strong, yet dainty nose.

Like Aphrodite come to Earth.

"Death?" I ask, squinting tiredly at him, my eyes flitting back to the beautiful woman. "…Life?"

"One and the same," she answers serenely, looking towards her… well, her husband. "Dear?"

Death kisses her knuckles, letting go of her hand as he walks over to me, sitting down beside me on my bed.

"So, you visited the Isle of Death," he says, looking at me with those empty eyes. "It has a tendency to claim the lives of those upon it."

"Isle of Death?" I echo, incredulous. "What, is it yours?"

Death nods. "As a matter of fact, it is. Well, in many ways it's mine. That island is the closest part of the Earth to my domain."

"Wouldn't that be the Veil of Death?"

"No, that's a portal. Two very different things," Death deflects, shaking his head. "Now… I didn't come here to debate the metaphysical. I just wanted to check up, see how you're doing. Tonight was quite the night for you, and I wanted to let you know that I agree with your decision. Those people you killed tonight got what was coming to them."

I scoff in confusion. "Death, telling me that they got what was coming to them? Aren't you supposed to be impartial or something? All deaths are equal, all deaths are the same?"
"Whoever said that?" Death asks, one eyebrow raised. "Just because I'm Death doesn't mean that I
don't look forward to seeing disgusting specimens like the ones you put down arrive on my
doorstep."

Life sighs loudly, patting her husband on the shoulder. "Please, let me speak," she says, Death
acquiescing and standing up, Life taking his spot on my bed.

"Helene, what happened tonight was awful, but necessary," she intones, her blindingly white eyes
boring into mine. "All things live, and all things die. This is part of life."

"I understand that. I don't regret what I did, but I massacred them," I argue, running my hand
through my hair. "I went in there and I butchered them in their cells like animals. I understand killing
the enemy. This is war. But how does executing them like that make me any better than the scum I'm
fighting?"

"Would they not have done the same or worse to you?" Death interrupts, spindly arms crossed over
his chest.

"That doesn't exactly make me feel all that fantastic, but yeah?"

"So that in turn doesn't make what you've done any worse than what they would," Life continues,
her cheeks dimpling as she smiles at me once again. "Did you enjoy killing them?"

I start in horror. "No! Of course not! Bellatrix… well, killing her felt like a weight coming off my
shoulders, but… no, I didn't enjoy it at all."

"Then you are already better than they are."

I fidget with my hands, staring dumbly at them as I wrestle with what Life has just told me. I'm not
thick enough to not take Godly advice to heart.

"I mean, I guess. Still a shitty job. I shouldn't be a soldier at my age," I complain.

"Yes, it's awful, but you know that you will kill again, yes?"

"I… yeah. I will," I concede, shrugging my shoulders. "Well, looks like I have the World Cup to
look forward to, to flex that particular killing muscle of mine."

Suddenly, Life pulls me into a hug. A God, a fucking God, pulling me into a hug.

I squeak in surprise as she wraps her arms around me, cradling my head under her chin as she strokes
my hair. "Be at rest. Sleep, and know that you will see me once more, that I promise," she whispers,
a heavy weight settling over my eyes as drowsiness washes over me, the overpoweringly calming
presence of Life itself bleeding away my stress and frustration. Before I can even protest, I sink into a
deep slumber.

Chapter End Notes

A touch of Lovecraft in this chapter. Just a smidgen.
Sanguis et luto: Blood to mud. (Latin)
I wake up to loud stomping, the walls practically shaking with fury.

"What in the fuck is this!?” Sirius shouts as he barges into my room, the door slamming against the framing behind it and sending a thick dust of paint chips to the floor. He marches up towards me, face knitted together in anger and brandishing a copy of the Daily Prophet. He aggressively waves the crinkled newspaper in my face, a moving black and white image of Azkaban prison shimmering across the cover catching my eye.

"Oh… that,” I say, getting a good look at the headline. I take the paper from him, Sirius grunting in annoyance as I skim over it quickly.

**Break-in at Azkaban!**

*Ex-Death Eaters Bite Off More Than They Can Chew!*

_in the wee hours of the night, the incredibly notorious prison of Azkaban was broken into. No, not out of. Into.*

_Nearly thirty convicts, many of them old members of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's army, Death Eaters, were killed in a surprise break-in turned assassination at the prison. The most infamous of these convicts was none other than the deranged Bellatrix Lestrange, former right-hand to the fearsome Dark Lord, and her husband Rodolphus, who was also one of You-Know-Who's most fearsome enforcers._

The article goes on to read about the same, a summary of the break-in and the very much dead state the prisoners were found in.

There's no mention of the dementors following me, the prisoners having a surprising lack of souls, nor the gruesome details of Bellatrix's death. Looks like the Ministry wants to keep this under wraps as much as possible so as to not incite any public panic.

Just like the summer after the Tournament.

Idiots.

I mean, it's not as if I want them to get people panicking about some maniac who can control dementors running about the country, but it's still really irresponsible of them to say nothing.

"Helene. Where were you last night?"

Oh yeah.

"Azkaban,” I reply, looking up at Sirius as I hand the paper back to him. It's not like I'm about to lie
to his face about this, and I never said I wasn't going to break into the prison.

Yeah, childish, I know.

"I thought you weren't going to do anything," he hisses, crushing the paper in his fist. I wince at his tone, but I can feel my temper quickly build.

"When did I say that? Did you think I wasn't going to go through with it if I didn't get your approval?" I ask, shaking my head. "You forget that I'm what… eighteen years old?" I gesture at myself. "Just because my body is young, doesn't mean that my mind is."

Sirius clenches his jaw, staring at me furiously. "It doesn't matter. You could have died. Died. Do you not know how dangerous that place is?"

"Sirius, you need to calm down," I argue, putting my hand up to stop him. Unluckily for him, I am pissed off right now what with him waking me up like this.

I am not a morning person.

"Really? What the hell has gotten into you. You know I'm fighting a fucking war on my own here, right? Do you think I'm not going to be in danger?"

"You shouldn't throw yourself into danger to begin with!"

I put my hands up in exasperation. "What's going on? Really? Tell me what's going on," I demand, standing up and getting into his face, nearly brushing against the bottom of his nose as I glare up at him.

Damn you for being so tall. It makes it so much more difficult to be intimidating.

He pulls at his hair, his face crumpling as he sits down on the bed. "I can't… I can't lose you too," he whispers, his throat dry and his voice catching dangerously. He frowns as he stares dejectedly at the floor, fidgeting nervously with his hands. "Everyone I know… all of them except for you and Remus… they're gone."

I sit down next to him, putting my hand on his shoulder. I shouldn't have blown up like that, but Sirius worrying has gotten to be a bit too much. "I know, and I'm not going anywhere," I say, comforting him. "I have the word of Death himself that I'm going to live to a ripe old age. What I am worried about is being incapacitated or unable to put down Voldemort because of some sort of drastic injury that not even I can come back from."

I pause, thinking carefully over my choice of words. I have a tendency to be a bit too… blunt, in situations like this.

"I'm doing everything I can to make sure that Britain and the rest of the world is safe from him. That's not a simple job, nor is it a safe one. Have you still been seeing the mind-healer? Or did you stop going."

Sirius shakes his head sadly, looking slightly embarrassed. "I thought I was doing fine," he grumbles, looking askance. "Guess not."

"Sirius…"

"I know, I know," he mutters, putting his hands up in surrender and leaning his head back, staring at the ceiling. "I know."
"Hey, you're doing a lot better than you used to be," I laugh, remembering chasing him around the Manor. "Better than when I had to tie you to a bloody table and paint you green."

"Very true," he chuckles wryly. "So… how did your er- well, your night go?"

"Fucking awful, which is better than I expected," I answer honestly. "Dementors cleaned out the top level while I looked for Tracey's parents. I put a hole in each of their heads."

"That's… I'm sorry."

I shrug. "Whatever, I'm getting used to it. It's shite, but I am. It's not like any of the stuff I'm going to do in the future will be any good as well, considering we're going to the World Cup in, what, three days or so?"

"Four days, we leave on Thursday," Sirius confirms. "What's the plan for that anyways? You're prepared to fight those guys when they show up, right?"

I nod in affirmation. "I'll go in there aiming to maim, but if I see a single curse that even has the potential to kill, all bets are off."

"I would do the same."

I pause, an awkward silence settling over the two of us. "How's the uh… politicking going?"

Sirius brightens up immediately, excited to talk about his misdoings in the Wizengamot. "Well, Lucius is in a right tiff after Octavius and I stopped yet another of his muggle-baiting bills from going through. Most of the light voting bloc have joined us after Dumbledore's fall from grace, no thanks to the persistently horrible Rita Skeeter and her awful diatribe." He shudders momentarily at the mention of the cake-faced blonde paparazzi. I heard from Octavius that she hits on Sirius mercilessly when she's around him, something that delights me to no end.

Poor guy.

"We've garnered a bit of support from the more neutral-leaning dark families, but I think it's going to take that little bit of work you did in Azkaban, as well as this upcoming skirmish, if you can even call it that, at the World Cup."

"It makes sense," I drawl. The dark families tend to be more traditional, very stuck in their ways. The light side likes to espouse that they're the progressive party, but under Dumbledore's leadership they were just as backwards as those they disparaged, just in different ways. "Just letting you know, when the shit hits the fan at the World Cup I'm going to be moving on my own. I don't want to have you associated with my… what on Earth do I even call it? Alternate persona? Now that I think about it, I feel like some sort of demented wizarding version of the Punisher."

Sirius cackles, his hair shaking as he heaves with laughter. "The Punisher? A little thing like you?" He cries, ruffling my hair playfully as I squawk in protest. "Just over five and a half feet of fury! Watch your ass Death Eaters! Here comes Death's Crusader!"

I scratch my chin at that, actually finding that I like that little nickname more than I should. Although, crusader seems to be a bit much. Honestly, I quite like the sound of Child of Death, ignoring the fact that the dementors are the ones to call me that, it's got a brilliantly eerie ring to it.

Excited shrieking causes me to snap my head up painfully, leaping out of bed and rushing over to Tracey's room. I barge in, opening the door with a flick of my wrist so that I don't smash into it in my rush. I stumble in to see Tracey holding a copy of the Daily Prophet out in front of her, sobbing.
uncontrollably.

Her gaze flicks up to meet mine, a wide, almost deranged smile on her face. "They're gone!" she gasps, hands shaking as she sets the paper down. She runs her hands over her face, her whole demeanor screaming disbelief. "They're... they're gone. Gone..." she trails off, pinching her cheek and cursing under her breath. "This is real, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it's real," I say.

Tracey yelps and leaps towards me, pulling me into a rib-crushing hug. "They're gone, they're gone, they're gone!" she chants, jumping up and down and tossing me about as she celebrates.

Daphne takes that moment to walk into her room, rubbing the sleep from her eyes, a dazed look on her face from being woken up. "What's with the commotion in here?"

She blinks tiredly at the sight in front of her, Tracey having nearly hoisted me over her shoulder in a fireman carry, tears streaming down her face.

"Tracey... were you watching Muggle wrestling again?" she wonders aloud, squinting at the two of us.

Tracey awkwardly sets me back down, and I massage my stomach where her shoulder was digging into it. "My parents are gone! Gone!" she announces excitedly, grabbing Daphne's hands and pulling her in for a hug, Daphne squeaking in surprise as the news registers.

"Gone? As in... gone, gone?"

"Yes!"

Daphne's face lights up as she begins to grin from ear to ear, bright white teeth shining. "You can be part of the family! Oh my God! Shit, shit, shit! This is fantastic!" She squeals excitedly, pulling Tracey in close and giving her a peck on the cheek. "I'm going to go tell mum and dad the good news!" she exclaims, already rushing out the door, her baby blue nightgown fluttering around her ankles.

In a matter of moments, it seems that the whole family is in Tracey's room, Terra cradling Tracey against her chest as Octavius paces the room excitedly. Astoria sits on Tracey's bed, kicking her legs playfully and smiling at the sight in front of her, while Sirius is resting on a short chair and Daphne looks as if she's contemplating burrowing under Tracey's covers to catch another half hour of sleep.

If I don't consider myself a morning person, Daphne must be an owl in human form. The girl can stay up until the wee hours of the morning like nobody's business.

"I should floo the Ministry immediately," Octavius says, thinking out loud as his sock-clad feed dig a furrow into the floor. "Tracey, do you want to come with me to fill out those forms?"

Tracey's face turns into a beacon of love and relief at those words, nodding furiously. "Yes!" she shouts, immediately beginning to shoo everyone out of her room. "Go, go! I need to change!" she announces, Sirius laughing as he's upended out of his chair and booted into the hall, scratching his hair.

"What about Daphne?" he argues. "I was pretty comfortable there."

Tracey rolls her eyes. "You know what she's like in the morning, give her five minutes and she'll be out light a light. I'll see you in a few minutes Occy!" she exclaims, slamming the door.
As I walk back to my room I can hear her furiously tearing through her wardrobe, muttering and cursing excitedly over what to wear.

I smile. Who says a little bit of murder can't do any good?

-:-

I pick a slightly dazed looking Astoria from the heavily trampled grass at the portkey site, a wizard in a hilariously bright zoot suit hurriedly waving us through to the World Cup campsite, a look on his face that speaks of the incredibly exhausting effects of monotonous work.

Poor guy.

We tread downhill towards the campsite, Terra handing off a few quid plus tip to the confused muggle worker. I shake my head, wondering once more why the Ministry decided to have the finals at a bloody muggle campsite of all places. It's not like they couldn't have warded the place to hell and just made a bunch of people forget that there's a campsite there for the few days that the event goes on for.

"Oh my God, do you see that guy?" Daphne giggles, pointing not-so-subtly at a wizard making his way through the teeming throng of campers wearing a garishly yellow coat that very strongly resembles the one worn by Paddington Bear.

Did I mention that he's wearing only a garish yellow coat?

"What the… what?" Tracey murmurs, staring in horror. "Is that supposed to be muggle clothing? Has he ever heard of, you know, jeans?"

Astoria meanwhile is having a hard time breathing due to laughing so hard, holding her belly as she cackles silently. I put my hand on her shoulder and help direct her towards our tent as we follow mum, dad, and Sirius, the honorary cool uncle of the group.

Apparently, we're meeting up with Andromeda, Ted, and Dora as they're staying with us. I think Sirius is going to finally work out introducing them back into the Black family this weekend. Unfortunately, Remus wasn't able to attend the festivities as the finals are occurring only two days after the full moon, and he's going to be a bit too knackered to enjoy it. He described the after-effects of the change as akin to 'the worst hangover that has ever, and will ever occur, and it somehow keeps getting worse.'

Poor guy.

After a few minutes of pushing our way through the bustling and very poorly dressed crowd of partiers, we make it to the tent.

It's much closer to the stadium than the Weasley's tent was due to Sirius shelling out to get a more convenient spot. Our seats aren't nosebleeds this time as well, which I'm thankful for. I didn't get the best chance to keep track of the game last time around, and I want to get a bit of tasteful excitement in before I go off and put down a few drunken Death Eaters.

Life can't all be destruction and mayhem.

The tent is quite tall, looking more like an enclosed canopy than anything. It's made out of a rich green fabric that somehow manages to look elegant yet sturdy at the same time.

I follow in with the rest of the girls to get a look at the place, and my jaw drops.
Space expansion charms are *amazing.*

It's like a tiny little replica of the Greengrasses public sitting room, accompanied by a fireplace, liquor cabinet, and a slew of loveseats and sofas surrounding a coffee table set in front of the roaring fire.

To the right of the fireplace, there's a door leading to a small, open kitchen, with a large circular dining table surrounded by a set of chairs, looking very much like a modern take on King Arthur's round table.

Off to the left, there's a staircase.

A fucking *staircase.*

The charmswork on this place is downright incredible.

Above the staircase is a tiny plaque reading, 'bedrooms,' so I don't have to do too much mental work to figure out what's in that direction. Knowing the Greengrasses, every single one of them must have an en-suite bathroom with accompanied magical plumbing systems.

Oh, the wonders of an aguamenti charm sealed into a wardscheme, as well as vanishing charms placed onto the toilets. Magic is amazing.

"Helene, are you alright dear?" Terra asks, walking over and placing the back of her hand over my forehead as if to check for fever.

I blink awkwardly, realizing that I'm standing stock-still in the middle of the tent. "Yeah, yeah, I'm alright," I mutter, still taking everything in. "This tent is… the charmswork is amazing. How did you ever get your hands on something like this? It must have cost quite a bit."

Terra laughs, looking about the tent proudly. "It's been with the Greengrass family for a while now. Comes with the name, you see. Historically, the Greengrasses were a family of herbologists, and a lot of travel is involved in a field like that," she explains, gesturing around herself. "So, this was commissioned two centuries ago by Octavius' great-great… well, great something or other," she laughs, holding her hand over her mouth. "This was what they stayed in when they were hunting down rare plants."

I nod along as she tells her story, imagining an almost Ernest Hemingway like man venturing around the jungles of South-America looking for rare tropical plants while still living in the lap of luxury.

Magicals are fucking weird.

A tall woman with long black hair, tight ringlets fluttering over her shoulders walks over to me, shaking my hand. I have to shake my head to get the similarity to Bellatrix out of my head, the woman looking remarkably similar to the deranged killer, the most discernable difference being her kindly demeanor and soft, motherly features. "You must be Helene Potter, it's so good to finally meet you," she says, smiling at me.

"Andromeda?" I ask, the woman nodding in response.

"I don't know if Sirius mentioned it, but we're working out me and my family's induction back into the House of Black," she mentions, her face lighting up. "So, I might be an aunt of sorts in the future."

I smile back at her. "Sirius did mention it, and it's great to meet you. He told me a while back, but I had to keep it under wraps. Apparently, Sirius loves his surprises."
"That son of a bitch," she mutters, putting her hand over her mouth in shock. "I didn't say that out loud, did I?"

"Don't worry, he gets that reaction out of everyone."

Andromeda laughs, her voice sweet and rich. "Gods, I forgot how ridiculous the man can be." She smooths out her light jumper, waving me off. "Don't let an old woman keep you, you go and enjoy the festivities. I'm sure we'll be seeing more of each other in the future."

I wave back at her, turning around to see a blonde blur speeding towards me. "Helene, Helene!" Astoria shouts, nearly knocking me over as she stampedes down the stairs and ploughs into me. I jump in fright, having not even seen her go up them in the first place.

Damn she's fast.

"Let's go find everyone else!" she exclaims excitedly, jumping around, Andromeda smiling kindly at the cheerful girl.

I smile at her. "You want to wait for Daphne and Tracey first? I think they would be pretty frustrated with us if we went to go meet up with Hermione and the others without them."

Astoria scowls playfully, before nodding her assent. "I'll go get them!" she says, already racing back up the stairs to forcibly drag the two girls down.

Of course, she does just that, Daphne and Tracey swearing loudly, much to Terra's chagrin, as they're torn away from whatever they were doing.

"Calm down Astoria! We still have plenty of time before the game starts!" Daphne exclaims, an odd mix of frustration and playfulness in her voice. Tracey stumbles in behind her, laughing loudly at Astoria's excitement.

"No! Let's go find them! Come on!" Astoria shouts, racing towards the tent-flap.

I roll my eyes. "I'll go make sure that she doesn't run off," I say. "You two coming with me?"

Tracey looks to Daphne, who shrugs. "Might as well, not much to do here except lounge around and eat."

The three of us head back outside, quickly catching sight of Astoria, who's jumping up and down, a hand held over her eyes to block out the sun as she scans her eyes over the campground. "I can't find them!" she chirps, frowning slightly.

I walk over and take her hand so that she doesn't run off again. She's so full of energy that she can remind me of an eight-year-old at times. "Well, Hermione told me that she's staying with Luna. I know that Lisa is staying with Padma as well, and I think I know where the Weasleys are camped out if all of you want to go and grab Ginny."

"That sounds like a good plan to me," Daphne says. "We can go and get Hermione and Luna. Do you want to get Ginny and then we can all meet by Padma's tent?"

I nod, leading Astoria through the teeming crowds as she ooh's and aah's over the different sights and sounds. She laughs excitedly when she sees a Bulgarian man fire breathing, rampant lions twirling around burning iridescent dragons, spiraling towards the sky. I have to say; the magical version of the carnival trick is much more impressive.
After stopping to watch some of the entertainers, a parade of people marching around on stilts, decked out in their countries colours, as well as a piss poor excuse for a snake charmer who nearly gets his nose bitten off by the viper he's trying to work with, we finally come across the Weasley's homely tent.

I walk over and stick my head in, knocking on a post to announce my presence. "Hello! Is there anyone there?" I call, Arthur Weasley poking his head out and smiling widely at me, his bright red hair looking slightly tousled as he tries to get the tent in order.

"Helene Potter! It's so lovely to meet you!" he cries, striding over and shaking my hand, his grip firm yet gentle. "Please! Please! Come in," he babbles, waving me in. "Were you looking for Ginny? I seem to recall her mentioning you this summer." He looks at me for a moment, a sad smile on his face. "As her Father, I'd like to say thank you for talking to her. You've always been a huge role model of hers, and after… after Ron's passing, you've been a bit of an emotional rock for her as well."

"I'm so sorry for what happened Mister Weasley," I murmur, bowing my head slightly. "It means a lot to know how much I mean to Ginny. I don't know her too well, but my sisters and I, as well as our friends hope to get to know her better."

"Thank you very much," he says, eyes knitted tight as he swallows heavily, still very much feeling the effects of the loss of his son. "Ginny is just over that way." He points off towards a tiny ramp, patterned crimson drapes drawn together by a ragged golden string marking the entrance towards Ginny's room. "I'll leave you to it, but if you need anything don't hesitate to get me, alright?"

He wanders off to continue setting up the tent, a spot of cleaning being done judging by the look of recently scourgified furniture.

Astoria and I walk up the small ramp, unlacing the impromptu door and walking into Ginny's room.

It looks much like her room at the burrow. A single bed next to the wall, clothes strewn about the place, as well as a smattering of band and quidditch posters tacked to the walls, most of them the familiar green of the Holyhead Harpies.

Ginny is lying on her bed, knees bent as she reads, the book propped up on her thighs.

"Go away Fred, George. I'm busy," she exclaims, not bothering to look up at us.

"Well, we're not Fred and George," I say, looking at Astoria who giggles.

"I don't think I've ever been called Fred before," she snarks, laughing even harder when Ginny jumps in fright.

"Helene! Astoria! Merlin, you scared the hell out of me!" she gasps, hand held over her heart. "What are you two doing here?"

"Well, Astoria and I were in the neighbourhood and we wanted to see if you'd like to join us. We were getting together with Hermione and the other girls. See the little shops, maybe get some souvenirs?"

Ginny smiles widely, setting her book down and throwing on a pair of sandals before I can even blink. "Say no more!" she cheers, running forward and taking my arm. "Let's go find everyone else!"

Leading the two giggling girls, one I'm amazed to find has the ability to laugh after what she's gone through, we work our way towards Padma's families tent.
As we're weaving our way through the crowds, I manage to spot an oddly familiar glint of silver.

I flick my eyes over, eyes widening when I recognize Fleur Delacour walking with her sister, Gabby, who immediately spots me and starts frantically jabbering to Fleur, jumping and pointing in my direction.

Fleur looks up, locking eyes with me and frowning for a moment, before walking towards us.

"Bonjour," she drawls, Gabby shyly hiding behind her. "I'm sorry to bother you Miss Potter, but my sister is quite the fan of yours. If it's no trouble, would you be able to sign an autograph for her?"

I gawk for a moment, blinking stupidly. "An… autograph?" I stutter, Gabby now blushing furiously. I pat my pockets, realizing that I don't have a pen or quill on me.

"Helene has a fa-a-an!"

Cheeky little bugger.

I cast a playfully annoyed look at her, turning back to Fleur. "Sorry, I've never done this before," I apologize, rubbing the back of my head sheepishly. Quickly, I summon over a fallen branch, snapping it in half and transfiguring the two pieces into a sturdy manila card and a simple fountain pen. "Er- who should I make this out to?" I ask, looking up at Fleur and suddenly being struck by how horribly gorgeous she is.

Holy Mother of God.

It's not as if I didn't realize how pretty she was in my last life, but I feel that I had placed her on an unreachable pedestal. This… impossible to even begin to think of ideal of a witch, ethereal in magic, mind, and body.

Now? All I can see are pearlescent blue eyes, shining at me inquisitively, an immense wealth of cleverness and talent hidden behind cerulean walls. She cocks one silvery eyebrow, lips quirked into a facsimile of a grin as she catches me staring at her. I have to tear my eyes away from her own, casting them downwards and finding myself entranced by the surreal vision in front of me. Soft, porcelain skin and sharp, well defined cheekbones that lead into the most inviting lips I've ever set eyes on.

I realize that I must be blushing something fierce, imperceptibly shaking my head and putting up my occlumency barriers to clear my mind of any lascivious thoughts.

Self control Helene.

Fleur's eyebrow raises even higher at how suddenly I've collected myself, and her smile grows even wider. "That would be for Gabrielle Delacour," she intones, her accent thick and oh so enticing.

I turn my eyes towards the shy little girl hiding behind her older sister, grinning widely at her as I sign the card with a flourish. "For… Gabrielle Delacour, my first and best fan," I say, handing the card to her, Gabrielle tentatively reaching out and snatching it from my hands, holding it close to her chest as she stares up at me in adoration. "I hope you two enjoy the game, make sure to stay safe though, yeah? I've heard that parties at events like this can quickly get out of hand… what with all the drinking," I add, hoping that the two aren't caught up in the travesty that's sure to happen later this evening.

Fleur gives me an odd look at that but nods all the same. "Thank you, Miss Potter," she says, turning towards her sister with another raised eyebrow. "…et ques disons-nous?"
Gabrielle looks to the ground, the absolute picture of cuteness as she puts her hands behind her back and quietly says, "Merci beaucoup, Mademoiselle Potter."

"Aucun problème," I reply, pushing the extent of my French to the limit with that short reply. "Well, I have to be going, but you two have fun!" I say as I pull Astoria and Ginny away from the image of beauty, Ginny blatantly gawking at Fleur.

"I've never seen a girl who looks like that before," she murmurs, a dazed look on her face. She suddenly realizes what she's said and clenches her jaw, a flash of fear passing over her. "Don't… don't tell my family I said that, please?" she begs, swallowing heavily.

I look curiously at her. "I won't, but why would that be a problem? I had a hard time tearing my eyes away from her myself," I admit, Astoria giggling at me.

"Did you think she was pretty Helene? Helene and Fleur sitting in a tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" she bursts, chanting playfully, a few passersby chuckling at her childish announcement.

Ginny shrinks into herself even more, biting her lip furiously.

"Hey, hey, what's going on?" I say, concerned as I kneel down in front of Ginny, placing my hands on her arms reassuringly. "Are you alright?"

She shakes her head nervously. "You… you really don't know, do you?"

"About what?"

"A witches witch… they're not… well. It's not talked about," she says flatly, staring at the ground. "Especially someone like you? A Lady of her House? People would lose their minds."

"Really? I mean, I thought it wasn't… mentioned in 'good pureblood company,' but I thought that was just the extent of it."

"No. It's pretty bad. My aunt… she's not really part of the family anymore. I heard mum talking about how she settled down with a halfblood lady after Hogwarts and was kicked out of the Prewitt's. No questions asked, just gone."


Just another thing to add on to how backwards this bloody country is.

"I won't mention what you said Ginny, but you should know that I'm probably going to make some waves some day. I'm a witches witch through and through. Wizards are just so… ugh," I shudder playfully, winking at her. Ginny's eyes widen dramatically at my admission and inadvertent coming out. "Astoria, I trust that you can keep your lips sealed on this?" I add, turning towards my little sister.

She nods furiously, making a motion of zipping her lips, suddenly quite serious. "Not a word of it," she promises.

"Alrighty. Well, enough interruptions! Let's be off!" I announce, pointing ahead and leading the two of them to the rest of the girls.

-:-:-
I'm sitting in the tent after the game chatting happily with Sirius as the shouts of glee turn into shrieks of fear, a loud explosion in the distance rocking our glasses, the liquor cabinet shaking violently as the bottles inside clink together loudly, the chandelier above us swinging from the shockwave.

"Well, looks like it's time," I say matter-of-factly, flicking my wand out of its holster as Sirius downs the last of his drink, removing his own as well.

"I'm going to get everyone together, you're splitting off in the commotion, right?" I nod in reply, Sirius pursing his lips. "Meet us where we portkeyed in as soon as you can."

Terra takes that moment to thunder down the stairs with the girls in tow, Octavius hot on her heels. "What's going on?" she asks, worry in her eyes, her normally calm voice thin and warbled. The Tonks' had left earlier, wanting to get an early night due to the whole family still working the next day. Good that they don't have to deal with what is to come this evening.

"An attack by the sounds of it, maybe a riot," Sirius answers, leading everyone out of the tent, Daphne, Tracey, and Astoria following with wide, terrified eyes, their wands held in shaking hands.

Rapidly, Octavius and Terra dismantle the tent, stowing it away in a satchel and hanging it over Octavius' shoulder. "Let's get out of here, everyone stay close together," Octavius says, Terra pulling the girls in close as we begin to make our way out of the forest, Sirius watching our back as we fight our way through the panicking throngs of drunken festival goers, horrible screams echoing off in the distance.

A fireball erupts somewhere to the right, startling everyone. I take that moment to quickly slip Death's cloak over my shoulders, placing my wand to my throat to distort my voice as I disappear from sight, making my way towards the panicked shouting.

I have to dodge around the fleeing mob, the familiar sight of a man in a bright yellow coat and nothing but scampering over liquor-soaked grass that seems to quickly draw in the spreading inferno in front of me, great flames reaching for the low hanging branches above, pine needles crackling loudly as they burst from the heat.

I tread carefully, yet quickly, pained and fearful screams growing louder and louder as I march onward.

I notice a duo cackling loudly as they spew large gouts of fire from the ends of their wands, swinging their weapons dangerously and without any worry for themselves or others as they wreak havoc over the campground.

Quickly, I snap off bone-breaking hexes, the men screaming out in pain as their knee caps shatter loudly, collapsing to the ground like marionettes with their strings cut, their wands flying from their hands.

I walk up to them, pulling back their hoods and removing their masks, two unfamiliar, yet undeniably aristocratic faces staring up at me.

Definitely pureblood elites.

"Who the fuck are you?" one of the two growls, a heavyset man with long, curled brown hair.

The other man groans pitifully, eyes spinning in their sockets as he deals with the pain of organic shrapnel having torn through the ligaments of his knees.

Did I say bone-breaking hex? I meant bone-exploding.
"Nobody of consequence," I reply, stunning the two and snapping their wands, leaving them next to their comatose bodies as I carry on.

Fingers crossed I come across my old friend Lucius tonight. I know I said that I was going to maim first, but that man deserves everything coming to him, and if I'm the one to remove him from this earth, then even better.

I continue forward, making my way deeper and deeper into the forest, the roaring of the fires around me beginning to ache on my ears, the blistering heat causing sweat to drip from my forehead. I cast a cooling charm over myself, staving off the sweltering heat for a moment as I set eyes on a group of just over a dozen Death Eaters. The same group of Death Eaters that nearly killed the muggle family overseeing the campsite in my last life.

Just on time, I see them levitate the terrified muggles, the family screeching in confusion and fear as they're lifted into the air by an unseen force, eyes bugging out of their skulls as they realize that magic exists.

In a flash, I've sent a massive gust of air towards the Death Eaters, causing them to stumble and lose their hold on the terrified family, who collapse to the ground in a confused heap, quickly scrambling to their feet and rushing off into the trees, the Death Eaters roaring in fury at losing their catch.

They quickly form a circle, firing killing curses errantly into the trees as they attempt to catch me.

Furious at how rash they are to be indiscriminately casting the most lethal of curses, I punch down with one fist, a wall of air slamming into the group from above and flattening them. One Death Eater is caught off guard, grunting loudly as his leg snaps, feebly attempting to crawl back to his feet with one crippled limb.

Before they can react, I'm snapping off another series of bone-exploding hexes, a handful of the men falling to the ground screaming in pain, sharp splinters of bone flying outwards and peppering their comrades, tearing through robes and skin alike.

I march forward, ducking under a curse sent my way as I continue to fire spell after spell. A cutting curse is laced through the confusing mass of light and sound, clipping my waist and tearing a ragged slice through my midsection, causing me to hiss loudly and hold my hand to the wound.

I'm good at one on one, but fighting a group of enemies? Especially ones that are prepared for a fight? Not exactly my area of expertise.

I cover my eyes as an incredibly bright light suddenly bursts in the middle of the clearing, two of the Death Eaters falling over as their skin is seared from its bones from the explosion, the others howling as their robes are set alight, pure white flames dancing across the inky black cloth and devouring swaths of the fabric. The men scramble to put out the fires, shouting in fear as the flames fight all attempts to be choked out, instead growing steadily and eating away at the men, their bodies crumbling to ashes in front of me.

Holy fuck, that wasn't my spell. That definitely wasn't me. That almost felt like…

Before I can finish that train of thought, the few Death Eaters left have regrouped, advancing towards me and casting furiously as they attempt to put down the one responsible for decimating their ranks. Jabbing my wand forward, another barrage of lethal hexes and curses are emitted from the tip, finishing off the panicked group of murderous bastards, the final few collapsing as if their legs were cut out from under them.
Well, they were, judging by the detached limbs that are leaking thick crimson lying about the clearing.

I walk into the clearing, wand still held out in-case my unseen helper decides that they want to attack me as well. "I'm checking the bodies! Seeing who they are!" I announce, one hand held high as I move forward.

"That's fine with me, I was about to do the same," the stranger says, their voice as distorted as mine as they walk out of the shadows.

I pause for a moment as I take them in. They're hooded as I am, their face shrouded and indiscernible. The stranger is tall, not incredibly tall, but looking to be about six feet. I can't get a good idea of their gender or physique underneath the baggy white robes they're wearing, which are also nondescript.

I do notice that their robes are shockingly clean. Not a speck of mud, dirt, nor blood to be found. Interesting.

I tuck my wand away, fingers flexed and ready to fight back as I kneel down and begin to lift the hoods off of the Death Eaters, recognizing a few of them.

Avery, Nott, and Crabbe Sr. are amongst the attackers, their vacant eyes gazing off into nothing, mouths agape in fear and anger. A few of the Death Eaters are burnt beyond recognition, and it's going to take a full autopsy and a look over the men's wands to figure out who they were, something that's beyond my ability.

I curse under my breath. No Lucius, unfortunately.

I groan as I get back to my feet, remembering the wound at my side. I move to pass my wand over the cut before realizing that there's no open hole in Death's cloak, the article having somehow knitted itself back together in the confusion.

Well, I didn't know it could do that. Neat.

Looks like I'll have to take care of the cut later.

"Thank you," the stranger says, bowing their hidden head towards me in recognition. "I helped the muggle family get to safety, they're just off in this direction." The turn slightly, pointing behind themselves deeper into the trees. "I don't think they would have gotten out of there alive without you."

"No, thank you," I say, shaking my head, my hood flitting slightly in the wind. "They managed to catch me by surprise, and I'm unused to fighting so many people at once. Whatever spell you used earlier was incredibly helpful and probably saved me a lot of trouble." I hesitate, before deciding to ask the question niggling away at my mind. "What spell was that earlier? I've never seen such a thing."

The figure tilts it's head curiously. "It's nothing you would be capable of casting, that I can say."

I laugh wryly. "Humour me."

The stranger pauses, before snapping their fingers and causing a pitch white burst of flame to erupt between the two of us, the blindingly bright inferno vanishing as quickly as it appeared. "Like I said, it's not something you would be capable of casting."
My breath catches, and I freeze. Is this person… could they be?

"I didn't know there was anyone else like me," I whisper, staring askance at where the flames once were, my mind racing.

"Like you?"

"A…"

I pause, unsure of whether or not I should say it.

No! This could be someone just like me! This could be someone who's gone through what I have, who knows what I know.

I have to take this chance. I can't let this just slip past me, not matter how rash I'm being.

"A Necromancer."

The stranger freezes, hand clenched tightly around their wand. "The opposite, in fact."

My eyebrows climb into my hairline, shock washing over me. "An Albumancer! That's incredible!" I gasp, amazed, before my mind carries on with an entirely different train of thought. "I thought… I thought it was one or the other. Only one of us could be in the world at a time… why does your magic not hurt me?"

The figure tilts it's head once more, almost serene as they stare at me with sightless eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Well… I've found phoenix song to be painful, so why am I not uncomfortable to be in your presence? I'd think that such opposite magics would react in some way, wouldn't they?"

The stranger scratches their chin, a lonesome finger disappearing into the depths of their hood. "That does make sense. I guess this is something I'll have to look into."

Suddenly very unsure of myself, and fully aware that I'm having a more in-depth and very personal conversation with a complete and utter stranger than I've ever had with my family or Severus, I decide to ask a question that's bothering me much more than it should. "If I may ask, why are you not disgusted by me? I would assume most people would be horrified to find themselves speaking to a Necromancer."

"Our abilities are nearly identical, why would I be disgusted?" The figure shrugs, playing idly with the hood of their cloak, pinching and tugging at the fabric. "I've seen too much pain and suffering in my life to decry someone else when they use Dark Magic for good. You killed these Death Eaters and saved that family, that alone tells me all I need to know about you."

I startle at the oncoming sound of shouting aurors, the (incredibly late) response team making their way towards us. I look up to see the Dark Mark flying above the tree line, a shimmering emerald snake idly coiling about itself as it hangs from the open maw of a distorted skull, it's teeth bared in challenge.

Looks like Barty Crouch Jr. escaped as planned.

I turn to move away, before looking back momentarily at the Albumancer. "If things are the same for you as they are for me… good luck with whatever you've been brought back for. I wish you the best."
"Thank you, and the same to you as well," they reply, vanishing in a flash of light.

Huh, flashing, blinking. Same thing I guess.

Deciding to do the same, and not at all interested in another confrontation with Amelia, I blink into the tree-line near the portkey site, glancing around before removing Death's cloak and stuffing it into my pocket, the fabric magically compacting and comfortably sliding into the small receptacle.

I wave my wand over my side, gritting my teeth as I incant the Aramaic healing charm, my side knitting together before me, thin strings of skin reaching across the miniature ravine and pulling the two sides back together, sealing shut.

Pulling my shirt back down over my hips, I tousle my hair to make myself look sufficiently frazzled, before rushing out of the tree-line towards the portkey site.

"Octavius! Terra! Sirius!" I shout as I sprint forward, the concerned group huddled together in the empty and almost demolished field, many people having strolled or fled through the small clearing over the day.

I manage to recognize them in the dark, Terra sobbing loudly as she runs towards me, pulling me into a hug and cradling my head against her chest. "Helene! You had us so worried!" she cries, running her fingers through my hair. "Where were you? Are you alright?" she asks, holding me out in front of her and kneeling down, scanning me with her eyes and patting me down to make sure I'm in one piece.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," I reassure her, smiling awkwardly. "I just got separated from everyone in the confusion. Is everyone else okay?"

"Everyone is fine," Sirius pipes up, nodding towards the small pile of terrified girls that I didn't notice earlier.

Daphne, Tracey, and Astoria are all cuddled up next to each other, eyes puffy and red from crying. "You're safe!" Daphne shouts, walking over and hugging me as well. "Don't do that again, please," she begs, burying her head in my shoulder. "I thought... I thought the attackers got you."

"I'm alright," I say, patting her back and looking over her shoulder, nodding at Tracey and Astoria, who sniffle tiredly and nod back. "Let's get home, yeah? I'm sorry for worrying everyone."

The adults each take one of us, Octavius being the most used to apparating multiple people taking both Daphne and Tracey.

We land off at home, everyone awkwardly stumbling off to bed, exhausted by the days events and the fear and excitement that came with it.

I don't fail to notice Daphne slinking off to Tracey's room, evidently too scared to sleep on her own tonight, nor Astoria following behind Octavius and Terra, the two not uttering a single complaint and instead inviting their daughter in to the safety of their bed.

I march off to my own, still riding the high from battle, deciding to take a shower before bed.

I quickly clean my teeth, before I disrobe and step into the hot water, letting it cascade down my back as I stand there and think.

An Albumancer. Someone like me.
Well, not someone like me, but as close as once can be. As close as someone can come to truly understanding what it's like to have been brought back to life... if that's what happened to them as well.

Would an Albumancer have been just... brought into life? Would that be the case? Does that even make sense? I mean, isn't everyone technically brought into life? I don't know if it would be Life's prerogative to take care of something like that, considering Death was the one to send me back.

God, my head hurts just thinking about it.

So, I don't know the specifics behind this person's... *travels*, but I want to know. Is this what it's like to truly be a Ravenclaw? This burning need to discover every bit of errant knowledge? Or am I just curious because I want to learn more about the one person who could truly understand me?

I groan in frustration, realizing that I'm probably never going to run into this Albumancer ever again. Knowing my luck, it's either that, or they'll somehow come to the conclusion that I have to die and will begin to hunt me down.

One of the two.

I quickly wrap up my shower, drying off and throwing on underwear and a large shirt, unceremoniously tossing myself into bed and falling asleep to many thoughts of 'what if?'

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for my piss-poor French. I never paid any attention to the mandatory language classes in High School.
The six of us are chatting excitedly in the Hogwarts Express compartment, the newly christened Tracey Greengrass wearing a pristine grin, one that she's worn ever since she was brought into the family a few weeks ago.

"I can't believe that I'm finally a Greengrass," she mutters once again, a dazed look on her face.

"You always were, it's just finally official," Daphne says, smiling widely at her new sister. "It just took us a hell of a lot longer than expected."

Hermione claps happily. "It is exciting news! I'm so happy for you!"

Tracy just grins back at her, Luna smiling serenely in the corner of the compartment as she whispers to Ginny, the red-headed girl putting her hand over her mouth as she giggles at whatever absurd joke Luna must have just told her.

Lisa and Padma are hunkered down next to each other, Padma poring over the fourth-year Defence book. She looks up at me, noticing my gaze. "I want to make sure I'm ready in the case that we have another maniac as a professor this year, it's a shame that Lupin wasn't able to stick around."

I nod. Remus wasn't ousted as a werewolf at the end of the year due to Severus being much less of a dour prick than he once was. Not that Severus isn't a dour prick, he's just a lot better than he used to be. No, Remus was hired by Sirius to help him with the incredible influx of parchmentwork he's been inundated with that he's become one of the biggest players in the Wizengamot.

After the attack on the World Cup, and many of the 'reformed' Ex-Death Eaters being found dead or arrested while still wearing their old mask and robes, nearly every neutral leaning member of the Dark bloc joined in with Sirius and Octavius. Many of them were more than happy to avoid being vilified for hanging around with the more unsavoury types that ran the political show in Britain for the last few decades.

Lucius Malfoy is understandably furious, having lost nearly half of his supporters, as well as many of his 'friends' due to my or the mysterious Albumancers murderous tendencies.

Speaking of the Albumancer, I wonder if I'll ever see them again?

I know that I'll probably run into them some day, but I'd like to get to know this person, to see if they'll be able to help me in the war against Voldemort. I got lucky, beyond lucky when I fought with Dumbledore, and I'm terrified at the prospect of Voldemort somehow incapacitating me permanently.

Sure, I may live to a ripe old age, but that doesn't mean that everything is guaranteed to be peachy. It just means that I'll pass away from organ failure, or some other boring natural cause. It doesn't mean that I can't be locked in a cage somewhere until the day I die.

No, this Albumancer, whoever they are would be an incredible asset to the war.
Hermione notices me getting lost in thought, tapping me on the shoulder softly to bring me back to Earth.

"Thank you," I whisper, smiling at her, Hermione returning the gesture.

"Just wanted to make sure you were still in there," she jokes, poking my forehead playfully. "You looked like you were worried about something."

I sigh quietly, glancing around the compartment quickly. Nobody else seems to be looking over here as they're already caught up in conversation, so I cast a quick *muffliato* over the two of us.

"I ran into an Albumancer at the World Cup," I say, Hermione's eyes widening.

"An honest to God Albumancer?" she whispers, hand clutching at her jumper just over her heart. "Really?"

I nod succinctly. "Yeah, and as far as I can tell they're just as powerful as I am. I'm just wondering whether or not I'll meet this person again, and if they'd be partial to helping me put down Voldemort for good."

"That would certainly make life easier. But do you even know who they are?"

"No, not a clue," I say, shaking my head sadly. "But, if I can subtly reveal myself to them without revealing my powers to the world, I may be able to get into contact with them."

"How would you do that?"

"Tri-Wizard Tournament, it's coming up this year." Hermione looks at me in confusion, her brow knitted into a frown. "It's a competition between three schools, Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang. It's taking place at Hogwarts this year, and I'm going to be participating."

"How do you know you're going to- oh, yeah. Time travel." Hermione smacks herself on the head for forgetting something so monumental. "How would you reveal yourself?"

I scratch my chin thoughtfully. "I could probably use my elemental powers in the First Task. We'll have to take an egg from a nesting mother dragon, and I could subdue it using earth and stone. The only other person I've seen with a handle over the elements was the Albumancer, and if it was published that I had some form of control over nature it would quickly be published in the Daily Prophet. Only the Albumancer would be able to make the connection that my powers are due to me being a Necromancer."

"That makes sense," Hermione murmurs, chewing her lip. "Wouldn't that be giving too much away though?"

"It's the best I can do." I shrug, not having any other thoughts come to mind. "And honestly, it's not the end of the world if it becomes common knowledge that I can control the earth. I won't use my powers over air, and I won't be using any of my more... grim talents in the tournament. I'm only revealing a small portion of what I can do, and Voldemort may come to believe that that's the extent of my unique suite of powers."

Hermione nods thoughtfully. "Actually, that's not the worst idea. He doesn't know you're, well, don't take this the wrong way, a lot older than you look. If he just thinks that you've got a unique control over the earth, then he's going to underestimate you when it comes to everything else."

"That's the plan," I reply, looking at Hermione pointedly as I lower the silencing charm, the pleasant
noise of my friend's conversations quickly reasserting itself.

I sit back and ponder the last few weeks, namely how ridiculous the Ministry and Daily Prophet have been.

There's a bounty on my head for slaughtering the Death Eaters at the World Cup. Or, should I say, 'fine, upstanding members of pureblood society.'

Fucking ridiculous.

They don't know who I am, they don't even have a description of me, nor of any specific spells I may be partial to other than the bone-exploding hex. But, there's a bounty out for me all the same, and it's only five thousand galleons.

I really can't decide whether I should be flattered or disappointed.

Of course, Lucius Malfoy has been baying for blood, the Daily Prophet running a series of interviews with him in which he decries the 'savage monster that murdered his close friends in cold blood,' conveniently forgetting the fact that his friends were in the process of a very violent bit of muggle baiting.

I mean, his friends did happen to die in an incredibly macabre and creative way, what with many of them being burnt to ashes by holy fire, or having their bones turned into shrapnel. Still, I can't imagine it's half as bad as the shit that he's done for Voldemort.

God, I hate that man.

I lean into my seat, shutting my eyes so that I can catch a quick nap before we arrive at Hogwarts.

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Padma flinches noticeably at the entrance of Professor Moody, or Barty Crouch Jr., I should say. I will admit, the man is a dab hand at acting, what with the way he perfectly personifies the incredible paranoia that is Moody. He has it all down to a T. But, I can see that she's already resigned to the idea that our Defence Professor this year is going to be just as dangerous or insane as Quirrel or Lockhart. Poor girl.

I laugh loudly at the screams of outrage as Dumbledore announces the cancellation of the yearly inter-house quidditch games, the man looking relatively nonplussed as students stand up to holler abuse at him. In fact, I find it incredibly impressive that he manages to keep a straight face when confronted by a handful of Gryffindors loudly disparaging him, and calling him a, 'senile geriatric shit,' if what I heard Lee Jordan shouting was accurate. Gryffindors abusing Albus fucking Dumbledore to his face. What a fantastically rare sight. This must be how David Attenborough feels when he happens across a unique or unseen creature in the wild.

Looks like Dumbledore's really lost his place in society. It's a miracle that he's managed to hold on to his position here at Hogwarts, but I know Sirius and Octavius aren't making any efforts to have him removed. That, and he's still got enough contacts and people loyal to him that he's somehow held on tight.

Regardless, it's just a matter of time before the last vestige of power slips out of his grasp. The only reason he's still here is because I allow him to be.

The crowd of students explodes into cheers after the announcement of the Tri-Wizard tournament, instantly forgetting the fact that Dumbledore just traded one form of entertainment that many can get
in on, with one that only three (or four, in this case) can.

I spy Cedric Diggory out of the corner of my eye, an excited smile on his face at the news, a flash of something more in his eyes as I watch him ponder joining the tournament. Doubt, fear, and anticipation all wrapped up into one emotional package.

"I'm not letting you die this time," I whisper, so quietly that even I can barely hear myself.

I'm going to do my damndest to make sure that Cedric lives. He's a stand-up guy. A bit naïve, but he had a normal childhood as far as wizarding lives go, so it makes sense that he's still impressionable.

No, if I have anything to do with it, Cedric is going to survive this upcoming travesty of a blood sport.

As dinner wraps up, the girls and I head to an unused meeting room near the library where we usually stay and spend time together outside of lectures. Tracey smiles at me as she grabs one of the slightly dilapidated sofas that we managed to clean up with a bit of handy use of cleaning and restoration charms.

I'm incredibly glad to have my friend, and now sister back. The tension between Tracey and I was tearing apart our little group, and it would have been awful if everyone split up because of that spat.

I flick my eyes over Ginny, happy to see that she's beginning to come out of her shell after Ron's death. It struck her hard, harder than I imagined it would. I didn't realize the two of them were that close, as the two of us weren't the best of friends in my last life, and Ron rarely spoke of her outside of the standard sibling rivalry complaints.

Ginny was always an object of curiosity for me. Not in a romantic way, but she was always an interesting person. The only girl in a family of seven, tomboyish yet feminine to a fault, and just as quick with her wand as she was with her tongue. She just has so much spirit.

I smile softly. It's good that she's beginning to heal, and although the death of a family member isn't something one just 'comes back from,' she's slowly coming to terms with what happened.

Daphne groans loudly off to the side, Astoria cackling at some awful joke that she must have just told.

"What's so funny?" I ask, tilting my head.

Sticking her face in her hands, Daphne runs her fingers through her hair, sighing in exasperation. "Astoria… she just said Draco Malfoy is… cute." She whispers the last word, a great shudder coursing through her body as the vile comment spills out across her tongue, Astoria giggling even louder.

"It's not like I'm interested in him. He's a prat, but you have to say he is cute," Astoria says, Daphne burying her face even deeper into her hands and looking as if she's about to fall over.

"That's… ugh," I mutter, shaking my head at the imagery of Draco and Astoria dating. "Wouldn't the fact that he's an obnoxious prick detract a little from how you see him?"

Astoria taps her chin thoughtfully. "Well, yeah. But have you seen his arse?"

"Oh, Circe and Morgana preserve me," Daphne curses, staring at her sister in abject horror, before turning to everyone else in the hopes of changing the conversation as quickly as possible. "So, everyone, did you get your dress robes for the upcoming ball?"
"A ball?" Padma shouts excitedly. "That's what those were for?"

"Yeah. At least, that's what I've guessed its for," Daphne muses, shrugging. "After Dumbledore announced the resurrection of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, I assumed that we were having a ball. It's a tournament tradition to have one around Yule."

"Oh. Oh shit, that means that we're going to get asked to the ball," Lisa adds, looking both excited and fearful, one hand flicking over her robes nervously, smoothing out imperceptible creases in the fabric. "Or not asked... shit."

Luna leans back into her seat, her normally dreamy look somewhat bashful as she quietly proclaims, "I do hope that Michael Corner asks me to the ball, he seems ever so lovely."

"I say Dean Thomas myself," Padma interjects, blushing nervously. "He's just so cute!"

I sit awkwardly, all of a sudden very unsure of how to deal with the route the conversation has taken.

Yeah, I've talked about dating before, but that was with the other guys in the Gryffindor dorms. That was... well, it was pretty laddish. Who wants to snog who, which girl has the most impressive... assets, that sort of thing.

This? Fuck.

I'm completely out of my depth.

My eyes flick back and forth, following the now outrageously bubbly girls as they work themselves into a romantic tirade, bickering back and forth over which boy is the closest to their image of prince charming, and which is a disgusting slob, before the dreaded question finally comes my way.

"Helene? Who do you hope will ask you?" Tracey bursts, looking a bit flustered from the sudden talk of boys.

"Knowing Helene, she'll ask him," Daphne pipes up, grinning broadly at her little joke. "She does tend to be assertive."

Good God. So... this is what I was worried about after finding out I was a woman.

The dreaded boy talk.

It's just as bad as I thought it would be.

I look around, nearly everyone on the edge of their seats as they lean forward, eager to hear what I have to say. Hermione and Ginny shoot me mildly apologetic looks, while Astoria looks like she's swallowed something rather unpleasant, her eyes comically bugging out of her face as she glances about wildly, obviously thinking of some way to direct the conversation somewhere else.

I'm sure I would find her expression of discomfort incredibly funny if I wasn't so tense.

I tilt my head back, gazing up at the ceiling and sending a silent prayer to whichever God is listening to make this as painless as possible.

Fuck this.

I can fight Dumbledore, Voldemort, and slaughter scores of Death Eaters while not even noticing the effects of a horde of dementors. I can handle this.
Looks like it's time to come out.

"I didn't really put much thought into it," I say, scratching the back of my head, my fingers getting somewhat tangled in soft curls. "Er- Penelope Clearwater seems quite nice?"

"Yeah, she really… huh?" Daphne splutters, blinking rapidly. "Clearwater? Head Girl, Clearwater?"

"Is there a different student here who goes by the same name?" I ask, trying to defuse the suddenly very awkward situation. "Yes, Penelope Clearwater. Head Girl, Penelope Clearwater."

"She's very friendly," Luna pipes up, smiling serenely, either ignoring the sudden silence that hangs over the group or just completely oblivious. I think Luna just chooses to ignore it all. "I think you two would make a lovely couple."

I notice that Padma has an odd look on her face, and I turn towards her, concerned. "Is everything alright?"

She opens and closes her mouth a few times, wrestling with her thoughts. "Yes, everything is fine," she croaks, her voice thin. "I…"

She begins to trail off, a few indecipherable sounds sneaking out of her mouth, unsure of what to say. "I'm sorry, but I didn't see that coming."

Damnit. This is exactly what I was worried about. Fucking ancient wizarding values. "Be honest, does who I find attractive make you uncomfortable?"

She chokes on her throat, looking askance. "Uh… yes, a little," she answers truthfully, burning with shame and confusion. "I just… my family comes from India, yeah? I only moved here… three? No, four years ago, so that my sister and I could go to Hogwarts. If you think Britain is archaic, well… it's a bit more strict when it comes to stuff like… well, like that, back home."

"Lovely," I comment, breathing out slowly. I make eye contact with Padma, who quickly averts her eyes, still looking quite uncomfortable. "Is this going to affect our friendship? It's not like I'm about to come on to you or anything. You're lovely Padma, but you're just not my type."

Padma's eyes flit around, the other girls still silent.

"It doesn't really bother me," Lisa interrupts, glancing at Padma. "I mean, one of my cousins married a muggle man, and nobody in the family really thinks differently of him."

Daphne puts her hands up in surrender when I look at her. "Hey, I was just surprised. You know me Helene, the family isn't going to shun you because you're gay."

I sigh in relief, Tracey nodding her agreement. "That doesn't change my opinion of you."

"Same here," Ginny comments, tilting her head at Hermione, who gives her a wry look.

"I was the first to know," Hermione says, squeezing my arm. "Helene accidentally let slip in first year, and it's been a bit of a secret between us since then. I'm glad you can finally come out and tell us all," she adds, smiling kindly at me.

Huffing loudly, Padma rubs her eyes slowly. "It's going to take me a bit of getting used to, alright?"

"Hey, that's fine. Honestly, this is on the better side of how I expected all of you to react. Just… let's not let who I see tear everyone apart, alright? I don't want something as simple as who I date to split
apart this little ragtag bunch of hooligans we have going here." I pause, stretching my arms out, my
shoulders cracking loudly. Hermione flinches at the noise, a look of disgust crossing her face as I
smile at her. Hell, she really hates it when I do that.

"I'm off to bed, it's been a long day," I announce, standing up and rearranging my robes. The girls
nod at me, deciding to stay around and chat for a while longer. "I'll see you all tomorrow morning," I
say as I walk off, feeling a touch hurt over Padma's immediate dismissal of me.

I really hope my preferences don't mess things up.

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The first month of classes goes by in a maddening rush, Hermione studying her heart out as she
prepares for her OWL's one year in advance.

That girl is insane.

Much to her chagrin, I'm still topping the charts when it comes to grades. She's taken to calling me a
cheater in private due to my time travel incident. She's definitely got a hell of a competitive streak.

At least I won't be so bored with repeating classes, as the students from the other schools are arriving
today. To be honest, I'm quite excited to see Fleur again.

Yes, a decently large reason of why is because I'm dumbstruck by how horrendously beautiful she is,
and I'd hope that something could come from that, but I remember her calming down a lot as the
tournament progressed the last time around. She lost the stuck-up façade and started to act more
naturally around me and the other champions as the year went by.

I'd like to be friends with that Fleur. The one who doesn't have to pretend to be… well, French. That
false aristocratic demeanour isn't exactly a selling point.

I'm assuming it's because of her Veela heritage that she acts the way she does. Makes it harder for
people to get close to her, and harder for them to hurt her.

I would know, I've a habit of doing the same thing.

I watch as the incredibly large carriage careens out of the sky, six massive abraxan horses kicking
their terribly large hooves as they fly towards the castle, the carriage jumping and nearly rolling over
like a lorry in a collision as it strikes the ground, kicking up a great cloud of dirt and dust as it tears
through the grass in its wake.

Dumbledore strides forward confidently, offering his hand to Madame Maxine as she descends the
steps, the woman leaning down and kissing both of his cheeks amicably, loudly greeting the
disparaged Headmaster.

"Why on earth did they not dress for the cold?" Hermione wonders aloud as the students make their
way out of the carriage, shivering underneath their thin blue robes. "Better question, why don't they
cast a warming charm?"

"Haven't a clue," I respond, shaking my head. You'd think that the students would have dressed for
Scotland's weather, namely mist and snow. I notice a few of the upper year students beginning to
cast warming charms, following Hermione's unheard recommendation as they begin to settle
comfortably, momentarily staving off the frigid Scottish air.

I find my eyes wandering immediately to a flash of silver hair, somehow finding Fleur in the teeming
crowd of students.

I barely even notice as the decrepit, seaweed and barnacle laden ship bursts from the middle of the lake, it's haunted mast shivering as the ship settles itself, tossing to and fro as it's directed towards dry land.

No, I find myself nearly incapable of thought as Fleur stares right back at me, pulling the scarf that covers her face down, revealing a playful smirk as she visually threads the needle. Bright blue eyes war with deep green, the two of us refusing to break contact.

For some reason, I feel like I would lose something if I look away.

"Bloody hell! Is that Krum?" someone shouts, breaking my focus and causing me to avert my eyes, a deep blush colouring my cheeks as the crowd of international students begins to mosey up the steps, heads held high as they follow Dumbledore, making their way to the Great Hall.

I fall in line beside Hermione, my bushy haired friend giving me a knowing look.

"Already set sights on one of the new students?" she asks as we take our seats, a quaint smile on her face.

I chuckle quietly. "Sort of, yeah. I knew her, well, you know when. She's a good person, and I'd like to be her friend this time around. If something comes of that? Well, I wouldn't complain."

Hermione nods her head, before a serious look passes over her. "Just be careful, alright? After that mess a couple of weeks ago, you know, the one where uh- Padma made everyone really uncomfortable?" she asks, glancing around before she says that to make sure that our friend isn't within hearing distance. "I did a bit of research on how… people like us are treated in Britain. It's not pretty, judging by the older news clippings that I've read."

"What do you mean?" I ask, brow furrowed.

Hermione sighs deeply. "People have been killed over it with little to no repercussions, especially if it's a pureblood committing the crime. What's even worse, is the concept of hate crime is completely unheard of here. I know the muggle world isn't much better in some regards, and you'd probably be able to get away with it because of your Ladyship, but me?" She rubs her face, all of a sudden looking incredibly stressed. "A muggleborn? I'd be surprised if I managed to live until I was twenty years old if someone found out."

I reach over, putting my hand over hers and smiling reassuringly. "I won't let anything happen to you, ever, got that? I think I'm going to shake things up this year, what with the Yule Ball and all the press that's going to be there. If anyone, that means anyone, threatens you... well, let's just say they won't be threatening anyone for long."

"Thank you... and God, I didn't even think of that," Hermione gasps, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Just... stay safe, alright? I know you're powerful, but not even you could take on the whole of the Ministry. If they find a way to make you a scapegoat... well, let's pray that doesn't happen. I don't want to hear about you being attacked by a lynch mob."

"Eh, I've been the Ministries scapegoat more times than I can count. Might as well have been attacked by a lynch mob then, what with the hate it got me." I pause, throwing down a silencing charm quickly. "Did you know that in my fifth year, they literally started a smear campaign against me? Calling me a lunatic for professing that Voldemort had returned. Everyone avoided me like the plague. I was harassed constantly, and I wouldn't have been surprised if the few times I got ill that
year were because of hexes that I didn't catch."

Huh, now that I think about it, I did get sick much more often than I normally do in fifth year.

Son of a bitch, I was cursed the whole time!

"That's awful!"

"Yeah. A smear campaign against a fifteen-year-old kid. Fudge is more than incompetent, and they sent a 'ministry approved teacher' that year who spent the whole time torturing me with a blood quill."

Hermione gasps loudly, obviously recognizing what a blood quill is as she puts her hand over her mouth in shock. "No," she whispers venomously. "That's not going to happen again."

"I'll probably end up killing her to be honest," I say, shrugging nonchalantly.

Hermione purses her lips, looking very uncomfortable all of a sudden.

"Sorry, sorry," I apologize, feeling a bit more than rude. "I just… fuck. You know that that break-in at Azkaban was me, right? This is something that I have to do."

Hermione nods sullenly, looking none too pleased. "I assumed as much. I just… it's so hard for me to wrap my head around you, you know? When you're around me and the other girls, you're this caring, friendly, and incredibly funny friend. But when you're fighting? The things you can do… it's downright terrifying."

I swallow heavily, my gut wrenching. "I… I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize," Hermione says, putting her hand up to halt the oncoming stream of verbal reparations. "I know that you're doing what you have to do. I just find it hard to equate the you I know to the one that can wipe out a couple dozen of Death Eaters in the span of an evening."

"Yeah, that makes sense," I concede. Just because it makes sense, it doesn't make me feel any better about it.

I bring down the silencing charm as the Ravenclaw table fills rapidly, the Beauxbatons students clustering together towards the middle of the table, Fleur Delacour sitting down right in front of me.

God damnit.

"Hello again Miss Potter," she articulates, smiling kindly as she takes her seat.

"It's good to see you Fleur. Is Gabby not here with you?"

She shakes her head, looking a touch sad, her silvery hair losing some of its ethereal luster. "Unfortunately, no. She may visit me later in the year, but she is much too young to come to Hogwarts with the rest of us. Only sixth and seventh year students were allowed to come and try their hand at the Tournament."

"That's a shame, but it makes sense," I say, know how close Fleur and Gabrielle were. God, I remember just how terrified she was when she couldn't retrieve her sister from the lake.

Fleur nods sadly, before clapping her hands excitedly and eyeing me in a dangerous manner. "Well, enough about me. How have you been, mon amie, if I may call you that?"
I smile at her, nodding, yet a little worried about her sudden excitable manner. From what I can tell, she seems to be a bit of a prankster. At least, she seems to like putting people on the spot. "That's fine with me." I turn to see a confused Hermione, as well as Padma and Lisa looking curiously at both me and Fleur, their eyes dancing between the two of us. A frown flickers across my face, as Padma looks a touch ill. "I met Fleur at the World Cup before everything went to shit," I explain, Hermione's eyes lighting up in recognition, a sly look passing over her face.

I guess she realized who Fleur is.

Clever girl.

"I didn't know you were going to be here, I'd assumed you'd already graduated."

Fleur's eyebrows raise dramatically as she holds her hand over her heart. "My oh my! Do I really look that old?"

I splutter for a moment, putting my hands up and attempting to explain that I didn't mean it that way, but Fleur just begins to laugh, her voice ringing out like a bell across the hall, rich and sweet as it graces my ears.

"It's fine! It's fine!" she chuckles, wiping her eyes. "I know you didn't mean it that way, mon amie."

Lisa sends me an odd look from across the table, a slight smirk crossed with an inquisitive frown. Jesus Christ, does everyone know I fancy Fleur already?

I praise whichever God happens to be looking down on me as the tables fill with food, and I do my best to avoid speaking by filling my mouth with heaping amounts of the delicious array in front of me.

"Excuse me, are you wanting the bouillabaisse?"

I look up from my meal to see Fleur smiling at me once more, holding a bowl of the seafood stew towards me. Sadistic French woman. She must love to watch me squirm.

I nod. "Thank you, but no thank you. It's a bit too rich for my tastes."

She nods, scooping a large amount out of the bowl and into her own, handing it down the line to the rest of her classmates, who give her an odd look.

I manage to make it through the rest of the meal without making a fool of myself, Fleur taking every opportunity to try and embarrass or fluster me. She would have succeeded if not for my intensive occlumency training. Thank God for that. It helps that I can literally cordon off the part of my mind that finds her horribly attractive for a short while.

Dumbledore drags out the Goblet of Fire, the crowd screaming their applause at the incredible artifact, pearlescent blue flames licking at the mouth of the goblet as they dance within its depths. It really is an impressive piece of magic. I reach out with my own, realizing that it's very similar to Iolaire in how it's been enchanted, the magical equivalent of an artificial intelligence locked within the goblet. This one feels more quite rudimentary in comparison to Iolaire, something I guess would be better described as as virtual intelligence, obviously limited to simply finding out who is 'worthy' of something.

I loudly proclaim my disinterest in the death trap of a tournament to my friends and others that are within earshot, hopefully avoiding the whole 'fuck Potter' train that drove me close to insanity in my
last life.

Dinner wraps up quite quickly after that, Hermione and Lisa ribbing me the whole way back to the dormitory, making comments about 'blonde seductresses,' and doing their damndest to torment me, while Padma is horribly quiet. Looks like I might be moving from one spat to another, but this time, it's completely unjustified.

Of course, my subconscious decides to taunt me as well, as I fall asleep to visions of a tall silver haired woman dancing across Scottish fields.

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I walk into Severus' office, wanting to catch up with him as we haven't spoken since early June.

"Hello?" I call, knocking on the doorframe as I enter the office, Severus looking up from a stack of papers that he's grading, smiling at me.

"Come in, come in," he says, waving me forward and standing up to put a kettle on. "How was your summer?"

"Alright, apart from the mass murder and other shenanigans that I tend to get up to," I answer, Severus looking mildly horrified.

"Let me guess, Azkaban was your doing?" he asks, before shaking his head and cursing under his breath. "Don't even answer that, of course it was. Were you responsible for the World Cup as well?"

I nod approvingly. "You know me so well Severus."

He shakes his head once more, sighing loudly. "Unfortunately, I do."

I laugh loudly, Severus smirking wryly at me. He just shows his love through dry insults and mildly demeaning banter.

"So, what about you? Get up to anything interesting?"

He walks back and hands me my tea, sitting back down as he drums his fingers across his mug. "Well, I went on a trip to South America to retrieve a rare breed of moonshade, which was quite an exciting trip."

"Sounds like fun. Did it go well?"

Severus nods, taking a sip of his tea. "It went as well as it could have gone. I unfortunately didn't manage to harvest as much of the plant as I would have liked to, but that comes with the territory of it only being visible on the full moon and only being found in the Paraguayan jungle near… well, you wouldn't know of the town even if I told you."

"And you didn't manage to tan one bit," I laugh, Severus scowling at me in reply.

"By the way, I had something made for you," he comments, taking another deep sip from his mug and standing up, walking towards a cabinet in the corner of his office. He had something made for me? What on earth could it possibly be?

He pulls the cabinet open, drawing out a pair of deep black boots, as well as a neatly folded set of equally dark battle robes that look to be made out of…
"Is... is that?"

"Yes, it is. This came from our harvest in the Chamber," Severus says, nodding contritely. "They're more fashionable than functional, but the hide is still somewhat resistant to minor charms and hexes, but any physical attacks will still cut through it as it would a very tough leather."

"Wouldn't it act in the same way that dragon hide does?" I ask, wondering why basilisk hide isn't as protective as I thought it would be.

"Unfortunately, no. Dragons are an odd in creature in that they 'drink' in the magic around them, almost like a magical photosynthesis. Dragons can go without food for decades, and their absorption of magic in turn makes their hide incredibly strong even long after death. Basilisks don't absorb magic, instead simply innately powerful, so their hide quickly loses the majority of it's protective properties," he explains, handing the clothing to me.

I reach out tentatively, taking the battle robes and boots from him and finding myself surprised at how light they are.

"The inside is lined with silk, lined with featherweight charms, as well as heating or cooling charms that will activate depending on the weather," Severus clarifies, opening the robes and pointing out the soft black interior of the robes.

I pause to study them. The boots are simple, calf high and quite sturdy, flaring slightly below the knee. A combination of laces and clasps work their way towards the top, making them look quite functional, like a very fashionable pair of combat boots. They end in a soft point, and I tap the end of the boot, noticing that there's steel laced into the toe. Whichever cobbler made these, they must be their Mona Lisa.

I hold out the robes in front of me, my eyes passing over the incredible work of craftsmanship. The robes are single breasted, and the arms taper off towards the wrist, shoulders flaring out into an intimidating point, looking vaguely like a very chic form of leather pauldrons. The coat, not robe, looks like it only closes up over the chest, the bottom of the coat looking like it'll end just below my knees. There's a loose cowl near the neck of the garment that would easily cover my own, and can probably be pulled up over my mouth and nose to add a bit of mystique to the look. I roll the coat over, noticing a loose hood hanging off the back. Yes, there's definitely a running subterfuge theme to this whole outfit.

Tucked into the coat is a pair of snug yet flexible looking breeches, a few shades lighter than the coat. A pair of gloves that I didn't notice falls onto the floor, and I lean over to pick them up, gazing at them intently. They're simple gloves that are elbow length, stitching running across the wrist, once more flaring at the joint and ending in a point, looking dangerous yet distinctly feminine.

"I thought you'd like something to remember her by, as well as an... outfit to wear when you're off and doing whatever it is that you do. Maybe when you start publicly murdering Death Eaters and some such, just please try to avoid killing me if I happen to be brought along on one of those horrific raids."

I look up at Severus with teary eyes. "Thank you... thank you so much," I choke, holding the robes close to my chest like a lifeline. "Thank you."

"It's the least that I could do," he says, putting his hands up in protest. "I'm glad that you like them. Just know that that is the only gift that I will ever give to you, understood?"
I chuckle through my tears, wiping them away with the back of my hand. "Got it. I'll make sure to never mention this to anyone as well, correct?"

Severus smiles at me, white teeth shining in the dim candlelight. "No one would ever believe you. A gift from the bat of the dungeons? Impossible. Hell would sooner freeze over."

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"Are you excited for the Tournament?"


She laughs heartily, garnering a smile from me. "That is very true. Unfortunately, many of our people are stuck in their ways, no?"

"Truer words have never been spoken," I say, as Dumbledore strides into the middle of the room, everyone and their mum crowded about the goblet, eagerly awaiting the reveal of the champions.

A galleon says the Hufflepuffs lose their mind when my name gets tossed out of it.

Hermione glances at me nervously, knowing what is to come but not at all excited about my participation in the notoriously dangerous tournament. I really shouldn't have told her about the dragons, nor about the imminent duel with Voldemort at the end of the year. If worrying was an Olympic sport, Hermione would easily take gold.

Dumbledore calls for silence, hands held out theatrically as he captures everyone's attention.

As much as I detest the man, I have to hand it to him. He does know how to put on a good show.

"May I have everyone's attention?" he calls, his voice echoing powerfully throughout the Great Hall, a tinge of bravado lacing his words. "Tonight, we are gathered to learn who our champions will be! One from each of our prestigious schools. Our guests, the masterful students of Beauxbatons," he announces, gesturing towards those adorned in robes of baby blue, a cheer ringing out from them. Dumbledore sweeps his arms over to point at the Durmstrang students, cloaked in heavy garments of deep crimson, fur lining the necks of their coats. "The scholars of the North! Durmstrang!" With another grandiose wave, he spreads his arms wide. "And last, but not least, you! My wonderful students of Hogwarts. A champion will be chosen from each, and those three will compete for eternal glory!"

The students roar, a deafening cacophony that seems as if it will shatter the great windows lining the Hall, the heavy din reverberating through my bones and throughout the rest of the excited throng.

Yeah. He's a hell of an entertainer.

Dumbledore claps his hands once, a singed piece of neatly folded parchment shooting out of the flames and into his waiting hands. He slowly opens it up, dragging it out as much as possible as he glances over the sheet, lazily, yet with extreme intent, turning his eyes back towards the eagerly waiting students.

"The champion for Beauxbatons is…"

He pauses, a smile tugging at his lips as he scans the crowd, shouting his announcement to the world. "Fleur Delacour!"
My silver haired friend of only four days stands up proudly, smoothing out her robes as she marches towards the far room, being beckoned in by Barty Crouch and Ludo Bagman.

Speaking of which, has anyone ever told Barty that his moustache very closely resembles that of the most horrific dictator to have ever lived?

The prick probably knows that and decided to keep the whiskers cut that way anyways.

Another paper bursts out of the goblet, Dumbledore cleanly snatching it out of the air and unfurling it, clearing his throat loudly. "The champion for Durmstrang… is Victor Krum!"

The normally stone-faced Quidditch professional grins widely, balling one hand into a fist and punching the air in celebration, Karkaroff, the sleazy two-faced bastard, slapping him on the back and loudly proclaiming how, 'he knew that he would be the one chosen.'

What a brilliant way to alienate the rest of your students and put Krum on the spot at the same time. Arsehole.

The goblet erupts for a third time, Dumbledore once more retrieving the parchment and reading it loudly. "The champion for Hogwarts… is Cedric Diggory!"

Cedric bursts to his feet, a bashful smile on his face as his housemates congratulate him emphatically, the Hufflepuffs bursting with pride as one of their own is chosen for a tournament that nobody expected a Hufflepuff to compete in, what with their unfortunate reputation of being the house of 'leftovers.'

Dumbledore glances in my direction, a sour look momentarily crossing over his previously cheerful features as a fourth piece of parchment flies out of the goblet and into his hands.

He takes a deep breath, casting his eyes over the students before settling his steely gaze on me, quietly intoning, "Helene Potter."

I feign shock, eyes wide as I glance around at my classmates surrounding me, a sudden hush falling over the Great Hall. A few of the students begin to mutter amongst themselves, the Hufflepuffs directing venomous looks my way.

"I didn't… what!?"

"Helene Potter!" he repeats, much more forcefully, his voice reaching a tone of anger that I thought he only reserved for when I was attempting (and succeeding) to kill him. I look over the staff table, most of the teachers looking curious, yet scared, Flitwick tugging at his hair as he stares at me fearfully.

Christ, I completely forgot to keep visiting the little guy.

"Come up to the front of the Hall, Helene Potter!"

I get up shakily, eyes flitting about nervously as I walk forward. "I didn't put my name into the goblet," I argue, clenching my fists in what I hope looks like righteous fury. "Is there any way to get me out of this?"

Barty Crouch intercepts me, his moustache bristling as he squares his shoulders. "Whether or not you did put your name in the goblet, you're now involved in a magically binding contract. There's no way out of it."
I flick my wand out its holster, raising it to the ceiling as I loudly intone, "I, Helene Lily Potter, do swear on my life and magic that I did not knowingly place my name in the Goblet of Fire, so I swear, so mote it be." My wand blinks brightly, and I quietly cast my patronus, the threstral leaping from the end of my wand and skittering noiselessly across the stone floor, a soft puff of fog emitting from its nostrils as it surveys the room.

The crowd immediately goes silent, any of the students who understand what I've just done probably wanting to bang their heads against the tables for such a risky display.

Oh! I think I hear Hermione's head thudding loudly against the table behind me. She happened to read up on magical vows after I explained the whole time travel fiasco to her, sending me a couple of incredibly cross letters calling me a 'pig-headed selfless moron,' amongst other things.

She's very creative now that she's become accustomed to cursing.

"Well, that settles that," Crouch murmurs, looking at me with a hint of amazement. "Come with me Miss Potter, we're going to be explaining the Tournament to you and the other champions."

I nod succinctly, glancing briefly in Severus' direction and nodding imperceptibly, the grim man lifting his finger in response as I stride confidently into the room that the other champions have been brought into.

The other champions turn as the door opens, all of them standing silently next to their Heads as Crouch, Dumbledore and I enter the room.

"Are we needed in the Hall?" Fleur asks, looking slightly confused.

I shake my head furiously. "No, but I seem to have been dragged into this travesty of a tournament."

Ludo Bagman takes that moment to clumsily barge into the room, unadulterated excitement gracing his chubby, boyish features.

I can't help but flinch away from him at his incredible likeness to Lockhart, restraining myself from reflexively cutting his head off as the man doddles about. I breathe in deeply, closing my eyes for a moment and attempting to relax.

He's not Lockhart. Lockhart is dead. I'm safe. I'm fine.

"Well, isn't this just fantastic!" he cries, breaking me from my mantra as he rubs his hands together gleefully as he stares at me like I'm a prize horse at the races. Honestly, he probably sees me that way, what with his awful gambling addiction. "We have a fourth champion!"

"No! Her?" Maxine interrupts, blustering. She waves towards me haughtily, nose held high in the air. "What is this nonsense? Dumbledore?"

"I'd like to know that as well," Karkaroff says, his normal frown much deeper than it usually is, thick owlish eyebrows pulled together angrily. "It seems Hogwarts has two champions? Is this what you think passes for good sportsmanship on this awful little island Dumbledore? I demand a second champion of my own."

Fleur glances towards me sadly, thankfully not calling me a 'leetle girl' this time, instead looking resigned to the situation. Krum stands primly, not a hint of emotion on his face as he holds eye contact with me, huffing once before turning his attention back to the argument at hand.

Cedric? Cedric just looks disappointed.
I think I'll have to tell him about the vow as we're leaving.

"I'm afraid that's not possible," Crouch argues, hands held behind his back. "Once the goblet has gone out, it will not be relit until the next tournament. There's no way for us to add second champions to the mix for each school, nor can the young Miss Potter here get out of the tournament," he adds, eyes flicking over me.

"This is… this is absolutely outrageous!" Maxime shouts, her face contorted in fury. "This little girl cannot compete! She's just going to go and get herself killed!"

I spin towards the half-giantess, my lip curled in a sneer. "Little girl? Little girl?" I hiss, venom coating my every word. "I don't think you'll be saying that when I crush the rest of the competition," I boast, quickly sending an apologetic look Fleur's way. "I may not be competing willingly, but I'll be damned if I don't try to win this thing."

Maxime sniffs loudly, lips pursed in contempt. "Crush the competition? I would like to see you try."

I let my ego get the better of me, once more intoning expecto patronum, allowing the macabre Prongs to burst from my wand and rear its head angrily in Maxime's direction, the incredibly tall woman looking shocked at the casual display of notoriously difficult magic, from the wand of a young girl no less.

I wave my wand, dispelling the patronus charm and smirking at her, Dumbledore finally deciding to break up the argument and send us on our way.

"If we could get back on topic?" he asks, looking about the room, the Heads averting their eyes in embarrassment at their childish display. "Thank you. Now, the first task will be occurring on November Twenty-Fourth, and while I would love to give each of you a hint of what is to come, the first task is based upon courage. As such, you will not be notified of what challenge you will be facing until the day of." He pauses momentarily, brushing his fingers through his long and wiry beard. "Do any of you have any questions?"

All of us shake our heads, filing out of the room as quickly as possible to get away from the stifling atmosphere left within.

I feel a hand gently grasp my shoulder as I leave. I immediately pull my arm up and tearing the offending hand off of me, twisting the wrist painfully as I spin around, finding myself face to face with Cedric Diggory.

"Gods! Helene! Let me go!" he cries, cradling his wrist as he looks at me with a touch of fear.

"Sorry about that," I apologize sheepishly, rubbing the back of my head. "I was a bit tense, and I don't uh- I don't really do well with physical contact. Are you alright?" I add, looking at him with no small amount of concern.

He nods shakily, shaking out his wrist and flexing his fingers, obviously finding the quick test of his limb to his satisfaction. "It's alright… things got heated in there," he says, glancing back at the room with distaste. "I just wanted to wish you good luck, and tell you that I believe you when you said you didn't enter your name into the goblet."

"Thank you. Well, I would have told you about the magical vow I took earlier anyways."

Cedric's eyes bug out of his head, mouth hanging open. "Magical vow? Are you insane?"

I laugh at his reaction, tucking an errant strand of hair behind my ear. "Maybe a touch mad. I think I
was born that way."

He chuckles loudly, shaking his head in disbelief. "Well, I guess you've got no shortage of courage. I think I may have to worry about you a bit more when it comes to this upcoming task."

I stick my hand forward, Cedric shaking it enthusiastically. "Good luck, and may the best student win."

"Sounds good to me," Cedric effuses as he wanders off, probably to go and celebrate with the rest of the 'Puffs.

What an unfortunate name for a school house.

"Helene! Helene!" I hear a voice call, one easily recognizable.

"Yes Fleur?"

She walks forward and pulls me into a hug, laughing quietly as I squeak in surprise.

"I'm so sorry that you've gotten roped into this," she says, looking at me sadly. "It's... I don't believe that this tournament is going to go well for anyone. I have a bad feeling about it."

I nod. "I feel the same. There's just... I dunno', something wrong. Well, what with me being brought into it without consent, I'd say it's already off to a rocky start."

"Just stay safe, oui?" she says, lowering her head and looking at me kindly.

I can't help but stare up at her, once more lost in a deep ocean of blue. "Oui, I can do that."

Fleur smiles widely. "C'est bon," she exclaims, turning around and glancing behind her shoulder. "I have to be going, as it seems that Madame Maxine is having a... how do you English say it? Tiff?"

I snicker at that, covering my mouth with my hand before waving her off. "Go take care of your Headmistress, and please tell her that I apologize for what I said earlier. I don't appreciate people looking down on me."

Fleur laughs once more, the sound music to my ears. "I thought her head was about to explode when she saw your patronus charm." She turns to walk away, waving at me as she leaves. "Take care mon amie!"

"Same to you!" I call back as I begin the arduous journey to the Ravenclaw common room, and hopefully to bed.

I'm not too interested in joining whichever impromptu party has probably been started there. Much too tired for such a thing.

After tackling the many, many flights of stairs, I lazily give the answer to the knocker's riddle, opening the door to the common room and muttering, "Oh shit," as I look out upon what seems to be an ocean of drunken teens cheering in my face.

How in the hell did they already get this pissed?

Penelope fucking Clearwater herself pushes her way through the crowd and picks me up excitedly. "Ravenclaws Champion everybody!" she announces as she awkwardly holds me to her chest, the sharp tinge of alcohol wafting over my nose and causing me to wrinkle it disapprovingly.
The Ravenclaws echo their support, a deafening roar bursting throughout the common room.

I blink, feeling a bit dazed by the sudden onslaught of noise.

"Could everyone calm down for a moment?" I ask, holding my hands up. "I'm going to say it once, and I won't say it again. I did not enter my name into the goblet, and I have no real interest in competing in the tournament."

The crowd goes silent, some quiet mutters sneaking their way through the intoxicated students.

By quiet, I mean stage whispers.

They are drunk.

"But!" I add, holding one hand up in the air, finger pointed to the ceiling. "That doesn't mean that I'm not going to try my best to win this thing! I promise you that Ravenclaw is going to take home the Tri-Wizard cup!"

I almost clap my hands over my ears at the sudden outpour of support, the students screaming their hearts out as they cheer for me, a group of seventh-years looking like they want to do nothing more than lift me up and have me surf across the drunken sea.

Of course, I don't allow that, as I'm wearing a skirt at the moment.

Like a whisper, I sneak my way through the party that seems to now be in full swing, trudging up the stairs towards my dorm where Hermione is resting peacefully in bed, a book propped up on her chest.

"Thank you," she says as I put a silencing charm on the door, the raucous din from downstairs no longer reaching up to our room. "You know, that was incredibly stupid of you earlier."

I can't help but laugh at her reaction, Hermione scowling at me. "What? I knew you were going to say that!" I manage to get out between chuckles, Hermione attempting to hide a grin. "You're awfully predictable."

"Well, you are too," she says, setting her book down. "Be careful, alright? I don't want to see my best-friend roasted by an angry dragon."

I cross my hand over my quiet heart, Hermione rolling her eyes in reply. "I promise that I won't be roasted. Really, do you have such little faith in me? That dragon isn't going to leave the pen in one piece."

"Do you really have to kill it?"

I look at her like she's grown a third head. "Do you know how expensive dragon hide is? If I get the Hungarian Horntail again, that's enough to last the next three generations if I someday have five kids, and they manage to have five kids as well," I argue. "Not to mention, dragon hide looks quite dashing."

"Ah? Looking for a way to get into Fleur's good books?" Hermione says playfully, one eyebrow raised. "I didn't know that she was into women in leather."

I groan in exasperation, Hermione laughing at me. "Oh, come off it. If something happens, it happens, but I'm not going to chase her down. I'm sure I'd love to be in a relationship with her, but I've got a lot on my plate this year. Hell, I always have a lot on my plate, and I probably always
"So why not pursue her? I don't get why you're so opposed to asking her out. I thought you wanted to make waves, didn't you?"

I scratch my head. "I mean, yeah, I do, but I don't want to take any chance of losing an already growing friendship."

Hermione rolls her eyes emphatically, deciding to put her book away for good, tucking a mark over her page and closing it, setting it upon her nightstand. "You know, you really act like a boy sometimes, you know that right?"

"You have no idea," I reply, laughing at Hermione's description of me.

God, she would lose her mind if she knew I used to be Harry instead of Helene.

"Well, think of Shakespeare. Better to have loved and lost than to have not loved at all."

"Really? Shakespeare quotes?"

Hermione huffs, crossing her arms. "I'm named after one of his characters, you think I wouldn't have read his entire works?"

I shake my head, stifling a smile at Hermione's expense. "Well, I'm going to get to bed, but I'll think on what you said, yeah? Relationships aren't exactly my forte."

"Just keep it in mind," she says, yawning loudly. "Looks like I should get some rest too. Goodnight!" she adds cheerfully, pulling her blinds closed and settling down for the night.

I cast a quick charm, cleaning my teeth as I crawl under the covers, wondering what would happen if I approached the intimidating woman that is Fleur Delacour.
I'm in a desperate rush to get to my Potions class, when I hear this absolutely hideous noise. Quite honestly the most hideous noise I've ever heard in my entire life, and I had to listen to a dozen or so Death Eaters die screaming just a few months ago.

"Potter! You think you could muscle in on the Tournament, did you? Didn't have enough fame as it is?"

I groan loudly as I turn around, face to face with Draco Malfoy.

"Did you not see the magical vow I took Malfoy?" I ask begrudgingly, knowing better than to even respond.

He snorts loudly, crossing his emaciated arms across his chest and looking at me with no small amount of disdain, his two lackies flanking him. He pulls his hand up to his chest, pointedly flashing the familiar 'Potter Stinks' badge in my face.

I can't help but snort. It would be a bit more intimidating if I was fourteen, and if I hadn't ever dealt with literally anything more stressful than basic bullying in my entire life. But I'm not fourteen, and I've dueled Amelia Bones herself, amongst many others, so I'm not intimidated in the slightest.

"Magical vow? That was just you blinking the end of your wand, that wasn't a magical vow," he sneers, inclining his head to Crabbe and Goyle as he walks forward, wand in hand. "I think you need someone to put you in your place, halfblood."

I flick my wand out of its holster as soon as he says that, suddenly recalling this exact confrontation, and how it ended with Hermione's teeth practically sprouting out of her face, growing at an incredible rate. I seem to remember this class being paired with the Gryffindors and not the Ravenclaws though… huh, I guess small things change as well.

I find myself grimacing mentally as I remember how Severus laughed Draco's attack off, finding it hard to equate the Severus I know now to the bully I once knew him as.

I'm glad to see the man has made great strides in not being an absolute arse all the time.

"Well? What have you got to say Potter?"

I look up, having already forgotten that Malfoy was in front of me. "Nothing really," I intone, eyeing him casually, a relaxed air about me. "I didn't put my name in the goblet. I'll say it as many times as you want me to, but I do not have any interest in competing in the tournament. Cedric is the real Hogwarts champion," I add, turning to the crowd that's gathered around us. "If you want to support Hogwarts, rally behind him. He's much more deserving of the honor than I am." I stop, turning back to Draco. "I know a magical oath isn't infallible by any means, hell, if I obliviated myself it wouldn't
be worth shit considering my wording. There's nothing I know that I can do or say to convince you that I didn't enter myself, so, really, I don't even know why I'm arguing with you over this."

Draco glances around, completely unsure of how to handle someone appealing to the mob rather than simply replying with their own vitriol. "Yeah? You can talk all you want Potter, but that doesn't change the fact that you're a filthy little upstart. If only your parents could see you now. They're probably glad that they're dead and don't have to put up with your pigheaded attention whoring."

I can feel a vein in my neck throbbing dangerously at his horrific statement, how he looks so proud to have brought up my long-dead parents. I grit my teeth, doing my best to ignore his awful diatribe. "Really clever Malfoy. Bring up the dead parents, like I've never heard that before." I laugh sardonically, Malfoy paling somewhat at my response. "What? Do you think I was going to fling spells at you? Grow the fuck up and start acting your age, you're a goddamn disappointment to everything that it means to be Slytherin."

Malfoy snarls wordlessly, waving his wand and suddenly shouting, "Everte statum!" the only sign of the weak banishing hex flying toward me an apparition of a shockwave in the air.

God, today is just like nostalgia alley. Didn't he use this against me when we dueled in second-year?

I throw up a shield, smirking at Malfoy's stunned look as the spell dissipates uselessly against it. "Go on, throw a couple more my way. Get it out of your system," I jibe, grinning.

He begins to attack me, a somewhat impressive onslaught of spells for a student of his age, different hexes and curses bursting vibrantly against my shield, specks of light spraying off of the ethereal barrier like sparks off a fire. I raise an eyebrow as the spells get progressively more and more dangerous, ones that could easily remove a limb or burn someone to the point that even Madam Pomfrey would be hard pressed to fix them up even with magic.

My grin splits even wider as Severus marches into the hall, bristling with fury.

"What is the meaning of this!?" he shouts, grabbing Draco by the scruff of the neck and yanking him off his feet, the miniature blond ponce squeaking in a pitch that even I would be hard-pressed to reach. "Fighting in the halls? With spells that you know could do incredible damage? What in Merlin's name are you thinking Draco?" Severus flicks his gaze towards me, quickly barking out, "Everybody into the classroom! I'll be with you in a moment!"

I nod, letting go of my shield and entering the room, taking my usual seat as I listen to the muted dulcet tones of Severus absolutely annihilating Malfoy just outside of the classroom. I can't really make out what he's saying, but I know from the tone that he's none too pleased.

Well, that certainly went better than last time.

Severus walks into the room with a very dressed down looking Draco in tow, sending one final heated glare Malfoy's way as he takes his seat and kicks off the class.

I get to work quickly, chopping and adding the necessary ingredients to the relatively simple girding potion. Unfortunately, about halfway through it Colin Creevey barges into the room.

"What is it now?" Severus barks, glaring balefully at the terrified Gryffindor.

"Er- uh… ah- I c- came to retrieve H- Helene Potter s- sir!" Colin squeaks, looking absolutely mortified as he stands in the midst of a class full of older students he doesn't know.

"For what, exactly?"
Colin lets muffled yelp, pulling on the neck of his shirt awkwardly as he glances at me, almost sweating buckets. "The, er- weighing of the ah- wands, Professor."

Severus turns towards me, nodding once. "Take your things and go, Potter. I expect you to write an in-depth essay on the brewing process of the girding potion since you're unable to complete it today."

I incline my head in reply, quickly packing up my things and vanishing my half-finished potion, pulling my bag over my shoulder as I follow Colin out of the classroom.

"So, uh… excited?" he asks nervously, an awkward grin plastered over his face.

I shrug nonchalantly. "Sort of? I really didn't want to be in this in the first place, but I'll do my damndest to win, yeah?"

Colin nods, unsure of what to do in my presence. Not that it's much of a presence considering I'm dressed in school robes right now, and not that incredibly daring little outfit that Severus had commissioned for me.

Now that would leave an impression.

We make it to the room that the weighing is being hosted in after climbing a few flights of stairs, Colin waving at me as he scampers off to go back to whatever class he was in before he got pulled away to come and fetch me.

I walk into the room, immediately making my way over to Fleur and smiling kindly at her. I nod at Cedric respectfully as I pass by him, Viktor making momentary eye contact with me, yet averting his gaze rather quickly, turning back to a quiet discussion with Karkaroff.

I do my best to avoid the excited gaze of Ludo Bagman, feeling myself wincing as he looks at me, a pit of anger and disgust simmering deep in my gut.

I shake my head, sidling up next to Fleur. "Ready to face the press?" I ask, gesturing with my head towards Rita Skeeter and her photographer, the two of them standing in the corner and fiddling with their things, Rita eyeing me with a predatory look on her face.

I hope the woman knows better than to mess with the daughter of her employer.

Fleur can't help but sneer, flicking her eyes over the pair with thinly veiled distaste. "Not quite. I've heard a bit about this woman, Rita Skeeter… I haven't been impressed by any it." She pauses, tapping her cheek thoughtfully. "Well, except for her biography on your Headmaster, that was quite well researched, even for a glorified smear piece."

"It really was," I reply, my own gaze passing over Dumbledore. "I can't believe he's still here and running the school after everything that's come out about him."

Fleur raises her nose haughtily, although there's a sense of playfulness to it. "Men in their ivory towers never know when to step down."

"That sounded almost philosophical," I smirk, Fleur returning the gesture.

"I am a learned woman, what can I say? I am quite impressive," she adds, putting her hands on her hips and raising her nose even higher. Suddenly, she leans in next to me, whispering in my ear. "Do you find me impressive, Mademoiselle Potter?"

I feel my breath hitch, and she snorts loudly, the joking and seductive hybrid of a persona crumbling
as quickly as it was put up. "Merde, I can't believe I said that out loud!"

I blink from the sudden heat that I can feel rushing through me, doing my best to put on my own playful act. "I thought you were just being French- ow!" I gasp, rubbing my shoulder where Fleur has struck me.

She raises her eyebrows, smiling coyly at me as she looks at my shoulder. "Hmm? What were you saying, Mademoiselle Potter?"

I send a glare her way, kneading my shoulder one last time before I direct my attention to the now gathering Headmasters and Headmistress, Ollivander taking up the rear as Dumbledore claps his hands excitedly, announcing the beginning of the weighing of the wands.

"Hello! Thank you all for coming!" Dumbledore begins, smiling kindly as he passes his eyes over the small group, his gaze darkening momentarily as it coincides with mine. "We're all here this afternoon to take part in the traditional weighing of the wands, the ceremony that will be administered by Britain's own premier wandmaker, Garrick Ollivander." He pauses to wave in the elderly (and still quite creepy) man, who bows slightly and steps backwards.

"We have Rita Skeeter here today with the Daily Prophet," Dumbledore continues, inclining his head towards Rita, not even a flicker of hatred in his gesture towards the woman who so effectively cut his legs out from under him. "Now, I will hand things off to the esteemed Mister Ollivander. If you would, Garrick."

Ollivander thanks Dumbledore, stepping into the middle of the small circle and clearing his throat. "Hello, and thank you all for having me here. The weighing of the wands is a rather simple affair, but important in its tradition. I do hope all of you have been taking good care of your wands, as you will need them in tip-top shape for the upcoming tournament," he says amicably, his smiling eyes passing over me and the other champions. "Now, if I may begin with the lovely Miss Delacour?"

Fleur inclines her head respectfully, stepping forward to the wandmaker with her chin held high. She flips her wand over, handing it to Ollivander handle first. He smirks at the gesture, turning the wand over in his hands and staring at it with a critical eye, one used to discerning detail.

"Ahh… nine and a half inches… what looks to be Rosewood, yes? Yes, a lovely wand wood, unfortunately one that I don't get to use often enough. Inflexible, and containing… why dear me-"

"A hair from the head of a Veela," Fleur interrupts, a stern look on her face. "One from my grandmother."

"Yes, yes, I find Veela hair is too temperamental for my tastes, but to each their own…"

I can't help but glare at his statement and thinly veiled attempt to insult Fleur's ancestry, biting my lower lip as he waves the wand, a loose bouquet bursting from the tip of the wand, silently falling to the ground.

"It seems to be in perfect working order," Ollivander says, handing the wand back to Fleur with a blank look on his face.

Fucking geriatric creep.

"Mr. Diggory, if you could come over next?"

Cedric passes by Fleur, nodding respectfully at her as he walks over to Ollivander, who quickly removes the wand from the Hufflepuff's hands.
"Hmm, I believe this is one of mine, yes?" Ollivander effuses, his excitement causing me to clench my fists.

Fucking geriatric, bigoted creep.

"I remember this one like the day I made it… twelve and a quarter inches, ash, a nice bit of springiness to it," he murmers, flexing the wand slightly between spindled fingertips. "This contains just one unicorn hair, an especially fine one if I would say so myself. You treat your wand regularly?"

Cedric smiles widely at Ollivander. "I polished it last night."

I snort loudly, Ollivander frowning at my little outburst as he continues with his biased theatrics. He jabs the wand forward, a series of smoke rings puffing absently out of the tip, lacing through one another on their journey to the other side of the room where they dissipate against the far wall.

"Excellent, excellent," he muses, passing the wand back to Cedric as he beckons for Krum to make his way over, once more repeating the routine.

He holds the noticeably larger wand in front of one eye, the other closed as he squints curiously at the creation in front of him. "Interesting… this is one of Gregorovitch's, I believe. Yes?" he asks, Krum nodding. "I do so admire his work, although he does tend to be a bit minimal…"

Passing his hands over the wand, he mutters quietly, shutting his eyes as he pushes his magic into the it. "Hornbeam? And what seems to be dragon heartstring, am I correct? Excellent! Quite thick, but very sturdy, ten and a quarter inches… just perfect for a strong wizard such as yourself."

Ollivander quietly says avis, the wand bucking as a flock of small chittering bluebirds appear out of the end, a deafening bang announcing the conjured animal's sudden introduction to reality. I shake my head as many of them flutter off and collide with the wall in the same way that the smoke rings did, yet instead of dissipating, they fall to the ground, unconscious.

"That was fucking hilarious," I whisper, just short of laughing openly at the display.

Ollivander glares at me once more, obviously having heard my comment. "Ah, yes. Miss Potter," he states through slightly gritted teeth. "If you could come over here please?"

I wipe the grin off my face, walking forward and offering him my primary wand, that of Blackthorn and Yew.

I haven't even bothered to use my old Holly and Phoenix Feather wand, what with the whole brother wand deal, along with it just not really feeling like a good match anymore. It's not that it's a bad match, but when it's compared to the one that I got from McCann or Death's wand, it just doesn't really match up.

Ollivander's eyebrows shoot into his hairline as he studies the wand, blinking rapidly as he takes in every little bit of it. "It seems that you've changed wands Miss Potter, what happened to your old one, if I may ask?"

I shrug plaintively. "I started to have some difficulties with it after second year. It still works, but it doesn't work as well as this one."

"A shame. I was quite proud of that one. Holly and Phoenix Feather correct?" he asks, and I nod in reply. "Quite a fantastic combination. A touch finnicky at times, but for the right witch or wizard it would stick with them through thick and thin." He pauses, once more spinning my wand in his
hands. "But this… this is quite the work of art. A blend of two woods, something quite rare. I notice the Yew, but what is this darker wood? Blackthorn?"

"Yes, yes it is."

Ollivander squints at me out of the corner of his eye, a knowing look on his face. "A warrior's wand. Quite powerful." He closes his eyes once more, running his magic through the wand as he attempts to discern the materials inside. He gasps quietly, flicking his head back sharply. "Phoenix Feather once more, yet I notice two other cores within. Curious… very curious. One of the ingredients is like steel… a cold strength to it… horned serpent ivory?"

I sigh quietly, apparently being put on the spot by the vindictive wandmaker. "Yes, horned serpent ivory, along with the hair of a thestral."

Tutting quietly, Ollivander continues to look over the wand. "Roughly twelve and one-half inches, a bit of yield. Oh my! Is that a gemstone that I see? You're quite the interesting character Miss Potter. This is one of the most complicated wands I've ever laid eyes on. I pride myself on being in the know when it comes to my field, yet for the life of me I cannot discern who fashioned this."

"It was Tracey McCann of Sayre's Smithy," I concede, just wanting to get this done and over with. I can just feel everyone's gazes digging into the back of my head.

"In Knockturn? I've never kept up with her, but I do recall her having some fantastically interesting ideas on the craft. It seems that she's gone above and beyond, as this is quite the impressive creation." He mumbles to himself for a few seconds, pondering what spell to cast, before he lights up, holding the wand out steadily. "Demandus patronum."

A smoky black apparition erupts from my wand, a shimmering raven cawing silently as it flits around and perches upon Ollivander's shoulder, looking much more substantial than a regular patronus. In fact, it actually seems to be interacting with him, its claws contorting the fabric it grips, digging into his shoulder.

There's no sense of warmth or comfort emanating from the phantasm that one would normally expect to be associated with the patronus charm. In fact, I can't feel much of anything from it.

What an interesting spell.

"A lesser known variant on the standard patronus charm, one that can actually be felt and touched, although it's not at all effective when used against dementors and lethifolds," Ollivander explains at my questioning look, the other champions around me gazing at him curiously. "It was once used in battles many a century ago as a more difficult to combat alternative to transfiguration, although the user is limited by their patronus form." He chuckles quietly. "I don't imagine a stoat would do too much good in a battle."

I can't help but be impressed. That was an incredibly interesting piece of magic that he just used, not to mention the fact that he used my wand to cast it, one that's not at all attuned to him.

I still think he's a bigoted, creepy prick.

I take my wand back from him, returning to my spot next to Fleur, who looks at me with a hint of scrutiny. It's not the offensive type, more of an investigative look.

"Excellent, excellent!" Rita shouts excitedly, walking into the group and taking charge of the situation. "Could everyone please line up? I want to get some pictures done for the Prophet."
The rest of the champions and I cluster together, being forced through picture after picture after picture, the process so exhausting that I could probably drink a barrel full of pepper-up and still feel a bit drowsy afterwards.

Rita, obviously recognizing me, comes up to me after the photos. I look over her with a bit of disdain, but I do my best not to show it.

"Hello, hello dear. I was wanting to interview all of you lovely champions, and I thought it best to start with the youngest of them all," she hums, tapping her quick-quotes-quill against her chin as she leers at me. "So, tell me, how does it feel to be going up against witches and wizards much older and more experienced than you?"

I roll my eyes imperceptibly, huffing quietly. "I would prefer if you used a standard notation quill for this interview Miss Skeeter, we wouldn't want your payroll to be cut, would we?"

She pales considerably. "Yes, yes… you are Mister Greengrasses adoptive daughter, aren't you? Well, I'm sure there wouldn't be any harm to the story if I did use a quick-quotes-quill. Trust me, I'll go over it later do some editing."

I smile dangerously, Rita looking a bit perturbed. "Oh, no, I insist that you don't use that quill, otherwise you're going to be leaving here without an interview from me, and I imagine the rest of the other champions."

Fleur snorts quietly, stifling a laugh as she watches me dismantle Rita bit by bit, stopping her mud racking before it can even begin.

"Absolutely, if you insist," Rita acquiesces sadly, tucking her sickly green quill away and pulling out a standard notation quill, letting it hover above the page. "Now, would you be able to answer my earlier question?"

"Absolutely. I don't feel intimidated per se, but I imagine I'm going to be hard pressed to come up with the perfect spell for each unique situation I may come across in the tournament. Knowledge is everything when it comes to magic, and unfortunately my competitors have three years on me. I'm going to have to study quite a bit to keep up, but I'm confident that I'll make do."

Rita nods a few times, glancing up at me in the hopes that I'll continue with my line of thought, but she carries on when I refuse to. "I've heard rumours from your peers here at Hogwarts that you illegally entered yourself into the tournament, yet at the same time I've heard that you made a public magical oath that you did not. While magical oaths are a very dangerous form of magic, they're very dependant on their wording, as well as able to be faked by a sufficiently powerful witch or wizard. What would you have to say about that?"

I raise one eyebrow in challenge, recognizing Rita's attempts to goad something out of me. Clever. Scummy, but clever.

"I understand that magical oaths are a touchy subject at best, what with what you said; there is a potential for it to be faked or worked around via clever wordplay, as well as the fact that memory charms would mix everything up. The magical oath I took is not a failsafe way to prove my innocence by any means, and no magical oath should be. While my peers may have a legitimate qualm with my being entered into the tournament, yet at the same time I've heard that you made a public magical oath that you did not. While magical oaths are a very dangerous form of magic, they're very dependant on their wording, as well as able to be faked by a sufficiently powerful witch or wizard. What would you have to say about that?"

I raise one eyebrow in challenge, recognizing Rita's attempts to goad something out of me.

Clever. Scummy, but clever.

"I understand that magical oaths are a touchy subject at best, what with what you said; there is a potential for it to be faked or worked around via clever wordplay, as well as the fact that memory charms would mix everything up. The magical oath I took is not a failsafe way to prove my innocence by any means, and no magical oath should be. While my peers may have a legitimate qualm with my being entered into the tournament, I would like to state once more that I did not enter the tournament by my own will." I stop to think, mulling over my thoughts before I continue, scratching the side of my head. "I would also like to say that I'm flattered that you believe me strong enough to fake a magical oath. That's quite kind of you, even if it was in a backhanded manner."
Rita can't help but smirk, obviously respecting me for my quick thinking and ability to skirt around her questions without come across as arrogant, a cheater, or both.

"Well, I can't just focus on you, so I'll be off to interview the other champions." She extends her hand, shaking mine daintily, and I have to do my best not to pull back immediately, her palm greasy with cheap lotion.

Ew.

"Enjoy the rest of your day Miss Skeeter, I hope your article does well," I reply as I go to leave the room, rubbing my hand on my leg with a grimace. I smile at Fleur as I head out, my silver haired friend returning the gesture as she prepares herself to deal with the wizarding worlds most reprehensible and tenacious 'journalist.'

Fleur suddenly intercepts me on my way out, leaning in close, her long hair tickling my cheek as she looms over me, and I realize how much taller than me she really is. "Would you be able to wait for me to finish this interview? I've been wanting to explore the local village, Hogsmeade is it? I was wondering if you would give me a tour."

I halt, my mind racing. Is she… is she asking me as a friend? God, get a hold of yourself Helene! Just because she wants to spend time with you, doesn't mean she's interested in you.

I try not to remember how low and sultry her voice was earlier.

No, this is just as friends. I'm quite sure.

"I can do that," I reply, remembering that I can chose not to attend classes if I don't want to due to the Tournament. I'm sure I'll enjoy that little privilege.

I look about for somewhere to sit down and wait, before I spot a few chairs tucked off to the side where the Heads were waiting during the weighing. "I'll just grab a seat, alright?"

Fleur nods her assent, confidently sauntering over the Rita Skeeter.

Her interview only takes about ten minutes or so, and I watch as she's interrogated. I can't help but admire the way she holds herself, head always held high, not giving any ground to the incredibly irritating woman in front of her, one who would happily drag her name through the mud for a moment of fame and fortune.

God she's amazing.

Fleur finishes things up, rubbing her hands together as she returns to me with a smile on her face. "Shall we go?"

I nod, taking off my robes as I stand up and tucking them into my bag.

"That's a lovely jumper you have," Fleur comments as we slowly make our way down the stairs and towards Hogsmeade, her following me along as I lead us through the winding halls of the school.

I look down at the little cable knit piece, gray with errant flecks of black popping up here and there in the threads. "Thanks, but it's not really anything special."

"Well, that's what makes it lovely. Simple things are often the nicest, and I quite like it."

"Well… thank you," I say awkwardly, not sure how to take a compliment on my choice of clothing.
Honestly, I dress quite simply. The only interesting thing in my clothing repertoire is that outfit that Severus commissioned, and maybe that biker jacket I own. Otherwise… well, I just look like every other girl my age I assume, although I do look a smidge like a very young professor, what with all the collared shirts.

What can I say, I like collars. They feel very protective.

"So, we're not going to be able to get to Hogsmeade the usual way, so we're going to have to take a secret passage."

"A secret passage?" Fleur asks, a confused look on her face. "A genuine secret passage? You're not pulling my leg?"

I laugh, shaking my head. "No. Hogwarts is… well, if you can't tell by the moving staircases and poltergeist that reaps carnage in the halls, it's a bit of a unique school."

"That's… that's quite odd."

"You have no idea," I say as I direct her towards the One-Eyed Witch, whispering 'dissendium' and watching as the hump on the back of the statue opens. "After you," I exclaim, waving at the pitch-black tunnel.

Fleur eyes it warily, turning her gaze towards me. "You're serious, yes? This is actually a secret passage and not some sort of elaborate hoax?"

"No elaborate hoax here. If you'd like, I can go first."

"I'd prefer that."

With a shrug, I jump in, sliding down a short ramp and into the tunnel, lighting the end of my wand. A short screech announces Fleur's descent, and I turn to catch her before she falls over.

Unfortunately, she does fall over, tossing me to the ground as I'm used as a landing pad. I manage to not knock my head against the floor, but I do feel my tailbone taking the brunt of the fall, groaning quietly as I move to rub my probably bruised backside.

As I move to do that, I suddenly realize that Fleur is sitting on top of me.

The blood rushes to my face as I stammer uselessly, scrambling to get up. "Are you alright?" I blurt, pulling myself up to a sitting position, Fleur resting on my lap and looking a bit embarrassed. She shuffles a bit, not making my situation any easier as I feel her thighs slide over my waist, the feeling completely alien and absolutely overwhelming.

"Oui… I'm alright. Just a bit flustered," she says, awkwardly getting back to her feet and helping me up, an odd look on her face. "My apologies."

I swallow heavily, doing my best to put a nonchalant smile on my face. "It's alright. I should have warned you about the slide." I rub the back of my head, snorting quietly. "Let's get going, it's a bit of a walk into the village."

Fleur once more follows beside me, my wand lighting our long and claustrophobic path as we wander towards Hogsmeade. There's a palpable silence between us, probably mostly blamed upon me as I can barely string two thoughts together that don't involve the feeling of her body on mine.

Christ. This is going to be an odd outing.
After what seems like hours upon hours, but is probably much less, I crack.

"So… uh, what do you like about Britain so far?"

Fleur turns towards me, tilting her head slightly, a wry smirk on her face. "Well, you've been a great part of it."

I cough loudly, covering my mouth with one hand as I look at her, askance. She laughs, the sound so close that it feels almost intimate as it bounces off the enclosed space of the tunnel, seeping into me. "I'm sorry, I have a tendency to tease friends," she apologizes, smiling kindly at me. "I like to push buttons. It's a bad habit of mine. But, being more serious, I quite enjoy the people here." She pauses thoughtfully, scratching her nose, somehow making the standard gesture look regal and composed.

Maybe that's how the Queen scratches her nose.

"I thought I'd have problems with the… backwardness of this country, but so far I haven't had any issues. But I assume people are still trying to figure out whether or not I'm a Veela."

"Well, I know some of the Ravenclaw boys are sure of it," I comment, mentally grimacing as I remember Terry Boot loudly proclaiming his love for Fleur in the middle of the common room.

Fleur pauses and looks at me curiously. "You have no issue with me being a Veela?"

"Why would I? You're just as much of a person as I am, and a family friend of mine is a werewolf. I just don't see the big deal about it."

She smiles brightly, a sight that would have caused my heart to flutter if it was still capable of beating. "You have no idea how much that means to me. So many of the students at Beauxbatons… they just don't understand. The girls assume I'm going to seduce their boyfriends away from them, and the boys look at me like a piece of meat."

I place my hand on her shoulder, ignoring how my stomach flips. "I won't judge you for something like that. It's your heritage, it's who you are. I say that it's something to be proud of."

"I agree." Fleur stops, looking ahead. "Is that a light? I think we're almost there."

I nod, bringing Death's cloak out of my pocket. "Get under here, we won't be spotted this way. The tunnel ends in the cellar of Honeydukes, a candy shop. I'd prefer if we didn't get arrested for trespassing."

I suddenly realize the danger of the situation as Fleur quietly agrees, snuggling up next to me under the cloak.


We both awkwardly sidle up the ladder, opening the trapdoor and peeking out, sighing in relief when we see that the owner isn't in the back room.

"Quickly," I mutter, climbing out ahead of Fleur and laying the Cloak over myself and the trapdoor so as to keep Fleur hidden as she comes up behind me.

She pops up quickly, once more stooping over as she stands next to me, her chin resting upon my shoulder and one arm wrapped around my waist.

Fuck.
We quickly sneak out of Honeydukes, ducking out into a nearby alley and removing the cloak, tucking it back into my pocket.

"Quel soulagement!" Fleur exclaims, an anxious smile on her face. "I feel like a spy!"

I chuckle, patting her on the back. "Secret Agents Potter and Delacour, at your service."

"Quiet you. Let me remind you that you have a village to show me," she says, chiding me playfully.

"Alright, alright, let's get going," I acquiesce, putting my hands up in surrender.

Fleur grins brightly as I take her throughout the village, visiting each and every store on the way. I take my time in Scrivenshaft's, stopping to really pay attention to the store that rests on my own land, having the benefit of not being crowded by students frantically shopping for refills on quills and ink.

I get dragged back into Honeyduke's at one point, Fleur excitedly picking out different sweets. I notice that she has a love for dark chocolate, as well as pastilles, tittering quietly as she fussed over the massive array of assorted candies and arduously picking through each and every one to tuck into her bag of spoils.

After an hour or so of venturing about, we decide to head into the Three Broomsticks to get a late lunch.

"The only thing I do not like about this place is the food," Fleur comments as we take our seats, Rosmerta having explained the house special of steak and stilton pie, as well as the option of a wizarding brand of stout to accompany it, the latter offer being directed only towards Fleur.

I guess the legal age is a bit younger in the wizarding world. I never really paid attention to that.

"It does tend to be a bit heavy," I say as I look over the menu, realizing that everything on the menu probably incorporates red meat, fish, or pastry in some way shape or form. "I think the lightest thing on here is the fish and chips."

"Well, I'll order that. It's a guilty pleasure of mine," she says as she sets her own menu down, Rosmerta quickly returning to take our orders.

"What can I get for ya' dears?" the buxom owner of the establishment asks, a notepad resting in her hand and a notation quill hovering just above it.

"I'll have the fish and chips please, and could I get a glass of ice water?" Fleur requests, turning to me as finish making my decision.

"I'll have the daily special and a butterbeer, thanks," I add as Rosmerta collects the menus, quickly walking off to relay the orders to the kitchen.

"So… tell me a bit about the famous Helene Potter," Fleur suddenly asks, pushing her cutlery off to the side and propping her elbows up on the table, her chin resting in her hands. "I want to know more about my new friend."

"I, uh- huh…"

I trail off, wondering what to say. "No one has ever asked me that question before, sorry," I apologize, Fleur waving lackadasically.

"Like I said earlier, I like to push buttons. I know that's a hard question to answer, but I like to watch
people squirm," she cajoles, smirking playfully. "So? What's going on in that head of yours?"

I sit back, resting my arms on the rests of my chair. My thoughts are momentarily interrupted as Rosmerta sets our drinks down, and I quietly give her my thanks before returning to the task at hand.

"Well… I guess there's not much to say, to be quite honest. I spend most of my time studying." I almost chuckle, not explaining exactly what I'm studying, as Necromancy isn't exactly part of a standard lunch-time discussion. "Other than that… well, I enjoy flying, although I don't have the time to join up with the Quidditch team. I'm a heavy reader as well, mostly muggle fiction and the occasional mindless adventure novel. What about you?"

Fleur tilts her head quizzically, murmuring quietly to herself as she ponders what to say. "Well, you know that I'm quite close to my sister, but I absolutely adore music. I've played piano since I was young, as well as violin. In my free time, I like to read as well, primarily poetry. I'm quite partial to the American classics. Walt Whitman would have to be my favourite."

I can feel my eyebrows rise. "American poets? Not French?"

She chuckles quietly at my faux surprise. "Yes, American poets instead of French. I find a lot of French poetry to be too… verbose."

"'Scuse me dears, I've got your meals for you," Rosmerta interrupts, appearing out of nowhere and almost scaring the piss out of me as she sets our food down. The woman is quiet when she wants to be. I swear that she did that on purpose.

"Thank you," I manage to get out, my body tensed dangerously at the sudden fright.

Fleur looks relatively nonplussed as she accepts her meal, murmuring her thanks to Rosmerta as she begins to dig in, nodding in appreciation at the first bite.

"I will admit, I do not like your countries food… but this? This is a treat."

"Best fish and chips in the country," I agree, smiling at her muted excitement over the dish.

I happily dig into my own food, savouring every bite of the rich pie, the flaky crust holding its own against the onslaught of gravy and thick steak, the potatoes mixing marvellously into the incredible meal.

The place may look like any old pub, dingy four by four rafters, lanterns that haven't been dusted since it's opened, and chairs that look as if they'll crumble under a stiff wind, but the food is to die for.

Far too soon, I find myself full and my plate empty, any remnants of the meal having been scooped up onto my fork, the porcelain painstakingly cleaned of every single bit and piece of the delectable pie.

"That was… wow," I gasp, running my hands across my belly soothingly, feeling close to bloated, but far enough away that I'm not nauseous. That was a big meal.

"I have to agree. I never thought that simple fried fish and potatoes could taste so good," Fleur adds, looking slightly astonished at her own cleaned plate. "I assumed I was just going to nibble on it and maybe take it back to the carriage later."

"Whoever works in the kitchen here has a deft hand. I've cooked for most of my life, and I'd be hard pressed to make something taste that good, especially simple pub food."
"A hobby of yours?" Fleur asks.

I shake my head. "I uh… I didn't have the best of home lives." I purse my lips at her sudden sour mood, her happy expression crumbling into one of controlled anger. "It's public, since I ended up doing an interview with the Prophet a year back, but it's still something I don't really talk about often. One of the ways that my relatives abused me was by making me do all the household chores from a very young age, and I've been cooking since I was old enough to learn how the stove works."

Fleur gasps loudly, putting her hand over her mouth in horror. "They? What? Those bâtards! Fils de pute! Those evil, vile little pigs! How dare they!" she exclaims, putting her hand over her mouth once more as she realizes she's shouting, a few curious customers glancing curiously at her little tirade.

I put my own hand up, halting her righteous diatribe. "I know, trust me, I know." I pause, glancing around furtively before leaning in close. "Want to know what I did to get back at them?"

Fleur still looks pissed beyond belief, but she can't help but nod excitedly.

"Burnt their perfect little suburban home to a crisp, white picket fence and all," I whisper, Fleur slapping the table as she guffaws in amused horror.

"Really!? That's… well, I can't say I can judge you for that, considering I would have done much worse to child abusers," she admits, putting one hand up as if to say, 'what can you do?'

I blink, suddenly realizing that Fleur is the first person I've told about my impromptu entry into the world of pyromania, and she begins to laugh even harder.

"Whoops," I mutter, finding myself unable to suppress the snort that escapes me.

"I can't believe I just told you that."

Fleur reaches across the table and squeezes my hand gently. "It is alright, mon amie. I just find the situation so ridiculous."

I shake my head, resting my cheek on my fist. "I find it odd how comfortable I am around you," I admit, turning serious for a moment, a familiar feeling welling up inside me. "I'm open with my family, yes, but with friends? I don't know."

"Sometimes we can't help it when we get close to someone, right? Sometimes you can just trust someone, and you don't know why."

I nod, suddenly being brought back to Hermione's little pep talk.

Would now be a good moment to see if Fleur is open to something more? God, I don't know. What if I mess up our friendship? She's already becoming much closer to me than I thought possible, slowly sneaking her way into my life, and I don't know what to do about it.

"I guess that's true," I murmur, staring at the table.

"Is everything alright?" Fleur asks, interrupting my thoughts. "You look worried."

I open my mouth to speak, to instantly reply with my standard, 'yes, everything's alright,' but I pause. I flex my jaw, studying Fleur. The way her hair streams down to her shoulders, straight and perfect. How I adore her elegant demeanour, and how she can be so happy and playful when she feels comfortable. Hell, even the faults in her that I've seen are attractive. She's stubborn, terribly so, but she has the intelligence and cleverness to back it up. She's a self-admitted button-pusher, but she knows when to not take things too far, showing a strong and compassionate side.
I admire her quite a bit. That, and I sincerely doubt she's a homophobe. If anyone's going to understand that love is love, it's going to be a Veela, a being that's presumably more in tune with love than anything else on this planet.

"I'm not worried, per se. I'm just thinking about something."

Fleur leans forward, raising her eyebrows questioningly.

I smile at her silent demand, biting my lower lip. "Fleur… would you be interested in coming with me to Hogsmeade next week for a picnic?" I spill, both hesitant and rushing at the same time, the words strained and awkward, tumbling out of my mouth like they've fallen over in their race to greet her.

"I would love a picnic," she effuses, not really understanding what I've just asked her. "Would you say no to me bringing a bottle of wine? I brought a couple with me from home."

I sigh quietly. "I… Christ, I've never really done this before. I was wanting to take you on a date, Fleur."

She stops, blinking slowly, her mouth held open ever so slightly.

"Oh."

I nearly groan in frustration. "Sorry, I just wanted to ask, it's no problem if you don't want to."

"Merde, I'm so sorry Helene." Fleur, exhales slowly, a sad look on her face. "You're a wonderful girl, but… you're much too young for me. I'm sure you'll find someone closer to your age to take to Hogsmeade, yes? Whoever else catches your interest would be… what's the word? Daft, not to say yes." She licks her lips, eyes flitting around. "I… I'm so sorry. I just realized how much I've been flirting with you… I- merde, I've been so inconsiderate."

Sighing once more, I nod regretfully. If only she knew that I was actually older than her, but she's not someone I can just up and tell about all this. I trust Fleur, but I don't trust her.

"Sorry if I've made things awkward."

Fleur puts her hand up. "No, don't apologize. You have nothing to say sorry for. If you were a few years older things may be different. But… the difference in age between fourteen and seventeen? I'm sorry, but that's much too big for me."

I almost laugh at her paraphrasing of what I said to Hermione just six or so months ago. A touch ironic, I believe. "Thanks for being understanding. Now, I'm very full, and I've got some studying to do. Would you care to come back to the castle with me?"

Fleur nods her assent, standing up and following me back to Hogwarts, a slightly awkward tension between the two of us, but nothing that we both can't handle.

-::-
God, if only she knew that I was older than her. Would she be interested then? Actually, why the hell am I so bothered by all this? Is it because I haven't really ever been rejected before? I remember Cho declining my invitation to the ball in my last life, and I was pretty disappointed over that, but I didn't feel this… I don't know what it is. I just know that I don't like it.

I knew I shouldn't have bothered.

I'm sitting down in the common room working on my homework, or at least trying to what with all these angsty hormonal thoughts, when Lisa interrupts me.

"Hey, Helene? Hagrid's been looking for you," she says, tapping me on the shoulder.

I look up, smiling at her and remembering why Hagrid would be coming to find me in the first place. I also realize that I haven't spoken to him at all since starting over again at Hogwarts. I think this would be a good chance for me to rekindle our friendship, even though he doesn't know that it's being rekindled.

"Yeah? Do you know where I can find him?"

She nods, pointing out the door. "He said to meet him at his hut at around eleven, didn't say why though."

I flick my wand, checking the time. Ten thirty. Lisa sure took her time telling me, I guess I should head down now, get there a bit early.

"Thanks for letting me know, I'll get going now." I incline my head appreciatively, jogging up to my dorm to grab a light jacket before heading back down and out onto the Hogwarts grounds.

After a bit of a hike, I find myself at Hagrid's hut, knocking loudly on the door.

"Gimme' a sec! One second!" he shouts, the sound of wooden and stone dishes clattering to the floor leaking out through the door. I smile at Hagrid's unseen clumsiness, grinning even wider when he opens the door. "Helene!" he announces happily, waving me in. "So good to see ya'! Please, come in! Come in!"

He trundles back into the hut, quickly cleaning up his mess and settling into his incredibly large seat, the legs groaning loudly under his immense weight.

"So, I know yer' probably wondering why I've asked for yeh'," he beams, running his fingers through his scraggly beard. He leans forward, lifting his chin slightly and looking at me through one eye, brow raised to the sky. "Now, ya' can't be telling anyone I'm doing this, but I thought since yer' so young and all that I'd bring yeh' out to the forest and show yeh' the beasties they've brought over for the tourney."

"Thanks for the support Hagrid. Every bit of information helps, and you can make sure that my lips are sealed." I zip my lips for good measure, Hagrid's beard twitching as he grins.

"Good to 'ear," he bursts, clapping his mighty hands against the arms of his chair and shooting up, hurriedly leading me out the door. "Now, stay close, al'righ'? I don't wanna' be caught by none of the staff."

"I'll be quiet as a mouse," I say, pointedly silencing my shoes and disillusioning myself, Hagrid nodding approvingly. I've never been so thankful that his magical education is lacking, otherwise he'd have probably questioned me about somehow having mastered a difficult seventh year charm in my fourth.
We venture out into the forest, Hagrid happily mumbling about this and that creature that he ran into, and how incredibly beautiful each and every one of them is.

You’ve got to appreciate the man’s enthusiasm, even with the childish naivety to it.

I notice a great burst of fire in the distance, recognizing it as dragon’s flame, my stomach churning excitedly.

I know I’m going to try and slay the thing, but I wonder if I’ll lose points for it? Knowing the judges, especially Dumbledore and Karkaroff, I’ll probably get docked.

Fuck it, it’s worth it.

I frown as we continue forward, an odd whispering flitting off my ears, sounding oddly like Magna’s crazed ramblings when she was being controlled by the diary in my previous second year.

"Oh, fuck me," I deny, horror coursing through me at the sight that greets me as we finally enter into the compound.

There’s an easily recognizable dragon, the massive Hungarian Horntail looming over its handlers, the men scrambling about as they attempt to subdue the creature with bursts of stunners. It roars in fury before it eventually succumbs to the constant barrage of spells, a dozen of them cast in quick succession knocking it out.

No, that’s not what’s got me nervous.

What has me nervous is the other creatures.

My eyes flick over the massive, magically reinforced cages. One of which is housing a manticore, a massive lion covered in thick, bristled fur, a few tufts standing out like angry fangs. It has a set of deep black horns that curl up and above its head like those of a ram, along with massive batlike wings that lay furled over its side, one wicked curved claw pointing to the sky at the elbow joint each appendage.

Of course, I can’t forget the fucking stinger, thick, barbed, and looking incredibly deadly. It’s encased in an insect like exoskeleton, the deadly limb flicking about next to the creature like a cat’s tail, glimmering in the moonlight as it dances to and fro.

Except this is a cat’s tail that can turn your guts to sludge.

Off to the side, there’s a quintaped, the oddest and most horrific looking amalgamation of body parts that I’ve ever laid eyes on. A gigantic head rests on five rippling, furred arms, ending in curled fists. The creature thrashes about angrily, protuberant eyes set wide and swivelling about like a chameleon as it takes in the humans surrounding it, throwing itself against the walls of its cage in an attempt to devour its handlers.

It roars loudly, its mouth opening sickeningly wide and revealing wickedly long, yellow and rotted fangs that taper off into a point. I can’t help but gawk at the size of it, never realizing that quintapeds are about seven feet tall, and just as wide.

What horrifies me the most is the chimera.

Yes, an honest to god chimera.

One of the deadliest creatures in the wizarding world. Although it’s in the same classification as a
dragon and the other assorted creatures, it's on par with a nundu in terms of being an absolute powerhouse of a monster. If the classification didn't end at five X's, this one would have earned a sixth.

Yes, monster is the operative word here.

It looks as if a mad scientist has thrown bits and pieces of miscellaneous animals together to fashion the most hideous and, to be frank, utterly terrifying creature known to man.

Its body is that of a lion, if a lion had been forcibly given growth hormone in vitro, as well as every other day since. It's humongous, yet it somehow looks emaciated at the same time, skin clinging to its ribs. It looks like it's been affected by a particularly vicious case of mange, its fur interlaced with grayed bald spots, it's bare skin pocked and rotted. In the place of a tail, is instead a thin and dangerous looking snake, virulent purple scales errantly flicking about and glancing un-amusedly at the workers wandering about, who I can't help but notice are avoiding the cage like the plague. This is what I was hearing and what had me set on edge, parseltongue ramblings of tearing the workers to pieces, melting their insides with its venom.

I can't possibly imagine why they're avoiding it.

A goat's head sprouts out from the middle of the monster's spine, milky white eyes predatorily tracking every bit of movement nearby. It flops around like a drug addled maniac, head lolling as it hisses and cackles loudly whenever a handler makes eye contact with it, causing them to flinch away. Its teeth aren't those of a herbivore, terrible in their sharpness as the torchlight glances off of them.

The lion though… I know it's one individual creature with three heads, but… fuck.

It speaks. Speaks. Loudly proclaiming what it would do to any of the nearby handlers, mocking, harsh, inhuman shouts detailiing the process in which it will keep them alive as they're disemboweled. How it will take its time savouring every errant bit and piece of their flesh as it picks them apart, baring its teeth in a feral grin at everyone that passes.

"Jesus fucking Christ."

Even Hagrid looks disgusted, staring at the chimera with the most conflicted expression I've ever seen on a person. It's as if he doesn't know whether to go up and hug it, or if he should wipe the abomination off the face of the earth with a gout of hellfire.

"I'm sorry," I apologize, putting my hand up, sheepishly setting it back down when I remember that I'm invisible. "I have to go, now. This is… damnit. I can't believe they brought a fucking chimera to this joke of a blood sport."

Hagrid nods drunkenly, unable to tear his eyes away from the sight of so many incredibly dangerous beasts in one place as I begin my trek back to Hogwarts.

More like sprint, in this case, as I need to get back and start planning yesterday.

Chapter End Notes
This ain't your daddies Tri-Wizard Tournament. Also, do you have any idea how hard it is to describe a wand without it sounding phallic? Jeez
Instead of going to go and research, I march a warpath towards Dumbledore's office, blistering fury emanating off of me.

Shit, fury doesn't even begin to cover how I feel. Rage? No, that's on the same level. Seething, incensed, maddened. I'm not furious… I'm fucking apoplectic.

No, I'm goddamn homicidal.

I can't believe the stupid old prick didn't do anything to prevent the ridiculous addition of these new fucking monsters to the Tournament.

A manticore, quintaped, and a goddamned chimera? Fucking lunacy.

I grit my teeth angrily at the massive statue guarding the entrance to his office, growling deep and low at the inanimate object. Somehow sensing my rage, it spins about, allowing me entrance to the geriatric maniac's abode.

I can feel the stone shuddering against my feet as I continue on, magic practically leaking from my pores as I tear a path up the dizzily winding steps, pushing my hand forward and knocking the door off its hinges, not at all interested in opening it by hand.

The heavy wooden frame crashes to the ground, the clap deafening as I step right over it, my hair standing on end and flailing wildly in an unseen tempest, bloodthirsty serpents set ablaze like the writhing mass that adorns Medusa's skull.

Dumbledore's eyes nearly pop out of his face as I wave my hand, obliterating a small end table next to me with but a gesture, the metal screaming hideously as it's twisted into a ball, shuddering spasmodically as it crunches and compresses into a heap of scrap, its contents crushed within its gnarled grasp.

"What in the fuck were you thinking?" I bellow, slamming my hands on his desk, the wood shuddering in protest. "A fucking chimera? Do you not understand how dangerous that is? What if one of the other champions gets it? Are you so brazen as to allow another student to die? Do you just not give a shit? What the fuck goes on in your head old man?"

"The chimera? That wasn't a part of the tasks before?" Dumbledore asks coolly, his glasses sliding down his nose. He readjusts them slowly, a stern look on his face. "I thought it was quite ridiculous and tried to argue against their inclusion into the tournament." He pauses, eyeing me warily.

"Although I did briefly entertain the idea that the creatures would get me out from under your spell if you happened to… perish whilst fighting them, I discounted it quickly as I didn't wish for the other, innocent champions to be hurt or killed."
I chuckle wryly. "So? You tried to argue against it? You're Albus Dumbledore. It doesn't matter if your influence on this country's politics is all but dead, your words still carry weight."

"You don't understand, you foolish girl. I tried, but I was incapable of even uttering a single word in protest. Your damned… restrictions that you put on me made it impossible."

My restrictions?

What could I have possibly said that would prevent him from… oh.

Oh.

"Fuck… fuck," I mutter, my fingers tangled in my hair as I yank painfully at the roots. "I can't believe I was so stupid! Such a catch all… 'don't interfere with the Tournament,' god, I'm a dumbass!" I rub my eyes, trying to shake off the frenzy that I've worked myself into. Standing next to an open window, I breathe deep, allowing the chilled air to cool me from the inside out.

All of the other champions may end up dying because of what I've done. Viktor, Cedric… Fleur may die because of what I've done.

"Why the concern? Are you worried that you can't handle the beasts?" Dumbledore interrupts, catching my attention.

I look up at the man angrily, an insult threatening to escape me. I hold back, biting my tongue. "Me? I know I can handle it. Yes, it's going to be incredibly difficult, and I may have to grow back a limb later, but the other champions?" I sigh loudly, looking up at the ceiling in consternation. "I can't let the other champions die because of my own stupidity."

Dumbledore frowns at me, and I can't help but wonder if he's actually as thick as he seems to be. "Do you really still think that I'm some sort of demon, all fire and brimstone? The other champions don't deserve this. They're what? Seventeen years old? People who haven't seen and gone through the things that I have. They have no fucking idea what kind of shit show this is going to be. These are people- no, children, who've signed up for a bloodbath, and they don't even know it."

I collapse heavily into the seat in front of Dumbledore's desk, kneading my temples slowly, praying that my rising headache doesn't get exacerbated by the stress I'm suddenly under. "Is there anything you can do to get this changed? Anything at all?"

Looking very unsure of himself, Dumbledore steeples his fingers, a dour look on his face. "If I could, I would have done it already. Unfortunately, it's much too late for me to make changes to the first task, let alone the others." He puts his hands up placatingly. "It seems that it's written in stone."

God dammit.

"Well, I've wasted enough time, I have to go and warn the others." I quickly get to my feet, casting a glance in Dumbledore's direction as I leave. "The next time you can do something to prevent deaths, let me know, call for me to come to your office for a meeting or the like. I don't want something like this to happen ever again. Understand?"

He nods hesitantly, unable to ignore my command.

I huff loudly, waving my wand and repairing the door on my way out, tumbling down the stairs as fast as I can as I make my way out to the Beauxbatons carriage.

It's the middle of the night, and I can't go and find Cedric considering I have no idea where the
Hufflepuff's dormitories are, so I'm going to have to settle for letting Fleur and Viktor know as soon as I can.

The crisp air greets me once more as I stride out onto the grounds, my steady pace quickly taking me to the foot of the great carriage, where I knock twice, the even beat echoing throughout the magically expanded transport.

After a few lazy minutes, a droopy eyed student opens the door, looking at me with no small amount of frustration for waking them up.

"Quoi?" he mutters, brushing frazzled brown hair out of his eyes and glaring at me.

"I have urgent business with Fleur Delacour," I state, hoping that he understands English well enough to recognize my severity. "I need to see her immediately."

He rolls his eyes, muttering something under his breath, I'm assuming it's derisive towards all things English. I hear stumbling down the halls and muted whispers, and my breath hitches as Fleur walks into view, looking impeccable as always. Hell, she doesn't even have mussed hair, the only sign that she just crawled out of bed being the set of bath robes that she's wearing.

"Is everything alright?" she asks, frowning. "I was told there was an emergency."

I glance around, before nodding. My words catch awkwardly in my throat as I go to speak, like hooks are nestled in my voice box drowning what I want to say. I still feel a tentative anxiety around Fleur after being rejected by her, completely unsure of how to approach the situation. "It's about the first task."

Fleur smiles kindly at me, shaking her head, obviously unaffected by the same mental hiccups that I've been afflicted with. "I already know about the dragons."

"Forget the dragon," I argue, before pausing suddenly. "Dragons? Plural?"

She looks at me oddly, slowly tilting her head. "Yes? I was told by Maxime the other day that I was to fight a dragon, I assumed that everyone was going to face one as well."

I ignore the niggling thought at the back of my head. "Did she forget to mention the manticore, quintaped, and fucking chimera?"

Fleur pales dramatically, her normally healthy alabaster skin looking sickly white. "Chimera?" she whispers, staring past me, suddenly losing her usual cool attitude, unabashed fear in its place. "You're joking."

"No, I'm afraid I'm not joking," I reply sadly, gritting my teeth. "They might as well have brought in a nundu."

She curses loudly, a long string of English and French laced together into a verbal tirade of biblical proportions, her hands clasping and unclasping as she steps out of the carriage and attempts to pace a small crater into the ground.

"Dragons were dangerous enough alone, but a chimera, not to mention the other creatures?" she swears, briefly covering her eyes with one hand before dropping it into a fist. "Thank you... I'm going to do my best to prepare for the coming fight. I'm assuming you'll be contacting Viktor and Cedric?"

I nod. "I'm not about to let the two of them get killed."
"That's good, that's good…"

She trails off, looking at me with concern in her eyes. "I think we should band together and train. There's no sense competing when every one of us may not come out of this alive."

That's a good idea. A very good idea. But I don't think I should train with them in the case that I accidentally reveal too much of my powers. If even one of them lets slip that I can cast spells way above my perceived ability, I'm going to have a much more difficult time fighting Voldemort come June.

I'm only comfortable with him know that I have power over the earth, and planning accordingly. If he realizes that I can control the air or have the knowledge, power, and ability to use spells that are well past the level of a mastery, I'm going to get the shit kicked out of me. I need him to overestimate and underestimate me at the same time.

"Thank you, but I won't be able to join you." I quickly put my hand up at Fleur's immediate argumentative expression. "Trust me when I say that I'll be fine, but I won't be able to work a full training session into my schedule, I already study enough on my own as it is."

She looks hesitant, but quickly acquiesces, a morose look etched into her features. "Don't get yourself killed, mon amie."

I smile at her, a mix of happiness and anxiety all tossed into one wry grin. "I'll do my best."

I give her one last wave as I head off, making my way over to the sinister Durmstrang ship. There's a student on watch, looking over the deck and smoking idly, the cherry red end of their cigarette glowing with each errant puff. They stand up when they notice me, calling out, "Who goes there?" in a thick Slavic accent.

Looks like they're a theatrical bunch.

"Helene Potter, here to see Viktor Krum," I respond, bowing my head and going with the flow. I can practically feel the student sneering at me from here. "I've come to parlay."

I giggle when the student huffs and walks off, the sound of a slamming door announcing him going below deck. A few minutes later, Viktor strolls up, and invites me up to deck.

I climb up the steep ramp, noticing that Viktor has ink smudges over his hands, and he's still fully dressed. Must be a night owl.

"I heard that you need me?" he asks gruffly, crossing his arms in a slightly intimidating way. Like I said before, not much intimidates me, so his show of bravado is met by a raised eyebrow and a smirk.

"I've come to warn you about the first task," I state, Viktor tilting his head at my mention of the tournament.

"What would my competitor be here to warn me about?"

"Well, the chimera for one."

Viktor immediately loses his arrogant mask, looking at me in horror. "A… a chimera?" I nod resolutely, Viktor shaking his head in disbelief. "I cannot believe this. A chimera… what other creatures are there? I know Karkaroff was going to visit the pens tomorrow, but I need to know
"A manticore, dragon, and a quintaped," I say, Viktor blanching with each and every addition to the list.

He walks over to the mast and smashes the bottom of his fist against it, anger rolling off him in waves. "Podqvolite! Those bastards! Da eba, I can't believe this." He halts his furious rant, turning back towards me. "You're not lying, are you?"

"Not a word of it."

"Laïna..." Viktor sticks his hand out, shaking mine briskly. "Thank you for warning me of this... travesty of a decision that the organizers have made. You're a respectable competitor."

I shrug. "It's the least I could do. Fleur already knows, and I'm going to tell Cedric tomorrow when I have the chance, probably after breakfast. Just to let you know, Fleur was wanting to get all of us together to train, and while I can't make it, I still think it's a good idea."

Viktor nods approvingly, his thick eyebrows knitted together as he thinks it over. "Da, this is a good idea... are you sure you do not need help? Someone as young as you will surely have difficulty."

"I'm going to be fine, I've got my own private tutor," I lie, Viktor taking the bait and relinquishing his efforts to bring me into the fold. "I look forward to competing with you Viktor, may the best one win."

He smiles broadly, his normally stony expression breaking into one of respect. "May the best one win," he says, shaking my hand once more.

I trod carefully down the ships ramp, heading back to Hogwarts, terribly eager to get some rest after such a long day.

:-:

I spear the bit of thin steak in front of me, drawing it up to my lips and chewing slowly. I grimace, suddenly being torn away from my meal as I remember the article Rita Skeeter had published this morning.

No, she didn't do anything to drag me through the mud, nor did she for the other champions, something I found quite surprising.

What happened was she told the world the unique composition of my wand.

Bloody bitch must have been writing the whole thing down, and to reveal the making of one's wand is a massive breach of privacy for a witch of wizard. A wand reflects the wielder, both through its use and its composition. So for Rita to let the world at large know that in addition to being a warriors wand, it's also deeply tied to life and death, she's inadvertently given out the knowledge that I'm someone not to be trifled with.

This means she's given Voldemort information that I didn't want him knowing yet.

What a pain.

I know it's not the end of the world, and to be quite honest it's not even that big of a deal, but it's going to make my fight with him come June a bit more difficult now that he knows I'm not just some simple, lucky little bastard who had the most dangerous curse in the world bounce off my noggin and
I also still find myself pondering what I'm going to have to do to prepare for the coming task.

Knowing my luck, I'm going to end up drawing the chimera. After warning Cedric the other day, who sputtered endlessly about how he had no idea what he was getting into and how absolutely and utterly fucked he was, wherein which I was awkwardly patting him on the back and telling him that everything was going to be okay, I went to the library to study over the creatures.

Chimera's are renowned for their viciousness, and while it's true that they're terribly difficult to fight monsters, the reason they're so feared is because of their intelligence. They're capable of intelligent thought, while not on the same level as a human, it's still terrifying to realize that they can plan and reason rather than just rush headlong into a fight driven by instinct.

Additionally, the damn things regenerate at a ridiculous speed, making them nearly impossible to kill. All three heads have to be removed, destroyed, the necks cauterized, and then the body burnt to a crisp with fiendfyre before it's truly dead.

Fucking ridiculous.

So, I'm going to be fighting against a nigh immortal, intelligent, and stupidly strong monster that prefers to play with its food before it eats it.

By play with it, I mean keep it alive for hours upon hours while it taunts them with its sickening inhuman voice, taking a bite out of you here and there until it finally decides to put you out of your misery by boiling your insides with its venom.

Really cheery stuff.

I stuff a bit of baked potato into my mouth, pushing it into one cheek with my tongue and crushing it between hardy molars, the relieving tinge of pepper and cheese washing over my mouth with each subsequent bite.

Regeneration, that's the key. I haven't done a ritual in a while, and I don't give a fuck if the world sees my hand fall off and reattach itself a few seconds after it's gone, regeneration is the key to my survival.

But is there a regeneration ritual that's as strong as I need it to be?

I wrap up my dinner, smiling at the girls as I get up to leave, running off to the Room of Requirement.

I walk in, immediately pulling out my book on blood rituals and scouring over it with a keen eye, praying that I come across something that can help me.

A way to improve one's dexterity and hand eye coordination looks incredibly useful, better balance and all that. I add that to my mental list as I continue on, searching and searching and searching for nearly an hour before I come across a few rituals that bolster one's regenerative abilities.

Such a pain in my ass that indexes weren't used at all in books this old. It would make my life so much simpler if I could just snap my fingers and find the fucking page I need.

So... it looks like a few of these rituals are pretty standard, amplifying one's regenerative abilities to an inhuman speed, but it's not as inhuman as I need it to be. All of these say that a broken arm will heal in a day, a normally mortal wound stitching itself together in a few hours without any magical
aid, sickness becoming nothing more than a memory due to the magical antibodies running through your system when it's all done and over with.

At least, I assume it's antibodies. I'm not sure any of the purebloods even know what an antibody is. The guys probably still think that 'a gentlemen's hands are always clean.' Thank God they believe that healing is below them, otherwise St. Mungo's would need a much bigger morgue.

Ah!

There it is, a ritual that will be so strong that my head could be cut off, and unless it was portkeyed away or incinerated the instant it left my shoulders, it would reattach itself good as new.

Now that's some impressive magic.

Let's see what I need to do… pretty standard runic sequence, maybe a bit more complicated than normal. Mostly centered around the spine, so I'll have a bit of difficulty working the knife blind, but I've gotten good enough at this sort of thing that it's basically second nature.

Wait, what's that asterisk for? Were asterisks even invented then?

"Fuck me running," I whisper as I read over the highlighted point of the ritual.

Chimera's blood is required.

No wonder it works so well, it used the creature's regenerative properties in its own, actually bonding the user with the blood of the animal. Sure, I wouldn't be entirely human when it's all done and over with, but since when have I ever been normal to begin with?

I mean, I had basilisk venom and phoenix tears running through my veins in my last life. That had to have changed my genetic makeup somehow. I'd have been terribly surprised if it didn't.

So… it looks like I'm going to need to somehow get my hands on chimera's blood, something that I know you can't find for sale pretty much anywhere, and I doubt I'd be able to get an in at some shady potioneer's in Knockturn before the first task.

Christ, I'm going to have to get the blood from the animal myself.

I can't just walk in though, and the creature is bound to know that I'm there, so how in the fuck am I going to do this?

I'm going to have to infiltrate the camp that the creatures are being kept in. But what happens if the handlers are alerted to my presence if I can't retrieve the blood without fuss? Should I stun the lot of them? Probably, but how am I going to get them all in one place?

I could probably get away with stunning the majority of them. As long as I don't use any elemental powers I should be in the clear.

I laugh quietly, suddenly realizing that I'm on another mind-numbing adventure. God, this is not how I expected my night to go.

Unfortunately, it's also not the time to bust out my new duds, much to my chagrin.

I tuck the book back into my bag, exiting the Room and quickly making my way back to Ravenclaw Tower.

I take the stairs two at a time, tearing off my robes and pulling Death's cloak out of my pocket,
throwing it over my shoulders and smiling as it melts and twists about me, fitting snugly, yet still having the stereotypical look of standard robes, dancing around my ankles like a fine dress.

"Where are you off to?" Hermione asks, walking out of the bathroom wearing an oversized t-shirt and checkered pyjamas, a towel wrapped around her head and hanging precariously off to the side as it completes its arduous task of drying her thick and bushy hair.

"I'm going to go and get some ingredients required for a ritual I need to undertake," I state, shutting my trunk and locking it with a flick of my wand.

Hermione sits down at the foot of her bed, rummaging through her trunk for a book to read. "What ingredient would that be?"

"Uh… chimera's blood?"

She drops the book to the ground, a loud thud resonating throughout the room. "Chimera's blood?" she screeches, the towel having fallen off her head and her fingers tangled in wet hair, pulling at the roots. "You're going to go get chimera's blood? Are you insane?"

"Yeah, a little," I shrug, Hermione groaning loudly as she puts her face in her hands.

"Please don't get yourself killed, alright?"

I put my hand to my chest, lifting my chin. "I swear that I will come back tonight alive, although I may be slightly maimed when this is done and over with."

She shakes her head, looking at me with wonder and fear. "Only you can casually go out to retrieve blood from one of the most dangerous creatures in the world."

I shrug playfully, smiling at her. "What can I say? I'm an impressive person."

Hermione smacks me on the shoulder, before pulling me into a hug. "Stay safe, alright?"

I hug her back, rubbing her shoulder blades comfortingly. "I'll be fine. Don't you worry about me. I'm going to have to kill the damned thing in a week and a bit anyways."

"You're going to what!?"

I rub the back of my head sheepishly, remembering that I haven't updated Hermione on the situation, nor have I informed Sirius and Octavius. I should probably get around to that.

"Well… you know how I said I was going to be facing dragons in the tournament?" I ask, Hermione nodding slowly. "They uh- well, things have apparently changed, and I'll have to face either a dragon, a manticore, a quintaped, or a chimera."

Hermione throws her head back, exhaling loudly. "I… what the hell is wrong with the wizarding world!?" she cries, flopping backwards, arms held out over her head. "Seriously? This is what they're having a group of seventeen-year-old students, as well as a fourteen-year-old go up against?"

"Yeah, bunch of bastards aren't they," I agree, double checking to make sure I have a few unbreakable vials on me to hold the blood in. "I've already let all the other champions know what's going on, and I chewed out Dumbledore for not preventing this from happening. Unfortunately, one of the commands I gave him made it impossible for him to interfere with the tournament at all, so he
was literally incapable of preventing this."

"I'm guessing you used a catch all statement?"

"Yeah, it was beyond stupid of me, but I did."

Hermione rubs her face tiredly, sitting back up. "Well, you better come out of this nightmare in one piece, otherwise you're going to have to face me."

I pale slightly, having long ago been conditioned into fearing Hermione's wrath on an instinctual level.

"Absolutely. Wouldn't dream of it," I state hastily. "Now, I've got a chimera to milk… okay, that really wasn't the best way to say that," I add at Hermione's disgusted look. "Alright, alright! I'm going!"

I pull the hood of Death's cloak over my head, immediately disappearing from sight as I start my trek back down the endless flights of sentient stairs towards the Forbidden Forest.

Stone turns to gravel, crunching loudly underneath my feet, the ragged stones slowly morphing into damp grass as I carry on forward, massive looming trees standing overhead like guardians, their branches tickling the sky and their roots stirring the earth.

I step over uneven ground, treading deeper and deeper into the forest, following the cacophonous sounds of a roaring dragon, flecks of moonlight that seep between the thick needles above guiding my way. I eventually set sights on a flicker of orange in the distance, the ethereal reflection of fire off of bark notifying me that I've reached my destination.

I step forward with trepidation, glancing around and sighing in relief when I see that the quintaped is long asleep, the manticore having followed suit, it's wings curled around it's body like an enormous bat as it lies motionless in its cage. My gaze carries on, past the scurrying guards who've now subdued the horntail, the ferocious dragon slumped against the floor of the forest, puffs of smoke emitting from its nostrils as it's forcefully put to sleep.

I catch sight of the chimera, the creature looking as if its sleeping, but I wouldn't put it past it to be pretending in the case that one of the handlers wanders in and provides it with a drawn out and messy meal.

I silence all of my clothes apart from Death's cloak, the garment already unearthly quiet, as well as casting a scent cancelling spell on myself for good measure. With a blink, I'm within the chimera's cage, my breath frozen as I stand still, praying that I wasn't detected.

If I want to do this right, I'm going to have to be as stealthy as possible. I know I can't bleed the thing and not expect it to wake up, but if I can subdue it before it has a chance to wake, it's going to be much easier for me to complete my task.

After nearly five minutes of doing an incredible statue impression, I realize that the creature hasn't been alerted. Tip-toed, I slowly creep forward, ears perked up as I get closer and closer to the nightmarish being in front of me.

I freeze as it snorts loudly, the lions head twisting into a more comfortable position, broad chin resting on massive paws. I wait, hands trembling, before deciding to take another few steps towards the monster.

In a flash, all of it's heads are reared, glancing about wildly.
"I know you're there..." it growls, its voice low and guttural, trailing across the cold night's air like a whisper, yet its words carry sickening weight. "I can't hear you, I can't smell you... but I know you're there."

I glance around, a couple dozen handlers quickly surrounding the cage and muttering amongst themselves, wondering what's gotten into the beast.

Fucks sake, of course this couldn't be even remotely easy. Looks like it's time to knock out a small platoon of people who are just trying to do their damn job.

Thinking quickly, I blink out of the cage, shooting sparks in the air and attracting the attention of all of the handlers, who spin about, heads twisting and turning as they attempt to locate an invisible foe.

I send off an area stunner, catching a good portion the group who immediately collapse to the ground like rag dolls, slumping over and on top of one another in a comatose pile. Some of them try to revive their co-workers, but I move to knock them out too, blinking forward and sticking my wand in the small of one woman's back, a bright flash of red signalling that she's out of the fight.

"Oi! Get the bastard!" one of the handlers shouts, a surprisingly well-kempt man sporting a trim red beard and slicked back hair, presumably the boss of the group.

He waves his wand, a cutting curse flying from the end of it in my general direction. I jump over the beam of light, chunks of rock and dirt peppering the hem of my robes as I drive forward, punching the man in the stomach with inhuman strength and sending him flying into a tree, crashing to the ground unconscious.

I allow myself to be visible, the remaining stragglers beginning to rain spells down upon me that I dodge and weave under, slowly advancing towards the cluster of handlers desperately fighting against me.

I curse as a torrent of fire washes over my leg, having not drawn up a shield in time. With a flick of my wrist, a large gust of air strikes at the man who injured me and a companion next to him, knocking their heads together loudly and sending them tumbling down.

The rest of them begin to panic, one man attempting to run off into the dark. He's easily taken care of with an errant stunner, catching him in the back of the head and causing him to trip over his own feet, slamming face first into the ground.

With another few lazy flicks of my wand, the remainder of the handlers are knocked unconscious. I levitate them up and away from the cage, tucking them safely off to the side in the middle of the clearing between the cages, as distant as possible from the chimera.

Speaking of the animal, it lowers its main head, sniffing as it stares me down, sniffing errantly as it attempts to learn my scent. Its tail dances curiously, tongue flicking out of its mouth every few seconds as it joins in on the investigation. The goat's head is lolling about once more, a sickening grin on its face as its eyes roll madly in its skull, nonsensical chittering leaking out from between sharp, glistening teeth, stained in red.

I guess it's eaten recently.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are..." it sings mockingly, circling its pen with loping, lazy strides, eyes glued to my own the whole while. "I haven't played in oh so long. Let me taste you. Let me tear you... flesh and bone in my belly, guts on my lips! Let me tear you limb from limb! How I'd love to hear the lovely pops as your bones snap and crumble! Let me stick my paws down your neck
and rip out the delicious secrets you keep inside!"

I shudder at it's mocking tune and the words carried in it. This monster needs to die come the first task. There's no way I can allow something so disgusting to live. Additionally, I now find it hard to believe that it can only be considered 'slightly intelligent' what with the way its speaking. This creature may end up being cleverer than most humans in a fight if its use of language is anything to go by.

I blink into the cage, jabbing my wand towards the creature and watching as rotting hands rise up from beneath it, surprising the creature and pulling it to the ground, tearing muscle from bone. It roars loudly, its other two heads hissing in pain as chunks of flesh begin to dot the floor.

I look on in horror as thin trails of blood fly up towards the gashes and canyons in its skin, pulling the torn flesh with it. Like pearlescent strings, the bits and pieces of gore are drawn back up towards its body, lacing themselves back into their homes like they had never been removed in the first place.

"Sick, dark magics! Pain!" it bellows, head thrashing wildly as it tears furrows into the ground with its massive claws. "I will devour you slowly, human. I will drink your blood and stamp out your life! I will laugh as I rip you apart piece by piece, savouring every last bite!"

I bring my hands up, encasing the monster in earth and stone, chunks of rock and powdered dirt laced together to create a makeshift prison for the abomination. Not wanting to give it any ground, I transfigure the earthen bindings into thick steel, drawing up layer after layer of earth over the cage and only leaving the monsters head visible.

I pant heavily as the chimera roars its fury, thrashing about as it attempts to escape the trap, but to no avail. I know this won't hold for long, but it will give me enough time for what I need to do.

God, that took a lot out of me. Note to self, stop trying to compact earth and stone. After wiping out the acromantula, you'd think I'd have remembered how tiring it is to do that.

As quick as I can, I dash towards the monster, dodging its biting fangs and deeply slicing into the only visible part of its neck with a well aimed cutting curse, just below the jaw. An artery is severed, and its lifeblood begins to spill out to the ground below. I hold a large vial underneath, the container eagerly drinking up the crimson liquid.

"It cuts me! You dare to cut me!? Filthy carrion, disgusting little creature!" it growls, it's malicious gaze locked on mine, unadulterated fury, and a deep hunger swimming within the depths of its bloodshot eyes.

I ignore the chimera's murderous protests and notice that the blood has begun to bubble. I throw a cap on top of the vial, watching in morbid fascination as it attempts to escape its new home, churning angrily against the magically reinforced cork that holds it back, a thick metal clasp holding down the stopper.

I repeat the process, filling three vials with the liquid and trapping it within, constantly eyeing the coffin that the chimera is bound within, checking for any cracks over its surface.

As soon as I notice a single break in the bindings, I blink out of the cage, tucking the vials into my robes and pushing my hands forward, allowing the makeshift prison to collapse and return to the earth, burying the steel deep below the forest.

The chimera doesn't just roar, it screams, homicidal ramblings flying out of its gaping maw at a mile a minute, the words so closely laced together as to be completely nonsensical.
Christ, that was something else. I'm not at all looking forward to trying to kill the abomination, especially if subduing it took that much out of me. Exhausted, I go to begin my walk back to bed when I spot an oddly familiar glint of white out of the corner of my eye.

I spin around to see the Albumancer standing in the tree line, their shining white robes fluttering just above the ground, making it look as if they're floating on air.

"Long time no see," I say after sticking my wand to my throat, disguising my voice.

The Albumancer inclines their head respectfully, looking towards the raging chimera as it systematically destroys the floor of its cage. "That was quite impressive," they drawl, turning back to face me. "Are you tired?"

I roll my shoulders, checking myself over to make sure I wasn't too hurt in the commotion. I feel relief wash over me when I find that my only injury is the burn across my thigh and hips. I press my hand to my chest, and while my heart no longer beats, I still feel the time numbing effects of an adrenaline rush. There's probably something I'm missing when it comes to human biology, but learning why I can still feel the effects of cortisol isn't at the top of my priority list.

"That took a bit out of me, but I'll survive," I concede, poking curiously at the burn on my leg and hissing at the pain. I guess it's a bad one. "What are you doing here?"

"I heard rumors of a chimera at Hogwarts and came to investigate. I'm not pleased to find that the rumors were true," they say, a bit of anger leaking into their distorted words. "The British are so far behind the rest of the world, and this creature being brought from overseas for a gladiatorial contest is just another glaring example of that."

"I couldn't agree more. Did you not hear that a fourteen-year-old is competing in the tournament against her own will? The insanity of it all."

I can feel the Albumancer eyeing me curiously underneath their hood. "Yes, it is quite ridiculous."

I lick my lips, wondering whether I should breach the subject of reincarnation and all that mess.

"You have something you wish to ask of me?"

I laugh quietly, nodding my head. "I was just curious… what were you brought back for? Were you brought back?"

"That's quite a personal question," the Albumancer states emotionlessly, tilting their head up to peer through the branches above.

I blush beneath my hood, thankful that it can't be seen. "Sorry about that. I'm just so eager to learn more about the only other person on this Earth who can understand me, you know?"

"I understand." The Albumancer nods, clasping their hands behind their back. "I was brought back after having died. I imagine Death was the one to ferry your soul back here, but in my case, it was Life."

"Yeah, he's a bit of a prick, but when you get to know him he's a nice guy," I chatter, happy to finally speak with the mysterious stranger once more.

Laughing, the Albumancer shakes their head. "I can imagine. I haven't had the pleasure yet, but I know that I'll eventually meet him some day."
"Hopefully not for a long time."

"Yes, that would be preferable... if you don't mind my asking, how old are you?" the Albumancer asks hesitantly, curiosity getting the better of them. "You've got the silhouette of someone young, but I imagine you're quite a bit older, just as I am."

"Ah! I'm sure I'd be giving too much away if I told you that," I smirk, wiggling my finger back and forth. "Just... read the Daily Prophet. I'll be... revealing myself, so to say in a few weeks. If you want to seek me out then, I'll be quite easy to find."

"Revealing yourself? Are you insane?" they gasp. I can practically hear their jaw drop.

I laugh again, loudly this time, clutching my belly as I bend over. I collect myself quickly, wiping a tear from my eye. "What? I'm not going to have an interview and say, 'Hello, I'm a Necromancer!'"

I ponder what to do for a moment, before realizing that I have a good opportunity to provide the Albumancer with a clue as to who I am. "I'm sure only you'll be able to figure out my identity when the news breaks... it will be quite subtle, but when you see this-" I lift my palm, an earthen replica of my own hand rising out of the ground and waving at the Albumancer, who shirks back at the sudden display of potentially dangerous magic. "You'll know it's me."

They nod, once more resuming their regal pose. "I'm assuming that earth and air are your given powers?"

"Yeah. Fire and water for you?" They nod once more. "That makes sense. Life was born from fire and water, and it eventually turns to dust and ash, scattered across the winds... quite poetic if I'm being honest. I wonder if that was intentional on Life and Death's parts."

"Hmm? You're a reader of poetry?" the Albumancer inquires, a smile in their words.

I chuckle, shaking my head. "Not really, but someone I know recently ignited my interest in the art."

"Well, if you do decide to begin delving into poetry, I would highly recommend E. E. Cummings. His works are... interesting. The flow to his writing is sporadic, but I feel that it adds charm to it."

"Well, I'll make sure to keep that in mind." Another pained roar from the chimera gets my attention, and I turn to see the handlers beginning to stir. "Well, it looks like nap time is over, and that means it's time for me to leave." I incline my head towards the Albumancer, smiling beneath my hood. "It was good to see you again. Good luck in your endeavours, and I hope that you seek me out face to face when you discover who I am."

"It will be my pleasure," they reply, a flash of white signalling their departure.

Oh yeah, I don't need to walk back.

Smacking myself on the head for forgetting such a simple thing, I blink back to my room just as the first of the handlers returns to the lands of the living, quickly removing Death's cloak and pondering what to do about my burns.

My staple healing charm isn't very effective when it comes to burns, considering it's used to knit flesh back together rather than repair damaged skin. I curse, realizing that I'll need to ask Severus for some dittany tomorrow to treat the wound.

Exhausted beyond belief, I tuck the vials of chimera blood into my trunk, safely nestled underneath a pile of neatly folded clothes. With a groan, I cast a numbing charm over my burned side and climb
into bed, asleep before my head even strikes the pillow.

Chapter End Notes

My thanks to Commando2341 for reminding me where the little chimera bit comes from. All credit for the idea behind the creature and others being introduced to the story can be given to Temporal Knight, and his fantastically fun, 'Harry Potter and the Rune Stone Path.'
I have a habit of stretching when I wake up, curling about on my bed like a tired cat, spine bent and limbs splayed as I attempt to get my blood flowing, like my contortions will somehow wake me up faster than if I otherwise didn't roll around like a demented circus performer.

Unfortunately, I seem to have forgotten the fact that a good portion of the right side of my body is layered in raw, burnt and knotted tissue.

I hiss loudly as my back bows from the sudden pain, hips lifting into the air as I struggle to escape my own skin.

"Fuck!" I groan, tentatively pressing my hand to my side and cursing once more at the burning sensation it brings. I summon my wand to my hand, the focus having fallen to the ground some time in the night, passing it over my wounded side and sighing lowly in relief as the overwhelming pain ebbs, slowly becoming more and more ignorable.

Now I understand why burn centres are considered one of the most daunting places to work in as a medical professional, be it either magical or mundane.

I push myself quickly through my morning ablutions, cleaned and dressed in record time as I set out to visit Severus for some burn remedy, making sure to pack the chimera's blood away in my bag before I leave. I trudge sleepily through the halls, passing through dusty fragments of light that cut through the many windows lining the stairwell, slowly working my way down the moving steps.

My un-caffeinated brain is short on the uptake as I find myself standing awkwardly in front of Severus' private office. I blink owlishly, knocking steadily on the door and kicking my feet at the floor, listening as the soles of my shoes scuff noisily off of the weathered stone.

The door swings open, Severus looking at me curiously as he invites me in.

"Is everything alright? You normally don't come to see me so early in the day," he asks, motioning to my usual seat. He tilts his head questioningly when I don't sit down. "What happened?"

"Managed to get burnt pretty badly," I say, gesturing at my side.

He purses his lips, squinting at me. "Were you the cause of the commotion in the forest last night?"

"Er- yeah? I thought you wouldn't have heard about that until later in the day."

Severus rolls his eyes dramatically, murmuring something quietly under his breath. "Well, when the DMLE comes knocking at three in the morning, it often gets all of the professors involved," he explains, shaking his head as he rummages through his private store of potions and balms. "Now, I've got some burn salve somewhere in here, but I'd like to know why you thought it would be a wise
idea to attack the handlers last night. You did it for a reason, yes? Not just to keep yourself busy?"

I shrug emphatically. "I needed chimera blood for a ritual, so I went and got it. I did my best not to hurt any of the handlers, but I think I might have given the supervisor a good knock when I threw him into a tree."

Severus blinks slowly, holding a container of burn salve in one hand. He stands there for a moment, just staring at me, bewildered, before lifting his head back and gazing at the ceiling with a dumbstruck expression. "Gods preserve me, you're suicidal," he utters, puffing out his lips and exhaling loudly.

"Hey! It was necessary! Knowing my luck, I'm going to have to fight the fucking thing, and I'd like to have a chance at surviving my upcoming battle with an intelligent, man-eating abomination," I argue, sticking my hands in the air. "It's going to be a kick in the head to try and kill the thing. Keeping it tied up was nearly as exhausting as fighting Dumbledore."

"Kill it? Are you absolutely insane?" Severus gasps, nearly dropping the salve in his shock. "How on earth do you expect to kill a chimera?"

"Fiendfyre?"

He groans loudly, handing me the burn salve and trudging over to his seat, slumping into it tiredly and cradling his head in calloused hands. "You're just like your mother, always jumping into a situation headfirst, and damning the consequences." He rubs his eyes, before pinching the bridge of his nose in exasperation. "You're going to cast fiendfyre in front of the judges and the press?"

"Well, it's classified as a dark spell since it's so difficult to cast, but... I thought it wouldn't be that big of a deal? I mean, it's still a big deal, but I can't get in trouble for it, right?" I muse, wondering aloud. "Would it be that big of an issue? I've heard of it being cast by aurors in the field before." I pause, my mind jumping back a moment. "You said my mother was reckless?"

Severus' eyes cloud over as he thinks back so many decades. "From what I can recall, yes, she was quite reckless. Always getting into some sort of trouble when it came to a new spell... Gods, she was probably responsible for most of Minerva's gray hairs." He runs his hand over his face, a nostalgic revealed underneath. "Your father and his hooligan friends could be blamed for the other half."

I smile at the mention of my parents, and even though I know Severus has nothing nice to say about my dad, it's still pleasant to hear something new about them. I've always heard a lot about my dad... but my mum? Well, the extent of my knowledge is that she had a temper as fiery as her hair and was devilishly clever.

"My mum? Really?"

Severus chuckles quietly, nodding and shaking his head at the same time. "Yes, yes she was. I seem to remember her working on an experimental runic sequence in seventh year... something for a NEWT project, I believe. She set fire to a good portion of the fifth floor and Dumbledore himself had to come down and put out the blaze while the students were evacuated." His eyes shine as he continues, a sparkling grin on his normally expressionless face. "She didn't even look ashamed! She just seemed frustrated that she managed to mess up the sequence, somehow forgetting the fact that she was working on a fire suppression matrix and had managed to fudge the numbers so badly that it turned into a fire-starting matrix."

I laugh loudly, able to perfectly imagine my mum with her hands on her hips staring angrily at the offending piece of runework. "Thank you," I say, another small chuckle escaping me.
"It's not a problem," Severus concedes. He taps his chin as his face turns serious once more, the sentimental mood having disappeared. "And speaking of fire-starting, yes, fiendfyre has sometimes been used by aurors. Aurors who got fired the instant they returned from their mission, if they weren't consumed by the fire in the first place." Severus pauses, lacing his fingers together and resting his hands on top of his desk. "Do you even know how to control the spell?"

I shrug once more. "Not really, and if I can't get a handle on it before the first task, I'm going to have to find a different way to kill the chimera."

"Well, I'd suggest you find an alternative, as well as outline a plan in the very probable case that you're vilified by the media if you do go ahead and use such a volatile and vilified spell. It is dark magic, and it is also incredibly dangerous and more than difficult to control."

I salute Severus playfully, two fingers bouncing off my forehead. "Can do boss. I've got an in at the Prophet, considering I have a large share in the company. I don't expect them to write anything poor about me, but I'll get in contact with them before they have a chance to publish anything so that I can make sure they don't publish anything… untowards."

I tap my fingers against my knee in a steady rhythm, pondering over whether or not not fiendfyre would be wise to use.

Well, I know it's not wise to use, especially in such a public setting. So what could I possibly use instead?

There's always felfyre, but that could easily be much worse than using fiendfyre, not to mention the fact that it's literally a spell meant to channel flames from Hell itself. I'm sure nobody would be able to identify it, but would they be able to identify the signature of the spell? I'd imagine that it would absolutely reek of death, but the most important question would be if they would know.

Hmm.

Severus yawns widely, breaking my train of thought. "I believe it's time for me to get to breakfast. Will you be coming with me, or will you be off to apply your salve now?"

"I think I'm going to go do that and get this ritual done as soon as possible, should help me with the burns," I say, packing the small container into my bag. "Thanks for the help Severus."

"Any time. Now, I'm off to eat," he states, pushing me out the door and sending me on my way.

We split off after climbing up the stairs, Severus headed to the Great Hall, while I continue on towards the Room of Requirement. I forgo the usual trek, instead deciding to blink up to the seventh-floor and cut the trip down to a second, limping into the Room and glancing around.

I nod as I notice that the Room has already set itself up for the ritual I'm about to undertake. Stripping down quickly, I grimace at the webbed mix of stringy pink skin stretched over ochre burns, the tissue looking as if it's been roasted over a campfire. I tap the darker burns with one finger, cursing when I realize that it has been cooked, the skin crisp like roast pork.

Makes me wonder if I'd taste half decent. Honestly, I'd probably be a bit stringy, what with how little fat I have on me.

Forgetting my morbidly curious thoughts, I pop the lid off the container and begin to liberally smear the burn salve over the damaged tissue, sighing in relief as the cool to the touch paste quickly works away, the pain ebbing and the skin beginning to regain a healthy colouring.
After allowing the salve to do its job, I wash it off, as the magic of the poultice would potentially disrupt the ritual.

With a wave of my hand, I summon the chimera's blood and one of the many athame's in the Room, catching it deftly and stepping onto the usual dais. I kneel, the stone cold on my knees and rough on the top of my feet, scraping uncomfortably against skin and bone. I pop the tops off of the vials, the blood stirring slightly before settling once more, it's home too far away for it to reach.

I begin to cut, the motions now second nature, their memories seared into my mind and muscles.

It starts with laguz, the scythe etched onto my sternum and back, the identical runes mirroring each other. Healing and renewal. I move on, inscribing an othala onto both of my collarbones, the two runes laced into the centrepiece by diagonal lines cut over the modest swell of my chest. Inheritance.

Blood slowly begins to creep out of the self-inflicted wounds, crimson slowly peeking out between broken flesh. I levitate the knife, setting it by the small of my back and carving in a small sequence, eihwaz, a reversed nauthiz, as well as thurisaz. Strength, endurance, necessity, and regeneration.

I continue carving, variations of the runes beginning to litter my body. A few on my stomach, along my thighs, between my shoulder blades, and one at the base of my skull. Fehu, something won or earned, to represent the stolen blood and its assimilation into my body.

I levitate one of the vials, pouring the still warm liquid over my body, letting it run down pale skin, dripping noisily against the floor. I empty the next between my legs, letting it pool around my knees. The third I bring up to my lips, breathing in once before drinking the contents, thick bitter iron running down my throat. I do my best not to gag, the liquid fighting my efforts as it tosses and turns, trying its damndest to escape its new prison. I gulp loudly, the last of the blood trickling down my gullet and churning in my stomach.

Spreading my hands out, I let my magic suffuse the blood on and around me, the two intrinsically different energies warring for dominance. With gritted teeth, I continue to push, forcing my will upon the chimera's liquid life. It shudders in protest, spitting around my ankles before it suddenly gives, the blood settling into a still pool as its will to fight is extinguished.

Just as suddenly as the first ritual, it rises up from the ground, climbing across my body as it desperately searches for refuge, like liquid snakes coiling over my limbs and slithering their way into my veins. My muscles quiver as they're infused with new life, the skin along my thigh and hip sloughing off like the peel of a fruit, the muscle underneath bubbling and twisting as it reforms new flesh.

I grin in approval as I heal at an unprecedent speed. Not as fast as the chimera, but much, much quicker than any human would. It takes about half a minute for the burns to be replaced by clean skin, no sign that I was ever wounded apart from a slight discolouration where the outskirts of the burn once were.

"Brilliant," I whisper, climbing back up to my feet and flexing my limbs. I smile happily when I confirm that it's as if I was never hurt, having full mobility of my leg. "Fucking brilliant."

I go back to where I'd left my things and throw my clothes back on, slinging my bag back over my shoulder and heading off to breakfast, feeling completely and utterly revitalized.

I skip, down the stairs towards the Great Hall, practically prancing my way over to the table where Hermione and the rest of the girls are sat. Fleur smiles oddly at me as I pass her by, looking slightly worried. I frown when I see that she's off on her own, and I suddenly realize that unless she's
sat with us, she's always on her own. Hell, I don't think I've ever seen her hanging about with anyone from Beauxbatons.

I shake my head, continuing on and taking a seat next to Luna, who slides over to allow me some room.

"Hey!" I say, happily taking my seat and piling food onto my plate. Hermione eyes me curiously, before her expression changes to one of poorly hidden shock. She mouths 'silence' across the table at me, and I acquiesce, placing us into a soundproof bubble. "What's going on?"

"What the hell happened to your eyes?" she exclaims, nearly lifting her hand off the table to point at me but thinking better of it, keeping it glued next to her plate, fidgeting with her cutlery. "They… they look like cat's eyes!"

I blink a few times, remembering that the ritual could, and probably would change me genetically. Looks like it did. I wave my wand over my face, silently casting a glamour charm to make my eyes appear as they normally do, making a mental note to check them out later and see how feline they are.

"I did that ritual I was telling you about, and it looks like the chimera's blood changed more than my regenerative capabilities," I explain, taking a swift bite out of a sausage link and humming in pleasure as the spiced meat dances across my tongue. "Are they still green?"

"Yes, they are, and- well, it looks a bit… terrifying, but incredibly attractive at the same time," Hermione says, slapping her hand over her mouth and blushing intensely. "Oh my, I just said that out loud, didn't I?"

I chuckle loudly, waving my fork at her, a bit of egg dangling off the end of it. "Yeah, you did. Thanks for the compliment."

She can't help but smile in return, nodding her head at me to remove the silencing charm, which I quickly do.

I chat amicably with the other girls, Luna making an offhand comment about how I seem 'different.' Either she's being Luna, or once more, she's a lot more perceptive than she seems. I know she's a perceptive little lady, but I also think that she just likes to take the piss out of everyone.

"So, are you ready for the first task?" Lisa asks, nibbling on a piece of toast.

I let out a slow breath. "As ready as I can be, considering I have to go up against a XXXXX classified creature."

Ginny chokes on her food, Hermione quickly giving her a hand and slapping her on the back. She coughs loudly, eyes watering. "What? Are you serious?" she asks, looking more horrified as I nod my head in confirmation. "That's… shite! Those… those, those buggering fuckwits! Who do they think they are!?"

I cover my mouth with the back of my hand, stifling a laugh as Ginny begins to rant and rave over the stupidity of the Ministry, the Hogwarts faculty, and anyone and everyone involved in the Tournament.

"…and they think they can get away with that? The competitors are eighteen at the oldest! Why the hell would they bring in creatures so dangerous!?"

"Ginny… Ginny!" I interrupt, snapping my fingers and halting her tirade. She blinks sheepishly,
looking around frantically as she realizes that just about everyone nearby has heard her rant. "I get it. Really, I do. But there's nothing I can do about it now."

Her shoulders slump as she leans forward dejectedly. "I know... I just... gods. This tournament is going to be a bloodbath if that's the first task..."

"Well, you don't have to worry about me getting hurt too badly," I boast, puffing out my chest. "The great Helene Potter would never fall to something so trivial as a gigantic man-eating beast!"

She giggles quietly, before sighing. "I'll hold you to that. If you die, I'll kill you! You got that?"

I put my hands up in surrender, a mock terrified look on my face. "Awful lot of people threatening my safety lately, huh?" I ask, turning my gaze towards Hermione who smirks at me.

"It's for your own good, little miss reckless," she jibes, pointing at me with her knife.

"Little Miss Reckless?" I echo, nearly dropping my silverware.

She nods. "Yes. Little Miss Reckless."

"Not really an intimidating name, is it?" I comment, Luna turning her dazed eyes towards me.

"Would you prefer Morgana?"

I click my tongue in thought. "Huh, it's got a good ring to it, but the connotation is a bit too fire and brimstone for me."

"Little Miss Reckless it is then," Luna states unequivocally, returning her attention to her meal.

I shake my head, laughing quietly at the little bout of banter. God, I love these girls.

-::- I blink from my room out to that same cliff face that looks over the North Sea, wrapping my coat closer around me to stave off the sharp autumn air. I continue blinking across the east coast of the Shetlands until I'm looking over an odd slant on the flank of the isle, a sea soaked diagonal cut of stone riding downwards and disappearing into the ocean. Behind me is a hill denoting where a broch once towered over the countryside, long crumbled masonry scattered over the protrusion of dirt and grass.

I get myself ready to blink out of danger in the case that my insane little venture into some of the blackest of magics goes awry. There's a good chance that it will, and I'd prefer not to be incinerated because of my own stupidity.

Rolling my shoulder, I take a few deep breaths, my nerves settling and my mind clearing as I lift my arm, wand pointed out over the roiling sea.

"Hiti á hel, standask við vel fjándmaðr," I whisper, my wand bucking as a torrential gout of noxious green flames erupt from the end of it. I know that it's hot, more torrid than even the centre of the sun, yet I don't feel a thing. The conflagration looks thick, almost corporeal as thin viscous strings of fire flicker off the steady stream like torn webbing, dissipating into the nights air.

I find myself starting in surprise, the sheer presence of the spell washing over me like the caress of a long-lost friend, the deluge of fire dancing across thin air, twisting in on itself and contorting into a whirl of feverous energy. It heaves as it curls into intricate patterns, signs and shapes recognizable for
but a moment before they vanish, new images forming in their place.

"Incredible," I mutter, my wand moving of its own accord, my wrist following behind like a well-trained conductor, the tempo slowly increasing. The felfyre picks up, yearning to reach its crescendo, to wash over the untainted land and cleanse it of all life, a dominance that screams out to the world its intent.

To cleanse.

It's Black Magic, and it's nearly biblical in its intensity, its single-minded purpose. Felfyre is not meant for the world of the living, so it means to bring all back to the underworld with it.

I snap my wand down, the neon, otherworldly flames dissolving noisily, hissing and sparking as they're constrained, suffocated and brought to heel.

"Holy fucking shit," I gasp, breathing hard as my eyes swim with flashing lights, shimmering bubbles of indecipherable colour dancing across my vision.

That was… wow. That felt absolutely incredible! Like that spell was meant to be born of my wand, to be fueled by my magic, to be driven by my intent.

On shaking, excited knees, I sit down on the slightly damp Shetland grass, crossing my legs and closing my eyes. I reach out with my own magic, sensing the power in the air and trying to put a name to how it feels.

The magic is… it doesn't feel like Black Magic, which I find absolutely remarkable. Somehow the darkest of the dark comes across as… pure. It's wholly and completely pure, and even though it's so destructive as to worry even me, I can't find anything intrinsically wrong about it. It destroys, yet it's meant to purify. It does not kill, per se, but if what I'm guessing is correct, it ferries life to the other side just as the veil does.

It's not Hellfire, it's Unholy Fire.

I frown at that thought. Well, it's not the worst way to describe it, but it's still not accurate. Unholy just has this awful vibe to it, and the word reminds me a little too much of that Dementor Lord underneath Azkaban, what with its harping on of, holy this and unholy that.

It's the antithesis Holy Fire, an energy born of creation. Therefore, Felfyre is destruction in its simplest form. It has no bias, it just is.

I find it strangely beautiful.

I stretch my back as I climb up to my feet, a noisy crack emitting from the closely knitted flesh and bone. Taking another deep breath of crisp, salty air, I blink back to Hogwarts.

-:-

I walk into the tent, the quiet roar of the crowd of students outside suddenly silenced by whatever charms have been placed upon it.

I smile genially at Fleur, Viktor, and Cedric, the three of them giving some form of weak reply back. A worried smile from Cedric, a brisk nod of the head from Viktor, and a meek wave from Fleur.

"So, is everyone ready?" I ask, rubbing my hands together nervously.
I'm really not looking forward to what's to come. Binding the chimera was hard enough, but for me to slay the abomination? Well, that's going to take a lot out of me.

"As ready as I can be," Cedric croaks, fingering his wand nervously, rolling the focus over in his shaking hands. He clenches his fist against his trousers, the fabric bunching underneath.

"Da, our training group went as well as I'd hoped it to," Viktor adds stoically, arms crossed.

Fleur nods her assent, tilting her head as she looks me up and down. I can feel her incredible blue eyes dancing over me, almost penetrating in their intensity. "I quite like your outfit Helene, where did you get it?"

I take a good look at her, noticing that she's not wearing the same uniform she did last time. Instead, her clothing is much more practical. Slightly baggy gray sweatpants, a thick white tank top, and a pair of snug looking ankle high boots, those of the combat variety. Yeah, that looks much more useful than a little blue skirt and wispy blouse.

I run my fingers over my own outfit, the one that Severus had commissioned for me. I want to make an impression on the magical community today, one that tells them that I'm not someone to be fucked with.

The reason why I'm wearing this instead of something else?

I can't easily put Death's cloak on over this outfit, so since there's no chance that I'm going to go on one of my… escapades without that, this'd be better suited for something more public. It's made to intimidate, and it'll serve its purpose well today.

"It was a gift," I answer, popping the button on the top of the jacket so I can breathe a bit more easily.

"Well, it was lovely gift," she says, once more devouring me with her eyes. "You look fantastic in it," she adds, her tone complimentary rather than flirting. "A femme-fatale, I would say."

God damn if I didn't wish she knew my real age.

"Thank you," I grin, averting my gaze from her own and doing my best to quell the sudden need to be close to her, to hold and be held by her. Christ, she really doesn't know what she does to me, does she?

I hear a clap from behind me and nearly jump to the side, the other champions startled just as much by the sudden appearance of Bagman in all his pudgy glory, as I am. He's decked out in his old Wimbourne Wasps jersey, the fabric stretched over his beer and grease induced girth. I eye him distastefully, a familiar fire lit in my belly, urging me to wipe the overweight doppelganger of my violator off the face of the earth.

With gritted teeth, I push that feeling down, rolling my eyes when he grins cheerfully and prepares his little spiel.

"Well, how exciting this all is! The first task!" He claps once more, fingers locking together. "Now, to get straight to business. You'll all be required to collect a golden egg from each of your… guardians," he utters, eyes gleaming with excitement. I almost growl at his nonchalant manner, how utterly delighted he is to see us go up against monsters that just may kill each and every one of us.

Well, except for me that is, but I'm a special breed.
He draws a familiar plush bag out from seemingly nowhere, the theatrical maneuver having no effect on our current, dour mood. Scowling minutely at our lack of reaction, he holds the bag up to Fleur. "Ladies first, if you will."

She purses her lips, moving forward confidently and placing her hand into the bag, breathing a sigh of relief as she draws out the manticore, the miniature monster growling as it prowls over her open palm. She casts a guilty expression my way, know that there's a higher chance now for me to draw the chimera.

Not that I wouldn't have drawn it anyways.

Bagman continues on, Cedric relieved to end up with the Hungarian Horntail, and Viktor looking emotionless as he receives the quintaped.

Yep, I knew that would happen.

Wanting to get it over with as fast as possible, I thrust my hand into the bag and pull out the tiny little chimera, the animated replica hissing and struggling as I pick it up by the scruff of the neck, tossing it to the ground and crushing it beneath my foot.

Bagman's eyes bug out of his head at my gesture, but he quickly collects himself, throat bobbing as he gulps loudly. "The order that you four are in is Mister Diggory to start, followed by Mister Krum, Miss Delacour, and finally, Miss Potter," he states, running his eyes over us, his greedy gaze pausing on me momentarily.

Looks like the chubby cunt bet on me once again.

"When the cannon goes off, that means it will be your queue to enter the field," he finishes, bowing slightly and exiting the tent.

I walk lazily forward and collapse into one of the seats that's been scattered about, feet kicking up clumps of grass as I drive my heel into the ground, carving shallow furrows into the earth.

"Helene… are you going to be alright?" Cedric asks uncertainly, his face twisted with worry.

I put my hand up lazily, cupping my forehead with it. "Yeah, I'm going to be alright," I say, the other three frowning at my statement. "Trust me. If you want to see a good show, try to convince Pomfrey to let you spectate. I'm going to make a bit of an impression today."

"And what would that be?" Viktor asserts, arms still crossed, a hardened look on his face.

I grin madly. "You'll have to wait and see."

All of a sudden, the boom of a cannon reaches the tent. Cedric squares his shoulders, rolling up his sleeves before he goes to leave the tent.

"Hey, Cedric!" I call, the terrified Hufflepuff turning back to me.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Go kick some ass."

He grins nervously, shooting me a thumbs up before slipping out of the tent, silence once more passing over us.

We sit for a while, time going by slowly in our worried state. Viktor is meditating in the corner, legs
crossed and his hands resting on his knees, slow shallow breaths slipping out of him. The cannon goes off once more, Viktor briskly standing up and striding out of the tent without a backwards glance.

Fleur on the other hand begins to pace as soon as he's left the tent, her calm façade crumbling away now that it's just me and her, her hands held behind her back like a general as she works herself into a fervor.

"Fleur, hey, take it easy," I say, walking up behind her and placing my hand on her back comfortingly, the taller woman freezing up at the physical contact. "You're going to tire yourself out before the task even starts."

Her shoulders raise and lower dramatically as she breathes in and out. I circle over to meet her and speak face to face, hand regretfully leaving her body. Fleur's eyes are shut tight, nostrils flaring as she continues to draw in air, mouth opening just a touch as it's let out over rosy lips.

"Oui, I know. I'm just… tense," she whispers, eyes opening a crack as she looks at me.

I smile reassuringly at her. "You're going to do fine, trust me. A witch like you? That manticore doesn't stand a chance."

She snorts, a wry chuckle escaping her. "It's not me that I'm worried about," she concedes, her gaze once more meeting my own. "It's you."

I swallow heavily, blinking a few times as her words register. "Oh?"

"You're a close friend of mine… one of my only friends if I'm being honest. I… I don't want to see you get hurt."

My sudden flash of hope is quickly dashed away at her words, but I can't help but nod knowingly. God, I've really got to stop getting ahead of myself. She rejected me, it's not going to happen. "That wasn't an empty boast earlier. Trust me when I say that I'm going to come out of this in one piece, and there's going to be one less chimera in this world when it's all done and over with."

"Don't joke around!" Fleur shouts, grabbing me by the shoulders, tears in her eyes. "Do you not realize how dangerous this creature is? C'est des conneries! You're going to get yourself killed!"

I push her away, Fleur stumbling backwards. "I'm not going to get myself killed," I clip, lowering my hands.

"You're fourteen-years old! I know you're smart, I know you're powerful, but you're still fourteen!" she argues.

I sigh loudly, holding my hand out in front of me. Fleur goes to open her mouth at my defiant gesture, but I turn my hand over, palm up, and lift. A hand of stone breaks from the ground, Fleur shouting in fright as she's gently lifted, her eyes widening at the casual display of wandless, elemental magic.

"I… what?" she croaks, hopping off the granite replica of my hand and back to solid ground, staring at me in wonder. She looks like she's about to say more when the third cannon shot goes off, Fleur cursing loudly. "When this is over with, you and I are going to talk," she says. She doesn't do so aggressively, but there's an unspoken promise in her words, a calm demand to know what just happened, accompanied by an indecipherable look in her eyes.
I nod, accepting her request. "Stay safe."

She clenches her jaw, inclining her head in reply as she sweeps out of the tent, the canvas fluttering in her wake and leaving me to stew in silence, suddenly realizing how very claustrophobic my surroundings are.

I let the fist crumble, sitting down in the middle of the tent, my eyes closed as I listen to the quiet murmuring that reaches me from the outside, a cleverly fashioned silencing charm muting all but the cannon. I absentmindedly pick away at the grass that pokes up from the earth, allowing the blades to flutter noiselessly to the ground.

Quicker than I thought, the cannon goes off for a fourth and final time.

Damn Fleur was speedy.

I brush the dirt from my knees, calmly exiting the tent and doing my best not to flinch away at the sudden roar. It's just as I remembered it, a large stone pit surrounded by sports bleachers, the entirety of the school and then some clustered about, a sea of Hogwarts colours interspersed by the familiar red of Durmstrang and pastel blue of Beauxbatons. The pit looks a bit different from last time, although that might be because much of it has been reduced to rubble, great gouges in the earth where there once were boulders, grayish tufts of fur matted in blood interspersed throughout the arena.

Looks like Viktor did a number on the quintaped. At least, I hope he did.

"Last, but not least, we have our youngest champion, Helene Potter!" Bagman shouts, his magically enhanced voice carrying well across the grounds, the crowd bellowing in approval. "Let's see how she does going up against the most fearsome beast brought in today, the chimera!"

A sudden hush falls over the audience, a few muted cheers being quickly silenced as the students who aren't in the know look to their seatmates for an explanation. The others just stare in horror as the chimera is herded into the organic theatre, resting on its haunches next to the golden egg, its intelligent eyes locked on me, a feral grin on its face.

I stretch my legs out, laboriously going through the motions as I relieve the tension in my muscles.

Wouldn't do to get a cramp in the middle of slaying a monster.

The crowd watches in silence as I venture into the pen, the intense magic of the wards that surround it washing over me.

Quite impressive.

The chimera doesn't hesitate, leaping towards me with a furious growl, thick strings of saliva curling out from under its sodden lips.

I duck and roll, narrowly avoiding the swipe of its claws just as the snake's head strikes at my shoulder, thin fangs glancing off the basilisk hide and hissing furiously.

:Damned human!: it screeches, tongue flicking out and tasting the air, it's eyes widening in recognition. :I know you! Thief! Disgusting little thing!: 

It roars, charging again. I throw myself to the ground, gravel crunching loudly underneath me as it bites, jaws noisily clamping on thin air. I try to roll away, shocked as the goat's head suddenly unfurls out of the chimera's body, its impossibly long neck having been hidden within the creature's
ribs and innards. Lunging at me, it wraps its teeth around my forearm, crushing it in its grip.

I howl in pain, pulling my wand up and casting a high-powered cutting curse at the animal, severing the head from its body. With another flick of my wand, I send a jet of fire at the bleeding stump, hoping that that's enough to halt its regeneration.

As the creature rages, I jump backwards, the bones in my arm cracking loudly as they rearrange themselves, painfully climbing back into place. I can feel the healing draw on my magic as my skin twists and shifts to accommodate the moving bone. It's slight, but it's there.

Bugger.

So that means that it's not as foolproof as I thought it would be.

_Fuck me sideways._

I cast a torrent of cutting and explosive curses at the chimera, the beasts hide bursting from the onslaught, chunks of viscera flying every which way as bits of it are torn away, others sliced neatly in long, straight furrows, rivulets of blood dancing across its hide and dripping thickly to the ground, the steady patter clear as day to my magically enhanced ears.

"You hurt me! You hurt me again!" it screeches, the goats head twitching and jumping on ground, thick, glistening ropes of gore snaking their way up and over its body, firmly attaching themselves to the disembodied head. The long strands of muscle flick around as they thread back into their home, the head shuddering as it is stitched back in place. It screams its fury to the sky, tongue lolling out of its hideous mouth as its eyes dance wildly in its skull. I notice in horror that the chimera's already regenerated most of the damage, blood racing back up it's patchy fur and disappearing into knitted muscle and skin. "I will rip the flesh from your bones! I will start with your feet! Little chunks, small slices, bits and pieces flitting across my tongue!"

The crowd, Bagman included, is silent as I slowly begin to sidestep around the chimera, the creature never straying too far away from the egg, staring at me challengingly, hackles raised. The fight pauses for a brief moment, the two of us dancing around each other. I continue to circle the arena, eyes flicking about as I try to find an environmental advantage.

I hiss in anger. Unfortunately, the arena has been too thoroughly destroyed for me to get the upper hand through my surroundings, and I curse heavily under my breath.

"Well, looks like I have to resort to this early," I sigh tiredly, flicking one finger forward and watching as a massive chunk of stone lances out of the ground, impaling the chimera. The moulded ore cuts right through it, exploding out of the back of the creature along with fragments of pearly white bone, muscle and skin folding out of the wound and laying across its spine like a twisted, sanguine flower.

"Dear God! Miss Potter has just done the impossible! Wandless transfiguration!" Bagman shouts excitedly, having collected himself. The previously silent crowd roars in excitement, somehow suddenly forgetting the incredible danger that I'm in.

_Fucking blood sport._

I open my hands wide and push both up, fingers splayed and palms to the sky. The earth boils, a wave of dirt and stone pouring upwards, wrapping around the chimera. It fights, great muscles flexing, quickly breaking out of the makeshift prison.

"To try that a second time? You wound me!" It cackles, a hideous sound, the sharp whine of metal
on metal.

It pulls back, standing on its hind legs. It sets its paws on the pike and begins to push, sliding itself off the makeshift spear. A thick, wet slurp announces the exit of the spear from its body, the gaping hole in its chest quickly reforming in front of me, blood no longer spewing from the foot-thick gap, instead oozing quickly across its belly and shuddering as it snakes its way back into bluish veins.

The chimera loudly slams back to the ground on its two front paws, a great cloud of dust billowing out from under it. It cocks its head to the side as it slowly begins to march forward, pushing me back and attempting to fence me in against the wall. I shuffle quickly, ducking and dodging the lazy swipes of its claws, the goats head snapping and growling as it tries to take a bite out of me, spittle dotting my cheeks as it flickers past my head.

Before I can react, there's a sudden flash of green, the chimera's tail whipping around at an incredible speed and wrapping round my waist. My wand falls out of my hand, and I choke as it begins to constrict me, screams of fear echoing from the stands and pounding on my ears. I gasp and splutter, scrabbling desperately at the thick coils that slowly tighten, the air being forced out of me as the chimera, swaying its head from side to side, gloats as it tries to crush my ribs.

"Tasty, tasty, tasty! Guts and blood and bone! I'll mash and scrape and taste and taste and all you'll do is moan!" it sings, licking its chops greedily.

I cough as a couple of my ribs snap. I can feel it break through the skin, and instinctually try to breathe in sharply, incapable of the feat with my chest bound so. I start in horror as a thin trail of blood slowly dribbles down my chin as something inside me pops, causing me to scream in pain. In the background, I can dimly hear Bagman crowing fearfully about the predicament I've found myself in, but I can't really make out a word of it, only the tone.

Feeling the last bit of air trapped in my lungs squeezed out, I clench my jaw. Slowly, my vision begins to swim, my head lolling as my neck can no longer support its weight. I can feel myself losing consciousness, flickering gray snow at the corner of my eyes, the world losing focus.

Huh… is this how I die?

Did Death lie to me? Do I not live to a ripe old age? Do I not defeat Voldemort?

I groan silently as my body folds over the massive curled snake, its smooth skin digging painfully into my belly.

Was this all some sort of sick joke?

"No… no no no no no. I can't die… I won't die," I mutter desperately.

With a sudden rush of strength, I summon my wand, turning it up at the neck of the snake and shooting a powerful rotting curse at it, one that will hopefully act faster than the creature can regenerate. The scales begin to peel off, revealing thin and bent ribs underneath, the flesh melting and bubbling as the curse gets to work.

It drops me, and I draw in great heaving breaths, holding my hand to my chest and loving every minute that the cold Scottish air graces my throat, ignoring the incredible aching pain deep inside me. Summoning up my magic, I pull my hands up, a veritable *tsunami* of earth flowing up and over the chimera, who's still fussing with its melting tail. With another flick of my wrist, long jagged spikes burst out of the curtain of sediment, and with a triumphant grin, I slam my hand down, the massive wave crushing the abomination.
I collapse to my knees as blood and muscle gush out from underneath the mound of earth, waving my hand and peeling back the natural mask, a contorted mish mash of viscera and bone twitching sporadically as it tries to tie itself back together. I grimace when I see that the chimera's life has already begun streaming back towards it, a river of grainy crimson mash coursing over thin channels in the ground like a grisly river, the heap of gore still spasming.

I extend my arm, wand pointed at the creature as I whisper, "Hiti á hel, standask við vel fjármáðr."

Just like atop the cliffs, a vibrant burst of green fire pours forth from my wand, greedily lapping up the hideous mess of entrails that lays quivering on the ground. It all but vanishes underneath the torrent of cleansing flames, a whirl of ashes bursting forth and scattering across the stadium.

I hold the spell, allowing the exhilarating burst of ethereal flame to work its magic, the ground baking and crystallizing underneath the incredible onslaught, cracked, glassy obsidian shining upon the outskirts of the emerald geyser.

When I can feel the last of my magic ebbing away, I cut off the spell. I let out a great choking breath, wheezing harshly as the dust settles, nothing but a crater in the wake of the selfyre. I grin triumphantly, stumbling forward and picking up the golden egg.

I throw my head back and roar in triumph, egg held aloft, my hair plastered against my brow, sticky with dirt and mud. Thick gashes litter my clothes, and a thin river of dried blood sticks to my chin and neck, making for what is probably a ghastly sight.

The crowd is mum, reticent, staring in awe at what has just happened.

Then, they fucking explode.

An outright clamor of screaming voices, stamping, and clapping, Bagman unable to get a word in edgewise over the fanatical audience. He gives up as the handlers pour into the arena, gawking at the bowl of glassy stone where the chimera was incinerated, eyes flicking back and forth between me and the impossible sight in front of them. I stand there awkwardly, too tired to move, my very bones aching from the beating I've taken and the sheer amount of magic that I've used.

Hermione comes rushing out of the stands to my rescue, aggressively pushing other students out of the way as she stampedes forward, scooping my limp frame up in her hands and supporting me on her shoulder.

"You're an idiot, you get that? An idiot!" she cries, Daphne, Tracey, and Astoria suddenly popping up in front of us with tears in their eyes.

Astoria rushes forward, nearly crushing me with the strength of the chimera as she draws me into a hug, bawling her eyes out. "I thought... I thought you were going to die!" she blubbers, head squashed against my chest.

I tiredly lift my arm, patting her on the head. "I'm alright, I'm alright," I cough, spattering the back of my hand with blood. I frown at that. "Well, not as alright as I think I am, I guess."

"Everyone move out of the way! Now!" Daphne bellows, helping Hermione out by taking my other side, the two of them ushering me past the wide-eyed students that are fighting amongst themselves to get a close up look at the teenage girl who just slaughtered a chimera. At least, that's what I think those blurs are, I can't really tell through the haze that seems to be settling even thicker over my vision.
I find myself in a daze as I'm led to Madam Pomfrey, the wizened Medi-Witch immediately falling into line, ordering everyone to make way as she quickly brings me aside. I splutter and cough as she pours potion after potion down my throat, running her wand over my body, muttering quietly under her breath as she stitches me back together.

"Dear God girl, what happened to you?" she whispers frightfully, lifting my chin and shining a light in my eye.

Huh, isn't it a really bad sign for your doctor to be scared?

"Your liver and… a few other organs have been split open or heavily bruised, nearly every rib shattered, and your pelvis is cracked. You're going to need skele-gro, and a lot of it."

"Oh my, what fun," I reply sluggishly, eyes flickering open and shut as I try not to succumb to the ever-present pull of unconsciousness.

I hear Madam Pomfrey clucking disapprovingly at my nonchalant dismissal of my injuries, and I can still hear the intense worry in her voice as she berates me. "None of that from you, you damn near died out there. Now drink this, or I'll knock you out and send you to St. Mungos."

I nod tiredly as another vial is pressed to my lips, the familiar bitter tang of skele-gro scorching my throat. I nearly gag, but I fight the instinct, swallowing heavily and allowing the last dregs of the potion to pour down my gullet.

Spluttering, I roll over to my side, no longer able to resist the efforts of Hypnos.

-::-

My eyes flit back and forth beneath heavy lids, the absence of a dull orange shine through the thin layer of skin denoting that it's the middle of the night. I slowly peel them open, gummy with sleep as I acclimatize myself to the dim candlelight that flickers off the polished, off white walls.

"Jesus Christ, that was a hell of a day," I mutter, pulling myself up to a sitting position and rubbing my eyes tiredly, every bit of me still aching dully.

I wonder how many days it's been, or hell, whether or not I've been out for a week. That chimera did a hell of a number on me, and it probably doesn't help that I used every last scrap of magic that I had in me to take the fucking thing down.

Well, at least I now have bragging rights.

I hear light footsteps to my right, off towards the entrance of the Hospital Wing, and turn my head over to see who's coming. Slowly, the great doors swing open, a familiar silver shine appearing in the open doorway.

I smile, the expression faltering as Fleur approaches, her normally pale skin looking ghostly, heavy bags under her eyes. "My God… are you okay?" I ask, holding my hand out and inviting her over.

She juts her head forward, eyes wide and an astonished look on her face. "Me? Me? You're asking if I'm okay?" she whispers angrily, sitting down next to my bed and turning the chair to face me directly. "Are you insane? Maudite anglaise, you selfless idiot!"

I weakly put my hands up in surrender. "Hey, you just looked really stressed out. I was just shocked to see your normally angelic features so… well, less than angelic," I smirk, Fleur scoffing quietly.
She reaches over and laces her fingers through mine, rubbing the crook of my thumb with her own as she stares at the floor, deep in thought.

"So… you wanted to talk?" I say, raising one eyebrow. "Although… I don't know how long ago that was. How long have I been out?"

Fleur takes a deep breath, turning her gaze back towards me. "Five days," she utters. "Five days you've been unconscious, two of which you were in danger of dying. After you passed out in the first-aid tent, the Medi-Witch, what is her name… Pomfrey? She immediately put you on a stretcher and had you rushed here." Fleur chews her lip, brow knitted in consternation. "You looked so frail… so terribly hurt… merde, I was demanding that they take you to a hospital immediately, but you were too injured to transport."

"Really? It was that bad?" I gasp, not realizing the extent of my injuries. I remember Madam Pomfrey saying something about my liver, as well as my ribs… Gods, I can't really remember what happened.

Fleur nods solemnly, wiping a tear from her eye. "It was touch and go, but you made it," she says, smiling weakly. "Just… don't you dare go off and do that again, understand?"

I salute her tiredly, grinning lopsidedly. "Understood captain, I'll be in tip top shape soon enough."

She sighs playfully, shaking her head at my antics. "Well, if you're up for it, could we discuss what happened in the tent?" she asks, a suddenly serious look on her face.

I nod, scratching my cheek. "Well, I'm feeling quite awake right now, so let's."

Fleur fiddles with my hand, her ministrations becoming a touch more fervent. "I… you- that… thing that you did with the fist, with the stone in the tent…" she pauses, nibbling on her thumb. "What I want to know, is how you fought it, how did you use the earth in the way you did?"

I frown, not quite prepared to tell Fleur everything about me. I know her, but I don't know her. And as much as I'd like her to know that I'm not just this little kid, I also don't want to risk her telling anyone.

"I just found that I could do it one day," I lie, shrugging my shoulders emphatically. "It just… it sort of comes to me, I can't explain it."

Fleur suddenly closes the distance between us, pulling me towards her sharply and putting her hand over my mouth, stifling my cry.

"So… you didn't get it from Death?"

"…what?"

I freeze, eyes wide as I look at Fleur in a whole new light. How pure she is, the way she seems to radiate compassion even through her normally stoic moods, beauty and grace in every step she takes. The way her hair shines, so similar to a familiar white robe, its wearer's face shrouded in darkness, voice disguised the same as mine.

I find myself breathing heavily, Fleur removing her hand from my mouth as she looks at me seriously, a graveness in those blue eyes that I've never seen before.

"You… you can't be," I murmur in disbelief, unable to tear my eyes away from hers, entranced.
"I am."

I inhale sharply, the air whistling through my teeth. "You're... you're the Albumancer?" I ask, a tentative smile tugging at the corners of my lips, hope brimming deep inside me, my mind racing at the speed of light.

Fleur... Fleur is the Albumancer? Fleur? I mean... it makes sense, really, it does. She's acted a bit differently around me... at least, from how I remember her in my first life. The way she looked unsure of something when she first saw me at the World Cup, how quickly she approached me here at Hogwarts and started our friendship, the way she supported me when I was once more forced into the tournament instead of decrying me for my age.

"I can't believe it."

She smiles, a wide, sparkling thing, her amazingly white teeth glimmering softly. "Oui, I am the Albumancer," she confirms, pursing her lips, the tip of her tongue flicking over them for just a moment. "How... how old are you?" she continues, once more smiling at me, my eyes widening at the familiar question. "You have the silhouette of someone young, but I imagine you're quite a bit older... just as I am."

God, I think I'm going to cry.

I hold her hand with both of mine, cradling it softly. "I died at fifteen, although, you probably know that if you're from the same world that I am." I pause to scratch my chin, forgetting for a moment how old I actually am. "I arrived back here just before my eleventh birthday. So... that makes me nineteen years old."

Fleur tilts her head, looking down and studying how our hands lace together, just the slightest and softest curve of her lips showing that she's still smiling. "I was... nineteen when I died. A year after you died in the ministry," she says, a slightly haunted look passing over her. "Things... things changed after you were gone... not for the better."

I nod, knowing that something like that may have happened if that universe continued on existing. Apparently, it did.

"I was killed in a skirmish in some quaint little village that I don't know the name of while fighting for the Order of the Phoenix. Someone got me in the back with a killing curse... I was gone, just like that," she states, snapping her fingers for good measure. "I came back when I was, well, I think at the same time as you. I was thirteen, turning fourteen."

"I'm so sorry," I whisper, unable to imagine the things she must have gone through after I went and got myself killed.

Fleur shakes her head, pressing one slender finger to my lips. "Don't apologize, mon amie. It was not your fault."

"But it was!" I argue, hands clenched into fists. "I fell into the veil because I was being a goddamned idiot! If I didn't do that, you wouldn't have gone through whatever horrors you did!"

Fleur lets go of my hands, gripping my shoulders and pressing her forehead against mine. I draw a long, strangled breath, closing my eyes against the soothing feeling of her skin against my own, the intimacy of it suffocating.

"You can't blame yourself for that," she argues softly, her voice gentle, like a steady, trickle of water. "It wasn't your fault, there's no need to apologize."
I open my mouth to argue, but my world very suddenly bursts, fireworks dancing behind my eyes as Fleur presses her lips to mine.

She runs her nails over the back of my neck, causing me to shudder as she draws me closer, panting softly, the taste of her breath sweet, **robust**, like the dark chocolate she loves to eat. I close my eyes, inhaling sharply as she tangles her fingers in my hair, slowly moving her mouth, caressing me, **coaxing** me.

I return the kiss, my mind melting from my ears and my body reduced to a puddle. My hands snake around her waist as hers scrape along my spine, caressing the small of her back as her fingers dance across my scalp, her tongue flicking over my lips as the kiss grows more heated, needy. I mewl softly, the sound bubbling up and out of my belly without direction, guttural, and driven by instinct. It creeps out and over my mouth and into her own, and I can feel her grin against my lips at the sounds that she's evoked from me. She crushes her body against mine, pushing me along the bed and cradling me tightly, lips mashed hungrily together.

I can't help but notice that we fit together perfectly, my legs wrapped around her waist like they were always meant to be there, a simple arm around my shoulder never having felt so incredible, so **monumental**. I shiver, deliciously exhilarating shocks coursing down the back of my neck as her hips press into that secret place nestled between my legs, eyes fluttering as I suddenly realize that Fleur- **Fleur Delacour**, is passionately kissing me in a hospital bed.

And I'm loving every fucking minute of it.

I gasp, eyes closed, hungry breaths shaking my body. "What… **what was that?**" I utter, dazed and stumbling over my words, my thoughts contorted and bewildered.

Fleur cups the back of my neck, rubbing softly as she puts her mouth to my ear. "That was me kissing you, **ma dulcineé**." Her breath tickles over my ear, warm and **oh so amazing**. I shudder, leaning into her touch. "You have no clue how distraught I was for you to be so young when I felt so drawn to you… how frustrated I was to find myself turning you away. You've no idea how **elated** I was to find you were but a few years younger than me, and the very person I've been trying to figure out since the World Cup. How terrified I was when your broken body was taken here, not knowing whether or not I'd ever be able to speak with you again."

"I don't know what to say," I whisper, unable to wipe the grin off my face. "Gods… you have no idea how much I wanted that. I tried to bring things back to how they were between us… but I couldn't, no matter how hard I tried. There's something about you Fleur… you're magnetic, **hypnotizing**, and I can't help but find myself entranced."

She laughs, the sound magical, so close to me that I **feel** it, our happiness mixing together, bubbling up and bouncing off one another, a swirl of elation as we sit there and bask in each others presence. We just lay there, cradled together. I have no recognition of the time passing, of how long we've been holding each other. It feels like it's been minutes and hours at the same time, the soft hum of her breath against my ear and the steady beat of her heart, a reminder that she's there, right next to me and so full of life.

I fall asleep in her arms. Soft kisses pressed to my forehead, and strong, yet gentle arms wrapped around my waist.

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I've been working towards this chapter since I first started the story. **The Tri-Wizard Tournament has always been my favourite arc, and the beginnings of it was a delight to write.** Also, looks like our ship has sailed! **To the sappy romance fans who very rightfully guessed my half-
I've been working towards this chapter since I first started the story. The Tri-Wizard Tournament has always been my favourite arc, and the beginnings of it was a delight to write.

Also, looks like our ship has sailed! To the sappy romance fans who very rightfully guessed my half-assed foreshadowing and not-so-subtle hinting towards Fleur being the elusive Albumancer, have fun. This is when the good shit starts.

Translations:
Hiti á hel, standask við vel fjáammaðr: Flames of hell, defy your enemy. (Old Norse)
I blink slowly as I adjust to the light that lances through the massive windows lining the Hospital Wing, motes of dust illuminated by the cold Scottish sun. I rub my eyes, dazed as I remember the events of the night before.

Fleur Delacour.

Fleur Delacour, in my bed, kissing me.

"Woah," I mutter, leaning back into my pillow and staring dumbly at the arched ceiling, tracking over the pristine masonry that hangs overhead. "Woah."

I hear the pitter patter of shoes scuffing lightly over stone to my left, turning to see Madam Pomfrey shuffling over, a large smile plastered over her face.

"You have no idea how good it is to see you awake, Miss Potter," she effuses, leaning over and scanning me with her wand, nodding approvingly at whatever information she's gotten from the quick diagnostic.

"That bad, huh?" I ask, already knowing full well how bad things really were. At least with my magic having replenished itself, or whatever magic does when you use too much of it, I'm going to probably be up and at it again within the next few minutes.

Madam Pomfrey purses her lips and nods sullenly. "You had me quite worried for a while there, but we did manage to get you stabilized," she explains, a frown gracing her features as she casts her wand over me once more. "But it seems that you're already fully recovered, which I find to be quite shocking." Tucking her wand away in her sleeve, she shakes her head disbelievingly. "I will say that I'm not one to complain about fast healers. You've made my job quite a bit easier."

I stretch my neck, cracking it loudly as I work out the kinks from having been bedridden for nearly a week. "So, I can leave when I want?" I ask hopefully, never having been a fan of hospitals, even with my familiarity with them.

It's the damned antiseptic. Tickles my nose. That, and it looks too… sterile. Probably because of the antiseptic.

"Yes, but I want you to take things easy. Don't do anything strenuous, otherwise I'm going to have you brought back here in ropes," she chides me half-heartedly.

I raise my eyebrows comically. "Ropes, Madam Pomfrey? I'm afraid that you're a bit too old for me."

She snorts loudly, slapping me on the arm before putting her hand over her mouth, unable to look
disappointed in me what with the smile creeping over her face. "You awful, awful girl. Out with you!" she cries, shooing me away.

"Alright, alright! I'll get out of here!" I say, putting my hands up in surrender as she walks away.

I slide off the bed, grabbing the change of clothes that has been left at my bedside. I tilt my head at the newly repaired basilisk hide coat, someone having gone to the trouble of bringing it back to whichever tailor fashioned it, I assume.

That someone most likely being Severus. I hope no one saw him having it fixed, otherwise the whole school is going to realize that he's not as bitter a man as they think he is.

Not that he isn't bitter. Just not as bitter.

I duck into the side-room, taking off the light hospital pyjamas and quickly putting on my outfit, flexing my fingers as I slide the gloves over my wrist. I run my hands over the surface of the jacket, admiring the seamless repairs. I'll have to find out where Severus had this commissioned, I might come to them some day for future work.

Boots clicking away, I make my way downstairs towards the Great Hall, following the immaterial trail of baked beans and crisp bacon. I walk into the Great Hall, a hush falling over the students as they all turn towards me.

The Hall is unearthly quiet as I walk over to my seat, a sparse few of the Ravenclaws smiling warmly, while most of the students stare at me with no small amount of awe and fear. I plop down next to Fleur, giving her a wry smirk as I start to pile food onto my plate.

"Bonjour, ma dulcineé." She places her hand on my back as I sit down, squeezing my shoulder affectionately, before filling a mug with coffee and sliding it over to me.

"Thank you," I say, unable to hide my dopey smile from her show of affection. "So, how've things been since I was out?" I ask, turning towards the other girls. Hermione bites her lower lip, not sure of whether she should smile or grimace, while the others breathe sharply through their teeth, Padma averting her eyes as she stares at her plate, a sour look on her face.

The hell has gotten into her?

"Er… well, things have been… interesting?" Hermione hesitates, an awkward look on her face.

I raise my eyebrows questioningly, nibbling idly on a piece of jam and butter toast. "Interesting? What do you mean by that?"

She nods slowly, popping her lips. "Yeah. Everyone thinks you're either the second coming of Merlin, or that you're the next Dark Lady."

I shrug my shoulders lazily. "Well, people are always scared of power," I comment, Fleur snickering quietly beside me. I'm going to assume that the Prophet has made a derisive statement about my use of an unknown spell?"

Hermione nods her head. "You guessed it. They've been subtle about it, but there's been a lot of 'what if' statements from the paper wondering whether or not you're going to end up taking Voldemort's place in the future."

My eyebrows raise once more, tickling my hair line. Subtlety has never really been a strong suit of the Prophet. They tend to be more 'shoot first, ask questions later.'
"Well, it seems I'll be having a chat with the editor-in-chief when I have the chance," I muse, Hermione tilting her head curiously. "I've got a large share in the company. I'll make sure they publicly dispel the rumours they've been making," I explain, her eyes lighting up in recognition. "It also helps that I've got a barrister for a dad."

Fleur speaks up, an amused look on her face. "I believe you'd also like to know that the Gryffindors have been loudly proclaiming that you're the reincarnation Morgan Le Fay. They believe the chimera is just the beginning of your future reign of terror." She shakes her head disbelievingly, a disappointed look on her face as she casts her gaze over to the staff table. "Their Head of House, that horribly prim looking woman up there with the large hat… she's done nothing to stop the rumours. I believe that she may actually be encouraging them. It's quite unprofessional."

I turn my own eyes over to McGonagall, the strict transfiguration professor looking at me disapprovingly, wearing a stern frown.

"Huh. McGonagall is out for my blood?" I ask, looking back at Hermione, who nods her head.

"I heard she tried to get you expelled."

I glower, feeling deeply annoyed that one of my favourite, or- well, old favourite professors apparently feels such animosity towards me. "Really!?"

Hermione slouches as she sighs quietly. "Yeah, I saw her in the crowds after you killed the chimera. She was in a tizzy, harping on to anyone who would listen, Dumbledore especially, to have you arrested for use of dark magic," Lisa interrupts.

Huh. Well that's not good.

I look up at the staff table once more, Dumbledore staring at me curiously. He doesn't look like he wants to remove my head from my shoulders right now, so hopefully I can get a chat in with him later and make sure that my tenure here at Hogwarts isn't ending any time soon. I don't think I ever told him not to expel me.

Speaking of which. If I haven't told him that, why haven't I been expelled yet? I'd imagine he'd love to put my head on the chopping block. Maybe that falls under my command for him to not interfere with the tournament? I guess that makes sense, as it'd be hard for me to compete when I'm not actually attending Hogwarts.

Odd.

"So, Fleur, I've been told not to do anything strenuous today by Madam Pomfrey. Would you like to have that picnic we were talking about? I'll have to go and change into something a bit more casual," I say, gesturing towards my clothes. "But we could maybe wander around the village, explore a bit and then have lunch while it's still somewhat sunny out?" I ask, turning towards the stunning French-woman.

She grins widely, the sight dazzling as she nods her head. "Oui, I would love that."

I go back to my meal, Hermione's eyes flitting between Fleur and I curiously, before her brow slowly begins to raise. "Oh my! Are you two… are you going on a date?" she inquires quietly, a slight smile on her face.

I look over at Fleur, tilting my head questioningly. She nods her head, once at me, and once at Hermione. "Yes, I would say it's a date."
Lisa smiles at the two of us, while Ginny whoops quietly, punching her hand into the air. "I knew it!" she cries. "Took you two long enough!"

Padma looks on silently while Luna leans in close, serenely stating, "You two have been absolutely covered in wrackspurts as of late. I'm glad to see that you're finally free of their finagling grasp."

I laugh as I clear off my plate. "Well, thank you everyone," I gush, smiling kindly at the other girls. "I'm going to go and get changed then, I'll see you in a half hour or so?"

"Oui," Fleur replies, flicking her eyes over to my empty plate and raising an eyebrow. "Do you not need to eat more? You were quite quick with your breakfast."

I shake my head. "I'll be fine. I never have much of an appetite after getting out of the Hospital Wing until one, maybe two in the afternoon."

"Well then, we'll just have to make sure that you eat enough on our date," Fleur beams, waving at me as I walk away.

I pop out the door and quickly head towards Ravenclaw Tower, jogging up the stairs and disrobing.

"What to wear, what to wear..." I mutter, tapping my chin as I look through my clothes.

God, I've never really had to worry about this before.

I snatch up a plain white button-down, throwing a forest-green jumper over top and a pair of snug, black jeans. With an uneducated eye, I check over my reflection in the mirror, quietly tutting to myself over whether or not I should go with this outfit. With a sigh, I decide to just go with the flow, rolling up my sleeves and deciding on a pair of brogues, feeling a bit dressier than normal.

Might as well make an impression.

I head back down towards the kitchens, threading my way through the crowded halls, the students now on their way to class.

Or at least, I normally would have to thread my way through them. Today, they part like the red sea, everyone except the Ravenclaws, as well as some of the Slytherin's, avoiding me like the plague.

I groan quietly, annoyed that I still managed to alienate myself from the rest of the school. Well, better I'm here in one piece. Dealing with scared teenagers is the least of my worries.

Ignoring the muted squeals and venomous whispers, I finally arrive in front of the kitchens, tickling the pear and walking through the newly opened doorway. The throngs of house-elves halt in their post-breakfast cleanup and stare up at me in confusion.

"Hey, I was wondering if you'd be able to fix me up some food for a picnic? A mix of English and French foods that are easy to nibble on?" I ask, looking over the tightly knit mob of dangling ears and drooping noses.

One of the house-elves, a short, squat little thing, even for a house-elf, looks at me in horror, her dinnerplate sized eyes widening melodramatically. "A student after breakfast? She's... is she still hungry!?" she shouts, her ears flapping wildly against her head as she shakes it in dismay.

I flinch as the lot scream in unison, "Still hungry!?" one of the elves dropping his stack of plates to the ground, the dishes crashing against the floor and shattering loudly.
"Woah! Woah, woah! Hold up a minute there!" I interrupt, holding my hands out in front of me, hoping to mollify the hysterical elves before they begin to riot. "I ate plenty, I was just going to be having a picnic for lunch and wanted to get it ready now."

The first elf collapses, falling to the ground in a relieved heap, the back of her hand resting over her pallid green forehead. "Missy was so worried!" she gasps, pulling her ears under her chin as if she's about to knot them together, rolling on her back like a stuck turtle. "We thought that you weren't happy with our food!"

"No! Not at all! The food is always wonderful!" I say placatingly, every single elf sighing in relief, the sound echoing about the kitchen.

God that's eerie.

A familiar elf jabs his finger in my direction, the spindly appendage quivering dangerously. "You!" he bellows, his lips pulled up underneath his nose in a deadly sneer. "Horse girly! Why are yous back here?"

"Horse girl?"

Oh!

Oh yeah.

I rub the back of my head sheepishly. "I uh- I came to get food for a picnic?"

He marches up towards me, finger still held out in front of him. One of his eyes twitches manically as he tilts his head, peering up into my own. "No horses this time?" he interrogates, one yellowed, bent tooth peeking out over his lower lip.

I shake my head. "No. No horses."

We stand there in silence for what feels like a lifetime, but is probably much closer to ten or so seconds, the statistically massive house-elf and I staring each other down, refusing to give an inch of ground. After a few harrowing moments, he sniffs loudly, nodding his head once.

"We makes you picnic," he mutters, rubbing his hands together as he turns back to the frozen crowd of kitchen workers. "Well? What are yous waiting for? Get working!"

The elves immediately break into action, dashing about the kitchen as they begin to toss together a plethora of different foods. Charcuterie, cheeses, breads, soup, and every other snack food under the sun being prepared at the speed of light.

I honestly believe that some of the elves must have broken the sound barrier at the rate they're moving.

The flurry continues, a blur of gray and green, interspersed by flashes of pale red and creamy yellow as food is quite literally tossed from one elf to another as they load up what looks to be an incredibly heavily enchanted picnic basket, a soft red tartan blanket laid overtop and laced between the handle.

The head elf lifts the wicker container with a single crooked finger, offering it towards me.

I reach out with trepidation, staring in amazement at the miniature basket that may contain enough food to actually feed a village for a week, something Petunia was quite fond of saying whenever Dudley refused to finish his outrageous portions.
No wonder the bastard was so bloody fat.

I grasp the handle tightly, fingers grazing over the smooth and weathered texture of the dried and wounded willow with reverence. It has to be one of the most impressive enchanted objects I've ever laid eyes upon…

…and it's a fucking picnic basket.

God damn magicals are weird.

"Thank you very much, I'll be sure to return this when I get back to the school," I say, nodding my head respectfully towards the head elf, who lifts his chin in pride.

"We's only doing our job," he replies succinctly, fading back into the frenzied crowd of cleaning house elves like he was never there in the first place.

I blink a few times as I turn to leave, slightly dazed after that incredibly interesting experience with what seems to be the most eccentric group of elves in the world.

Before I know it, I'm standing outside the Great Hall, waiting for Fleur to show up. I sidle up next to one of the large pillars, flames dancing upon the sconce and lighting up the room much better than any flame should. Magic, I guess.

I break out into a grin when I catch sight of Fleur walking into the entrance hall, decked out in a very warm looking tan vest, snug tweed trousers, and a pair of brown knee-high boots. "Hey there," I say as she pulls me into a hug, the top of my head just coming up to her chin, my hair tickling against her neck.

"Bonjour," she replies, handing me an expensive looking bottle of red wine. I pop open the top of the basket and set it inside, Fleur lacing her arm through mine once I've finished. "I thought it would be nice to bring that wine that I mentioned," she continues, a demure smile on her face. "And I would like to apologize for rejecting you in the first place, especially after all of my flirting."

I put my hand up, halting her. "It's alright, really. You didn't know, and I didn't know. It also doesn't hurt that I did the same thing last year, sans-flirting."

Fleur arches one eyebrow curiously. "Yes? Who was it that you turned away?"

"Hermione," I answer, knowing that if anyone can keep a secret, it's another resurrected time traveller.

"Really?" she asks as we set off, beginning our trek across the grounds and out towards Hogsmeade.

I nod my head. "Yeah, it was a hell of a surprise for me. Just goes to show that you can't judge a book by its cover." I snicker quietly at my own little joke, Fleur tilting her head questioningly. "She's a bibliophile through and through," I explain, Fleur snorting good naturedly.

"Yes, I seem to remember her being quite… intense in her studies when I was last here. I saw her dashing around the library in a frenzy when I went to research dragons for the first task."

"That's Hermione for you," I laugh, quickly taking a look around to make sure that there's nobody nearby. Once I've confirmed that the coast is clear, we untangle ourselves and blink, or flash past the Hogwarts gates and onto the path towards Hogsmeade. I lace my arm back in hers and ignore the nervous fluttering in my belly. "So… do we need to spend our day in Hogsmeade? I know a fantastic little spot that I think would be great for a picnic."
Fleur taps her chin playfully. "Hmm... let me think," she mutters, lips puffed out in concentration. "I believe we could go somewhere else. Where did you have in mind?"

"Ever been to the Shetlands?" She shakes her head. "Well, in that case, I'm going to have to take you along with me."

Fleur looks worried for a second, causing me to look at her in confusion. "What is it?"

"Well... aren't we both opposites magically? Wouldn't your form of travel hurt me?"

I pause, frowning.

Huh, I forgot about that.

"I could apparate the two of us," I offer, Fleur nodding in reply.

Helps that I studied that particular form of travel. Wouldn't do to blink everywhere, as it would easily give me away.

With her hand held tightly to my arm, I screw up my eyes and focus on the broch where I was practicing my spellwork. After the briefly disorienting sensation of being squeezed through a small tube, we both land safely far bit north-east of Hogwarts, looking out over a sea that's much calmer than the last time I'd seen it.

"So? How do you like it?"

Fleurs looks around, slowly taking in the wonderful sight before her. A smile slowly creeps over her face as she crouches down, running her fingers through the thick brush of grass.

"I love it."

"Excellent." I smile widely, taking the blanket off the basket and laying it out over the ground, setting the basket down in the middle as I sit down, Fleur nestling in next to me, her thigh brushing against mine. I tear up two blades of grass, transfiguring them into wine glasses and placing low powered sticking charms on the bottom so that they don't get knocked over on the uneven ground. Fleur reaches over and helps me out as I begin to unveil an amount of food that looks to be prepared for a banquet, let alone a picnic.

"Jesus Christ, those crazy little elves," I mutter as I draw out a whole baguette, followed by a half a dozen well-fired rolls, my eyes widening as I come across what looks to be a roast duck.

Fucks sake. It is roast duck.

How the hell did they manage to make a duck confit in five minutes? Isn't it supposed to be cured for a whole day? Do they just have this shit lying around? And if that's the case, why have I never seen it served before?

Shit. I think I just hijacked tonight's dinner.

"My, my, my!" Fleur mutters appraisingly, looking over the wide array of foods available. "This is looking very fancy."

I chuckle quietly, still shaking my head at the sight in front of me. "Well, I know I'll be giving the house-elves a hearty 'thank you' when I get back. This is absolutely incredible."

Fleur hums approvingly as she slices the end off the baguette, coating it with a thick layer of pâté.
She pops it into her mouth with relish and chews slowly, her eyes closing as she savours the deep flavour of the forcemeat.

"This is wonderful!" she sings, already reaching for more. "Please, you must try this," she says as she spreads the pâté over another slice of bread, handing it to me.

I bite into it with gusto, eyebrows raising at the intensely rich flavour that coats my tongue. I take my time with the simple, yet incredibly delicious food, nearly purring as I allow the soft fluffy bread to mingle with the smooth, spiced meat, a slight crunch following every bite as the crust is slowly ground between my teeth.

"Woah," I murmur dumbly, staring down at the simple concoction of meat and bread in front of me. I have to figure out if house-elf magic can be used by humans, if only for the sake of learning how to cook like they do.

Fleur reaches over and uncorks the bottle of wine, expertly pouring out two glasses and passing mine over to me, sipping daintily from hers. She licks her lips, picking up an errant droplet of the sweet liquid.

"So," she says, softly drumming her long fingers along the stem of her glass as she eyes me curiously, her gaze dancing over my body from head to toe, before her face melts into a very seductive smirk.

Well, I think it's seductive. That's how it feels to me at least.

"How did Harry Potter come to be Helene Potter? What did I miss?"

I exhale slowly. "Starting out with the big questions first?" I ask playfully, eyebrows raised. "Well… after I kicked the bucket and came back to life, I decided to go and get a head start on picking up my school supplies, wand and all that. When I went to visit Gringotts, I needed to have my identity confirmed by my account manager, since I didn't have my key."

I take a sip from my glass, swishing the wine around in my mouth. I've never drank the stuff before, but I find it to be quite nice. Crisp, slightly tangy, yet rich at the same time. It's not my favourite by any means, but I'm sure I'll come to like it quite a bit more with time.

Shame I can't feel the effects.

"So, it turns out that I had been locked into being Harry at a young age, probably when Dumbledore had picked me up from Hagrid after Voldemort came in and fucked up everything. Apparently, he was worried about how the public would view me if I was a girl, something about being in a much stronger political position if I was a man. That, and I'd be too powerful for him to keep in check, as the binding locked away a good portion of my magic… at least that's the conclusion that I've come to."

Fleur curses under her breath. "A terrible thing to do to someone, especially for such petty reasons," she states, a horrified look on her face. "You say Dumbledore did that? I can't believe that the man I fought and died for could do such a thing!"

I nod sadly, remembering how crestfallen I was to learn that the man I most looked up to in the world was tampering with my life. "Yeah, that threw me through a loop when I found out it was him. I always held such reverence for him, so for me to find out that he had changed me just so that I would be more appealing to people I didn't know and would probably never meet… it was… well- it was a bit of a trip, to say the least."
I run my fingers through my hair, Fleur smiling warmly at me as she reaches over and squeezes my shoulder. "At least you found out who you really were," she comforts, tilting her head cutely.

"Yeah, it was more than stressful in the moment, but ever since I was turned back into me, I've never felt better."

She smiles even more broadly at that, pecking me on the cheek and causing me to blush furiously.

"Well, I find Miss Potter much more attractive than Mister Potter," she proclaims, wiggling her eyebrows at me.

"That's quite fair. I think I prefer Fleur over Francois," I jibe back, Fleur laughing. "So, what uh-what happened after I was gone? If you don't mind me asking, that is."

She bites her cheek, shaking her head softly as she takes another sip from her glass. "Nothing good," she murmurs, a faraway look on her face. "After you died, Voldemort quickly took over. Not many knew, of course, but members of the Wizengamot started to disappear… others changed how they voted, previously forward-thinking people began to speak publicly about the 'danger that mudbloods posed.'" Fleur grits her teeth, fingers curled into a fist, knuckles white. "Fudge stayed on as Minister, since he would do anything to save his own hide, happily passing along any and every law that served to make the lives of muggleborns, beings, and anyone they just didn't like more difficult." She takes a deep swig, finishing her drink before pouring another, swirling the wine within the bottle as she stares at the ground vacantly.

Fleur coughs, clearing her throat and collecting her thoughts.

"It took a few months for things to get bad… very bad. Ces fascistes, they set up prison camps for the muggleborns and other undesirables, just like in Nazi Germany…"

I cover my mouth, gasping in horror.

"That's… what!? They… they set up concentration camps?"

Fleur nods shakily in reply, pursing her lips. "They collected people in the dead of night. Death Eaters running around Britain like the Gestapo. It was horrible, absolutely horrible. This toad of a woman was running the program, interrogating muggleborns and halfbloods, asking them where they stole their magic before locking them up if they couldn't provide an answer to an unanswerable question."

I don't know if they began to… exterminate people, or if they would stoop to that level, but I do know that if you managed to fight them off and escape… well, they sent their best men after you, and you would be publicly executed if you weren't dead already. If you were… well, they just strung you up in Diagon Alley for all to see. Mothers, fathers, children… anyone who tried to escape was made an example of."

"That's… that's fucking horrendous," I whisper, unable to imagine how things could get that bad that quickly. To set up camps, have public executions… to even have those in power loudly proclaiming that 'mudbloods' are the problem already raises enough red flags on its own… but to go that far?

I let out a long, slow breath, digesting that information as best as I can. "Let me guess… Lucius Malfoy lead them?" Fleur scoffs, tearing a roll in half and attempting to butter it, nearly stabbing herself with the knife as she does so. "Hey, here, let me get that," I say as I reach over and take it from her, calmly buttering the roll and handing it back, Fleur nodding in thanks.

She takes a bite, chewing thoughtfully. "Yes, Lucius Malfoy was the one leading things… he was
more of a general, never to be found in a direct fight, always commanding his underlings. It was Lestrange you had to watch out for. Any of them, but Bellatrix was the most terrifying of all."

"Well, you don't have to worry about her or the rest of the Lestrange family anymore, I went and put an end to the lot of them this past summer," I say, changing the subject away from the macabre discussion of prison camps and probable genocide, to the less macabre topic of family annihilation.

Fleur lifts her chin, eyes wide. "That was you? Mon Dieu, Helene. You broke into Azkaban?"

"It's really not terribly difficult with our abilities. I mean, it wasn't easy, but it wasn't incredibly difficult either," I opine, looking off over the sea in the general direction of the unholy fortress. "Sure makes it easier when you can talk to dementors."

"You can what?"

"Talk to dementors. Something to do with me being half-dead and all that."

Fleur puts her hand up asking me to stop, using her other to pinch her forehead. "Alright, forgetting the dementors… what do you mean by half-dead?"

"Er- well, I'm not technically alive, so to say," I hesitate, curious about how things have worked for Fleur.

Now that I know she's not half-dead as well, does that mean she's… normal-alive? Super-alive? Mostly-alive? I haven't a clue, but I'm sure I'm going to find out.

"A few months after being resurrected, I managed to knock-off Voldemort's container, some doddering idiot named Quirrel," I explain, remembering how I managed to traumatize most of the school. Not my best moment. "Death showed up after Madam Pomfrey noticed that my heart wasn't beating. He froze time and gave me a little spiel about how I should go out and learn Necromancy, Blood Magics and the like. His reasoning was, that since I wasn't alive, and I wasn't dead either, that's the perfect combination to use his brand of magic."

Fleur reaches out, pressing her fingers to the bottom of my neck and frowning when she doesn't feel a pulse, shaking her head in confusion.

"That's… bizarre," she comments, perplexed. "I guess you're truly the opposite of me then… after I had come back, Life explained to me that I was going to notice some changes." She snorts, a smile creeping across her face. "It was like getting 'the talk,' learning all about my new body. I sort of… radiate? Is that the word? I radiate life." She pauses, sweeping her hand over the grass and screwing up her eyes in concentration. Her palm begins to glow with a soft white light, the grass underneath it growing rapidly before my eyes.

"Wow," I whisper, staring in awe as the grass grows from just under an inch, to nearly a foot in height in a matter of seconds.

Fleur releases her hold on the magic, a feeling of pureness and… health? It doesn't make sense, but her magic feels healthy, emanating from her in waves, like a low tide of calm washing over me. "If my assumption is right, I think you'd be able to do the opposite," she guesses.

Feeling curious, I mirror her, my hand held out over the much taller tuft of grass as I channel my magic into it. I nearly squeak in surprise as a void appears over my palm, an empty, inky blackness that seems to go on forever. Hesitant, I watch as the grass withers and crumbles to dust, motes of gray picked up by a lazy wind and scattered across the broch.
"Well, isn't that something," I say, staring at my hand in awe. That is... much, much too dangerous an ability for anyone to have, let alone an undead nineteen-year-old.

"Agreed," Fleur echoes, looking both impressed and worried at the same time. "Please make sure not to do that when your hands are on me, yes?"

I can't help but laugh, Fleur joining in with me as we collapse into a fit of giggles. I roll over onto my back, a snicker or two escaping me as I look up at the sky and watch the clouds slowly ebb and drift across the horizon. Fleur sidles up next to me, resting her head on my chest and her arm over my waist.

"Hello there," she whispers, staring up at me, a coy smile on her face.

I awkwardly return the gesture, one arm wrapping around her back, hand resting on her hips, hoping that I'm doing something right. "Hey."

She kisses me softly, lips curled up into a smile as they meet my own. I hum happily, slowly detaching from the gentle embrace. "So, Miss Potter. Tell me something about yourself," she says, staring up at me, head still resting on my chest, fingers tickling up and down my side.

"Well, I…"

Ooh, that's actually a difficult question to answer. Is she going to ask me that every time we go out? I hope not.

"Hmm, well, to start, I'm a big reader, although right now all I've been reading has been spellbooks and big dusty tomes on magical theory. I'm just stocking up on every spell that I think could help me out in a fight." I pause, scratching my chin thoughtfully. "I like to cook, I'm a morning person through and through, and when this whole mess with Voldemort is done and over with I'd like to settle down somewhere quiet, maybe open up a shop somewhere. I'm a dab hand at runes what with my Blood Magic experience, so I could get into enchanting. Otherwise, I know that the Weasley twins want to eventually open up a joke shop, so I may join them on that if I have the chance. What about you?"

Fleur clicks her tongue, eyes narrowed in thought. "I quite enjoy runes as well, and I was actually interested in being a curse-breaker before the war. Either that, or I'd like to be a teacher." Her eyes practically glow as she continues, a small smile creeping across her face. "I've always helped Gabby with her schoolwork, and there's just something about it that I love. Other than that, well, you already know that I love American poetry, but I also love to paint and sketch. But I'm warning you now, I'm a nightmare in the kitchen."

I chuckle quietly, Fleur giggling at her own little comment. "That's alright. If I'm ever cooking and you want to help, you can just chop the veggies."

"Ah, that, I can do."

I sigh and lean back, running my fingers through Fleur's hair and just enjoying the moment, the two of us curled up next to each other and just enjoying the day, cool air staved off by the steady beat of the autumn sun.

"So… would you like to come to the Yule Ball with me, Miss Delacour?"

She arches one eyebrow, a playful look on her face. "The Yule Ball? I seem to recall you being an awful dancer, Miss Potter. Would I have to take out insurance on my poor toes before then?"
"Hey! That was because I was in the wrong body!" I argue, Fleur laughing loudly at my mock indignation. "I'm sure I could dance circles around you now. This marvelous body has been enhanced beyond natural means," I say, waving my hand across myself, the corner of Fleur's mouth curling up into a coy smile.

"Oh? Magically enhanced you say? Tell me more," she whispers seductively, her voice trailing off into a sultry breath.

I inhale sharply, completely unaware of how to respond to her.

"I… well… uh-"

She laughs at my frazzled self, tinkling bells ringing off across the picturesque, windbitten countryside. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she apologizes, wiping away an imaginary tear. "I shouldn't rile you up like that."

"It's okay, I'm just… well, this is my first time dating someone, properly dating someone, you know?"

"It's the same with me," Fleur responds, my eyebrows raising sharply.

"Really? A clever, beautiful woman like you?"

She lets out a soft, slow breath. "Yes… I've never dated before. My heritage makes it… difficult for me to find someone who's truly interested in me, and not just enthralled by my aura."

I tilt my head, Fleur noticing the curiosity in my eyes.

"Well, you already know that I am Veela, yes?" she asks, and I nod in reply. "I, and all other Veela, we have an aura of sorts. It's a defense mechanism, a way for us to escape or distract those who would wish us harm. Unfortunately, since society has changed and is no longer so vicious as it once was, the aura just brings us more unwanted attention now that we are rarely are forced to use it. Men and women alike are entranced by us because of it. It makes a true, real relationship of any kind hard to come by."

"I'm sorry," I murmur, fingers tangled in her hair.

She shakes her head, nuzzling into me. "It's fine. I've gotten used to it. You know, in our last lives you caught my interest?" She smiles as I shake my head, eyes crinkling. "You barely reacted to me. It was there, yes, but you could ignore the aura, look past it. Why, if you were but a few years older, I might have had my wicked way with you."

I laugh, my tongue poking out of my mouth. "What a shame!" I cry, hand held over my face in faux dismay. "To have been with the delectable Fleur Delacour!? My life is at an end!"

"Hey!" Fleur shouts, unable to hide her smile. She jabs me in the chest playfully, causing me to grunt, her dainty finger much sturdier than it looks. "No complaining! You're on a date with me as we speak!"

"That I am, that I am… still can't believe it if I'm being honest."

She quirks an eyebrow. "Hmm? Why can't you?"

I shrug awkwardly. "Well, you're you, and I'm me. My only experience with dating was an awkward trip to Hogsmeade, a kiss that involved more crying than kissing, and a very angry woman who
thought I was ignoring her for my best friend."

Fleur looks worried for a moment, gnawing on her lower lip for a fraction of a second.

"What is it?" I ask, concern written over my features.

She closes her eyes, sighing softly. "After I saw you at the World Cup, I did some research to see if this world had somehow changed after I returned, seeing as someone I knew had managed to change genders entirely. I... I read your interview to the Prophet about your family. Was it really that bad?"

I shake my head, jaw clenched tight. "No... if I'm being honest, it was quite a bit worse." I run my hand through my hair, scratching my scalp lightly, a slow and tense breath trickling out from between my lips. "It wasn't the beatings that got to me... those I could deal with. I don't know why, but I could. It was the deprivation of everything good that was the worst. I never once heard a good word come out of their mouths. Every single thing they had to say was derisive, derogatory, meant to beat me down into submission, crush me... hell, my Aunt spent most of her time harping on about what a 'wretched bitch' my mother was, and how great it was that she was dead. So... if you're wondering why I have a bit of a hard time understanding why you're interested in me, go ahead and blame it on those sad sacks of shit."

I hear a quiet growling, looking down to see Fleur with fury in her eyes, teeth gritted and chin jutting forward. "Fils de pute!" she hisses, her voice thin and coarse, almost animalistic. I frown as I see her pupils narrow into slits, her canines lengthening into fangs.

"Woah! Hey! Are you alright?" I croak, eyes wide. "What's going on?"

She closes her eyes, breathing slowly, her nostrils flaring as she inhales, lips parting slightly as she exhales. It takes her a few moments, but she opens her eyes again, pupils once more returned to normal and her canines having shrunk back to size.

"I... I apologize," she mutters, looking slightly ashamed. "Veela can be a bit... animalistic when it comes to someone we care for. For someone to so poorly treat one of our partners... well, we can lose a bit of ourselves to baser instinct."

"That's... actually really interesting." I blurt, quickly slapping my hand over my mouth. Fleur goggles at me, before laughing loudly.

"Interesting? Really? Most people are terrified by that."

I shrug unapologetically. "I'm half-dead, you're a living fountain of youth. I don't think things get any weirder than that." I hesitate, before continuing with my train of thought. "Also... you said partner?"

She shuts her mouth tight, looking very sheepish all of a sudden. "Well, you see- I... merde," she curses, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Forgive me for presuming," she apologizes, looking me in the eye. "This is a first date, I shouldn't put a name on things so quickly."

I tilt my head in thought, clicking my tongue to a staccato beat. "You know, it really does have a good ring to it," I muse, Fleur brightening up immediately, a smile on her face stretching from ear to ear.

"Are you sure? I don't want to take things too quickly, I mean, you're still quite a bit younger than me, and we're both inexperienced, and-"

I silence her with a kiss, Fleur squeaking quietly, before sinking into the embrace, one hand reaching up to cup the back of my neck as she presses herself against me.
"We're both new to this, and forgive me for presuming, but I think that things are going to go well between the two of us. I mean, look at us!" I exclaim, my hand waving over her and I. "We both died and came back to life, we both know what happens in the future and are fighting in this weird, unmentioned and unknown war. We both have incredibly rare powers, regularly have conversations with Gods, and we're worried about whether or not to put a name on things? If any relationship would make sense, it would be this one."

Fleur frowns, staring off in the distance. "Well… if you say it that way…"

"We're both having a fit over something that isn't really an issue, aren't we?"

She nods. "I guess so. Then, in that case… I would be more than happy to call you my girlfriend."

I grin, pecking her on the cheek, already feeling surprisingly comfortable with how things are going. For someone who's never been in a relationship before, I think I'm doing quite well.

"That sounds absolutely wonderful."

I walk into the Daily Prophet decked out in the most intimidating clothing I own, the long black basilisk hide jacket skirting around the top of my knees as I march through the office, garnering confused looks from the staff inside as I move past them in a blur.

My boots click heavily across the hardwood floor as I stomp up a flight of stairs, fingers skirting over the bannister as I climb level after level, moving past each inconsequential floor on my road towards the editor-in-chief's office.

After about a minute of climbing, I've made my way to the top, the secretary ahead of me not even looking up from her work as she says, "Sorry dear, Mister Cuffe isn't scheduled for any meetings right now, you'll have to come back later."

I ignore her, striding past and tuning out her spluttering protests as I slam the door open, Barnabus Cuffe jumping in his chair. I eye the man with disgust, his whole office screaming 'lavish.' So lavish that it should be impossible to achieve considering the average income of an editor-in-chief, so I imagine that a good majority of his income comes from bribes and other under the table means. This man must be a Scrimgeour who can write. This is going to be fun.

He's wearing a gray pin-stripe vest, the blue collar on his shirt tucked tidily underneath thick jowls, indicative of his fondness of the less healthy things in life. He slicks his brown, going on gray hair back, standing up and jabbing his finger in my direction.

"How dare you come barging into my office! Why, I have half the mind to-"

"Would you please just shut up?" I retort, waving my hand and shutting the door behind me, following that up with a silencing charm or two.

Cuffe blusters angrily, nonsensical muttering leaking out of his chubby mouth.

"Now, I have half the mind to run this place into the ground after the article you wrote about me," I begin, Cuffe's eyes lighting up in recognition.

"And how would you do that, exactly? Tear out the foundations with whatever odd, wandless magic you use? You'd be arrested in an instant," he spits, rolling his thick neck imposingly.
"Tear the place down? No, I didn't mean that so literally. Who do you take me for? Voldemort?" He blanches considerably, flinching at the mention of the moniker. "Because that's who you made me out to be with your recent story, one that was published while I was in intensive care. Very brave of you, Mister Cuffe, to write a smear piece on a teenager while she's unconscious. Bravo," I sniff, clapping slowly.

I gesture for him to sit down, the man doing it as primly as he can, head held high as I take my own seat in front of his desk, legs crossed serenely.

"So, here's what's going to happen. You're going to write a public apology and retract your statements towards me, specifically those that subtly inferred that I was the next up and coming Dark Lady, ready to take Voldemort's place after having offed him when I was barely even a year old." Barnabus goes to speak but I lift my hand, pointing it at him dangerously. "The reason you're going to do this is because I own a quarter of the paper, as well own the entirety of Witch Weekly, along with Teen Witch Weekly."

Cuffe's eyes widen dramatically as he pales even further, a bead of nervous sweat dripping down his forehead that he doesn't move to wipe away, too focused on the conversation at hand.

I smile at him, a thin and stretched thing that doesn't lend itself to friendliness in any way. "I see that you're beginning to understand the situation that you're in Mister Cuffe."

He nods vigorously. "Miss Potter, I had no idea that... well, you understand, right?"

I tilt my head questioningly, clasping my hands over my lap. "No, I don't understand." I wave my hand for him to continue. "Please, do tell."

He straightens out his collar, swallowing heavily. "Well, when one of our... other shareholders, requests a certain story be told, we often take their opinions into consideration. When one of our primary shareholders demands a certain story be told, it happens." He folds his hands out in offering. "I'm simply doing what I can to run the paper."

"No, no, I understand that," I say, lifting my hand to my chin, cradling it. "That's not going to be happening anymore, at least, whoever demanded you publish that article no longer has any say in what goes on here, as, I can assure you, whatever they can threaten you with, it doesn't even compare to what I will do."

Cuffe splutters indignantly and I put my hand up once again, my palm glowing lightly. "Mister Cuffe, I'm afraid you don't understand the situation," I lament, resting my cheek on my fist. "I have you by the balls, and I don't care how much money Malfoy throws at you, if you continue to do what you're doing, you will be out of a job so fast your head will be spinning." I smile once more, my expression screaming danger, causing the heavy man to lean back into his chair in an attempt go shirk away from me. "Now, that won't be the end of it. What will happen after that, you say? Well, let me explain."

I steeple my hands in front of me, perched under my chin. "I will go about making sure you will never find a job in Britain again. I have the backing of the Black-Greengrass voting bloc, and in turn, their business. If word gets around to the most powerful party in the Wizengamot that the Daily Prophet has been spewing nothing but Malfoy's propaganda under your direction, there will be hell to pay." I put my hand out, waving it over my head dramatically, watching as Cuffe follows it with his eyes, his complexion all of a sudden quite sickly and pale. "Imagine it. Every single business owned by either me, or the members of that bloc having put out a blacklist on you. If I had to guess, I'd say that nearly half of the businesses in wizarding Britain fall under ownership or direct control of those men and women, and if they decide to spread the news that Barnabus Cuffe is an un-hireable
menace? Well, I think you'd be shit out of luck, wouldn't you say?"

He inhales sharply, lips pursed as he finally understands how well and truly *fucked* he is if he continues on the road he's on.

"I… I see what you're saying Miss Potter," he chokes, throat bobbing. "I- I'll make sure that a full apology is published tomorrow morning, you have my word."

I grin, clapping my hands as I get out of my seat, inclining my head towards the terrified man. "Thank you for your time Mister Cuffe, I'll be on my way," I jibe as I turn to leave, striding out the door and leaving the flustered, miserable little bastard to take a long hard look at where his life has gone.

Chapter End Notes

A little bit of fluff, a little bit of intrigue.
I smile widely as I sip from my coffee, sending a cheeky look Fleur's way as I read the newest edition of the Daily Prophet. The bastards are practically groveling in their apology, the article so heart-felt as to feel clichéd.

I absolutely love it.

Hermione sighs quietly next to me, looking down at the paper with an exasperated look on her face. She whispers for me to put up a silencing charm, so I quickly remove my wand and flick it through the air, a curtain of quiet settling over us.

She puts her hands on her hips, sending a disappointed look my way. "Did you threaten the Daily Prophet?"

I put my hand over my heart, feigning shock. "Why, I did nothing of the sort!" I deny, unable to hide my grin. "Although I did mention the fact that I own a good portion of the paper, along with my links to the more… politically savvy members of my family. There may have been talk of a complete and total blacklist on the editor-in-chief as well."

She jerks her head to the side, nodding in approval. "Well, at least you didn't physically threaten them," she sighs, relieved. "I thought you were going to go in there guns blazing."

"Er- I may be slightly deranged, but I'm not about to murder someone over a newspaper article," I say, slightly perturbed that Hermione immediately expects me to just set fire to the building with everyone inside.

At least, that's what I imagine she's expected.

"No, no, I know that," she concedes, putting her hand on her cheek. "I just thought there'd be more threats of bodily violence."

"Oh"

I turn away from her, looking at the table dumbly as I remove the silencing charm.

I've really become quite a violent person, haven't I? Or at least… I think I am? I honestly haven't a clue, but I think I'm doing the best I can given the constant supernatural danger that is my life.

"Helene?"

I turn up to see Lisa, a question on her face.

"Yeah? What is it?"
"What are you wearing to the ball?"

I blink a few times, turning to Fleur, before turning back to Lisa and blinking a bit more.

"Fuck."

I completely and utterly forgot to buy clothes for the ball. Christ, I don't even have half a clue of what to wear to a semi-formal occasion, let alone something so elaborate like the Yule Ball.

"I'm guessing you've forgotten to buy a dress?" she says, something terrifying in her eyes. I don't know what it is, but I don't like it. Not one bit.

I scratch my neck, before nervously tucking a lock of hair behind my ear. "Er- yeah, I have."

She smiles the most horrific smile I've ever seen in my entire life, and I saw a giant sized dementor with rotten teeth, quite literally, grin from ear to ear. No. I do not like where this is going.

"That means we're going to need to go to Gladrags, aren't we?" she asks, eyes passing over the other girls. I feel a shiver through my spine as the same look spreads over to the rest of them, Hermione included.

Good God, what have I gotten myself into?

"I believe I'll have to come along, to make sure we match," Fleur pipes up, that same gleam in her eyes. "We're both champions, are we not? We must make sure we set a good example."

"Oh God, not you too," I whisper, eyes wide as my head spins frantically, looking to anyone, anyone for support. Not a peep.

"Understand that I am doing this under duress," I say, finger wagging angrily at each and every one of them. "I could have just as easily done this on my own."

"But where's the fun in that?" Ginny gasps, looking terribly offended that I wouldn't want to go on a group wide shopping trip.

I look at her, askance. "How can shopping be in any way fun? It's an errand! It's something that you have to very reluctantly take time out of your schedule for, not something that you excitedly make time for."

Fleur pats me on the back consolingly. "Sorry Helene, but you're outnumbered. Also, you're definitely not allowed to complain when you have more shoes than even I do."

"That's because shoes are easy," I grumble, putting my head in my hands. "There's only so many different kinds out there, and a good pair of shoes is very important, I'll have you know!" I add, poking her shoulder half-heartedly. "You can ignore an uncomfortable shirt, but you can't ignore uncomfortable shoes."

"You keep telling yourself that," she smiles, rubbing my shoulder before returning to her own cup of coffee, stalwart as she does everything she can to ignore my pleading look.

I sip at my own mug, already dreading the coming trip to Hogsmeade.

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I grimace at my reflection, spinning to see the way the glimmering green dress clings to my hips, tapering off at an angle, revealing a touch more of my right leg than my left. It's perfect, how it supports everything just right, accenting my body in ways that I didn't know it could be accented.

And since it's so perfect, I absolutely detest it.

"No," I mutter, the gaggle of teen girls behind me groaning in frustration. I believe this may be the eighteenth dress that I've tried on, and in my mind, that's eighteen too many.

"Why?" Luna asks, a blank, yet curious look on her face, lips parted ever so slightly. "I believe you look quite stunning in it... have you been affected by wrackspurts yet again?"

I shrug, blowing a lock of hair out of my face in exasperation. "I don't know. I really don't know, but something about this isn't working for me," I say, wearing a mildly apologetic look.

Mildly, since I was forced into this.

Fleur walks up behind me, placing a hand on my shoulder, meeting my eyes in the mirror ahead.
"What's wrong? I agree with Luna, you do look ravishing in that dress."

I smile faintly, confused by my hatred of the dress, or dresses in particular.

"I like skirts. Skirts I can do in the summer, maybe late spring and early autumn depending on the weather... but a dress? I just feel so out of sorts in it." I puff out my lips, staring my reflection down, as if I'll force myself to give in to the girls and purchase the damned thing already.

Fleur cocks her head to the side. "So, why don't you wear dress robes instead? Maybe a suit, like a tuxedo? It would definitely... suit you." She chuckles quietly at her quite frankly awful little pun.


But a tuxedo?

"Huh, I think a tuxedo could work," I say, Fleur clapping her hands excitedly.

"A tuxedo?" Padma says, looking a bit disgruntled. "Why would you wear a tuxedo?"

"Well, I like the idea of it. Why can't I wear a tuxedo?" I ask, confused.

She sighs loudly, crossing her arms. "It's just not proper!" she exclaims, one hand waving in annoyance. "You'd look like a-

Padma shuts her mouth very suddenly, turning away. It doesn't stop me from catching her tone of voice.

"Like a what, exactly?"

She turns her head to the ceiling, mouthing a sort of silent prayer. "You'd look like a dyke."

Everyone falls silent, Lisa shuffling awkwardly next to her best friend, looking very conflicted. Ginny and Hermione both look quite pissed off, while Luna just stands there tapping her finger on her chin thoughtfully. Fleur puts her hand on my back protectively, a blank look on her face.

"I think you'd make a lovely dyke Helene."
I snort loudly, Luna smiling her quaint little smile, knowing full well that she’s broken the tension quite effectively.

"Why thank you, Luna," I say, an odd, stressed laugh creeping out of me.

I guess Padma is as old fashioned as I thought she was. I decide to ignore her little outburst, instead coming to the decision that I should own who I am. I'm not going to flaunt it, but I'm not going to hide it either.

"I think a tuxedo sounds wonderful, I'm going to go ask the tailor if they have any more feminine cuts," I announce, quickly striding past the brooding group of girls towards the lady who's been helping us.

I knock on the counter, a shock of bright gray hair announcing the tailor popping her head out of the back room. "Yes miss? Is that one to your liking?" she asks, gesturing towards the green dress.

I shake my head, the woman looking a bit disappointed by my refusal of yet another dress. "I'm sorry for being such a terrible customer, but I just don't think a dress is for me. I had something else in mind though."

She lights up, excited at the prospect of a different sort of challenge, hoping to narrow down the field and direct me to something that I'd like. "Well, what would you be interested in? We've got a large selection of dress robes."

"Well, I'd actually like to see what sort of tuxedo's you have. Something simple. No ruffles, nothing baggy." I stop for a moment, suddenly remembering Amelia Bones' absolutely fantastic little suit and skirt that she wore, having a good idea of the type of cut I'd like. "Do you actually have something more on the minimal side? Light texture on the fabric, and a pocket square and bowtie in the same colour as this dress?"

The lady nods excitedly, quickly pulling me through the women's section and out to the men's, a cluster of flustered teenage boys awkwardly attempting to decide on dress robes for the upcoming ball, having forgot them as well.

Almost in unison, their heads snap up, eyes widening as they set sights on me, a few smiling awkwardly and attempting to make small talk as I'm tugged past them towards a slightly empty section.

"Over here we have our tuxedos and suits. While muggle fashion is big in the workplace, it hasn't really caught on in formal settings," she explains, gesturing towards a somewhat garish three-piece, the tuxedo looking as if someone had just bought a mountain of rhinestones from Poundland and went on a decorative bender.

"Er… I don't think that one is for me," I say, eyeing the suit with distaste.

The tailor nods hurriedly, quickly directing me towards a fantastic sight. A very dark gray, two-piece, and with just the right amount of texture and gloss to the fabric so as to be more interesting, while not looking like someone's wrapped me in tweed clingfilm.

I point to it excitedly, already knowing that that's what I want. "I think that's the one," I say, the lady looking at me questioningly.

"Are you sure you don't want to try it on?"

I shake my head. "No, but if I could get it tailored to fit, that would be fantastic."
She quickly removes the suit from the headless mannequin it adorns, laying it over her forearm delicately and directing me to go and change back into my regular clothes while she adjusts the outfit.

With a skip in my step, I make my way back to the girls, who are now awkwardly standing around, completely silent.

Good job Padma, you made things weird.

"I already got everything figured out!" I say happily, Fleur smiling at me.

"That was quick! What did you decide on?"

"Dark gray, two-piece tux, with a bowtie and pocket square in the same colour as this dress," I answer, gesturing towards myself.

Fleur lights up, her smile widening. "I'm sure you'll look fantastic in it," she effuses, before ushering me back into the changing room. "Now go get back into your regular clothes, before you start complaining about dresses even more."

I laugh as I head back to get changed, hiding the fact that I'm a touch worried about Padma.

I know that people can be… uncomfortable, with gay couples. It doesn't make their bigotry acceptable in any way, but I get it. I don't like it, but I get it. People are odd creatures, and they form biases like nobody's business. Just look at Britain, the people here are so caught up about nonsensical blood status, and there've been wars fought over it. Racism, sexism, and prejudice in any form is a terribly unfortunate, natural thing.

But, for a friend to act that way?

I don't really know what to do about that.

I quickly slip out of the green dress, tossing on my regular clothes as quick as I can in the hopes that I can get as far away as possible from the much too breathable outfit.

"So, Padma," I say as I walk out from the dressing room. She doesn't make eye contact as she looks towards me, keeping her head cast downward and gaze sweeping across the floor.

"Yes?"

I sigh, scratching the back of my head. "So, I'm gonna' be honest. I'm not exactly pleased that you're acting the way you are." She clenches her hand into a fist, blushing from her neck to her ears, obviously mortified. "I'd think that after four years of friendship, something like who I date wouldn't really cause issues, but it seems that I'm wrong."

"It's not that! It's just…"

She stumbles with her words, looking very unsure of herself.

"It's just what?"

"It's just… I don't get it! I don't… Gods, let's just forget about it, alright? I'm sorry," she pleads, jaw set defiantly as she shakes her head.

I nod reluctantly, placing my hand on her shoulder. Padma flinches as I make contact with her, sheepishly glancing upwards. "Just never do it again, alright? I can forgive you this once… but
again? I can't do that."

She returns with a nod of her own. "Let's just get your tuxedo and get out of here, okay?"

I watch as she walks away, a knot in my stomach. I don't think this is going to end too well.

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We return to the school in silence after having retrieved my outfit, not a peep of conversation dancing between us as it normally does. I find that our little entourage is often boisterous, bordering on deeply annoying in terms of the amount of verbal energy tossed about. It's... uncomfortable, to see everyone so quiet.

I know they're unsettled by Padma's continual displays of... is bigotry too harsh a word? Prejudice? Uncomfortableness? Is that even a word?

I don't really know, but what I do know, is that something is changing between all of us, and I don't think it's for the better.

Hermione and Ginny both have their mouths shut tight as we climb into the carriage. They're probably pissed off as well, either that, or not at all sure of how to come to terms with the fact that one of their closest friends doesn't like them on principle.

Not that they're out, of course. But it doesn't change the fact that they know.

Funny how two people I never expected to swing that way, do. Ginny I could see. Not that I believed she was, but I could see her dating a woman, if that makes sense. Hermione? Now that was a shocker. Hermione Jean Granger, interested in women... who'da thunk it? Certainly not me, judging by how I reacted last year when she confessed her feelings.

Just goes to show that you can't judge a book by its cover.

The carriage shudders to a halt, and we begin to pile out, Fleur taking my hand and helping me down the steep array of wooden steps, not letting go as we walk towards the castle.

I look up at her, head tilted up ever so slightly to meet her taller figure. I can't help but wonder at the fact that she's the Albumancer. That she's the only other person on this Earth who knows exactly what I've gone through, and will go through, and she has the heart and temerity to join me in that, knowing full well that the world will decry us for who we are come the Yule Ball.

God, she's amazing.

I don't know what I feel for her. I don't know what I feel half the time. Comes with the territory of being emotionally stunted, what with my lovely little upbringing and the fact that I've seen and done things that would leave most adults catatonic.

I might be a bit detached, deranged, and just a smidge psychotic, judging by my incredible ability to kill scores of people with but a few flicks of my wand, but I'm doing my best. I just hope that I have the capacity to feel, and to love someone the way I want to. They way I hope I'll one day love Fleur.

My cheeks heat up, blushing at my own little mental tangent. I smile, knowing that I'm getting ahead of myself.

But who wouldn't in my situation? After going through what I have. I know I'm starved of affection, and I'm used to it. So, doesn't it make sense that I would latch on to the first ray of light in my life?
The way I did with Sirius? The way I did with the Greengrasses? Hell, I'd just be following the trend if I ended up falling for Fleur.

"Something on your mind?" she asks, raising an eyebrow and squeezing my hand lightly.

"You," I reply, meeting her gaze.

"Hmph? What about me are you thinking about?" she continues, her lips curled up just the slightest.

"Well… I was thinking about how… what's a good word for this? Coincidental? Yeah- how coincidental everything is in terms of… well-us."

She frowns, not a thing of frustration or anger, but a want to know more. "What do you mean?"

I snap my fingers, trying to figure out how to put my thoughts into words. "Just, that you and I are a rare two people. We both… well, you know," I say, looking pointedly at the other girls nearby. I realize I'm being silly, and quickly put up a silencing charm over the two of us. "We're both time-travelers, very specific types of time-travelers considering our method of dying and pissing off the wrong God. We're together, and I was just thinking over that. How, of all the people available in the world for us to date, we chose each other?"

I shake my head, a happy smile on my face. "I'm not complaining, far from it. Hell, I'm ecstatic about it all. I think it's just so perfect, you know? How the two of us, warriors out of time… we end up seeking each other out."

Fleur grins back at me, squeezing my hand once more. "Very poetic, don't you think?"

"Very much so," I reply, turning my attention back to our little walk, having come up upon the massive studded doors that cover the entrance to Hogwarts. I remove the silencing charm as we push on through, and before I can bring my purchase back to the common room, I'm confronted by a familiar sight.

"Miss Potter," Dumbledore says, a blank look on his face, hands clasped in front of him over pastel blue robes, dotted with different futhark runes that swim absently over the fabric's surface.

I blink a few times, wondering why he would come out to speak to me. I detest the man, he detests me, simple as that. There's no need to speak unless there's been an emergency.

"Yes Headmaster?" I ask, letting go of Fleur's hand. "What is it?"

He looks at me, then at Fleur, an odd look settling over him. He frowns, but it's not a concerned expression, more confused than anything. "Would you be able to come with me up to my office for a discussion?"

I nod. "Sorry Fleur, looks like I have to get going. I'll see you later, alright?"

"I look forward to it," she says, stooping down to kiss my forehead, her hand trailing over my cheek as she turns to walk away, headed back to the carriage.

"Well?" I ask, eyebrow raised as I redirect my gaze back to Dumbledore. "Shall we be off?"

He inclines his head, quiet as he leads me to his office, his robes trailing across the ground yet not picking up a speck of dust as they glide over the stone. Must be enchanted in some way.

We quickly arrive at Dumbledore's office, the man whispering into the gargoyle's ear and allowing
us entrance. We ascend the winding steps, and I go to take my usual seat in front of Dumbledore's desk, transfiguring it into something much more comfortable.

"So… what did you want to speak with me about? Has there been an emergency?" I ask, Dumbledore shaking his head.

"Nothing of the sort," he replies, cocking his head to the side inquisitively. "You're awful close to the Beauxbatons champion. Fleur Delacour, is it?"

I clench my fist, glaring daggers at the old man in front of me. "Are you making threats, Dumbledore?"

His brow raises, a confused expression on his face. "Threats? No, I find that's more your line of expertise," he quips, hands laid out on his desk lazily, palms down. "I was just wondering what your relationship with her was. I'd hate to see a lovely girl like that be hurt."

"You say you're not making threats, but then you infer that Fleur will be hurt?" I ask, incredulous. "You will never hurt her, be it physically, mentally, or magically. You will not hire someone to hurt her or go out of your way to have her be hurt through extraneous means. If you learn that someone intends to hurt her, you will do what you can to prevent it, as well as relay that information to me as soon as possible."

Dumbledore flinches as the magic of the slave bond washes over him, his eyes closed for but a moment before they reopen, a furious look on his face. "How dare you. To believe that I would bring harm to a girl who has done no wrong, all in an attempt to get to you? Do you believe me so simple, Potter?" He clenches his jaw angrily, moustache bristling as he reigns in his temper. "I would never commit such an atrocity. In fact, I was compelled to warn you, and her in turn, of the events of the second and third tasks, considering the first was changed from what you originally recalled it to be."

I open my mouth to speak but find that I can't. Looks like Dumbledore has struck me speechless. I did not expect that to happen, not at all.

"I… apologize," I muster, the words feeling unfamiliar on my tongue, like they shouldn't be directed towards the man who's wronged me so.

He looks absolutely bewildered to hear that, blinking sharply at the unbidden apology.

"I care for Fleur… deeply. If she was hurt… I don't know what I would do." I scoff quietly, knowing that I would most likely rain down an unholy fire upon those who harmed her. I just don't know what I would do after that. If she died… God. I don't even want to think about it. I know I could resurrect her, but would it be wise? Would she want that?

Thoughts for another time.

"So," I say, clapping my hands together. "What are the details of the second and third tasks?"

"Have you solved your egg yet?" I shake my head, ashamed to realize that I haven't yet put the egg under water, or whatever I need to do to figure out the clue on the damned thing. For all I know, the next task is going to involve me trying to magically defuse a nuclear bomb in the heart of London.

Dumbledore frowns, but carries on. "The second task will take place in the Black Lake, and you will be required to retrieve a hostage."

"Huh? That's identical to the last one."
"Did they ship in numerous magical creatures for your second task? A Beisht-Kione among them, as well as a slew of Kelpies, a Hydra, and a Lusca?"

I pale at the mention of a Hydra, and while I have no knowledge of what a Beisht-Kione or a Lusca is, I'm sure I'm not going to be pleased to find out.

"Please… elaborate, on what a Beisht-Kione, as well a Lusca is," I say, a pit of fear bubbling up within me at Dumbledore's expression. He looks haggard just mentioning the creatures, so I have no doubt that they're just as bad, if not worse than a chimera, considering I'll have to fight them underwater.

Dumbledore steeples his hands in front of him. "A Beisht-Kione is a sea monster, quite large in size, nearly twenty feet in length. It looks like a nightmare, to say the least. You could compare it to a seahorse, if a seahorse was covered in teeth-bearing tentacles, had a mouth like a plesiosaur, and could tear a ship in two with it's bite alone." He shakes his head sadly, a far away look on his face. "Those fools at the ministry thought it would be more 'entertaining' to bring in these creatures," he says, spitting out the word entertaining as if it was filth in his mouth.

"So… is a Lusca any worse than a Beisht-Kione?" I ask with trepidation. Not sure if I want to know whether or not the next creature on the list is just as terrifying as the last.

"No, thankfully, it's not quite as bad as that." I sigh in relief, Dumbledore running his fingers through his beard. "A Lusca is a magical hybrid of a goblin shark and octopus, although it could be compared to an incredibly small kraken. It's normally only found within the Caribbean, but the Ministry deemed it acceptable to ship one over. The monster has three heads, each of which has a mouth that can… snap forward, for lack of a better description. It has a mass of tentacles that it uses to snatch up it's prey, and it has a weak form of electrical magic, magic that can stun one if caught unawares."

I pinch the bridge of my nose, exhaling softly. "Well, it looks like I'm going to be spending the whole task keeping the others alive," I muse, not mentioning the fact that Fleur can hold her own just as well as I can. At least, I imagine she killed her manticore. I really should ask her about that.

Dumbledore once more eyes me strangely, an odd light in his eyes. Of course, the man still can't wrap his head around the fact that I'm not some sort of unearthly destroyer of worlds.

"Well… thank you very much for telling me of this," I say kindly. "I'll do my best to make sure the task doesn't turn into the bloodbath that the first should have been."

"You don't wish to know of the third task?" Dumbledore queries.

I shake my head. "Is it an everchanging maze full of terrible, unholy creatures?" I ask, Dumbledore nodding in reply. "Well, that's about all I need to know. As long as those idiots don't bring a nundu in, I think I'm going to be alright."

I pause, remembering the question that I wanted to ask him. "Why haven't you expelled me? I don't think that was covered under my mass of commands."

Dumbledore narrows his eyes in thought. "I actually never thought of it, to be quite honest."

I snort, an odd smile stretching over my face. "Well, as much as I hate to do this, I command you to not expel me."

He sighs as the magic washes over him again, shaking his head. "I wouldn't have expelled you even if I had thought of it," he concedes. I raise my eyebrows at that. "It's easier to keep an eye on
"Makes sense," I admit. "But, I don't know how many times I have to tell you, I have no interest in death, destruction, or domination of any kind. I just want to make sure that everyone comes out of the coming war with Voldemort in one piece, and if I can avoid it all together by killing him come June, that would be even better."

Dumbledore inclines his head silently, a conflicted look in his eyes. I nod thankfully at him as I leave, my head swimming as I try to run through strategies that I can use to survive the upcoming task. Well, I know I'll survive, and I'm quite sure Fleur will, but I'll be damned if I let Cedric or Viktor get slaughtered in this gladiatorial blood sport. What a fucking nightmare this is all turning out to be.

Here, I thought it was going to be a walk in the park. Dragons, a couple of Grindylow, and a chat with a sphinx. Instead, I get these ancient fucking monsters that the Ministry must have drugged up from the depths of Hell itself. Seahorse nightmares, and the psychotic blend of a shark and an octopus? Not to mention the fucking Hydra they've brought in just to spice things up?

Fuck my life.

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I study myself in the mirror, adjusting the thin lapels on the tuxedo. I smooth out the already perfect fabric, smirking at my, dare I say it, dapper reflection.

The tuxedo fits me like a glove, kind of a funny saying, but quite apt. Snug on the shoulders, yet there's just enough room in the chest to accommodate me. The trousers come down straight legged, but not so tight as to be uncomfortable when I dance. I adjust the bowtie, quite happy with how well I've managed to do up the remarkably difficult knot.

Magic is- well, it's magic. I don't think I'd have been able to tie the damned thing otherwise.

My hair sits right at my chin, tight, controlled curls framing my face pleasantly, bringing attention to the thin sprinkle of freckles across the bridge of my nose. I refused Daphne and Tracey's efforts to cover me in makeup, having no love for the feeling of the product on my skin. It makes my face feel heavy, like I've just rolled around in dirt and forgot to wash.

Not that I've ever done that, of course.

With one last look, I head off, both anxious and excited to bare myself to the world today.

I've been vilified before, what with the train-wreck that was my fifth year, along with the constant flip flopping of the students. One minute I'm a hero, the next I'm a deranged psychopath. But after tonight? I don't know what they're going to think. If things are as bad in Britain as I've been lead to believe, I may have to set up my own mail wards this evening before I get to bed.

I cut down the stairs, a few younger students, as well as older ones who've decided not to attend the ball watching me as I descend, either frowning, or their eyes widening in amusement at the tuxedo I wear. I notice that most of the students who are muggleborn look to be friendly, while the purebloods, and even some of the halfbloods look on with disdain.

That's about what I expected.

I quickly find myself in the entrance hall, serenely making my way down the stairs, my shoes clicking lightly against the stone with each and every step. The other champions, as well as
McGonagall look up, but I don't pay any attention to their reactions. Instead, all I can focus on is Fleur.

She's wearing a pale, teal dress, quite alike the one she wore to the previous Yule Ball. Simple, yet flowing in long curtained rivulets down towards her feet, stopping short just below the knee. I notice that this dress balances out against her porcelain complexion perfectly and won't look garish next the sharp, rich green of my bowtie and pocket square.

She's planned ahead, as she said she would.

Fleur is absolutely radiant, her hair tidily knotted into an elaborate braid, curling down across her bare shoulders and laying flat over her collarbones. Her eyes are practically sparkling as they set upon mine, their calm depths pulling me in as I walk ever forward, pulling her into an embrace.

"You look absolutely incredible," I whisper, kissing her lightly on the cheek.

She smiles, a brilliant thing, all shining and joyful. "The same to you," she mutters, running her eyes over me as if I'm a present to be opened at her discretion. "That tuxedo is… magnifique, you look amazing in it."

I turn back to the gawking champions, Cedric blushing furiously, Cho latched onto his arm, her eyes dancing between Fleur and I, apparently having a hard time recognizing that we're a couple. Viktor looks as stoic as always, but his eyes are kind, something that nearly causes me to sigh in relief. Hermione is with him once again, wearing that familiar periwinkle dress, her normally untameable curls pulled into tidy braids, trailing down the back of her neck and just over the cusp of her shoulder.

"Hello everyone!" I effuse, taking Fleur's hand and smiling happily at my fellow contenders and their dates. "Sorry if I'm a bit late, took me forever to figure out this thing," I add, gesturing at my bowtie.

McGonagall clears her throat loudly, a disappointed look on her face. "Miss Potter," she drawls, casting a surreptitious glance Fleur's way. "Are we still waiting for your date?"

I let the question hang in the air for a moment, enjoying her confusion. I mean, I might as well, considering it will probably turn into disdain in five seconds. McGonagall already seems to hate me because of my little display at the first task, so I imagine she's not going to react too well to my dating Fleur.

God, and for a long time I thought she was gay.

"My date is right here, Professor," I say, lifting Fleur's hand with mine and smiling at her.

She inhales sharply, looking quite annoyed with me. "On your head be it," she declares, huffing quietly. "I will announce each couple one at a time, you will make your way into the Hall and find a seat at the head table. After the meal, you will open the dance." She pauses, looking at me once more. "I expect you all to be on the best of behaviour, and to act as Champions, the most prestigious members of your schools. Do I make myself clear?"

Very subtle. Translation: I really don't like you, Potter.

What a shame that is. She used to be my favourite Professor.

McGonagall slips into the Great Hall, and after a moment her booming voice announces, "The Durmstrang champion, Viktor Krum! With his date, Hermione Granger of Hogwarts!"
Viktor gives me a clipped nod, Hermione grinning at me as the two of them stride excitedly forward, or Hermione does, Viktor is as aloof as always, into the Great Hall, the heavy din of cheering and clapping students meeting my ears.

"So… Helene, er- Fleur's your date?" Cedric asks awkwardly, Cho glaring at him from the corner of her eye.

I squeeze Fleur's hand. "I'd say I'm more her date, considering I'm the younger one here, but yes, she is."

Fleur shakes her head, a smirk on her face. "You were the one that asked me to the ball. I'd say that I'm your date."

"You two look lovely together," Cho interjects, smiling stiffly. It's not unkind, she just looks unsure of herself. "Good luck with the rest of the school," she offers, suddenly looking quite annoyed. "The Slytherin's are going to give you no end of trouble over your… preferences."

"I assumed as much. It's not like any of them can outduel me or anything, not that they'd ever try after I made half the school piss themselves in fear just a couple of weeks ago."

Fleur and Cedric laugh loudly, him and Cho inclining their heads in goodbye as they're called through to the Great Hall.

"Very eloquent, Helene," Fleur jibes, watching as the two leave. "Piss themselves? I thought you were more posh than that."

I put one hand on my hips in faux annoyance. "Hey! I'll have you know that I'm the opposite of posh. Just because I'm wearing a tuxedo doesn't mean that I'm some sort of anal-retentive pureblood heiress."

"I never went into that much depth, are you sure you're not projecting?" she asks, one eyebrow raised.

I shake my head. "I don't think I'll ever be able to win a battle of words with you."

She chuckles, squeezing my hand once more. "I'm glad you've figured that out so soon."

The roaring voice of McGonagall cuts through our conversation. Fleur's eyes brighten up, excitement dancing within. "…and I do believe we've been called. Are you ready?"

"Ready as you are," I say with a grin.

I lace my arm through hers, the two of us taking a deep breath before we march confidently through the doors, the cheering crowd quieting as they see the two of us together.

"Look at them," I say, scanning the Hall. Many of the students look like they're about to have an aneurysm, faces pinched and eyes bugging out of their head. Of course, a few of them, both men and women, stare with no small amount of lust in their eyes. The combination of Fleur's aura, and the thought that she dates women… Hell, that gets me flustered, and I'm lucky enough to be the object of her attention. "I think they can't decide whether or not they want to drool or throw a fit." She laughs, like tinkling bells ringing out across the Hall. "We make a beautiful couple, you the most."

I smack her arm playfully as we continue on. "Hush, you. You're the looker here."
"If you insist," she states, a wry smile on her face. "I still think you're the most beautiful woman here. No one in this school can hold a candle to you."

I can feel myself blushing, and I attempt to shrug off her compliment, directing us as quickly as possible towards the staff table, unfortunate enough to find ourselves once more next to Percy Weasley. Well, I am, Fleur never had to sit next to the brown-nosing prick.

How on Earth could the Weasley's produce such a bureaucratic asshole?

I pull out Fleur's seat for her, and she thanks me as she sits down. I pull in next to her, having to prevent myself from giggling at the still awestruck expression of the students.

"Miss Potter," Percy intones, looking down on the two of us, nose raised highly in the air. "I had assumed the champions would be arriving with their dates, and not a friend."

I smile at him, pretending not to be bothered by his attitude. "Fleur is my date, Mister…"

"Weasley."

"Mister Weasley," I say, knowing full well by his annoyed expression that he's none too pleased to have not been recognized. "What do you do, Mister Weasley?" I ask, redirecting the conversation towards something I know he won't be able to shut up about.

"I'm Mister Crouches assistant, and since he's been under the weather as of late, I'm here in his place as the Ministries representative for the Yule Ball, and may be a judge in the coming tasks depending on his health," he boasts proudly, puffing out his chest.

"A secretary then? I've heard the ministry pays quite well, it must be good work," I jibe, watching in glee as his face melts into an expression of deep annoyance.

"I do much more than any secretary would, I assure you. I've had to take on all of Mister Crouches tasks for the tournament, and it's quite a busy job."

I nod placatingly. "That's very impressive, considering you just graduated this last year, correct?" He nods. "Good luck with climbing the ladder, I've heard it's difficult, but rewarding in its own."

I turn away before he can respond, listening as Dumbledore calls out, "Pork chops," his plate being magically filled with the simple dish. I notice as he looks over at me, once more looking a touch conflicted. I wonder what's gotten into the man.

Shrugging, I stare at my plate, wondering what in the hell I should have for dinner.

Ooh, I've got an idea.

"Beef wellington, mash, gravy, and seasonal vegetables," I announce, eyes widening as the meal appears in front of me.

God, that's impressive. I really need to learn house elf magic. How easy would cooking be, if I could do that on a daily basis?

I'd eat like a bloody queen.

"Coq au vin, et confit de canard," Fleur says, eyes widening as the dishes she's ordered appear without fuss. "Incredible," she whispers, taking a tentative bite of the marinated duck, humming in pleasure as she methodically chews it. "Incredible. You have to try this." She daintily cuts a slice of
the duck away, pushing her fork towards me. "Eat."

I blush, reaching forward and biting down on the golden fowl, eyes closing as it washes over my
mouth. A perfectly rich, yet subtle blend of garlic and thyme, amongst other spices. The skin is crisp,
crackling ever so slightly as I bite into it, letting the food suffuse my palate.

"That is… yeah, that's something else," I mutter, looking at the duck with raised eyebrows. "I didn't
even know food could taste that good!"

Fleur laughs, cutting another bit of duck away, the meat poised on the end of her fork. "The
Hogwarts elves are in a class of their own, it seems."

"No kidding," I reply, turning back to my very dense looking meal with a gleam of anticipation in
my eyes.

If the duck was that good, I can't imagine how delicious the wellington will be. I grab my fork and
knife, the heavy, serrated cutlery cutting through the thick mix of beef and pastry with ease, flakes of
crust scattering over the plate.

My mouth practically explodes as I place the incredible bit of magic, for that's all it could be, into it,
everything in the incredibly arduous dish coming together perfectly.

"Yeah, I'm really going to have to figure out how they do this."

"Do what?" Fleur asks.

I point towards the food with my fork. "Make this food so quickly and so well. We both ordered
very specific dishes, so I imagine it's done from scratch. I'm going to ask the house elves how they
cook some time."

Fleur smiles brightly. "An excellent idea. If your cooking is already as good as you say it is, I can't
imagine how amazing it would be if you managed to learn how to cook like an elf."

I laugh, returning to my meal and relishing in every bite, the mashed potatoes smooth, roast brussels
sprouts crisp with just the right tinge of bitter, along with perfectly seasoned carrots, giving the
slightest amount of yield in each bite.

Soon enough, and sadly enough, I'm finished with the delectable food, the tables across the Hall
beginning to clear up as people wrap up with their meals.

Dumbledore stands up, clapping his hands loudly and causing the rest of the plates to disappear,
some of the students grumbling in annoyance at having their dinner cut short. "Thank you everyone
for coming," he announces loudly, his voice echoing across the Hall. "Now that we are finished with
our delightful dinner, I would like our lovely champions to come out and begin the dance," he
continues, gesturing broadly with one arm and directing us towards the centre of the Hall.

Fleur takes my hand as we stand, all of us slowly but surely making our way to our places. I don't
even notice the other champions as she sets one hand on my waist, the other holding my hand up and
off to the side. I set my own remaining hand on her shoulder, leaning up to get a good look at her.

She grins at me, her smile dazzling in its purity. Her eyes nearly twinkle, yet they don't remind me of
Dumbledore, instead bearing a shine of their own. They glint like raw sapphire, untempered and
chipped. Flawed, yet perfect.

The steady beat of the waltz begins, Fleur stepping to the side and drawing me with her, hands
clasped snugly together as we begin to whirl and twist slowly to the driving tempo. Her dress flows around her knees, an unseen wind picking it up and setting it down with every spin, like it has a life of its own and has joined us in our dance.

The song continues to pick up, the strings becoming more urgent, yet never driving over into what could be considered frantic. I grin, holding eye contact with Fleur as we dance about the Hall, unable to tear myself away from her.

She returns the gesture, lips pulled back and baring her ecstatic smile to the world, cheeks flushed and a strand of hair tickling over her nose. She blows it away, shrugging with her eyebrows and garnering a laugh out of me, the noise only discernable to the two of us.

The song begins to reach its crescendo, the roaring of the horns blaring over the sharp strikes across the violas and cellos, the steady din of a double bass plucking away in the background and holding everything together. With each and every step the music drives us forward, each thud of our foot to the ground being echoed by a shot from a trumpet, or a trill from a French-horn.

I squeal as Fleur lifts me up, twirling me around her and setting me down gently, unable to hide the blush on my features as we continue in our effervescent dance. If my heart could beat, it would be thundering against my rib cage, a constant thumping that I imagine would reach out towards the alluring woman in front of me, binding us together in some unspoken way.

Before I know it, the timpani crash loudly, before simmering down to a light roll, the bass note bursting out across the Hall and echoing in my bones. A few trills from a flute, and a haunting high note pulling off a clarinet signals the end of the waltz, and Fleur and I step back, still holding each others' hands.

"That was…"

"Incroyable," Fleur whispers, a dazed look on her face.

I nod shakily. "Agreed."

"And now… the Weird Sisters!" Dumbledore bellows, the hordes of students pouring out onto the dance floor halting our breathy conversation.

I shrug my shoulders. "Would you like a drink?"

"That sounds wonderful. I'll come with you," Fleur says, once more lacing her arm through mine and directing the two of us towards the punch table, where we see the Weasley twins leaning lazily against the bit of furniture.

"George, I tell you, that Helene is a different breed."

"Quite right my brother, quite right. Why, she's making us all look bad, with that lovely bird on her arm."

They both grin at us, laughing to themselves. "Long time no see, our fellow red-headed devil," Fred says, George smacking him on the arm.

"She'll burn your eyebrows off if you call her that, you dolt. Don't you remember the beast slayers display? Helene Potter, bane of both women and monsters?"

I chuckle loudly, laughing even harder at Fleur's confused, yet amused expression. I guess she never really met the twins before. They must not have been allowed to take part in the Order even after my
"Oi you two, calm down," I say, placing my hand out in front of me. "I could never hurt my two brothers in arms."

George turns to Fred, eyebrows raised. "Brothers in arms she says? Why, I haven't heard a peep from you since you were but an ickle firstie!"

"That's correct my brother. Why, I would even go as far as to say she's been avoiding us. Us! What does she take us for? Craven fools?"

"Not a chance in the world. I've just been insanely busy. You know, slaying monsters and women. That's tiring, and thirsty work," I say, pushing past them and grabbing two glasses, filling them with punch and handing one towards Fleur.

"Ooh, looks like she's grabbed the special punch George."

"Aha! You two are interested in a boisterous evening, are you?"

I look down at the punch in hand, downing it in one quick gulp, flinching at the sting of alcohol. I'm not really affected by it, but I may as well make an attempt anyways.

Fred slaps his knee, laughing loudly. "We've got a real dangerous one here! Watch out for Helene Potter! Slayer of beasts, women, and fine drink!"

Fleur looks at me worriedly as I pour myself another glass. I pull her close, standing on my toes and whispering in her ear, causing her to shudder. "I'm immune to the affects of alcohol. It's something to do with my more peculiar traits."

She nods understandingly, looking much more comfortable as she sips at her own, looking down at the drink in surprise. "My, this is strong!" she declares, clapping her hand over her mouth and looking around to make sure she hasn't been caught.

"No worries my dear, no worries at all," Fred says, setting his hand on her shoulder. "Silencing charm around the table, so none of us perfect little students get in trouble with the big bad professors."

"You guys have thought of everything." I salute them with my glass, the two bowing deeply in return, their noses nearly sweeping across the floor.

"Well, we're off to go dance-"

"You mean shake our beautiful arses all over the school," George interrupts, grabbing his brother and dragging him towards the dance floor. "Beautiful quidditch girls await us! I wish you luck in your endeavours Miss Potter. Don't be a stranger," he finishes, inclining his head as he and his brother disappear into the energetic throng of dancing students.

"Those two are…"

"Different? Hilarious? Absolutely and utterly insane?" I ask, Fleur nodding in reply. "Now you know why I want to work with them."

"I'd met them a few times, back when, but we never really sat down and talked. Too much going on all the time, and they weren't as… playful, as they are now."
I shake my head plaintively. "War changes people. I just hope that it doesn't get to them this time."

Hermione stumbles out of the crowd, an implacable grin on her face. "Hey! You two look *amazing!*" she sings, pulling me into a hug.

I pat her back awkwardly, unused to the sudden affection. "You having fun?"

She pulls back and nods happily. "Viktor is an absolute gentleman," she boasts proudly. "And a hell of a dancer."

She goes to reach for some punch, but I stop her hand. "Careful there, the second bowl is spiked."

She blanches, nodding at me thankfully as she moves over to the leftmost bowl, pouring herself a glass of punch as Viktor strides forward.

"That one is spiked," I repeat, pointing towards the bowl. Viktor nods as well, moving directly for the spiked bowl and helping himself to quite a large drink.

I guess Bulgarians are better drinkers than the English.

I finish my second drink, setting the empty glass aside and watching as Fleur downs the rest of hers.

"Would you like to dance?" she asks, extending her hand.

"Why yes, I would love to," I reply, taking the offered hand, waving goodbye to Viktor and Hermione and following her onto the floor.

She brings me in to the heaving mass of students, some leaping and punching their fists into the air, others awkwardly swaying to the beat, while a few grind on each other suggestively, close enough to leave no doubt in mind what they're emulating.

"That's… that's straight up *sex!"* I gasp, looking around and wondering why people aren't as shocked as I am at the lascivious dance.

Fleur chuckles in my ear, and I feel a chill run down my back. "That is dancing, like you would see in clubs," she explains, placing her hand on the small of my back and pushing me deeper into the sea, many of the students clearing out with disgusted looks on their faces.

I ignore them as Fleur brings me in close, resting both her hands in the dip in my back, pressing me up and under her chin, her breasts squashed against my upper chest.

I try not to focus too much on that… particular sensation.

"This… this is how some of us dance in France," she whispers, her hands running over me, fingertips trailing across my spine and causing me to flinch, driving myself into her, pressing our bodies even more tightly together.

"I thought- I thought you hadn't dated before," I croak, mind foggy and swimming with thoughts better left unspoken.

She chuckles, low and throaty- *seductively.* "Just because I haven't dated, doesn't mean I haven't danced."

I close my eyes, feeling as our bodies press together, ignoring the fact that we're both dressed to the nines and dancing in a way that doesn't lend itself to a formal occasion. The dance feels like more of a promise, of moans, sweat, and grinding flesh.
I lose myself in the sensation, song after song threading together with no sense of change in between, the few rock songs interlaced with steady beats and heavy bass, coursing through my body and thudding in my empty veins, blurring my mind.

I catch glimpses of the other girls in the throng, Daphne and Tracey having gone stag, giggling loudly as they shuffle past, sending knowing smiles my way. Luna twirls absurdly off on her own, her technicolour dress sparkling garishly, yet in a way that is so perfectly Luna. I spot Ginny and Neville, the two of them awkwardly stumbling about each other. Very cute.

My body grows hotter as we dance on. It's almost imperceptible, but it does, Fleur pressing soft kisses to my neck, tugging my ear with perfect teeth. I gasp as she nips at my neck, a low growl emanating from her.

She pulls me aside, dragging me through the crowd of now intoxicated students, many of them too far gone to even cast an annoyed glance in our direction. "Let's get some fresh air," she whispers, directing us towards the rose garden. Unfortunately, one of the drunken students has set eyes on us, apparently taking offense at our very existence.

"You! Potter!"

I turn, still somewhat dazed from Fleur's affections, frowning when I set sights on Malfoy, his cheeks tinted with the red blush of liquor, eyelids drooping and the flesh within foggy and unfocused. Crabbe and Goyle flank him, the two of them looking a bit tipsy, but not as pissed as Draco.

I sigh quietly, knowing that this probably won't end well. "What is it Malfoy?"

He sneers, lip curled up in extreme distaste as he wobbles on his feet. "You disgust me," he grunts, his words slurred and stressed in all the wrong places, the drink coming through in his laborious enunciation.

"I do? Can't imagine why."

Draco jabs a finger in my direction, tottering slightly. "You... you fucking dyke... bloody poofter. I knew there was something wrong with you, knew there'd be a reason you were such a stuck-up cunt." He swallows heavily, looking around and grinning at the forming crowd. "See! Everyone sees it! You're not just a fucking mudblood, you're a rug muncher!"

He laughs loudly at his own joke, a few bystanders joining him, while most of the others just look uncomfortable.

I can't help but notice Padma put a hand over her mouth, completely unaware that I've caught her laughing at his vitriol.

Fleur hisses next to me, and I pinch the bridge of my nose lazily. "You're drunk, Draco. Go back to your common room, get some rest, and we can all forget this ever happened."

"Foul little pig," Fleur mutters, a much more impressive sneer on her face. Her pupils narrow slightly, looking more animal, her Veela blood coming out to play.

I'm going to have to stop this before it turns bloody.

Draco hiccups, leering at her. "Hey there lovely. Let's say you get away from fire-crotch over here and spend your time with a real wizard. Bit of cock'd do you good."

Before he can even react, she's slapped him so hard that he's toppled over, collapsing to the ground in a heap. He shouts something unintelligible, yet most likely incredibly vile, a dangerous look in his
eyes as he staggers, pulling himself back to his feet with the help of Crabbe and Goyle. The two trolls, for that's all they could be, grunt menacingly, shoulders rolling as they take a single step towards us threateningly.

"Fleur, would you like to handle this, or should I?" I ask, turning up to look at her, some people in the crowd cheering for a fight.

Where the fuck are the professors when you need them?

She grits her teeth, spitting on the ground in front of Malfoy. "Be my guest."

I whip my wand out of my jacket sleeve, lazily pointing it at Draco and binding him, as well as his cohorts. He roars angrily as magical ropes twist and dance around him, knotting and pulling tight, Draco once more toppling over, resembling a falling tree as he careens into Goyle.

Like dominoes, all three of them tumble to the ground, squirming and shouting.

I sigh, looking over the commotion and casting a curious glance over the bystanders. "So, is that what everyone here thinks of me?" I ask, a rhetorical question, but one I want to get out all the same.

"I get that you're scared of me over the chimera. I understand that completely, but for me to be hated for this?" I shake my head, disappointment in my eyes as they sweep over the students, some having the decency to look ashamed, while others direct their revolted gaze elsewards. "Shame that you'd hate someone for something so simple." I look back down at Draco, who's still struggling feebly against his bonds. "Someone find a professor and get this prick back to his common room to sober up. He's had way too much to drink."

With that, I take Fleur's hand and lead her out of the Hall, pushing past students and teachers alike as I drag us outside.

I march a warpath, wand sweeping ahead of me as I clear out piles of snow, blazing a trail in front of me as I unconsciously work myself towards the tree by the lake, where Hermione and I sometimes come to chat.

Flicking my wand, I summon a few bluebell flames, setting them around us for light before casting a sweeping heating charm over the small clearing I've made, followed up by halting the freezing wind that cuts out across the grounds.

"Well, that was unpleasant," I say, leaning back against the tree and settling my head against the tough, dry bark.

"I nearly killed the pig," she growls, jaw still clenched tightly as she stares out across the lake, her fury nearly tangible.

I wrap my arm around her shoulders, pulling her in close. "Well, I think we'd have a bit of a mess on our hands if that happened."

Fleur laughs quietly, her head pressed against my chest, tucked neatly underneath my chin. "How can someone be so hateful?" she wonders aloud. "I know that you've had problems with him, with those stupid badges in our last life. That was just the tip of the iceberg, wasn't it?"

I nod sadly. "He's a product of his environment. His dad is a murderou prick, his mum is a posh bitch, so in turn, he's a spoiled, inbred bastard." I pause, remembering Fleur's incredible slap. "You sure gave him a good smack though, it was really quite impressive."
"Ah, it is one of my many talents." Her eyes widen. "I just slapped a fourteen-year-old… a fourteen-year-old! Merde! I'm in my twenties and I slapped a child!"

"Hey, he was practically begging to be slapped," I say, before going back a moment. "Talents? What are your other talents?"

She smiles wryly at me, her worries quickly forgotten, eyes narrowed. "What kind of talents?"

I swallow heavily, eyes widening as I realize where the conversation has gone. "Fleur… I-uh… hmm," I stammer, suddenly very cognizant of the fact that I'm in a relationship. A relationship, in which sex will probably one day be involved.

That's something that scares the piss out of me.

I blink a few times, breathing heavily as I remember flashes of coiffed blond hair, leering smiles, and a puddle of my own vomit soaking through my messy school robes.

"Helene? Helene, are you alright?" Fleur asks, pressing her hand against my cheek.

I flinch reflexively, turning my head away from her as I continue to inhale and exhale, my breaths becoming more frantic. I close my eyes, trying to quell my sudden fear and revulsion, feeling much too warm, much too claustrophobic.

"I… I have something to tell you," I mutter, forcing myself to speak, so quiet that I can barely hear it myself.

Fleur sits back, giving me some space as she places her hand on my knee comfortingly. "What's wrong?"

I take a deep, shuddering breath, a sickening shiver running down my spine. Almost on reflex, I put up a suite of silencing charms, Fleur pursing her lips at the sudden quiet that falls over us.

"In second year… I was- I… fuck, I don't know how to say this."

I feel something on my hands, looking down to see Fleur lifting them, pressing a chaste kiss to my knuckles. "You don't need to tell me if you don't want to."

I shake my head. "No, you need to know this," I argue, grinding my teeth together anxiously. I let go of Fleur's hands, clenching mine into fists and laying them on my lap, head bowed.

With one last, deep breath, I steel myself. "In second year… in second year, I was assaulted. I was raped, by Gilderoy Lockhart."

Fleur gasps, a hand over her mouth. She looks like she doesn't know whether she should cry, stare into space, or crush something with her bare hands. "I… mon dieu, I am so sorry Helene. I- good God, that's awful."

I nod shakily, having a hard time controlling my muscles, the gesture stuttered and robotic. "I cut his head off… he was my first real kill, amongst other things."

An odd croak escapes me as Fleur grasps my shoulders, not tightly, but not softly either. "Listen to me," she says, tipping my chin up with one finger and looking me in the eyes, her own despondent, almost sorrowful. "What happened to you doesn't count. It is a monstrous thing for someone to do, and you're not at fault. I don't know what is expected of me in a situation like this, but know that I'm here for you, oui?"
I nod once more, more steadily than before.

"I adore you, Helene Potter, and I will take things as slow as they need to be, yes?"

"Th- thank you," I muster, smiling weakly at her. "It's just all so confusing. I know that I… well, for lack of a better word, want you. But it's so damn terrifying, you know? Just thinking about it makes me want to hide my head in the sand."

Fleur cups my cheek, and I lean into it, her touch warm and reassuring. "There's no need to thank me. Just… let me know if I ever take things too far, alright? Sometimes we Veela… we can lose ourselves in the moment."

"Like when you're 'dancing?'" I say, making air quotes with my fingers.

Fleur laughs, pressing a soft kiss to my cheek. "Yes, like when we're dancing, as you so put it."

I sigh, slouching down and pressing myself into Fleur, letting her wrap her arms around me and hold me close.

Funny, how that doesn't bother me.

Maybe it's because I know there's nothing overtly sexual about it? It's just… I don't know, an expression of affection. It can be sexual, but right now, it's not.

Yeah, that's probably why.

"Padma was laughing with Draco."

"The girl from the shop?"

"Yeah, that one." I run my hand over Fleur's side, a little voice in the back of my head shouting at me that I've ruined her dress and my tuxedo by laying on the grass. Really weird that I get thoughts like that at times like this.

"I don't like her," Fleur states honestly. "I don't trust her not to ruin everything in your little group. I could see how uncomfortable your other friends were, Hermione especially, when she had her moment."

"Well, Hermione's a muggleborn, she has good reason to be uncomfortable with it. Someone of her heritage, in this country, who plays both teams?" I pause for a moment, knowing how poorly things would go for Hermione if her preferences got out. "She's a hate crime waiting to happen, and it scares me. I'm worried for her."

"Could she not get out of the country?"

I nod. "She could, but I think she's so damned stubborn that she'd stick around hoping that she could personally make a difference." I look out across the lake, just able to make out the calm shimmer of the moon across its inky surface. "She's my best friend… I've already had one die, I won't let the other go either."

"Ron Weasley, right?" Fleur asks, hesitantly.

"Yeah… fucking Pettigrew killed him, and then Dumbledore finished the job after I tried to bring him back."

"Dumbledore? Bring him back!?" Fleur breathes, shock lacing her words.
"One of my fancy little powers," I say, studying the back of my hand, knuckles rolling as I flex my fingers. "It has to be very soon after death, otherwise they live on in eternal torment. Cheery, right?"

"That is… I can't deny that it's useful, but doesn't it go against… everything? The dead should stay dead."

"I agree, but I couldn't let him go. It had only been half a day, so he wasn't even aware that he had died. I did the same to Dumbledore after I killed him, but with a lot of extra rules placed so he wouldn't run off and try to have me executed for use of Black Magic."

Fleur pauses, her mouth hanging open. "You… you killed Dumbledore?"

"Well, I had some help from Severus, the potions professor," I admit. "I would never have been able to take him on my own, and after Dumbledore put Ron back under, I got complacent, and he soon found out that I was a Necromancer. I had no choice but to kill him."

"That is… your life since returning has been quite a bit more eventful that mine," Fleur mutters, almost looking ashamed of herself for not being an adventurer like myself.

Not that I'm an adventurer by choice, but one has to play the cards they've been dealt.

"All I've done is train, train, and train some more. Trying to understand and master my elements, as well as whatever White Magics I can learn."

"See, I've done the same. Lots of Blood magic rituals on my part, and I was lucky enough to come across a book here at Hogwarts that outlines what I imagine to be the entirety of Necromancy."

"You what? Where?"

I blink, realizing that if I found a book on Necromancy, there's surely one on Albumancy. "Room of Requirement. It's this magical spot on the seventh floor that can turn itself into anything you need. For me, it often appears as a ritual room, full of athames, books on dark magic, and a low altar in the middle so I can practice Blood Rituals."

"You're taking me tomorrow," she demands.

"Of course, why wouldn't I?"

She shrugs. "I don't know, it just sort of slipped out."

We both laugh, cuddling up next to one another.

The two of us sit and chat through the rest of the night, warmed by each other's embrace, absent conversation, and the knowledge that we're both in this together.

Chapter End Notes

God, Draco is an absolute dickhead.
The day after the Yule Ball, I expect more stares and whispers, an amount that could possibly trump the hate that I'd seen during the last Tournament. Seems I'm a prophet.

Everyone I pass in the halls seems to stop at the sight of me, looking on with morbid curiosity, wondering what'll come of my decision to come out to the world. Either that, or they're just interested in joining the lynch mob, judging by the shouts and jeers from some of the older Slytherin students.

I guess I'm going to be hearing the word dyke quite a bit.

I push through the wall of silence, the hush that falls over the Hall as I walk into it, making my way over to my usual seat, eager to begin breakfast. The Hall isn't busy yet, as many students are painfully hungover, but I'm quite happy to see Hermione, Luna, Ginny, and last but not least, Fleur, all sitting in a cluster and happily munching away.

"Morning," I mutter tiredly as I take my seat next to Fleur, sipping from the steaming mug of coffee she hands me like a parched wanderer in an oasis. I really like my coffee in the morning, maybe a bit too much.

"Morning," everyone else replies, errantly picking away at their meals, Fleur rubbing my back briefly before returning to her scrambled eggs.

I guess the other girls drank a bit more than I thought they would, as I assume that my sisters are feeling the affects of last night judging by their non-attendance of breakfast. I really can't believe the professors didn't even catch the spiked punch. Either the twins are truly masters of deception, or the staff in this school couldn't give less of a damn over incredibly underage students drinking heaps.


Early, actually quite a bit earlier than normal, a cluster of owls swoop into the Hall, dropping off bundles of newspapers along their way. I reach out curiously, picking up the paper and staring dumbly at the unfamiliar text that springs out at me.

No, not the Daily Prophet. The *Ministry Herald*. A new paper written by the Fudge regime, started up via the philanthropic help of one Lucius Malfoy. At least, that's what the appendage on the front page says.

I guess he must have gotten the news that I had the Prophet by the balls. Shame.

I scan over the main front-page article, posted after the groveling thanks towards Malfoy and the rest of the pureblood regime, frowning more and more as the words begin to register.
It's something that I would have expected from the Prophet in its heyday, full of mindless vitriol, useless platitudes, and the inherent fearmongering that comes with the territory of politics. Healthy fearmongering, in the politician's eyes, one that won't lead the populace to riot, pitchforks and torches included. No, this kind of fearmongering is the type that directs their hatred towards a useful scapegoat, that being myself and Fleur.

Speaking of which, Fleur has leaned over my shoulder, angrily muttering, "Those petty bastards."

I shrug. "They worked faster than I thought they would."

**Girl-Who-Lived a Deviant!**

Last night at Hogwarts, the students and faculty were witness to the incredible event of the Yule Ball, a dance in favour of unity between the three greatest magical schools in the known world, a hallmark of the recently resurrected Tri-Wizard Tournament.

Students were not just witness to the ball, nor the incredible events of the First-Task. No, they also laid eyes upon someone that Britain looks up to as something of an idol, acting in unspeakable ways. Yes, I'm talking about the one and only Girl-Who-Lived, Helene Potter.

Helene Potter had made waves through every magical society across the globe for her defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named so many years ago. Her brush with death and survival of the most terrifying of the Unforgivables, the Killing Curse, was a miracle of its own. She went on to shake Britain when it came out that she was in fact not the Boy-Who-Lived, something that was published and professed since that untimely October night in 1981.

Since then, Helene has been outside the public eye, sequestered away at Hogwarts, working diligently as any student would. It was just recently that she re-entered the spotlight, having miraculously slain a Chimera in sight of the world through unknown means during the first task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. When asked, experts within our Ministry were completely unsure of what spell she had used to destroy such a beast, and replied with, "There was no possible way that a girl of her age, let alone ninety nine percent of wizards of any age, could have killed that Chimera through normal means. She's practicing Dark Magic, the Darkest of Dark, and we shall be keeping an eye on her."

Many fear whether or not Helene Potter may go on to take the place of the man she slew a decade and change ago, and even more are worried about her choices now that her predilections have come to light.

Last night at Hogwarts, Helene Potter attended the Yule Ball with her fellow competitor and champion, Fleur Delacour of Beuxbatons, on her arm.

This was not a friendly thing, as some would expect. Two girls going stag to a dance, enjoying themselves without anyone to tie them down, as any teenager or young adult would. No, Helene Potter came to the ball with seedier intentions than that. The two shared touches, those oft reserved for couples, sparking confusion throughout the school. Her deviancy was confirmed when the two nearly rutted in the midst of the dance, the older French girl, a confirmed Veela at that, forcing her tongue down Helene's throat in front of every student there.

When confronted by a young Slytherin fourth year, Draco Malfoy, son of our benefactor, the esteemed Lucius Malfoy, she attacked him and his friends leaving them hurt and bound in the middle of the Great Hall before fleeing, presumably towards the privacy of Delacour's chambers.

As a people, we have to ask ourselves, is this what we want to see from a girl that many witches the
world over look up to? Is this what we want for the future of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter? Someone who flaunts their aberrance in front of all to see? Someone who is condemning one of our oldest families to death, plagued by an illness of the mind?

Helene Potter is turning out to be far from what we in Britain expected. Practicing insidious, Dark Magics and brazenly using them in full display of the world. Tainting herself with the touch of another witch, a creature no less.

We at the Ministry Herald say no. No to how Potter has thumbed her nose at our traditions. No to how Potter has contaminated herself with the sickly addiction that is Dark Magic. No to the danger that she poses to our ancient and prestigious society, one founded on the lifeblood of good witches and wizards who have made it their lives work to advance our country to the power that it is today.

We say no.

I fold the paper neatly, incinerating it with but a thought and watching as the ashes scatter across the Hall.

"So… looks like Lucius has made his move," I say, ignoring the gawking students and focusing on my meal. I refuse to show any weakness, and if I react any more than I just did, that would be too much. The more I behave as if I'm unaffected, the easier things will be when I eventually kill the son of a bitch. I know that any public hostility on my part would just encourage an investigation when that happens.

Hopefully I can nail him with that blood turning curse in the graveyard. A poetic end for both him, and Bellatrix.

"Are you not angry? Furious?" Fleur asks, aghast.

"Fleur… I've put up with this shit my entire life. The only thing I'm mad about is the fact that they dragged you into this. That, I can't forgive."

She shakes her head, looking slightly incredulous. "I don't know how you can just… shrug this off," she wonders aloud, hands held out in confusion.

"Like I said, I've put up with it my entire life." I lean in close, whispering, "Honestly, it doesn't really matter in the long run. Things should be done and over with come June, after that, Lucius can get his just desserts if he hasn't met the business end of my wand yet."

She sighs loudly, shoulders slumped in defeat. "I understand that… it just infuriates me that this is the state of your country." She jabs her finger towards an untouched paper angrily. "Britain is such a beautiful place. Why does it have to be such a mess?"

"Inbreeding… political, magical, and cultural stagnation…" I say, ticking off each of my fingers. "That's just a few, but it all comes down to the pureblood dogma."

"Is France that much better? We visited a few summers ago, and we saw so many different types of people and species walking around the magical districts. I didn't know if it was just that area we saw, or if it was the whole country," Hermione asks, jumping into the conversation.

Ginny perks up. "Is France really like that?"

"That sounds like the France that I know," Fleur confirms.

"God… I still can't believe that we're so backwards."
"Hopefully not for long, what with Octavius and Sirius' efforts in the Wizengamot," I add.

Hermione nods. "I know, but… everything that could happen, you know?"

Luna looks over at us, her normally wide eyes slightly narrowed. "A lot things can always happen, you just have to see them through as they come along."

"Always with the words of wisdom, huh Luna?"

She smiles serenely at me. "They're the only things worth saying."

I laugh, turning my attention back to Hermione. "Just try to stay safe, yeah?" I murmur, Hermione inclining her head. "Hopefully by the third task everything will have cleared up."

Fleur puts her hand on my shoulder. "That reminds me, I need to begin preparing for the second and third task. Do you remember that book you were going to help me find?"

I nod. "Yeah, just let me finish with my breakfast, and we can go get that taken care of."

"Book?" Hermione asks excitedly. "What kind of book?"

I open my mouth to speak, but pause. Hermione has no idea that Fleur is like me, and I know I can trust her, but Fleur should be the one to tell her. I put one hand up, asking Hermione for a second as I look at Fleur, putting up a silencing charm around just the two of us. "Hermione knows what I am, do you want to tell her about yourself?"

Her eyes nearly bug out of her head as she gapes at me. "She knows you're a Necromancer? Really?" She looks towards Hermione, who returns Fleur's stare with an expression of confusion, deaf to our discussion. "And she hasn't tried to have you arrested?"

I shake my head. "No, in fact she was key to me putting down Dumbledore and shackling him in the first place."

"There's much more to her than meets the eye, isn't there?" she asks, looking slightly impressed. "I remember her helping the Order with research during the war. She has a quick mind and an interesting way of looking at things."

I smile. "That sounds like her. Did you… did you know her well? After I died?"

Fleur frowns. "No. We'd talked a few times." She hesitates, brow creased. "But she… she was killed a few weeks before I was. Someone had discovered where her and her parents lived… the house burnt down with them inside. They should have been at Headquarters, but we couldn't change the wards to let in her parents since both you and Sirius were dead, so she stayed with them."

I inhale sharply through gritted teeth. That's not going to happen, not if I can help it. I'll kill a hundred Death Eaters before they can get their hands on Hermione. "Do you know who did it?"

She nods sadly, a frustrated look on her face. "Who do you think it was?"

"Malfoy."

Fleur nods. "He's just as dangerous as Voldemort. That man is cunning, disgustingly so."

"I know, he gave a cursed diary to Ginny in her first year, one that contained a shade of Voldemort. It let out the basilisk, Magna, siccing her on the halfbloods and muggleborn. Christ, it was damned lucky that no one died. Everyone ended up petrified."
"That does sound like something he would do," Fleur mutters venomously.

"I think we can both agree that he's a bastard of the highest order." I incline my head towards Hermione. "So? What's your verdict?"

"I'll tell her," Fleur says resolutely.

I expand the silencing charm to accommodate Hermione.

"So… what's going on?" she asks once I've finished, head tilted curiously.

"Fleur? Here, or somewhere else?"

Hermione looks on in confusion as Fleur gets to her feet, beckoning for the two of us to follow.

"Come on," I say, the two of us getting up as well. "Fleur has something to tell you that we can't talk about here."

Hermione grunts tiredly in affirmation, waving goodbye to Ginny and Luna as we head off, quickly making our way towards one of the many abandoned classrooms within the school. In fact, it's the same one in which Fred and George gave me the Marauders Map a few years ago, couches and all.

"So? Why did you have a sudden private discussion? What's going on?" Hermione asks again, crossing her arms.

"I'm an Albumancer," Fleur intones, getting straight to the point. "You know about Helene, yes? We're each others' counterparts."

Hermione's eyebrows climb to her hairline, mouth opening in surprise. "You… what!?!" She turns to me, still wide-eyed. "Really? She's the Albumancer?"

I smile happily. "Yeah, really."

"Oh my God!" Hermione squeals, eyes alight as she claps her hands together. "That's so romantic!"

Fleur's mouth opens and closes a few times, like a fish out of water. Her head whips towards me, looking almost offended that Hermione isn't shouting in surprise. "That's what she says? I tell her that I'm an Albumancer, and all she has to say is that it's romantic?"

I laugh loudly, Fleur sighing in defeat. "Well, she already knew that I ran into an Albumancer at the World Cup, she just didn't know that it was you."

"I guess that makes sense…" she mutters, definitely disappointed that Hermione isn't losing her mind.

"Are you looking for a tome that's the same as Helene's?" Hermione interrupts excitedly, looking between the two of us. "I'd love to see it when you're done with it, if you do manage to find something like that."

"You know you won't be able to cast any of the spells, right?" Fleur asks.

Hermione crosses her arms. "Of course I know that, but it would still be interesting to read."

"Well, you might as well come with us, we're off to go search for the thing," I say, Hermione's eyes widening.

"Really?"
"Yep." Hermione jumps at that, even more excited at the prospect of long and forgotten magic. "You've got class, right? Skiving off?"

She nods hurriedly. "Incredible magics that only you two can use instead of Herbology? Are you kidding me? Sign me up!"

"Hey, I didn't want to assume anything," I say jokingly, Hermione huffing quietly in response.

"Of course I'd want to come along! Who do you think I am?"

I put my hands up in surrender. "Hey, I'm just saying." I look to Fleur for back up, and she chuckles quietly.

"Come on, lead the way Helene."

I incline my head, quickly leading us off and through the school, ascending the many staircases until we've reached the seventh floor.

"Why are we in an empty hallway?" Fleur asks, confused. "Is there some sort of secret passage up here? I remember you telling me about those."

I shake my head. "This is something much more impressive. Watch."

I pace three times in front of where the Room of Requirement lays, whispering, "I need to find a book on Albumancy," under my breath with each pass.

Hermione and Fleur both gasp in surprise as the door materializes out of nowhere, Hermione excitedly opening and running through the door before either of us have a chance to follow.

"After you," I say, giving a sweeping bow to Fleur as she enters the Room, giggling at my antics.

"So very kind of you, Mademoiselle."

I trail in behind her, noticing that Fleur's version of the room, at least that's what I'm assuming this is, is a hell of a lot cheerier than mine.

Bookcases line the room, packed to the brim with tomes filled with esoteric, ancient, and modern knowledge on White and Light Magics. There's a large desk situated to the side, similar to the ritual room, parchment, quills, and fountain pens laid across the top neatly. Pristine marble walls surround us, almost radiant in their perfection, Romanesque blind arcades climbing towards the ceiling, light pouring in from the enchanted stone like that of St. Peter's Basilica. The rays are idyllic, like a perfect summer day, filtered through the thin, crisp leaves of a tree that sway gently in an impossible breeze, placed in the centre of the room.

In front of the tree rests a lectern, the parallel of *Et Necromantium* laid open upon it, its sheer white pages soaking up the sun that trickles in above.

Hermione looks around in awe. "What is this place?"

"The Room of Requirement," I reply, spreading my arms wide and slowly spinning about the room. "It can be anything you want it to be, within reason. I asked it to provide me with a book on Albumancy, and it seems it decided to give me the whole kit and caboodle."

"...kit and caboodle?"

"Yes, kit and caboodle."
Hermione shakes her head in faux exasperation. "So? The book?"

Fleur and I make eye contact briefly, before she walks over to the lectern. She closes the book delicately, reading the cover. "Ars Autem Vivifactor…" She murmurs quietly, fingers running lazily overtop the polished eggshell leather. Somehow, the book still looking remarkably new, the only sign of age being a few crinkles over the thick cover.

Magic, I guess.

Her words register. "Life-Giver?" I ask.

"My Latin is a bit shaky, but I believe that's correct," Fleur answers, tentatively opening the book once more and flipping through to the first page. "At least the book is in French."

I look over her shoulder, frowning. "Looks like English to me."

"Must have a translation charm on it then."

I click my tongue. "Is that really a thing?"

"Helene, it's magic."

I put one hand up. "Hey, I didn't grow up a witch. I'm still figuring out what the limits are." Looking at the hand I raised, I can't help but recall the terribly comfortable cold that swept over it as I leech the very essence from a patch of grass.

Well, if I can do that with a thought, then an all-purpose translation charm doesn't sound all that complicated.

Hermione joins the two of us, whistling lowly at the book. "That looks much more inviting than Helene's spellbook," she comments. "That thing looks worse than anything you can find in the restricted section, combined."

"Hey! I'll have you know that my spellbook is quite badass," I say indignantly.

"Can a book even be badass?"

I tilt my head, all shoulders. "I'd say so. Hell, for all I know it's bound with human flesh. Wouldn't that be badass?"

Hermione coughs, grimacing at me out of the corner of her eye. "Helene! That's disgusting!"

"I'm not saying that it is bound with human flesh, I'm just saying that it's a possibility." Really, it would make sense, all things considered. Necromancy isn't exactly a tasteful subject at the best of times. At the worst? Well, most of the spells contained within that tome, if used, would be considered war crimes by the ICW.

I frown. Now I have to check and see if the book is made of human flesh. Morbid curiosity has gotten the better of me.

Hermione swallows heavily, while Fleur just sighs. "Enough about that… distasteful subject. I'd like to get a chance to read this, yes?"

"Go for it, I'm going to lay down for a bit, daydream of how I'll make Lucius Malfoy's life miserable in the near future, maybe take a nap," I say, pointing with my thumb towards a massive couch that has appeared just behind me. "Grab me if you need me?"
Fleur kisses me softly on the forehead. "Hermione and I will look over the book, enjoy planning your revenge *ma dulcineé.*"

"Thanks for the words of support!" I hum, collapsing onto the feathered cushions of the sofa. *Christ* this is comfortable.

I wonder if I'll be able to plan revenge on this thing, or plan much of anything for that matter. Really, I can't believe how insanely comfortable this sofa is. It's absolutely unreasonable.

I prop myself up, one hand behind my head and tangled up in auburn locks, the other scratching along my belly absentmindedly.

What *should* I do about Malfoy?

Would it be unreasonable of me to find a way to kill him now? I'm sure I could get into his home with no trouble on my end, but is it a good idea to have him knocked off so soon after he's *very obviously* begun a smear campaign on me? I mean, if I do that I might as well get up on top of the astronomy tower and scream, 'Hello world! I'm Helene Potter, and if you so much as look at me funny, I'll put you six feet under!'

No, not the best idea.

I'll have to talk to Octavius and Sirius to see if anything can be done politically, but I doubt that anything more can come of their campaign against Lucius and the rest of the Death Eater stragglers. I think they've eked every bit of power they can from both the dark and light voting blocs, as the only ones left in either major party are the diehards, or those too scared to leave.

No, that's not really an option either.

Fuck, do I really just have to sit here and wait until I can end his miserable existence?

That's damned annoying.

I huff loudly, frustrated that I can't go and remove the blight upon humanity that is Lucius Malfoy right this very minute, nor can I even make threats without giving away my ability to bust through wards like they're tissue paper.

I roll over, propping myself up on my elbow and watching as Fleur's hand weaves above her head in some unrecognizable pattern, one of the branches on the tree twisting and contorting to follow her dancing movements.

"That looks useful," I comment, Fleur peeking over her shoulder and smiling winningly at me.

"Oui, it seems I have a touch of control over plants as well."

"Oui, it seems I have a touch of control over plants as well."

I raise my eyebrows. "Odd that I can't do that, huh? I mean, I can control the earth, wouldn't a plant loosely fall into that?"

"I don't think so," Fleur answers, shrugging. "Plants are full of life and light magic, even the 'dark' ones," she continues, embellishing her words with air quotes.

"That's no fun. Controlling plants could be ridiculously strong, like some sort of insanely powerful druid."

"Maybe that's where druidism came from?" Hermione adds, a thoughtful look on her face. "I
remember you mentioning that what people think is necromancy, isn't, so maybe current druidism is the same?"

"That... that makes an awful lot of sense," Fleur says, sporting a curious frown. "I'll have to do more research on that."

I grunt lazily, swinging back over to a sitting position and resting my elbows on my knees, chin on my fist. "Any other incredibly neat magic in there?"

"Well, there are a couple..." Fleur trails off, flicking through the book to an earlier page, squinting slightly as she scans over the tome. "Should be right about... there!" Wand in hand, she waves it over her head, "Erco, woch'ista-mè."

A glimmering, golden shield erupts from her wand and spreads out around her, resplendent in its glory. My eyes sting, the magic so bright as to be nearly blinding, an aura of indomitable protection pulsing throughout the room, its presence nearly sacred.

Fleur lets out a quiet sigh as she allows the shield to fall, her expression full of wonderment. "That was amazing," she whispers, eyes shining. "It felt like... I can barely explain it..."

"Pure?" I offer, remembering how I reacted the first time that I'd truly felt the affects of Black Magic.

She nods shakily, still awed. "Yes... pure."

"That was incredible!" Hermione shouts, mouth hanging open and her hair looking almost electrified in her excitement. "Is that what you twos' magic always feels like?"

I suck the air through my teeth, shaking my head. "My magic feels nothing like that. To me it feels great, but to others? Dumbledore looked like he was going to be sick when I used my own brand of magic in our duel."

Hermione looks a tad bit depressed at that, but sighs in understanding. "That makes sense." She clicks her tongue quietly. "Do you mind showing me?"

I look to Fleur, who lifts her hands unknowingly. I reflect the gesture, turning back to Hermione.

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you." I jab my wand towards empty space in front of me, and well away from the other two, conjuring a large feathered pillow.

I don't think it would be in good taste to conjure a pig and tear that to bits, so the pillow it is.

"Mortuus manibus," I intone, doing my best to ignore Hermione's flinch as the Black Magic washes through the room, how she shrieks in fright as rotted, gnarled hands burst from an empty void and rip the pillow to fluttering, downy pieces.

With a flick of my wrist, the spell is cancelled, Hermione letting out a tightly held breath, swallowing heavily as she stares in abject horror at the spot where the hell-spawned limbs were just thrashing.

"Get what I mean?"

She nods shakily, pupils like pinpricks and goose pimples standing in sharp relief on her bare forearms. "That was... absolutely horrific," she musters, teeth chattering.

I walk towards her, laying a comforting hand on her shoulder. She sighs quietly as she leans into my touch, shivering in revulsion at the display of wrongness that she just witnessed. "I'm going to cast a
calming charm on you, alright?" Her eyes flick up to meet mine, and she nods once more.

I swing my wand, Hermione closing her eyes for a few moments as the magic washes over her, replacing the feeling of death with that of serenity, slowly but surely. I can see her tense shoulders relax, jaw unclenching as her nerves settle.

"Fleur, are you alright?" I ask, turning to face her.

She narrows her eyes, looking a touch perplexed. "Yes, I'm fine… much to my surprise. I thought I wouldn't be able to stand your magic, but it feels quite normal to me."

"Huh." I blink a few times, unsure of what to think of that. "I would have thought that you'd be repulsed by my magic… and now that I think about it, I should have been repulsed by yours, shouldn't I?"

Fleur rubs her eyes, tutting quietly. "I thought that's what would have happened, but it seems we're fine." A smile spreads across her face. "That's wonderful! We don't have to worry about each other's magic making us sick, or worse!"

I squeak as she pulls me into a hug, very quickly melting into a puddle of girlish delight as she mashes her lips against mine. I blink, dazed as she pulls away, the shine of her eyes dazzling.

"Woah. What was that for?"

Fleur laughs heartily, pressing a much more chaste kiss to my forehead. "You have no idea what that means, don't you?"

I shake my head, confused, looking over to see a matching expression on Hermione's now sufficiently calmed face. Well, if she has no idea, then I definitely don't. "Haven't a clue."

"If our magic was incompatible, we'd never be able to… well…” her eyes widen, and she slams her mouth shut, blushing furiously.

"What is it?"

Fleur stammers wordlessly for a moment, before covering her face with one hand. "Merde, I believe I've just dug myself a hole." She peeks out from between two fingers, and I raise one eyebrow. Sighing, Fleur uncovers her face. "I've gotten ahead of myself again."

I smirk. "How so?"

She groans, rubbing the back of her neck awkwardly with one hand. "I… well, since our magic isn't completely and totally incompatible… we could still- ehm, have a… a child together."

Oh.

I blink stupidly for what must be a solid minute. Just blinking. Stupidly.

So… children, huh?

To be honest, I've never really thought about that before. I mean, I have, sort of, but more along the lines of wanting to have a family, and I guess children tend to be involved in that. Children weren't explicitly tied to that in my mind… I just wanted to love someone and to be loved back. At least, as much as someone of my current mental stature can love someone.

My idea of a family is… what I have now.
Sirius, Octavius, Terra, Daphne, Tracey, Astoria… Hell, I'd consider Hermione, Luna, and Ginny family as well. Sisters in all but blood.

_That_, to me, is family.

So… children. Not something I ever thought of.

"Helene?"

I blink another few times, remembering the current conversation. My eyes flick over to the side, trying to get Hermione's attention. I curse silently when I realize that she's completely enthralled by what I imagine she sees as an incredibly romantic moment. Red face, wide eyes, and a shocked smile covered by two firmly clasped hands.

I'm not denying that it's an incredibly romantic moment. It _is_. So that means I have _no idea what the fuck to do._

"Ch- children?"

Fleur nods once, a worried look on her face. "Is that… is that alright? I mean, _merde_, it's not like we're getting married or anything. I just- well, kids are something I'd like some day, yes?"

"No, no, I get it. I get it." I swallow, running my fingers through my hair. "I've just never really planned my future, you know? Family is something that I want, _badly_, but… my idea of family isn't so traditional- does that make sense?" Fleur shakes her head, so I elaborate. "By family, I mean what I have with Sirius and the Greengrass- _God_, I'm still not used to saying it, my mum and dad. Daphne, Tracey, and Astoria are my sisters, and I consider Hermione one too. That's family to me. Children… children haven't ever crossed my mind, but I can't say I'm opposed to the idea."

Fleur grins brilliantly, eyes crinkling, before she quickly settles herself, inhaling deeply through her nose and exhaling slowly through her mouth. "That's… that's good. Yes," she mutters, smoothing out an invisible crease on her blouse.

"You two are so fucking _cute!_" Hermione squeals, clapping frantically as she bounces on her heels.

I can feel the blush creeping along my cheeks as I turn to her. "Thanks, I think?"

"Agreed," Fleur says, smirking at me. "I think that we're 'fucking cute,' as Hermione put it."

"I won't argue with that," I admit. "We are damned cute."

"_Fucking_ cute." Fleur corrects me.

I put my hands up in surrender. "Alright, fucking cute."

She presses a neat kiss to my cheek, humming happily. "I think I should get back to studying that book," she exclaims.

"One second first, yeah?" Fleur tilts her head to the side questioningly. "Second task has changed as well, they've brought in a bunch of Kelpies, a Hydra, a Beisht-Kione, and a Lusca."

Fleur pales dramatically, her normally porcelain skin taking on a more sickly tone. "That's not good," she mutters, mind already racing.

"Not at all, and I believe we should start training together."
"You want to train with me?"

"Of course I do! Who else would I be able to train with? Dumbledore? I think you're the only person in this school apart from him, or maybe Severus or Flitwick, who could practice with me."

"Well, then I'd love to," she says, smiling prettily. "But not today, alright? I'd like to go over that book first. Maybe we can practice this weekend?"

I nod, following her over to the couch, tome firmly grasped in her hands, Hermione sitting in a loveseat across from us and poring over one of the many other books in the room.

We hunker down, mentally preparing ourselves for the upcoming task, and the battles that we know will come after.

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I knock on the door to Severus' office, the grim man allowing me in, a thoughtful look on his face.

"How've you been?" I ask nonchalantly, taking a seat and sipping on the offered cup of tea.

Severus studies me for a moment. "I've been well. What about you? Your… display the other day at the Yule Ball has been discussed to death amongst the staff. How is it amongst the students?"

I shrug indifferently. "I don't have to worry about a large dorm, and Hermione has no problem with me, so it's alright on that front. I just have to deal with the fallout from it as best I can."

"You knew that you would become vilified, yes?"

"Of course I did," I scoff, taking another deep sip from my cup, clearing my throat. "That was the whole point. Now people will focus on my being gay, instead of my accomplishment in the first task. The most serious things are never considered serious. Christ, you see it all the time with muggle news. A war in Croatia? Who cares about that? We've got to talk about the two celebrities that kissed in public!"

Severus nods approvingly. "I didn't know you could be that clever."

"I already told you, Iolaire wanted me in Slytherin. I'm just Slytherin enough that I decided to be a Raven instead," I say, raising my glass.

"Speaking of which, he… it?" Severus scratches his head.

"He."

"Well, he is an interesting man. I never imagined that the Sorting Hat would become my closest colleague here at Hogwarts. Although he does need to learn to shut his mouth every once in a while…" He swirls his tea, gazing oddly at the mug as the liquid dances around. "How much have you changed things?"

I laugh harshly, studying my own drink. "I think I may have changed things too much, and not enough. Everything is going well, but I have no idea where things are going to go once I've killed Voldemort, if I even do manage to time things perfectly with the third task. Will there be a political shitstorm? Will we be able to finally drag Britain into some semblance of normalcy?" I sigh, tapping my fingers along my knee. "I just hope that all the changes I've made come out for the best."

"I believe everything will work out fine, and even if there's some rough patches, you've done more
than anyone else could, and would,” Severus offers.

I snort. "Is that a compliment?"

He shakes his head, lips quirked. "A compliment? From Severus Snape? They'd never believe you."

I sigh melodramatically. "It would be the best of blackmail material if I had a picture of you smiling. I'd be able to hold that over you until the end of time."

Severus laughs. It's a dry noise, slightly strained, like he's not used to it. Probably isn't. "I'd threaten you, but I don't believe I'd have a good chance at coming out of that duel in one piece."

"Really? I'm sure we'd have a good fair fight."

Severus frowns, looking at me curiously. "You don't quite understand how powerful you are, do you?" I shake my head, and he sets his drink down, fingers steepled under his chin. "You're an immensely powerful witch if you could match evenly with Dumbledore like you did last year. I almost find it worrying that someone so young as you could do such a thing, and it's even more worrying when I realize that you've not even begun to reach your peak."

"Hey, we got lucky with Dumbledore, I can't deny that. I don't think I'd be able to pull something like that off again without the element of surprise."

"I'd have to disagree,” Severus intones. I lean back, waiting for him to explain. "After seeing you burn that chimera to nothing, I believe you'd give Dumbledore more than enough trouble. In fact, I'd hazard to say that you'd win that battle four out of five times."

"Really!?"

Severus nods. "Yes, really. Dumbledore is old, very old, and while he's still one of the most powerful wizards around, he's not as powerful as he once was. He's gotten slow, mentally and physically in his old age, and that's crippling for a wizard who specializes in transfiguration and other precise magics like he does."

I narrow my eyes thoughtfully. "I never really thought about it that way. God, I can't imagine what he must have been like in a fight in his twenties."

"He did end a war singlehandedly," Severus offers, and I nod.

"Here's hoping I do the same."

"I have no doubt in my mind that you'll be the one to put the Dark Lord deep into the ground." He raises his glass in a modest salute. "Cheers."

I laugh, clinking my glass against his own and draining the last of the tea from it. "Cheers."

"So, you and Miss Delacour?"

I raise one eyebrow curiously. "Are you asking me about my relationship with her?"

Severus puts his hands up in a calming manner. "Nothing derogatory, I assure you. I was just curious how it all came about. I didn't take you for the kind of witch to be in a relationship with anyone weak, so to say."

I snort playfully. "Well, she's definitely not weak. I'd say she's at about the same level as me." I make sure not to mention the fact that if anyone will be nearly identical in power to me, it would be her. I
don't think Fleur would be too happy with me accidentally giving away the circumstances of her strength to Severus.

"Really?" Severus frowns, pursing his lips. "She did deal with the manticore with an ease that I didn't expect from a witch of her age... and now that I think of it, a witch of any age." He looks up at me. "You cast a great shadow over the rest of your competitors, so it passed my mind."

"Yeah? I keep forgetting to ask her how that went. What did she do to kill it?" I ask excitedly, wanting to hear about Fleur in action.

"She used a fire that somehow managed to burn its way through a normally magically resilient creature," Severus says, a tone of contemplation laced through his words. "She didn't use veela fire, nor a standard incendio. It was touch and go for a few minutes, as a manticore is quite agile, but she managed to whittle it down more quickly than anyone thought she would."

"I'll have to ask her about that," I murmur, pretending that I don't know exactly what kind of magic Fleur used. Holy Fire leaves a mark, and I'm surprised she got away with that.

Then again, I did use the flames of Death itself to incinerate the Chimera. That tends to leave an impression.

I can tell that Severus knows that I'm holding something back from him, but he ignores it, much to my relief. "Any plans for the second task?" he asks, continuing with his good-natured interrogation.

"Yeah, I've ordered some gillyweed for it that should arrive in the next few days, and I've updated my repertoire of spells to include ones that function just as well, if not better underwater than they do in air."

"A wise plan, especially the choice of gillyweed. And a simple relashio won't do you any good against a Hydra or the like."

I groan, remembering the awful, awful creatures that have been brought in for the task. "What is it with the Ministry and wanting to have every single one of the contestants die? Really, they have to realize that we're damned lucky everyone made it out of the first task without losing a limb, let alone their lives. Now they bring in these fucking monsters for a task that takes place in an environment that humans aren't at all used to fighting in?"

Severus grits his teeth. "The Ministry is deeply in Lucius' pockets, along with the Board of Governors. What he says goes, and if he wants there to be fifty Lusca's at the event, let alone one, it's going to happen."

"How do you know this?"

"Because the bastard visited me after you had dealt with Draco at the Ball." Severus kneads his forehead, obviously tired of Draco's behaviour. "I don't know how my godson has turned out the way he has, well, no, I do. I just still can't believe that he's Lucius' son. As much as I detest Lucius, I will admit that he's one of the cleverest men I've met in my entire life, and he has to be to properly have a handle on the power he wields. It's a wonder Draco is so unlike him."

I grit my teeth for a moment at the mention of the homicidal blond, shaking my head and tearing the clinging murderous thoughts from my mind. "I still can't believe you're Draco's godfather. How did that end up happening?"

Severus wets his lips, a far away look on his face. "Narcissa was one of the prefects when I was at Hogwarts, five years above me. She was one of the few kind people in Slytherin, even when the war
had just begun, and no one knew where anyone stood yet in Slytherin." He smiles slightly, his whole demeanor softly announcing his bout of nostalgia. "She was something like an older sister, and when a few of your father's… pranks, went awry, she was always there to help me with the counterspell."

I cringe, remembering how much of an arse my dad was as a teenager. God, I probably would have found him absolutely infuriating to be around.

"After she graduated, we kept in contact. I attended her and Lucius' wedding, and I was brought under his wing." His eyes flick towards his left arm in revulsion. "He filled my mind with poison and lies, and when things fell to pieces with your mother, I went to him for support. Throughout all that, Narcissa and I stayed good friends. When she fell pregnant, she asked me to be godfather to the child, and I was more than happy to accept."

Severus sighs quietly, pushing his mug off to the side and clasping his hands together, thumb rubbing along the crook of the other. "Now she's changed. She's no longer a kind woman and has adopted the same terrible attitude of her husband, whispering the same vile words in her sons' ear that he does." He curses under his breath, nostrils flaring. "What could have been a bright and friendly boy has been reduced to a blithering, boorish idiot, nothing but yet another unfortunate statistic to add to the pureblood way of life."

His eyes meet my own, and while mine are filled with curiosity, his hold only muted sadness, like something once used to hurt him, and now he's simply remembering that pain. An echo. "He used to be a nice boy, friendly, and just so incredibly curious." Severus lets out a slow, steady breath. "And now? He's just an unintelligent clone of his father. All the pomp, and none of the brains. I'd be happy with his lack of foresight if he wasn't so cocksure and churlish all the time."

I look down at the table, all of a sudden fully aware of the fact that Malfoy could have just been a regular kid, if not for the unfortunate circumstances of his parentage. God, I can barely imagine if he had ended up my friend that first day here. What if he was kind to me? Such a small change could have made all the difference in the world. Just one little thing, a flip of the coin, and bam, everything has changed.

Makes me wonder even more how much things differ now because of my actions. I know I just discussed that with Severus, but it honestly worries me a bit more than I let on. What if I've somehow done something to make Voldemort more powerful? What if Sirius still ends up dead? What if other people, more people end up dead than otherwise?

I sincerely hope that these are only worries, and don't come to pass, otherwise I'm going to be in for a hell of a ride, probably honest to god war, not just a series of lazy skirmishes and one big final battle.

"I'm sorry that Draco behaves the way he does… it must be painful for you."

Severus shrugs lazily, but the gesture still carries that note of melancholy. "I've come to terms with it. People not meeting your expectations is one of the things that happens in life, and its something everyone must become accustomed to."

"Yeah, tell me about it," I complain, my thoughts now drawn to Padma's ridiculous behaviour.

I think I may just completely cut her off, but at the same time, I don't want to make Lisa feel distanced from the rest of us. It's an odd thing to juggle, but it's not like it's a big deal. I mean, shit, Padma is fourteen. It's not like I've decided to dismantle a decade long friendship.

"What's been bothering you?" Severus asks, his demeanor shifting slightly into that of a mind healer, reminding me of the first few times we chatted together.
I still can scarcely believe that Severus Snape has become my favourite professor. What a world we live in.

"I'm trying to figure out what the responsible thing to do is when it comes to a friend suddenly becoming… hostile, is the best word. I'm probably just going to explain that I'm not interested in talking to her and cut her off."

"Probably a smart thing to do. Does this have to do with your relationship with Miss Delacour?"

"Yeah."

"Well, that's all you can do, really. If someone is so petty as to be hostile towards you over such a small thing, then there's no point in keeping them around."

I smile at him. "Thanks Severus, who knew you could be such a socially conscious guy?"

He scoffs quietly, rolling his eyes. "All Slytherins are socially conscious. It's how we work."

"Did we not just talk about how Draco doesn't behave as a Slytherin should?"

Severus sighs in annoyance. "Well, outside of him and his little gang, Slytherins are inherently socially conscious people."

"Whatever you say," I jibe, setting my glass down. "Thanks for the chat Severus, make sure not to slaughter any first years, alright?"

He chuckles quietly as I leave the room. "I'll try my best, but I make no guarantees."

Chapter End Notes

A slow chapter, mostly exposition. I think that a nice blend of paladin and druid for Fleur is going to be kick ass.

Translations:
Erco, woch'ista-mè: Heavens, protect me. (Proto-Gaelic)
I duck as a burst of light whizzes past my head, the raw energy crackling loudly in my ears before it splashes against the wall behind me, chunks of stone peppering my back as I pull into a roll. My knees scrape painfully against the floor, and I rest on them for a fraction of a second as I return fire, quite literally, a massive gout of blistering magical flames streaming from the end of my wand towards Fleur.

She curses loudly in French, rapidly throwing up a familiar, massive, nigh impenetrable shield. I take a second of reprieve, empty lungs filling with dry, hot air as I watch the flames billow over the glimmering construction and dissipate into nothingness.

I fire off a slew of cutting, concussion, and blasting curses, a plethora of multicoloured lights roaring towards Fleur like the salvo of a rocket. The majority of them burst harmlessly against her shield, but I can see that they have an impact, a thin, shining splinter crackling across the surface like that of broken ice. With a deep breath, I let off one more blasting curse, twisting my wand and contorting the magic as it leaves the weapon, causing the spell to spiral like a drill and shatter the shield upon impact, a thousand glittering fragments melting away into thin air as it carries on through. Fleur flips head over heel backwards as the curse strikes her, hitting the ground hard and sliding a few feet.

I hold my wand steady, smiling in relief as she dexterously flips herself back onto her feet, wand already twirling in maddening patterns as spell after spell is hurled towards me. I duck again, sweeping my wand in front of me in an arc, corrosive black smoke pouring from it in waves and ebbing out across the Room.

Fleur spins, wand twirling above her head before punching downwards, a screaming arc of wind exploding outwards in every direction, nullifying my acrid attack. With a grin, Fleur turns her hand like one would turn a doorknob, an orb of water materializing in front of her and spinning rapidly. Thrusting her hand forward, the sphere shoots towards me at an incredible speed, catching me in the shoulder and sending me spiraling backwards, my collarbone very much broken.

I ignore the burning pain in my shoulder and push my hands behind me, a gust of air halting my dizzying fall and softening the blow as I skid to a halt on the floor. As soon as I feel the grit of stone on my back, I’m twisting back upwards, legs spinning like a dancer as I fling myself back to a standing position, wand arcing downwards as my fist pulls up. Flecks of blood cling to my hand as they race toward the tip of my wand, a thin, dangerously sharp needle of the shining liquid flying almost impossibly fast towards Fleur, just as an open palm of stone bursts out of the ground underneath her.

She leaps, hands stretched outwards, Holy Fire streaming over the earthen palm, so hot as to outright melt the stone. Grimacing, Fleur takes a grazing shot of the bloody needle, the projectile shattering upon impact into thousands of crystalline pieces of shrapnel, cutting thin, shallow slices across her flank and underarm.

"Should we call it there?" I shout, bringing our duel to a momentary halt.
Fleur grits her teeth as thin rivulets of blood pour down her side, the hand held to her waist rapidly turning a bright, angry red as her blood begins to collect, the many, many thin streams forming together, truly showcasing how severely she was injured.

Eyes wide, I rush forward, a healing spell already on the tip of my tongue. Fleur puts her hand up, halting me.

"Thank you, but I've got everything taken care of," she says, murmuring softly as she passes her wand over her wounds, the smattering of small, angry cuts closing one by one as the soft white light emanating from her wand pulses over them. It takes only a few moments for her to clean herself up, scourgifying the not so insignificant amount of blood from her clothes before repairing the cuts in her top.

"I think we should call it here," she breathes, shoulders rising and falling heavily as she collects herself. "That was quite intense."

I nod my agreement, placing my wand against my shattered clavicle and gritting my teeth as I heal it, the displaced shards of bone tearing skin and muscle as they're returned to their rightful place. I let out the breath that I've been holding as I knit the tissue back together, giving myself one last check over to make sure that I'm not running around with a compound fracture.

I mean, I did go to bed once without a hand, so I wouldn't put it past me to be caught out in the halls with a chunk of bone sticking out of my neck.

"Damn good fight," I agree, looking down at my sweat soaked clothes. "I really could use a shower."

I smirk, sending a silent thank you to the Founders as the Room immediately begins to rearrange itself into a large bathhouse reminiscent of ancient Rome. Stone sliding over stone, silent, like cogs in a machine, a massive depression forming in the centre of the room that rapidly fills with opaque, steaming water.

"This magic never fails to amaze me," Fleur mutters, blinking slowly at the incredible feat of conjuration, transfiguration, enchantment, and all else in between.

It really is the most impressive piece of magic I can think of, and I amaze myself at how I take it for granted.

"If only it gave us some swimwear," I lament.

Fleur cocks an eyebrow, smirking slightly. "It's a bath, is it not? What do we need swimwear for?"

I pale as she begins to strip, and I turn around, blushing furiously. Fleur giggles at my reaction but doesn't move to do anymore. I stand there waiting, breathless, until I hear the soft sound of splashing water, turning to see Fleur floating at the far end of the bath, hair wet and shining like sterling.

"Are you coming in?" she asks, a playful smile on her face as she treads water, the bath apparently being much deeper than I thought it was.

I find myself both annoyed and thankful that I can't get a view of her under the water at this angle.

I glance around, eyes locking onto an array of faucets situated just a few feet in front of me. I walk towards them, sighing in relief when I realize that they're near identical to the ones found in the Prefect's bath, and I immediately turn on the one that I know will cover the water in enough bubbles that I'll feel comfortable jumping in.
"You're no fun," Fleur pouts, swimming towards me as the surface of the pool begins to dance, a thick, yet short layer of bubbles rapidly covering it.

"Excuse me for not being super comfortable with my own nudity. Remember, I'm not French," I say, huffing when I realize how harsh that sounds. "Sorry, I'm just not… well, this is new to me."

Fleur shrugs, a soft smile on her face. "I tend to forget that others aren't as comfortable with themselves as I am. Would you like me to turn around?" She inclines her head pointedly towards me.

I nod hurriedly. "That'd be great, thanks."

Acquiescing, Fleur turns her back to me, humming quietly. Blinking a few times, I remove my dirtied clothes, blushing from head to toe as I stumble towards the edge of the bath, dip my toe into the water to test it, happy to find that it's just bordering on too hot, a temperature I find to be quite perfect.

I take a moment to just study myself as I look downwards. The curves of my body, how my hips flare just enough, the modest swell of my chest… and I can't help but compare myself to the imagined image of Fleur that dances through my mind. I find my eyes flicking over to her, her wet hair trailing off into the water, clinging to her glistening back, a few floating strands visible overtop the thick foam.

I wonder what she looks like. Whether she's broader or narrower than me, softer, or more muscular…

"God dammit," I whisper, trying to turn my mind away from those tempting, tempting thoughts. It's not like I don't want to be with her, but goddamn does the prospect of it terrify me.

Would I panic? Would I embarrass myself? What would happen?

I think it's damn likely that I'd be a touch scared, but the question is how scared? Are we talking panic, as in worry for a test panic? Or would it be panic? Sobbing, messy, catatonic panic?

"Are you alright?" Fleur asks, her back still turned.

"Y- yeah, I'm alright," I respond, closing my eyes and taking the plunge, slowly stepping into the deliciously hot water. I hum as I step deeper and deeper into the bath, feeling like I've been wrapped in liquid comfort. The water somehow tames, if just a little, my anxious heart. "I was just thinking about some things."

"What things?"

I duck my head under the water, thin waves running out across the bath as I pull back up and breach the surface, sitting down on a surprisingly soft ledge and letting the bottom of my chin rest just underneath the bubbles.

"Us."

"Us?" she continues, turning around and wading over to take a seat next to me, eyes slightly drooped and looking quite relaxed. "What about us?"

I shrug, feeling a bit odd. "Well, about whether or not I want to… well, you know."

Fleur frowns, before her eyebrows raise, her cheeks slightly flushed. "Oh. Oh." She coughs, covering her mouth with the back of her hand. "Well… know that I won't push you into anything,
I nod, smiling at her. "I know you wouldn't push me into anything, and thank you for that, I just… don't really know how to go about all this, you know? Not the emotional," I say, gesturing between the two of us. "But the physical."

"I understand you completely," she says, resting her head on my shoulder.

I breathe in sharply at her being so close to me in our current state of undress, shutting my eyes tight. "Can you… can you kiss me?"

Fleur lifts my chin with one finger, and I open my eyes, finding myself staring into her own. She presses her lips against mine, softly, tentatively, one hand resting lightly on the back of my neck, the other still cradling my jaw.

A soft, shuddering breath snakes its way through my mouth as hers leave mine, and I can feel her smiling against me, soft lips curled upwards. "Yes, yes I can," she whispers, pressing another, needier kiss to my lips and pulling me against her.

My hands float outwards, cradling her hips awkwardly, one wrapped up and around her back. I stifle a giggle as she nips at my bottom lip, tugging on it playfully before pulling away. I lean forward, and Fleur leans back, and I just know that she's grinning at me.

"Damned tease," I mutter, threading my fingers through wet, silky hair and pulling her towards me.

Fleur pulls away again, laughing. "Tease? Why, you've hurt me, Helene, right here," she says, taking my hand and pressing it against her chest.

I inhale sharply, and I can practically feel my pupils dilate. Fleur smiles at me, a simple, perfect expression full of equal parts humour and want. "Right there?" I echo, feeling her soft skin beneath mine, the way it almost melts into my hand.

Jesus Christ.

"Right there," she whispers throatily, lunging towards me, tongue flicking across my lips.

I find myself lost in the sensation of her body pressed against mine, the way our curves – the ones I was so curious about – mould together. Her lips pressed softly to my neck, her tongue dancing over the dip of my collarbone, her fingers sliding along the crook of my spine… her. Just her. A myriad of touches and feelings that all culminate into something that is so simply Fleur.

I bite just below her ear as her fingers, tentatively, trail over my chest. A shudder runs through my whole body at the dull shock her touch brings, a whimper escaping my throat as she pinches in just the right way.

Heat suddenly floods through me, something that I find shocking, considering my body is absent of a beating heart. My breath catches in my throat, not in a good way, but in a thick, cloying manner. I can feel the phantom sensation of a fluttering in my chest, and a tinge of nausea dredging up my throat.

"F- Fleur," I groan hoarsely, the sound stuttered and unsure. Anxious.

"Yes?" she replies, breath hot against my skin.

"I- I think we should slow down," I mutter, shaking my head, trying to push away the sudden
bubbling pit of fear in my stomach.

"Are you alright?" Fleur asks, holding me at arms length and looking me in the eyes.

I nod shakily. "I'm fine, I think. Just... well, what I was worried about, you know?"

She sighs deeply, a sad look on her face. "You panicked, yes? Panicking?" she adds worriedly.

"Something like that."

"Well, we can stop there. Remember, you're the one who calls the shots here," she says, tapping my forehead with one slender finger.

"Thanks for being so understanding."

Smiling, Fleur wraps her arms around me, nestling my chin against the crook of her neck. "There's no need to thank me ma dulcinée, it's what anyone would do."

I bury my face deeper, nose squashed against her shoulder. "I don't think they would... they'd be more annoyed than anything. Most people aren't as accepting as you are."

"What do you mean?" Fleur asks, eyebrow raised quizzically.

"You really don't know, do you?" She shakes her head, confused. "You're kind, damned kind, much more kind than I am... and you're perfectly accepting of the fact that I'm a Necromancer, and that I've killed on numerous occasions."

"You forget that I fought in a war, however brief," she argues.

"But we're not technically at war right now. I mean, we are, but we're not, right? Everything I've done has been a precursor to the true battle to come." I pause, trying to properly put my thoughts out in the way I'd like. "What I'm trying to say, is that you didn't need to be as accepting of my flaws as you have been, and I'd like to say thank you... for being you."

I start as Fleur bites her bottom lip, trying, yet failing to stifle tears.

"Are you okay?" I stammer, wide eyed.

She nods, a cracked smile appearing on her face. "Yes, yes... I'm alright. I... things were truly that bad for you, weren't they?"

I blink in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"You can barely wrap your head around someone liking you for you, and not in the hopes that they can use you in some way." She puts her hand up, pressing one finger against my lips. "No, you don't see it, but I do, and I think everyone else does. You've had a hard life Helene, always have, and a life like that leaves a mark on you. I'm ecstatic to have your trust, and I promise you that I'll never break it."

"See what I mean?"

Fleur snorts, smacking me on the head playfully. "Quiet you."

"Never," I argue, kissing her on the cheek.

She pulls me closer, our bodies pressed together, and for a brief moment my worried thoughts are
The weeks up to the second task slip on by, a confusing daze of quiet bigotry interlaced with even more silent support, the school seemingly divided right through the centre.

On one hand, there's a definite group that has mine and Fleur's backs… at least, in a manner of speaking they do. Sort of. These are the students who nod at me if I make eye contact, the ones who still smile kindly in the halls, or the younger students who sit near me in the common room and ask for help on their papers.

Like I said, it's a silent form of support, but it's support nonetheless. All I want is to be treated as if nothing has changed. Pretty simple when you get down to it.

The bigots and the hateful? Well, for the most part they're quiet. Draco and his goons are loud enough that I could consider them to be a faction of their own. Padma seems to have fallen in line with the rest of this crowd, casting disdainful glances my way when given the chance.

So, to make a long story short, I've cut her out of my life.

No big confrontation, nor any massive, dramatic fight. I just stopped talking to her, simple as that. It's not like we were friends for any incredible length of time, and there's also the fact that I'm probably a good five years older than her when you get down to it. Although, I might be a bit stunted considering the fact that the only friends I've had for the last four years have been quite a bit younger than me, and the only true conversations I've had have been with a man I once detested to an impressive degree.

Eh, little details.

All in all, things have been better than I thought they'd be. It might be due to me being, again, a considerable amount older than most of the students here. That, and I've dealt with things that make this an absolute walk in the park. Why worry about the words of children when you've got a Dark Lord to kill?

But, ignoring all that, the second task is now looming ahead. In fact, it's going to take place in about an hour and change.

Cedric nearly had a heart attack when I told him that the second task was going to be even more dangerous than the last, while Viktor simply scoffed loudly, and said something along the lines of 'Bulgarians never quit.'

Needless to say, if the two don't stick behind me and Fleur during the task, I'm going to stun them and leave them on the shoreline.

Speaking of which… "Who do you think our hostages will be?" I ask, Fleur shrugging.

"Well, I know for a fact mine won't be my sister…"

Oh yeah… Fleur's sister. I halt for a moment, remembering how dangerous this upcoming task will be. It doesn't take more than a second for me to be absolutely and utterly furious.

"I swear to every fucking god in the world that if they've taken my sisters for this damned task, I will rain down an unholy hellfire upon every last one of those bastards at the Ministry!"
Fleur places a calming hand on my shoulder. "They'll be fine, yes? With you and I together, no harm will come to them."

I inhale sharply, nostrils flaring. "They'd better be, otherwise heads will roll."

I hear the scuffling of feet on dirt and panting behind me, turning to meet Colin Creevey, hands on his knees, trying to regain his breath.

"You alright there?" I ask, walking over to him.

He nods, still desperately drinking in the air. "I'm- I'm alright," he gasps, wiping his face with his hand. "You're wanted back at the castle; Professor Dumbledore said your family was here."

I look to Fleur. "Want to meet the family?"

Her eyes widen, throat bobbing as she swallows nervously. "Y- your family? Are you sure?"

"If you don't want to, that's fine. I just thought that they might be over here to meet you is all."

I can see the thoughts whizzing through Fleur's head as she stares off into space, brow furrowed. After a moment of consideration, she nods. "If I can handle sea monsters, I can handle meeting your family."

I laugh, Colin's eyes dancing between the two of us anxiously. "Well, let's head back in then," I say, leading the three of us back inside, up the sodden, wintry grass until we finally find solitude from the crisp midday air and walk through into the school.

I still don't know why this task takes place at the end of February. Could they not have swapped the first and second, or are they just that damned sadistic?

I see Professor Flitwick standing by the doors to the Great Hall, and he beckons me over.

"Hello Professor, I heard my family was waiting for me?"

He smiles kindly at me. "Yes, I'll take you to them now," he says, bringing us into the Great Hall, towards the little side room in which we were originally brought during the drawing ceremony. "It's been quite a while since I've talked to you Miss Potter. Don't take this as an underhanded compliment, for it's nothing but praise… you seem to be doing much better magically than I'd have assumed you would."

"Well, after you gave me that charms lexicon – which I'd like to say thank you for, once again – I got hooked. I've been practicing damned near everything since then."

"And it shows," he says proudly, his tiny little chest puffed out. "You gave me quite a fright back in November, but by god you put on a show. If I may ask, would you be able to tell me what kind of spell you used to defeat the Chimera? I've never seen anything quite like it."

I inhale sharply through my teeth. "I'm sorry Professor, but that's a spell of my own design, and until the end of the tournament I'd prefer to not have it get out."

He inclines his head in understanding. "Fair enough. Now, if you ever need any help with spells unrelated to the tournament, please come and see me." He winks at me, waving towards the closed door in front of us. "Your family is just through here. I'll be seeing you in class Miss Potter. Take care!"
I wave goodbye to him, squeezing Fleur's arm briefly before opening the door and treading inside.

Glancing around, I spot Octavius and Terra, as well as Sirius sitting patiently on couches that weren't here the last time I was, a wide table between them filled with biscuits, tea, and small sandwiches.

"Hey everyone!" I say, grinning at them. I put my arm around Fleur's waist, bringing my nervous girlfriend in close. "I'm sure you've already read the paper, but this is Fleur."

She smiles nervously. "It's good to meet you all."

Sirius and Octavius look at me oddly, before Sirius pats the couch next to him. "It's good to meet you Fleur. Please, come on and sit down, have a bit of tea."

Fleur and I acquiesce, taking a seat and pouring ourselves a cup of tea. I grab a biscuit and nibble on it slowly, looking back up as Terra speaks.

"So, how long has this been going on?" she asks, pointing between the two of us, a smile on her face.

"Since the first task I'd say? So… a little over three, maybe four months?"

Fleur nods, already looking a bit more comfortable. "Around there."

"You two look absolutely lovely together, I wish I could have been there to see you two open the ball."

"I think you would have been more entertained to see me shoot down a drunken Malfoy."

Octavius snorts, while Sirius simply laughs aloud, slapping his knee. "I would have paid to see something like that," he chuckles, grinning sheepishly at Terra's faux scandalized expression. "Never been a fan of that family."

"Hard not to when they're all bastards," Fleur blurts, eyes suddenly widening. She slaps her hand over her mouth, blushing furiously.

Everyone laughs, even Terra joining in with an undignified snort, a closed fist pressed to her mouth. "Good god there's two of them," Octavius despairs, leaning onto one hand.

"Quiet you." Terra scolds, slapping him playfully on the arm.

Sirius wipes a tear from his eye, another dry chuckle escaping his lips. "Gods, I haven't laughed that hard in a while." He groans, holding a hand to his chest. "You find yourself a feisty one there Helene. Hold onto her."

I smile, resting my head on Fleur's shoulder for a moment. "I'll do my best."

Octavius glances between Fleur and I, smiling slightly before sighing. "Well, as much as I'd love to joke around for the next hour, we were hoping to discuss the events of the first task with you. Your mother was quite curious about the magic that you used." He looks at me pointedly, eyes once more flitting towards Fleur, before he tilts his head towards the door.

Oh. *Fuck.*

He wants me to tell Terra about my powers.

Well, only one thing to do.
"Fleur knows everything," I say, Octavius and Sirius' brows raising in surprise, while Terra frowns in confusion.

"What do you mean by that? Fleur knows everything?" she asks, turning to Octavius, frown growing deeper. "You obviously know what she means… what have the three of you been keeping from me?"

I put my hand up, wand waving in a well practiced pattern as I scan for any magical bugs, both figurative and literal. I nod in relief as nothing comes back to me, quickly putting up a heavy slew of privacy charms interlaced over one another in a way that makes Mad Eye Moody look perfectly trusting.

"Could someone tell me what on earth is going on?"

I sigh heavily, Fleur placing her hand on my back reassuringly. "Mum… I- I've something to tell you." She cocks an eyebrow, arms crossed. "I… Christ, you know this isn't easy dad."

"I know that, but Terra deserves to know what's going on, now more than ever," he states.

I can't really find it in me to argue with that.

"It's alright, if anyone will understand, it's Terra," Sirius mutters so that only I can hear. "She may freak out, but she'll get it better than any of us."

"Thanks," I whisper back.

I take a deep breath, Terra looking at me with concern. What the fuck am I supposed to say? 'I'm a time traveler, but wait! It gets worse!' Like that would go over well.

"Mum… I don't really know how to explain everything, so I'm just going to come out and say it. I'm a time traveler, I'm a Necromancer, and I'm destined to kill Voldemort."

Terra sighs loudly, rolling her eyes. "Really? You get me all worried for this? Some sort of practical joke?" She turns to Sirius, a scowl on her face. "Did you put her up to this?"

"Mum," I interrupt, catching her attention. "I'm not lying, and I'm not playing a joke on you. I died in the year 1996 and Death himself brought me back five years to 1991. Because of that, I'm the first Necromancer in a few centuries, and that fire that I used to kill the Chimera? That was quite literally Hellfire."

"Why are you joking about this?"

"I'm not. I would never joke about something like this."

Terra swallows heavily, turning back to Octavius. "Is this really true?" She gestures to me shakily, voice warbled. "Is… is Helene really- really telling the truth?"

He nods solemnly. "Every word of it."

"Circe…"

She gets up out of her seat, practically bounding around the table. I squeak awkwardly as she pulls me into a hug, my back cracking loudly.

"Helene… dear, gods- you've been through so much more than I ever imagined," she mutters, rocking me slightly.
I return the hug, staring over her shoulder at Octavius, who simply shrugs.

"It's not that big of a deal," I reassure her quietly. "My life here has been a thousand times better than my old one."

She pulls back, still holding me. "It doesn't matter, whatever happened to you still happened. Dying? Gods, I can't imagine the terror you must have felt." She sniffs quietly, wiping a tear from her eye. "You weren't with us in your last, were you? You were with your mother's family the whole time."

I sigh. "Yeah, I was stuck with he Dursley's the whole while."

"Cunts, the lot of them," she curses, my eyes widening in shock. "What? They are. Self righteous, holier-than-thou bastards. I met them once, at your parents wedding. Didn't like them one bloody bit. Whole time they acted like their shite didn't stink."

"Is that how you always curse?" I ask, incredulous.

Terra blushes somewhat. "I blame my father for my language when I get this way. He was born in a little village near Glasgow, and even though he appeared to be the poshest of purebloods through and through he always swore like a sailor." She chuckles to herself. "I learned from the best."

"So… you're not mad? You're not disgusted?"

"No, and how could I be?" she says, squeezing my shoulder. "Yes, I'm disappointed that you didn't tell me, but I understand the why of it. A secret like that? I would tell as few people as possible if I was in the same position. It's going to take me a while to get used to, no way around that…" she pauses, looking at me in a different light. "So… you're an adult then, huh? Not taking advantage of this lovely girl next to me, are you?"

I gawk, mouth held open in silent protest, before it slams shut as Fleur giggles loudly.

"Mon dieu, your family is interesting." She lets out a slow breath, shaking her head. "Madame Greengrass, Monsieur Greengrass and Black, I would like to confess to the three of you that I have dealt with a similar… predicament, I would say."

Once more, my mouth drops open. "Fleur?"

She puts her hand up. "It's alright, if they know about you, they should know about me."

"Are you a Necromancer as well?" Sirius interrupts, leaning forward, his eyes shining with interest. I almost snort at his reaction. Of course he'd take something like this in stride.

Fleur shakes her head. "No, I am the opposite. An Albumancer."

"Wait, wait. Did the two of you know each other in your last lives?" Octavius asks, trying to keep a track of things.

"We both competed in the tournament in our last lives as we are now, although it was a hell of a lot easier then," I explain. "Fleur and I didn't know each other all that well."

She inclines her head, nodding slightly. "We were friends, but only for a short year. We didn't get to know each other until this life, where we met once again at the World Cup."

"Hold on a second," Terra mutters, slowly beginning to connect the dots. She gasps, looking up at me with a hint of fear in her eyes. "You? You two killed those people?"
I sigh. I knew this was going to happen. I get it, I really do, but it doesn't make it hurt any less.

"Yes, we did. Those Death Eaters died at mine and Fleur's hand. It was the least they deserve for their actions in the last war, and the one to come."

"War to come!?"

I rub my eyes with one hand, holding in a sigh. I completely forgot about how hard it is to explain the whole war thing.

Is this what Basil felt like?

"Yes, war to come. Voldemort isn't dead, not truly, and it's been prophesized that I'm to be the one to kill him."

Terra releases me, her face set into a worried grimace. "Tell me that isn't true. Please, tell me that isn't true."

"I'm sorry, but it is," I intone, shaking my head sadly. "A genuine prophecy backed up by a God. Nothing I can do about it except fight the genocidal bastard with everything I've got."

Hands over her mouth, Terra breathes heavily, tears leaking out of the corners of her eyes. "Gods… Helene…"

"It's okay mum, really, I've done a lot of preparing for this."

"Terra, dear," Octavius interrupts, having made his way over when I wasn't paying attention. He rests his hand on her shoulder calmingly. "Trust me when I say that I have the utmost confidence in Helene and her skills. While I don't approve of everything she's done, I can't deny that she's prepared, and prepared well at that. Why do you think I got back into politics?"

Terra hiccups, back of her hand pressed to her mouth. "To support Helene." She lets out a soft, exasperated breath. "It's all obvious in hindsight, but how do you know if you'll be safe?"

"Death itself told me that I will be. If I can't trust a primordial being that has the actual date of my death written into a massive magical book when it comes matters related to safety, who in the hell can I trust?"

"Wait… you weren't joking when you said Death?"

"Not once," I swear.

Terra blinks owlishly, lips pursed. "Death exists? Death?"

"And Life," Fleur adds, raising her hand on reflex.

Sirius snorts loudly, causing Fleur to blush. "I know we're in a school, but you don't need to raise your hand to speak Fleur."

A crisp knock on the door tears us away from the conversation at hand. I stand up, glancing behind me as I walk towards the door. "We can finish talking about this after the task?"

"You bet your arse we are," Terra retorts, before a frustrated look settles over her. "It's time already?"

I flick my wand, taking a quick glance at the ethereal numbers that pop into existence. "Looks like
"Miss Potter, Miss Delacour," he intones, smoothing out his robes and inclining his head in greeting towards the others in the room. "Hello to you as well, Lord and Lady Greengrass, Lord Black. If you would all come with me, it's time for the second task."

"Headmaster," I reply coolly, frowning. I wonder why Dumbledore came to fetch us, as opposed to Flitwick.

He tilts his head, and I remember the silencing charms. I put my hand up, a single finger held high, and he nods briefly as I shut the door.

I glance behind me, locking eyes with Terra. "Don't trust Dumbledore. He's firmly under control, but I'd like to let you know that he's the cause of much, if not most of the grief in my past life. Anything that he says you should take with a grain of salt, if not the whole cellar."

"Really?" she asks, looking past me to the door.

"Really."

"I've never liked the man all that much, but... really?" She gets a dangerous look in her eyes, her gaze burning a hole in the door. "He put you with the Dursley's, didn't he?"

I nod. Terra's lip curling up in contempt. "Hey, mum, trust me. I've got everything well in hand."

"Well in hand? How is he not in prison for his ineptitude? Putting you with Petunia and her twenty stone limp pricked bastard of a husband?"

I feel a bout of laughter coming on, quickly directing it away with a forced cough. Terra really does have a way with words.

"He's quite literally my slave right now. He can't do anything without my say-so."

"What? You better explain that when we talk after the task," Terra states as I take down the layered array of silencing and privacy charms.

"I promise I will," I reply, pulling the door open to once more be met with the sight of Dumbledore. We stand there for a brief, curious moment, Dumbledore scanning the room with an odd look in his eye, while I try to figure out just what it is that he's thinking. He looks almost... nostalgic? I can't quite place his expression, but it just strikes me as odd.

He clears his throat quietly, covering his mouth with a polite fist. "Please, if you would come with me," he repeats, waving behind himself.

Fleur, Octavius, Terra and I follow behind him, while Sirius strides forward to walk in line with Dumbledore, chatting his ear off about something asinine.

I smirk as I see Dumbledore glance at Sirius out of the corner of his eye with no small amount of awkwardness as the conversation moves from Sirius' supreme political power, and what an absolute shame it is that Dumbledore's throne has crumbled so, to the uncomfortable intricacies of house-elf breeding.

"Is he always like this?" Fleur whispers, hand cupped over her mouth.

"When the mood strikes him, yeah," I reply, holding back a laugh as Dumbledore turns an odd shade
as Sirius moves on to the wonderful muggle invention of hypertension medication, and their happy little side effects.

"Is he… is he talking about-?"

"Yes, yes he is," Octavius quietly interrupts, a tense smile on his face. "He's always been a hell of an actor."

"Actor?"

He nods. "Whenever Sirius gets frustrated, tense, or he just plain doesn't like someone, he goes on a little tangent like that," he explains, inclining his head towards the verbal chaos occurring not ten meters away from us. "I've always wondered if the constant hooliganism of his was some way of lashing out."

I frown, remembering how I had to confront Sirius a short while after he'd been released from Azkaban because his constant pranking had gotten out of control. "I think it's his way of getting his stress out," I say, pursing my lips. "This is the first time you two have been in close contact with Dumbledore since you learned about what happened to me, right?"

"It is. At least, we haven't really interacted with him outside of Wizengamot meetings," Octavius confirms, holding out a hand for Terra as we walk down a particularly slippery patch of grass.

"I don't how he doesn't just thrash him," Terra offers, a sharp look on her face as she stares daggers at Dumbledore's back.

"That's his way of thrashing him."

She sighs quietly, shaking her head slightly. "That man will never grow up, will he?"

"No, but we love him for it anyways."

I squeeze Fleur's hand as the packed stands come in to sight, a flickering of yellow and red further along denoting Cedric and Viktor, the two shivering on the impromptu dock that sits at the edge of the lake.

A cheer sweeps through the crowd as they catch sight of us, Dumbledore raising his hand to greet them, eagerly taking his chance to escape Sirius' verbal clutches.

He sweeps forward without a word, quickly taking his place on the stands with the rest of the judges, Karkaroff wearing his usual fetid scowl, Maxime's large shadow cast over the crowd behind her, and Bagman blabbering some sort of nonsense in Percy Weasley's uninterested ear.

Crouch Sr. must be off locked up somewhere. Doesn't Jr. kill him some time soon? I'm pretty sure that was before the third task, but I'm not too sure on that.

My eyes flicker off through the crowd, locking onto the faux Moody, who jabs his gnarled cane into the dirt and raises his chin at me respectfully for a fraction of a second before he's off again, magical eye whirring madly as he patrols the stands.

If Sirius is a great actor, I don't know what Crouch Jr. is. He may be a Death Eater who is very close to meeting his timely demise at my hands, but I can't deny that he has a talent in impressions.

"Greetings, everyone!" Dumbledore booms, his voice carrying out across the grounds.
The crowd roars again, and I turn back to everyone.

"I'll see you in a bit," I say, hugging my parents in turn, Sirius squeezing my shoulder reassuringly and giving me a sturdy clap on the back.

"Kick some scaly arse down there," he grins, although it doesn't quite reach his eyes.

"I'll be safe," I say, glancing over at Cedric and Viktor, the first of which is waving the two of us over. "I've got to get going."

Fleur and I quickly jog over to the platform, waving goodbye one last time to my family. As soon as we make it to the makeshift dock, we take a healthy chunk each of gillyweed from our robes before shedding them. I grimace at the sudden sting, quickly casting a copious amount of warming charms on myself to stave off the frigid winter air, Fleur following suit.

Funny how my heart doesn't beat, yet I still feel the cold. Magic is an odd, odd thing.

"You two are right on time," Cedric says, glancing towards the stands, Dumbledore continuing to build up the audience's excitement as he begins explains the events of the task, and the nightmares we'll be encountering beneath the lakes surface. He looks back over to the two of us, before groaning in annoyance. "Gillyweed? I should have thought of that."

"I've got some to share," I chirp, stooping down and reaching into my robes, taking out another two viscous globs of the unappetizing herb and handing one each to Cedric and Viktor. "And if you're wondering, we just got back from meeting my parents."

Fleur smiles as she crosses her arms over her chest in a way that serves to be quite distracting, shivering slightly against the cold even through the warming charms.

"How did that go?" Viktor asks, his face blank but his voice carrying a slight tinge of humour.

"I think it went quite well," Fleur replies, placing her hand on my waist and pulling me close. "You?"

"Quite well," I echo.

"That's good to hear," Cedric says, before he rolls his shoulders, his demeanour rapidly shifting from playful to serious. "You two ready?"

"Funny you should ask that. Fleur and I want you two to stay close to us during the task. We don't want you two to get in any danger, considering the monsters in the lake are just as bad, if not worse than the ones we had to deal with in the last task."

Viktor scowls at that, while Cedric just looks thoughtful.

"You two are powerful, that I can't deny, but… what makes you think I will not be fine on my own?" Viktor queries stubbornly.

"Hydra, Beisht-Kione, Lusca, Kelpies," I say, ticking off a finger for each creature I list off. "You think you can outswim them? And don't tell me that you think a partial transfiguration would be enough," I add, putting an immediate stop to Viktor's oncoming argument before it can even begin. "I know about your little shark trick. These creatures are some of the worst of the worst, and we're already at a disadvantage since we have to deal with them on their ground. It's going to work."

"I'll stay with you two," Cedric offers, glancing at Viktor. "If not because we should just work
together on this, but also because I know that we'll be safest if we work together."

Grunting, Viktor shakes his head. "No, I'm sorry, but I do things my way."

I groan, looking to Fleur, who nods at me, the silent message sent clearly. We stun the two of them and send them back up to the docks.

"Fair enough," I say, sticking my hand out towards Viktor. "May the best win."

He smirks, clasping my hand firmly and shaking it once as he cocks his head to the side. 
"Suglasuvan."

I let go, huddling up and resting the back of my head on Fleur's shoulder, her arm still wrapped snugly around my waist. "I think this one is going to be all you. You're better with water than I am," I whisper, Fleur humming in response to my thinly disguised statement.

She kisses the top of my head softly. "You can count on me."

"Oh, don't I know it."

"Quiet," she scoffs, squeezing my waist and pointing towards the stands. "I think we're about to begin."

I follow her gesture, my eyes landing once more on the judges, Dumbledore's hand raised high into the air, wand pointing skyward.

I stuff the gillyweed in my mouth pre-emptively, flinching slightly at the hideous texture as it lays thickly against my tongue, Fleur following suit and grimacing noticeably. Cedric clumsily stuffs his cheek with the disgusting herb, choking loudly as he forces himself to swallow it, eyes watering as he attempts to keep it down.

"Stick your head in the lake Cedric, otherwise you're going to suffocate," I state, patting him once on the back. Cedric nods hurriedly as the expanse of skin just below his jaw begins to ripple and twist, gills slowly forming where muscle once was. He dunks his head in the water just as Dumbledore fires off the signal, a loud crack emanating across the grounds followed closely by the excited cheers of the spectators.

Not much of a spectating sport when they're watching an empty lake, but that's just my opinion.

Viktor immediately leaps into the water, Cedric toppling forward and disappearing into the lake with a swift kick that sends him downwards.

Fleur and I both swallow the gillyweed. Well, she does, I make a valiant attempt. It feels like I'm trying to stuff a dead octopus down my throat whole, but I somehow manage, coughing in revulsion as it manages to finally make its way down.

"I fucking hate that stuff," I groan, Fleur chuckling as she jumps into the water.

Stomach of iron, that one.

I leap in after her, the telltale scratching working its way up the side of my neck signaling that the gillyweed has begun to work. I shut my eyes as the water washes over me, cracking them open and letting out a bubbling sigh when I find that I can look around just fine, smiling at the ethereal sight of Fleur floating in front of me.
Her hair dances around her like a living thing, thin strands of silver laid fluttering slowly in the soft surface current. She smiles back, pointing behind me. I turn, spotting Cedric a few meters off, floating absentmindedly while he waits for the two of us.

Before he can even react, Fleur's stunned him. She quickly follows our plan, setting a timed sleep and stick combo that will release him once the gillyweed wears off, placing him against one of the dock supports with his head just a foot or so below the surface.

Suddenly, she grabs my arm, pulling me towards her once more. I frown as she spins me and wraps her arms around my waist, Fleur only raising an eyebrow at me in return.

The hell is she doing?

I find out quite quickly, letting out a muted, burbling shriek as we fire off, Fleur kicking strongly while manipulating the water around her, using it to launch us forward towards Viktor so that we can knock him out and drag him to safety.

I can the rise and fall of her chest on my back, Fleur obviously finding my sudden terror incredibly entertaining. I huff, the expression coming out as nothing but a rush of water, the few remnants of air trapped within my neck and lungs jettisoned from my body and left in our wake, trailing off towards the surface.

Keeping my wand trained in front of me, I silently cast a point-me spell, the wood turning like a dowsing rod, down and slightly to the right, off through a small forest of seaweed.

With a jab, I send a flurry of low powered cutters through the thick, subaquatic underbrush, garnering a series of high pitched, keening squeals. A smoky cloud of leaden-blue blood announcing the death or maiming of a good dozen or so grindylow, the tentacled creatures floating off towards the surface, a smattering of limbs and greenish, leathery skin trailing behind them. A few of them flee, hissing their defiance as they disappear into the murky depths of the lake.

"Where are the Kelpies? The other creatures?" I hear Fleur say, her voice somehow incredibly clear.

I try to ask her how she's speaking, but my words come out in an indecipherable mess of bubbling nothings, Fleur chuckling at my sudden annoyed frown, the sound once more carrying through the water with ease.

"I found out that I can… project better because of my ability to use water," she explains.

Makes sense. Does that mean I'd be able to speak with a mouthful of dirt? I have to say, I'm not all that eager to try that.

I mumble unintelligibly, shrugging my shoulders. Thankfully, Fleur manages to figure out what my water addled grunting means, and whispers, "They've got to be hiding somewhere. Keep an eye out and pinch me if you spot anything."

I nod in response, Fleur once more squeezing me reassuringly before we kick off in the general direction of the point-me, this time at a slightly more cautious pace.

I keep my eyes peeled for a sight of any horrific creatures, particularly ones that are covered in tentacles, have row upon row of terrible, serrated teeth, or the equine equivalent of a water nightmare.

A water nightmare that has terrible, serrated teeth, and may or may not be covered in tentacles. Got to keep with the pattern of course.
Fleur freezes suddenly, and I jump to, wand held out in a tight, webbed grip. I try my best to listen, but my ears are flooded with the quiet, yet overwhelming sound of slowly churning water. I flick my eyes left and right, rapidly scanning the dark, imposing environment, my muscles tense as I feel the metaphorical walls closing in.

This would be so much less worrisome if I could just fucking see more than twenty feet in front of me.

Just as that thought strikes me, I catch a flurry of movement off in the distance. Reflexively, I send a burst of compressed air hastily fashioned into spinning needles towards the disturbance, gritting my teeth in frustration when nothing happens. No screams, no blood. Nothing.

I breathe heavily, the tension getting to me as we both float stock still, back to back.

My eyes are suddenly filled with a bright, golden light, a massive shield having erupted from Fleur's wand and surrounded us. I blink the afterimage away, thick blotches of ever shifting colour dissipating just as the shield flashes, a Kelpie bouncing off the indomitable barrier with an outraged shriek.

The creature is large and covered in shimmering, sickly green scales. It bares long rows of thick, angry teeth, the yellowed bone jutting out of its mouth in every which way. The Kelpie kicks angrily with its two hooved legs, its muscled tail flicking out and striking at the shield, the light shuddering under the impact, yet still holding strong.

Fleur sticks her hand out over my shoulder, fingers bowed forward and tendons stretching the skin underneath.

I watch in amazement as she cooks the Kelpie from the inside out, the creature screeching as the water around it begins to boil furiously, thrashing about as its scaled hide colours darkly while every bit of water within it superheats, eyes bursting in their sockets. With a last, heaving gasp, it dies. I catch sight of a few other Kelpies in the distance, watching as their brethren floats off to the surface, a thin gelatinous trail in its wake of boiled viscera.

'Jesus Christ,' I mouth silently, the other Kelpies apparently following suit and retreating into the darkness, not at all interested in fighting the creature that just killed one of their own in but a brief, horrifying moment.

Fleur lets the shield hang for a few seconds, scanning her surroundings before letting it drop, the light flickering out and allowing the darkness to seep back in.

"Well, that's the Kelpies taken care of… I hope," she mutters, wand still gripped tightly.

I try to mention the fact that there's still probably a good dozen of them out there still, not to mention the Beisht-Kione and the Lusca. Again, I curse the fact that I can't get a word out.

I feel Fleur's hand press to my neck, the water within morphing and feeling somehow more malleable. "What were you trying to say?"

"There's still the Beisht-Kione and the Lusca, we have to watch out for them," I reply, eyes widening when I actually hear myself speak. "How did you do that?"

She shrugs. "I have no idea, I just wanted you to speak, and so you do."

"That's a relief," I say, feeling a bit more comfortable about the whole task now that we can properly communicate. "Should we just keep an eye out for Viktor while we make our way towards the
"Mermish Village?"

"That sounds like the best plan to me. I just… I don't feel as comfortable about this task as I was with the first."

"You were comfortable with the first?"

Fleur rolls her eyes. "Of course not! I just feel even less comfortable about this one."

"Well… let's get out of here, wands at the ready."

I can feel the water in my throat shift again as Fleur removes her hand from my neck, taking a hold of me before she continues on forward, checking every corner, crag, or crevice for any sign of other aquatic monsters.

I grow more and more tense as we come across absolutely nothing. No sign of the Beisht-Kione or the Lusca, only a dead silence that permeates the entirety of the lake.

It reminds me of the time I read about how one can recognize danger in a forest. It's when you can hear no birds chirping, nor any other animal scurrying about in the underbrush. The only sound that greets you is the dull roar of absolute and total silence.

So, I'm understandably stressed as can be.

We start to pick up pace, ambling deeper and deeper into the lake with extreme trepidation, eyes and ears working in overtime as we listen and scan for any and all signs of Viktor, silently praying that we don't find him in more than one piece, or don't find him at all.

My ears perk up as I start to hear the distant, muted notes of Mermish singing, the normally discordant sounds instead are soothing, yet haunting in their own right.

Like some sort of twilight zone suburbia, we swim past silently watching Merpeople as their daily routines are disrupted by the task. A mother with ribbon-like tentacles flowing softly behind her scaled head places a hand on her child's shoulder as we move by, the two floating behind a stone rendition of a fence. The kid - a little boy - smiles at us, sharp white teeth glimmering softly in the murky, magical light that glows evenly across the village.

I smile awkwardly back, the child squealing in surprise as he tugs on his mums arm and points at us excitedly. She shakes her head at him, inclining her head in our direction as she pulls the protesting boy back into their home.

"Excitable little boy, isn't he?" Fleur wonders aloud as we venture quickly towards the centre of the village. I nod in reply, taking note as the small clusters of civilians start to become more and more interspersed with trident wielding warriors, glowering in our direction.

The vaguely familiar barnacle encrusted statue finally shimmers into view, and we quickly sweep forward to retrieve our hostages.

I instantly recognize the shock of bright red hair that belongs to Ginny, as well as the round, smiling eyes of Luna, Cho floating between the two. I scowl angrily. Of all the people they could have illegally brought down here, they had to take the girl whose brother was killed but a year ago, as well as the one who still is trying to come to terms with witnessing her mother's sudden, violent death.

A garbled 'bastards,' slips out from between my lips as I move to cut Ginny free, but it's quickly interrupted by a sudden crash that nearly overwhelms me, a shockwave thundering out across the
lakebottom as *something* is destroyed behind me.

I turn around, a slew of deadly curses held on the tip of my tongue as I'm met with the sight of thick, writhing tentacles snatching Merpeople out of the water and swinging them about, the Merpeople screaming in fear before they're swiftly broken, bodies unnaturally bent and golden eyes vacant. The cloud of dust begins to settle, revealing the rest of the Lusca, the creature looking much more hideous than I imagined it to be based on the illustrations I'd found of it.

That's one big fucking shark.

Three gaunt, demonic faces thrash about as crooked needle-like teeth tear into the mutilated remains of a Merman, a smoky cloud of blue-green blood swinging this way and that as the three heads snap at each other, one keening angrily as it's headbutted by its companion.

The keening quickly morphs into a roar of pain as a trident is violently thrust into its flank, the offending warrior quickly snatched up and torn in two by the distended jaws of the Lusca, one of the three mouths having launched forward of its own accord, independent of the rest of the monster.

With a strong kick I launch myself forward, a violent barrage of spells bursting from the tip of my wand and impacting the creature heavily. It roars once more as it's skin blisters and bubbles from the combination of rotting curses I've struck it with, a few of the blisters popping and releasing a foul looking ichor.

Unfortunately, my magic doesn't seem to be enough, as it releases its mutilated capture and lashes out at the nearest threat.

Me.

Electricity visibly *explodes* off the creature, causing my limbs to seize up and shake as I'm struck by the sudden shock. My eyes widen in fright as the Lusca rears back, tentacles flowing towards me in one solid, writhing mass.

A sudden burst of superheated water shatters the world between us, my eardrums nearly popping as the Lusca screams its outrage. The roiling bubbles clear, revealing a very burnt, very *angry* looking hybrid, beady black eyes shining with a frighteningly intelligent rage.

"You will not touch her!" Fleur shouts, having suddenly appeared right in front of me, wand cutting through the water at a blistering pace as spell after spell rockets out and towards the Lusca. She clenches her fist, drawing it down sharply as a suddenly condensed chunk of brightly shimmering water violently crashes into it from above, grinding it against the floor of the lake.

The displaced Merpeople warriors take quick advantage of Fleur's attack, burying fanged tridents in the creatures hide, immediately releasing their weapons so as to not get dragged away as it bucks against its watery restraints. A wall of stone houses crumble as it rolls onto its side, fins thrashing as it attempts to swim towards me, three sets of maddened, marble black eyes locked onto my paralyzed form.

With a sudden burst of strength, the Lusca escapes its bonds, an almost human grin of pleasure spreading across its three gnarled heads. I try to move, to do *anything* to get out of its path, but my limbs are are still frozen uselessly at my side, muscles addled by the electric shock and refusing to respond to my frightened commands.

The water superheats as a torrent of fire bursts out from underneath the Lusca, the creature suddenly blanketet in a cloak of Holy Flame that defies the everpresent press of the water around it, refusing
to succumb.

Just as suddenly as the fire appears, it disappears, leaving a charred, hideous mess floating in its wake. Burnished, warped spear handles jut out of the broiled corpse, glinting softly in the dim, now flickering light, the magical sconces that line the village having been twisted and cracked by the force of the Lusca's attack.

Fleur sets her webbed hand on my shoulder, and I can feel her trembling even through the water, fingernails digging into my skin as she catches her breath.

I open my mouth to speak, and her hand climbs up the nape of my neck and presses up just below my jaw, that same sensation of the water morphing inside my throat both unsettling and reassuring. It tells me that she still has control.

"Are you okay?" I ask, the sound coming out oddly between a shaking jaw and still semi-paralyzed tongue.

"Y- yes, that just took a lot out of me," Fleur admits, slightly wide eyed. "That was more water than I'm used to."

I nod. "Looked like a couple of tonnes or so," I guess, trying to do the mental math before suddenly realizing that I don't really know how much water weighs, nor how difficult it is to compress it. So that's right out.

Judging by how exhausted Fleur looks, it's probably incredibly difficult. My reasoning being, if we're about the same when it comes to power and I can compress stone and air without too much difficulty, that must mean that water must be horribly draining.

"Thank you for saving me."

She shakes her head, and I'm sure she would have let out an audible sigh were we not a few hundred feet below the surface. "Don't mention it, you would have done the same."

"Doesn't mean that it wasn't impressive, nor deserving of thanks," I argue, stifling her with a kiss, Fleur smiling tiredly against my lips.

I jerk my head to the side, towards the hostages. "I think we should get this nightmare of a task over with, before things get even worse."

Fleur nods in response, a bit more steadily this time as I take her hand and quickly lead us towards the three of them. With a flick of my wrist their bonds are cut and they begin to slowly float towards the surface. I reach out and grab Ginny, Fleur doing the same with Luna and Cho.

We turn to go back the way we came, and I absentmindedly fire off as many *reparo* charms as I can without draining myself, a good chunk of the damage done repairing itself before my eyes.

I freeze up as we come across the ruins of a familiar looking home, crumbled chunks of stone that once made up a ramshackle fence strewn about, no sign of the mother and child that we met upon entrance to the village to be seen.

I can feel a dull fury building up inside me at the sight of it. The death of bystanders, *innocents*, made to play host for a contest that the participants can't even see. And they'll probably write it off just because they're not human.
All that over a fucking competition.

"I'm going to find out who allowed this," Fleur says icily, a grim look on her face. "I'm going to take each and every one of them aside, and find out why they thought this was okay, and if their answers aren't to my liking..."

I nod, fully understanding and in acceptance of her promise to most likely murder whoever let this all happen.

What can I say? We both have pretty lackadaisical approaches to morality, mortality, and all else in between. Comes with the territory of being us, I guess.

I wave my hand in an intricate pattern as I pull the errant chunks of stone and begin to twist them together, moulding them into a likeness of the mother and child. It's a bit rough around the edges, but it's the best I can do given the situation.

With another flick of my wrist the monument is buried in front of the ruins of their home, fused with the rock that lies just beneath the coarse sands that cover the bottom of the lake. Without a backwards glance, I tighten my hold on Ginny as we begin to ascend towards the surface, still somewhat shaken from the sudden attack by the Lusca.

Fuck.

If that fiasco back there was just the Lusca, I can't imagine how difficult fighting the Hydra will be, or the Beisht-Kione for that matter. Fleur took a lot out of herself there, and she's the best of us when it comes to fighting underwater.

We continue on, each kick bringing us closer and closer to what I imagine to be the fight of a lifetime. I don't know why, but I just have a feeling that things are about to get even worse.

I notice as light begins to trickle in from above, thin slices of it cutting through sparse seaweed forests that stretch up dozens of feet. I catch a glint of a soft green shine in the distance, pale gray stone covered in thick layers of mossy algae denoting the slow, steady curve towards the shoreline.

I also notice as a current that shouldn't exist begins to pick up, tugging us along to the surface and towards the distant roar of battle.

Two massive creatures shadow the lake. One is composed of a large, thick trunk of a body covered in sharp, stony projections that jut out every which way. Powerful limbs dangle underneath it, the muscled legs quickly morphing into flat, webbed fingers that bear claws the size of a small child, the crystalline appendages glinting dangerously. Nine miniature dragons heads rest atop long, prehensile necks, knotted together and wrapped tightly around the writhing body of an eldritch monster.

The Beisht-Kione is even more horrific than Dumbledore, or anyone else could have described it. A single, massive serpent covered in tentacles, each of which are littered in tiny, glittering teeth. Its body looks as if it's ever-shifting, the mass of limbs constantly trying for purchase on one of the many necks that bind it, tearing chunks of flesh from the screaming Hydra. Its bottom is just as told, a thick, coiled tail that resembles that of a seahorse, except for the barbed spike that adorns the tip.

A long, bony face extends from the end of a thin, scaled neck. An angry cluster of needle-like teeth rip and tear the armoured hide of the Hydra, while the enneadic seadrake continues to constrict it.

I gape at the sight of the titanic creatures grappling, eyes widening as one of the Hydra's heads is mercilessly torn from its body, a thick trail of spine and sinew dangling from the now deceased head.
Eight lives to go, it seems.

I can feel a rush of raw cold fear wash over me when I see something that I'd missed, the battle having so effectively distracted me.

A tiny body floating just upon the surface of the lake, a cloud of crimson, human blood surrounding it.

Fleur notices as well, immediately shooting off towards the surface. I follow behind, unable to keep up with her as she rockets forward, her feet disappearing from sight as she breaches the surface at such a speed that she's launched out of the lake.

As I get closer, I recognize the sodden, curly brown hair of Hermione splayed out across the water, my mind racing.

What happened to her? And where the fuck is Viktor?

I breach the surface, gills shrinking away painfully as I readjust to the use of my lungs. Fleur has one arm wrapped around a spluttering Luna, with her other pressed to Hermione's chest. Cho treads water next to her, looking slightly panicked. My eyes widen as I catch sight of the damage done to Hermione, muscle peeking out from between a long, jagged tear that stretches from collarbone to navel, blood leaking from the gaping wound.

Ginny coughs loudly, a few drops of water spattering the surface as she glances around wildly. "What the hell is going on? Why are we in the lake? Is tha- Hermione!" Ginny shrieks, reaching forward and attempting to paddle towards the unconscious brunette.

"Wait a second. Wait damnit!" I shout, shaking her slightly. "We need to move, now. I don't know how long those two bastards are going to take, but if we don't get out of here we're fucked!"

They all turn, Cho gasping in fright when she sees the turmoil occurring just a couple hundred or so feet behind us, the two sea monsters having now breached the surface. I quickly notice that only five of the Hydra's heads are remaining, and push down the fear that threatens to overtake me.

"My God," Cho mutters, shaking hand held over her mouth. "That… has that always been in the lake?"

"No, the Ministry brought the nightmares in. Fleur, did you learn any of your new healing magic?" I ask, ignoring our usual secrecy and cutting straight to the point.

She shakes her head. "It's restoration magic, not healing," she replies, her voice hoarse. "I need grass, trees... plants to get her knitted up. Kelp won't do."

I pause for a moment, mind racing as I try to figure out what to do.

"Fleur, you need to get her back to land since you're the fastest out of the two of us. I'm going to make sure everyone gets back in one piece, alright?"

She looks up at me, jaw clenched tight. "I'll grab Cedric on the way... stay safe," she breathes, handing Luna to me and ducking under the water, her arms wrapping around Hermione's waist from underneath before she begins to race towards the stands, a burst of water splashing over me in her wake.

I wait until she's a good distance away, freezing a large section of the lake and quickly pulling the three of us on top of it, sighing in relief when it doesn't tip over under our weight.
"What's going on?" Ginny asks, teeth chattering as she clumsily pulls herself to her feet, nearly slipping on the ice. Luna stands beside her, arms wrapped around her chest as she shivers violently. Cho places a steadying hand on my back, both for her sake and mine as we stand shakily on the slightly shifting ice.

"The second task is what happened," I growl, quickly glancing behind me as I hear the Beisht-Kione's muted roar, watching in horrified silence as it tears the final head from the Hydra, a thick torrent of blood gushing out of the stump and spreading out across the water, painting it an oily green. "As you can see, they brought a bunch more monsters, and we're going to have to get the fuck out of here right this second."

I wave my wand as quickly as I can, casting a warming charm over all of us before conjuring boots over the three girls feet as well as my own, steel teeth lining the bottom so we don't slip and fall across the ice. With another flick, the boots are tied snugly.

"We're going to have to run, alright? Can you three do that for me?"

They all nod, their mouths open as they breathe heavily, thin, wavering puffs of condensation emanating from their mouths with every breath. I hit them with a mild calming charm, just enough so that they don't lose themselves.

"Well, let's get to it. I'll be right behind you every step of the way, alright?"

We start to move, and I freeze the water in an expanse in front of us, constantly providing a path for us to run. My eyes narrow in focus as I try to judge the distance between us and the stands, assuming it to be about three hundred feet.

Too damn far.

I push as much magic as possible into my next freezing spell, forcing the ice to spread out across the lake. I have to pause to catch my breath as a loud crackling fills my ears, ice forming rapidly and rushing forward like an avalanche, the frost going so far as to creep up and over the distant rocky shores.

I fall to my knees, waving the three girls off as they go to pick me up. "Just run, I'll be right behind you, alright?" I say, a tired smile making its way across my face.

Ginny and Luna open their mouths to argue, but are quickly interrupted by Cho. "We'll be waiting for you," she says, grabbing the two girls and pulling them along, the group sprinting towards the stands.

It takes me a moment to collect myself, but I pull myself back up to my feet, inhaling sharply as the path behind me erupts, ice peppering my back as I stumble and fall once more, quickly flipping over to see the gaping maw of the Beisht-Kione rushing towards me, the inside of its mouth and throat bristling with short, curled fangs.

I cast a bludgeoner at the ice next to me, launching me a good dozen feet away from the serpent as it strikes at empty air, burying its head through the ice and into the water, a high pitched screech echoing out of the hole and reverberating across the frozen lake.

"Run! Run god damnit!" I shout, throwing up a wall of ice between the girls and the serpent as I lay prone on the ground. I catch a momentary glimpse of Luna's wide, frightened eyes as the barrier climbs upwards, standing proud and tall.

Legs scraped, I jump back to my feet as quick as I can, jabbing my wand towards the pool of inky
green blood far to my left and twisting it. I pull, a shining emerald spear flying towards the Beisht-Kione and skewering it, sloughing off a line of tentacles in its wake like shaven hairs.

The monster pulls itself back up as I let the spear melt, instinctively knowing that I shouldn't leave any evidence of Blood Magics in the open as I prepare for the beast to lunge.

Looks like I was successful in getting its attention.

Its eyes spin like those of a chameleon, before locking on mine. They're tiny little things that rest in deep, wrinkled sockets, a shine in them speaking of hunger for both food and blood.

It roars, the sound itself cracking the ice and popping my eardrums. I grimace in pain as I feel the tiniest trickle of blood freezing against the cold air as it makes its way down the side of my neck.

Before I my regeneration even begins to kick in, it's lunged again, tentacles flaring out across its body and writhing madly.

I react instinctively, a burst of explosive hexes erupting from the end of my wand just as a sharp whirlwind is formed with my free hand, hundreds upon hundreds of tentacles falling from the shrieking creature like leaves from a tree, heavy thuds echoing as they drop to the ice.

I dive just as it collides with the ice next to me, already replacing the open water in its wake with more ground for me to work with, not wanting to be sequestered back into the water where I know I won't last more than two seconds.

A burst of Necromantic magic lances out from the tip of my wand and impacts the creature, rot and pus spreading out across it's hide like the ice across the lake. I grimace as the spell thins out, the creature's magic too strong for it to go any further.

It strikes the ice in front of me, launching me into the air. I shout in fright as I sail up and over the monster, crashing into the ground and wincing in pain as my left shoulder shatters from the impact, the shards of bone tearing through muscle.

I heard myself shout at least, that means my ears are back in action.

Panting, I stand back up, arm hanging uselessly from my side as I throw spell after spell after the Beisht-Kione as it slithers towards me, using its tentacles to grab the ice and pull itself forward faster than I can react.

Just as it's about to reach me, the creature roars once more as a massive, wintry sword slices deeply into its hide, nailing it to the ice below.

I blink at the sight of Dumbledore, as he waves his wand above his head, conjuring more blades and skewering the creature along its length.

Am I hallucinating?

"Don't let it get back up! What are you staring at me for?" he shouts.

I shake my head clear, drawing a line in the air with my wand, pulling it up towards the sky and watching as a trail of the creatures murky red blood follows with it. Gritting my teeth, I fashion the blood into a glaive, thinning out the point of the blade so that it's sharper than anything as I drop it down on the Beisht-Kione's head.

The serpent gives out one last, furious roar as its head is cloven from its body, blood gushing from
the neat stump and quickly forming a macabre puddle. I let the glaive melt, the weapon joining the growing pool of burgundy liquid.

I curse as I hold my arm, pushing magic into it and feeling as muscle and bone begin to settle into place. Dumbledore begins to draw closer, and I point my wand at him, my throbbing arm momentarily forgotten.

"Don't be a fool, I couldn't hurt you even if I wanted to," he states, waving his wand at me.

"Fuck!" I shout, as a sling is conjured around my arm and tied snugly around my body. "You could have warned me!"

"Well, it looks like I can hurt you, unintentionally at that," Dumbledore muses, looking on curiously.

I stare at him, mind racing. "Why did you help me?"

"You're not who I imagined you to be."

I blink, shaking my head once in disbelief. "What?"

"You're not a monster," he admits, brow furrowed. I continue to stare at him, completely incredulous as to what's happening.

Did I die? Am I in the Hospital Wing right now experiencing the fever dream of a lifetime?

"Not a monster," I say drily, my words heavily laced with disbelief. "So what, you finally believe me when I say that I have no interest in taking over the world? Or is this just another one of your ridiculous plans?"

Dumbledore sighs heavily, a forlorn look on his face. "I... I'm not sure that I can properly put into words an apology that even remotely covers the wrongs I've committed against you. I've done a lot of thinking these last few months, and after seeing you fight that creature so that young Miss Weasley, Lovegood, and Chang may survive... " He trails off, a wry chuckle escaping his lips. "I don't believe I've ever been so wrong in my entire life."

I gape at him, trying to simply compartmentalize all that he's just said.

"I guess selflessly throwing myself against another nightmare snake the size of a house is a way to make a good impression," I mutter, Dumbledore huffing goodnaturedly.

"So it seems."

I shake my head in disbelief. "Now of all times? Now? Is this some way to alleviate your guilt or something?"

"I can assume why you would come to that conclusion," Dumbledore states. "I still am... coming to terms, you could say, with the magic that you wield and the circumstances behind it. I don't believe that it's something that I can ever, or will ever be wholly comfortable with." He drags his hand through his frostbitten beard, tilting his head. "But, even after all that, I've come to the conclusion that your motives are not that of destruction, but that of peace. You truly do wish to see the end of Tom, don't you?"

I laugh, my shoulder still stinging a touch. "Oh my god... that... wow," I breathe. "So... what does this mean then? The enemy of my enemy is my friend?"
Dumbledore nods after a moment. "Yes, I believe that would be acceptable."

I snort. "Un-fucking-believable. Absolutely unbelievable." I point at him aggressively. "Don't think this gets you out of what you've done. The Stone, Lockhart, Ron, Sirius, me. You've fucked with a lot of people's lives, and you're going to answer for it once this is all over with."

He inclines his head in understanding. "Once more, I believe that would be acceptable. I… I have much to answer for."

I stride forward, walking past him. "Well, as long as you know it. Now, I want to know if Hermione's okay."

Dumbledore pulls up beside me, and I realize once more how damned tall the man is. "Miss Granger is hurt, but stable. She will make a full recovery."

I breathe a sigh of relief. "That's good." I take a quick glance back at the massive corpse of the Beisht-Kione, twenty feet of it stretched out over the ice floe.

"Viktor."

"Mister Krum… gave his life to save Miss Granger," Dumbledore says, answering my muttered question.

I grit my teeth. "This fucking competition is a travesty." I turn back to him. "Who's idea was it to bring in the creatures?"

"That would be Ludo Bagman, Barty Crouch, as well as Cornelius Fudge," he states.

I raise an eyebrow. "You know I'm going to kill all of them for this, right?"

He swallows heavily. "I… assumed as much."

"Are you going to do anything about it?"

"There's nothing I can do about it. You have me well and truly under control, Miss Potter."

I shrug my shoulders. "I know that, but you could always tell someone, make them go into hiding if I don't command you not to."

Dumbledore sighs heavily, looking much older than he normally does as he gazes off in the distance, the two of us slowly making our way towards the stands. "Another thing I've come to the conclusion of, is the fact that there's some people you can't, and shouldn't save."

I whistle. "The great pacifist has changed his mind?"

"I never have been a pacifist," he argues. "I fought and killed more than I could keep track of in the war against Grindelwald. It was because of that… so much senseless, needless slaughter, that I hoped to preserve as much life as possible during the next war."

"At the expense of others."

He nods solemnly. "Yes, at the expense of others, something I deeply regret."

I turn to him, slightly shocked. "Really?"

"Yes, really," he echoes. "Now, let's get you back and healed," he adds, inclining his head towards
my arm.

"Oh yeah, that," I say, running my hand over my shoulder and giving it one last burst of magic. "Fuck," I groan as the bone and muscle flip over one another, putting themselves back in their original place and knitting together.

"Incredibly impressive… is that the same magic that you used after our battle?"

"No, something different."

Dumbledore pauses for a moment, looking as if he's about to question me. "Regardless of the type of magic, it's still an impressive sight," he admits, deciding not to press the issue. "I never would have imagined that such a field would extend to the healing arts."

"I mean, it's not quite healing per se... but I guess that's close enough."

"I guess so."

I vanish the sling, rotating my newly healed shoulder and smiling happily at the result. My mobility isn't as good as it used to be, but that should be gone within the next few hours.

Magic is wonderful.

We walk in silence, slowly but surely making our way back to shore.

The stands are still crowded, but they're silent, a solemn hush having fallen over them as they recognize that only three champions have made it back, as opposed to the original four.

Nobody cheers as Dumbledore and I walk back onto solid ground. Instead they gape at us, at the magic we just so casually threw about. "Will there not be a fiasco because you helped me?"

"The task was over once all the hostages were retrieved. Fine print," he explains. "I took advantage of the fact once I realized it and went out to retrieve you."

"Retrieve? Is that what you call skewering a giant sea serpent to an ice floe?"

"What else would you call it?"

"Well, I sure as shit wouldn't call it rescuing," I gripe, smiling awkwardly as I catch sight of my family, as well as Fleur rushing towards me.

"I hope to talk to you soon, Helene," Dumbledore says as he walks away, leaving me to reassure them.

I'm quickly swept up in a crushing hug by Terra, my adoptive mother crying on my shoulder in relief. "We were so worried!" she gasps. "I'm so glad you're okay!"

"Mum, mum, I'm alright," I croak, the air being squeezed out of my lungs.

She lets go of me, wiping the tears from her eyes and sniffing quietly. "I know… I just… God, you had us so worried."

"I told you I'd come back safe," I say.

"How the hell do you use magic like that?" Daphne interrupts. "Where do you learn that kind of shit?"
"Daphne!" Terra chides.

"What? That was even more ridiculous than the first task! She just froze the whole lake!"

Tracey and Astoria stand next to Daphne, silent, yet the awe is still written all over them.

"I... practice, a lot," I explain, Astoria scoffing loudly.

"Practice? That's from practice? You're powerful Helene."

I shrug. " Haven't we always known that?"

Daphne jabs her finger towards the lake. "That is not normal."

"Like I said, since when have I been normal?"

She purses her lips, a deeply curious look in her eyes. "You're going to have to explain everything to me, hell, all of us someday. That just doesn't happen from training."

"Look, can we not do this here?" I exclaim, Daphne noticing the exhaustion in my voice as she quickly settles down, looking slightly ashamed.

"Yeah, I'm sorry, I just... I was so damn scared."

"It's okay," I say, setting my hand on her shoulder.

Fleur stands amidst everyone awkwardly, fingers laced together as she fidgets with her thumbs.

"Hey, get over here," I instruct, waving her over with one hand.

She smiles nervously, pulling me into a tight, fearful hug. "You have no idea how terrified I was," she whispers, her voice shaky. "After that... thing broke out of the ice and came after you... I couldn't leave Hermione to help, she was too injured."

"It's alright, you were saving her." I kiss her neck softly, her skin cold against my lips. "Just like you saved me at the bottom of the lake. And speaking of which, where is she? Did Pomfrey get to her?"

She snorts quietly. "Yes, her and Cedric were brought up to the Hospital wing. And... I guess so, I just hate that I couldn't do anything to help you."

"Hey, you did everything you could," I argue, pulling back and placing my hand on her cheek. "Let's get out of here, okay?"

She nods, and I turn to my family. "Hey, I'm sorry, but I... we, need to go and rest. Today has been... well, it's been a little fucked up," I say pointing towards the lake.

"It's okay, you go and do what you need to. We can walk you in," Octavius says, squeezing my shoulder.

"Thanks dad."

We all start to walk back to the castle, ignoring the crowds as we trek up the frosty grounds.

"Fleur," I say, after a few minutes. "Did you hear about-"

"Viktor? Yes, I did." She exhales softly, before biting down on her cheeks. "He... he shouldn't have
died. We could have stopped him."

"We could have," I admit. "We made a mistake, a massive one, and next time something like that happens, we will stop them."

She gets a sharp glint in her eyes, equal parts grief and anger. "We will."

I smile sadly at her. "Let's get out of here."
Hermione's chest rises laboriously, her pale skin almost blending in with the hospital sheets, blanched as they are. I can picture in my mind the knotted mess of scar tissue that runs from her shoulder to her belly, straining against the pull of her lungs. Scar tissue that can't be healed, not fully at least, the Beisht-Kione's fell form reflecting the magic that courses through it.

Fleur and I did our best for Hermione – her yesterday, and me this morning – and while it will fade somewhat, she'll still bear a mark of the second tasks happenings for the rest of her life.

I find myself both thankful and annoyed that my well-used healing spells have met their match in the form of a cosmetic change. It lets me know they're not perfect, but it also lets me know that I'll have to abuse concealment charms if I manage to injure myself horrifically in the future.

A warm hand settles on my shoulder and I look up, offering a faltering smile to Fleur as she pulls up next to me, somehow knowing where I'd be without me telling her.

I didn't realize I was so predictable.

"Did you rest well?" I ask, kissing her on the cheek and laying my head on her arm, letting my eyes rest for a moment.

"Oui, I did," she replies, her brow furrowing a touch. "When did you wake up?"

I scratch the back of my head, shrugging tiredly. "Around six-ish? Maybe earlier?"

Fleur curses under her breath. "Helene."

"Hey, I know, I know." I put my hands up in defeat. "I just couldn't sleep, worrying about Hermione," I explain, gesturing to my unconscious friend.

My closest friend.

"I understand," Fleur sighs, rubbing her forehead. "Promise to get some rest later? Take a nap?"

I nod. "Promise."

She kisses the top of my head, and I find myself wondering if my hair scratches her chin.

My train of thought is quickly derailed as Hermione begins to stir, an almost imperceptible moan snaking its way out of her mouth, only noticeable due to my ritual enhanced senses.

"Hermione? Hey, you there?" I whisper, laying a hand on her arm.

"I'll get Madam Pomfrey," Fleur mutters, silently getting out of her chair.

"Thank you," I say, keeping watch on Hermione in the probable case of her leaping out of bed in a panic, what with her having passed out the other day due to severe trauma.
Her lips move slowly, silent gibberish spoken in the daze of a half-dream, her eyelids fluffering languidly as she returns to the land of the living bit by bit.

Hermione groans unintelligibly, shoulders quivering as she attempts to sit up.

I place a hand on her shoulder, making sure to keep it away from her injury. "Hey, you've gotta' stay in bed, alright Hermione? Madam Pomfrey would be in a tiff if she caught you wandering around the Hospital Wing."

"H- hospital Wing?" she croaks, eyes cracking open just a sliver. "What?"

"You were badly injured during the second task. Madame Pomfrey should be here in just a second to check up on you," I explain.

She nods dazedly as she settles back into bed, a frown crossing her features.

I hear the quiet shuffle of footsteps behind me and turn to see Fleur returning with Madame Pomfrey by her side.

"Thank you for fetching me dears," she says in greeting, her face held in its usual pinched expression. She casts her wand over Hermione, a myriad of different lights blinking away at the tip of it as she checks her over, nodding in approval at whatever information she receives.

With a flick of her wrist, she summons a small crystal vial full of a thin, burgundy liquid. She twists the top off with a slight pop, handing the vial to Hermione. "Please drink this Miss Granger."

Hermione takes the vial, raising it to her lips with pale fingers, weakly gulping down the potion. She grimaces at the taste, screwing her eyes shut as she tosses the rest of it back, handing the vial back to Madame Pomfrey with a shake of her head.

"Well, that sure woke me up," she mutters, eyes now fully open yet still looking slightly bleary.

"I've always said that blood-replenishers are often quite a bit more effective than a cuppa," Pomfrey says jokingly, glancing towards me. "Has Miss Potter told you why you're here?"

Hermione shakes her head. "Not really, just that I was injured during the second task."

She tuts quietly, a low quiet sigh escaping her. "What do you remember of the other day?"

"I… don't remember much. I was in the lake." She raises her hand and presses it to her shoulder in remembrance, rubbing slightly. She winces in pain at the contact. "My chest hurt, and I was confused. I- I just remember Viktor screaming something in Bulgarian before he pushed me away." She looks up at us, fear in her eyes. "W- where's Viktor?"

Madame Pomfrey's shoulders rise and fall as she sighs, a drawn look on her face. "Miss Granger… there's no easy way to say this, but Mister Krum didn't make it."

Hermione stares at Madame Pomfrey unblinkingly, eyes losing focus as her gaze bores through and past her, off into space. "He… he's dead?" she whispers, lips slightly parted and jaw hanging loose.

"Yes, Miss Granger," she confirms, biting her lip. "I'm so sorry."

Hermione swallows heavily, throat bobbing as her eyes begin to flicker with tears. "Oh," she whispers, sounding completely and utterly lost.

I sit there, heart breaking at the sight of Hermione's world crumbling before her very eyes. The death
of a friend – maybe something even closer – is never easy to deal with. Even worse when it's the first.

"Hey," I say, quietly. The only sign I've caught Hermione's attention is the brief flicker of her eyelids. "I'm here for you." I gesture to Fleur, who's face is etched with concern. "We're here for you. If you need anything, anything at all, just ask. You need to chat at four in the morning? Wake me up any time, alright?"

She nods shakily, tears welling up at the corners of her eyes, and just like a switch has been flipped, she breaks down, sobbing as she reaches forward and latches on to me, face buried in my chest.

I hum tunelessly as I rub her back, holding her close. "I'm right here Hermione. Right here."

She mutters something unintelligible, the words lost in the fabric of my jumper as they mingle with tears.

Madame Pomfrey pats my shoulder as she gets up. "I'm going to head back to my office, please don't hesitate to call me if you need me."

I nod in thanks, Hermione's frizzy curls scratching at my cheek.

Hermione says something again, and I turn back to her. "Sorry, I didn't hear you."

She hiccups loudly, pulling her head back. "C- can you do…" she looks past me, waiting for Pomfrey to leave. As soon as her office door shuts, Hermione has her hands buried in my jumper, fistfuls of cotton knotted in her tight grasp. "Can you b- bring him back?"

My eyes well up with tears at the sight of her, how broken she looks. "I… I'm sorry Hermione, I can't."

"Why!?" she shouts. She shuts her eyes tight, letting out a long slow breath, before whispering, "Why not?"

I grimace, not really sure of how to tell her that there's not enough of Viktor left for me to bring back.

"Why?"

"He was eaten by the Hydra," I blurt, immediately regretting my decision. It wouldn't take anything at all for her to connect the dots between eaten by a Hydra, and the most corrosive stomach acids known to the magical world. "I'm sorry, I just- I couldn't even if I tried. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry, but there's nothing I can do."

She coughs, almost choking as she does so. "Can… can I be left alone, please?" she asks, eyes downcast, a fist pressed to her mouth. "I need some time to think."

I sigh quietly, but acquiesce, squeezing her shoulder once as I let her go. "I'll come back around before dinner if you're not up and out yet, alright?"

She nods, laying her hands across her lap and staring at them. "Thank you," she whispers.

"There's no need to thank me," I say, smiling weakly at her. "I'll always be here for you, yeah? Sisters have to stick together."

Hermione lets out a puff of air, tilting her head as she looks back up at me, tears staining her face. "Sisters, huh?"
My mouth opens and closes as I wonder what to say, worried that I've overstepped my bounds.

I don't have to worry for long though, as Hermione makes an odd choking noise that I quickly realize is a laugh.

"You look so worried," she chuckles morosely. "It's... I'm flattered that you consider me your sister. If it wasn't for my-," she coughs, rubbing her throat before sniffing loudly. "My... well, I consider you the same."

I pause for a moment, wondering whether I should question her on her interrupted line of thought, before deciding better. "Glad to hear I haven't made an absolute fool of myself," I say, a dry laugh escaping my throat. "We'll uh- we'll leave you to it."

Fleur and I head out, and I turn back once more at the door to get a look at Hermione and make sure she's alright.

Well, as close to alright as she can be.

I catch a glimpse of her lying down, hands held over her eyes as she sobs quietly. It takes everything in me not to rush back and just try to be there for her, but I know that when Hermione says she wants space, she wants space.

I'll do my best not to suffocate her, but I won't let her deal with this all on her own.

"Do you think she'll be alright?" Fleur whispers.

I shrug. "It's going to take her time, but Hermione's stronger than most."

She nods, lips pursed. "This tournament is..." she shakes her head, huffing quietly. "I can't put into words how much I hate it, hate how it killed Viktor, how it killed all those Merpeople..."

I wrap one arm around her shoulders, squeezing lightly. "We've got a list of those responsible," I remind her.

Fleur's normally soft features harden, her expression forming into something indomitable. "And they'll all pay for what they've allowed to happen," she vows.

"And I'll be right there with you," I add, nodding resolutely.

I'm sure as I can be when I say that Bagman, Crouch, and Fudge better be prepared for a world of pain. Because whatever they've done to me, to Hermione, to Viktor... they're going to be paid back tenfold and change.

-::-

Black banners hang from the ceiling once more, flat and terribly conspicuous. Twisted, snarling gargoyles bearing the faces of the founder's beasts peek out from between the dark cloth. The Hall is silent, unbearably so, every student bearing the weight and understanding of the death of one they praised as Champion.

I lace my fingers together, resting them on the table in front of me as I look up to the front of the room, Dumbledore standing tall, yet bowed. He grasps the sides of his usual, winged podium, crooked knuckles standing in sharp relief against the weathered brass.

"It saddens me deeply to find us here once more, with black hanging from our ceilings," Dumbledore
states, his head raised and tilted slightly as he looks up and onwards.

He clears his throat, blinking hard. "Just yesterday, tragedy befell us here at Hogwarts. Viktor Krum could easily be described as a man who accomplished very much in very little time. He was a student to look up to, and a symbol to strive towards."

"While Viktor was no stranger to achievement, I would like to instead focus on him, and who he was as a person." Dumbledore sweeps his hand back, gesturing towards the staff table. "To that end I would like to invite Igor Karkaroff to the stage."

I watch as Karkaroff stands tall, cocking his neck as he walks towards the stage. But I can't help but notice that there seems to be a weight about him. The way his head bows just so slightly, or how his beard is even more unkempt than normal.

"Looks like he really is capable of caring," I whisper to myself, feeling slightly torn to realize that while he's by no means a good person, he's just as human as I, or anyone else is.

Karkaroff nods to Dumbledore as he takes the stage, wrapping his fingers around the sides of the podium and holding tight. "It is no secret to anyone that Viktor was my favourite student," he begins, his gruff voice sounding oddly soft as it carries across the Hall. "I saw a spark in him when he first set foot inside Durmstrang, something to be nurtured and fed." He pounds his fist on the top of the podium. "Viktor was great, let there be no mistake about that. But, all of you should not just remember him for his abilities as a seeker, or his prodigious magical talent. While that is what he was famous for, he was so much more than that."

He slams his hand once more, voice raising as he continues. "Viktor was resolute, one of the few people I've met in this world who knew who he was and what he wanted, and was unashamed to live his life as himself. Remember Viktor for what he was and what he stood for and learn from him. Strive to be the best you can be in all things, and never settle for less than that." He raises his chin, looking off towards the sky. "Viktor, I will always be proud of you."

I'm almost moved to clap as Karkaroff bows his head, briskly marching back to his seat with his jaw clenched and chin set forward stubbornly, a glint in his eyes.

"Thank you, Igor," Dumbledore says as he reclaims the stage. "To all who wish to attend, a public service will be held this next Saturday in Viktor's hometown of Bansko. Please speak to your Head of House – or Headmaster or Headmistress for our visiting students – to request permission to attend."

With a sweep of his hands and a short bow, food appears on the tables. By the look of it, most of the food would be standard Durmstrang fare; thick soups, cabbage rolls, grilled meat, salads, and casseroles.

Homely and delicious.

I fill up my plate, a cornucopia of different foods that I never would have thought would come from the Balkans piling up before me. I find myself humming as I bite into a soft pepper stuffed with cheese and rice, the sweet vegetable bursting as my teeth sink into it.

As soon as I find myself enjoying the meal, that enjoyment twists into guilt, shame building up inside me for enjoying something when the mood in the air is so deeply sorrowful. I stare listlessly at the remainder of the pepper dangling from my fork, its insides dripping thickly onto the plate, my appetite lost.
With a sigh, I place the rest in my mouth, chewing slowly. What was just a second ago filled to the brim with flavour is now bland and tasteless, the texture that of slime and gristle.

Grimacing, I wash it down with cold water before pushing my plate away.

"Not hungry?" Fleur asks, looking as conflicted as I am.

I shake my head. "Haven't got much of an appetite," I say, the realization that Viktor is dead suddenly bearing down on me. I click my tongue. "We should have done something."

Fleur clenches her jaw, lips parted. "We didn't know."

"We still should have done something."

She turns her head towards me, teeth gritted. "You think I don't understand that? I made the decision as much as you did to not chase after him immediately."

I open my mouth, before shaking my head, guilt washing over me. "Fuck. I'm sorry, it's just so-"

"So awful."

I nod succinctly. "Yeah."

Fleur places her hand over mine, understanding in her eyes. "I tend to forget that you haven't dealt with the death of others in the way that I have… that your previous experiences don't line up with mine and the war."

I frown. "Orphan, remember?"

She shakes her head. "No, that's not what I mean." She purses her lips, looking down slightly. "You've never really had someone close to you die apart from Ron. You're not used to the present sense of death, it's always been something that happened a long time ago. There's a large difference between the two."

"I… yeah, I guess that makes sense," I concede, shrugging slightly.

She takes my hand with both of hers, bringing it up to her lips and kissing it softly. "What you said to Hermione goes for me too. If you need to talk to someone, talk to me, okay?"

I let out a puff of air, something neither close enough to a laugh or a sigh to be considered as such. "Thank you."

Fleur smiles, the expression not quite reaching her eyes as she squeezes my hands one last time before letting go, returning to her meal. "Any time."

I look back to my own plate with resignation. I pick through it at a sedate pace, taking a bite here and there. Not enough to fill up, but enough to get by.

Before I know it, the meal is over and I'm looking at an empty table, hands still poised over where my plate was and gripping nothing but air.

That's vaguely unnerving.

I get out of my seat, flinching when I hear someone clear their throat behind me. I turn around to see Dumbledore standing over me, a tired look on his face.
"Miss Potter… would I be able to speak with you in my office?" he asks, glancing up towards Fleur for a moment before his eyes flick back to me.

I frown. "About?"

"About the other day," he explains. "I'd like to speak about it more in depth."

I pause for a moment. "I'll meet you there," I say. "I've just got to walk Fleur back to the carriage."

He bows his head a touch. "I'll wait for you in my office then."

Fleur and I watch him leave the Hall, waiting for the rest of the crowd to leave. Once we're left amongst the last few stragglers I take Fleur's hand.

We walk in companionable silence, feeling no need to speak anymore after such a long day. The quiet carries over to the night as we step outside, the only sound that of us treading over melted snow, the slight crunch as the slush compacts and mixes with the mud and grass underneath.

"Sorry I'm so quiet," I apologize, having almost forgotten that I have a walking partner.

She smiles almost crookedly at me. "It's alright," she says, squeezing my hand. "We both have a lot on our minds."

"Thanks for being so understanding."

She shakes her head, pressing one hand to my cheek. "There's no need to thank me," she denies, kissing me softly on the cheek as I move to protest.

I sigh as the carriage comes into sight, not wanting to let her go.

I pull Fleur into a hug, burrowing my head underneath her chin and breathing in everything that makes Fleur, Fleur. Funnily enough, she doesn't really smell of flowers but instead of dark chocolate and citrus.

"I…"

I blink, realizing that those three fated words are on the tip of my tongue, and I don't know if I'm quite ready to say it.

I still don't think I'm quite capable of it.

"Thank you anyways," I murmur.

Fleur kisses me on the top of the head. "You're much too polite for your own good," she says jokingly. "It's adorable."

I bury my face even deeper in her shoulder, unused to compliments.

"And that is even more adorable."

"God damnit," I laugh.

"God damn what?"

"You, you idiot," I say, kissing her neck.
"Sweet dreams ma dulcinée, I hope your chat with Dumbledore goes smoothly. Try not to kill him again, yes?"

"Hush you." I kiss her once again, more softly this time. "Sleep well. I'll see you at breakfast," I say, watching as she climbs back into the carriage and gives me one last wave goodbye.

I pull my robes tight across my chest as I trek back towards the castle, a sticking charm on my shoes keeping me from slipping over patches of ice and slush.

Funny how life just hits you like this.

I was so sure that I would come out of the Tri-Wizard Tournament better than before, almost naïve enough to hope that it would be nothing more than a quick jaunt down memory lane before a very well-to-do and impressive duel with Voldemort culminating into a happily ever after.

I sigh as Hogwarts grows closer and closer, my breath coming out as a visible puff of smoky translucent air, disappearing in a whirl as it's caught up by one of the many winds that cut across the castle grounds.

Rubbing my hands together, I stride up towards the front doors, pushing one of the two open, the ancient carvings slick underneath my fingers. I close my eyes as the warm air washes over me.

Now that I think of it, it's odd that while I'm not really bothered by the cold as much as I once was, but I find myself craving warmth. Life is different when you're half dead.

Legs still somewhat frozen, I slowly make my way up the stairs and off towards Dumbledore's office, the gargoyle shuffling out of my way as soon as I come into sight. The spiral staircase twists in a familiar manner, almost climbing in on itself as I ascend.

"Please, come in," I hear as I stand in front of the door, twisting the latch and allowing myself entrance.

Dumbledore sits behind his desk, a steaming kettle placed just to his left and two mugs set on opposing sides of the table.

I sit down, taking a sip from the proffered tea, enjoying the bittersweet tang as the nearly scalding liquid spills over my tongue. Setting the cup down, I look up at my singular audience.

Well... he could be better described as an interrogation suspect, sans overly-bright headlamp directed right into his face.

"The first thing I'd like to ask, is why in the hell were hostages still involved in the second task?"

Dumbledore draws one hand over his brow, showing every single bit of his one hundred and thirteen years in that lone gesture. He looks more drawn than I've ever seen him, like all his shortcomings and misdeeds have caught up with him all at once and his mind and body can't quite handle the onslaught of shame and guilt that is suddenly bearing down on him.

At least, I imagine he's swamped in shame and guilt, otherwise he's a better actor than Sirius and Crouch Jr. combined.

"I tried to do everything I could, but there was no way for me to get around Bagman and the rest of the panel. They were adamant about the hostages being involved, and my hands were tied."

"Your hands were tied?" I hiss through gritted teeth, leaning forward slightly. "Did you
do anything to keep the hostages safe?"

Dumbledore frowns, as if my question is completely and utterly ridiculous. "Of course I did," he states, sounding a bit offended. "I personally cast a layer of protections over each and every hostage. If I hadn't have done such, Miss Granger would not be with us today."

With a sigh I lean back into my chair, pinching the bridge of my nose. "Sorry, I just… I'm very worried about her."

"That's completely understandable… and my apologies for not keeping you up to date on the situation with the second task," Dumbledore concedes.

I rub my eyes, resting my head on one fist. "So… why now?"

Dumbledore tilts his head. "Like I said the other day Miss Potter, I've come to realize that you're not the monster I believed you to be."

"No, no. That's not what I'm asking. Why now?" I ask, punctuating each word that comes out of my mouth with a tap on his desk. "You've obviously been wrestling with this for a while, so why is it now that you change your mind? Why is it now that you've suddenly decided to throw in your chips with me?"

He lets out a long, drawn out sigh. "Because I needed to be sure."

"Just as I was sure that you were the kind, benevolent leader you made yourself out to be?"

I watch as Dumbledore visibly holds back from speaking, the slightest pinch of his bottom lip telling me that he's biting down the words he wants to so badly say. I find myself almost smirking at his reaction, but instead settle my face into a stony blank.

There's no need for me to behave like a child when Dumbledore is finally here in front of me admitting his wrongs.

"You use people, Dumbledore. I'm glad that you finally recognize what you've done, and that you want to do something about it, but don't expect me to behave any differently around you or to treat you kindly." I jab my finger towards him in frustration and no small amount of spite. "You ignored my parents will and had me placed with the Dursleys, as opposed to the Longbottom, Bones, or Greengrass families. You willingly left me there, and never checked up on me. Not once. In addition to that, once I'd finally arrived at Hogwarts you allowed the most asinine, ridiculously unsafe things to occur. Why in the hell would you bring the Philosophers Stone to a school of all places? Knowing that Voldemort isn't as dead as the world believes him to be?" I clench my jaw, nausea washing over me. "Not to mention the… sickening things that Lockhart committed under your nose."

Dumbledore bows his head, an almost palpable aura of regret about him. "That…" he pauses. "My intention was never to-"

I interrupt him, my upper lip curled in contempt. "But, that's the problem. Intention. Good intentions, bad intentions, it doesn't matter what they were. No one does something thinking they're wrong. That's just insanity." I let out a long, slow breath, calming myself. "Just… let me finish speaking, alright?"

Dumbledore nods sullenly, so I continue. "Everything I've done, that you've done… hell- even what Voldemort has done, we've all done with the idea in mind that we're doing the right thing." I laugh drily, the harsh sound odd coming from the body of a teenage girl. "For all I know, I'm doing the wrong thing. For all I know, I'm the villain of someone else's story. But… that's not really the point.
The point is, is that even when you thought you were doing the right thing, you were still willfully ignorant of what happened around you. That's not the sign of a man who thinks that what he's doing is right."

He replies with a sardonic chuckle of his own, his voice cracking. "I've always thought that I was the one best responsible to make the hard decisions… the ones that no one else wanted to make. It was hard not to when that was the crown that Britain foisted upon me." Dumbledore glances at Fawkes' empty perch, a look of resignation flitting over him. "I was always considered powerful. Gifted. My years at Hogwarts, my years travelling after graduation… and of course, my time with Gellert. Throughout all of it, I was always told that I was special. A wizard that comes along once in a lifetime, if that."

I sit still, silent, and allow him to continue. Dumbledore's expression morphs from sadness to something more bitter. The way his bottom lip quivers, or his eyes harden. A quiet whistle escapes him as he sucks air through his teeth, shaking his head. "Then, my sister was killed. Killed in some ridiculous spat between two power hungry young men with delusions of grandeur."

He pauses, swallowing heavily as his eyes flicker with tears. "I… I allowed that to happen. Me. Ariana died, was murdered, and I was the only one responsible for it. Something in me cracked and left me broken, something deep inside me drove me into a rage, an anger and fervor so thick and all encompassing that I didn't come out of it until I was standing over the bloodied, unconscious form of Gellert, with nothing but waste and death in my wake."

"I almost fell to pieces after that. The man who was once my lover, confidante… my closest friend, having become the maniacal, genocidal monster that the world will forever remember him as, and I couldn't help but think that, just maybe, that was my fault as well." Dumbledore scoffs, jaw clenched as he looks on blankly, momentarily lost in thought. He blinks a few times, shaking the daze from his head. "But the world revered me. They revered me for all that I'd done… the blood that I'd spilled. The countless, countless lives that I'd cut down like so many blades of grass." He turns towards me, locking eyes. "It's estimated that I'd killed nearly four thousand men during the war. Four thousand people, and just over a quarter of that magical. Those are the reserved estimates. I killed them, put them down regardless of whether they were conscripted, coerced, or willing participants of Gellert's insane pursuit of world conquest."

Dumbledore raises his hands above his head in a facsimile of cheering, his face twisted into something terrible. "The great Albus Dumbledore! How they sung my praises! Countless people lining the streets as I ventured back home. Cavalcades as far as the eye could see, cheering me on whether they knew it or not. I'd ended a war that encompassed both the magical and non-magical world, and I was found wanting. I'd spread a trail of death from Normandy to Berlin in some sort of twisted search for meaning. Some form of damnation or atonement to be made for my crimes, and instead I tallied them up even further."

I watch as Dumbledore weaves his story, the raw despair that laces itself into every word spoken or gesture made by the normally unaffable man, and I may be just beginning to understand who he is as a person.

A scared old man.

A man who's seen so much death and pain in his long, long life that he began to distance himself morally, whether he knew it or not. To submerge himself in Machiavellian schemes, all equally convoluted and ultimately ill-purposed, each one intended to fix something, to just try and make the world a better place.

"After that, I returned to Hogwarts. I took up the post as Headmaster, I took up the post as Chief
Warlock, and I took up the post as Supreme Mugwump, and... you know what, Miss Potter?"

I tilt my head curiously. "What?"

"I've hated every last second of it. Every minute spent working with eels and snakes bearing the face of men, fools and swindlers that sought to drain every drop of wealth and happiness from those less fortunate than them. But, I did it because I thought I knew best, because it's the only thing I've ever known." Dumbledore laughs, truly laughs. A great, loud thing that almost shakes the room, and I feel the catharsis from it, watching as the weight leaves his shoulders. "Good God... do you realize how long I've wanted to tell someone that?"

I frown, pretending to tick the time off on my fingers. "About fifty odd years?"

He snorts. "Give or take, yes." Dumbledore sighs, the sound less of grief, and more of acceptance. "So, I dealt with the Wizengamot and the Confederation. A host of backstabbers all riding on the coattails of their fathers, who did the same before them. And then one day, word came about of the rise of a new Dark Lord, one within Britain's borders no less. Voldemort... Tom Riddle, whatever one would like to call him. A student that – thanks to you – I now understand the immense mistakes I made in dealing with."

Just as quickly as Dumbledore had cheered up, his face crumples back into a forlorn expression. "But once the war picked up and the country called to me once more to save them, I was terrified. I knew it was Tom, I knew that he'd sunk low, lower than any when it came to his depraved pursuit of power. I knew that I'd have to take up the mantle in the fight against yet another Dark Lord, but the deaths that were wrought at my hand so many years ago now stayed it. I couldn't... wouldn't bring myself to take another life. I..."

Dumbledore lets out a choking cough, his eyes glistening. "I was so scared of the power I wielded, how easy it would be to become a monster, how I nearly became a monster and only swayed from that path after my sister died at my own, foolish hands." He drums his fingers over his desk, before flicking his wand and summoning a tumbler and a small decanter containing a deep, amber liquor. He pours himself two fingers, pausing, before pouring himself one more.

Dumbledore sips at the drink, closing his eyes and savouring it, allowing the liquor to wash away his fears and pain. "So, I went to war as a pacifist, a foolish endeavour at best and insanity at its worst. Worse yet, I told those following me, commanded them to not meet those they fought with the same force." He shakes his head, taking another, long sip. "Of course, many of them died. Benjy, Gideon and Fabian, Marlene, Dorcas... they all died because they looked up to me as some sort of paragon, as if the war crimes I'd committed would lead them to victory, and I ordered them to not harm the Death Eaters who would just as happily kill them as they would attend a play."

He downs the rest of his drink, hand trembling slightly as the glass meets his lips. A blur signals the tumbler being slammed into the table, the magically reinforced glass holding up underneath Dumbledore's sudden bout of temper. "The war carried on, just as it always does. People get used to it, somehow, in their own strange way. They become accustomed to routine, even if that routine is more parts terror than it is joy or complacence. I did as well. War was familiar to me, it was something I knew intimately, and I found myself quite shocked when a doddering con-woman began to tremble and shake, and a true, really, really true prophecy spilled from her lips."

Dumbledore tips his empty glass towards me in recognition. "I jumped at the chance... and how couldn't I? A child... a child, prophesied to destroy the Dark Lord I'd pitted myself against for a decade. I thought that you would be the ticket, the way out of all the misery that seems to follow me
and the rest of the world." He looks up at me, his expression that of a lecturer, the teacher he once was long ago before the wars tore his psyche into a hundred little pieces. "Prophecies are… fickle at best, that's a cut and dry fact. But yours… yours was something special. I could feel it in the magic in the air, the way Sybill's eyes bled the incorporeal substance as she was forced to watch and recite a view that could be likened to the destruction of Sodom."

I frown, wondering why Death would gloss over something so monumental as that. I mean, I guess most things are inconsequential to an immortal, omnipotent being, but he's always been so… personable? He seems so human, and always has, even when I first met him. Yes, he's an asshole, but I don't find it surprising that Death, of all the gods, is a prick.

"No wonder Death was so interested in me," I say, tapping out a silent beat on the armrest and attempting to settle my mind. "He told me that my prophecy was ordained by Fate herself."

Dumbledore whistles quietly, and I can't help but chuckle at his reaction. He arches one eyebrow, very evidently aware of the somewhat childish action. "The majority of prophecies are simple glimpses into the future that are woven into spoken form… but it makes sense that yours was one given by Fate, if such a being could exist, of course."

"So… why the Dursleys then?"

He bows his head at that, shame washing over him. "I never could have imagined that you'd have been treated the way you were. Yes, I believed that they would never raise you with the same comforts the would raise their own flesh and blood son with, but never, ever in my many years have I heard of the type abuse they wrought upon you."

I frown, my stagnant blood boiling. "What do you mean by that?"

Dumbledore puts up his hands placatingly. "Abuse the type you suffered is so incredibly rare in the magical world that I didn't think it to truly exist until but a decade or two ago."

I open my mouth to speak, but this time Dumbledore interrupts me.

"Magic acts as a thread of sorts, tying the life and love of parent and child together, making it all but impossible for a magical parent to treat their child as the Dursleys treated you. It's simply not doable, as their magic itself would prevent them from even contemplating such a thing, let alone committing it." Dumbledore runs his fingers through his beard, his moustache bristling.

"Your family-," Dumbledore clicks his tongue, quickly correcting himself. "No, relatives... they didn't bear that same magic, and I was foolish to assume that they were incapable of what they did to you. I was too eager to assume the best in people, and too afraid to check in the case that I was wrong."

I grit my teeth, shutting my eyes tight and trying to wrestle with the information Dumbledore has given me. "Everything I suffered through… the awful, awful words, the cuffs upside the head that no six-year-old should take, the belting that occurred every time Vernon had something go wrong at work… all of that was because of one, simple little oversight, and your refusal to face up to the chance you were wrong?"

"Y- yes… yes it did."

"You… you-"

I bite my tongue, clenching one hand into a fist and pressing it to my mouth. "What about Lockhart? Are magicals incapable of rape too?" I spit, my words like venom.
"No, no they are not," he utters, lips pursed. "I… I am so, so terribly sorry that such a horrific thing happened to you when it should have been my job to protect you. I allowed myself to assume everything was well in the world, when I better than anyone should understand that the opposite is much more likely."

I wave my hand angrily, pushing down the urge to curse the man in front of me. "Sorry doesn't really cut it, Albus. I'd also like to bring up that you never answered my question. Why the Dursleys?"

"Because I was worried that you would turn out like me… like Gellert or Tom." He bites his cheek, moustache quirking upwards. "I was still… very focused on the idea of pacifism, and to be quite honest, it's only now that I've begun to realize how truly wrong I was. But, in some twisted way, I thought that you being raised in an even mix of both good and bad, neither spoiled nor forgotten, that you would break the mould of all the most powerful wizards I had ever known."

I draw my hand over my mouth, shaking my head. "So, it was all some sort of experiment?"

"No! No! Nothing of the sort!" Dumbledore argues, hands raised. "I never intended to treat you as something so animal, like an object to be studied and twisted to ease my worried mind."

He pinches the bridge of his long, crooked nose, his long hair falling forward and shrouding his face. "Nothing I ever do, nothing, will ever return what was taken from you. What I can do is try my best to aid you in your fight against Voldemort. In that, I will fight on your terms instead of my own." He raises his head, locking eyes with mine as he sets his wand out on the table in front of him, before laying his hands beside it in surrender. "My wand is yours to call on as you see fit."

I stare at him, in awe of the gesture he's just made.

To give lay down your wand, your wand, the one tool that sets magicals apart from their less gifted brethren, has got to be one of the most significant gestures of trust one can make in the magical world. Sure, it's somewhat lessened by the fact that Dumbledore is well under my thumb, but for a man of his age and stature to do such a thing?

It would be like King Arthur prostrating himself before a serf.

"I don't believe I'll ever trust you," I mutter, clenching one fist and looking down at it with lips pursed. "I'll never look at you the same way I once did… a grandfather, and one of the closest things I had to family in what was a miserable life." Dumbledore flinches visibly, his face drawn. "But, that doesn't mean that I will turn you away, because you are trying to make a difference, both in the way you act, and in your effort to truly make amends."

I take his wand, one that I assume was his before he won Death's own. I run my fingers over it, the wood smooth and aged. Holly, deep and rich, just like my own, albeit lesser-used wand.

I flip it over, handle forward, and hold it towards him. "I may never trust you, but that doesn't mean that I'd be so foolish as to ignore your help, nor spend so long a time trying to push you to realize the wrongs you've committed just to turn you away when you truly try to make reconciliations."

He grasps the wand – gently removing it from my hand – and nods once. "Thank you."

"No need to thank me, Albus." I hesitate, breath hitching. "Thank you. For trying to make a difference when most would find it pointless to do so."

He smiles at me, not the smile that an educator directs towards their pupil, nor the one that a politician directs towards one of their many subjects.
No, it's a smile of peers. A smile that tells me that Albus Dumbledore, one of the most accomplished mages of our time, deems me someone worth following.
A week or two has passed since the second task, and life has slowly begun to move on.

Hermione is… adjusting. She's not the girl I knew anymore, not after what she's gone through, and only time will tell if the changes in her personality will be for better or for worse. The mood about her is often cool. Not to the extreme, but quite cold nonetheless.

I've done my best to be there for her, but it seems she grieves more differently than I do. Where I find it necessary to be around others, she requires seclusion, and I'm finding it hard to balance helping her while not coming across as stiflingly overbearing.

Ginny and Luna are both affected, although less so, and Cho… Cho I don't know about. She's spent her time since latched onto Cedric.

Not the healthiest way of coming to terms with your near death, but she's only fifteen.

More often than not Luna seems to be caught up in her own world, that faraway look in her eyes seeming ever more distant. Ginny on the other hand is more aggressive, always making her presence known via jokes and tales of nothing.

Their methods of coping make me really understand how different I am from other people, how I can walk away from a two-tonne sea monster and the death of a friend with my worries shadowed behind indifference and burgeoning acceptance.

Fleur is the same in that regard. Stoic is the word I would use to describe us.

We're not unfeeling – far from it – but our familiarity with death and tragedy has made us a bit hardier when it comes to this sort of circumstance.

It does help when we've sequestered ourselves for a few moments each day in the hopes of figuring out where in the hell Ludo Bagman lives.

The man has evidently done well to hide himself away from loan sharks and other unfavourable persons.

It's not as if we can ask around about the mans address and then kill him a few days later. If anything screams, 'yes, we're the ones who killed him,' that does.

We've relegated ourselves to attempting to put together where both he and Fudge live, choosing to go after the easier target first. That, and I'd prefer not to sabotage the already abysmally inefficient Ministry a couple of months before war may break out.

As much as I detest Fudge, killing him now will only make things more difficult if I don't manage to put Voldemort down during the third task. And it's not like he's going anywhere, the man would do
his damndest to hold onto his post, even if Voldemort's return was publicly confirmed this time round.

Hell, he did hold onto his post after Voldemort had publicly returned. I just happened to be dead at the time.

I knead my forehead tiredly as I lean back in my seat, staring at the ceiling of the Room of Requirement.

The stress is beginning to pile up as the third task treads steadily closer, my to-do list seeming more and more impossible to complete.

First, kill Bagman and Fudge, as well as Crouch if I manage to get my hands on him before his son does.

Secondly, find a way to hamstring Lucius Malfoy before the third task.

Third, make sure that my family and friends can escape to safety in the case that full fledged war does break out in the next few months.

A quiet groan escapes me as I mull over what to do.

The first on my list is relatively simple, while the second and third are immensely more complicated. My current running theory is to utilize the Daily Prophet to stage a media campaign against Lucius, calling attention to his questionable bid for freedom after the end of the war, among other things.

It could work, and it could just as easily fail miserably. Only trying will tell.

Getting my family to safety would involve getting my hands on multiple illegal- no, make that doubly illegal portkeys from a reputable vendor, since they'll be cross-country. To add to that, I'd have to find a way to explain why exactly Daphne and the other girls would need one on their person at all times, not to mention a fire-drill of sorts to get them off Hogwarts grounds so that they can use it.

"Is everything alright?"

I blink at Fleur, my eyes and mind foggy. "Just thinking," I reply, sucking on my cheek.

She crosses her arms on the table, resting her chin on them. "Talk to me."

"I'm just trying to figure out what I can do about getting my family to safety if all hell breaks loose come the third task." I explain, rubbing the exhaustion from my eyes and frowning when my vision blurs even more.

Fleur hums in thought, eyebrows knitted together. "Portkey?"

"Incredibly illegal and hard to find ones at that." I pop my lips in annoyance. "I have no idea where the hell I would look for something like that, let alone convince everyone I know and care about to carry one around without asking too many questions."

"That would be difficult," Fleur agrees, fingers ghosting lazily over the desk in a poor facsimile of a pianist. "Couldn't we make one?"

I shake my head. "Portkeys are advanced enchanting. I'm good with runes, but I'm not good enough to learn how to make one in only a couple of months."
"I forgot about that," she grumbles.

We sit there in silence for a few minutes, only broken occasionally by the steady tap of her fingers over the table.

Fleur gasps suddenly, shooting to her feet and nearly knocking her chair over just as my eyelids begin to droop, startling me away from the brink of sleep.

"What? What is it?"

Clapping her hands, Fleur's eyes light up. "Dumbledore!"

"Dumbledore?"

"Yes, Dumbledore!" she says excitedly. "Dumbledore would be able to make portkeys, international ones at that. He surely has the know-how, and it would all be perfectly legal."

I smack myself on the head. "How did I forget that? He's the Chief Warlock and the Supreme Mugwump. God I'm an idiot."

I shake my head. The stress is really getting to me.

Fleur leans over and kisses my cheek, and I can't help the tired smile that tugs at the corner of my mouth. "Thanks for that."

She gives me a confused look. "What for?"

"For being you."

A glittering smile spreads across her face, eyes crinkling happily. "You flatter me."

"No, really. Thank you for being you." I look down for a moment, wondering where I'm going with this train of thought. "You're just so damn amazing, you know that? Every little thing you do is just… entrancing. You're a good person, a genuinely good person, which is something you don't see all that often."

Her smile grows even wider just as her cheeks begin to flush. "I… thank you," she murmurs, eyes downcast. "Thank you."

"No, thank you."

Fleur groans loudly as she stacks the parchment away, tucking her tome into her bag. "You're insufferable, you know that?"

"Really?" I hold my hand to my chest. "You wound me Miss Delacour."

Rolling her eyes, Fleur slings her bag over her shoulder. "Dumbledore?"

"Dumbledore," I agree, grabbing my own bag and following her out of the Room and off towards the Headmasters office.

We walk briskly, ignoring the usual stares and whispers from passersby as we quickly make our way over to the second floor.

For all the secret passages and magical space-bending corridors, one would think that there would be a simpler way to get to the Headmasters office. Going down to the second floor, and then back up a magical staircase to the tallest tower of the school?
I guess the magical world isn't known for having incredible civil engineers.

The gargoyle turns on the spot as we come into view and I can't help the reflexive nod of my head towards it as we move up the stairs.

"Did you just thank an inanimate object?" Fleur jibes.

"Force of habit," I reply, rubbing the back of my neck as she smiles at me. "What?"

Her smile grows even wider, and she shakes her head, hair tossing slightly. "Nothing, you're just really cute."

I blush, murmuring a denial under my breath.

"Miss Potter… Miss Delacour? Please, come in," Dumbledore says, announcing himself through the door.

I open it smoothly, frowning when I realize that I've probably spent more time kicking the door down than opening it properly.

Poor thing has been through a lot these last few years.

Dumbledore beckons us over, transfiguring a second chair with his other hand. "Come in, come in."

"Tea?" he asks as we take our seats, the two of us denying his offer with a cordial shake of the head. He studies Fleur curiously, eyes flicking towards me and a confused look on his face. "What can I do for you two?"

I look to Fleur. "It was your idea."

She smiles, folding her hands over her knee. "Helene and I require intercontinental portkeys to provide her family in the case of war breaking out."

Dumbledore coughs loudly. "Excuse me?"


"Ah, so the two of you are planning for a worst-case scenario?" We nod, Dumbledore scratching his chin as he pauses briefly. "I can easily make you as many as you need, it's the least I can do after everything I've done." He cocks his head to the side inquisitively. "If I may ask… how long has Miss Delacour here been aware of your more… interesting talents?"

"Interesting talents?" Fleur asks, glancing at me. "Our relationship hasn't progressed quite that far yet."

"Fleur!" I gasp, garnering a whooping laugh from her and an amused look from Dumbledore. "God damnit… what Fleur meant to say was she's known since after the first task."

"You've known the whole time then?"

Fleur nods. "Yes, I have. It was quite shocking at the time, but I know not to relate the magic to the person."

Dumbledore hums in agreement. "Something I myself have just come to understand." He turns back to me, hands clasped in front of him. "Now Helene, how many portkeys do you believe you would
require?"

I frown, ticking off on my fingers as I count. "Well, my immediate family plus Hermione and the other girls… I’d need nine, maybe ten to be on the safe side so that there’s an extra lying around the house."

"I can have them brought to you tomorrow night," he says. "Portkeys require quite a bit of magic to be properly constructed and I'm afraid that I'll only be able to get half of them made this evening, the other half tomorrow."

"Thank you, you have no idea how much it means to me to keep my family safe."

God, it feels odd to be on speaking terms with Dumbledore again.

"No need to thank me Miss Potter," he denies, waving me off. "Like I said, it's the least I can do."

"Er- about that," I mumble somewhat sheepishly. "You know how I said I was going to kill Bagman?"

To Dumbledore's credit, he doesn't flinch at my comment. Instead he narrows his eyes. "Yes?"

"Well, I was curious as to whether or not you know where he lives?"

Letting out a long sigh, he pinches his nose. "I do, and though I understand your reasoning and will do nothing to prevent you from killing Ludo, I have no wish to be complicit in cold blooded vigilantism."

"Please don't make me force you to tell me."

Dumbledore shuts his eyes tight, lips pursed. "Ludo Bagman lives on the outskirts of Wimborne, a few miles south of the motorway passing through the town."

"Thank you," I say, getting out of my seat. "I'll see you tomorrow evening to pick up the portkeys, you don't need to have them delivered to me tonight."

Dumbledore nods his head. "Do not let this get the better of you Miss Potter, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I know that better than most."

I pause, hand on the doorknob. "Thank you. I'll make sure of that."

"That's all I can wish for," he murmurs as we exit his office.

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I hold tightly onto the silk bag, a light jingling emanating from it as I tuck it away into my rucksack.

We asked, and Dumbledore provided. Ten portkeys all enchanted to bring the users to an old Order safehouse in eastern France, the property lying in stasis since the war.

Now I just have to figure out how to tell the rest of my friends and family that I'm a time traveling Necromancer with a penchant for the occasional bout of murder.

Walking into the Great Hall, I make a beeline towards my sisters at the Slytherin table. I groan in frustration as Draco catches sight of me, his upper lip immediately curling in undisguised contempt.

"What are you doing over here Potter?" he scowls, attempting to goad me into a fight.
I cast a disinterested glance his way. "I'm here to speak with my sisters, Malfoy."

He snorts derisively. "The dyke has come to spread her sick?"

Crabbe and Goyle laugh as if on reflex, the two sycophants probably having been bred to be nothing but fat and muscle. I'd have to meet – and kill – their fathers to really find out.

"Projecting Draco?" I sniff the air, cocking my head to the side. "That's a lovely perfume you're wearing, are you sure you haven't caught the sick already?"

He blusters loudly, face darkening as a few snickers echo quietly across the hall, the other tables having heard my comment.

"You'll have to let me know where you bought that, I just love citrus," I shoot, walking past him and towards my sisters, all three of which are holding down giggles. "Hey."

"Hey yourself," Daphne replies, smiling at me. "What brings you over here?"

"I actually came because I want to talk to you three tonight, if that would be possible."

All of them frown, with Tracey speaking up. "Is everything alright?"

I put my hands up. "Everything is perfectly fine, I've just got some important things to tell you, as well as Ginny and Luna."

Daphne looks off to the Ravenclaw table, before turning back to me. "Sure, where do you want to meet us? I don't think it'd be a good idea if you came into our common room again. She tilts her head towards where Draco is sitting. "I don't think another fight would go over well."

"No, no that's fine. Meet me on the seventh floor after dinner, by that portrait with the guy trying to teach trolls how to dance."

"Love that portrait," Astoria interrupts, a goofy smile on her face.

"Hate it," Daphne interjects. The two glare at each other for a moment before Daphne blinks, Astoria punching the air excitedly.

"I win again!"

"Yes, yes, you win again," she drawls, rolling her eyes at me. "We'll see you tonight Helene."

"Thanks!" I say, waving goodbye as I return to the Ravenclaw table, taking my usual seat next to Fleur.

"Are we meeting them tonight?" she asks, spreading some jam on a piece of toast.

I nod, kissing her on the cheek. "Yeah, we're meeting them tonight."

"Ginny and Luna?"

I look towards the two girls a few seats away. "I was just about to speak to them. Hey! Ginny, Luna!" I call, waving at them.

Ginny looks up from her plate, Luna glancing at me out of the corner of her eye as she munches away at some terrifying concoction of breakfast foods that she's fashioned into a smiley face. "Yeah? What is it?"
"Can I talk with you two tonight after dinner? I've got some things to discuss with you and my sisters."

Her eyes lose focus for a second as she ponders over her schedule. "Sure, I can do that. Luna?"

The fairy-like blonde tilts her head to the side, closing her eyes. "I will be able to attend."

I smile nervously. "Good, I'll see you two tonight on the seventh floor, by the portrait with the dancing trolls."

Luna's mouth quirks upwards in a faint smile. "I do ever so love that portrait. Teaching trolls to dance? Maybe I should speak with daddy about writing that into the paper."

"I'm sure that'd be excellent Luna," Hermione adds, pulling in to the seat next to Fleur.

"Bonjour Hermione, how did you sleep?" Fleur asks.

A grimace flickers across her face for a moment before her features settle. "Just fine, how about you?"

"I was up late last night studying over my new book, there are some very interesting things in it."

Hermione very nearly lights up. Not quite, but close to it. "Yes? What did you find?"

"Ah, not at the table," Fleur chides, wagging her fork playfully. "I can talk to you about it later."

"Hermione, wanna' meet us in the Room after dinner? We can talk about it then," I break in, leaning forward over the table.

"I… yeah, I can do that."

Good, looks like she's slowly starting to put the pieces of herself back together.

"Sounds good to me."

I watch her for a second, shaking my head imperceptibly as I return to my breakfast, filling up my plate.

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Fleur and I stand outside the Room of Requirement, my foot tapping a steady, nervous beat into the floor.

"Everything's going to be okay," she whispers, resting her hand on my shoulder.

I sigh audibly. "I know, I know… I just can't help but worry though."

Her lips ghost across my cheek. "Don't. You have nothing to worry about."

I close my eyes and lean into her, melting into her arms. "I'll do my best."

"That's all I can ever ask of you."

Smiling faintly, I let her cradle me, arms wrapped around my waist and my head tucked underneath her chin. She hums quietly, the sound calm and sweet as it reverberates through me.

"Hey!"
I open my eyes, smiling as I catch sight of Hermione. "Hey."

She crosses her arms, tilting her head. "So, we were going to talk?"

"Yeah, we're just waiting for everyone else to get here."

"Everyone else?" she asks, frowning.

"By everyone else, I mean them," I explain, pointing behind her at my sisters and the other girls.

Daphne waves at me. "Hey Helene, I picked up these two on the way over," she says, jabbing her thumb towards Ginny and Luna. "So... what are we doing waiting out here in an empty hallway?"

Fleur lets go of me, squeezing my arm reassuringly. "Helene and I have some important things to tell you all today, and we've got a private room all set up." Hermione gapes at us as the other girls hum their agreement. Fleur winks at her before pacing in front of the empty wall, whispering quietly under her breath.

Luna's the first to notice the change, squeaking excitedly at the door appearing out of thin air. "Oh my," she exclaims, hand over her mouth and her normally half-lidded eyes wide in surprise. "A secret room?"

"Cool!" Astoria effuses, clapping her hands.

Fleur opens the door, beckoning us over with a sweep of her hand. "Please, come in."

I follow behind as the girls enter the Room, taking a deep breath as the door clicks shut behind me.

By the look of things, Fleur has fashioned the Room to be as comfortable and welcoming as possible. A large pale cream couch rests in the centre of the room, a loveseat set opposite. The two articles are littered with pillows of pastel blues and reds, a thick gray shag rug tucked below the furniture.

Luna is sprawled over the carpet, resting on her elbows with her feet kicking playfully in the air. Ginny and Astoria sit beside her, laying against the foot of the couch, Astoria playing idly with the fabric of the rug. Daphne smiles up at me, her and Tracey having set up camp on the couch.

"What's going on Helene?" Hermione asks, having chosen to stand instead.

I cock one eyebrow. "Exactly what you think is going on."

"A- are you sure that's a good idea?" she gasps.

I shrug. "I was going to have to tell them sooner or later."

"Tell us what?" Daphne interjects, crossing her arms. "Is this about the magic you've been using? How you somehow managed to freeze over the whole lake?"

Luna tilts her head towards me. "That really was quite impressive by the way."

"Er- thank you Luna, and yes Daphne, that's what I wanted to talk to all of you about."

"Well, aren't you just really powerful?" Ginny asks, looking somewhat confused. "Well, really really powerful."

Tracey shakes her head. "Ginny, only someone like Dumbledore is that powerful."
"Well, I am, and so is Fleur," I add, reaching over and taking her hand.

The corner of her lip tugs up in a smile. "I don't believe I'm quite that powerful Helene. Close, but not quite."

Daphne clears her throat. "Wait, wait a second. Enough talk about how powerful you are, you said you have something to tell us?"

I take another deep breath, letting it out slowly, cheeks puffed. Fleur squeezes my hand, once more whispering, "You have nothing to worry about. They're your sisters, your friends. They'll understand."

"Yeah… I guess you're right," I acquiesce.

Standing up straight, I let go of Fleur's hand. "Daphne… well, I assume everyone here has been wondering why I'm so powerful."

"You did kill a bloody Chimera just a few months ago, so yeah, we've been wondering," Daphne jibes.

I frown, exhaling heavily through gritted teeth. "Yeah, yeah I did." Shutting my eyes tight, I look up towards the ceiling.

Well, here goes nothing.

"I'm a time-traveler."

Everyone freezes for a moment, before Daphne starts laughing. Ginny joins in, an odd smile on her face, while the other girls stare at me with no small amount of confusion.

I stand there, stoic.

It takes a second or two, but Daphne begins to calm down, wiping a tear from her eye. "No, seriously, pull the other one. Come off it Helene, give me a real answer."

"I'm not lying. My name is Helene Lily Potter. Died mid-June 1996. Resurrected the day of July 24th, 1991." I point towards Fleur, inviting her to speak.


A heavy silence falls over the room, and I can practically feel Hermione nervously chewing on her lip. My hands are clenched into fists, fingernails biting painfully into the skin of my palm.

"I… you're joking right?"

"Deadly serious."

Daphne stammers nervously. "But- you couldn't…" she throws her hands down in frustration. "That just doesn't make any sense! You can't… what?"

"Death exists. The God, the being, the demiurge… whatever you'd like to call him… it. He brought me back, apparently over a case of red tape." I pause thoughtfully. "At least, that's the excuse he gave me."

"It's true," Hermione blurs, mouth hanging open. "I… it's true, every word Helene has said, it's
true."

"It really is quite true."

The girls, sans-Fleur, scream loudly at the pale apparition that has appeared within our midst.

Immaculate suit wrapped tightly round his body and sundial adorning his wrist, Death stands there in all his glory, calmly adjusting his tie as if he's been here the whole time.

Could have been for all I know.

"Please, please, don't stop on my account. This really is quite entertaining."

Fleur walks towards him, reaching forward to shake his hand. "Death, I assume?"

He looks down in confusion, before cackling loudly. "Yes, in the flesh so to say," he drawls, clasping her hand with his own and shaking it once. "I'm sure you've heard all about me from my young protégé over here."

"Enough to know that you're quite a bit different from your wife. Please let her know I said hello." He nods deeply. "I'll do just that when I next see her." Turning back to us, he claps loudly. "Like I said, please continue."

"What the \textit{fuck} is going on!?" Tracey shouts, the others gaping blindly, too shocked to speak.

Death taps his chin. "Well, if I've been keeping track of things, Helene and her girlfriend here have just told you some \textit{very} interesting facts about themselves, and you all nearly had a heart attack when I decided to show myself." He smiles dangerously, perfectly straight teeth glinting. "Don't worry, it's not any of your times yet, and if I'm being quite honest heart attacks are a \textit{dreadfully} dull way to go."

"Good to see you too," I sigh. Looks like whatever this is has gone to shit.

"On the contrary Helene, it had gone to shit as soon as you had the idea to tell a room full of teenagers about yourself, I'm simply giving it a little push."

I eye himdangerously. "Could you please shut up?" Death puts his hands up in surrender, one twisting over his lips like he's locking a door. With a sigh, I turn back to Daphne. "Yes, this is Death. Yes, Fleur and I are telling the truth."

The mood in the room has become tense, everyone studying me in a whole new light. I can see it in the way that Ginny avoids eye contact, or how Tracey is trying – and failing – to hide her shaking hands.

"You… you \textit{died}?!" Daphne asks, horror in her eyes. "Both of you died?!" She pauses once more, pointing towards Death. "He's \textit{real}?!"

Fleur clears her throat. "Yes, the two of us died and were brought back by Death, in Helene's case, and Life in mine."

Daphne simply sits there, lost. "I… I don't know what to say."

"No wonder you're never afflicted by Nargles," Luna comments, blinking slowly.

I snort loudly, unable to hold back the laughter that escapes me. "God damnit Luna."
She smirks at me. "Just making an observation. Nargles aren't a fan of death. I've never seen a Nargle on a Thestral, for example."

"Well, I'll keep that in mind." I roll my eyes, my nerves now long gone thanks to her timely input. "So... the reason I'm telling all of you this is because you may be in danger in the next couple of months, and I need to provide you with these."

I pull my rucksack off my shoulder, reaching in and pulling out the silken bag. I drop it on top of a table that appears in front of me, the sound of metal crashing against metal ringing out as it strikes the wood.

"In this bag is a portkey for each and every one of you, activated by the word salutem." I pull one of the portkeys out of the bag, a thin bracelet fashioned of steel. "When activated it will take you to a safehouse in France. These can only be activated outside of Hogwarts grounds, so you'd need to leave the castle to actually have it work. I'll be showing you all a secret passage that one can use to get out into Hogsmeade that only Fleur and I, Dumbledore, and the Weasley twins know about."

"Are you sure things are about to get that serious?" Hermione asks, nervously eyeing Death as she takes one of the bracelets and pulls it over her hand, the metal shrinking slightly to fit.


Daphne slams her hand on the table. "Could someone please explain what the fuck is going on?"

"Voldemort is coming back, and it's my... Fleur and mine's job to kill him."

She pales. "What?"

"God, I'm going about this all terribly," I mutter, sitting down on a chair that materializes below me.

Death smirks at me, obviously loving every moment of the current the fiasco. I watch as he disappears. Just there one moment, and then he's gone.

I guess he didn't want to deal with the interrogation he was soon to receive.

I lean forward, elbows resting on my knees, hands clasped. "There was a prophecy told about me a decade and change ago, before my family was attacked. This prophecy is as genuine as it gets, and it details how I must be the one to kill Voldemort. Because of this, I've spent the last four years preparing for what I know will happen from prior experience, a battle with Voldemort during the third task."

I run my fingers through my hair, stretching my neck. "This is my best chance to put him down. Returning to life from whatever halfway state he's been in since I accidentally offed him as a baby will leave him weak and unpracticed. If things don't go the way I expect them to... you have to get to safety, all of you, mum, dad, and Sirius included."

Ginny raises her hand awkwardly, and I gesture for her to speak. "This is why you're so powerful? This is why you could kill the chimera? Why you could save me and Luna?"

"Yeah. I've had a lot of time to study every facet of magic that I can, as well as learn a lot of things that Voldemort has no experience with."

"Like what?"

"Necromancy and Blood Magic."
Daphne breathes in sharply, a hand held over her mouth. "Necromancy?"

"Yes, and while I'd offer a demonstration, the last time I did it left someone quite shaken. If you remember that spell I used against the chimera, that was felfyre. Fiendfyre is a poor imitation of that."

"So, let me get this all straight." Daphne raises one hand slightly, counting down on her fingers. "You died, you time-travelled, you're trying to kill Voldemort, and you say that we're in trouble because of this?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Shite Helene, you really don't do things halfway," she groans, falling back into her seat.

I catch Astoria fidgeting out of the corner of my eye. "Did you want to ask something?"

"Er- yeah. Did you and Fleur know each other in your last lives?"

"Yes, we did, although we were only friends, not even close ones at that," Fleur answers, leaning over to kiss the top of my head. "After the first task I found out that Helene was the same as me. You couldn't keep me away from her after that."

"Hush you," I chide, smacking her playfully. "I don't want us to be that couple."

Hermione laughs. "Helene, you two already are that couple."

I groan loudly, pinching the bridge of my nose. "God damnit. I hate that couple."

"Okay, forgetting how painfully cute you two are, how are we supposed to know if something has gone wrong?" Tracey asks.

I scratch the side of my head. "Well, if you're in danger of course. If he attacks Hogwarts, the house, anything like that... just get out. Don't stay and fight."

Astoria raises her hand. "Do mum and dad know?"

"They know everything."

Daphne sits there, kneading circles in her temple. "So, what now? Are we supposed to just walk around pretending that this never happened? That my sister is five years older than she says she is, and practicing Black Magic to boot?"

"Daphne I..."

I purse my lips, tongue clicking nervously against the roof of my mouth. "Daphne, I don't expect everything between us to go back to normal, but this is something I had to tell you. You all... you matter so much to me, and I don't know what I'd do if you got hurt."

She sighs. "No, I get that. I just- sorry, I'm having a hard time wrapping my head around all of this."

"I'm still trying to wrap my head around this, and it's been my life for the last four years. Hell, Voldemort has been after me since I was born, this life and the last. I've just learned to roll with the punches as best I can."

I look over everyone once more, relieved in some part to see them doing well, relatively calm all things considered. Another part of me already mourns the loss of their childhood, how just by being close to me their lives may be, and probably will be thrown out of balance, forced to run from a
monster that would sooner kill a newborn than risk his plans so much as hiccup.

Clearing my throat, I speak up. "I... I'm going to get going, give you some time to think about all I've said."

Daphne stands up. "Helene, I..." she shakes her head, moving forward and pulling me into a hug. "You're my sister and I love you, okay? This doesn't change anything, it's just going to take us a while to really come to terms with."

I hug her back, her hair tickling my nose. "Thank you."

She pats me on the back, letting me go. "Go spend some time with Fleur. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"I'll see you tomorrow," I reply, the weight that I've carried since returning to life finally leaving my shoulders.

I feel free.

-:-

Fleur and I sit on a hill overlooking Wimborne, the village laid out behind us. Unseen to muggle eyes, a home rests at the foot of the hill. It's large, but not obtrusively so, looking like something out of the regency period.

The deep red tones of brickwork are easily visible between woven ivy and a sparse, but impressive garden. Hedges line the property, standing proud and tall as they mark the boundary of the magical and muggle worlds.

Turning the page on the Daily Prophet, I continue to enjoy the lovely smear piece that has been written about Lucius Malfoy on my bequest.

He's being drug through the mud by the wonderful mind of Rita Skeeter, the article having been published under one of her many aliases.

Nothing is kept safe from her peering eyes. His voting record in the Wizengamot and his 'imperiused' life as a Death Eater are the most important things that she's been investigating, and it shows.

Every single vote has been listed in an easy to read chart, showing a long-standing tradition of his to spit on any civil rights bills, as well as the many laws that he's brought to the table. Increased taxes for newcomers to the magical world, job restrictions for muggleborns and halfbloods, as well as a proposed ban on allowing the aforementioned peoples to even so much as open a store in Diagon Alley or one of its many offshoots.

So, all in all it's pointing out the fact that he's a reprehensible waste, while showing readers that even if he was truly imperiused like he says he was, his voting record speaks of a man who's views very much align with Voldemort's.

"She's really done well for herself on this one," I mutter, pointing at the paper when Fleur looks at me questioningly.

She turns her nose up. "I still believe her to be a vile woman."

"A vile woman who we have under our thumb is still very useful."
Fleur nods reluctantly. "True. I just detest the woman for what she made you go through the last time."

"What about what she made you go through? 'The Veela Temptress,’” I say, waving my hands over my head in a grandiose manner. "She tore you apart just the same as she did me."

"If she steps out of line, I'll squash her like a bug."

I snort. "I'd love to be there for that."

A flash of light catches my attention and I grab Fleur's shoulder, pointing towards Bagman's home. "Look who's back."

She squints, smiling when she sees the previously dark windows shining brightly, the shadow of a man passing back and forth on the top floor. "Took him long enough."

"You're telling me," I groan, standing up and wiping the grass off my bottom. "I'm glad we brought food to this stakeout."

Fleur hums appreciatively. "Very good food at that. I'll need to pop in and thank the house elves against for a wonderful meal."

"I'm sure they'd absolutely love that," I laugh. "Let's buck up, it's time for a little revenge."

Fleur nods, her joking demeanour shifting into something much more serious. Something hardened. I grab her hand and we disappear in a wash of shadow, reappearing just outside the front door of Bagman's home.

Up close, it looks a bit quaint, especially for someone who was once a major quidditch star. Seems his gambling addiction is just as bad as I assumed it to be.

Peeking through the window, I get a view of the foyer. It's dim, but there's enough light coming from the upper level for me to be able to get us inside. Once more I transport us, this time reappearing in the midst of a sparsely furnished hallway, a flight of stairs to our right and a plethora of Wimbourne Wasps memorabilia hanging from the walls.

I blink at the assaulting presence of so much yellow and black, the interior looking more like a hive than a home.

"It's nice on the outside, but terribly tacky inside," Fleur comments, eyeing the decorations with distaste.


She smiles at me, moving up the stairs. "How kind of you."

I grin. "You know I aim to please."

"Oh yes?” she jests, eyebrow raised. "Maybe you'll have to show me some time."

I groan quietly. "Dear god Fleur, now is not the time for innuendo."

Smiling broadly at me, she shakes her hips, giving me a sweeping bow from the top of the stairs. "Après vous."
Holding back a playful sigh, I look about. The upper level seems about the same as the lower, what I assume to be the rest of the four-bedroom manor home. The walls are made of what looks to be mahogany, polished to a deep shine, a small decorative table at the top of the stairs made of a black ash, topped with an empty vase.

Not many visitors if he's going to leave that empty. That makes our job easier.

Silently we creep forward, following the out of tune singing that rings out from down the hall, light pouring out from a crack in the door.

I put my hand up, three fingers raised high into the air. I count down on them slowly, breaching the door as soon as I make a fist, a well placed expelliarmus catching Bagman unawares. Snatching his wand out of the air, I smile dangerously at him as I flick my wand and bind him. He collapses to the ground in a heap, struggling against the enchanted ropes that now wrap tightly around his body.

He shouts in fright and anger. "Who the hell do you think you are, breaking into my home? Bunch of goddamn…” his eyes widen as he recognizes us. "Helene? Fleur?"

"The very same." I sweep my wand over the room, casting a blanketing silence charm to prevent any sound from escaping. "You've been stepping on the wrong toes Mister Bagman."

He frowns in confusion. "The ruddy hell are you talking about? Stepping on the wrong toes? Let me go this instant!"

Fleur tuts, wagging her finger. "Now now, that isn't the way to speak to someone that has you in such a dangerous position."

"Are you two insane?" he cries, eyes flitting back and forth between the two of us. "You've broken into my home and left me bound, how else am I supposed to speak with you?" Spitting on the ground, he shoots us a glare. "Fudge was right about you two."

My eyebrows raise in undisguised interest. "Hmm? Fudge has been speaking about the two of us? What has the blithering idiot got to say?"

Bagman continues to fidget, straining against his bindings. "Mentally ill you two are, cavorting around with each other. The magic you use," he adds, directing his ire towards me. "Dark Ladies in training is what he thinks."

I let out a whooping laugh, holding my belly as I cackle madly. "That… wow, you know, he's not too far off on that." I wipe a tear from my eye, sighing. "Too bad that he's dead as soon as he loses his position, whenever that happens of course."

"Dead?"

I look down at Bagman, grinning. "Well, what do you think we're doing here?" I lean down, sticking my wand under his chin. "You allowed a good man to die for the sake of a gladiatorial blood sport Mister Bagman. All of us could have died. Teenagers, children, sent to the chopping block for what? A way for you to keep to your vices? To avoid the Goblin's that so dearly want to see you slaving away in their mines for the rest of your miserable life?"

His eyes widen in fright. "It… it was Malfoys idea!" he stammers, jaw hanging loose. "You have no idea how powerful that man really is! He- he made me do it!"

"I know how much sway Malfoy holds over the government, don't take me for an idiot," I hiss, eyes darkening. With a swipe of my hand the usual glamour that I wear collapses, revealing to Bagman
slitted, inhuman eyes. "Malfoy is the least of your problems right about now, so don't even try to throw him under the bus. He'll get his own at the end of my wand just as you're about to."

"You're a monster! A monster!" he shrieks, worming backwards. "Get away from me!"

I turn to Fleur. "Would you like to do the honors?"

She nods, giving me a somewhat crooked smile. "I love those eyes of yours," she intones, quickly directing her attention back to the shivering man before us.

Fleur grabs him by the hair and hauls him off the ground, throwing him against the wall. He crashes against it loudly, head lolling as he groans in pain. Teeth bared, she gets into his face, teeth elongating into fangs and her eyes just as feline as my own.

"Because of you, Fudge, and Malfoy, Viktor Krum is dead. Because of your decisions, they don't even get a body to bury. No closure, nothing. Their child gone because of your ridiculous attempts to make the most dangerous Tri-Wizard Tournament yet." She grips his jaw forcefully, twisting his head so that he's forced to stare into her eyes. "You will die tonight, and I will take pleasure in being the one to end your miserable existence."

She lets go of him, forcefully planting her foot in his gut. Gasping breathlessly, Bagman falls back to the ground, squirming.

"Ati-dāw-ino Sfliga."

A blindingly bright spear of light lances out of Fleur's wand and impales him in the gut. Bagman screams hoarsely, pain flooding his entire body as the spear begins to shine even brighter, fractures of light crackling over his skin. His body suffuses with light, the cracks leaking the substance like a shattered vase as it creeps ever further over him.

Just as suddenly as he was attacked, he lets out one final scream, pure white shining from his mouth and eyes like a sunbeam as his body crumples.

The light fades, his eyes still left wide open in unimaginable fright, weeping a trail of thin gelatinous viscera, the organs having burst in their sockets. His skin bears scars, lines like fractured glass spread over his body.

"One down, two to go," Fleur mutters, grimacing at the sight before her.

I rest my hand on her back, rubbing small circles. "They'll get theirs."

She clenches her wand hand into a fist. "I'm just so furious. Viktor is still dead because of this bastard and his compatriots," she clips, pointing angrily at the statuesque corpse.

"I know, I know. I am too… we'll get to them eventually, but for now we have to worry about Voldemort."

Nodding reluctantly, Fleur kisses me in the forehead. "Thank you."

I shake my head. "No, thank you."

"Hush you," she says, poking me on the shoulder. "Let's get back before someone comes to investigate. I'm sure that light could have been seen all throughout the town, magical or muggle alike."
I grab her hand, reaching down for that familiar sensation of darkness. "Sounds good to me."

Chapter End Notes

Ati-dāw-ino kom Sfliga: Spear of Blighted Fire. (Proto-Gaelic)
Amelia Bones kneaded her temple with one hand, staring at the corpse of Ludo Bagman.

Even she would admit that the sight was horrific.

His skin was covered in markings from head to toe, lightning-like cracks that spread all over as if he'd been a bit of pottery dropped from a high.

Not to mention the bloodied, gaping eye sockets; a trail of gelatinous residue was all that remained of the organs once nestled in his skull.

She'd never seen magic the likes of this before. No one had. Damnit, she'd wager that even the unspeakables had never seen such a thing.

If that didn't scream danger, she didn't know what did.

"Shacklebolt, anything you're getting from those readings?" she asked, a touch of impatience lacing her words.

Her right hand looked up from the body with a blank look on his face. "Nothing at all ma'am, at least, nothing I've ever seen before." He cast a confused glance back towards Bagman, brow furrowed intensely. "It's… I can't explain it."

She crossed her arms, looking back at her subordinate with an understanding expression. "Just tell me what you can Shack."

He nodded shakily, face still knitted in consternation. "The magic is unlike anything that I've ever seen. It's raw… pure, and he's absolutely covered in the stuff." Rubbing his forehead, Shacklebolt continued. "We'd have to call in the research division to take a look at this, but the closest thing I can think of would be whatever spells that person who broke into Azkaban used."

Amelia's mood took an immediate nosedive at those words, her features falling into a poorly concealed grimace. "What do you mean?"

"I… it's hard to explain, but it's almost exactly like that magic. Just… opposite."

Swearing loudly, she dragged her fingers through her hair. "Call in the Unspeakables immediately. I want them to find out whether or not this murder is connected to the break in as soon as possible."

Shacklebolt got to his feet, briskly nodding at Amelia. "On it, ma'am."

Just as he was leaving the room, she turned and shouted after him. "Get the files on the break in to my desk while you're at it. Everything we've got."
A muted, 'yes ma'am,' reached her ears, immediately followed by the telltale pop of apparition.

"Fucks sake," Amelia muttered, turning back to the crime scene and pinching the bridge of her nose. "Looks like we've might have another Dark Lord on the rise."

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**Ludo Bagman Murdered!**

*Just last evening one of our most accomplished members of society was found brutally murdered in his own home.*

*Ludo Bagman was best known for being the former star beater for the Wimbourne Wasps, as well as the Assistant-Head of the Department of Magical Sports and Games. Many are also familiar with him due to his being one of the primary Tri-Wizard Tournament Planners and Judges.*

*The Department of Magical Law Enforcement was called to his home yesterday afternoon, after he was noted as conspicuously absent from work. Our esteemed Minister Cornelius Fudge attempted to get into contact with his long-time co-worker and friend. When he could not get a hold of Ludo via floo, he contacted the DMLE and had them sent over, where the body of Ludo was found.*

*As the investigation is still on-going, we are not privy to all the information.*

*What we have been told, is that Ludo was subjected to magic of a most horrible nature, something never before seen by the DMLE, nor the Department of Mysteries.*

*We at the Herald offer our condolences to his family and friends and hope dearly that justice may soon find his killer.*

The news is… well, it's news.

I send a calming smile Fleur's way, an unspoken message reassuring her that there's no possible way for them to find out who we are by magical signature alone.

It's not like a fingerprint as some would assume, but more like a feeling, a smell or taste that can be correlated to each individual witch or wizard.

Fortunately for us, and unfortunately for the DMLE, one cannot be tracked by that alone.

No, they'll have a record of the spell used as well as a faint remnant of Fleur's magical signature, but unless they catch her casting that exact spell once more – in plain sight at that – they have no chance in hell of so much as guessing at who killed Bagman.

All in all, we're off scot-free.

Now all we have to do is get as much training in as possible before the third task happens in about two weeks.

In all honesty, I've never been quite so nervous before. Yeah, I've seen and done some serious shit in my life – let alone the last four years – but fighting Voldemort is going to be a task in and of itself.

Unlike Dumbledore, he's going to be resurrected back into his prime, and while I use the word prime very loosely in this regard what with the whole 'undead snake man' thing he'll have going on, he's someone Fleur and I cannot underestimate.

Once more, unlike Dumbledore, he's not afraid to use everything in his repertoire to bring us down.
Every single bit of the knowledge he's allotted over his near eighty years of life will be sent our way in the most violent manner possible.

Makes me wish I had another four years to spend studying and training, and I'm sure even then I'd still feel terribly nervous.

My mastery over Blood Magic has taken great strides as of late. Having a suite of horrifically dangerous curses under my belt will be very useful when up against Voldemort, and the same goes for my ability with Necromantic spells.

Necromancy is still a funny subject for me. Not that I'm averse to using it, not at all. In fact, it's become my favourite branch of magic, something that would have sickened me greatly to know not even two years ago.

The spells just… they come to me, I can't really explain it. Every facet of the Black Art feels like I should have been casting it my whole life, like it's always been a part of me.

I don't know if that has to do with the fact that only I can use those spells, or if it runs deeper. That's something I've thought about a bit more lately, especially after coming to understand that while Death has always been open with me, he's never been open.

He gives information freely, but it feels like he's only supplying me with the information he wants me to know. I get it, there's some things that people can't know, but there's this niggling feeling at the back of my mind that tells me he's holding back something very, very important.

The plights of getting caught up with gods.

Scratching my chin, I glance towards the Slytherin table, surreptitiously watching and waiting for Draco Malfoy to leave the Hall.

Reason being, I need to sweep his mind to find out where he, and more specifically, daddy dearest live.

The location of Malfoy Manor is relatively public, something that I could, and have easily gotten my hands on. What I really need to know is the layout of the place. Where Lucius spends most of his time, or where his hideaways are and how to get to them. Most importantly, I need to know if there are any boltholes that he'll flee to in the case of an attack and whether I can trap them in advance.

Even a tracking charm set in places where he may go will be crucial in making sure that he dies and Fleur and I get away without a fuss.

Of course, we're not attacking him quite yet.

If things go as expected with Voldemort, we'll kill him in the graveyard. If that doesn't happen, we'll already have all the information we need on Malfoy Manor, somewhere that I know Lucius spent most of his time during fifth year.

Ipso facto, we'll be as prepared as possible if we've got to deal with the worst-case scenario.

War.

That's my primary fear.

The fear that everything that I've trained for, that Fleur has trained for amounts to nothing. That the future she's seen comes to pass once more.
How many people will die? What will happen to Britain? To my family?

That's something I can't allow to happen.

Draco gets to his feet and I push my thoughts aside, watching him out of the corner of my eye as he leaves.

"I'll see you all later, yeah? I've just got to go and do something," I say, pulling my bag over my shoulder and setting off behind him.

I nearly miss him turning to the left, heading off towards the dungeons. Walking a bit more briskly I tag along, smiling as I realize that he's made my job quite a bit easier.

The dungeons are littered with countless abandoned rooms, not to mention the fact that they're dungeons, meaning they're quite soundproof. The pathways and corridors wind and twist like a snake coiling in on itself, a maze of carved stone spreading out across the bottom of the castle.

As soon as we actually reach the dungeons proper, I silence my shoes, breaking into a run and stunning Draco from behind.

He collapses to the ground with a muted thud, and I cast a quick *mobilicorpus* on him. I continue on forward, Draco levitating in my wake until I'm comfortable with how far away I am from the Slytherin common room.

I pick a room at random, transfiguring a chair out of a bit of rubble and binding Draco to it. After frisking him and removing his wand, I throw a silencing charm at the door before resuscitating him with a whispered *ennervate*.

Spluttering loudly, Draco comes to, eyes still somewhat foggy. "Wh- what the hell is going on? Where am I?"

I kneel in front of him, poking him in the chin with my wand. "Wakey wakey little Draco," I taunt, lifting his head and staring into his eyes.

His eyebrows shoot up dramatically, mouth opening in surprise. "Potter?" His astonishment quickly morphs back into anger. "What do you think you're doing?"

Tilting my head questioningly, I ask, "What do I think I'm doing?" Tracing his jawline with my wand.

I watch as he looks down at the seemingly innocuous stick, a simple piece of wood that when combined with the right incantation and a little *push*…

Magic is a terrifying thing.

"I d- don't know, but you better stop it right now," he threatens, upper lip curling almost reflexively. "You of all people should know how powerful my father is."

I tut quietly. "Draco, Draco, of course I know how powerful your father is. That's the whole reason I've got you here all tied up, see?" I gesture forwards, reminding him of the situation he's in. "Have you been working on your occlumency Draco?"

He frowns, mouth opening slightly. "What?"

"I said, *Have you been working on your occlumency, Draco?*"
He blusters, looking almost offended. "Of course I have! As the next in line for the Malfoy family I've got to have a strong hold on my mind!"

"Good. That's good," I mutter, jabbing him in the forehead with my wand. "Wouldn't want this to be too easy, you know?"

Cross-eyed, he stares up in fear at the bit of wood digging into his skin. "Easy?"

"*Legimens.*"

I feel the immediate, familiar pressure of my mind. A cacophony of smells, shapes, sounds, and other feelings all culminating into a roiling mass of *me.*

With a tug, I reach forward, *yanking* on the other presence I feel on the forefront of my mind, attempting to tear a hole in it and allow myself entrance.

Draco shouts in pain, screaming as I bore a hole in his psyche.

He's good, that's for sure. Lucius probably began tutoring him in the mind arts at a young age, maybe as young as four or five. Hell, maybe even three, considering the general antipathy that Lucius regards others around him with.

I don't know if a man like him can love, *truly* love his son, as opposed to see him as a means to an end. Another nameless face in a long line of blond aristocrats. Another spoiled, soon to be dangerous man.

But he's never been truly attacked, never had someone try to pry his figurative skull open like a trepanation. He's never been attacked by someone who truly wanted to know what he keeps trapped and hidden within the recesses of his mind.

As such, he doesn't last very long.

I can feel his shields falling rapidly, his screams becoming more muted as I delve deeper and deeper into a tumultuous mess of memories that feel foreign, almost offensive, very evidently set apart from my own.

With one last cry, I fall through, rummaging through his thoughts like a burglar given free reign, paying no heed to his discomfort and pain as I search for the information that I require.

*There.*

Something hidden deep, *deep* in his mind, an almost ignorable cluster of whirling memories that have been sequestered away. Boltholes, escape methods, portkeys, even hidden artifacts of dubious, and insidious nature all contained in one effervescent bundle.

I gasp as the sheer extent of Lucius' planning begins to be revealed to me, and I can't help but worry that I've only been given a snippet of information, what bits and pieces the man could trust his son to know.

Two hideaways in France, and one a piece in Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland. Multiple secret passages running in and out of Malfoy Manor, each one covered in its own series of wards and traps, triggered by all manner of things. A magical pressure plate here, an enchanted trip-line there, all equally lethal in their own right.

I tally each and every bit of information up, ripping it from Draco's mind and storing it away in my
own, keeping it put under metaphorical lock and key until I get the time to go over everything.

Like pulling my shoe from wet mud, I eject myself from Draco's mind, coughing and spluttering from the after effects of poring over his every thought.

Looking into his mind has given me a new perspective on the person who spent most of his time in my past life making my existence as painful as possible.

From a young age, a very young age, he's been trained by his father to be the same as him.

Stoic, unfeeling, and motivated to advance his families standing at any cost. Not to mention the near brainwashing he's gone through, having all compassion towards those 'lesser' stripped away with a fine blade, a hate for newcomers to the magical world seared into his mind like a cattle brand.

It doesn't make his behaviour acceptable, but it helps me understand just a little bit more.

He never really had a choice.

I look down at the now unconscious blond in front of me, a thin stream of blood trickling out of his nose and his head lolling over the back of the chair, face wet with sweat.

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I hit him with the strongest obliviate I can muster, wiping his mind free of the last fifteen or so minutes.

I pull the marauders map out of my robes, quickly scanning over it and grunting in relief when I see that the dungeons are still empty.

With a smooth flick of the wrist, I heal Draco of his nosebleed, before levitating him. I walk us back to where I stunned him, throwing Death's cloak over myself and propping him up in the middle of the corridor, supported by magic.

Another murmured incantation and he's awake, shaking his head in confusion before heading off to do whatever he'd come down to do in the first place.

-:-:-

Tree roots snake over each other as they race towards me, knotted and twisting in impossible ways as they churn up earth and rock.

With a shout, I leap over them, enhancing my jump with a burst of wind and sending myself sailing well over the serpentine attack. Just as I reach the forest floor, I cushion my fall with another use of my elemental abilities, throwing up a wall of earth just as the roots come crashing towards me, the wall shuddering under the impact.

Jabbing sharply, I cut deep into my forearm, drawing out a thin line of shining red blood. Grimacing at the pain, I focus my magic to regenerate the cut, the skin quickly knitting itself up of its own volition. Twisting my wand, I fashion the blood into a spiked ball, spinning it rapidly.

I jump up and over the wall, quickly setting sights on Fleur.

Thrusting my hand outwards, I banish the chunk of crystalline blood towards her, following it up with a heavy volley of spells that home in like a hawk.

Cursing loudly in French, she sweeps her hand in front of herself, a curtain of flame melting the blood on impact.
I blink at the sudden shine, the light of the fire so bright as to sting my eyes. Gritting my teeth, I duck and roll, feeling the magic as it whizzes past my head and obliterates the tree behind me.

Or, so I thought.

I shriek as I'm grabbed from behind, spinning around to see gnarled limbs wrapped around my waist, like an Ent come to life.

Touching my hand to the bark, I push, a blackened void appearing underneath my palm and turning the writhing branch below it to motes of immaterial dust.

Collapsing to the ground with a thud, I groan loudly. "Jesus Christ that is some of the freakiest shit I've ever seen." With a grunt of exertion, I point my wand upwards, drawing a circle over my head before jabbing forward, a torrent of sickly green smoke rushing towards Fleur.

She throws up a glimmering, golden shield, the necrotic smoke eating away at the magical substance. Eyes wide, she claps her hands, pulling them up towards the sky, a wall of water forming around her. Somehow still making the gesture graceful, she throws her hands towards the ground, the water exploding outwards and taking the smoke with it, rushing loudly around the shield that I cast just in time.

I stab my wand forward, a line of rotted hands erupting out of the ground and grabbing aimlessly at the air above them.

Fleur lets a torrent of flame out of her open palm, incinerating the desiccated limbs in the blink of an eye.

"Aw come on! That's no fair," I grumble, chasing after her with earthen spikes.

"All's fair in love and war!" she shouts back, grinning at me.

I blink awkwardly, Fleur taking advantage of my momentary pause and catching me in the chest with a well-placed banisher, sending me flying backwards.

My entire body bends over the rock I come into contact with, ribs splitting under the pressure and sending a great, heaving gasp out of my mouth.

Coughing loudly, I send magic rushing through my veins, un-bruising muscle and pulling bone back into place. "Shit," I gasp, wiping a bit of spit from my mouth. "That was a hell of a hit."

Fleur rushes up to me, a worried look on her face. "Are you okay? I think I got ahead of myself there."

I nod shakily, pulling myself back to my feet. "I'm fine, I'm fine," I say, waving her off. "Something like that isn't enough to put me down."

She hums in agreement but doesn't look entirely convinced. "I think we should call it there, we've both used a lot of magic."

Letting out a slow breath, I nod once more. "Sounds good to me." I press my hand to my neck, stretching it out with a slight pop. "You've gotten a good handle on that druidic stuff."

"It's really useful," she admits, lazily flicking her wand and returning the animated branches and roots to their rightful place. "I'm sure it'll catch Voldemort by surprise."
I smile. "That and the fact that we'll be in the middle of a graveyard."

Fleur's eyes widen. "I'd forgotten about that."

"Yeah, those bastards are gonna' be in for a hell of a surprise." I continue stretching, pushing on the small of my back and groaning in relief. "Psychological warfare against Death Eaters… seems a little ironic, don't you think?"

She shrugs lazily. "It's no worse than what they've done to others."

"I know, I know. I just thought it was a little funny. I can't wait to see the looks on their faces when Voldemort's dad comes shambling out of his grave ready to tear them in half."

Fleur snorts loudly. "What a lovely image that paints."

"The loveliest of them all," I agree, throwing my arm around her waist. "Do you think we're ready?"

"Ready as we'll ever be." She puts her arm over my shoulder, kissing me on the forehead. "Just… don't get hurt, alright?"

I put my hand over my heart. "I promise. If things get really messy and we have to get out of there, we will. Can't kill Voldemort if we're horribly maimed."

She squeezes my arm. "Good. I don't want to see any of that ridiculous selflessness from you, alright?"

"Ridiculous selflessness?" I ask, aghast. "Why, I never!"

"Hush you," she chides, playfully flicking me on the head. "You know what I mean."

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I flip the page on my book, once more going over the hundreds upon hundreds of spells contained within Et Necromantium.

Taking a moment to just study the tome, I can't help but feel a small sense of accomplishment and pride.

It's carried me through so much in so little time, the spells within helping me to grow from a naïve teenager into the woman I am today, and while I don't exactly look too 'womanly' on the outside, I feel that I've managed to mature quite a bit in the last four years.

Glancing up, I take in the sight of Daphne lounging about, the girls having turned the Room of Requirement into their own personal common room, a place for us to spend time with each other without dealing with the issues that come with an inter-house friendship.

Smiling, I set the tome down and move over to join her, slumping into the couch next to her.

"Done reading?" she asks, looking down and steadily filing away at her nails.

I nod. "Done as done can be." Stretching my arms over my head, I close my eyes tight and sigh. "I just want to be as prepared as possible for tonight."

Daphne pauses momentarily, her idle grooming having been forgotten. "Yeah." She vanishes her conjured file, turning her attention towards me. "Are you sure everything is going to be fine?"
"I'm as sure as I'll ever be," I admit, scratching the back of my neck. "And it's not just me, Fleur has been practicing a ton as well. We're pretty much evenly matched if she focuses on using offensive magic, although most of her spells tend to gravitate towards controlling an opponent rather than putting them down."

"Is she really that strong? Are you really that strong?"

I shrug plaintively, gnawing at my bottom lip. "We're strong, that's for sure, but I don't really have anything to compare us to... if that makes sense?" I pause, resting my chin on my palm. "Think of it this way. I know we're strong, that's a fact. How strong? That's what I'm not sure about. The only person I've ever really fought properly was Dumbledore, and we were both holding back for fear of taking the school down on our heads."

"You fought Dumbledore?" she asks, aghast.

"Er- yeah, I did," I answer sheepishly. "This was a while back, end of second year. But yes, we fought, and I came out on top... although it took a lot of trickery on my part to make that work. I'm sure we'd be a much more even match now. Hell, I'd probably win seventy percent of the time, but he's old, very old. Dumbledore was a calamity in his time, and since then he's been complacent, he's lost his edge. I'm sure he could give Voldemort a run for his money simply because he understands how the man fights, but I don't have that advantage."

Daphne leans forward, interest shining in her eyes. "Didn't you... did you fight him in your last life?"

"Yeah, I fought him a few times," I admit. Glancing upwards, I recollect our few battles.

The Philosopher's Stone... the Chamber of Secrets, and the Graveyard.

Each and every one of those wasn't a true fight, a real, proper duel. Those were just... they were fleeting moments of fear and panic; my whole being focused on surviving and nothing more.

"And?" Daphne continues.

"I didn't really fight him. More like survived him, all things considered." I tuck an errant lock of hair behind my ear, the blur of red having encroached upon my vision. "I was only a child then... eleven, twelve, fourteen... no prior experience in the magical world, just dumb, blind luck. I barely survived each of our encounters, but this time? This time it's different.

"I've been training, training my goddamn heart out nearly every day since I was brought back. Be it learning new spells, mastering them, or working on my ability to dodge and shield... I've been doing everything in my power to make sure that when it comes down to me and him, I'm the one to come out on top." I clench my fist, teeth gritted. "He and his fucking gang are going to be wiped off the face of the earth come tonight, and I'll be happy to see them gone."

Daphne gapes at me, mouth hanging open. "I... I've never seen this side of you."

I laugh. "Because I'm scared of how people will react. I'll admit that quite readily. People look at me and they see this snarky little red head. 'Whatever, just your average fireball,' is all they think." I shake my head, a quiet groan escaping me. "But deep down... there's a darkness in me. There's a fire. It's always there, always just below the surface, ready to escape. When it does?"

I let that statement hang for a moment, wondering whether I should continue.

Fuck it.
"I've killed a lot of people Daphne. A lot. Yes, they had it coming, but I still killed, and you know what? I'm fine with that. I'm fine with the fact that I'm a killer, that I'm a soldier. I was raised to be one. Hell, it was the only thing I could be, my childhood considered." I throw my head back onto the neck of the sofa, groaning. "My earliest memories are of being beaten. By the time I came to Hogwarts I had no sense of self, no idea who I was. All I'd ever been told was that I was a delinquent, something unwanted. So, I threw myself at whatever friendship would come my way, whatever love came my way.

"I became everything that the Dumbledore of that world wanted me to be. Naïve, complacent, and unaware of the true danger that I was in. All of that because he didn't want me to grow up the same as him, to go through what he did as a young adult. Instead, I killed a man at the age of eleven, nearly died fighting a Basilisk at twelve, had to fight off a horde of Dementors at thirteen, and was entered in this same fiasco of a tournament at fourteen."

I wipe my face, resting my head in my palm. "After I died… well, I sort of just went along for the ride. I think I was running on some sort of high for the first year I was back, still completely in awe of the fact that I was back, that I was still kicking." Clicking my tongue loudly, I continue. "But things kept happening. Somehow things got worse, my problems aging with me, becoming more and more… awful. Something in me snapped after that, and I killed someone, deliberately killed them. It was something that I had to do, needed to do… but after that? That little fire inside me grew and grew, and while I have it under control, there's still an inferno blazing away that just wants to get out."

"You've been through a lot," Daphne murmurs, reaching out and covering my hand with her own. "More than anyone should."

I snort loudly. "That's the life of a hero I guess… at least, an anti-hero in my case." Slapping my knee, I let out a long slow breath. "But yeah, that's the side of me that no one ever really sees. The Helene that will sooner slit a man's throat than try to convince him the error of his ways."

Daphne studies me, really looks at me, her eyes practically boring through my person and into my soul.

"I can't say that that doesn't scare me, but I get it."

"Huh?"

She lets go of my hand, clasping her own together and covering her mouth. "Look, I'm not as good with words as you are, never will be, but I get it." She tilts her head back, pausing. "You've been through a ton of shit, more than I, or anyone else would be able to handle. But you've still come out of it as you. She pokes me in the chest. "You know what?"

"What?"

"I like this side of you." She puts her hand up, one finger raised in the air. "Listen, let me finish. I like this side of you because I've always felt like you were hiding something. Like I never saw the whole Helene, you know?" Gesturing to me widely, she smiles. "But now I and everyone else know the real Helene, with all the bits and pieces, good or bad. That's something to celebrate."

I nod dumbly. "Never thought of it that way."

She pats me on the shoulder. "Because you're ungodly dense half the time."

"Hey!"
Daphne laughs loudly, holding her belly. "Come on! You know it's true."

Moaning in protest, I cover my face with my hands. "My own sister turned against me! What's the world coming to?"

"I'm just knocking some sense into you, is all," she denies, crossing her arms and attempting to look superior, nose raised and all.

I have to say, she does quite a good job of it.

"Whatever, whatever, I guess I needed that," I concede, squeezing her shoulder. "Thanks for that."

She smiles at me, flicking her wand and casting a silent tempus. "No problem, but let's get you out to the pitch, the task is starting in a half an hour."

I groan loudly, but admit defeat, climbing up and off the sofa and following Daphne out of the room.

We quickly make our way downstairs, where I'm confronted by the sight of the rest of my family.

"Where in gods name have you been?" Terra chides, muttering quietly as she checks me over. "We've been looking everywhere for you."

I blink. "Oh shite, I completely forgot! Sorry, Daphne and I were having a bit of a heart to heart."

"Don't drag me into this."

"Hey!"

"Enough you two," Terra continues, wagging her finger at us. She brings me into a hug, rubbing my back calmingly. "I just wanted to see you before the task, all of us did."

Octavius walks over and claps me on the shoulder. "Be safe out there tonight."

I nod seriously. "I will."

"That's all I can ask for... your mother and I love you, and no matter what happens tonight, we want you to know that."

Blinking awkwardly, I shake my head. "I... I love you too."

Terra kisses my forehead. "If anything goes wrong, anything, promise me you'll get out of there."

"I promise." I pause, looking around for the one missing person. "Where's Sirius?"

Octavius frowns. "He was just here..."

A sudden yelp warns us to the current predicament a big, fluffy dog has found itself in, surrounded by cooing teenagers all fighting to get its attention.

"Ah."

Laughing loudly, I let go of Terra and push my way through the crowd. "Hey there Padfoot," I murmur, patting him on the head and attempting to put the fact that I'm patting my godfather on the head out of my mind.

I'm sure as shit not going to scratch his neck.
"Is that your dog?" One of the girls asks, a younger Hufflepuff.

"More or less," I answer, grinning at Sirius. "Come on, let's get out of here."

Barking in thanks, he races between my legs and off towards Octavius and Terra, the two of them looking down at him with no small amount of exasperation.

"Good luck in the task!" the girl shouts after me as I leave.

"Thanks!" I say, giving her a quick wave in reply.

I jog back over to everyone. "Come on, I haven't got much time."

Terra sighs loudly. "Well, let's be off then."

We quickly make our way over to the pitch, and I catch sight of Fleur on the main path, waiting for us.

"Hey!"

She smiles widely, rushing over and pulling me into a hug. "Are you ready?" she whispers, her breath hot on my ear.

Holding back a shudder, I reply. "As ready as I'll ever be. You?"

"The same." She lets go of me, looking up at my family. "It's good to see you, Mister and Missus Greengrass."

Octavius waves her off. "No need for any of that, it's Octavius to you."

She nods, Terra offering the same. "Thank you."

"Hush dear, there's no need to be so cordial," Terra states, hugging a somewhat confused Fleur. "Keep my baby safe out there, alright?"

"I'll do everything in my power," she answers, awkwardly returning the hug.

Terra lets go, smiling thinly at the two of us, her tension getting the better of her. "We'll be in the stands… I'll see you tonight Helene, Fleur."

"See you later, Mum, Dad."

Fleur grabs my hand and starts to lead me towards the pitch but makes an odd turn towards the main stands where the judges are sitting. "What's going on?" I ask.

"My family is here, and they wanted to meet you."

I blanch. "They what?"

She chuckles at my sudden bout of fear. "It was a surprise. I didn't expect them to show up, but they started asking me about you."

"Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit," I mutter, noticing the glint of a very familiar silver standing out amongst the crowd.

"This is what you're scared of? Not Voldemort, but my parents?"
"Fighting I know, this? This I have no idea." I pause to think. "Do they know about you?"

Fleur falls silent. "No… I haven't told them."

"Shit. They're going to kill me when they find out."

Laughing once more, Fleur leads me over to them.

I recognize the small blonde girl hiding between her parents immediately, Gabrielle looking the same as I remembered her, bright hair and a small, pixie like face.

Fleur's parents are daunting, to say the least.

Her father is a heavyset man, with a large salt and pepper beard and tidily styled hair, a broad smile on his face.

Her mother is what scares me.

Tall, collected, and undoubtedly a powerful woman. She evokes a sense of strength in the way she carries herself, chin held high and rigid, eyes scanning over me like a hawk studies it's prey.

What with Veela being an avian species, that doesn't surprise me.

"Maman, Papa? Voici Hélène," she says, introducing me with a slight wave. "Helene, this is my father, Clément, and my mother Appoline." She points towards Gabrielle. "And I believe you've already met my little sister, Gabby."

"It- it's good to meet you," I stutter, cursing myself for being so terribly awkward all of a sudden.

Get it together Helene!

Clément laughs boisterously, patting me on the shoulder. "No need to look so worried!" he cheers, smiling at me. "It's lovely to finally meet you my dear."

"Bonsoir," Appoline intones, reaching forward to shake my hand.

I take her own and shake it briefly, nodding at her. "Bonsoir."

Fleur chuckles at my horrendous accent. "You don't need to say it that way, you know?" I glare at her, just causing her to laugh even more. "It's good to see you all."

Clément hugs her. "Same to you my dear, it's been too long." He turns his attention towards me. "So, tell me about the little lady here who's seemingly captured your heart?"

Blushing furiously, Fleur slaps her dad on the arm, while Gabrielle giggles at her plight. "Père!"

"Enough teasing my love," Appoline interjects, placing a dainty hand on his shoulder. "I'm happy to finally meet you Hélène and put a face to the name. Imagine our surprise when we found out that our little girl was dating the Girl Who Lived?"

I rub the back of my head sheepishly. "Eh, I find that label a bit more frustrating than anything."

Appoline's eyes shine with approval. "Agreed. I can't imagine how terribly obnoxious it is to have people view you through a moniker."

"I'd think that if anyone understood, it would be Veela."
She smiles at me. "Absolutely. I was lucky to have met Clément," she states, sending a loving glance her husband's way. "It's not so often that we get to meet someone who sees us for who we are, rather than who they imagine us to be. Veela more so, what with our gifts."

Just as she says that, a bell rings loudly, signalling the beginning of the task. "It was great to meet all of you, and good to see you again Gabrielle," I offer, smiling at Fleur's very shy little sister. "I'll hopefully be seeing more of you."

"The same to you," Appoline says, nodding regally. She turns towards Fleur. "*Fais attention à toi, ma chère."

"Oui, à tout à l'heure," she replies, hugging her mother for all she's worth. "*Pareillement, Papa, Gabrielle."

Fleur and I leave the Delacours, walking hand in hand towards our lone competitor, Cedric standing towards the front of the maze, his shoulders sagging.

"You ready?" I ask.

"Ready as ever," Fleur states.

Chapter End Notes

1 - *Fais attention à toi, ma chère*: Stay safe, my dear.

2 - *Oui, à tout à l'heure / Pareillement, Papa, Gabrielle*: I will, I'll see you later. Same to you, Father, Gabrielle.
"Cedric, are you alright?"

He turns towards me, a tired look on his face. "I'm… to be quite honest, I don't really know."

I frown. "What's going on?"

Throwing his hands up, he gestures towards the maze. "All this, this goddamn tournament and everything in it. I just… how the hell am I supposed to survive this? After Viktor… well, let's say I'm not too confident anymore." He looks back at me. "I forgot to mention it, but thanks for stunning me at the start of the second task. I… I probably wouldn't have made it if you hadn't."

I walk forward, placing my hand on his shoulder. "You don't have to do this." I leave unsaid the fact that he won't do this. I'm going to be stunning him again if he decides to go into the maze.

Cedric looks towards the stands, his face pinched. "My dad would never let me live it down."

I follow his gaze, recognizing the familiar sight of Amos. "Would you rather your dad be disappointed in you, or would you rather risk your life?"

He curses loudly. "I don't know!"

"Cedric, look. Cedric. Look at me." I grab his other shoulder, shaking him. "This isn't a difficult decision. Do you want to risk life and limb for a measly thousand galleons, or do you want to risk your dad being disappointed in you for a few months?"

He stares at me, and even in the dim light I can see how tired he is. The bags under his eyes are deep, cheeks sallow and mouth drawn tight.

"I forfeit," he whispers, before removing my hands from him. He looks up towards the stands and shouts, "I forfeit! I forfeit the task!"

A clamour runs through the crowd, and Dumbledore rises from his seat, quickly striding towards us.

"Are you sure about that Mister Diggory?" he asks, glancing towards me briefly.

He nods resolutely. "Yes, yes I'm sure," Clenching his fist, he continues. "I can't… I can't win against Helene or Fleur, I know that for a fact, and I don't want to risk dying just to come in third place."

Dumbledore stares at him for a few seconds, before inclining his head. Quickly turning back towards the crowd, he makes his announcement. "Cedric Diggory has decided to forfeit the third task, and as a result it will be between our two, final competitors. Fleur Delacour of Beauxbatons Academy, and Helene Potter of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"

As the crowd moans and grumbles, I pat Cedric on the back. "You made the right decision."
He grunts out a muted 'thank you,' shrugging me off as he wanders over to his confused father.

"So, that makes things a bit easier, doesn't it?"

"Oui, it does," Fleur replies, placing her hand on the small of my back. "Wait for me?"

I smile at her. "Always."

A loud clap emanates behind us. "My apologies for the delay," Dumbledore booms, his voice amplified. "We are now about to undertake the third, and final task of the Triwizard tournament, please give a round of applause for our competitors!"

He pauses, allowing the audience a brief moment to cheer, the clapping and shouting slightly discordant due to the sudden removal of Cedric.

"Our two remaining champions will be required to fight their way through an ever-shifting maze, the Triwizard cup hidden deep within! The first to find and claim the prize will attain glory for themselves and their school! And now, without further ado, would Helene Potter please take her mark!"

Wand held high in the air, Dumbledore gestures for me to move to the starting line, a divot marked into the grass to denote the beginning of the 'race.'

He lets off a massive bang from the tip of his wand, and I rocket off the ground and into the maze, halting as the bushes behind me knit together with a thin, seedy crackle.

Casting a tempus, I check and see how much time I have until Fleur enters the maze.

About thirty seconds, give or take.

I jump in place, stretching out my legs and arms and preparing for the ordeal to come.

After a short wait, the bushes behind me reopen, Fleur dashing over to my side. "Hello, hello my dear," she effuses, grinning. "Let's do this."

"Agreed."

We start off at a light jog, slowing down around each corner, easily able to avoid the few traps we meet within the first couple of minutes.

Being able to see magic, no matter how little, is a godsend when it comes to stuff like that.

"Wait a second, hold up," I whisper, putting my hand up. "Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Fleur asks, straining her ears. "I don't have super senses like you do Helene, describe it for me."

"It sounds like… like fire and bone."

Fleur frowns. "Fire and bone?"

Just as she says that, I shout, pulling her down and underneath the burning red flare of a Blast-Ended Skrewt as it launches itself towards us.

It snaps its unseen mandibles together in frustration, another gout of fire erupting from its rear end.
"God damnit I forgot about those."

"What the hell is it?" Fleur shouts.

"What? You didn't run into one of these last time?"

She shakes her head, staring at the abomination with no small amount of horror.

I draw my hand up, piercing the creature from underneath with an earthen spike, a thick, luminous orange ichor leaking out of its broken carapace. The ground bursts to flames, hissing and sputtering as the glowing bodily fluids drip upon it.

The Skrewt shrieks horribly, a thin grating wail that seems to run right through me.

"Euch," I mutter, grimacing slightly. "At least it wasn't another Chimera."

"Or a Manticore," Fleur adds, lip curled in disgust. "Come on, let's get out of here."

"Right behind you."

We carry on, more on edge than before.

The maze, I have to admit, is both an incredible work of art and at the same time, one of the creepiest things I've ever seen.

And I've seen Azkaban in all its glory.

I think it has something to do with the moving walls, the way they're always just shifting, swaying in some invisible wind. Or how they suddenly jump, twisting together like some sort of…

"Fleur."

"Yes?"

"Can you use your druid voodoo on these bushes?" I ask, pointing towards them.

She slaps herself on the head. "Merde, I'm an idiot."

"Don't worry, we both are."

She snorts, putting her hands out and pulling them apart, like she's prying open a door.

A hole slowly opens before us, thick, woven branches lacing backwards like fleeing snakes, revealing a passage.

"You go first, I have to keep focusing to keep it open," Fleur states.

I nod, jumping through the hole and checking to my left and right, waving her through once I confirm that there's nothing waiting to eat, dismember, or melt us behind the walls.

Fleur follows behind me, clapping her hands together once she's through and allowing the branches to collapse back together. She lets out a loud breath, shaking her head. "Let's try to do that as little as possible, yes? It's very different when the plant has a mind of its own."

"Worst-case scenario then… you alright?"

She nods, catching her break. "I'm fine, it didn't take much out of me, just caught me off guard."
"Good… which way should we go?"

Fleur casts a point-me charm, her wand spinning aimlessly on her palm. "Er- whichever direction we'd like to go."

"Damnit," I curse.

Looking up at the sky, I check the position of the moon. I never thought I'd say this, but thank god for astronomy classes.

"We came into the maze from the north end of the pitch, right?"

"Yes, we did."

"Alright, so… that means that the cup should be that way." I point to my left.

Jogging once more, we head down the path, slowly pushing our way further and further into the maze, the leaves overhead whistling quietly, just barely heard over the constant groaning of wood.

Fleur gasps suddenly, holding her hand to her chest. "Do you feel that? It's so cold all of a sudden."

"Dementor probably. Not a big deal for either of us."

She nods. "True, it's just very uncomfortable."

I put a hand on her, letting some of my magic suffuse her body. She sighs as it passes through her, shivering. "Feels better already."

"The benefits of having me here, huh?"

She pouts at me. "Don't get so full of yourself."

"Full of myself? Me?" I roll my eyes. "Impossible."

"Damnit Helene, we have a tournament to win," she chides, her voice playful.

I put my hands up in surrender, "Alright, alright." Looking off in the distance, I shout. "Hey! You! Get out here, wherever you are!"

The night suddenly seems much darker, a swirl of tattered cloaks and wispy smoke floating towards us. The cluster of Dementors bows before me, their hoods sagging.

"Greetings, Child. What do you wish of us?"

I tap my chin, glancing at Fleur, who's staring at the bowing monsters with shock.

Even if I told her about my little talent, it's still something to see.

"The man with the fake eye, have you seen him?"

The Dementor at the head of the troop inclines its head deeply. "Yes, we have seen him."

"Good, good. How swiftly can all of you move?"

It pauses for a moment, mulling over the question. "Where would you need us to be?"

"I would need all of you to attempt to devour his soul once we've taken the portkey in the centre of
"the maze," I instruct, gesturing towards myself and Fleur.

"We will begin preparations," it states.

"Excellent. Do that now," I command, waving them off.

In a flourish, they split up, diving up and over the top of the maze, all prepared to take Crouch Jr. out of the picture.

Makes me feel a little nostalgic.

Speaking of nostalgia, I wonder if I'll run into that Sphinx again. See what happens if I just blast through her riddle with no regard.

At least, if she uses the same riddle as before.

"This isn't as dangerous as I thought it would be," I comment. "Considering the shitshow that were the first and second tasks, this is a walk in the park in comparison."

"Helene, please don't challenge fate."

I spit on the ground. "Fuck Fate, she's the one that got me into this mess in the first place."

"Fate exists? As in the God Fate?"

I nod. "Yep, Death says she's a bit of a bitch."

Fleur groans loudly. "You didn't just challenge fate, you challenged Fate. Helene, please."

"Alright, alright! Sorry, I've got a bit of a problem with gallows humour."

"Just don't piss off any Gods, alright? We've got enough to deal with on our plate."

"I'll do my best," I concede, smiling at her. "No guarant-

A loud roar interrupts me, a furry blob covered in way too many limbs beginning to charge us.

"Quintaped!" Fleur shouts, rolling to the side just as the creature attempts to bowl her over, teeth gnashing.

With a flourish, she shoots a jet of flame out of her palm, the sickly-sweet smell of burning hair and flesh pouring off the now screeching Quintaped, it's many limbs flailing as it attempts to put itself out.

I slice downwards with my hand, bisecting the creature with a razor-sharp blade of air, two sides toppling over, organs spilling out of its body and into a bloody heap, glistening in the moonlight.

"Fuck that stinks."

I send a gust of air forward to push away the putrid scent of the roasted Quintaped, accompanying it with a freshening charm.

"What did I tell you earlier?" Fleur asks, walking towards me with a dangerous light in her eyes.

"Don't challenge Fate, very much received," I say, putting my hands up placatingly. "Won't happen again, I promise."
She nods. "Good, because if you do it again, you can deal with whatever comes next all on your own."

Our venture into the maze continues much in the same vein, us dispatching (relatively) harmless monsters and traps as we slowly push our way towards the cup.

It worries me that the monsters are so simple – at least, for us they are. I doubt many other witches or wizards could deal with the near constant barrage of class three and four magical creatures coming our way.

The cleverest trap we've come across so far was a magical pitfall of sorts, complete with fake grass, all leading down to a very much lethal hole in the ground filled with what looked to be an enchanted solvent, judging from how much it bubbled and hissed.

I can't wait to put down Fudge for this idiocy. If Cedric had stayed in this round and somehow slipped past me, he'd most likely be dead by now. The creatures and magic involved in this task isn't on the same level of danger as the first and second, but this one involves a steady stream of encounters that would leave Cedric exhausted within a quarter of an hour.

I'm getting really fuckin' tired of seeing Blast-Ended Skrewts though.

"How many more of these are there going to be?" I shout, impaling the umpteenth chitinous nightmare monster, already accustomed to their manner of attack. Namely, launching themselves in our general direction and attempting to douse us in magical napalm.

"I don't know, but I hate them even more than when we began," Fleur replies, looking up at the sky. "J'en ai ral le cul! This is infuriating!"

I almost shriek in happiness as we turn the corner, noticing a silver metallic shine atop a stone platform at the end of the path.

"Fleur! Look!" I point excitedly, her eyes widening in recognition.

She throws her hands up in celebration. "Finally!"

Just at that moment, a low, rumbling growl catches our attention, and I notice a purple haze settle over the ground near the cup.

"You see that?"

Fleur nods. "Yes, but I have no idea what it is."

The growl turns into a roar as what looks to be a lion pounces towards us, the animal having hidden in the shadows.

"Get back! Nundu!" I scream, a wall of earth bursting out of the ground and catching the feline in the midriff, knocking the wind out of it and sending it spilling across the ground. "It's just a kitten, hit it with the strongest thing you've got!"

Fleur jabs her wand forward, a ribbon of green light lancing out of the tip and striking the Nundu in the flank, the light wrapping around the creature before tightening, eliciting an unearthly howl out of the feline.

"That was the strongest thing you've got?" I ask, panicking.
"Just about," she says shakily, staring at the beast in horror. "Keep it down! It's getting back up!"

I curse loudly, wand whipping through the air as I send a salvo of multicoloured spells towards the stumbling Nundu, each and every one striking it cleanly, bursting and shattering against its magic resistant hide.

"Fuck! Nothing is working!"

Pushing my palm forward, I twist, tens of invisible wind formed daggers lancing out. I grin when I see slices appear in the beast's hide, its neck puffing out in anger, thick barbs jutting out of the bulbous skin like the spines on a pufferfish, glinting dangerously in the moonlight.

"Physical attacks work!"

Fleur doesn't miss a beat, conjuring a large amount of water and sending it rushing forward, the liquid enveloping the immature Nundu and lifting it into the air.

The creature thrashes and roars, the bubbles emanating from its fanged mouth filled with acrid purple vapour, tainting the water in its path.

I look on in fear as Fleur begins to sweat, hands trembling as she pushes every ounce of magic she has into crushing the beast. I rush over, placing my hands on her shoulders and flooding her with my own magic, hopefully giving her enough power to end the Nundu's life, or at the least, knock it out.

"Come on, you can do this," I whisper, glancing up at the floating orb not fifteen feet away from us, the Nundu's thrashing becoming more and more laborious. "Just a few more seconds and you've got him."

She nods tiredly, gritting her teeth and letting out an earthshaking roar as she clenches her hands into fists, the Nundu's limbs bending and collapsing against its body as they break. The monster screeches in pain before its neck twists impossibly, a thin stream of ochre blood leaking out from between its lips, eyes vacant and unfocused.

Panting, I reach over to help Fleur up, arm on her back as I support her, letting her lean on me to catch her breath.

"You good?" I ask, looking at her with both worry and admiration.

Her jaw hangs loose, chest heaving as she drinks in the air. She nods, eyes closing for a moment. "I'll be fine."

I hold her tighter. "Are you sure? You look exhausted."

Reaching into the pocket of my basilisk skin jacket, I pull out a small flask. Handing it to her, I say, "Drink this, it's Pepper-Up."

Fleur smiles thankfully, tilting her head back and quaffing the potion, grimacing as smoke bursts from her ears and her face flushes. "I'm fine, let's finish this."

"Just wait a moment." I pull Death's cloak out of my pocket, throwing it over her shoulders. "You need to stay hidden after we take the portkey, and only start fighting when I do, alright? We only have one chance at this."

She runs her fingers over the Unhallowed fabric, shivering slightly. "Don't get hurt, please."
Her voice holds a tone that I've never heard from Fleur before, an almost begging whine tingling her words. It makes me pause, searching her eyes for a hint of whatever she's feeling.

Fear.

She blinks, thick eyelashes fluttering from the unconscious movement, and I can't help but think that I've never once realized how terribly beautiful her eyes are. A crystal-clear turquoise in a sea of white, so full of love and worry that I fear my heart may burst.

"I promise." I kiss her, pouring every bit of myself into the action. Every ounce of care, every drop of adoration, I push through my lips and onto her own.

Pulling back, I tuck away an errant lock of her hair, tidily placing it behind her ear. "I love you."

She grins, those amazing eyes of hers crinkling with joy, teeth shining, her face pulled into an expression of absolute elation. She stares at me, unable to wipe the smile from her face, the corners of her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

"I love you too," she whispers, kissing me hard, forcing us together. "Sans toi, je ne suis rien."

As she lets up her fevered assault, I blink the daze away as best I can, mind foggy. "What… what does that mean?"

Fleur kisses down my jaw and neck, a gasp snaking its way out of my mouth as she nibbles at my earlobe, her breath so deliciously hot against my skin. "Without you… I am nothing," she answers, the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end and a cold shock racing down my spine.

I press my head against the crook of her neck, drinking in her scent. "Ditto."

She laughs like a ringing bell, her voice carrying out across the maze. "You have a way with words, don't you?"

I groan, shaking my head like a petulant child begging to sleep in. "Hard to think when you're kissing me like that."

"Like this?" she asks, sucking at the skin beneath my jaw.

Moaning, I pull my hand up to the back of her head and hold her there, fingers tangled in her hair. "Fleur…"

"What is it my love?"

"We kinda' have to kill Voldemort still."

She grumbles in complaint, slowly detaching from me. "You make a fair point."

"Much to my disappointment, I do." I kiss her on the cheek, squeezing her arm. "You ready?"

She smiles brightly. "Always."

Lacing my arm through hers, we walk past the deceased Nundu, scattering the remaining dregs of its toxic breath with a gust of wind.

With trepidation, we stand before the cup. "No turning back from this," I whisper, hand outstretched.

Fleur places her hand over mine, pulling the cloak over herself completely, disappearing from sight.
"No turning back." And with that, she presses forward and takes hold of the cup, my hand locked beneath.

A pull at my navel, and we're spinning through space and time, a dizzying blur of places I've never been and never will be passing by my eyes at the speed of light.

Just as suddenly as it activated, we're tossed to the ground by the portkey, landing on wet grass with a dull thud.

I take my old wand out, Holly and Phoenix Feather held out in front of me. "Hide," I whisper, the quiet scuffle of Fleur's shoes against the sodden ground the only sign I have that she's gotten to safety.

Well, here we are.

Slowly treading forward, I take in the familiar and very much unappealing sight of the graveyard.

It's scary how long this image has haunted me. How long it's flitted through my mind, how I felt true terror the last time I was here.

Tall, crooked headstones, all weathered with age. Thick moss lays in deep cracks, the graves near to crumbling from age, left to rot like those buried beneath.

I continue to creep forward, watching and waiting for the tell-tale flash of red of the stunning charm. Waiting for the moment I've been practicing for the last few months, honing my control of magic to perfection.

My ears perk up as I hear a quiet, nearly imperceptible footstep from ahead.

The rat is right on time.

"Stupefy!"

I push my senses outwards, catching hold of the spell and splitting it.

This is something that I considered doing when I first realized that I could see magic, and while it only works on simple spells like this, it still works.

The crackling red ball of energy dissipates over my chest, and I fall backwards, feigning being knocked out.

This way, I won't be in a daze from being brought to. Let's hope he doesn't check me over.

I hear the quiet snuffling of a man more rat than human as he scampers forward, poking and prodding at me with his wand.

"Stupid girl," he chitters, groaning as he leans forward and picks me up, along with my fallen wand.

Doing my best to hold back an involuntary shudder, I allow him to carry me across the graveyard, stifling a pained groan as he wrenches my arms backwards and ties them behind the headstone of Voldemort's father.

I hang there, head slumped, waiting through the initiation of the ritual. The telltale crackling of a fire being lit, the maddened hissing of Wormtail as he shuffles about, preparing everything.

A few minutes go by before I feel magic wash over me, presumably an ennervate.
Groaning quietly, I shake my head dazedly, slowly peeling my eyes open and looking about in faux confusion.

Meanwhile, I'm grinning on the inside, summoning up a piece of stone and letting it cut away at the ropes that bind me.

"Where the hell am I?" I croak, straining my voice.

"Quiet," Pettigrew stammers, his voice nervous and cracked.

A sibilant voice rises up from within his robes. "Wormtail, begin the ritual."

He nods obligingly, dropping a bundle of cloth into the cauldron with a heavy splash, a glimpse of pale, cracked skin seen from within.

Wormtail flicks his wrist, murmuring quietly as he gouges a hole in the earth and pulls a bone from it. "Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son," he intones, slowly levitating the ulna up and over the cauldron, dropping it into the potion within.

He holds his arm out, hand trembling dangerously. "F- flesh of the servant, willingly given, you will revive your master." With a sickening cry, he slices his hand from his wrist, the severed appendage joining the mixture below.

Shaking, he stumbles forward, face pale and drawn. His eyes flit about nervously, the bags that frame them sickly. He holds out the same knife he used to sever his hand, pressing it up against my arm and slicing deeply.

Frowning, he jabs at the wound, causing me to cry out in pain. Muttering to himself, he continues to poke and prod at the open flesh, finally nodding once he's garnered enough blood to coat the tip of the knife.

"Blood of the enemy, forcibly taken, you will resurrect your foe."

I smile dangerously at those words as I pump magic into my wound, knowing full well that the blood is far from forcibly taken.

Enjoy it while it lasts, Voldemort.

He flicks the knife at the cauldron, jumping away from it as it begins to froth, a thick steam emitting from it and wafting over the graveyard.

The steam begins to clear, and a naked, horrendously disfigured silhouette stands out against the gloom.

Spine bent and twisted, vertebrae jutting out of cracked, leathery skin. Its limbs are much too long, too thin, fingers like bone wrapped in vellum flexing, testing their new form.

The creature that is Voldemort stands tall, back hunched and head misshapen, his protuberant brow furrowing in confusion as he draws his hands up and runs them over his face, a terrible growl emitting from him, the sound low in his throat as his fingers pass over crooked fangs that peek out from between a nearly lipless mouth.

Good god, that changed the ritual even more than I thought it would.

"Wormtail!" he cries, his voice dual toned and thick with malice. "What have you done?"
Simpering, Pettigrew, shambles forward, his head bowed low. "Master… I- I don't understand!"

"You insipid fool! You've scarred me, your Lord." He strides up to Wormtail, pinching his jaw between two terribly long fingers and forcing him to look up and into the face of a monster. "My robes and my wand, Wormtail."

Shivering, he begins to dress Voldemort, thin conjured robes of a sheer black nearly floating over him, yew shining out from between spiderlike fingers.

"Your arm… Wormtail."

As the terrified man sticks his left arm forward, I finish cutting my bonds, grabbing the ropes before they can fall and instead letting them silently drift onto the ground riding upon a cushion of air.

A series of loud, staccato pops signals the arrival of the inner circle, masked and hooded figures dressed in robes black as night appearing out of thin air, spreading out into a half moon around their master.

With a sneer on his face, sharp teeth glinting, Voldemort shoots a dark yellow ray from his wand, piercing Worrmtail through the chest.

A burst of red splatters over the gravestone behind him, and Worrmtail collapses to the ground choking on his own blood, wet coughs wracking his body.

The graveyard is silent as he slowly dies, red bubbles collecting at the corner of his mouth as he begs for mercy, begs not to die through the blood spilling across his jaw. His voice rattles in his throat, a wet gurgle escaping him as his eyes go dim, finally let free of his torture.

"My friends," Voldemort intones, turning to the gathering with his arms spread wide in welcome. "My deepest apologies for the mess, it seems that one of our old comrades was a touch too simple to rejoin our ranks once more."

Throwing his head back, he sighs loudly. "Thirteen years… thirteen years, and you answer my call like it was just the other day." Protuberant lips pursed, he looks them over. "I find myself… disappointed."

"My lord!" one of the men cries. "We didn't know!"

Voldemort jabs his wand forward, the mans spine bending dangerously as he's thrown to his knees, crying out in pain. "Did I not profess myself immortal? Did my loyal compatriots not believe me?"

Sneering, he lets go, allowing the man to pull himself back up on shaking legs. "Did you not fight beside me? I didn't take you for a blind man, Macnair, unable to see the raw power I wield."

"No, my lord!" the man whimpers. "You are great! Far greater than I!"

Voldemort pauses to look over him, head tilted curiously. "You are naught but an executioner, Macnair. Do try to not be so foolish in the future."

He walks away from Macnair, ignoring the man's quiet pleas for mercy. Voldemort stands in front of one of the taller figures, looking down on him. "My friend… Lucius. You did not search for me. Why?"

"My lord, if I had heard even a whisper, I would have done everything in my power to bring you back," he grovels, and even through his mask I can tell he's locked eyes with the ground.
"A whisper, Lucius? There were much more than whispers my old friend, there were screams."

"I… my lord-"

"Enough!" he roars, the tip of his wand crackling angrily, sharp gray sparks spitting out across the wet grass. "Enough begging and pleading, enough of your excuses." Taking a deep breath, he passes his hand over his face. "We are not gathered here to fight amongst each other, but to take witness to my revival." Jabbing his finger in my direction, he grins dangerously. "And… to take witness to the end of the Girl Who Lived… the Boy Who Lived, whatever title you wish to go by these days, my dear. Unless… you'd like to join me, that is. I'm sure I could find a place for you in my ranks."

"Fuck off." I spit on the ground. "You look like a goddamn troll."

Face twisted in fury, Voldemort strikes me with the cruciatus curse.

I scream, collapsing to the ground as my nerves set alight, a thousand daggers driven into my skin, a million brands pressed to my muscles and searing the pain through to my very core.

He holds me under the curse for what feels like years, and when I come to, I find it hard to reconcile the too real sensation of being flayed alive with seeing my skin still sitting in its rightful place.

Looking at the frayed rope lying behind the gravestone, he states, "You escaped your bonds… it seems that Wormtail was even more incompetent than I believed him to be. It must have been those odd wandless powers of yours he'd told me of…" He shakes his head lazily, returning his attention to me. "What was that you said, my dear? Please, you'll have to repeat yourself, I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

I glare up at him, slowly pulling myself to my feet. "I said, go fuck yourself."

Voldemort smiles oddly at me, his eyes alight with interest. "Manners, child! Show some decorum! Did your parents raise you in a barn?" He leans forward, brow raised. "Forgive me, I'd almost forgotten. They're dead, aren't they?"

I laugh in his face. "You can do better than that! Come on, tell me something I haven't heard before. Show a little originality, Tom."

His face contorts in fury, a forked tongue flicking out his mouth as he hisses at me reflexively. With a lazy flick of the wrist, he hits me with the cruciatus once more. "Give the girl her wand!"

The pain is there and over in a flash, but it's still nearly debilitating. It takes everything in me not to fall to the ground, but I keep standing, defiant.

One of the Death Eaters walks over to Wormtail's rapidly cooling corpse, fishing through his robes before tossing me my wand with disdain, letting it fall short.

Lazily, I levitate it into my open hand. "Thanks."

The Death Eater grunts, and as he turns away, I'm sorely tempted to strike his head from his shoulders.

Voldemort turns back to me. "Have you dueled before, Potter? First, we bow," he drawls, bending forward and sweeping his arm over the grass. "Yes?"

As he's doing that, I'm funneling my magic into the graves around me, pulling and twisting at the threads that separate our world from the next, forcing a modicum of consciousness into the bones that
"Bow? I'm afraid I don't bow to monsters." I scratch my ear lazily, hand still shaking somewhat. "Can we just get this over with?"

He cackles loudly, his wrist twisting in a tight circle as the air shimmers.

I feel the familiar sensation of the *imperius* as it washes over me, but I ignore it quite readily. "I'm waiting."

Looking at me with a small amount of astonishment, he smiles crookedly. "My oh my, you're even more interesting than I thought you would be Miss Potter. Why, it feels like only yesterday that you tore me from that defence professor of yours without so much as a 'how do you do.'" He steeps his hands in front of him. "If you would be so kind as to explain that peculiar elemental ability you have before I kill you, I would be delighted."

"You mean this?" I ask, pointing at Macnair, a bullet of air sent rocketing his way. I watch with glee as blood bursts from the back of his hood, the man toppling over like a rag doll as his compatriots' step back, wands pointed towards me. "I'm afraid that it can't be taught."

Voldemort studies me, a look of unabashed curiosity on his face. "Interesting." He puts one hand up, looking over the Death Eaters. "I will fight her alone, understood?"

The Death Eaters mutter their affirmations, stepping further away so as to avoid getting caught in the crossfire.

"Ready when you are," I state, sweeping my hand forward and inviting him to begin.

"My dear, you have no idea what you're in for, do you?"

I tilt my head. "Actually, I understand better than most."

With that, I let the black tendrils of necromantic power I've been holding inside me lash out of my body, tearing through the ground and rushing out across the graveyard.

Voldemort throws up a shield reflexively, pausing when nothing happens. "Was that supposed to do something, or was it simply a show of force?"

I grin widely. "Oh, just give it a second."

Stepping aside, I allow the skeleton of Voldemort's father to burst from its grave, hands clawing at the ground and tearing deep furrows in it, pulling up grass and dirt in their wake that cling to the appendages like glue.

His eyes widen, this time in shock. "Necromancy?" Spells burst out of his wand, and I roll out of the way, returning fire with a slew of necromantic curses and blood turning hexes, an array of pastel lights careening towards him.

Almost lazily, Voldemort throws up a shield, the immaterial cover holding for just a moment before it shatters, having absorbed all my spells.

One of the Death Eaters screams as his leg is torn off by a rotten hand, blood gushing from the ragged stump as he falls to the ground, scrambling to get away from the animated corpse attempting to disembowel him.
He doesn't get far, the semi-decomposed body ripping into his own with a keening growl, pulling his intestines out with clawed fingers and tearing his belly to ribbons.

My eyes smart as a gout of flame incinerates the two corpses, Lucius standing over the flaming detritus with a horrified look in his eyes.

I throw up a wall between Voldemort and I, reinforcing it as I make eye contact with Malfoy Sr., making sure I've gotten his attention before drawing a finger across my throat and mouthing 'you're next.'

He pales, turning away as he begins to chain spells together, choosing to focus his attention on destroying the oncoming undead army.

"Potter!"

The wall explodes, and I send a powerful gust of air outwards, scattering the rubble. Voldemort strides through the dust and debris, wand raised. "You will not leave here alive."

A spear of light rockets out across the graveyard and just barely misses him, Fleur tearing the cloak off and tucking it away. "You won't leave here alive, vous fils de pute."

"Hello dear."

She smiles at me. "Bon soir."

He frowns at the sudden arrival of Fleur, cocking one crooked eyebrow. "Temper, temper." His eyes flick towards me. "Is this your Veela bitch, Potter? To taint yourself with another woman, a creature no less. How… disappointing."

"No more a bitch than your mother, Tom," I return, jabbing my wand at the ground beneath him, rotted arms bursting from the earth that just narrowly miss him as he leaps overtop, flying unaided.

Drifting towards the ground, he lets loose with a flurry of spells, an uncountable number of crackling balls of magic whizzing towards us.

We dodge, Fleur to the left and I to the right, a fist of earth erupting near where Voldemort is about to fall and grabbing at him.

I hiss in pain as I stand back up, fingers ghosting over a large gouge in my midriff. As I pour magic into the wound, regenerating it, Voldemort lazily dismantles my attack. The hand explodes as an orange light strikes it, the overpowered confringo easily tearing it apart.

A wave of fire rushes towards him, burning white hot, the grass in its path turned to ash as it tears across the graveyard.

The bright, silver light of an aegis fortis forms around Voldemort, the flames washing over it, a Death Eater behind him screaming in pain as they're incinerated in an instant.

The crackling of fire meets my ears as the shield goes down, the ground blistered, and in some places glassy, thin flames dancing sparsely over the wastes that Fleur has created.

"Impressive," he concedes, a bright white light flashing from the tip of his wand and a nest of snakes spraying out across the charred dirt. :Kill them:

:Kill each other: I hiss back, Voldemort flinching at my use of parseltongue, ignoring the snakes as
they turn on one another, spitting and biting.

:You speak it?:

I grin at him. :Is that a surprise?:

:No more than your Necromancy: he replies, pointing his wand up and to the sky.

The sky flashes and I dodge, a bolt of enchanted lightning striking the ground were I once stood.

Fleur screams somewhere to my left, and rolling, I summon whatever corpses are left in the graveyard, sending them shambling on broken feet after Voldemort.

I look over to her, Fleur's left arm hanging loose as she fires a barrage of spells towards Voldemort, the man dodging away from her assault, as well as the half a dozen decayed soldiers that grasp at his robes, striking them down with precision.

One of Fleur's spells hits, his robes bursting into flame.

Voldemort howls in pain and anger, dousing the offending substance with water before transfiguring the rubble nearby into a cluster of spears, sending them Fleur's way.

She pulls the water that Voldemort created and uses it to bat the spears away, the liquid forming around her hand like a sword, shimmering and shifting as it wraps around her arm. Lunging, she scatters the water, a thousand miniature projectiles rocketing towards him.

As he moves to shield himself, I return a barrage of spears his way, fashioned of air, twisting them so that they curve around his shield.

The water scatters across the ethereal barrier, but the spears get through.

Voldemort's eyes widen as he recognizes the attack, twisting backwards and dodging most of the immaterial weapons, but one clips his leg, tearing through it and scattering his blood across the ground.

"I grow tired of this!" he bellows, jabbing his wand into his wound and knitting it shut, glaring at us with unadulterated hate. "I did not waste thirteen years of my conquest as a shade to be attacked by schoolchildren." Punctuating his words with spellfire, he marches forward. "This battle is no longer amusing."

I pale as he begins to throw volley after volley of killing curses our way.

Reflexively, I construct innumerable layers of earthen shields, the barriers shattering under the onslaught of acrid green.

"I have a plan!" Fleur shouts, looking towards me briefly.

"Do you have time to explain?"

She shakes her head. "Follow my lead."

I nod, watching as she throws her hands forward, teeth gritted as she forces her left arm up, the limb scarred from the lightning strike. The ground churns as the desiccated roots of the flora within the graveyard begin to tear through it. Countless organic tendrils rip out of the ground as the earthen walls fall, Voldemort twisting around the daggered limbs with a grace I'd not thought possible in the man. The attacks he can't dodge, he parries via explosive curses, the roots splintering into countless
shards as he decimates Fleur's attack.

Following her assault, I throw countless curses his way, accompanying them with a barrage of earthen spikes and blades of air, attempting to overwhelm Voldemort with sheer destruction.

Face contorted in anger, he whips his wand around his head, raw magical force exploding off of him and destroying the attacks, cratering the ground beneath his feet.

"Enough!"

The night lights up green as he goes on the offensive yet again, killing curses laced together with spells that I've never before seen in my life, Voldemort's mouth twisting rapidly as he barks out a stream of some unknown language.

I shout as the spells begin to curl together, an unpredictable whirl of a thousand colours crackling with the veritable fury of a sun. Time slows down for me as Fleur scrambles to get away, and before I can even think, I've tossed myself in front of the attack, wand pointed out in defiance and a spell on my lips.

My magic collides with the magical cannon blast, the spells crashing against each other with a horrible, wrenching crash, the force of it reverberating through my bones, my teeth tingling from the aftershock.

Arm horribly burnt from the magical backlash, I hold steady, not even allowing my magic to seep into the wounds as I focus on the thin, golden stream that pours out of my wand. The light of Voldemort's attack dissipates to reveal his incredulous face, staring down at the beam that connects his wand to my own.

I grin. "Gotcha.'"

Forcing every ounce of my magic into the connection, I push, the terribly bright ball of effervescent light pushing away from my wand and towards his own, the priori incantatem beginning its full effect. The beam crackles, sparks of gold shooting off it and forming a cage, pulling us into the air.

I look down at the Death Eaters from above, the havoc that we've caused. Four of them lay dead, the remaining ten staring up at the light show before them, firing spells ineffectually against the barrier of raw magic.

With a flick of my off hand, I pull my Blackthorn and Yew wand from its holster, pointing it at Voldemort.

His mouth opens in a noiseless shout, wrenching his wand away from the connection as he attempts to return fire.

Blood pools at the end of my wand, crystallizing, before firing across the distance and piercing his heart in the blink of an eye.

Voldemort's eyes widen in shock as we both fall to the ground, the two of us colliding with the earth with a boneless thud.

"Holy shit, we did it," I croak, staring disbelievingly at the still form of Voldemort.

Fleur rushes over, kissing me on the top of the head as she helps me to my feet. I groan in pain, looking down at my very much broken leg. With a shout, I regenerate it, hissing out as the bone snaps back together with a crack. "We still have the remaining Death Eaters to deal with," Fleur
states, keeping her eye on the gathering of hooded figures.

"Lay down your wands, and we'll make your last moments painless," I shout, brandishing my wand dangerously.

I see Lucius stand out amongst the crowd, chin held high. "Damn you, Potter!"

He begins a spell chain, curse, hex, curse, hex, all flying in our direction. Ducking, I pull underneath the bombardment, flicking my wand and tearing through his robes. Lucius cries out, pulling his hand up to his arm. He slowly removes it, arm shaking, grimacing at the sight of blood.

"I'll have you put down for this," he growls, holding his wand out in front of him defensively. "The Ministry will know what you are, what you both are."

"That is if you somehow escape here alive."

His brow furrows, and he glances down towards Voldemort. Suddenly, he smiles, teeth bared manically. "Oh, I do believe I'll be fine."

I follow his gaze, mouth opening in silent horror as Voldemort pulls himself to his feet, wiping the blood from his chest. "You missed, Potter."

Panicking, I pull my wand up, my other hand following the motion.

A cutting curse strikes me in the face, blinding me in one eye as I stumble backwards, replying with my own shower of spellfire.

Fleur shouts, bodily pushing me out of the way as she lashes out against Voldemort, my eyes stinging at the flashing lights and constant barrage of explosions.

I swear loudly as I attempt to funnel magic to my wounded eye, the damage repairing much more slowly than it should.

The wound must be cursed.

Resolute, I press forward, spell after spell erupting from the end of my wand, Voldemort just barely managing to defend himself from our combined attack via a combination of dodging and perfectly timed shields.

Wicked green felfyre explodes forward, washing over where Voldemort once stood as he leaps out of the way, a wordless snarl emitting from his lips.

I follow him, the spinning curtain of Unhallowed flames chasing after the man at a frightful speed.

"Just die already!" I shout, whole body strained as every ounce of my power is poured into sustaining the jade inferno. "Fleur!"

I hear her grunt loudly in affirmation, summoning her own unique flames, a pure white of such brilliance I fear I may go blind bursting forth and combining with my own.

The blaze grows, flames moulding together as if they were always meant to be that way, a vibrant blue much the same as Fleur's eyes screaming headlong towards Voldemort.

He disappears into the inferno, the ground exploding as the roaring inferno strikes it, rubble scattering across the graveyard.
Panting, I let my arm fall, cutting off the stream of magic and nearly falling over. A loud scraping noise catches my attention, and I look over at the charred waste left over from our attack with a growing sense of dismay.

One sickly, scabbed hand bursts from the ground, fingers scrabbling for purchase. Before we can react, Voldemort wrenches himself out of the earth, naked and scarred. Terrible burns run over his face, the flesh melted and knitted back together like an abstract art piece. A blackened stump hangs where his left arm once did, sores upon the skin bubbling, leaking a thin, yellow pus.

I attempt to move, to get myself away from whatever attack is about to be thrown my way, but I stumble, foot catching on a chunk of stone. Pitching forward, my knees burn as they scrape across the ground.

Desperate, I attempt to pull myself to my feet.

Too slow, too late.

The emerald light fills my vision, and all I can hear as my life leaves me is Fleur screaming.

-:-:-

I collapse to my knees.

The white, foggy nothingness is achingly familiar, a pure smoke that seems to go on forever in every direction, the only recognizable structure being the façade of Kings Cross Station.

Tears sting my eyes as I realize that the last four years weren't enough.

"Can't die," I mutter, staring at my hands. "Can't die, my arse."

Fuck, even if I've got to do all this over again, it won't be the same.

"Fleur."

What's going to happen to her?

Will I see her in a moment? Will she go on without me, somehow wresting victory from Voldemort's grasp? Or will she end up dead in another few years, off to continue the cycle?

Will there even be a cycle?

"Would you quit your moping already? This isn't what you think it is."

I look up at Death, frowning. "What the fuck else could it possibly be?"

He puts his hands up, rolling his eyes. "Well, you're not dead, for one."

Getting to my feet, I walk towards him, jabbing him in the chest. "Explain."

Death snaps his fingers, offering me the same seat he once gave me so many years ago. "Sit."

And I do.

"This is going to take a bit of explaining, and you're probably going to be quite infuriated, but all the same, I knew this was going to happen."
I lean forward, clasping my hands in front of me. "Explain."

"Sheesh," he jibes, running his hand over his hair. "Tough crowd."

I continue to stare at him, and he lets up. "Alright, alright. You, Miss Potter, had a little piece of Voldemort's soul right here," he explains, poking me in the forehead, right on top of my scar.

"A piece of his soul!?" I shout, aghast. "I have a piece of his soul in my head?"

He nods lazily. "Had," he drawls, drawing a circle with his finger. "Had being the operative word in this equation. Yes, Helene, you once played host to a sliver of Tom Riddle's twisted and broken soul, and the only way to get rid of it was to visit me once more." He jabs his thumb behind him, and I look past to see what looks to be a creature from a Hieronymus Bosch painting.

"That's the piece of his soul?" I bang the table with my fist. "And you couldn't have taken care of this when I was first here? Or do you just enjoy watching me suffer?"

Death glowers, a threatening aura rolling off him in waves. "Do not take me for a trickster, Potter. To even compare me to deities long dead is an offense I do not take lightly."

Taking a deep breath, I calm myself. "I'm- I'm sorry, this is all just…" I snort. "This is all a lot to take in."

"Understandable," he agrees, nodding succinctly. "Just do not treat me like some sort of paltry god. As long as life exists in any universe or world, so do I, and so does my wife. We were, We are, and We will be. We are an absolute."

I blink, attempting to take that in. "You're infinite."

"In all definitions of the word, yes, We are." He steeples his fingers, resting his chin atop them. "Before I send you back, Miss Potter, would you like to meet with anyone?"

"What?"

"I said," he provokes, drawing out the word. "Would you like to meet with anyone?"

"I…"

Freezing up, I realize what he's asking.

"My… my parents?"

"How terribly cliché."


He raises his hand flamboyantly, waving it about. "Of course, of course. Just don't take too long, I do have a job to get back to."

As he walks away, I find myself muttering under my breath, "What an insufferable prick."

"Helene?"

"Fuck off Death, please, just give me a moment, alright?"

"Helene!"
I let out a shocked gasp as I'm hugged from behind, a blanket of red blocking my view. "Mum?"

"My God, it's really her! James! James, get over here!" the voice behind me cries, and I turn to see a sight I never thought possible.

My mum and dad. My dead mum and dad, standing behind me.

I fall out of my chair.

"Holy shit."

Dad *laughs*, laughs like he's never laughed before, as if the concept was just introduced to him and he find it to be the most incredible thing in the world.

I begin to cry.

"Hush dear, it's okay, it's okay," my mum coos, cradling my head against hers and hugging me tight, whispering in my ear. "Everything is alright."

I cough, tears pouring down my face. "Is it… is it really you?"

My dad kneels down in front of me, tucking my hair behind my ear. "Hey there, love."

"Oh my god," I choke, covering my mouth with one hand. "It's really, really you. I- I have so much to say! I have so much to ask you!"

"So do we," he replies, cupping my face with his hand. "Are you alright? You've been through a lot in the last few hours, not to mention your entire life."

"I… I'm alright, I think." I wipe my eyes clean. "How… how've you two been?"

Mum giggles, helping me to my feet. "We've been fine as well. Not much that can go wrong in the afterlife, and your… friend, Death, occasionally drops by to check in with us."

"Death? Checks in with you?"

She nods. "That he does. Odd fellow, but he's not that bad once you get to know him."

I snort. "That's one way of putting it."

"Dear," my Dad begins, an odd look on his face. "Tell me about this Fleur girl."

"Fleur? My girlfriend?"

"Do you have any other Veela girlfriends that I'm unaware of?" he asks playfully.

"Shut up," I jibe, laughing slightly. "What do you want to know?"

He crosses his arms. "Does she make you happy?"

"Of course she does! She makes me happier than anyone I've ever met before," I shout, incredulous. "She's just… there's something incredible about her, I can't explain it."

"Sounds like someone I know," he adds, glancing towards my Mum.

"Quiet, James," she shoots back, smiling lovingly at him. "What your father was asking, was are you happy?"
Resolute, I answer. "With her? Yes, I am."

"And that's all we need to hear," she smiles, running her fingers through my hair.

I pause. "How on earth did you and dad end up together." I point towards him. "No offense, but I've seen what you were like at Hogwarts, and I was not at all proud to find out you behaved that way."

He rubs the back of his head nervously, shoulders raised. "I was a prick, I'll admit that." He glances back towards mum. "I guess I grew out of it."

"You did more than grow out of it, you became a completely different person," my mum explains. "James used to be… well, awful would be a good way to put it."

"Hey!"

"You just admitted it dear, you can't deny it now," she chides. "After your grandparents passed, James changed. It was like everything bad in him disappeared and all the good came to the forefront. Brashness turned to confidence, and arrogance to humility."

"Makes sense," I say. The death of a loved one, especially your parents… that can really change a person. I know that better than most, considering the conversation I'm having right at this very moment.

Dad checks his wrist, a watch clasped to it. "Lily, we don't have much longer."

Frowning, she looks at his timepiece. "So we don't."

"What do you mean?"

"We… this is temporary dear," Mum states, looking at me seriously. "We're currently in a crossroads of sorts, something that could be likened to purgatory. Both the dead and the living cannot stay here for long, lest they pass over to the other side. You need to be getting back."

"But… what about us? Doesn't time not matter here?"

She places her hand on my shoulder. "Time matters everywhere, it's the substance that the universe is built upon. Just look at yourself for example. You died and returned, twisting time into something new and never before seen. Death explained it to us after he'd had you sent back… what he did changed the fabric of reality."

"Why me?" I plead.

"I don't know, and I don't think he would explain," Dad laments. "I… we love you, more than you could ever imagine. You make us so proud, Helene."

Crying once more, I hug him tight, afraid to let go. "I love you too. I miss you both, so, so much."

"You can come and visit us in a hundred years, does that sound alright to you?"

I nod, a wet laugh escaping me. "Sounds good to me."

He kisses me on the top of the head. "We love you. Go out there and end that miserable bastards' existence once and for all."

"I'll try my best," I promise, letting go of my dad. "Goodbye for now, I guess."
My mum kisses my cheek. "Say hello to Fleur for me, alright?"

Snorting, I nod. "Can do."

"Alright! Time's up everyone, it's time to get this show on the road," Death calls out, striding back into view. He looks over at me, his black eyes shining. "By the way."

"What?"

"You've got five more of those little bits of Voldemort to deal with before he can die."

I let out a shocked choke. "What? Can you tell me where they are? What they are?"

Death crosses his arms, looking affronted. "And where's the fun in that?" He raises one hand, fingers poised. "Do take care of yourself Helene, I'll be sure to keep in touch."

And with a snap, I'm gone.

-:-

Gummy eyed and delirious, I blink, a haze of silver and porcelain blocking out my vision.

I groan, wiping the muck from my eyes as I attempt to sit up, unable to rise due to the weight pressing against my chest, the sound of quiet sobbing reaching my ears.

Suddenly, the crying pauses. "H- Helene?" I hear, the voice thin and tired, exhausted.

"Fleur? Is that you?" I croak, still blinking heavily.

She starts babbling in French, kissing me from head to toe, hands running over my body as if she can't believe I'm really there.

"Hey, hey," I whisper, lacing my fingers through her hair. "I'm here, I'm not going anywhere."

Sobbing once more, she lifts me up to a sitting position, cradling me against her as she rocks back and forth. "You died… you died," she weeps, her words thick with confusion and sorrow.

"Apparently that was supposed to happen," I grumble, kissing her on the neck before pulling back, holding her face with one hand and stroking her cheek with my thumb. "But I'm back, I'm here."

Tears spilling from her eyes, she kisses me, mashing her lips against mine.

The movement is greedy, hungry, desperate. So full of love and fear that I find myself lost. "How… where did they go?"

She chuckles drily against my lips. "They fled after you were struck down. Voldemort was heavily injured, so were the rest of the Death Eaters, they must have decided to cut their losses and escape."

I snort. "Cut their losses, more like they ran after they thought they'd won." Looking her over, I check for injuries. "Did you fix yourself up?"

She nods, kissing me one more, she holds me tight. "Helene… I love you, I love you so much that I can't put voice to my feelings. You… without you, I am nothing."

I kiss her back, fingers tangled in her hair. "I love you too."
Moaning, she pulls me against her, fingers running over my back as if she can't hold enough of me. She bites, sucking on my bottom lip, tongue running over it before prodding through and into my mouth.

I gasp, briefly shocked before I comply, sucking on her tongue and threading it with my own, nibbling on her upper lip.

Fleur tugs on my hair, pulling my neck back as she attacks it, sucking and biting at the skin below my jaw, tongue ghosting over my ear lobe before tracing over my cheek and back to my mouth. "I need you," she murmurs thickly, her voice dry. "I need you."

I take a hold of her, wrapping my magic around us and sending the two of us towards the first place that comes to mind, Slytherin's private room in the Chamber of Secrets.

Collapsing back onto the bed, I pull her on top of me, lunging up towards her mouth and wrapping my arms around her back, my legs around her waist.

Holding her against me, I attack her throat, biting and suckling at her collarbone, my tongue leaving a trail across her throat. "Then take me."

Fuck Lockhart and what he did to me, tonight, I win.

She tears at my jacket, hands shaking as she pulls it off me, my arms stretched into the air as the garment is removed from my body. Her hands run over my undershirt, an athletic camisole stretched tight over my body. Fingers trace over my belly, up across my ribs, before halting.

"Helene?"

I look up to see her worried face, features pinched with anxiety. I take her hand, pressing it against my breast, smiling at her. "Take me."

She moans, kneading the soft flesh gently, her mouth pressed against my neck.

Sensation floods through my body, sharp sparks of electricity lancing through my chest and down my spine, legs folding tightly over her waist.

Desperate, I pull at her own clothes, tearing the muddied jersey from her body and staring in awe at the pale skin that looks back at me, crimson lace cradling her breasts.

"You're incredible," I whisper, pushing myself up and biting at the top of her chest, unable to get enough of her, unable to taste enough of her skin.

She pants heavily, reaching back and unclipping her bra, the fabric falling between us silently. Without missing a beat, I move down, taking a nipple in my mouth and flicking it with my tongue, pinching it between my lips.

Gasping, Fleur laces her fingers through my hair, tugging and pulling at it. I moan into her, reaching up and taking her other breast with my hand and squeezing.

Cursing in French, she pulls at my top, clipping my nose with it as she tears it off of me. "Oh no!" she gasps, holding my face and looking at me with horror. "Are you hurt? Are you okay?"

I laugh, kissing her on the cheek. "I'm fine, I'm fine. I just fought Voldemort, I don't think a flick on the nose is going to take me down."
She nods awkwardly. "I just… I'm so nervous."

Taking her hands in my own, I give them a squeeze. "Me too. This is… terrifying, if I'm being quite honest, but… I love you. I want you. I need you."

Hands trembling, she lets go of me, standing up and climbing off the bed. She pauses to survey the room. "Where are we?"

"Chamber of Secrets, Salazar Slytherin's old private quarters."

She turns back to me, eyes wide. "We're about to… in Slytherin's quarters?"

I chuckle loudly. "Seems like we are." Leaning back on my elbows, I raise my eyebrows. "It makes it a bit difficult if you're off the bed. I don't think that stone looks too comfortable."

Blushing, Fleur turns away from me, fingers tracing along her hips as she catches the fabric of her trousers, slowly pulling them down.

I gasp as she removes them, her rear practically wrapped in a matching red thong, the thin string of fabric disappearing between creamy skin. A squeak jumps out of my throat as she turns back to me, the fabric translucent, a tuft of curly, silver hair visible through the garment.

"Your turn."

Reaching arm over arm, I pull the sports bra I'm wearing up and over my head, hissing at the wash of cold over my breasts, feeling as my nipples stand out in sharp relief. Tentatively, I let my hands trail further and further, thumbs tucking into my trousers, one hand shaking as it unbuttons them. With a long, slow breath, I pull them off, the fabric catching on my heel.

Swearing, I tug them off, staring at my foot with disdain, as if the offending limb is solely responsible for turning a smooth gesture into something clumsy.

Fleur giggles, crawling back onto the bed and holding herself up, looking over me. Her eyes chase over my body, drinking in every curve, every bit of skin and bone that makes me, me. I feel even more naked before her eyes – those amazing, incredible eyes, as they bore through me.

Her pupils dilate, thinning out into slivers as she lunges, taking my breast in her mouth and biting down. I gasp, pushing down the sudden bout of fear and focusing on the here and now. Fleur and I, in bed, doing this. It's enough to make a girl shiver.

She kisses a trail down my belly, breath hitching as her teeth run over the hem of my panties. "You're so beautiful," she murmurs, kissing my core.

My hips shoot up, a slow drawn out gasp escaping me as my fingernails dig into the bed below. "Oh my god," I mutter, eyes shut tight as she nibbles on my thighs, hot breath washing over me. "Oh my god."

I feel as she tugs away my last bit of clothing, her body pressing over top of my own and lips pressing to mine. She kisses me strongly, tongue flicking across my teeth as she inhales sharply. I open my eyes to see her staring into my own, searching.

"I love you," I murmur, kissing her softly. "I trust you."
She nods, pulling away and back down my body. My breath hitches as I feel a pressure, her lips pressed against somewhere lips have never been pressed. My eyes shut tight as she searches my body, tongue flicking over that tiny, secret place, nestled between the petals of a flower. It's tentative, curious and unpracticed, but it's her.

I can't help but moan, squirming as she kisses and sucks, licking up and down, sharp bursts of sensation screaming out and through my body. My body quivers as I run my fingers over my chest, grabbing at the small peaks that rest upon my chest and twining, amplifying the shocks of pleasure that course through me.

An unearthly gasp escapes my throat as I feel a finger enter me, pushing just up and back, a second accompanying it a moment later. My eyes roll as I buck against her hand, feeling as she presses into my core, into my very being.

Panting, I grind against her, fingers tangled up in her hair as I beg for more, beg for her to be faster, harder, to tear me apart.

She complies.

She sucks, hard, fingers pounding into me as I squirm, thighs clasped around her head.

"Oh my god."

My mind explodes, body bursting with innumerable sparks that course up and through my chest, resonating in my core. Legs shaking, I collapse to the bed, hair splayed out behind me. My hips buck as she slows down, licking and kissing as her fingers slowly pull out of me, the delicious sensation of being filled leaving with a slight gasp.

I reach down, grabbing onto her and pulling her towards my face. Lips mash hungrily together, a bittersweet tang meeting my tongue as it lashes with her own, something that I realize to be me. Fleur whines into the kiss, wet fingers wrapping around the back of my neck as we force ourselves together, hungry.

I detach, kissing a trail down her neck, across her breasts, and down her belly until I'm face to face with something that has haunted my dreams and fantasies for much too long.

Desperate, I rip the pants off her, fabric tearing as it's tossed aside unceremoniously. Entranced, I pounce.

My lips meet her flesh, soft and so very, very warm. Like a furnace. I kiss, licking up and around her, teasing and tasting the nectar that coats the flower before me.

I place my mouth over her mound, sucking at the bead that's nestled within, tongue flicking over it slowly, a test. A test to see what makes her tick. Is she the same as I? Hard and strong, almost furious in its intensity? Or does she like it soft and slow, an almost imperceptible flutter that sends her begging?

She squirms beneath me, my hands clasped around her thighs, kneading the skin, a burning sensation deep within me to feel all of her. To know her inside and out.

I reach down, tongue stretching up and in.

Fleur cries out as the taste of her washes over me, so sweet my eyes sting. Like I've been starved, I devour her, hungrily suckling and biting at her body, mouth wrapped around her core like it's the only thing keeping me alive.
I pull my hand up, pressing it over the little bump of flesh that peeks out from between sodden lips, rubbing small circles. Fleur gasps loudly, crying out in French as I begin to bring her to release, her legs wrapping around my neck and pulling me close, fingers pulling desperately at my hair.

Complying, I continue with my assault, letting the sensations of her love wash over me as she squirms against my touch, a soundless gasp emitting from her as I look up and over the valley of her breasts. Fleur's eyes shut tight, chest heaving as she pulls me closer.

"Please," she begs, fingers scratching over my back.

I suck, licking at raw nerves as my fingers plunge inside her, driving in and out with animalistic fervor.

She grinds against my mouth, screaming my name as her legs quiver and shake, collapsing like dead weight against my back.

I massage her, a soft, tender kiss accompanied by slow and gentle caresses, slowly drawing my fingers out of her.

On all fours, I pull myself up, crawling over the goddess beneath me and laying beside her. Curious, I stick my fingers in my mouth, sucking the juices from them like a wanderer in an oasis.

Strong, sharp, sweet, the flavours dance across my tongue like fire, my mind alight with sparks.

Fleur grabs me, pulling me close and pressing her tongue to my lips. I open my mouth as she invades it, Fleur desperately conveying her emotions, everything she's feeling. Something raw, something so unbearably intense that it brings tears to my eyes.

"I love you," she whispers, forehead pressed against my own. "I love you so much."

"I love you… I can't put into words how much I love you," I reply, my voice heady, exhilarated. "I never want this feeling to end."

She kisses me softly, pouring every ounce of her love into the meeting of our lips. I wrap my arms around her neck, eyes shut tight, a few tears leaking from them as I kiss her back.

I've never felt so whole.
I blink in confusion at the blanket of silver hair that clouds my vision, eyes crinkling as it tickles at my nose.

Just as suddenly as I've woken up, I'm nearly jumping out of bed as last nights events come rushing through my mind.

Voldemort, Death, Mum and Dad, Fleur… sex with Fleur.

"Jesus Christ," I mutter, burying my face in Fleur's hair and gently pulling my arm over her waist, cuddling up against her.

Eyes shut tight, I breathe her in, attempting to make myself as cozy as possible.

A mix of sweat, sex, and dark chocolate flits across my nose, and I have to stop and think for a moment to wonder how I know what sex smells like.

Of course, a small part of my mind immediately screams out, 'Because you just lost your virginity last night, you idiot.'

I smirk at the thought, a small puff of air escaping me as I try not to giggle at my childish reaction.

"Hmm?"

"Hey there," I whisper, hugging Fleur tighter and tucking her hair behind her ear as I press a kiss against her neck. "Sleep well?"

A smile crosses over my face, as I can practically feel her waking up and the confusion she's radiating.

Just give her a moment.

"Oh my."

I laugh quietly. "Oh my indeed."

Fleur clumsily turns herself over to face me, brushing her hair out of her face and looking at me through half-lidded eyes. "Look at you," she murmurs, eyes trailing over my naked form, the duvet resting just over my waist. "What a sight."

I cock one eyebrow, giving her a not-so-quick onceover. "Have you seen yourself?"

Rolling her eyes, Fleur smacks me on the shoulder. "Quiet you, you're the cute one."

"Did I call you cute?" I ask, scratching my chin. "I don't think I mentioned anything of the sort." She opens her mouth in faux horror, and I smile broadly. "…but, if I was to describe you, the first word I would use is gorgeous."
Shaking her head, Fleur nuzzles herself under my chin, hair tickling against my neck. "You'll be the death of me yet."

"I mean, that's sorta' my powers and all that, you know?"

"You know what I mean," she huffs, her breath warm against my chest.

"I know, I know, I just couldn't resist," I jibe, running my fingers through her hair.

Humming quietly, I hug her tighter, a smile creeping over my face.

"What is it?" Fleur asks, detaching herself enough to look up at me.

I glance away bashfully. "Nothing… just feeling happy."

She grins broadly, pressing a kiss against my cheek. "Hmm? Why is that?"

There's only one thing I can say. "Because I love you so goddamn much."

Fleur blushes hard. Her normally porcelain cheeks dusted heavily with a reddish pink. "Oh," she squeaks, a goofy smile on her face. "Oh."

"Once more, oh my indeed."

Rolling her eyes, Fleur scratches her neck. "Oh my indeed."

Just as I'm about to reply, I startle quickly at a loud knocking at the door.

A loud knocking on Slytherin's private chamber door in the Chamber of Secrets.

"What in the fuck?" I ask aloud, wand flying into my open hand.

Again, knocking at the door. A steady one-two-three lilt, and if I wasn't so tense all of a sudden, I'd comment on the fact that it almost sounds like a swing beat.

"Who's there?" I call out, wand held forward.

"It's Iolaire you stupid girl, now open the goddamn door!"

I blink. "Iolaire?"

"Yes, now open the bloody door so we can speak properly!"

Looking down at myself, I call out, "Gimme' a moment, I need to get dressed."

I can hear him grumbling through the doorway as I toss out a cleansing charm at my old, dirtied clothes before transfiguring them into a set of clean robes.

They'll last long enough for this conversation I assume.

Tossing one of them to Fleur, I smile at her reassuringly as I put my own set on. "Alright, I'm going to let you in now."

The grumbling behind the door only gets louder as I open it up, face to face with a very disgruntled looking Iolaire, his burgundy beard not it's usual well-groomed self, and instead quite tangled. "You alright?" I ask, looking him over. "You look like you haven't slept… do you need sleep?"
"Yes, this body needs sleep," he snaps, glancing over the room. "I see you've broken in Salazar's old chambers?"

Blushing, I nod. "Seems like it, yes."

He nods curtly towards Fleur. "Good morning Miss Delacour, I don't believe we've spoken."

Walking towards her, he extends his hand. "My name is Iolaire, you may know me better as the Sorting Hat."

Her eyes widen as she glances towards the limp hat atop his brow. "Helene's told me about you," she replies, shaking his hand.

"All of it horrific, I assume."

She shakes her head. "Nothing of the sort," she denies. "She actually quite likes you from what I can tell."

I smile. "He's got a wicked sense of humour."

Iolaire returns the gesture. "That I do." He crosses his arms, leaning against the wall and looking us over. "What happened last night?" he asks, eyeing me oddly. "The papers this morning read like both an obituary and a holiday announcement."

"What do you mean?"

"The world thinks you're dead," he answers, pointing at me, before his finger angles towards Fleur. "And you're on the run." Turning back towards me, Iolaire continues. "Not to mention that you've been named a Dark Lady, defeated before she could begin her reign of terror."

"What?"

He laughs. "Exactly my reaction. I assume things didn't go as planned last evening?"

I shake my head in disappointment, remembering how the battle went. "No. Voldemort got the better of us. That man is... beyond frightening. I thought we'd had him by the first fifteen minutes, but then he just- I don't know. He wasn't taking us seriously to begin with, but when he did?" I grimace. "He's got an ungodly amount of power, knowledge, and the experience to use it."

Iolaire scratches his chin. "Well, I better tell you two now, rather than later."

"Tell us what?" we ask in unison.

"Dumbledore is dead."

"He's what?" I croak.

"Dead," Iolaire repeats. "D. E. A. D. He collapsed last night in the midst of everyone panicking as they attempted to figure out where you were." He continues to explain at my confused look. "Amelia Bones and half the Auror force were on the grounds after Mad Eye Moody was attacked by a host of Dementors and it turned out the man was actually Bartemius Crouch Junior. After that happened, she tasked her men with trying to find out where in the hell you two had disappeared to."

My fingers find their way into my hair, tugging angrily at the red curls. "Shit, shit, shit. He must have died when I did."

Iolaire raises one eyebrow. "You died again?"
I nod. "Very briefly, but yes, I died again." With a sigh, I detach my fingers from my hair, drawing one hand over my face. I suddenly remember what I was told last night by Death about the bits and pieces of Voldemort's soul that are tucked away. Information that I imagine Dumbledore knew of. "I was wanting to give that bastard a piece of my mind."

Looking down at my hands, I frown.

I'll take care of that later.

"So, the world thinks I'm dead… I'll have to let my family know otherwise. They must be distraught." I turn towards Fleur. "We'll visit your family as well, yeah?"

"Oui, I would like that," she answers, a concerned look on her face. "They must be worried sick right now."

Head swimming, I sit down on the foot of the bed. "So… what the fuck do we do now?" I wonder aloud, looking to Fleur for some form of guidance.

She clenches her jaw tightly. "We go to war."

"The two of us against the world, huh?" Fleur looks at me curiously, so I explain. "Well, the world thinks I'm a dead Dark Lady, so what happens when I show up again?" I let the question hang for a moment, Fleur's eyes widening in recognition. "So, you and I start battling against Voldemort and his Death Eaters again… whenever they make themselves public, that is. Everyone will know immediately who we are, recognize the fact that I'm not dead, and immediately make a correlation between myself and Voldemort. They're going to think that the two of us are fighting over who gets to take over Britain, nobody is going to think that we're fighting for them."

"Merde," she mutters. "This isn't good at all." Frowning heavily, Fleur pinches the bridge of her nose. "We're going to need to be ready at a moments notice to fight back against any Death Eater attacks. In my last life they always attacked early morning, or late at night. Very rarely in the afternoon." Fleur walks up to the ancient dresser against the far wall, cutting a chunk of wood off it with a well placed diffindo, and transfiguring it into a pen and paper.

With a flourish, she begins to jot down a list. "We need to get our hands on at least two or three radios, tuning them in to different stations so we can keep track of any potential attacks."

"Diagon Alley will be the first place to be attacked, Voldemort has too large of an ego to not make himself known in the most grandiose way possible," I mention, Fleur nodding in agreement.

"Agreed. Either that, or he'll gun for the Ministry immediately," she adds. "I doubt the latter will happen though, even when the world knew he was out there he still worked from the shadows. Picking off members of the Wizengamot and Ministry, bribing others… he's the patient kind of monster."

"That means we should be on the lookout for people being imperiused as well, he and his followers used that curse extensively in the last war."

A sharp cough behind us breaks our attention. Iolaire slowly draws a fist away from his mouth, one eyebrow arched precariously. "As entertaining as your brainstorming session is, I have to get going," he says, inclining his head towards the door. "I will find a way to notify your siblings that you are still alive Helene."

I smile at him. "Thank you, you have no idea how much that means to me."
He nods once. "It's no problem." Giving us one final wave as he shuts the door, Iolaire comments, "Good luck you two. Severus and I will make sure that Voldemort does not manage to get a foothold on Hogwarts."

"Well, that's good to hear," I agree, watching as he leaves. "Severus though… how is that going to work? He still has the Dark Mark."

Fleur shrugs. "I'm not too sure myself. Last time we only had news of Karkaroff dying well into the war, so I imagine Snape will be fine if he stays within the castle's wards."

I frown. "That's surprising. You'd think Voldemort would've hunted him down as quickly as possible."

"I think he pawned it off to a few of his underlings," she comments, inclining her head in thought. "As spiteful as he is, he's not an idiot. Splitting his resources so heavily to kill a traitor isn't worth it when he had the whole of Britain nearly in his grasp."

"Shame he's not an idiot," I mutter in annoyance. "Would make our lives a hell of a lot simpler."

"Since when are our lives simple, Helene?" Fleur asks, smiling sadly at me. "We're paragons of the most powerful deities in existence. Life will never be simple for us."

I huff quietly, finding it hard to keep up the elated high I felt upon waking. I knew there was a chance of war, and it looks like it's already knocking on my door.

"So, our plan at the moment is to retaliate against any Death Eater attacks," I summarize, looking over the notes that Fleur has taken.

Christ, she's extensive. Never have I been so glad for her to have already experienced war, as horrific as the notion is. We need every edge we can get.

"What about Voldemort's immortality?" Fleur asks, turning towards me with a quizzical look on her face. "Did Death tell you anything else about it?"

I shake my head. "No, not a damned thing. He just told me about it without so much as a how do you do. Gritting my teeth, I look down at the wand resting in my hand. "Although, I know who we can ask."

"Who-"

Fleur pauses, a grimace settling over her features as she realizes who I'm talking about. "Dumbledore?" she asks, more confused than anything. "I thought he… I thought he was on our side?"

"He is… wasn?" I shrug angrily. "I don't know anymore. What I do know, is that he held back information from me again, and I'm going to pull it out of him even if his goddamn soul is driven insane."

I close my eyes, dredging up the ever so cold magic of the afterlife, misty tendrils of black seeping up and through the cracks in the stone, forming into the shape of something roughly humanoid. Pumping magic into the immaterial substance, I reach deeper and deeper into the metaphorical pit, grabbing hold of Dumbledore and yanking.

The smoke gains shape and mass rapidly, the silhouette of Dumbledore becoming more and more recognizable with each passing moment.
A sharp cry of pain comes screaming out of the wraith, back arching away from the floor.

Dumbledore lets out a thin, rattling breath, his wispy form clawing at the ground as it struggles against invisible bonds. "H- Helene? Why- why did you bring me back?" he rasps, eyes slammed shut in what looks to be an attempt to hold back the agony he's under.

"Because you didn't tell me about the little bits of Voldemort floating around out there," I hiss, glaring at the tortured soul before me. "I thought you trusted me, Dumbledore. I thought we'd reached some sort of understanding, something amicable."

He gasps soundlessly, mouth opening and closing as he wrestles with his ability to speak. "W- what?"

"The pieces of his goddamn soul Dumbledore," I growl, staring him down. "I fucking died, again. I know for a fact that you at least had an inkling of what was going on, so tell me now and I can let you get back to being dead."

"H- Horcruxes," he splutters, eyes wide in recognition. "They- they're called Horcruxes."

I nod approvingly. "Good, what do you know about them?"

"Voldemort cannot die without them being destroyed," Dumbledore continues, lip trembling. He lets out a thin wail, the sound grating against my spine. "I believe he made them out of objects of great power, or personal significance." He points upwards, arm shaking under the effort. "Notes, in my office. Use them well."

"Why didn't you tell me about this?"

His eyes screw shut in equal parts pain and guilt. "I knew of no other way to destroy the Horcrux inside you."

"...and Voldemort would live on forever," I murmur. "Dumbledore... I- "

My hands clench into fists, jaw clenched tight as I look down on the man that has done so much in his long life, both great and awful. "I hope I never have to see you in the afterlife... but I don't enjoy your suffering either. Go."

With that, I release my hold on the magic tying him to the living world, allowing him back to the void in an explosion of black mist, the scattered motes of Unholy magic accompanied by a sharp gasp of relief.

I feel Fleur's comforting touch on my back as Dumbledore disappears, her fingers curling into the fabric of my robes. "Are you okay?"

Pausing for a moment, I bite my lip. "No."

"I'm sorry."

"I just... fuck. I thought that we finally understood each other, that everything was fine, or as fine as it could be between us." I drag a hand through my hair in frustration. "Then he pulls this shit on me, and he had to go and fucking die."

"Helene- "

"I know, I know," I murmur, leaning into her touch, staring vacantly at the spot where Dumbledore
just was. "I'm just pissed off that it all had to end this way. For a moment there I was optimistic, you know? That I would get closure or... something. I don't know. I hoped that maybe we'd even part amicably, but... god, this is so frustrating."

"At least he gave us something to work with," Fleur offers.

"True," I concede, huffing loudly. "We should check that out."

She wraps her arms around me, the room disappearing in a flash of light. I open my eyes to the sight of Dumbledo- no, the Head's Office.

The two of us glance around, wondering where he could have possibly kept his notes.

"They wouldn't be in his desk, would they?" Fleur asks, one eyebrow raised.

I shrug. "Might as well check."

She walks over, rifling through drawer after drawer, the tip of her tongue sticking out of the corner of her mouth as she concentrates. After a few minutes her eyes widen, and she thrusts a thin, handbound notebook to the sky. "Found it!"

"Yeah?" I make my way over, leaning up against Fleur as she opens the journal.

The thin, eccentric, and incredibly familiar handwriting of Dumbledore meets my eyes, the notes accompanied by sketches of magical artifacts. Dates and times are scrawled into the margins, as well as locations jotted underneath, many paired with a solitary question mark, signifying guesswork and approximations.

Fleur begins to leaf through the pages, the two of us reading through the notes.

I frown as I catch sight of a familiar image, reaching forward and staying Fleur's hand as she moves to turn the page. "Wait," I tell her, finger tracing over the sketch. "I know that book."

"What?"

"I destroyed that book, twice now," I say. "It's Voldemort's diary, from when he was here at Hogwarts."

"Something of personal significance." Fleur echoes Dumbledore's earlier words. "What made his diary so important?"

"Hogwarts," I reply, wondering how I didn't make the link earlier. "Hogwarts was huge for him, monumental. He found out he was special. I remember seeing echoes of him in the Diary, memories, his shade, or whatever it was... I got the sense that he was extremely proud of the power he wielded."

"Well, we already knew he was a megalomaniac," she scoffs, garnering a laugh out of me. Fleur smiles, glancing back down towards the notebook. "I wonder what else is in here."

We continue to pour through the journal, most of the pages littered with mindless ramblings and other, useless information.

All up until we come across a sketch of five artifacts.

"The founders," Fleur declares, pointing out the iconography on each bit of inky craftsmanship. "Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Slytherin, and Hufflepuff." She pauses, resting her finger on the image of a
plain, crooked looking ring, an odd symbol etched into its surface. "But who does this belong to?"

I look at the drawing in confusion, the image almost familiar, but at the same time distant. "I haven't a clue."

"Well, we've narrowed it down at least." Fleur points at the notes on the following pages. "Dumbledore looked to be set on the fact that these are the Horcruxes."

I peer down at the thin scrawl, nodding my head. "Looks like it. So… now we know what we're looking for, but where do we look for it?"

Fleur's face scrunches up in thought. "Personal significance. Dumbledore repeats that over and over in his notes." She flips backwards through the pages. "Look," she says, pointing out a location on the page. "Wool's Orphanage."

"Is that…?"

"Where Voldemort grew up?" she says. "Probably. We'll only find out if we check it out." I hum in agreement as she taps her finger against the page. "East London is where we'll find it, should we head out?"

"After we tell our families what's going on."

"Shit, yes, yes we should do that," she blurts, looking slightly frazzled.

"You alright?" I ask, placing my hand on her shoulder.

She nods. "Still getting over yesterday."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No, I'll be fine. I'm just somewhat… out of sorts, still."

I squeeze her shoulder reassuringly. "Let's go visit your parents first."

She turns to me. "Oui?"

"Absolutely. I'm sure they're worried about you."

Taking my arm, we disappear once more. This time I'm met by an unfamiliar sight.

A large cottage greets me, made of white cream stone. Clay shingles line the roof, and ivy stretches across the walls, tickling around blue shutters that frame steel grilled windows.

It's warm out, the Mediterranean air smelling of the sea. I can hear waves crashing faintly in the distance, and the rustling of a light wind brushing through the tropical flora.

"Damn," I mutter. "Homely, but this is a really nice place."

Fleur smiles nervously. "It's home."

"It's lovely, just like you."

"Damnit Helene," she groused noncommittally. Taking a deep breath, she grabs my hand, leading me towards the door. Eyes shut tight, Fleur raises her hand and knocks twice.
I stop and listen as someone in the house shuffles their way towards the door, their steps heavy. The door is wrenched open, Clément peeking his head out from between the crack. "Je vous ai déjà dit que je n'en savais rien," he curses, rubbing his face tiredly. He looks up, squinting, before he gasps in shock. "Fleur?" His eyes carry on, locking onto me.

With a snarl he draws his wand, and I just barely manage to get a shield off in time as he fires a stunner in my direction. "Monstre!" he shouts, brandishing his wand at me. "What are you doing here? Fleur!" He waves her over. "Get away from that… thing!"

"No," she replies tersely. "You don't understand what's going on."

"I understand perfectly well what's going on," he states, not taking his eyes off of me. "You've been caught up in something terrible. Come with me, or I'll call the Aurors."

"Père," she says, her voice commanding. "You've heard the wrong story. I'm- we're here to talk… to tell you about what happened last night and make sure you, mère, and Gabby are okay."

I look between the two of them, unsure of whether or not I should say anything. "Mister Delacour," I entreat, swallowing heavily. "I'm going to hand you my wand, alright?"

He stares at me for a second, before nodding brusquely. I flip my wand, grasping it by the end as I hand it over to him. "We just want to talk."

With a huff, he opens the door wider, inviting us in. "You better have something extraordinary to tell me, otherwise the Aurors will be here before you can blink."

"Extraordinary doesn't even begin to cover it," Fleur interrupts, resting her hand on my shoulder. "Where should we talk?"

"The kitchen, your mother is in there," Clément deadpans, leading us through the house. "Appoline, we have… guests."

As we walk into the kitchen she turns to greet us, letting out a cry of shock as she rushes towards Fleur, pulling her into a desperate hug. "On s'inquiétait pour toi, tu étais où? Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?"

"Je vais bien," Fleur replies, hugging her back. "Everything is fine."

Appoline sniffles quietly, grasping Fleur's shoulders as she pulls back. "Tell me everything."

"That's what we're here to do."

"We?"

Fleur nods her head towards me, and Appoline's face darkens. "You," she growls, pointing at me. "What have you done to my daughter?"

She gasps as Fleur reaches out and grabs her wrist, drawing her hand down. "She's done nothing, mother. Now can we please talk? I can't begin to understand what you're going through right now, but Helene doesn't deserve to be attacked."

Appoline scowls for a moment, before letting out a deep sigh. "Yes, we can talk."

"Please, tell us everything," Clément adds, arms crossed.

"Fleur? I think you should be the one to speak," I say.
"Oui, that seems like a good idea," she concedes, pulling herself up and onto the countertop, using it as a seat. "I… wow, I didn't expect to be telling you about everything this way." Fleur runs her hands across her thighs nervously, the fabric pinching underneath her grasp. "Helene and I are time travelers. We died. Died, and were sent back to fix things."

Clément raises his hands in frustration. "Time travelers? Really? That's the excuse you have for what's happened?"

Fleur grits her teeth. "Yes, time travelers, sent back by Life and Death themselves." She reaches over to her left, picking up a flower vase. She puts her hand over the soon-to-wilt lavender and channels her power into it, the plant lifting towards her touch like a child grasping for its mother.

She hands the vase to me and sends me a knowing look. With slight trepidation, I push my own, albeit opposite powers into the flower, causing it to crumble into nothing.

"I am of Life, and Helene is of Death," she states, once more twisting her hand over the vase, a seed within splitting open, and a new shoot of lavender rising up from the now murky water. It twists over the top of the vase, flowers blooming, larger than any sprig of the plant I've ever seen before. The petals continue to stretch out, each and every one of them a palms width and the most vibrant purple one can imagine.

Fleur clears her throat, catching her parent's attention once more. "Last night we set out to finish something that is our responsibility to finish, to kill Voldemort." She puts her hand up, silently asking her parents to hold their questions. "We knew that the cup at the end of the maze was a portkey, since we'd already lived it once before. What we didn't know, is that Voldemort is much harder to kill than we originally believed."

"You went to kill Voldemort?" Appoline stammers, aghast. "You're just… you're just children, teenagers! This isn't your responsibility!"

"Mother, we're adults," Fleur interrupts. "I died at nineteen, Helene died nearly sixteen. We've been back for almost five years now."

"That doesn't change the fact that you shouldn't be fighting!"

"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 the Dark Lord will mark them as his equal, but they will have power the Dark Lord knows not. Either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives."

Appoline and Clément twist their heads in my direction, shock written all over their features. "Prophecy?" Clément asks slowly.

"One given by Fate itself," I add. "Yes, Fate exists as well. No, we haven't met."

Clément balls his hands into fists, thumbs lips pursed in thought. "All of this is true then? You two went to fight Voldemort last evening?"

"Yes, we did," Fleur confirms, blinking heavily as she turns towards me. "Helene… Helene died, again. We underestimated him, and she was struck by the killing curse again. We're unbelievably lucky that Death was fine sending her back once more, but it's still our responsibility to destroy that monster."

Appoline clears her throat loudly. I almost wince at her expression, no longer one of concern, and instead one of motherly rage. "You will not be risking your lives fighting against that madman, not if
I have anything to say about it. War is no place for people of your age."

"I already fought in a war, it's how I died," Fleur interjects, Appoline blanching at her tone. "I'll be damned if I don't see this through. Helene has to kill Voldemort, and I'm not going to let her do it alone."

Fleur's mother moves to argue, but Clément places a hand on her shoulder, shaking his head. "There's nothing you can say to her that will stop her."

"She's our daughter, and she's going off to fight a Dark Lord! Of course I have say in this!"

"Appoline," he says, looking her in the eye. "Look at her, do you think you could stop her if you tried? She's looks like she's ready to draw her wand."

I look at Fleur, taking note of her rigid posture, the way her right hand flexes ever so slightly towards her wrist.

He's right. She is ready to draw her wand.

Appoline lets out a quiet sob, burying her face in her husband's shirt. "She's our daughter."

"I know that, my dear, but there's nothing we can do." He glances up towards Fleur. "You say you two fought Voldemort? How close did you come to winning?"

"Very."

He clenches his jaw for a moment, before nodding. "Take care of my daughter Helene, I don't believe you need me to say what will happen otherwise."

"I'd die for her, if needs be."

He nods once more. "You two should go. Fleur? Try to keep in touch."

"I'm sorry," she says, reaching out towards him before pausing. She clenches her hand, drawing it back. "I'll keep in touch."

In the blink of an eye, Fleur's grabbed me and flashed us back to the Chamber.

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Amelia Bones' stomach sank as she looked over the Ministry wide emergency bulletin.

Helene Potter was dead.

Helene Potter was a Necromancer.

She read over it once more, trying to take in the sparse amount of information listed upon the thin sheaf of parchment.

Emergency Announcement
- Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge –

We have received first-hand accounts from numerous members of the Wizengamot this morning describing how they were pulled unawares from their homes by an insidious magic and viciously attacked by Helene Potter and Fleur Delacour.
These brave men fought against Potter and her creature lover but were shocked further to find her summoning and commanding a battalion of corpses during the skirmish. The Department of Mysteries has collaborated with the victims and have confirmed that Necromantic spells were used during the fight after inspecting the location in which it took place.

Four members of the Wizengamot are now dead as a result, but thankfully, due to their courage, Potter was struck down during the battle.

We can all rest easy knowing that a rising Dark Lady was defeated before she could come to power. The news will available to the public in this afternoon's papers.

Her hand trembled dangerously as she angrily swept the bulletin off her desk.

"She was playing me the whole time," Amelia swore, getting out of her chair and making her way over to a liquor cabinet set to the side of her office. Something she kept there for just such an occasion as this.

Pouring herself a drink, she slammed the amber liquor back, eyes scrunching up as it burned her throat. Moving to pour herself another, she paused, setting the bottle aside. It wouldn't do to get drunk, not with the mess that she knew was coming.

Her whole body aching, she slumped back into her chair, defeated.

'She must have been the one at Azkaban,' Amelia realized, her eyes widening.

It all made sense. Their height and silhouette matched almost perfectly, and she'd already assumed that the person who'd invaded the prison had been either been a woman, or quite young.

Turns out she was right on both accounts.

"She fucking used me," she growled, eyes darkening.

There was one rule Amelia had lived by ever since she had joined the Aurors. If someone hits you, you hit them back twice as hard. It stopped her from being passed over for promotions because of her gender. Hell, it turned her into one of the best Aurors the department had ever seen.

And then she was tricked by a child.

A clever one at that, she would readily admit. Much cleverer than she should have been, considering her age.

Amelia found that a part of her wanted to hunt Helene down, to find her and bring her to justice. But she couldn't.

Helene was dead.

Glancing back over to the bottle, she pondered getting another drink before a sudden thought struck her.

'Something about all of this doesn't add up.' She reached into one of her cabinets, pulling open the folder on the Azkaban break in and rifling through it. Clicking her tongue in concentration, she found herself reading over her and Shacklebolt's account of the evening, recorded the night of the confrontation.

Brow furrowed, Amelia traced her finger over a single line. "The attacker mentioned Voldemort by
name, said he was coming back," she murmured, tapping against the text. Reaching back down, she pulled out a more recent folder, one containing the report on the Bagman murder. Leafing through it, she looked over another quote. "The magic is unlike anything that I've ever seen… close to the spells that were used in Azkaban."

Cursing under her breath, her eyes flitted back and forth between the two reports, mind racing. "There's a connection here somewhere, I know there is," she thought aloud, lips pursed. "But what is it?"

The high-pitched roar of the emergency siren caused her to nearly shoot out of her seat.

Collecting herself, Amelia flicked her wand, sending her glass and bottle back into the cabinet and locking it shut.

'Wound't do to make a bad impression on her subordinates.

Opening the door, she walked out into the office, surveying the chaos in front of her. Aurors rapidly lining up, ready to be sent out into the field. Shackelbol quickly pulled up next to her, drawing out a sheet of parchment. "Attack on Diagon Alley ma'am, men in Death Eater regalia."

She frowned, the dots and lines in her mind becoming even more convoluted. "Death Eater regalia?"

"Yes ma'am," he affirmed. "Rough estimate says about a dozen of them."

Amelia nodded, pointing to three Aurors. "Barkley, Smithe, and Carter, lock down the apparition point, make sure that civilians have a clean way out of the Alley. Tonks and Shack, you're with me, I need the rest of you to form up in your usual squads and make your way down the alley. Stunners and binding hexes unless they start throwing killing curses, in which case feel free to use cutting and blasting hexes." She stomped her foot once. "Let's go!"

The Aurors scatter in an instant, marching through the floo and off towards Diagon Alley, Amelia following behind with her squad. A short, dizzying whirl of neon green later, and she stepped through the flames and into the tavern, only to be immediately confronted by absolute chaos.

A mob was currently trying to push its way to safety, all trapped within the Leaky Cauldron. Amelia could see Barkley standing atop a table with his wand against his throat, shouting orders at the fleeing civilians and guiding them outside or towards the floo. Frustrated, Amelia slowed down dramatically as she attempted to push her way through the crowd.

Adrenaline began to course through her as she finally marched out into the alley, surveying the cloud of smoke hanging over the shops and scattered fires dotting the footpath. Shouts further down the alley drove her forward, Shackelbol and Tonks at her side as she went to catch up with the rest of the Aurors.

Amelia cursed as the sickly yellow of a rotting curse whizzed past her head, ducking beneath a pile of rubble and glancing over to see seven of her men bunkered behind a transfigured wall. She cursed, looking past to see three bodies resting in the street, two of which were garbed in the staple crimson of the Auror Department.

"That's not good," she muttered, pulling her necklace up to her mouth, tapping her wand on it. "Report."

One of the men in the distance repeated her gesture, his voice ringing through loud and clear from her necklace. "There's about fifteen to twenty men here, all wearing the same outfit described in the report. When confronted they immediately responded with killing curses, taking down Norwood and
"Cutting curses and blasting hexes are how we're going to do this, get the best of you at transfiguring to start setting up cover for us."

"Ma'am."

Amelia turned, ready to give orders to Shacklebolt when she was interrupted by a blinding flash of light, pure white cast out across the alley and reflecting off the cracked shop windows.

"What was that?" she growled, poking her head over the rubble to catch a glance of the attackers.

Her eyes widened in surprise, and she blinked. Once, twice, three times, before conceding that what she was seeing was real.

Helene Potter and Fleur Delacour standing in the middle of the alley, firing a barrage of spells towards the Death Eaters.

"What?"

---

Fleur and I sit listening to the quiet hum of the radio as we go over our things. I decided to gather our belongings upon returning to the Chamber, before they could be retrieved by McGonagall and Maxime. Fleur took the chance to go and grab a radio from a market in France while I was off, setting it up as soon as she'd arrived.

We lie on the bed, cuddled up next to one another and listening to the dull hum and crackle of the Wizarding Wireless.

My nose crinkles as a shrill beep erupts from the appliance, and an emergency news bulletin begins to be read out.

"They're attacking immediately?" I shout, staring at the radio in shock as the announcer drawls out their announcement. "Are you serious?"

I was just about to go visit my parents!

"Looks like it," Fleur muttered, throwing her tournament outfit on as fast as she can, not wanting to fight in robes.

I dash towards my reclaimed trunk, throwing it open. I begin to strip, putting on my basilisk-hide outfit.

"Trying to make an impression?" Fleur jibes playfully.

"Hey, these are made for fighting in. I'm going to wear the damn things." I pull my gloves on, wand out and ready. "You or me?"

Fleur pauses to think for a moment. "Me, let's blind the bastards."

I grin, the world disappearing in a flash of white before I find myself in the midst of Diagon Alley, a slew of curses already bursting from the tip of my wand and towards the easily recognizable Death Eaters.

The men have taken cover behind debris from fallen shops and transfigured stone, and I can just
imagine their eyes widening in fear at the sudden salvo of technicolour destruction careening their way.

Just as the spells crash into their hastily fashioned cover, tree roots erupt from the ground, lifting two of the Death Eaters into the air and crushing them in one single motion, blood bursting from their lips as their organs are liquified.

Nodding at Fleur's quick thinking, I close one hand into a fist, driving it to the side. A chunk of stone bursts out of the side of a shop, crashing into a cluster of the masked men and sending them flying into the next wall.

Only one of them gets up.

"Potter!"

I whip around, immediately recognizing the people behind us as aurors, taking note of the two lying motionless to my right. "Shit."

Amelia Bones stands up from behind a pile of crumbling stone, in that moment looking everything like a paragon of righteous anger. She flicks her wrist, the bright red of the cutting curse terribly alike that of the fallen aurors robes.

I duck, rolling to the side as I dodge past a trio of what look to be destructive spells, seeing as how they obliterate the cobblestone on impact. "Fleur," I shout, pointing behind me. "Go after them, I'll be fine here. Meet me back in the Chamber, okay?"

She hesitates for a moment, before rushing off towards the now fleeing Death Eaters. I turn back to face Amelia, who's standing atop the rubble and looking down at me with fury in her eyes. "You've got a lot of explaining to do."

I blink awkwardly, wand still held at the ready. "You're not going to try and kill me?"

"No, I'm going to take you in and figure out what in the hell is going on," she growls. I wince as I catch sight of Tonks behind her, looking at me with confusion and dismay.

"I told you once before, I'm fighting Voldemort," I say, squaring my shoulders. "He's back as of last night. Wounded heavily, but back."

"You died."

"He should have double checked."

We stand there, staring each other down. I keep watch out of the corner of my eye as aurors begin to flank me, spreading out around me in a semi-circle.

Smart, that stops cross-fire.

I point to my right, not taking my eyes off her. "Tell your men to stand down, we're not enemies."

Amelia fidgets with her wand, glancing sharply towards her subordinates. "Stun her."

I groan, already forming a wall of stone that catches each and every spell sent my way. I leap, launching myself towards Amelia like an organic cannonball, catching her by surprise.

She gasps as the wind is knocked out of her. I catch her soundly around the waist and drag her with me, spinning her around and the wand from her hand. I place my own against her head, shouting at
the aurors. "I said, stand down."

They shuffle nervously, still aiming their wands towards me, unsure of what to do. Amelia nods stiffly, and that seems to be the cue for them to drop their wands, letting the weapons clatter to the ground.

"Good, now I'm going to walk away, and you're going to let me, yeah?"

Amelia curses loudly, my ears nearly smarting at the incredibly diverse show of profanity she manages to string together. "Should I take that as a yes, or a no?"

She pauses, and I can practically feel the wheels turning as she considers the situation. "Yes."

"Good," I repeat, pushing her away from me. I twist my hand, fashioning a cushion of air beneath her to break her fall. "I'm not the enemy Amelia. I point forward at the black robed corpses, blood dripping from twisted branches. "They are."

She grits her teeth in frustration. "How do I know if you don't just want Voldemort out of the way so you can attack the Ministry?"

I laugh, loudly. "God Amelia, you're so far off the mark it's ridiculous." I wipe a tear from my eye, unable to hide the grin on my face. "I plan to kill the son of a bitch so that I can have a chance at a normal life some day. So all of you have the chance at a normal life," I add, pointing at the aurors.

Some of them flinch under my gaze, and I huff in disappointment at their apparent fear. "The Ministry is probably dangerously close to being taken over by Voldemort already, especially if he's decided a public attack like this is safe." I jab my finger towards Amelia. "You need to make sure that Lucius can't get his filthy little fingers any deeper into that pie, otherwise this war is going to be a hell of a lot harder."

"War?"

I raise one eyebrow in curiosity. "What else did you think this was?" I ask, gesturing at the destruction all around me. "The war never ended." I kneel for a moment, looking her in the eyes. "Upgrade the wards on your home, you're one of Voldemort's key targets. As much as it doesn't seem like it, I look up to you Amelia. Stay safe."

With that, I blink back to Salazar's chambers, although, I'm sure they're more ours rather than his, considering the man's been dead for near on a thousand years and we've christened the place.

I'm quickly wrapped up in a tight hug, the familiar scent of chocolate and wine washing over me, albeit muddled with the sharp tang of blood and dirt. "You alright?" I ask.

"Yes, are you?"

"Yeah, I just wish I didn't have to have a run in with Amelia. That was... awkward, to say the least."

I can feel Fleur's breath against my hair as she laughs. "Helene? Do you have a thing for older women?"

I gasp, frowning at her. "What? Where did that come from?"

She giggles louder, letting her arms rest around my waist. "I thought I'd lighten the mood. There is a war on."
"Yes, there is," I sigh, resting my head on her shoulder. "I just hope it's not as bad as what you experienced."

She hugs me tighter, fingers grasping at my jacket. "We'll come out of this just fine, and if Britain hates us for it, you can come and live with me in France."

"Live with you?" I ask playfully, raising one eyebrow. "Moving a bit fast, aren't we?"

She groans in annoyance, kissing the top of my head. "Shut up and get in the bath, we've got a long day tomorrow."
"Helene!"

I turn to Fleur, who looks towards me, wet hair clinging to her bare shoulder, a towel wrapped around her body. She frowns.

"That wasn't me."

I squint in response, looking about the room. "Helene!"

"Where the hell is that coming from, and who the hell is speaking?" I grouse, following the sound to my trunk.

Throwing it open, I shuffle through the trunk's contents – pushing article after article of clothing aside as I dig. I purse my mouth as I grab onto something cold, and hard like stone.

Prying the object from the embrace of a sock, I find myself holding onto a small, rectangular mirror.

"Helene!"

I jump, nearly dropping the mirror when it – an inanimate object – screams at me.

Realization floods through me, and I nearly smack myself on the head. "Sirius!" I cry, flicking the mirror once when it doesn't work. "Er-answer!"

My reflected face shimmers, disappearing in a whirl of magic as Sirius' appears in its place. His eyes light up immediately, and I can't help but notice how wet they look. "Helene! My god, it's so good to see you," he effuses, a grin threatening to split his face in half. "I knew you wouldn't go down so easily."

I hear voices in the background, Terra's unmistakable lilting tone piercing through Sirius' voice. "Is that Helene? Is she alright?"

Her face pops into the frame, Sirius grunting loudly as he's knocked aside. "Watch it! I nearly dropped the mirror, and then we wouldn't be able to speak with her!"

Ignoring him, Terra begins to needle me. "Where in the hell have you been? You stupid, stupid girl, running off and disappearing like that. Then we hear about an attack in Diagon Alley of all places, with you two being spotted there! We thought- we thought you were- "

She chokes loudly, her hand covering her mouth. "We thought you were dead."

I find myself tearing up, distraught to see the state my family is in. "I'm so sorry." I bite my lip, taking a deep breath. "I… there's no excuse for me not coming to see you immediately."

"Just get over here as soon as you can, we need to see you."
"You've had us terrified," Octavius interjects, his head appearing near Terra's – face stern, deep bags around his eyes. He glances upwards slightly, taking in my damp hair. "Come over as soon as you're ready."

I nod shakily. "I won't be more than a minute."

As I cut off the call, Fleur places her hand on my shoulder. "I can't believe we forgot to visit your parents," she mutters, taking her wand with her other hand as she removes her towel, spelling herself dry.

I repeat the gesture, the familiar heat of a warming charm passing over me, lingering as I grab the first clothes I can out of my trunk and throwing them on.

As soon as Fleur is dressed, I take her hand and blink us to my home, appearing in the sitting room of Greengrass Manor.

I'm immediately swept up in a bone crushing hug as Terra bowls into me. She buries my head in her shoulder, arms held round me as if I'm about to dragged away from her.

"I'm fine mum, I'm safe," I whisper, my own arms wrapped around her waist. "I'm safe."

She cradles me, her body shaking. She pulls away, hands pressed against my face, looking as though she can't believe I'm there in front of her. Her bottom lip quivers as she lunges forward, pressing kiss after kiss against my forehead. "Don't ever do something like that again," she exclaims, her voice hoarse. "Don't you dare scare me like that."

"I'll do my best."

Her eyes narrow sadly, but she nods. "Do your best. That's all I ask."

I nod sullenly, walking over to Octavius and hugging him tightly. "Hey Dad."

He rubs my back softly. "Hey you," he replies, his face drawn. "Are you hurt at all?"

"No." I shake my head. "But you should see the other guys."

He snorts reluctantly, a glint of amusement passing over his eyes, before it disappears just as quickly. "Always with the gallows humour… you'd let us know if you were hurt, right?"

I let go of him, jabbing my thumb towards Fleur. "I've got my own resident healer, not to mention I'm a dab hand at it myself," I say, slowly feeling the tension begin to leave the room.

"You can, quite literally, raise the dead. I think you have me beat," she retorts.

"That's a party trick at best," I argue, Sirius laughing loudly at our exchange.

"Hey kid," he says, patting me on the shoulder. I can't tell if he's oblivious to the shadow that seems to hang over the room, or if he's just being him. "It's good to see you."

I pull him into a hug. "You too."

Smiling reassuringly, he pats me on the shoulder once more, waving for the two of us to sit down. "Come on, you must be exhausted."

I smile thankfully, sinking into the couch in an instant, Fleur quickly following suit as she tucks herself into my side.
"So… what happened?" Sirius begins, evidently the only one in the room willing to breach the topic of the third task, judging by the uncomfortable looks on my parents faces.

I can feel as my face twists up against my will, unsure of what to say. "I uh… Fleur?"

She places her hand on mine, sending a calm smile my way. "We were close, very close, but unfortunately we didn't succeed," she says, the disappointment in her voice clear. "It turns out that Voldemort has taken… precautions against the inevitable. Even if we did succeed in killing him, it would have only been temporary."

Octavius takes a seat across from us, his hands resting on his knees as he leans forward. "How is that even possible?" he asks, glancing towards me. "I thought that only, well, you would be able to do something like that."

"Let's just say that it's magic that even I wouldn't dabble in."

"Helene," he states forcefully, leaning even further. "Please, we may be able to help."

I share a look with Fleur, who shrugs. "You told Iolaire."

Sighing, I press my hands to my legs. "He's torn his soul to shreds, placing the pieces of it into – presumably – six different objects, two of which have already been destroyed." I glance in Sirius' direction. "The Diary was one of them."

Sirius' eyebrows raise dramatically. "What?" he gasps, appalled, eyes flitting towards his hands as if they may burn him for having come into contact with a sliver of Voldemort's soul.

I wonder what he would say about me having housed a portion of it.

"That book was… it contained a piece of him? How?"

I shake my head, even the concept of tearing a soul apart making me feel disgusted, some intrinsic part of me in perfect understanding of the depravity of such an act. As someone who's being is so deeply intertwined with life and death, the idea of quite literally mutilating ones entire, well- everything, is one of the most utterly horrific things I can think of.

How could one go on to whatever afterlife exists – be it good or bad – incomplete?

Could they even pass on?

Would they go to some place even worse than any hell imaginable? Would they simply cease to exist? Disappearing into complete and utter nothingness?

I can feel a headache coming on just thinking about that deep, confusing rabbit hole of questions, and push myself to reply to Sirius.

"I don't know the exact details, but I do know that it involves cold-blooded, deliberate murder, and I imagine there to be an extensive, equally terrible ritual."

He nods solemnly, noticing my – albeit mild – discomfort, probably shocked to see me unsettled by anything, for once in my life. Necromancers don't tend to be a squeamish bunch I imagine. Something either brought about from the standard experiences that come with a passion for corpses, bile, and all things unsanitary, or whether it's a quirk that one develops from dying and being miraculously resurrected by a primordial, eternal being.
I'm getting distracted.

"Because of his having hidden away pieces of his soul, we have to search for, and destroy them before he can be finally, truly killed," Fleur states, continuing my explanation.

Sirius can do nothing but gape. "That's…"


"What about the other day, in Diagon Alley?" Octavius interrupts.

I find myself yawning before I can answer, resting my face on one hand. "Death Eaters decided to begin their revelries before we thought they would, so we killed them while they thought I was dead."

He blanches at my straightforward answer, and curiosity gets the better of him. "How… how many of them?"

"Quite a bit."

His jaw clenches. "Ah."

And the tension returns, just like that.

I think it scares them, to know how ruthless I can be. Octavius had plenty of time to come to terms with the fact that I'm a time-traveller, but I don't think any parent can reconcile the image of their own child and that of a soldier, let alone a seasoned killer.

I think he's just begun to recognize which of the two I am.

An uneasy smile creeps over my face, some sort of attempt to ease the sudden discomfort of my family. "I… we've got to get going, got a war to win, you know?"

Terra shares my tentative expression, her lips pursed tightly. "Yes. But… please, don't be afraid to come by. The wards are always open to you two, you should have no issues getting in."

"I don't think many wards could keep us out," Fleur laughs.

Sirius chuckles in reply. "I don't think they would, but it's the thought that counts. Wouldn't want to accidentally fry you two on arrival."

I bark out a laugh of my own, Sirius' easy humour once more breaking the awkward tension of a family unsure of how to act around one another.

Just as I stand up, I'm drawn into another hug from Terra, this one much more subdued, less desperate than the one before.

"We love you. We will always love you, just remember that, okay?" she whispers.

I pause, before nodding, relief washing over me. "I love you too."

She nibbles on her bottom lip as she lets me go, the worry on her face – on all of their faces – clear.

"We'll be safe, don't you go worrying," I boast, Fleur nodding her agreement.

"I don't believe that any Death Eaters outside of the inner circle will be of much worry to us," she
Octavius nods uncomfortably, his shoulders tense. "If anyone can end this war, you two can."

"Thanks dad."

He smiles, a small thing, but smile all the same. "No problem sweetie."

I scoff, waving ineffectually. "Sweetie?"

Laughing loudly, he smiles wider. A proper one. "Look at that," he says, elbowing Terra in the side playfully. "I can embarrass her."

She shakes her head, waving her hand in goodbye. "Keep in touch, okay? I don't- I don't want to be worried sick over whether or not you've not come out of one of your… skirmishes safely."

"I promise."

She breathes in deeply, her jaw tight. "That's all I can ask for."

Fleur puts her arm around my shoulder and nods at me meaningfully. "We're to visit Wool's, yes?"

"Yeah… yeah we are."

She kisses me on the forehead. "Then we'll be off. It was good to see all of you again," she says, bowing her head towards my parents.

"You as well," Sirius answers. "Go out there and kick some ass for me."

"That's our job," Fleur jokes, taking us away in a flash of light.

-=:

"So… where the hell is this placed actually supposed to be?" I ask, looking at the map for the umpteenth time. I turn it sideways, glaring at the thing as if it'll suddenly reveal its secrets to me.

I've come to the conclusion that I hate maps.

"It's supposed to be somewhere around here, near Wilkinson Street," Fleur explains, pointing at a miscellaneous line that's supposed to mean something important to me.

I frown. "I haven't a clue where we even are to begin with."

She sighs patiently, finger placed over the map on top of yet another meaningless line. "We're right here," she says, dragging her finger to the left and tapping at the paper. "And we're supposed to be looking around here."

I put the map down, looking around the neighbourhood we find ourselves in. Vauxhall is… dull, to say the least. Heart of London, and it still manages to be as plain as humanely possible. If it wasn't for the lack of screeching, I'd have thought myself on Privet Drive.

Fleur continues to lead me patiently through the winding streets of the city, and I find myself realizing that I haven't spent much time anywhere apart from Hogwarts and home.

Bit sad, now that I think about it.
I'm not the type to really want to go running around the city doing anything specific, like hunting out a restaurant or finding a shop, but I haven't even spent time around London just for the sake of it like someone else my age would.

It makes me realize how terribly odd my life has been.

We wander past the same brickwork homes, only broken up occasionally by offices, small corner stores, and the rare paint job; a multitude of equally boring shades of eggshell and cream.

Apparently, there's a difference between those two.

"Look, here we are," Fleur points out gesturing towards a sign, plainly reading Wilkinson Street.

"Well, it should be over here then, right?" I ask, pointing down the lane.

She shakes her head, hiding a smile behind her hand. "No, this way."

I glare as she points in the opposite direction.

"Shite."

Laughing loudly, she laces her arm through mine and begins to walk down the street, taking me with her. "You really are hopeless when it comes to directions, aren't you?"

Shrugging, I reply, "I can somehow find my way to the Shetland Islands on my own, but I can't make it through London. I don't get it."

She pats me on the shoulder condescendingly. "I imagine it's quite a bit easier to find an island, over a specific building."

"You're feeling awful cheeky today, huh?"

"Well, no one has tried to kill us yet, so things are going well."

"Didn't people try to kill us just this morning?"

She rolls her eyes. "Minor details."

I snort, Fleur grinning at me as we carry on.

After another few minutes, we finally find Wool's Orphanage.

It looks even worse than anything I could have imagined, and I find myself hardly believing that the building is still standing, let alone still functioning as an orphanage.

It's old, probably made some time just before the war, all weathered brickwork and industrial windows, a crumbling tower jutting out of the top of the building. The orphanage itself is contained within walls, not unlike that of a prison, with sharp, jagged spikes arrayed overtop the wall like some sort of hellish barbed wire.

In all honesty, the whole place looks like Azkaban's younger, somewhat better-behaved younger brother. And that whole fortress was built by a Necromancer.

"Nice place," I mutter, unable to wipe the frown off my face.

"This place looks… horrible."
"I actually thought it looked quite lovely, don't you?"

Fleur raises one eyebrow at me. "It looks like a psychiatric hospital for serial killers."

I nod meaningfully. "Yes. Perfect for a Dark Lady such as me."

She grins widely. "Of course, but what about your Albumancer girlfriend, should I not have a cottage in the forest? Something perfect and idyllic?"

"I prefer the doom and gloom myself. Maybe we could take over Azkaban some day?"

Laughing, Fleur swings open the gate, ducking underneath a clothesline laden with laundry, most of which looks like it once was white, but now a muddled gray.

"Maybe some day."

We walk up the door, Fleur knocking against the faded wood. We wait for a few moments, before the door swings open, an elderly woman with a messy gray bun and a simple brown dress staring at us in confusion, brushing a thin lock of hair out of her eyes.

"You two with the city?" she asks, eyeing us curiously.

"The city? No, we're just here to ask about someone who lived here a long time ago."

She frowns, confused. "How long ago?"

I look to Fleur. "Er- sixty odd years? Something like that?"

"Lord, it's been a while since then," the woman says, more to herself than us. She nods hurriedly, waving her hand and beckoning us in. "Come on, no need to mind your shoes, we're getting torn down soon anyways."

"Torn down?" I ask, stepping into the foyer, which is no less depressing than the exterior.

She waves her hands over her head, gesturing at the building around us. "We haven't had proper funding since the fifties, and the council isn't changing that any time soon."

We follow as she leads us through to the back into a large kitchen, and I nearly stumble as two kids run past us, giggling loudly. I dodge quickly and end up spinning into the kitchen, quickly noticing the cracked floor tiles, the grooves between them thick with grime that I think may be older than me. I glance up, equally ancient cast iron cookware hanging from rungs on the ceiling. I pause, wondering how long the orphanage has been functioning on what could only amount to a stipend, if it hasn't been that way since it was built.

"Tea?"

Fleur shakes her head, subtly eyeing the kitchen with disdain. "We're fine, but thank you for the offer."

The woman nods, humming quietly as she turns on a burner and sets a kettle atop it. She nods towards a small table, inviting us to have a seat.

"So, is this for a school project of some sort? Old family?" she asks as she settles down, leaning forward on the table. She pauses for a moment, blinking. "God, I've completely forgotten to introduce myself. "I'm Martha."
I shake her hand briskly. "Helene."

Fleur repeats the gesture. "And I'm Fleur."

"Lovely names," Martha states drily. "So, who were you two young ladies wanting to ask me about? I don't know if I can remember everyone who's been through these doors, especially such a ways back, but as you can see, I haven't much to do." She rolls her eyes, looking around us, before tapping the side of her head. "Anything to keep this old mind of mine ticking."

"We were wanting to ask you about a boy who must have gone here some time in the late thirties, maybe his childhood. He was an orphan, Tom Riddle."

Martha breathes sharply through her teeth. "Could you repeat that for me?"

"Er- Tom Riddle?"

"Of all the children who've been here, that... boy-" she practically spits the word, gnawing on her bottom lip. "That boy terrorized the other children, me and the other workers... old Mrs. Cole." Martha clenches one hand into a fist, skin stretching over the knobbled bones in her fingers. "If any child was ever a monster, that one was." She looks up at us, lips pursed dramatically. "What could you ever want to know about him? Doing a project on serial killers?"

I look at Fleur, not quite knowing how to respond. Thankfully, she seems to know just the thing.

"We're actually with the Met, and are looking into recently re-opened cases, one of which concerns Tom Riddle," she explains, surreptitiously waving her hand over the table.

I watch as the subtle confundus charm hits Martha, her eyes glazing over for just a brief moment, before she nods acceptingly. "Didn't know they hired so young now." She shrugs lazily, clasping her hands together. "So, he went off and became a killer then?"

Fleur nods. "Yes, although his name was never released to the public as the killings couldn't be directly pinned on him, mostly due to the technology of the time."

Martha hangs her head back and sighs. "I knew that boy was trouble from the start. Stealing from the other children, hurting them... we never managed to catch him in the act ourselves, but we always knew it was him. The children were terrified of Tom, wouldn't go near him if they had the choice. Any of the new arrivals... well, they learned quickly not to step within a few yards of him lest something happen.

"We never could do anything about him, but then one day an old man just showed up at the doorstep and asked for Tom. After that things were easier, for a time at least, when he was gone to boarding school most of the year." She rubs her eyes, before pinching the bridge of her nose.

"When he came back? Things were worse. Somehow, some way, he managed to become more and more sadistic. Oh, sure, he was better behaved, on the surface at least. But behind closed doors? Some of the children started to worry for their lives... I worried for my life. Dead animals in the yard, children hiding bruises from us." She scoffs, shaking her head. "Even broken bones. He was... he was a monster."

Fleur leans forward, eyes flicking over to the kettle as it starts to hiss. I barely notice as her fingers dance, the dial on the stove turning off and the water inside the kettle most likely frosting over. "Is there anything specific you can tell us about him? Places he frequented, any sort of patterns or rituals he may have followed?"
Martha nods slowly, her face pinched. "We used to take them to the ocean, on trips. A way to get away from the city and the war, before it got bad. Mrs. Cole, bless her soul, the woman who used to be in charge before me, had family on the Isle of Wight. We'd take all the children, pack them up on the trains, ferry them over to the island… it was always supposed to be a good experience for them. Give them a taste of what it's like to be with a family.

"First time we took him on that trip two of the other kids came back traumatized; looked like they had shellshock, like the soldiers coming back home from the Great War." Martha looks towards Fleur, staring into her eyes – her own shining with long forgotten anger. "They were never the same after that. Amy and… God, I forget the boys name. Something to do with the clergy. They stopped speaking, didn't eat at meals. We nearly had to take them to the hospital and put them on a feeding tube. They just… I'd never seen someone so broken before. Children, too scared to speak, too scared to eat. It was horrible."

"Where was this beach exactly?" Fleur asks, her voice kind, yet strict.

Martha runs her hand over her face, closing her eyes. "It was just west of Totland, but he had snuck off with the two of them and taken them south, to the cliffs near the Needles."

Fleur nods, turning her head towards me. "That matches with what we've been told."

"Y- yes. Yes it does," I reply shakily. "We have to get going now, but you've helped us tremendously."

"Best of luck to you two," she responds, her voice dropping as she fiddles with her thumbs. "Is he… is he still alive?"

"Yes. He is."

Martha looks down at her hands, seeming much older and wearier than before. "If you get something to stick, let me know. I've got an old bottle of double malt tucked away, and I've been waiting for an opportunity to crack it open."

Fleur smiles at her. "We'd be happy to. Take care of yourself Martha, and I apologize for bringing up any bad memories."

She waves us off. "Nonsense, I was happy to help."

As we get up to leave, I stop. "Fleur, one moment please."

"Yes?"

I flick my wand out, pointing it at Martha, who looks stunned. She eyes the wand with a sense of familiarity, her gaze flicking upwards to meet my own. "You two are-"

"Obliviate."

The spell strikes her in the chest, her eyes glazing over. "We were never here. You went to the kitchen to make some tea and ended up nodding off after forgetting to turn on the stove."

Martha seems to nod at my words, head bobbing lazily from the force of the obliviation.

Fleur looks at me curiously, a small frown on her face. "If Voldemort came here, something I have no doubt he will do, he would question her. We can't let him find out what we're after. What we know."
"That… yes, that makes sense," she admits, glancing towards Martha. "I'm glad you realized that." Placing her hand on my shoulder reassuringly, Fleur squeezes it once. "Come, we've got work to do."

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The crisp sea wind rushes through my hair, causing it to flutter angrily, tangled strands of red flicking over my nose.

Fleur leans on the railing beside me, enjoying our brief moment of relaxation.

It was her idea to take a ferry, travel the muggle way. Said it would be good to have a second to ourselves before the madness that we know is to come.

"Do you think someone else in our situation would fare better?" she asks, turning towards me.

"What do you mean?"

She gestures slowly with her hands, sorting out her thoughts. "This war, Death, Life… it's all insane, yet here we are completely unaffected."

I wrinkle my nose, squinting against the summer sun. "I wouldn't say we're completely unaffected. We've adjusted quite well, all things considered."

"That's exactly my point." She sighs, gazing off into the distance towards the Isle of Wight. "I remember how you and I used to be, before our… second chance. You were a shy little thing. Brave to a fault, but terribly shy, and too kind for your own good." Smiling, Fleur reaches over and runs her thumb along my cheek. "You're still kind. So kind I can't believe it myself, but that kindness isn't the endless fountain it once was. There's a merciless, dangerous side to you. To me." She pauses, tongue poking out from between her teeth. "What I did to Bagman, it should frighten me - both of us - but it doesn't. I just find myself wondering why."

"I slaughtered three dozen prisoners in the span of fifteen minutes at Azkaban just last year," I say, clenching my jaw. "For a moment there, right after killing Bellatrix, I felt powerful. I felt like nothing could challenge me, the world at my fingertips." I turn my head towards Fleur. "I turned her blood to mud, tearing her apart from the inside out. I thought it would be fitting for her to die like how she imagined the countless muggleborn and halfbloods she'd killed."

I wring my hands together, turning back towards the ocean, short waves bursting as the ferry cuts through them like a knife. "That feeling left me as soon as I realized what I'd done. I was sick to my stomach, but I wasn't disgusted by myself. I was… disgusted by the situation, to be surrounded by so much depravity. I think we… I think power like ours does something to people. Maybe we become distant because of it, unable to fully connect with what happens around us - at least, in the same way that someone normal would. Maybe distance breeds power, and people like us just end up this way."

I wave my hand. "Not… emissaries of primordial beings, but terribly powerful witches or wizards."

Fleur frowns thoughtfully, her fingers tapping across the railing. "Sorry for bringing up such a morose topic," she apologizes, and I wave her off.

"It's not morose. Honestly, I think it would have come up eventually."

She shrugs. "I just haven't thought about it much until now. I thought I was changed because of my last life. Dying in a war and coming back to life would change anyone, but I don't think I realized how much I'd changed until I came to England." Her face contorts into a thin smile. "Not much conflict to be had in France, just a return to school and years spent learning what I was capable of. In
fact, the first fight I'd gotten into was the one at the World Cup, where I met you in the forest."

"Huh. I never really thought about that. Guess I've been enjoying all the excitement without you, haven't I?"

Fleur laughs, nudging me with her shoulder. "I wouldn't necessarily call it excitement, but I believe 'complete and utter catastrophe' doesn't have the same ring to it."

"Oh hush you," I chide, rolling my eyes.

Pointing towards the Isle, Fleur cocks her head. "I think that's been enough relaxing. Shall we?"

"We shall," I reply, letting her take my arm and apparate me to the coast.

Silently, we disappear, reappearing on the beach and startling a couple passing by, the presumed boyfriend shrieking in fright and yanking his girlfriend into the sand, the two of them tumbling over one another.

Laughing, Fleur apparates us again, my vision spinning, yet stomach calm as we head westward, dashing across the coastline like a blip on the radar.

The fluttering glimpses I catch of the town of Ryde quickly make way for shorn grassland and distant farms. Unfortunately, there's no time to admire the scenery. We do have a bit of Voldemort's soul to find and destroy.

Within a matter of minutes the small town of Totland greets us, the only place on the western side of the isle one could consider a town at that, rather than the sparse hamlets and villages that populate Wight - if one ignores Newport, that is.

"We're close," I say, feeling out with my magic and detecting a shimmer of something dark in the distance.

"South?"

I nod. "Off in that direction," I explain, pointing past the town and towards the shore. "It must be nestled in the cliffs."

We apparate once more, caught staring over a sheer drop, sharp craggy rocks lining the side of the Isle like wicked teeth. I push one hand forward, the stone of the cliff punching outwards and forming a makeshift staircase that leads down towards the thick concentration of magic I detected a moment ago.

We descend tentatively, each step careful as we tread towards a sheltered opening in the cliff face, the cave practically screaming out at me. I can see thick tendrils of dark magic wafting out from it, tickling at the open mouth of the cave like smoke pouring from a smoker's mouth.

I doubt anyone other than Fleur or I could even perceive such a thing.

"This is definitely the place," Fleur murmurs, frowning. "It feels sickening."

"It's a bastardization of Necromancy," I state, reaching out and flicking away the immaterial magic, watching as it recoils at my touch. "It's almost sentient… it feels like it knows it's wrong."

She eyes the smog with distaste, her fingers lighting up with raw White Magic, shining out across the cave entrance. The tendrils scatter like cockroaches, shrinking into cracks in the stone and hiding
away from the glow that pours out from her hand.

I stroll forward and place my hand against the rock the smoke emanated from, a sense of broken familiarity tickling against my palm.

I scoff.

"He locked the door with blood magic. It feels like a… cheap imitation."

Fleur pats me on the back. "Enough with the ego, love."

"What, you can't tell the difference?" I ask, almost offended. "This is… this is- it's embarrassing. It's as if he drew out the enchantment in crayon with his left hand."

"Just because you're innately gifted with an understanding and familiarity with blood magic doesn't mean everyone is," she jibes.

"It really isn't all that difficult," I grumble, running my finger across the stone. I reach out, grabbing a hold of the ramshackle chains that tie together Voldemort's enchantment. With a swipe of my hand, I tear them to pieces, the stone crumbling to dust. "See?"

Fleur laughs, shaking her head. "Yes, yes. It's very impressive."

I puff my chest out dramatically. "Told you."

Humming appreciatively, Fleur takes a step past the remains of the door and into the greater cave itself. She raises her wand over her head and incants slowly, a smattering of magelights shooting out across the cave and lighting it in its entirety.

It's bloody massive.

A sheer black lake reaches out to what must be the other end of the isle, only a faint glow marking its walls. I can make out a miniature island in the middle of it due to my enhanced senses, the only thing on it a stalagmite that juts out towards the ceiling, a crystalline bowl carved into its peak.

"I assume that's where we need to go."

Fleur squints, leaning forward somewhat. "That little island?"

I nod. "Seems to be the ca-"

Suddenly, I crumble, clutching my head as a thousand voices scream out in pain. At least, I think it's the voices in my head. It just as easily could be me.

Eyes screwed shut, I'm helpless as magic radiates off my body and pours into the still waters of the lake, nearly vomiting at the abomination that reaches back out of the depths.

Thousands of dead, their voices stilled but their minds awake, shrieking in everlasting agony. Ghostly fingers scrabble at my mind, scratching and tearing and begging for release. They can feel the presence of Death, his paragon, and they revel in it.

Just as quickly as it occurred, it's gone, and I'm left staring out at the cavern, panting.

"Helene! Helene are you okay?" Fleur shouts, grabbing a hold of me.

I clumsily lay my hand on her arm. "Yeah, I'm alright. I just… this cave, there's something wrong
with it."

"What do you mean?"

"It's filled with the dead," I gasp, head still packed full with the shouts of the damned. I point towards the lake. "They're in the water."

"Inferi."

"They're still aware Fleur. They still feel."

Her fingers dig into my arm. "What?"

I look up, her horrified face lit eerily by the reflections cast off the water. "Their minds are whole, but they're trapped."

She grimaces, brow furrowed in thought. "We can't save them, not at this moment. Maybe... we can come back, after all this is over,' she adds, noticing my expression.

"We can't just leave them. This place is a blight, it shouldn't exist."

"Helene, we've got our priorities right now. We need to end this war as soon as we can," she reasons, cupping my cheek. "I promise, we will come back and fix this."

I nod against her hand, shakily getting back to my feet. "How are we supposed to cross over?"

"Do you not sense it?" Fleur asks, reaching forward and grabbing hold of thin air. All of a sudden a glowing green chain appears in her hands, as if it were soaked in magical brine.

"Huh," I murmur. "I do now."

She yanks on the chain, and I watch as the water bubbles, the crest of a simple rowboat peeking out of the lake and nestling against the shore.

Beckoning for me to get in, I join her, and we begin our short voyage to the island, the boat ferrying us along.

I can't help but gaze into the water, unable to find any sign of the countless undead that I know are just below the surface.

"Don't think about it."

"Kind of hard not to, when I can feel each and every one of them," I retort, frowning.

"Just... they're a trap, you know that, I know that. We don't want to set it off."

I nod sheepishly. "I know. I just hate that I can't do anything right now."

It takes everything in me not to trail my fingers along the water, apart from the very clear assumption that if I do, we'll be in immediate danger.

The dinghy sidles up to the shore, its hull grinding against the stone.

We climb out, trudging up the shale rock and trying not to slip over it as chunks of the stuff slide out from underneath our feet.
The crystal bowl shimmers eerily, the inky black liquid within stock still, like the surface of a pensieve. There's a glimmer underneath, the outline of a piece of jewelry - a grand locket.

"This doesn't look very promising," Fleur grimaces, staring at the cup that lies beside the bowl.

I attempt to twist the bowl, to tear it out of the rock and turn it upside down, but it doesn't budge an inch.

"It's not actually stone," I add, peering at it curiously. "I can't use my powers on it."

"Do they work on crystal?"

I nod. "If there's any impurities in it, I can mould it. This is made to look like stone, probably so no one could spell the liquid out of it."

She waves her wand over the bowl, frowning. "Whatever that liquid is."

"Some sort of terribly evil potion, I imagine." I reach out and grab the cup, Fleur snatching my wrist as I bring it to the liquid.

"What are you doing?" she hisses.

"We obviously have to drink," I say, gesturing towards the bowl. "We don't have the decades of magical knowledge to create this trap, let alone dismantle it. And bruteforce would just attract the Inferi." I kiss her softly. "Let me do this. If any of the two of us could deal with whatever this potion is, it's me." I tap my chest with one hand. "Chock full of blood magic augmentations here."

She kisses me once more. "Don't you dare die."

I dip the cup into the potion. "Not in a million years."

Bringing it up to my lips, I nearly flinch at how cold it is, instead sending a sly wink Fleur's way.

"Cheers."

I take a deep drink of the liquid. The cold smoky potion trickles down my throat, burning every nerve ending along the way.

Spluttering, I reach forward and refill the cup, taking another swig. My eyes screw shut of their own accord, flinching against the fiery substance.

I feel as if smoke has begun to settle over my vision - despite my eyes being closed - apparitions claw in the dark.

I drink, and I drink, and I drink. The cold weight of the realm of Death settles over my mind like a silk curtain, enclosing me, trapping me.

The walls press in - my thoughts spin just as the world does. Voices reach out to me, and my own cries out in response. Their pain and suffering is a dirge, a cacophony of interstellar proportions, whittling away at my mind like steel burrs.

I open my eyes to the nether, the endless, infinite nothing that makes up the world below, beneath, and all around us. The inevitable is stifling.

Death is in every corner, a trillion corners that make up every crystalline facet of time, its currents flowing like a waterfall; and time- time makes up everything, all of it, a living breathing essence of
everything and nothing. The walls of this world are mourning given form, the sprouting of a seed that withers away into dust and ash, only to rise again and recommit itself to the endless cycle of its forebears.

A being of pure nightmare walks by me, feet crunching against a forest of bone as it snatches up skittering, spider-like monsters, the creatures shrieking as it devours them. Whole universes make up the lifeblood that dribbles down its chin, the substance glittering like a thousand dying suns.

In the distance, the exhumed corpse of a dead god bows towards me, its slumbering mind singing dreams of hellfire and conquest, waiting for the day in which its followers raise it once more so that it may pillage the worlds beyond.

I look up to see our own - my own - realm above, wrapped around the darkness like a child clinging to its father's leg, and Life itself stands behind it. The mother of all that Is- Was- and Will Be- resting its hands proudly upon the shoulders of the material. It forms an effervescent barrier of joy and life, so bright I fear I may go blind, yet I know somewhere deep down inside that it is but my parallel, the final piece to the metaphysical puzzle that makes up existence.

For all that is, there is not - and there is nothing strange about it.

I step through the darkness, a road of emptiness so dense I can walk upon it, driving myself ever forward on the path.

Creatures line the cobbled shadow of the road, chains made up of the essence of a metal I will never know the name of tying them to the idea of a universe, the mere representation of its fingers splayed out across the landscape and capturing all that dare tread near - binding them to itself and the forces that guide it.

I fall through a hole in the darkness, past dragons crafted from tempered obsidian and a being the size of a continent as it battles against a horde of shapeless, nameless entities that wish to feast upon its corpse.

The world disappears before me, and I'm tossed unceremoniously back into our world - my world - gasping at the sights I was forced to witness: the death of a universe displayed before me in the span of a moment, and a moment taking millennia to reach its peak.

Fleur's garbled voice reaches my ears, but I don't understand it, not after hearing the singing of a dead god and a drumbeat that drives legions of the nameless dead.

"I'm… I'm fine- I'm fine," I choke, spitting out a wad of living darkness, which shrieks and scuttles into the water. "Just give me a moment."

I stand there for a while, gazing off into the Dark- the Light- the Wrong- choosing to ignore everything that I just saw. I reach into the empty bowl and grasp the frigid chain that lays within. Throwing it around my neck, I pull myself to my feet, Fleur staring at me with fear in her eyes.

"I… I'm fine, yeah?"

She nods shakily, hand resting on my arm, her eyes somewhat wild. "Are you… are you sure?"

"Sort of," I grumble, balancing myself against the pillar. "Should we get out of here?"

"Yes, yes, we should."

She turns, crying out in anger to find the rowboat a ways back in the lake, having fallen back in
while I was witnessing complete and utter madness.

"How the hell are we supposed to get back now?"

"Like this," Fleur says decisively as she takes a chunk of stone from the ground, waving her wand over it. I watch as it turns into a miniature row-boat, before she sets it back upon the floor and enlarges it. Another flick of her wand sends it into the water, which immediately begins to roil like a boiling pot.

Her eyes widen and she turns towards me, shock clearly written over her features.

"Fuck fuck fuck!" she curses, dragging me into the dinghy and casting her arms forward, pushing the boat across the lake as fast as she can, scabbed, spindly hands bursting out of the water and reaching towards us.

I jab my wand into the water and freeze the lake behind us.

The warbled screeches of the Inferi are suddenly muted as we continue to speed over the water, crushing misshapen bodies beneath us as the boat rocks against them.

"I didn't think they would attack so quickly," Fleur bellows, her hair now wet, clinging to her neck.

"It doesn't matter now," I answer, trying not to speak in the language of a long forgotten civilization as I slice away anything that gets too close with paper thin gusts of air. "We're getting close! Brace yourself!"

Fleur flinches just as we crash against the shore, and I'm tossed into her, sending us sprawling over the jagged stones.

My head crashes against the rock, shocks running down my spine as my cheek is ground against thin chunks of shale.

Cursing in frustration and no small amount of pain, Fleur and I haul ourselves to our feet, and I can feel the cold chill of cavern air against the open wound on my cheek.

Before we can even check over our wounds, the ice shatters, thick chunks of it flying through the air as rotten gray masses of flesh climb over one another, chittering and shrieking as they race towards us.

I glance towards the entrance to the cavern from the bit of rocky shore we find ourselves standing on, attempting to blink the two of us over.

That method of attack is quickly brought to a halt as I cry out in pain, terror running through me.

"This isn't good," I mutter, watching in horror as the horde climbs out of the deep. "This isn't good at all."

"Merde," Fleur groans, a slice across her forehead trickling a thin stream of blood over her face.

"I can't blink Fleur, there's something here that's stopping me."

I can hear her gasp beside me, as she attempts to flash her way over to the other side. "Me neither," she groans, looking completely bewildered. "What could possibly stop us?"

"Blood magic, probably," I think aloud, looking around us at the walls and only for the first time noticing how the shadows cling much too tightly to the stone. "Definitely blood magic, something
close to our own powers, a much better imitation. I don't think it could be anything else."

Cursing loudly, Fleur begins to attack.

Teeth gritted, she sends a gust of shining, holy fire across the cavern. The water it strikes instantly flashes to steam, making it nearly impossible to see; and just as suddenly as the steam appeared, it disappears, Fleur drawing the moisture out of the very air itself and fashioning it into thousands of jagged icicles that she sends careening back into the water.

I pull up shards of stone and form a makeshift palisade around us, making sure that it's as sharp as possible. Hopefully a few of the Inferi manage to slice off their limbs trying to climb the damned thing.

Shutting my eyes, I attempt to reach out and turn the Inferi into something more manageable, or to even coax them over to our side. Jaw clenched, I twist and shape their magic as best as I can before my own magic is suddenly torn away, whatever runes used to bind the Inferi rejecting any outside influence.

"Son of a bitch," I mutter, shooting a salvo of different Necromantic curses towards the encroaching wall of dead that just spatters uselessly against them. "I'm useless here!" I shout, hoping Fleur can hear me over the endless, ear splitting screams.

She must have heard me, as the water explodes with oversized lichen, thin tendrils of the fungus wrapping around the Inferi and dragging them back down into the depths. Just as that's happening, roots hanging from the ceiling enlarge, rushing down and spearing the water, drawing out whatever they happen to latch on to. The captured Inferi twist madly, hissing like feral cats.

The palisade begins to crumble, a wall of grasping hands tearing the stone apart piece by piece. Frustrated, I pull a chunk of stone from the ceiling, shattering it and crushing the Inferi underneath.

Dredging up the power deep inside me, I let a pure unholy fire wash out from my wand, tearing apart the Inferi - the water itself- *ignore the screams* - in a burst of terrible, sickly green. I hold the spell, letting the creatures burst into so many clouds of ash, boiled alive in a sea of fire.

Their shrieks are endless, the voices of the people they once were crying out as they're torched by the flames of the underworld, purifying their bodies and their souls.

The spell ends as my feet are yanked out from under me, slimy broken fingers tearing through my trousers and scraping away the flesh underneath.

Crying out in pain, I blast the Inferi away with a gust of air, impaling it on the remains of the palisade. The stone bursts through its chest and peppers me with chunks of flesh and bone, the Inferi clawing madly at the bloodied rock and attempting to drag itself towards me.

Disgusted, I immolate the creature, ignoring its pained wails as emerald fire licks at its bones and melts the stone it's mounted upon.

The Inferi are upon us now, and there seems to be no end in sight.

They're like ants as they pour over themselves, one single being made up of hundreds of rotting souls.

*The drums beat louder, the damned grow closer.*

An impenetrable wall of flesh bursts across the cavern like a tidal wave, the glowing eyes that peek
out from between thrashing arms and broken legs are the only thing that remind me that these were once people.

They're nothing compared to what I have already witnessed.

Fleur and I continue to lose ground, and I throw up a wall of stone beside us that reaches towards the ceiling - fusing with it and fending off any potential attacks from our flank.

"Any good ideas?" I pant, back pressed against the wall and visions of infinite, sentient fire swimming past my eyes.

She continues to douse the Inferi in fire, and I can see the sweat dripping down her brow. "Haven't a clue," she grunts, letting the fire drop and pushing the creatures back with a sheet of rapidly formed ice.

I shout in surprise as I'm grabbed by one of the Inferi and dragged with them, Fleur screaming my name as I'm pulled into the water.

Kicking and fighting with all my strength, I try desperately to pull myself out of the Inferi's grasp, air bubbling out of my mouth towards the surface.

I cough and choke on the water as a chunk of my shoulder is torn off, my muffled screams trapped by the twisting bodies that surround me, mixing with the misty blood that slowly ebbs from my wound.

My vision dims to a complete and utter black, yet I can still feel the hands ripping away at my skin, trying to tear me in two.

Pouring my magic into my body, I attempt to regenerate it, to hold it together against the constant onslaught of skin split by bone and gnashing, crumbled teeth. The muscle and flesh knit together rapidly, but I can feel myself becoming more and more exhausted as I attempt to hold back my imminent, grisly death.

Suddenly, time freezes, and I find myself face to face with Death, who is completely and utterly dry, seemingly ignoring the fact that he's submerged twenty feet in an underground lake.

"In a bit of a bind, are you?" he asks in a nonchalant manner, brushing a spec of invisible dust off his lapel.

It takes me a moment to collect myself, before I eye him curiously, wondering why he chose to show himself now.

I mean, apart from my imminent grisly death.

"Yes, I am."

"A shame," he muses, tilting his head to the side. "And you have no idea how to save yourself from this situation, do you?"

I look down at myself, arms and legs still bound by Inferi, their mouths held wide open in some twisted form of joy, the shreds of their cheeks revealing barnacle encrusted tongues and teeth thick with blackened slime.

"Not particularly."
He taps me on the forehead. "Don't be daft. You're a Necromancer, my champion," he admits, brow furrowing. "You control the essence of death. You live it. You breathe it. Let that power suffuse you, let it drive you, let it guide you."

"How?" I ask, attempting to gesture towards myself with my chin. "Kind of trapped at the moment."

Rolling his eyes, Death cradles my chin with his thumb and forefinger. "Let the power fill very nook and cranny of your being, and then, you will find yourself free." His eyes seem to swallow me up, impossibly cold and so terribly familiar. "You saw it earlier… the Abyss. The Underworld. My realm." He pinches my jaw, his eyes glimmering with the cries of creatures whose very existence is pain, the flap of a bird's wings that sweeps away whole worlds and creates new ones in their place, a god made of dreams that burns millions in its name."

He jabs me in the chest with his finger, leaning closer. "That potion shows something deep down inside you. It showed you the core of your being. Where one would see their nightmares, you instead looked into the deepest, darkest depths of existence. You gazed upon the unending nothingness of shattered time and lost dreams, and you came out unscathed. You have seen the Infinite."

I stare into the void.

"Use it."

Shadows explode off my body, tearing through the water and ripping the Inferi asunder, their very existence being shredded by the palpable death that seems to emanate off me in sickening waves.

They scramble to get away from me - from tentacles that shouldn't exist that erase their very being.

I push myself out of the water, using the shadows like limbs, standing tall and proud over the Inferi, watching as they scatter like rats.

With a sweep of my arm, they're demolished, chunks of rotten flesh spattering against the walls with a series of heavy thuds, one after the other.

Reaching down, deep, below the surface - the world - I root up the fleeing dead like a gardener tears out a weed, crushing them beneath my grasp.

Before the power can leave me, I creep back towards Fleur on a thousand jagged legs made of the death of a civilization, setting myself down in front of her.

"Got 'em," I choke, collapsing against the stone.

I feel as she pulls me into her arms, clutching desperately. "You're okay, you're okay, you're okay," she repeats, fingers digging into my back.

"I'm fine," I cough, the words clumsily spilling out over my lips.

She kisses me deeply, and I can taste the salt on her lips, finding myself wondering if it's the water or her tears.

"I'm fine."

She looks at me, into my eyes. "What happened there? You… you changed."

"Death," I state, still trying to catch my breath. "He showed me what my powers are, what
they can be. I… I saw his world. I can't- no words can describe it. It defies all… all everything." I close my eyes and breathe once, twice, three times before I feel myself beginning to calm down. "I saw it all."

She looks a mess, a heavy frown on her face, blood caked around her nose and forehead. "The underworld."

"The Underworld." I correct her, and I know that she can hear the force contained within the word.

"Do you think… do you think I'll see it?" she asks, partly excited, partly fearful.

I answer her, somehow knowing the answer deep in my soul. "Yes, but not after you visit Life's domain."

She lets out a shaky, breath, pressing her forehead against mine. "Let's… let's go. Do you have the horcrux?"

I reach around my neck, fingers skimming across the icy metal. "Yeah. Yeah I do."

Fleur kisses me on the forehead as she transfigures another boat out of the rubble.

"Do you hear their voices?"

I stop and listen.

"No, I don't."

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