### Mute By Choice: The Witchy Hybrid

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**Mute By Choice: The Witchy Hybrid**

by **AvyJC15**

**Summary**

(Book III of the Mute By Choice Series)

Delilah Keren Aleah Hawkins has come back to them.

With what seems like little yet is quite a lot of effort, she regains her post as Harry Potter's Curatoria, rebuilds her friendship with the rest of her golden quartet, the Weasleys and many others, and builds a new one with a certain blond Slytherin. There is a new boy who looks awfully familiar to her, yet she knows she has never met him before. Who is he? Has he got anything to do with her past? And let's not forget the disappearances here and there that still don't stop, and the curiosity and fear for others never stop from consuming her. Will she finally give away what she is? What do these sudden physical and psychological changes mean?

Spending most of her time protecting her three best friends, she's a completely different person now, but will she finally be able to open up to these three children this year, or will she stay her same reserved self? Will she be mute once more?

With these new year's events, will anyone finally find out who and... what she really is?

Never leaving Harry's eyes, will she finally feel the same as he feels? Will she finally change?
**ATTENTION** I DO NOT OWN ANY OF J.K. ROWLING’S ORIGINAL CHARACTERS FROM THE ORIGINAL HARRY POTTER. I ONLY OWN DELILAH, HER FAMILY, THE KIDS FROM THE ORPHANAGE, THE ADAMS, AND SOME OTHERS I MIGHT CREATE FURTHER ON.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Preface

She grew up again.

She didn't know how, but she just did.

She was, in a way, reborn.

She was reborn and grew up again in a period of six months. She didn't know how she knew that— she just did. All she could remember was her name— Delilah Dawn... Hawkins— and her new life. She was aware of her regrowth— of her rebirth, but she couldn't put sense into it.

She was two years old when she became an orphan and had to start wandering around on her own, not really knowing what to do or where to go.

She was three when she was first kidnapped. When she'd had her first glimpse at the Cruciatus Curse— her being the target. She had no idea what was going on back then, what with her parents and older brother being dead... she was alone until they found her. But even they knew nothing about this, so there was no way she'd be aware of what was waiting for her in the future she knew she didn't want to live through.

She'd never given much thought to how long she would live— that is until she was bitten. She'd never given much thought to how she would die either... until that day. The day she faced Bellatrix— one of the worst days in her entire life... or so she believed at the time.

She was five when she phased for the first time. It was scary and painful, but even so, she dealt with it. She wouldn't say she was fortunate for being what she is, but she sure was lucky to have them by her side— to have them accept her.

At the age of six, she was bitten and compelled. She didn't really care about the compulsion, but she sure as hell couldn't keep the pain out of every thought she had up in her mind. It was more than the pain she had gone through at her first phase. The pain was bewildering. She couldn't understand, couldn't make sense of what was happening. It felt as if she was being burned alive, yet she couldn't do anything. She had become a hybrid.

But... maybe she already was?

She was seven when he was killed right before her eyes— she showed the first signs of... magic... apparently again. Dumbledore came then to reveal her real age and identity and take her... Home.

But was it ever really her home?

Today, she knows everything— not everything, but most of it, and she won't let anything bring her down. Nothing physical or even insults about her being something not normal will ever make her back down on her lifetime quest. I mean, what do people expect? Nothing is normal anywhere! Yeah, she gets that her case really goes overboard with the whole 'not normal' thing, but she doesn't care. Despite the fact that she hates being the special one, she's glad she was trusted enough to be the only one chosen to be the witchy hybrid.
Lost and Found

**DELILAH HAWKINS STILL MISSING AFTER RESCUE FROM THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS**

**BY RITA SKEETER**

Delilah Hawkins, a girl known and loved by everyone, is still missing two weeks after her mysterious disappearance following her rescue from the Chamber of Secrets on the first week of the month of March. Her wand was discovered two Saturdays ago on the outside grounds of Hogwarts near the third Herbology Greenhouse where mandrakes reside. The glass windows and doors of the building were all shattered and the grass-covered ground was stained with blood, surely Delilah's.

The Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore, would not say if anyone is a suspect in the girl's disappearance, but no one has not ruled out foul play. Below are recent pictures of Delilah Hawkins. The Ministry of Magic urges anyone with information to owl the following toll-free crime-stoppers hotline.

The address of the Ministry of Magic was circled in black spilled ink.

Yes, it had already been two weeks that Delilah Keren Aleah Dawn Hawkins had been missing, and no one in Hogwarts other than the staff and Dumbledore knew about it. Some teachers told the students that her injuries from when she had been taken to the Chamber of Secrets were too severe and had to be treated in St Mungo's hospital, others said she had left on a special quest given to her by the Ministry of Magic.

From the golden quartet, only Ron Weasley and his brothers knew about it, they didn't tell Ginny, the youngest Weasley, knowing what her reaction would be like. Hermione Granger wasn't part of a wizard family to stay updated on the wizarding news, so she wouldn't know (that's a first). Harry Potter... well, you couldn't really count on his aunt, uncle or cousin seeing as they hate everything that has to do with magic, including the word itself. Though Harry couldn't help but think something was wrong. He knew Delilah well enough. He knew she wouldn't just leave school even if the Ministry required it, or to heal at some special hospital. She can't even bear word 'hospital', and she might not be Hermione, but school was still very important to her. And most of all, he knew she would never leave him.

Dumbledore, like Harry, was worried the most. He had gone all the way to the orphanage where he had first met her in the 'States' but found nothing. He, then, had sent Hagrid and many private Aurors to look for the girl he had started to look upon as a niece, a goddaughter... a granddaughter seeing as she often called him 'grandpa D'. He couldn't help but miss her which is rare since the only person he had ever missed was his sister.

Throughout those two weeks of disappearance, Delilah's life wasn't exactly what you would call 'being kidnapped into paradise'.

Her kidnapper was an idiot.

That's all she could say.

For some reason, she couldn't phase— shift, call it what you want— anymore. She didn't know why, but she just couldn't. Every time she tried, she either ended up passing out or coughing and throwing up blood.

How did she end up this damaged?
Oh, right. Her idiotic kidnapper is to blame.

He had tortured her for five days after he took her. The only reason she was able to escape was because she had outsmarted him. She said so many things about her possible rescue that made him panic and check every inch of the building he had hidden her in.

As he disappeared, closing the door behind himself, she quickly gathered as much strength as she could and dragged herself across the floor all the way to the patched-up window. She started cursing in Latin, seeing the window was patched up with huge plaques of wood.

She was weak. She couldn't shift, she couldn't use her alpha powers to create a long distance mind link and contact Dumbledore or anyone for that matter. Not even another alpha, Alpha Brian being the only other one she knew she could trust. She didn't even know where she was to see if she was close to that pack or close to Hogwarts.

She needed air and sunlight, those were the only things that could give enough strength—enough to Apparate.

Clenching her jaw, she pushed herself to her feet, slightly wobbling due to the broken bones in her legs. She lifted her hands, ignoring her right broken arm and started pulling as hard as she could. She could finally hear the wood breaking. She had to hurry, though. The idiotic unknown kidnapper would be back soon.

She collapsed, sighing in satisfaction as air blew in through the broken window and the sunlight beamed through the glass, warming her up. For the first time since she was kidnapped...since the Chamber of Secrets, her lips curled up into...a smile. A genuine smile.

Though, as soon as it appeared, it vanished as she heard the kidnapper running up the stairs. He was almost at the door of the room she was in. She quickly looked back at the sun, not caring if the ultraviolet rays burned her eyes, and focused. She focused as hard as she could and closed her eyes. The door of the room burst open but...

Delilah was long gone.

The kidnapper was furious and started cursing under his breath, finally ripping off his mask and running a hand through dark brown hair, his bright green eyes staring at the spot where she had stood before she disappeared. "Blast her." He chuckled. "She just had to be the strongest, most powerful witch in the world." No, duh. Idiot.

She fell. That's all she could recall after her escape. She was falling down until her back hit the grass-covered ground, a loud crack being heard followed by a few girly gasps before everything went black.

Delilah woke up several times. She looked up and couldn't help but grimace at the sight before her. Yes, Beauxbatons Palace was a very beautiful chateau surrounded by beautiful gardens and fountains magically created out of the surrounding mountains, but she knew, from the moment Dumbledore had told her about it, that she would never want to go there, even to visit.

Yet there she landed. Woopie.

When she finally came around, she wasted no longer than a second before sprinting out of the Beauxbatons infirmary.

"Stop, you cannot leave. You are 'urt," called a voice behind her. She might've been hurt, but there
was no way she was staying there any longer.

Delilah spun around only to find a beautiful girl making her way towards her. She was tall and willowy, with an air of grace that made her seem like she was gliding when she was walking and her very presence seemed to emanate a faint, silvery glow. She had long beautiful silvery blond hair, large, deep blue eyes, fair skin, a petite frame and very white, even teeth, though Delilah wasn't really impressed even in the state she was in.

"My name eez Fleur. Fleur Delacour. And az I waz zaying, you cannot leave. You are 'urt and—"

"I am sorry, Fleur. And thank you very much for your concern and hospitality, but I do not care if I am hurt, I must leave," Delilah said.

Fleur shook her head. "At least let us clean you up. You 'ave been here only a day and you are still... well, not clean."

Delilah hesitated but gave in either way. Fleur and her little sister Gabrielle had found a liking to her and kept giggling at how clueless Delilah was about being half veela. After being as 'fresh as a daisy' and partly healed, Delilah made her way to the door. Once outside, she couldn't help but internally smile as a fresh breeze blew in.

"You 'ave to promise to stay in contact with us," Fleur said with a smile.

Delilah smiled back a small smile at the tall blond. "I promise, Fleur. As much as all this... girly stuff is not really my thing, I really like you and your sister. Thank you for taking care of me," she said sincerely.

Fleur's smile widened. "You are welcome."

"Are you sure you do not want to zee yourself in the mirror?" Gabrielle randomly asked as she and her older sister, Fleur, followed Delilah outside.

Delilah gave her a weird look. "Why are you asking me that?"

The two sisters looked at each other and giggled.

"You really are unaware of your beauty, aren't you?" Fleur said.

Delilah gave her a puzzled look. "Beauty? Me?"

Fleur rolled her eyes and flicked her wand, making a body length mirror appear. "Look at yourself."

Reluctantly, Delilah stepped forward only to nearly faint. Yes, she had never seen herself in a mirror — except maybe in her first year at Hogwarts when she looked into the Mirror of Erised, but even then she didn't pay attention to her own reflection until now — but she was sure she had jet black hair with light brown highlights and extremely sure that her eyes were orange-pink morning glory-begonia, not violet orchidee with a few gray specks in them. And her skin was a whole lot paler than she remembers it being.

"Oh, my goddess of the moon, what on earth happened to me?!" she whisper-yelled. She started shaking, ignoring the pain in her body. "I have to get to Hogwarts, now!"

Before Fleur or Gabrielle could stop her, she closed her eyes and disappeared... only to land somewhere else, with someone she never thought she would meet — someone she never even thought would still be alive, or even existed...
The bed was so comfortable that Delilah didn't want to get up, though the smell of the dirty floor wasn't really helping her fall back to sleep. She slowly pushed herself up, making a mental note to thank whoever wrapped her arm in a sling and healed most of her wounds.

She was about to get off the bed when she let out a low growl as pain shot through her ribs.

"Careful, you're not completely healed yet," said a voice coming from the shadows in the corner of the room she was in.

She lied back down and took a few deep breaths, never taking her eyes off the stranger.

"Who are you?" he asked before she could even ask him that herself.

"Delilah. Delilah Dawn... Hawkins, and you are?"

A man stepped forward and she couldn't help but gasp. He was also tall and thin, with a great deal of long, stringy gray hair and beard. Delilah would've thought he was a rather grumpy-looking old man if it weren't for his kind smile that gave her rather the impression that he wasn't one who smiled often — like her.

"Aberforth Dumbledore."

So... yeah, as you might've guessed, Aberforth was grandpa D's brother. Delilah doesn't remember exactly what he's been telling her— she just remembers that he said that at some point he became the barman and owner of the Hog's Head Inn in Hogsmeade, which is where she was at presently. So basically she's not as far from Hogwarts as she thought. Oh, right, and turns out what she'd been doing all along wasn't Apparating, it was something similar that only she could do, being the strongest witch in the world. He named it something like... 'instant transmission'. Not to confuse him with grandpa D since they both shared the same last name, Delilah had decided to call him Uncle Aberforth or Uncle Ab when he started giving her lessons on how to Apparate correctly.

"Now, the three most important prospects of Apparition are the three D's!" Delilah giggled but instantly stopped when Uncle Aberforth gave her a stern look.

She smiled sheepishly. "Sorry." He chuckled and shook his head.

"What do the three D's stand for, Delilah?"

She pursed her lips and scratched the back of her neck, rummaging through her brain. "They stand for... Destination... Determination and Deliberation!"

He beamed at her and nodded. "Yes. Now, I want you to first, look at that hoop and only it. Then, focus on it, it's your Destination! Second, be Determined to get there, and third, Deliberation! Try it now!"

She nodded then mentally face-palmed herself; she forgot what Deliberation means.

"Alright!" she whispered, squeezing her eyes shut.

"Destination. Let's see, my hoop is about six feet away," she thought. "The left-hand corner of the living room. Check. Determination. Self-pep talk will work. Go, Deli! I am going to get inside that hoop. I want to get inside that hoop. I will get inside that hoop. And... er... Deliberation... well..."

"DELIBERATE!" she shouted, spinning on her heel. Nothing.
"Shoot!" she grumbled, feeling stupid. Uncle Ab looked at her with amusement twinkling in his eyes. It had been going that way for the past three days. "I just shouted deliberate, did I not?"

He nodded. She turned around and tried to do it again. "Hoop. Six feet, back corner. I'm going there. Now. Spin and deliberate! I actually moved! I moved about three feet. Halfway there! Wait... three feet. That's nothing, dang it!"

Uncle Ab chuckled. "More deliberation, Delilah."

She scowled. "Load of bull. Deliberation! Pft! I don't need deliberation! I don't need to Apparate! I'll just use the 'instant transmission' thing I apparently already do or... a transport charm or a portkey. Floo network! The best yet, I'll use a dang broom!"

He shook his head, chuckling softly. "Just try again, Delilah."

Delilah pouted but nodded. She took a deep breath, spun on her heel and found herself just outside her hoop. More deliberation. She walked back to the spot she was standing and took another deep breath. She closed her eyes and concentrated as hard as she could.

"Hoop. Six feet, back corner. I'm going there. Now. Spin and deliberate!"

She opened her eyes and squealed, but then started panicking when she saw she was in a room she did not recognize. A bedroom more precisely. After a few confused seconds of looking around, a door opened and a... shirtless guy walked in. They looked at each other and screamed. Delilah was completely freaking out that she threw herself onto the floor and hid under the bed that was right in the middle of this gigantic room.

"Who're you and vat 're you doing 'ere?" he asked.

"Can you put on more clothes before I answer any of whatever you just said?" she pleaded. "Because hiding under a bed is really not all that comfortable."

He sighed. "I'm done," he said.

Delilah hesitated a bit but then finally got out of her uncomfortable hiding spot. The boy standing before her was thin, dark, and sallow-skinned, with a large curved nose and thick black eyebrows. He looked like an overgrown bird of prey yet he had quite an innocent look on his face, making it evident that he was probably around sixteen or seventeen years old.

Once he had a better sight of Delilah, his eyes widened. He cleared his throat and grabbed her hand. "I am Viktor Krum," he said, planting a small kiss on it, making Delilah slightly blush.

She smiled, relieved that he wasn't a creeper. "Delilah Hawkins," she said.

He smiled back then smirked. "So vat exactly vere you doing 'ere in my bedroom?"

Her blush darkened as she put her hands in the pockets of her jeans and giving him a sheepish smile. "I was learning how to Apparate... but I guess I put in a little bit too much of a Deliberation."

He laughed. This guy was actually great, though she really couldn't wait for tomorrow. Hopefully, she'll be back at Hogwarts before her second year ends. Delilah owled Uncle Aberforth but he couldn't come until an hour later so she talked with Viktor and learned a lot more things about him. He even gave her a few tips for playing better at Quidditch. She still couldn't believe that she Apparated as far as Bulgaria. It's shocking, but... cool. When uncle Aberforth finally arrived, Viktor and Delilah promised to stay in contact and with that, she was back at uncle Ab's place and called it a
night. Though Delilah did not sleep, despite her exhaustion. She couldn't get Hogwarts out of her head... and thinking of it, she even wondered a few times what had happened to her robes as she remembered having them on before she was kidnapped. Now she only had the pair of jeans and her long-sleeved shirt that surprisingly survived the whole time.

When morning finally came around, the first thing uncle Ab said right after breakfast was, "Not too much Deliberation, because Hogwarts isn't as far as Bulgaria. And don't forget, focus mostly on your Destination."

Delilah pouted and whined a lot, but nodded as she walked over to the spot she stood in yesterday.

"Alright!" she whispered, squeezing her eyes shut.

"Destination. Let me see, Hogwarts is not so faraway, through the left alleyway, past the bridge. Check. Determination. Self-pep talk still works. You can do it, Deli! I am going to get inside to Hogwarts. I want to get inside that damned school. I will get inside that dang blasted school. And since I still do not know what Deliberation means so...

"DELIBERATE!" she shouted, spinning on her heel.

She felt sick to her stomach and dizzy, but she didn’t throw up. Not like anything would come out anyway, she had barely eaten anything for breakfast.

She didn’t understand anything after she landed somewhere unknown to her. It all happened so quickly that it all seemed to a be nothing but a blur to Delilah, but the thing she remembers perfectly was looking back into a familiar pair of violet orchidee eyes and hearing,

"Oh, my goddess of the moon, Delilah... you're alive."

Then hell broke loose.

Everyone was fighting. Many had shifted into large wolves while a cloaked figure remained watching Delilah with an intense gaze as she fought as well, ignoring the confusion that had overtaken her. She was about to be hit from the back, but she quickly sidestepped the attack, grabbed the attacker by the neck and twisted.

Time seemed to stop.

Her eyes widened as she quickly let go of the now limp body she had been holding. She couldn’t believe it. Sure, she had fought the previous summer alongside a pack of shifters against werewolves, but she never killed. She only attacked to defend or seriously injured, but she never killed in her life.

For the first time in a forever, as she felt her body change form, she didn’t feel pain as her arms turned into golden wings and her body shrunk. She looked down at herself and realized she had just turned into her fifth soul animal.

A phoenix.

Though right now wasn't the time to phase, she had to fight. Concentrating with a bit of difficulty, she turned back into her human self, her first murder rushing back into her mind. Delilah spit the crimson iron tasting liquid on the floor, still internally freaking out about her first kill, before looking up at the strange cloaked figure.

"Where is it, Delilah?" said the man hidden beneath a crimson red cloak.
Delilah narrowed her eyes at him as she collected as much saliva and blood she could before she spit it out again; her throat was starting to burn. "I have no idea what you are talking about."

His face might've been hidden beneath the cloak, but you could still see his features growing angry. In less than a second, he stood in front of Delilah, raised his hand and let it come in contact with her face. She couldn't deny it: that slap hurt like hell.

But the cloaked man wasn't the only one who was angry.

"I do not know what in hell you are talking about!" Delilah yelled at him as he raised his hand once more. This time, slim leather hit her across the face, making more blood collect in her mouth.

"Liar!" he said as he swung at her once again. Blood trickled down her chin as it dripped down onto her black jeans.

"I am not lying!" she screamed back at him.

The man grabbed a fistful of her hair and yanked her head back, bringing his lips to her ear. "If you don't tell me where the damn moonstone is, then I will kill every member of your stupid little pack."

Delilah's vision became as red as her eyes. "They're already dead," she said in the deadliest voice she had ever used.

Nothing was moving in slow motion. Instead, the adrenaline rush seemed to make the brain of every witness work much faster, and they were all able to absorb in clear detail several things at once.

But of more immediate importance was the bloody organ in Delilah's hand. Her eyes went back to their normal violet orchidee and widened as realization slapped her across the face as hard as the whip had.

Delilah, a thirteen year old girl, just killed two people.

Yes, they might've been monsters... and evil, but they still had hearts— hearts that beat.

Dropping the heart, she stumbled onto her feet and started stepping backwards in terror, in fear of herself.

"What did I do?" she started mumbling, gripping her head, not caring that her hands were covered in blood. "I just ki— I wasn't— this wasn't supposed to— oh, my goddess..."

"Shh," hushed a gentle voice. Soon, Delilah found herself being held in a warm embrace. "It's okay, Lilah. You didn't mean—"

"So? That doesn't make a difference!" Delilah was shaking now. "Even an alpha shouldn't... I-I just ki... I don't want to remember this... I want to forget..."

_Cynthia Dawn Hayes_ looked at her niece with sad eyes. Delilah reminded her so much of her twin Ella-Grace when she had lost her mind after loosing her _mark_. She regretted every day not being able to help her sister that _night_, if only she had made it back to Anima Curatoria in time, maybe they wouldn't have been dead and Delilah wouldn't have been an orphan. She couldn't deny that she was still extremely shocked to find out that her niece was alive and turned out being a witch, unlike her.

Cynthia was a squib.

It should've been considered humiliating to be the only squib in a family of pure-blood witches and
wizards, but their family never cared about that. If you were part of the family from the start, you stayed part of the family no matter how you turned out. Her husband, Carl Hayes, was also a wizard, but he rarely used any of his magic, he mostly spent his life looking after his own pack of shifters, taking his role as Alpha of the Starlight Pack very seriously. Cynthia, being a squib, had learned in her earlier years how to do magic like a regular witch, though she was less powerful than one so whenever she did use magic, it was mostly the wiccan magic that had been in her side of the family for generations, and was more powerful than a witch’s or wizard’s power combined. You didn't even need a wand to use it.

As Cynthia was thinking about the past, going through many ups and downfalls of life, it wasn't until the thirteen year old Delilah looked like a three year old baby again that she realized what was going on. Cynthia smiled. Delilah wasn't her child, but she did always want to have a daughter, to give her son a sister, to give her husband the chance to look down at a little girl and get to call her 'daddy's little girl'.

"You probably already forgot, and I am truly sorry you had to go through the worst your whole life, but I promise you, Delilah, I will do my best to make your life a paradise... I will give you the family you lost... the one you never got to have."

Delilah didn't understand completely what was going on as her mind was blank; every memory of everything she lived, of everything she went through was gone. All she could make out was that her name was Delilah, and that after being lost for so long... she was found.

Though even as a toddler, something kept nagging her... the things she somehow still remembered.

Her name was Delilah Keren Aleah Dawn... Hawkins.

She was a thirteen year old... baby, did that make sense? No. "I'm going to stick with the fact that I'm a baby and forget I was somehow thirteen," she thought as Cynthia placed around her neck a strange white stone hanging from a pure silvery string... the moonstone those cloaked figures had been looking for. She let it hang beside a beautiful golden locket that had a heart-shaped diamond on it.

Cynthia Dawn looked down at the three year old looking girl who was surely two, and couldn't help but think,

"Ius Rex... Those bastards. They have been after you since before you were born, but were too cowardly to come themselves. Hopefully, with me, you won't have to go through the same again. I know I am being selfish, but you will be my daughter. Hopefully, that way you will be less in danger."

What she didn't know was that, some people's fates just can't be changed... Especially not Delilah's.

Unfortunately, things started changing again, six days after she lost her memory.

Delilah couldn't make sense of how quickly she was growing— how quickly she was celebrating her birthdays... aren't they supposed to be once a year instead of once every three or four weeks? Her mom seemed to know the answer, but she never said anything about it... and... well, Delilah never really dared herself to ask.

It was on the week of her second birthday, when it all happened.

"Momma?" she had asked her the night before her birthday. There, by the fire place in their living room, was a two seated sofa that was occupied by Cynthia and Delilah.

"Yes, sweetheart?" Cynthia asked, looking down at her lovingly as Delilah snuggled up beside her.
She looked a lot like her mom. They shared the same pale skin and violet orchidee eyes, though for some reason, Delilah had a few gray specks in hers and Cynthia's hair was dark brown almost black while hers was light brown.

"Can you tell me a bit more about the magic stuff you and daddy do?" she asked.

Cynthia chuckled. "Well, Lilah, there isn't really much to say other than the fact that witches and wizards do exist, but of course they are nothing like they are in fairytales."

Delilah giggled and jumped off the sofa to stand in front of her mom. "Of course not! You're nothing like those ugly witches. You're beautiful! You could even be a queen!" she exclaimed herself, throwing her her hands up in the air.

"Calm down, Dels. You're gonna wake gramps up," said my older brother, Andrew, as he came to sit beside their mom. Andrew had hair as dark as Cynthia's, dark yet pale skin like Delilah, though his eyes were a green figi color, like their dad's, Carl.

Delilah slammed her hands over her mouth and giggled as she heard her grandpa, her daddy's dad, snoring loudly from his room. "Oops."

Andrew laughed. "You never change, Dels, do you?"

She grinned at him. "Nope!"

He chuckled and shook his head. "Good. Don't." Delilah, then, crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes as she thought.

"Momma, am I a witch?"

Her mom smiled down at her and hesitated for a moment before replying, semi-truthfully. "We don't know, sweetheart. The powers emerging from can probably only be your gifts from your sou— your shifter side."

"If I was, would I be able to look like my true age?" Delilah asked, tilting her head to the side.

"Why don't you try?" Andrew said.

"That doesn't sound like such a bad idea," Carl said as he joined them, sitting on the sofa's armrest beside the Cynthia.

"I don't think she sh—"

"It wouldn't hurt to give it a try, Cynthia," he said, cutting her off.

Cynthia sighed. "Alright, Carl."

They turned to look at Delilah and she smiled brightly. "Awesome! I'm tired of being a one year old who looks like a nine year old."

She took a deep breath then closed her eyes. Her brows furrowed and her lips curled down into a frown as her body went stiff. After a few minutes, she could feel her body starting to shrink. Opening her eyes, she looked at her appearance in the mirror that hung above the fireplace then scowled.

"Never mind, I look retarded," she muttered before growing back up but only until she looked like a five year old. She frowned and turned to her family in confusion.
"It seems that your body has decided to adapt the appearance of your five year old self and slow down the growing process," her dad said.

They all looked at each other with similar serious expressions on their faces for a few minutes then grinned at each other. That was one of the best nights of her life, though the next night... let's just say it ended her happily ever after.

The walls of her bedroom were painted purple— one had a 'Happy 2nd birthday!' banner hanging on it— the sealing was spiked in a very decorative way and the floor was wooden. Delilah was, as usual, snuggled by her mom's side on a queen sized bed.

"Momma? Are we in danger?" she asked in her two year old voice, fiddling with the necklace she had been given... she couldn't exactly remember when while eyeing the golden locket hanging beside it with a frown. She never knew how she had it, nor did anyone.

Cynthia smiled sadly at her. "Yes, sweetheart. But I promise it will be over soon," she said, holding her tighter against her. Sighing in relief at the news, Delilah snuggled deeper into her blankets and tightened her hold on her. She had a feeling that even if she said that, something bad was going to happen. Delilah was scared. She was scared and felt so vulnerable as she knew, being one of the youngest in the pack, she didn't know how to fight. They hadn't taught her, so there was no way she could help protecting the pack.

"Momma, I don't want to lose you, daddy or Andrew," she whispered in a tiny voice.

"You won't, Dels, I promise," Cynthia assured her, kissing her forehead before singing that song she sings to her every night.

"Just close your eyes, the sun is going down
You'll be alright, no one can hurt you now
Come morning light
You and I'll be safe and sound...."

She didn't get the time to go on as the glass from Delilah's window broke and smoke suddenly filled her nostrils. Everything happened so fast that all she remembers was running out of the now burning house and getting slightly lost.

"Mommy, daddy! Where are you?" she shouted, coughing roughly because of the smoke. She looked around, panicked and confused.

"Run, Lilah, run!" someone shouted.

Delilah turned, looking for her cousin. "Kyle? Where are you?"

"Doesn't matter, just run and don't let them catch you!" his sister, Kayla, shouted.

"No, Kayla! I can't leave you guys here!" Delilah protested.

Kayla ran up to her and grabbed her by the shoulders. "Dels, you're brave and loyal, and I love you for that, little cous, but you need to get out of here, now!" she shouted over the roaring flames as hooded figures started approaching them.

"B-but, I—"
"Come on, let's go!" Andrew shouted, grabbing Delilah's arm and dragging her towards the forest which seemed to be their only way out. The hooded figures split up and few came after them.

Suddenly, something caught onto Andrew's shoulder and yanked him back away from her. Delilah stopped and shouted, "Andrew!"

"Don't stop, just keep going!" he shouted before she was surrounded by the hooded figures.

"No! I ca—"

"GO!" he managed to shout before a pair of pair hands twisted his neck, creating an ear splitting 'crack' before dropping his now limp body, causing Delilah to scream out in pain.

"ANDREW!"

"DELILAH, RUN!" her dad shouted.

So she did.

She ran.

She ran away from the other children's cries. She ran away from a war they couldn't win. She ran away and let her mother, her father, her brother... her family die.

Now, she regrets ever running.

She ran till she couldn't anymore. It was too dark for her to see— her senses weren't enhanced yet. She ran and after she knew she was far enough, she let herself fall onto the ground that was now muddy because of the rain she had just realized was falling. She couldn't run any further. She felt like she was dying, and even though she wasn't, she wanted to.

She wanted to die. She wanted to join the others... but guess that wasn't going to happen any time soon. Her whole body wasn't responding anymore and she was now being engulfed by darkness. She didn't fight it this time as she thought...

Why does this feel like a déjà vu?

After awakening, she kept running. She ran for a long time, not really knowing for how long— probably a week had passed since she started running— or even where to go, the only stop being when she was kidnapped by a bunch of cloaked figures, though the fact that these cloaked dudes fought with sticks made me relax, knowing they weren't the same as the ones from the night of her 'birthday'.

Though her relief soon vanished as she sensed the same dark atmosphere coming from these hooded figures.

"Tell me, where is he?! Where is the boy?!" shrieked and ear-piercing voice.

There, within the crowd, Delilah lied on the floor, not really knowing how she got there. She didn't remember being beaten up— was she that weak?

She curled her hands into fists and clenched her jaw. "I don't know," Delilah snarled, though her voice sounded broken.

The woman shrieked. "Crucio!" she shouted, pointing her stick at Delilah.
The girl screamed.

The pain was so intense, so all-consuming, that she no longer knew where she was—not that she even knew it before—white-hot knives were piercing every inch of her skin, of her scars that she'd had since 'birth' for some unknown reason, reopening them, her head was surely going to burst with pain; Delilah was screaming more loudly by the second.

I'm going to die, was all she kept repeating in her head when her vision got blurry and suddenly, she was no longer in the forest.

"This is my dream, I can leave when I want to," said a voice that sounded quite oddly familiar... like her.


"Yes, sure, in your wildest madman dreams. Go to... Tartarus! I will never join you. I do not care what powers I have that you want," the girl—Delilah—growled.

"Hmm... perhaps this will change your mind, princess," he mocked before shouting, "Crucio!"

The pain was so intense, so all-consuming, that Delilah no longer knew where she was—not that she even knew it before—white-hot knives were piercing every inch of her skin, of her scars, reopening them, her head was surely going to burst with pain; she was screaming more loudly than she'd ever screamed in her life—

"Devine. Ego non iunctio vos. Ego non. Devine!" she shouted. Why was she shouting in another language?

Suddenly, her eyes fluttered open and she stared at the ugly woman. Delilah was beyond enraged. She knocked out the people who held her down and threw them against a few trees then turned to the woman who was now staring at her in shock and slight fear.

"What is your name?" Delilah demanded in a tone she had never used before.

She gave Delilah a look, still pointing her stupid stick at her. "Bellatrix Lestr—"

"Bellatrix Lestrange, you will forget all of this happened as well as your accomplices and leave."

Her expression went blank for a few seconds before they all disappeared leaving Delilah to continue her lonesome journey with no specific destination. Time went on and for some reason, she just couldn't get it out of her head that she was now 'five' years old.

She was eating wild berries, not caring if they were poisonous when she suddenly smelt them. Forgetting the berries, she followed the scent. Delilah climbed up a very big pine tree and saw a man, who appeared to be in his mid-thirties, and a boy who seemed to be around twelve or thirteen years old just standing there. To her shock they were facing a horse sized dark brown wolf who seemed very hungry. A rogue werewolf.

As the wolf was about to pounce, Delilah jumped from the tree and attacked it. As they were fighting, she made sure to examine the wolf, to learn it tactics and ways of fighting. She realized that it seemed to be trying to figure out a way to go around her and attack the... humans. Finally deciding himself, he clawed Delilah's arm, making her scream in pain before bouncing towards the man and boy who were slammed, the next second, against a tree. She suddenly started to shake violently, though it was not out of fear that she was doing so. She started panting and then gasped in pain as she could hear the breaking of her bones, each one by one, blood rushing everywhere.
Crack!

Seconds later, an ear-splitting ripping sound erupted from her, and where her hands once were, were now pure silvery paws. She didn't take her time to admire herself, she simply attacked the brown one with so much rage that she injured it and made it run away. Coward.

She looked back and suddenly felt light headed as her vision got blurry. She hadn't realized she phased back until she was about to collapse onto the ground only to be caught by two pairs of arms.

They found her... when she was lost, though, let's just say, when it came to believing she would never lose someone again, she got her hopes up too quickly...
Delilah's P.O.V.

— Five months later —

Miss Delilah Hawkins

Bellefaire Orphanage, 4th Floor
22001 Fairmount Blvd.
Shaker Heights, Cleveland, OH

Dear Ms. Hawkins,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment. Term begins on September 1.

We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,
Deputy Headmistress

"Well that explains pretty much... a lot," I muttered sarcastically under my breath as Dumbledore chuckled. Questions exploded inside my head like fireworks and I couldn't decide which to ask first. After a few minutes, something got my attention and I blurted out, "If this letter is for me, why is it dedicated to a Miss Hawkins? And what does it mean, they await my owl? I mean, sure my dad has a job, but this country ain't that rich."

Dumbledore chuckled again. "Your surname just so happens to be Hawkins. And as for the owl: every student has their own owl in order to keep in touch with their family, friends, and school from time to time. In your case, your owl has belonged to you since your parents 'slip away', as well as the money you will be using to buy everything you'll be in need of."

"Wait, hold on a second... I own an owl? I thought you said I had a phoenix... and a husky, much like the one I have now... but different?"

"You did, but you went through a tragic moment where I'm sure you can guess what happened."

I was silent. I understood what he was saying perfectly. My phoenix and husky were dead. But—wait... I had a damn owl the whole time?! Ugh... never mind.

"Sir, why did I have to start, now, at the age of thirteen? Soon to be fourteen, as a matter of fact. I mean, I don't mind. You know, 'better late than never', but why didn't I start earlier? You told me once before that every witch and wizard received her or his acceptance letter at the age of eleven. I'm almost three years late. You never told me why I had to stay here and lay low for a while," I told him, hoping he would tell me more than what he had told me on our first encounter, weeks ago.

He shook his head, giving me a warm smile. "Actually, Delilah, you were already there before. You just don't remember. You will know later on after you've settled in. In the meanwhile, I advise you to pack your bags. Hagrid, the keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts will come for you
tomorrow," he informed me.

I nodded sadly and turned to my dad. His eyes were watering. "Dad?"

He shook his head. "Not now, Dels, we'll talk about it in the morning. Right now we'll get ready and we'll go play baseball, then later we'll go fishing, then—" he cut himself off, remembering that Dumbledore was still here. His tanned cheeks turned a soft scarlet tone as he turned to face the old man who was looking at my dad with an amused expression on his face. "Sorry, Albus."

Dumbledore chuckled. "It's alright Kenton. If you'll excuse me, I'll be off now," he said, before disappearing.

BOOM.

The whole house shivered and I bolt upright, staring at the door of my room. I quickly jumped off my bed and ran out of my room and down the staircase only to bump into dad.

"You heard that too?" he asked me as I nodded in response, looking around the living room.

BOOM.

The whole place shook once again, making both, my dad and I, jump and yelp in surprise. Someone was outside, knocking to come in.

Out of nowhere, there was a crash coming from behind me. I turned around only to see my dad skidding back into the room. When was he gone? I have no shitting idea, but he was holding a rifle in his hands— I never knew he had that. Wait... oh. At least now I know what had been in the long, thin package he had brought home last week. Maybe it's for hunting... not that I'd let him go anyway...

"Who's there?" he shouted. "I warn you— I'm armed!"

There was a pause. Then—

SMASH!

The door was hit with such force that it swung clean off its hinges and with a deafening crash landed flat on the floor. A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair. The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down, picked up the door, and fitted it easily back into its frame. The noise of the storm I hadn't noticed outside dropped a little. He turned to look at dad.

"Couldn't make us a cup o' tea, could yeh? It's not been an easy journey..."

Dad nodded and stumbled over to the kitchen while the giant strode over to the sofa where Jack, my husky, had just woken up and was now staring at me in expectation. He was waiting for me to explain, but I gave him the look and he went back to sleep. Yes, I have a husky and he's really friendly. I found him a few weeks ago, and since then we've sort of shared a connection.

"Nice wolf, yeh great lump," said the stranger. Skipper, my little yellow duckling— yes, I own a baby duck as well— squeaked and skipped towards me, still squeaking at me to pick him up. "An' here's Delilah!" said the giant. I looked up into the fierce, wild, shadowy face and saw that the beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile. "Las' time I saw yeh, you were... shorter, and you had darker hair..." said the giant. "Yeh look a lot more like yer mom, and yeh've got her eyes too— just like they used
My heart started beating faster at the mentioning of my mother just as dad came in with three huge cups of tea. For some reason, I felt like this giant and I weren't thinking about the same person; I looked like my mom did, but not completely. From the corner of my eye, I could see dad stirring his cup of tea quickly, and from the looks of it, he seemed pretty nervous so I went to sit beside him on the couch in front of the big guy.

"Dad, are you okay?" I asked him, placing a hand on his shoulder while using my emotion ability, trying to comfort him.

"Dad?" the man asked, in confusion.

I nodded before explaining that Kenton had found me in the forest during a hiking trip with Brady—I left out the part about the Cruciaturs curse and Brady being... turned then killed—and decided to adopt me. Seeming relieved for god knows what, he smiled and nodded as he acknowledged everything I said.

"Anyway— Deli," said the giant, turning his back to Jack, "a very belated... or early happy birthday to yeh. Got summat fer yeh here— I mighta sat on it at some point, but it'll taste all right."

From an inside pocket of his black overcoat, he pulled a slightly squashed box. Curiosity filled my stomach as I eagerly lifted the lid. Inside was a large, sticky chocolate cake with Happy Birthday Delilah written on it in purple icing. I was touched... even though he could've waited till next December twenty-seventh—I finally remembered the real date of my birthday—instead of wishing me the last one that had already passed several months ago.

I looked up at the giant who seemed quite familiar. I meant to say thank you, but instead of thanking him I asked, "You're Hagrid, aren't you?"

He chuckled. "True, you don't remember..." Rememb— seriously? "But yeah, my name is Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts."

Ignoring the confusion, I grinned as he held out an enormous hand and shook my whole arm.

"What about that tea then, eh?" he said, rubbing his hands together. "I'd not say no ter summat stronger if yeh've got it, mind."

"So... Hagrid. Do you happen to know why Dumbledore wouldn't let me start attending Hogwarts when I was supposed to... or if I did, like he said, why can't I remember any of it?" I asked, sounding casual. He locked his big black eyes with my violet orchidee ones. He hesitated for a long while before finally answering.

"Well, it's best yeh know as much as I can tell yeh— mind, I can't tell yeh everythin', it's a great myst'ry, parts of it..." He turned into the chimney's fire for a few seconds, and then said, "It begins, I suppose, with— with a person called— but it's incredible yeh don't remember his name, everyone in our world knows—"

"Who?"

"Well— I don' like sayin' the name if I can help it. No one does, remember? No, wait, yeh don't..."

"Why not? Why don't people like saying his name?"

"Gulpin' gargoyles, Delilah, people are still scared, especially since the last two years. Blimey, this is
"Could you write it down?" I suggested.

"Nah— can't spell it. All right— Voldemort." Hagrid shuddered. "Don' make me say it again. Anyway, this— this wizard, about twenty-two years ago now, started lookin' fer followers. Got 'em, too— some were afraid, some just wanted a bit o' his power, 'cause he was gettin' himself power, all right. Dark days, Deli. Didn't know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches... terrible things happened. He was takin' over. 'Course, some stood up to him— an' he killed 'em. Horribly. One o' the only safe places left was Hogwarts. Reckon Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was afraid of. Didn't dare try takin' the school, not jus' then, anyway."

"Now, there are two families. A girl and her grandparents, one of the most powerful and good witch an' wizard I ever knew. They gave their lives up to save the little girl. And then there's the boy an' his mum an' dad. His mum an' dad were as good a witch an' wizard as I ever knew, just like the girl's grandparents. Head boy an' girl at Hogwarts in their day! Suppose the myst'ry is why You-Know-Who never tried to get 'em on his side before... probably knew they were too close ter Dumbledore ter want anythin' ter do with the Dark Side. Maybe he thought he could persuade 'em... maybe he just wanted 'em outta the way. All anyone knows is, he turned up in the village where they were all living, on Halloween twelve years ago. Harry was just a year old. He came ter his house an'— an'—" Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, spotted handkerchief and blew his nose with a sound like a foghorn.

"Sorry," he said. "But it's that sad— knew his mum an' dad, an' nicer people yeh couldn't find— anyway... You-Know-Who killed 'em, just like the grandmum and granddad. An' then— an' this is the real myst'ry of the thing— just like the girl, he tried to kill Harry, too. Want—"

"Harry?" I asked, curiously. I've always wanted to meet someone with that name— weird I know, but just out of curiosity. And now, turns out a Harry goes to the school I'll be attending and to top it all of, he's famous!

"Yeh. Lilly and James lil' boy. Ever' one calls him and the girl The boy and girl who lived'. Anyway, You-know-who probably jus' wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or maybe he just liked killin' by then. But he couldn't do it."

"What do you mean?"

"He used the killing curse on Harry and the girl," I gulped as I remembered when Bellatrix was going to use it on me, but then I noticed Hagrid hasn't told me the name of the girl yet. "But it didn't work. Instead, he left a mark on his forehead and on the girl's neck... and another on her shoulder."

"You mean the Voldy dude used the killing curse on Harry... and the girl, but failed and just left a scar— scars?" I asked, my voice raising up a few octaves and my eyes widening in disbelief.

Hagrid sighed and nodded. "That's what yeh get when a Powerful, evil curse touches yeh— took care of hir mum an' dad an' hir house, even— but it didn't work on him or the girl, an' that's why they're famous. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except Harry and the girl, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches an' wizards of the age— the McKinnons, the Bones, the Prewetts, the— an' they were only babies, an' he lived."

"But what happened to Voldylocks?"
"Good question, Delilah. Disappeared. Vanished. Same night he tried ter kill Harry as he was only damaged the night he tried to kill the girl. Makes them even more famous. That's the biggest myst'ry, see... he was gettin' more an' more powerful— why'd he go? Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die. Some say he's still out there, bidin' his time, like, but I don' believe it. People who was on his side came back ter ours. Some of 'em came outta kinda trances. Don' reckon they could've done if he was comin' back. Most of us reckon he's still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on. 'Cause somethin' about those kids finished him. There was somethin' goin' on those two nights he hadn't counted on— I dunno what it was, no one does— but somethin' about Harry and the girl stumped him, all right. In her first year at Hogwarts... he came and tried to get her on his side, but she refused as she had accepted to protect her first best friend, Harry."

I was silent for a moment before curiosity took the best of me. "Hagrid... who was the girl?"

He looked at me with sad eyes and I instantly regretted asking that. "That girl... was you, Deli. You were only a few months old when..."

My eyes widened. Me? I had already gone to Hogwarts? I had already met this... this Harry? I had... wizard... ing friends? And another evil wizard after me? Ugh! Can't my life get any worse?! I guess it can.

"You don't know how... how I ended up forgetting, do you?" Hagrid shook his big head. I sighed. No wonder I always felt like something in my life was missing, even when they were still alive.

He sighed and got up. "It's gettin' late and we've got lots ter do today," he said loudly. "Gotta get up ter town, get all yer books an' that." He took off his thick black coat and threw it to me.

"You can kip under that," he said. "Don' mind if it wriggles a bit, I think I still got a couple o' dormice in one o' the pockets. Anyway, get yer stuff and we'll be off. Thanks, mister...?"

"Turnbull, Kenton Turnbull," dad immediately responded. After that, I went to get my things, hugged my dad goodbye, reassuring him that I'd see him again in Christmas, then I followed Hagrid and we left.

On a train, I was practically daydreaming about how Hogwarts would be until Hagrid spoke up.

"Still got yer letter, Deli?" he asked as he counted stitches. When did he get those? Anyway, I took the parchment envelope out of my bag and showed it to him.

"Good," he said. "There's a list there of everything yeh need."

Curiously I unfolded the second piece of paper I hadn't noticed the night before, and read:

**HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY**

**UNIFORM**

All students will require:
1. Three sets of plain work robes (black)
2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear
3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)
4. One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

**Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name tags**

**COURSE BOOKS**

All students should have a copy of each of the following:
The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 3) by Miranda Goshawk
Unfogging the Future by Cassandra Vablatsky (if attending Divination)
Intermediate Transfiguration by Emeric Switch
The Monster Book of Monsters (if attending Care of Magical Creatures)
Numerology and Grammatica (if attending Arithmancy)

OTHER EQUIPMENT
1 Wand
1 Cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)
1 set of glass or crystal phials
1 telescope
1 set of brass scales
Students may also bring an Owl or a Cat or a Toad.
PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS

As I went over the list about three times, something caught my eye.

"Um, Hagrid? It says here that only first graders don't get a broomstick. But am I a part of them? Because I mean, I am thirteen, but—"

"Nah, you'll be in yer third year," he reassured me.

"So I'll get my own broom?" I asked, hopeful as he nodded in response. I was so excited and couldn't wait to finally get there.

"Yeh already have one, but yeh can get a 'other one if yeh want," he said with a chuckle.

The way to Diagon Alley was pretty cool, but the place itself was even better. There was everything you could ever need, but Hagrid and I first went straight to Gringotts apparently I was super freakin' rich. I got a silvery Hawthorn wand. I didn't get a wand because I apparently already had one. I bought myself a broom model Firebolt, a black cauldron which I took a liking to because it was black, and everything else I needed and the 'just in case' books like for Arithmancy.

Hagrid had gone to talk with some people he knew around here while he let me go to the pet shop. I was walking there, I could see the sign when I heard someone gasp in pain. I turned to look around and spotted a tall boy with black hair and round glasses, his eyes scrunched up and his hands on his face. I was about to rush over to him to see if he was alright, but instead, I ended tripping over God knows what and fell on top of him.

I quickly got off him, grabbed his wrists and pulled him up. "Are you okay?" I asked. He opened his bright green eyes that seemed familiar to me as he looked up at me.

"I'm fine," he whispered. He moved his hands from his face, revealing a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead.

I looked at it curiously, tilting my head to the side. "What happened to your face?" I blurted out.

"I'm sorry, I was just curious, geez," I muttered before turning to leave.

"Wait," I heard him say, but I was already gone.
Once I entered the pet store, the first thing that caught my eye was white feathers. Shockingly, it wasn't an owl. It looked at me in the eyes and I gasped making the man behind the counter, that I had noticed just now, look up at me.

"Are you alright, miss?" he asked.

I blinked many times as I tried to register what was going on. "I-I... um I- is that...?"

I heard a gasp come from the man as he rushed over to my side and stared at the beautiful creature as well. "A phoenix," he whispered.

The man and I looked at each other with wide eyes in disbelief, and just as we did, I felt something gently rest on my right shoulder. I think my eyes could've popped out of their sockets by now. "Is it —" The man nodded.

"Don't be afraid child, I will never hurt you. I was born to protect you."

I quickly looked up at the creature resting on my shoulder. "Did you just talk?" I asked it.

It pecked my cheek softly before answering me. "Yes, child. I am your Auxilium. I was born to occupy that role. I will be your ducere until you learn how to go on, on your own."

"I'll take her," I blurted out without thinking. The man stared at me in disbelief, then stared at the phoenix then nodded. I paid him and then left to join Hagrid.

We headed back to the train station, he helped me on to the train that would take me back to the house that was apparently mine nearby, then handed me an old worn out envelope.

"Yer ticket fer Hogwarts," he said. "First o' September— King's Cross— it's all on yer ticket. Any problems with anyone, send me a letter with yer... phoenix, she'll know where to find me.... See yeh soon, Delilah." The train pulled out of the station. I wanted to watch Hagrid until he was out of sight; I rose in my seat and pressed my forehead against the window and watched until he was gone.
Dementors and memory lane

I spent a month in London, pretty much locked up in the house Dumbledore said was mine. It was beautiful, but even its beauty couldn't stop me from mopping around over my dad. I missed him so much, but then there was also that Harry kid Hagrid had told me about. Somehow his story and situation made me want to meet him already. If he was my best friend... then I want and try to keep him and his loved ones safe no matter how much more trouble that would cause me. Even Blazealbumer— my... er... new phoenix— agreed with me on that matter. On the last week I sent a letter to dad, telling him I was fine and how much I missed him and to take care of himself, and to Dumbledore leaving Blaze— my phoenix's nickname since the name I gave her is pretty long— under his care.

September first, as I reached King's Cross at half past ten, it took me a while to realize something.

There's no freaking platform nine and three-quarters.

As I went around asking random people for directions, a group of people passed just behind me and I caught the words I was waiting to hear... well not exactly, but you get what I mean.

"This place is packed with Muggles—"

After that, I drowned down their voices and simply followed them as discreetly as possible.

As they went through a wall, I copied their action and pushed my trolley forward towards it. I walked more quickly as I thought I was going to smash right into that barrier and that I'd be in trouble— leaning forward on my cart, I broke into a run— the barrier was coming nearer and nearer — I wouldn't be able to stop— the cart was out of control— I was a foot away— I closed his eyes ready for the crash— or pretty much just me breaking through the wall with my super strength. But nothing happened. I just kept on running.

I opened my eyes. A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said Hogwarts Express, eleven O'clock. I looked behind me and saw a wrought-iron archway where the barrier had been, with the words Platform Nine and Three-Quarters on it. I grinned in victory. Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every color wound here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to one another in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks. The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats.

I pressed on through the crowd until I found an empty compartment. I sighed, pulling the curtains over, then I went through my small bag off more personal belongings and brought out my favorite book; Wuthering Heights. After I had it safely between my hands, I preceded to sitting down though just as I did, the door opened, revealing a boy with pale skin, icy blue-gray eyes and white blondish hair. He was flanked by two beefy boys with dark hair, dark eyes.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Breathing. You?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

He turned to his two beefy friends and ordered them to go get food. When they walked away he drew the curtains, locked the door and sat across from me. I immediately tensed up as I sensed a dark aura coming from him. The aura wasn't black so I knew he wasn't completely evil. It was a dullish
gray so whatever bad thing he was doing, he was obviously being controlled.

As he looked at me, he seemed to be assessing me. Not in a checking-you-out way... okay, never mind, he was checking me out, but anyway, it also seemed as if he were trying to figure me out. Deciding to be more *me*, I crossed my legs in a manly way—don't judge me—opened my book and started reading from the page I had marked the last time I was reading it.

"My name is Malfoy, Draco Malfoy," he announced, holding out a hand. I looked at his hand before returning my eyes to my book. I wasn't trying to be mean or anything, but it's just I don't like being in physical contact with people I don't know, especially if they have no idea what I am. Hagrid was an exception because he seemed quite familiar and trustworthy, but this guy... if I knew him, I'm darn sure I didn't like him. As I kept on reading, I could feel his icy eyes on me. Annoyed, I rolled my eyes and sighed.

"Dawn, Delilah Dawn," I told him. From the corner of my eye, I could see him raising an eyebrow and studying me curiously.

"I have never heard of you or your family before. And you have quite an unusual name." At that, I snapped. I slammed my book close, making him slightly jump and looked him straight in the eyes. I could feel my own turning a darker color. They were probably a violet or reddish begonia by now. I saw him flinch a bit away.

"Me? An unusual name? I'd have you know that my name is one of the most common names in England as well as where I'm from. And at least my name has a meaning. As for you, what does your name stand for? Dracula? If you don't want me doing anything worse than just yelling at you especially since we just met, I suggest you stay out of my way and don't insult my name again. Got it?" I snarled before grabbing my book, my bag, and shrunken trunk, and heading towards the door.

"Wait... yo—Delilah, is it really—where are you going?" he demanded, grabbing my shoulder. I yanked away from the contact.

"Far, far away from you. I don't like you, so as I said before: Stay. Out. Of. My. Way," I said before leaving the tiny room. I went around, my bag hanging from my shoulder, trunk in my pocket, and holding my book tightly against my chest as I walked down the long corridor of the train that fortunately hadn't started moving yet. I longed the hallway, hoping while looking for an empty compartment, but all were full except for the one at the very end of the train.

This had only four occupants, a man sitting fast asleep next to the window, two young boys and a girl. I knocked and all three teens turned to look at me. I bit my lower lip in nervousness. I was never really the type to socialize because most of the time the people I ended up acquainting or loving ended up... dead. But these kids are wizards, so they're basically stronger... right?

I swallowed hard. "Um... hi. I was wondering if I could sit here with you guys. The other ro—compartments are full except that one with two big guys and a kid named Dracula or something—"

"You mean Draco?" the red headed boy said. I narrowed my eyes as I tried to remember the boy from the other room.

"Tall, icy blue-gray eyes, white old man hair and pale skin that makes him look like he's in need of a serious tan or needs a refill in the sanguinary part of his system? If yes, then yup," I answered as they stared at me with wide eyes before laughing.

"Yeah, that's him alright, and yes you can sit with us if you want to. I'm Hermione, by the way. Hermione Granger," said the girl smiling.
I nodded and went to sit beside the kid with round glasses. "Thanks. And I'm Delilah. Delilah Dawn," I answered smiling halfheartedly.

"How do you come up with these things? That was the funniest way anyone has ever used to describe Malfoy," the redhead said before they all three laughed again.

I shrugged. "Dunno. They just pop into my head and come right out of my mouth," I answered as they grinned at me.

"I'm Ron Weasley," the red-headed boy told me.

"And I'm—," I cut the kid beside me off with a scowl. He's the ungrateful kid from that other day at Diagon Alley.

"You're that ungrateful boy from Diagon Alley," I accused.

"Yeah, sorry about that, I didn't mean to snap. Just didn't expect you not to know me," he said, smiling apologetically.

I pursed my lips and narrowed my eyes before nodding with a halfhearted smile. "Fine, I forgive you...?" I cocked my head to the side waiting for him to tell me his name.

His face lit up like a kid's on Christmas and he smiled brightly at me. "I'm Harry Potter," he answered softly. And my eyes widened. He's Harry? The Harry Hagrid told me about? My... best friend?

"Are your parents by any chance Lilly and James?" I whispered.

He seemed taken aback by my question but nodded. I wouldn't blame him. I'm sure it must be a touchy subject. "Sorry," I apologized.

He shook his head and smiled. "It's alright."

I smiled back and nodded. "Well, that's great. At least now I know your names. I kept referring to you in my head as the girl, the red head and the kid beside me," I said, looking down at my book as I blushed in embarrassment. They laughed again.

"Blimey, Delilah, you're hilarious," Ron exclaimed himself as I chuckled in response.

"Please, call me Deli... I think it's better than Delilah considering a lot of people think it's tangling for some reason," I told them. They grinned and nodded.

"So you don't like Malfoy," Harry stated, seeming satisfied and... relieved at the fact.

I shrugged. "I'm not his fan, that's for sure," I muttered.

From the corner of my eye, I could see Hermione pursing her lips. "I noticed your accent is different from ours. That must mean you aren't from here, am I right?" she asked, interest flashing through her brown eyes.

"As right as my math teacher who compares his life to the subject he teaches," I answered, looking down at my book. I saw them give me a puzzled look, making me sigh. "I meant you're right. I'm not from around here," I said as I opened my book and continued reading it.

"Well? Where are you from?" Ron asked, seemingly desperate to know the answer.
"Across the sea," I answered, biting my lower lip to stop myself from smiling.

He rolled his eyes at me. "Where from across the sea?"

I snorted. "Okay, fine, I'll tell you. No need to pressure me, geez. I'm surprised you couldn't tell I had an American accent since we have been having a pretty long conversation up till now." I looked up at them, but made sure I had my eyes hidden behind my bangs since I was pretty sure it had changed colors many time right now. They were staring at me in shock.

"You're from America?" they asked at the same time in disbelief, practically shouting the question in my face.

"Shh, we have a man sleeping here!" I whisper-yelled at them making them shut up. I sighed before going on, "And yes, I am. Forks, Washington, DC. In the United States of America."

They looked at me in amazement. "Wow— wait, did you say Forks? Why would a town be named after a utensil?" Hermione asked.

I shrugged. "I don't know. Ask the town's founder, sadly he died before any of us were even born," I replied, making them grimace.

They were silent for a moment before Hermione spoke up. "Deli... is your... is you second last name Hawkins?"

My eyes widened in surprise. "Yeah... how did you know?"

Her eyes started to water, making mine go wider. Did I seriously just make a girl I don't even know cry?

"Deli..." Ron said, looking at me in shock for a second before realization crossed his features. I was just getting more and more confused.

"Yeah...?" I asked, starting to feel awkward.

"You don't remember us?" Ron asked.

I gave him a puzzled look. "I've met you before?"

"Deli! Why don't you remember?!!" Hermione cried out.

"What?"

"Deli, you've been missing since March after Harry rescued you from the Chamber of Secrets—"

"The what now?" I asked, cutting Ron off.

"The Chamber of Secrets. You had given up yourself to save Ginny, Ron's little sister, then he and I went to save you," Harry butt in, making me slightly jump. I had forgotten he was here too.

"Er... I know I forgot... something... but I really don't know what you guys are talking about," I admitted, biting my lip.

Hermione began to cry, making me slightly jump. It made me sad. I quickly sat up, grabbed her arm and pulled her close. I awkwardly started patting her back, trying to comfort her.

"Oh, God," I muttered. "Uh... hey, please don't cry. It'll be... um... okay. Who knows, I might
remember you guys, I just don't remember you, right now," I said in a light tone.

She looked up, sadness filing her eyes, but she still smiled and nodded.

"Besides, you guys might be right... I mean, I know I definitely know you guys. I've seen you all before, you look familiar. I can't quite remember where I know you all from, but I know you," I said smiling at them as they nodded.

I let out a sigh of relief when Ron changed the subject. "Anyway, who d'you reckon he is?" he asked, referring to the sleeping man.

"Professor R. J. Lupin," whispered Hermione at once as the door of the compartment slid open and a petite redheaded girl stepped in.

"Do you know everything— how is it you know everything?" Ron quizzed starting to get confused.

"Ron," I said, making him look at me. "It's on his suitcase," I said while pointing to it.

He blushed. "Oh."

"Yeah," I said, biting back a smile as I turned to look at the girl.

She was already looking at me curiously. "Hi, I'm Ginny," she said, holding a hand out for me to shake with a smile.

I couldn't help but smile a small smile back as I shook her hand. "Delilah." I felt my heart drop when I saw sadness flash through her eyes as I let go of her hand. I'm guessing I knew her too. "Are you a Weasley?"

She nodded then groaned. "I'm the youngest."

I smiled again. "Hey, I'm sure it isn't so bad. I honestly wouldn't mind having another sibling."

"Do you think he's really asleep," Harry suddenly asked, bringing us back to the previous subject.

I turned and narrowed my eyes, studying the figure near the window. The man seemed to be sleeping, but I wasn't sure. "Yes," I answered, shrugging, but I then instantly stiffened when his scent got caught up in my nostrils. Werewolf. I internally growled. For some reason, I hate werewolves. I just don't know why.

"Good, there's something I want to tell you guys," Harry muttered.

"Go away, Ginny," said Ron.

"Oh, that's nice," said Ginny huffily, and she stalked off, but not before throwing me a smile.

Harry shut the compartment doors behind her as I bit my lip, hesitant. I wasn't sure if I should stay or leave to let them have a little privacy.

"Um... should I—" I started, while getting up, but I was cut off.

"No, stay," Harry said, taking a hold of my hand and slightly tugging me down. I nodded and sat back down. He took a deep breath and subconsciously scooted closer to me, still holding my hand. I don't really know why I felt pretty comfortable with his touch when I usually freak out at moments like these. Why was I okay with this, now? I mean I tensed up a bit at the contact, but eventually
relaxed as he intertwined our fingers and squeezed my hand gently.

Anyway, he then told us everything about running away after accidentally blowing up his uncle's sister and what Mr. Weasley, Ron's dad, told him about Sirius Black and how he was out to kill Harry and Delilah Ha— well, me. I think we were all in a bit of a shock. After processing it all, Harry began to talk to Ron. When suddenly my vision went blurry.

Sighing, I closed my eyes for a few seconds, leaning my back against my seat, before opening my eyes again and gazing above me in wonder.

I looked down to my left and saw a younger version of Ron with a stunned look on his face.

"I'm Ron Weasley," Ron muttered.

"Harry Potter," said a voice from beside me. I turned and instantly recognized him as being Harry.

"Are you really?" said a girl with brown bushy standing by the door of the compartment. I also instantly knew she was Hermione. "I know all about you, of course— I got a few extra books for background reading, and you're in Modern Magical History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century."

"Am I?" Harry asked, feeling dazed.

"Goodness, didn't you know. I'd have found out everything I could if it was me," said Hermione. "Do either of you know what house you'll be in? I've been asking around, and I hope I'm in Gryffindor, it sounds by far the best; I hear Dumbledore himself was in it, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad..." she trailed off as she finally noticed me sitting right next to Harry.

"Who are you?" she asked her curiously.

I felt my hand move and looked down at it only to find myself writing on a white board with a black marker and held it up for Hermione to read. As she read the name, her eyes widened in shock, practically bulging out of their sockets.

"Y-you're D-Delilah Keren Aleah Hawkins?" she stammered. Whoa, that's my name? That's a really long name, adding the Dawn in it. I nodded, grabbed the board, erased what was written and wrote,

"Yes, that is my name. It is a pleasure to meet you, Hermione Granger."

Whoa... is this like some sort of memory? And why am I writing on a board... and so properly?

Suddenly, my vision got blurry again and I had to closed my eyes, but then I was thrown against something hard and... broke my freakin' arm. I opened my eyes and saw I was in a bathroom.

Slightly wobbling, I got up and saw... a troll making an uncoordinated lunge at Ron! Whoa, when did I ever fight a troll? I quickly dove forward shoving him away, as it gripped my around the waist pulling me up, making a loud CRACK ring through possibly the whole bathroom. He tightened his grip slightly as I let out a loud whimper from the pain.

"Stupefy!" I managed to shout, pointing my wand at the troll as he was sent flying back— breaking the wall connecting the bathroom to the hall— dropping me, as I landed with a 'thud' and rolled to the side, hitting my head against something sharp as I groaned. I tried to get up, only to collapse back onto the ground, whimpering. It went quiet I was sure of that, as I felt someone approaching me.
"Is it— dead?" Hermione's voice asked.

"I don't think so," said Harry. "I think it's just been knocked out."

"What about Deli? She saved my life" Ron's voice was shaky. I growled lowly, wobbling myself back onto my feet, clutching tightly the right side of my body.

"Deli?" Harry hesitated, reaching a hand out towards me, but I quickly shook my head. He sighed, bent down and pulled his wand out of the troll's nose. It was covered in what looked like lumpy gray glue.

"Urgh— troll boogers."

He wiped it on the troll's trousers.

A sudden slamming and loud footsteps made the three of them look up. I hadn't realized what a racket we had been making, but of course, someone downstairs must have heard the crashes and the troll's roars. A moment later, a woman had come bursting into the room, closely followed by a man dressed in black, with another man wearing a weird turban bringing up the rear. The guy with the turban took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and sat quickly down on a toilet, clutching his heart.

The man in black bent over the troll. The woman was looking at Ron and Harry. Even if it wasn't directed at me, I couldn't help but flinch, seeing them so angry, afraid of being hit for some reason. The woman's lips were white.

"What on earth were you thinking of?" said the woman, with cold fury in her voice. Harry looked at Ron, who was still standing with his wand in the air. "You're lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you in your dormitory?"

The man in black gave Harry a swift, piercing look. Harry looked at the floor. Then, finally realizing that the two boys weren't the only ones here and the hole mess that was made, they looked at the big hole in the wall where lay the troll, before looking at me.

I whimpered. "I am sorry for breaking your wall," I whispered before collapsing onto the ground as darkness engulfed me completely.

Did I seriously just apologized for breaking a wall?

Next thing I knew, I was standing in a forest, at night, with Harry staring at a... hooded figure. Okay, really, what is it with all bad guys being hooded these days?

The hooded figure raised its head and looked right at Harry— unicorn blood was dribbling down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly toward him. I quickly got into a protective stance in front of Harry— he couldn't move for fear.

All of a sudden Harry grabbed his forehead, gasping and panting.

"Are you alright, Harry?" I asked softly, my eyes still on the hooded figure.

It was still over the unicorn's corpse, but when it looked up at me, it completely forgot about Harry and started approaching me. My eyes widened and I quickly made a run for it, but stopped when I realized Harry wasn't following.

"Harry, come on," I called out, but the figure was getting closer and stupid Malfoy had run off with
The figure had now pasted Harry and was getting closer to me. "Harry, come on, please," I pleaded in a whisper.

It turned and started heading straight for Harry, but I sprinted in front of him. Next thing I knew, I was thrown into the sky and landed on none other than... Dracula. Okay, not the actual Dracula, but you get who I'm talking about, don't you?

"How did you get all the way over here?" he asked, helping me up.

"That hooded figure threw me over here, but we must go back and help Harry," I said calmly, starting to walk away, but I was yanked back by the arm.

"You can't go back there, you'll get hurt or even worse killed," he said, and if my ears weren't mistaken his tone was caring and concerned about my free will.

"So? I would rather it would be me, than my best friend. I have to help him, and me talking to you is making his chances grow thinner by the second," I said, trying to yank my arm free unsuccessfully. "The seconds are ticking by, Draco. I have to go."

His eyes narrowed. "No. You'll die if you go back," he whispered.

His hand now on my chin—his fingers holding too tight, till it hurt.

My eyes widened as I saw the resolve form abruptly in his icy blue-gray eyes. "N—" I started to object, but it was too late.

His lips crushed mine, stopping my protest. He kissed me angrily, roughly, his other hand gripping tight around the back of my neck, making escape impossible. His mouth was soft, despite the anger, his lips molding to mine in a cold, unfamiliar way.

I grabbed at his face and pushed him away, far enough for me to pull my arm back and then let it snap forward, punching him in the mouth with as much power as I could force out of my body.

There was a crunching sound.

"Ow! OW!" he screamed, frantically hopping up and down in agony while clutching his nose and mouth. It was broken, I knew it. Good for him.

"Do not ever try that again!" I shouted before turning away and sprinting off towards the direction I had been thrown from, previously. Many thoughts ran through my brain through every second that passed.

Note to self: bleach mouth later.

I finally found the patch, saw the poor unicorn dead, and Harry talking to a centaur.

"The forest is not safe at this time—especially for you. Can you ride? It will be quicker this way. My name is Firenze," he added, as he started lowering himself, but soon stopped when he saw me.

"You must be his Curatoria. Hawkins, is it?" he asked.

I nodded, stepping forward. "Delilah Hawkins." So... I used Hawkins more than Dawn back then... I guess I'll have to do that again.
He smiled kindly at me and lowered himself on to his front legs so that Harry and I could clamber onto his back.

"Are you alright? That thing didn't fling you too hard, did it?" Harry asked me in a whisper.

I shook my head. "No, I landed in front of Malfoy and he helped me up..." I couldn't help but growl at the memory of what he did.

"What's wrong, Lilly?"

"I-I... nothing," I mumbled.

"Don't tell me it's nothing. What's wrong, Delilah?"

I groaned. "He kissed me," I muttered.

"He did what?!" I slightly flinched at the way he shouted. "Oh, when I get my hands on him..."

"No need. I already broke his nose and... jaw, I think," I said lightly, but he didn't reply. As darkness came over me again, something told me that Harry got Malfoy right in the face again.

I stood in a room in front of Harry, watching him take a deep breath and pick up a small bottle. He turned to face black flames.

"Here I come," he said, lifting the bottle to his lips, but I stopped him mid-way. He looked back at me and looked down to see my hand over his, stopping him from drinking... whatever he was going to drink.

"I am coming with you!" I suddenly declared.

"Lilly, I—" I grabbed his face and made him look at me.

"No, Harry James Potter. I am coming with you. Do you want to know what meant what I said back in the forbidden forest, the other day, in detention?" Harry nodded. "Anima Curatoria, means soul guardian. That is the main reason I accepted to come to Hogwarts in the first place. My job was and still is to protect you, Harry. It is my job to keep you alive. Hermione is capable of getting help, you on the other hand need me! So I am coming!" I said, and the next thing I knew a pair of soft lips had crashed mine, arms wrapping themselves around my waist. I was surprised, but kissed back anyway, wrapping my seriously thin arms around his neck.

Okay... now I'm confused, wasn't he like my best friend or something like that?

He tightened his grip on me... as if he was scared that he might... lose me.

Slowly we pulled apart and rested our foreheads against each other's. "I've been wanting to do that for a while, now," he whispered, blushing.

I smiled. "We should go," I said softly. Harry nodded as I pulled away and the scenery changed. I was standing in a very crowded store with Harry, Ron and Hermione.

"Big deal," Ron said, rubbing his foot where a photographer had stepped on it.

A man seemed to have heard him. He looked up. He saw Ron—and then he saw Harry. He stared. Then he leapt to his feet and positively shouted, "It can't be Harry Potter?"

The crowd parted, whispering excitedly; the man dived forward, seized Harry’s arm, and pulled him to the front, but Harry still held my hand, so I was pulled up front with him. The crowd burst into
applause. Harry’s face burned and the man was about to shake his hand but stopped short when he saw Harry's hand intertwined with mine.

He looked at me curiously. "Are you the girlfriend?" Say what, now? I opened my mouth not sure what to say, yet I didn't get a chance to even think about what to say.

"Blimey! You're Delilah Hawkins!" The crowd went silent. "Get up here!" The crowd cheered again as the photographer shoved us in front with the man who grabbed Harry in a one arm hug. Panic rising inside of me, I hid behind Harry again, I hate the attention.

"Nice big smile Harry! Together you and I will make the front page! Delilah being your girlfriend is good for publicity as well!" The cameras flashed numerous times, then the man released Harry, who kept me tucked safe behind him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said loudly, waving for quiet. "What an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I’ve been sitting on for some time! When young Harry and Delilah here stepped into Flourish and Blotts today, they only wanted to buy my autobiography— which I shall be happy to present them now, free of charge—" The crowd applauded again. I gave Harry a confused look as he shrugged, looking as uncomfortable as I was.

“They had no idea,” the man continued, giving us a little shake that made Harry's glasses slip to the end of his nose, "that they would shortly be getting much, much more than my book, Magical Me. They and their schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September, I will be taking up the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!” I groaned; I already didn't like this man.

The crowd cheered and clapped and Harry and I found ourselves being presented with the entire works of Gilderoy Lockhart whom I’m guessing was the self-centered man who trapped us in front of the crowd to get damn pictures taken. I flicked my finger and shrunk my books before putting them into my bag. Then I went to help Harry with his since he could barely walk, staggering slightly under their weight.

"Thanks," he said relieved. "I think I might give them to Ginny, so the Weasleys don't have to spend a lot."

I nodded as we made our way out of the limelight to the edge of the room, where the little redheaded girl from earlier was standing next to her new cauldron. When she saw Harry, she gave him a questioning look, but when her eyes flickered over to me, like earlier, her eyes widened and her mouth fell open. I sent her a small smile as she simply stared.

"You can have these," Harry said. "I'll buy my own—"

"Bet you loved that, didn't you Potter?" A voice said, Harry straightened up and turned around, he was face-to-face with the one and only Dracula Malfoy, who was wearing a sneer. "Famous Harry Potter, can't even go into a bookshop without making the front page. And you had to drag in Delilah back there, didn't you? And where did you leave her now? You've got to stop bring—"

"Just, leave him alone, Malfoy," I said in a dark voice, ready to step in front of Harry, but he held me back. The little redheaded girl was looking at me with a worried expression.

"Y-yes. Leave him alone," she said in a small voice but then immediately cowarded back behind Harry.
“Potter, you’ve finally got yourself a girlfriend!” Malfoy drawled.

“Yeah, and it’s Delilah!” she said, louder now before hiding her face behind Harry’s back. I felt my cheeks heat up as they kept talking about me as if I weren’t here... and seriously! I thought Harry was my best friend!

Malfoy's face went pink with anger as he turned to Ginny. “Oh, look, another Weasley as if they don’t have enough!”

Now I get why I hated him at first sight.

I let go of Harry's hand and clenched my fists tightly in anger. The little redheaded girl went scarlet as Ron and Hermione fought their way over, both clutching stacks of books.

“Oh, it’s you,” said Ron, looking at Malfoy as if he were something unpleasant on the sole of his shoe. "Bet you’re surprised to see Harry here, eh?"

"Not as surprised as I am to see you in a shop, Weasley," Dracula retorted. "I suppose your parents will go hungry for a month to pay for all those."

Ron went as red as his sister. He dropped his books into the cauldron, too, and started toward Malfoy, but Harry and Hermione grabbed the back of his jacket. I, on the other hand, took that as the perfect opportunity and lunged forward, aiming for the face I had successfully destroyed more last year. Sadly, I wouldn't be able to do that again right now since the moment I lunged and was about a few inches from his face, a pair of arms wrapped themselves around my waist and pulled me back.

"Please calm down, Lilly,” Harry whispered in my ear, burying his face in the crook of my neck. Lilly? I like that, though the name somehow saddens me... I took a deep breath and slightly relaxed yet I remained tense as Malfoy stared at me with a look of shock and... hurt on his face? Before everything went black.

My eyes fluttered open as I gasped for air. My whole body hurt like hell. But I didn’t care. All that mattered the most at the moment was the fact that Harry was with me.

"Ha-Harry? What happened?"

"He’s dead. I-I killed him!"

"And the basilisk?" My voice was shaky, I couldn’t breathe, I need to get out of here. I need Madam Pomfrey! Wait, who?

"It's dead too... You’re going to be okay, just hang on, Lilly!" I nodded my head, trying to keep my breathing steady. It was getting harder by the minute and I felt scared. Then I saw the blood on his arm.

"Harry, you are hurt! Damn, I am so not doing a good job at keeping you safe," I muttered.

"I’m fine. We need to get you out of here! I’ll be okay!" He gave me a small smile. At that moment, a red phoenix came flying in. It landed between Harry and I, and looked at Harry’s arm. A small tear rolled down its face, and landed on the wound, healing it in seconds.

"Thanks, Fawkes." Harry moved his arm happily. Black spots started to take over my vision.

"Harry?" He looked at me in confusion. I blinked hard, causing my vision to clear. "Thank you!" I
crashed my lips onto his. He just saved my life when I was supposed to save his. It took a minute for him to react, but he did. He placed his hands on my hips while I tangled mine in his hair. When we pulled away, I smiled at him then let the blackness take over.

My head was yanked backwards, lips pressing against my ear. "If you don't tell me where the damn moonstone is, then I will kill every member of your stupid little pack while you watch."

My vision became as red as my eyes probably were. "They're already dead," I said in the deadliest voice I had ever used.

Nothing was moving in slow motion, the way it does in the movies. Instead, the adrenaline rush seemed to make my brain work much faster, and I was all able to absorb in clear detail several things at once.

But of more immediate importance was the bloody organ in my hand. I felt my eyes going back to their normal violet orchidee and widen as realization slapped me across the face as hard as a whip would have.

I, Delilah Dawn Hawkins, a thirteen year old girl, just killed someone.

Yes, they might've been monsters... and evil, but they still had hearts— hearts that beat.

Dropping the heart, I stumbled onto my feet and started stepping backwards in terror, in fear of myself.

"What did I do?" I started mumbling, gripping my head, not caring that my hands were covered in blood. "I just ki— I wasn't— this wasn't supposed to— oh my goddess..."

"Shh," hushed a gentle voice. Soon, I found myself being held in a warm embrace. "It's okay, Lilah. You didn't mean—"

"So? That doesn't make a difference!" I was shaking now. "Even an alpha shouldn't... I-I just ki... I don't want to remember this... I want to forget..."

Everything went black and clicked together in my head.

I opened my eyes and saw that I was back on the train with only one thought in my mind.

Holy shit, I do know these people! I know what I went through... but why was I being mute at a certain point in my life? I still didn't know that, but at least now I knew that Cynthia Dawn and Carl Hayes weren't really my parents though I was related to them. I just didn't know how. But then... who would be my real parents?

I was feeling slightly dizzy and in need of fresh air as I was in a bit of a shock. I looked to my right and saw Harry talking to Ron, Hermione looking absentmindedly at the ground with a small frown on her face.

"Uh... I have to go to the restroom," I told her, before gently pulling my hand out of Harry's hand and leaving the compartment.

**Harry's P.O.V.**

I watched Delilah leave the carriage, just hoping she really was okay. I couldn't believe it was really her. I recognized her in Diagon Alley, but I wasn't sure, and when I had tried to stop her, she was already gone. I couldn't help but also hope that she would remember us— me.
The moment I turned my attention back to Hermione and Ron, I heard someone clear their throat from the door.

"Well, look who it is," said Malfoy in his usual lazy drawl, pulling open the compartment door. "Potty and the Weasel." Crabbe and Goyle chuckled trollishly.

"I heard your father finally got his hands on some gold this summer, Weasley," said Malfoy. "Did your mother die of shock?"

Ron stood up so quickly he knocked Crookshanks's basket to the floor. Professor Lupin gave a snort.

"Who's that?" said Malfoy, taking an automatic step backward as he spotted Lupin.

"New teacher," I said, getting on my feet, too, in case I needed to hold Ron back.

"What were you saying, Malfoy?" Malfoy's pale eyes narrowed; he wasn't fool enough to pick a fight right under a teacher's nose.

"C'mon," he muttered resentfully to Crabbe and Goyle, and they disappeared.

Ron and I were about to sit back down, but something odd happened, the train stopped and me, Hermione and Ron all exchanged puzzled looks.

"Maybe we have broken down," I said trying to think of a logical reason to all this commotion. Seconds after I had said that, the temperature began to drop and I started to shiver as I could see my breath had escaped my mouth and joint Hermione's and Ron's in the air. Ron moved over to the window.

"Guys," Ron's voice was shaking either out of pure fear or the fact that none of us could feel our fingers anymore. "There's something moving out there."

It was then I realized Ron was just as scared as I was. We were all still wondering what on earth was going on when this creature came in to our view, it was like nothing I had ever seen before. It crawled into the carriage and before anyone could do or say anything, its attention turned to me and I could feel every speck of blood leave my face as the creature came closer to me. And then the thing beneath the hood, whatever it was, drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it were trying to suck something more than air from its surroundings. An intense cold swept over us all. I felt my own breath get caught up in my chest. The cold went deeper than my skin. It was inside my chest, it was inside my very heart...

I felt my eyes roll up into my head. I couldn't see. I was drowning in cold. There was a rushing in my ears as though of water. I was being dragged downward, the roaring growing louder. And then, from far away, I heard screaming, terrible, terrified, pleading screams. I wanted to help whoever it was, I tried to move my arms, but couldn't... a thick white fog was swirling around me, inside me—

"Harry! Harry! Are you all right?"

I then felt something hard hit my face. I opened my eyes and saw that I was still sitting on my seat, but I was practically laying on it.

"Did you just slap me?" I mumbled, slightly frowning at her.

She ignored my question. "Are you alright?" Hermione asked, still a bit shaken. Lupin held out something to me.
"Eat, don't worry it's chocolate," he told me before they began to explaining to me what had happened when it dawned on me who was missing. I instantly started to panic.

"Hermione, where’s Delilah?" I asked and as soon as I said her name, Hermione and Ron's eyes widened. Where is she? I had just gotten her back, I wasn't ready to lose her again. She's important to me and I hope she's alright.

As the realization dawned in on my two friends their expressions showed lots of panic as I tried to stay calm, but I couldn't. I couldn't stay calm knowing that Delilah was not by my side. Hermione was the first to compose herself, but we could still see the nervousness on her face.

"Don’t worry, Harry. She said she was going to the restroom. There was probably just a long waiting line," she said in a shaky voice, but it sounded as if she were trying to convince herself more than us.

We all got up look while Professor Lupin said he wanted to go talk to the driver, not sure where to start. Ron suggested we tried talking to the twins who always notice everything, so we set off right out of the carriage and down the train; we found them sitting with Lee Jordan and Angelina Johnson talking about what had just happened.

"Hi guys, did you see the Dementor? That was horrible," Angelina began to babble on but Ron cut in, this was a lot more important.

"Have any of you seen a tall girl with dark yet very pale russet skin, light brown hair, and an odd eye color?" he asked, looking at the twins.

"Violet orchidee," I corrected, almost growling at him.

"Do you seriously think I'm going to memorize every eye color her eyes change into?" Ron exclaimed himself at me as I simply shrugged before turning my attention back to the twins.

"No," they replied in unison.

"Who’s she? Is she new?" Angelina was babbling again, she was starting to really annoy me, but Hermione started talking before I could say anything harsh to her.

"Guys, no she's not new... it's... it's Delilah! She went towards the restroom just before the train stopped and she hasn’t come back," Hermione explained. You could hear the concern in her voice and I swear I saw the twins go a little pale before they both shot up to start looking with Lee and Angelina at their heels.

We decided to look for Ginny hoping she would have probably seen Delilah. As we got to Ginny, the twins began explaining what had happened I noticed out of the corner of my eye right down the back of the train someone lying on the floor without even mentioning it to the others I ran straight for her.

"Harry, where are you go—" Ron began to shout after me, stopping his sentence short when he noticed what I was running to.

When I reached her, I pulled her up by the shoulders so she was in a sitting position... almost. I could feel the tears spilling from my eyes and dropping against her cheeks. Her skin was burning hot, but I ignored it and kept trying.

"Delilah... wake up. Lilly, please, can you hear me? Stay! Please, keep your heart beating. Do it for me," I pleaded, whispering the last four words, trying to wake her up but was getting nowhere. Her
body was limp, still and lifeless she was barely breathing... this was like the Chamber of Secrets all over again, though this time, I had everyone on the floor around trying to wake her up... even Malfoy.

"Ron, go and find Lupin!" Hermione shouted, really starting to panic.

"Where am I meant to look?" Ron protested.

"He said he wanted to speak to the driver, start there!" I argued back.

The minutes we waited for Ron to come back with help felt like hours, looking over everyone's faces we were all pale with worry. Finally, I decided it was too crowded here in the corridor so I took her hand, still looking at nothing but her. I knew what happened to her, why she was in this state and all I wanted was to hear comforting words or better yet, have her wake up, but she didn't even budge and no one could think of anything to say.

You could hear Ron and Lupin's footsteps pounding down the train. I turned to see them as well as people looking out of their carriages to see what was going on. Lupin took over, picking her up, and I wanted to protest and be the one to carry her, but I stopped myself as we headed back to our compartment with him beckoning me, Hermione and Ron to follow him. I looked at the others wanting to thank them for at least helping us look, but Ginny beat me at it, placing a hand over my shoulder and smiling kindly.

"Just go, we'll see you when we get to Hogwarts... probably before," she said, reassuring me.

I looked at the twins looking at Delilah's motionless body with sad eyes. Their eyes met mine and for that split second, I could see tears build up. I couldn't believe it. Most of these people didn't know it was Delilah, but as always, she somehow managed to already have us all wrapped up around here delicate finger. They ripped their gaze away and walked back to their compartment. I wanted to follow and tell them everything was going to be okay, but even I was afraid I'd be wrong and the best thing I could do right now is be with Delilah, so I went and sat by her side waiting for her to wake up.

**Back to Delilah's P.O.V.**

When I had walked out of the compartment, I had started to feel nervous for some unknown reason. So I set off left, walking down the train when it stopped. I almost fell and hit the floor but I caught myself. I thought about going back to the others when my body temperature blasted up at the sudden cold. I tensed up at the creepy silence, but did my best to remain calm while taking quick deep breaths before I could start freaking out. A bit more calmly, I started to make my way back to the room I was in. Somehow managing to get myself at the other end of the corridor at the back of the train, the lights then went out, and if I was just a human I wouldn't be able to see a thing anymore, so it was a good thing that all my senses were enhanced thanks to what I am, but since I hadn't phased or used the monstrous side of me, my senses were pretty dull. I could see in the dark, but not as well as I used too. So I was basically stuck and all I could hear were other students’ voices and then it went silent.

I finally began to freak out, it was like something out of a scary movie or a nightmare that was about to get ten times worse as, coming from the other end of the train, was a creature that I don’t even think would appear in one of my dreams. At its sight, it felt like any happy thought I had or would ever have was gone and the closer the creature came, the worse I felt. It reminded me of *Regium* in a more ghostly way.

Yes, that's it, it reminds me more of a ghost.
It was like a person with no life, no soul. I wanted to run and hide, but something about its presence froze me into place. I let it get closer and closer till I was face to face with it, the only feature it had was something that resembled a mouth which was the last thing I noticed as, then, it looked like it was taking a deep breath but it felt like it had forced its way inside my head and began tearing me apart pulling anything that could resemble a good thought out of me till I wanted to scream, to shout for... help or pull away. I wanted to do anything but stand here.

I couldn’t even cry. My throat suddenly had that old burning sensation I had learned to control in the last few years and my body heat was rising as my skin felt like it was ripping apart. It was like if both of my changes were molding together and transforming me into a bigger monster than I already was. I wanted to break something, to kill something... but most of all, I wanted to die. Whatever this creature was doing to me, for the first time I seriously wanted to cry. For the first time, I was admitting that I was in pain.

Yes, all I wanted was to die. To never have been born. The whole of my existence did not outweigh this pain. Wasn’t worth living through it for one more heartbeat.

*Let me die, let me die, let me die! Just kill me, kill me, kill me!* I wanted to scream at it... that is until I heard... them. They were shouting at me, telling me to run, to escape... just like that day. But then they were asking for my help. I wanted to help them, I tried to move my arms, but couldn’t... a thick white fog was now swirling around me, inside of me, but then—

I heard her voice... so soft and velvety, but something about it was different. I forced my eyes open only to be greeted by a sight of a memory I never thought would come back to me. A memory in which my past self did nothing... nothing but watch the chaos unfold before me.

Yes.

*I watched.*

*I simply stood there and watched the roaring flames engulfing our small villa that was now collapsing.*

Anima Curatoria would be no more. It was, now, just a matter of minutes before our territory became vast.

"Aurelia, take Delilah and run as fast as you can!" a voice shouted. I might've been confused at why this was happening, but I knew who everyone here was. I knew them all and I didn't want to leave anyone behind. Not my... three brothers, not my other relatives, not mom or dad... not Chance— my mate. I remembered now.

"No, Eben! We're not leaving you!" my real mom shouted back as she pulled me aside trying to dodge the burning pieces of wood that were flying around in the air.

"Daddy, come with us," I pleaded. We've lost so many people already— I don't want to lose him too, even though I knew I was going to lose them all.

"I can't, sweetheart. I'm the alpha. I must stay behind, now go!" he shouted, pushing us towards the woods.

"I can't, sweetheart. I'm the alpha. I must stay behind, now go!" he shouted, pushing us towards the woods.

"No! If you stay, then I will stay too!" I protested, trying to get out of my mother's grip. I didn't want to leave. I couldn't. Why? The answer was all in my blood. The blood of a true alpha.

Dad smiled at me. "You truly carry the blood of an alpha. I'm proud of you, Lilly," he said, kneeling down before me and scooping me up into a hug. Little did I know, that would be the last hug I would...
ever get from him.

The next thing I knew, I was being dragged through the forest, the burning houses fading from my field of view as my eyes started to water. Holding my mother's hand, together we kept running. It would have been faster if I had shifted, but I was still too young. We accelerated our run, but whatever happened next, happened too fast for my mind to comprehend it. We were thrown into the air in different directions—my mom was thrown into a bunch of bushes while I was thrown into tree, breaking my right arm.

My mom quickly recovered and fought the wolf that had attacked us before it could call anymore reinforcements, but it was too late; he had already howled. With one last punch, he fell unconscious but didn’t phase back.

"Lilah, sweetheart, I need you to get to in salvum domus. I need you to run. Run as fast as you can, then run even faster than that. Don't look back, do you understand? Do whatever you have to do to get out of here, okay? Don't let them catch you, do you understand me?" she said.

I nodded, the tears already running down my cheeks. She pulled into a tight hug in which I couldn't help but grimace in pain caused by my broken arm. I tried to hug back, but I couldn't. Little did I know, that would be the last hug I would ever get from her too.

"I love you," she whispered in my ear.

"I love you too," I whispered back, fighting back the more tears that were threatening of coming out.

She kissed my cheek before letting go of me. I suddenly felt cold. "Now, go! Run!" I didn't know those would be the last words I would ever hear her say, but I obeyed. She told me to run.

So I did.

I ran.

I ran away from the other children's cries. I ran away from the war we couldn't win. I ran away and let my mother, my father, my brothers... Chance die. I still regret ever running.

I ran till I couldn't anymore. It was too dark for me to see—my senses weren't enhanced. I ran and after I knew I was far enough I let myself fall onto the ground that was now muddy because of the rain I had just realized was falling. I didn’t get to in salvum domus—our safe house. I couldn’t run any further. I felt like I was dying, and even though I wasn't, I wanted to.

I wanted to die. I wanted to join the others... but I guess that wasn't going to happen any time soon. My whole body wasn't responding anymore and I was now being engulfed by darkness. I didn't fight it, this time.

Now I know why I felt even more broken when the Ius Rex had destroyed the home of the Starlight pack and I simply watched it all being engulfed by the flames. It felt like I was being torn apart piece by piece and I could do nothing. I could feel myself falling lower and lower till I felt a blow to the head and I was on the floor looking up at the creature. It hadn’t stopped, but there was nothing I could do other than just stare at it. Just stare at it and... relive everything... well, almost everything.

Things I try to avoid thinking about were flowing through my head. The creature's control was getting stronger and it was pulling me up towards it and all I could do was look at its cold face as true horrors were flowing through my mind and I was shaking, pleading it to stop. When it did, its force was just cut off and I felt my body fall back onto the floor once again. I let out one sigh of relief as I was released from the pain. I could feel my weakness begin to overwhelm me as I shut my eyes.
letting a fearing kind of darkness, I knew only once back in my life, take over my body and one tear roll down my cheek. Was I that weak? I have never cried, not even once in my life... I think. But even so, I haven't cried, not even in the moments when I have been in my most vulnerable and fragile state...

But that was when I realized... those tears weren't mine. Someone was holding me and... crying for me.

"Delilah... wake up. Lilly, please, can you hear me? Stay! Please, keep your heart beating. Do it for me," I heard a voice plead, whispering the last four words, trying to wake me up.

Harry? Harry, was here, caring about me? Crying for me? He was trying to save me?

Of course, I wanted to tell him.

Of course, I would keep my heart beating. After all, I had promised that to so many people. I had to promise him too, now, and keep it. I tried to feel my heart, to find it, but I was so lost inside my own body. I couldn’t feel the things I should, and nothing felt in the right place. My eyes fluttered open and I blinked a few times, but I couldn’t see anything as my eyes dropped close again, unwillingly. I could feel many people surrounding me and I could hear them pleading me to wake up, but no matter how much they pleaded or how much I wanted to and tried, I just couldn't. How could I have gone so weak? I hadn't felt like I must do something in a long time. How had they managed to make me feel like this again? Whoever they were, that is...

After what seemed like an eternity, my eyes fluttered open again; there were lanterns above me, and the floor was shaking— the Hogwarts Express was moving again and the lights had come back on. Disorientedly, I looked around only to see Harry kneeling in front of me, and Ron and Hermione were kneeling next to him. Above them, I could see a tall boy whom I recognized as Neville, Ginny and Professor Lupin watching me intently. I started feeling nervous, having a werewolf watching me... and I honestly felt very sick; when I lifted my right hand up to my forehead to brush my bangs away from my face, I could feel cold sweat on my face. And that was really bizarre because I never really sweat. As I sat up, Ron and Hermione went back onto their seat and Harry sat in between them.

"Are you okay?" he asked nervously.

"Yeah," I answered, looking quickly toward the door. The hooded creature had vanished.

"What happened? Where's that— that thing?" I looked around the bright compartment. Ginny and Neville looked back at me, both looking very pale. A loud snap made them all jump and me, turn to glance at Professor Lupin. He was breaking an enormous slab of something brown into pieces.

"Here," he told me, handing him a particularly large piece. "Eat it. It'll help." I took what I guessed was chocolate but didn't eat it. "It will make you feel better," he added, and as soon as he said it I eagerly took a small bite, hoping for their sake and my own that it will make me feel better, as he smiled watching me, making me feel quite uncomfortable instead of better.

I narrowed my eyes, making sure to control my emotions so my eyes wouldn't change colors on me right now. "What was— was that a Dementor?" I asked Lupin. How did I know what it was? I have no shitting idea.

He pursed his lips. "Yes," he finally said, giving chocolate to everyone else. "One of the dementors of Azkaban." I sighed in frustration, taking another bite.
"Delilah, what do you remember?"

I hesitated as I thought what to say for a moment, not wanting them to know everything. "Something, the dark... a figure that looked like... Reg— a ghost." Shit, I was about to say it looked like Regium...

He nodded. "But why were they here?" I asked him as everyone turned their attention back to him.

"That Dementor was one of those who are supposed to guard Azkaban especially these days. It was searching the train for Sirius Black," he explained, but I was only taking half of it in. The last thing I heard was him saying he wanted to finish talking to the driver and he was gone. As well as Ginny and Neville and everything went black.

I opened my eyes only to find myself stomping my way up the stairs and turning along a corridor, which was particularly dark; the torches had been extinguished by a strong, icy draft that was blowing through a loose windowpane. I was halfway down the passage when suddenly I heard someone calling my name. I groaned. I don't have time to socialize... even though I never do. I turned around and almost screamed out of relief. Ginny was walking toward me. I ran toward her and grabbed her hand.

"Ginny, I know the reason why we have to get rid of that diary now. Come on, we have to destroy it," I said quickly, pulling her towards the way I was going.

She pulled me back. "No. I don't want to get rid of it."

I gave her a weird look. "Ginny, we must. If we do not... the Chamber will be opened."

"That's the point, Delilah," she said, smirking at me in a way that made me shiver. Something was wrong. This was definitely not the Ginny I knew.

"What are you going on about, Ginny?"

"Haven't you guessed yet, Delilah Hawkins?" She laughed. "Or should I say... Delilah... Black."

"What?" I asked. I was seriously getting confused. I already knew without a doubt that this wasn't Ginny, but what was she going on about my surname being... Black? As far as I know, I'm not related to anyone with that name— everyone I'm related to is dead. And I couldn't possibly be related to Sirius Black, that would just be... insane!

She sighed. "You took a very long time to get stupid little Ginny to stop trusting her diary."


She sighed and shook her head. "See... I can't do that. She was doing perfectly fine, pouring her secrets and soul into the diary. But then... you came in, Deli. Because of you, she finally became suspicious and tried to figure out how to dispose of it. But then you came back, and I couldn't have been more delighted. Of all the people who could have easily snatched it from such a fragile little girl, it was you, who sneaked in to write in it. The very person I was most anxious to meet again... well, one of them..."

"And why did you want to meet me?" I asked. Anger was coursing through me, and it was an effort to keep my voice steady.

"Well, you see, Ginny told me all about you, Delilah," said Riddle. "Your whole fascinating history." Ginny's brown eyes roved over the lightning scar on my neck, and their expression grew hungrier. "I
knew I must find out more about you, talk to you, meet you if I could before I met your precious Harry Potter. So I decided to show you my famous capture of that great oaf, Hagrid, to gain your trust—"

"Hagrid is my friend," I growled. "And you framed him, did you not? That is the stupidest thing anyone could ever think of doing, and considering it is you who did it? I would have expected more from you, Voldemort, but—"

Riddle laughed his high laugh again and it's honestly kind of creepy, especially coming from Ginny's lips.

"It was back in my days, Black." Seriously, why is he calling me Black?! "And besides, it was my word against Hagrid's. Well, you can imagine how it looked to old Armando Dippet. On the one hand, Tom Riddle, poor but brilliant, parentless but so brave, school prefect, model student... on the other hand, big, blundering Hagrid, in trouble every other week, trying to raise werewolf cubs under his bed, sneaking off to the Forbidden Forest to wrestle trolls... but I admit, even I was surprised how well the plan worked. I thought someone must realize that Hagrid couldn't possibly be the Heir of Slytherin. It had taken me five whole years to find out everything I could about the Chamber of Secrets and discover the secret entrance... as though Hagrid had the brains, or the power!"

"He might have never been so brilliant, but he is the better person you will never get to be. I mean, come on, you did end up... bodyless," I pointed out, shuddering at the memory of last year's confrontation with the two headed creep. "And let us not forget I can still destroy your diary and this will all be over. No one will be in danger."

He laughed, making me look away as the thought of him being in possession of my best friend's little sister's body creeped me out. "Actually, now that I think of it, you know a bit too much. And... well... that just won't do."

I snorted humorlessly and crossed my arms over my chest. "And what are you going to do about it?"

He— she— oh, I don't know! Okay, Tom slash Ginny laughed... quite evilly, might I add. "I'm glad you asked. Well the answer is simple."

I raised an eyebrow and waited. "If it is that simple then why do you not just tell me."

Tom slash Ginny smiled and pointed her wand at me, making me take a step back warily. "I'll make you forget."

"Wha—"

"Obliviate!" A flash blinding light hit me, throwing my back against a wall then making me collapse onto the ground.

The world was spinning and the last thing I heard before everything went black was, "What did you to her?!

Then I was back on the train.

We were all silent and no one moved. I was starting to calm down, but jumped when Harry took his place right beside me and moved as close to me as he could, making sure there was no space left in between us as he took my hand and intertwined our fingers.

"How are you feeling?"

"Good," he stopped, I think he wasn’t sure what to say next or even how he would say it.

Hermione jumped in before he could. "We should change into our robes we will be there soon." Harry hesitantly pulled his hand away and smiled as he and Ron left to change. I got up to pull my trunk out of my pocket, un-shrunk it, took my uniform out before closing it and putting it overhead.

"I’m so glad you're both alright. We were so scared after Harry’s attack and then we couldn’t find you—" Hermione began but I cut her off.

"Say what, now?"

"Harry was attacked too. One came into the carriage." I felt shocked and guilty; I couldn’t even check on him and see or ask if he was okay. Ugh. Some protector I was planning to be...

After Hermione and I finished changing, Ron and Harry had joined us again. We sat down and I took another bite of my unfinished piece of chocolate and to my great surprise, I felt warmth spread suddenly from the tip of my tongue to the tips of my fingers and toes.

"We'll be at Hogwarts in ten minutes," said Professor Lupin. "Are you all right, Harry?" Harry didn't ask how Professor Lupin knew his name.

"Fine," he muttered, embarrassed.

Then they turned to me. "Are you all right, Delilah?" Professor Lupin asked, looking directly into my eyes. I simply nodded before looking down at my sadly more damaged book. None of us spoke much during the remainder of the journey.

At long last, the train stopped at Hogsmeade station, and there was a great scramble to get outside; owls hooted, cats meowed, and Neville’s pet toad croaked loudly from under his hat. It was freezing on the tiny platform; rain was driving down in icy sheets.
"Firs' years this way!" called a familiar voice. Harry, Ron, Hermione and I turned and saw the gigantic outline of Hagrid at the other end of the platform, beckoning the terrified-looking new students forward for their traditional journey across the lake.

"All right, you four?" Hagrid yelled over the heads of the crowd. We waved at him but had no chance to speak to him because the mass of people around them was shunting them away along the platform. Harry, Ron, Hermione and I followed the rest of the school along the platform and out onto a rough mud track, where at least a hundred stagecoaches awaited the remaining students, each pulled, I would've assumed, by an invisible horse, if I hadn't been able to see the dead skeletal horses, because when we climbed inside and shut the door, the coach set off all by itself, bumping and swaying in procession.

The coach smelled faintly of mold and straw. Harry had felt better since the chocolate, but still weak. I only felt all the more depressed but hid it pretty well. Ron and Hermione kept looking at us sideways, as though frightened either of us might collapse again.

As the carriage trundled toward a pair of magnificent wrought iron gates, flanked with stone columns topped with winged boars, Harry and I saw two more towering, hooded dementors, standing guard on either side. A wave of cold sickness threatened to engulf us again; Harry leaned back into the lumpy seat and closed his eyes and I simply tensed up until we had passed the gates. The carriage picked up speed on the long, sloping drive up to the castle; Hermione was leaning out of the tiny window, watching the many turrets and towers draw nearer. At last, the carriage swayed to a halt, and Hermione and Ron got out. As Harry stepped down, a drawling, delighted voice sounded in my ear as I followed Harry's steps.

"You fainted, Potter? Is Longbottom telling the truth? You actually fainted?" Malfoy elbowed past Hermione to block Harry's way up the stone steps to the castle, his face gleeful and his pale eyes glinting maliciously.

"Shove off, Malfoy," said Ron, whose jaw was clenched.

"Did you faint as well, Weasley?" said Malfoy loudly. "Did the scary old dementor frighten you too, Weasley?"

"Shut it, Dracula," I snarled, stepping forward towards him, making him step back in surprise. I still disliked him very much for everything he's done to my friends in the past two years and from when he kissed me. I wonder if I ever did bleach my mouth after that. "Just because you don't like Harry and Ron, doesn't give you the right to make fun of them, especially not after such an attack."

I could see Ron and Harry smirk at pale face in satisfaction, from the corner of my eye.

"Delilah," Snow White whispered. Yes, I'll be giving him nicknames from now on.

"What?" I snapped at him, looking away. I could see almost everyone that was standing nearby, including my three friends, cringe at my icy tone.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked me, and I could see that everyone was shocked by his concern.

I took a deep breath and groaned. "Yes, I'm better. Now leave Potter, Granger, and Weasley alone, understood?" I demanded.
"Is there a problem?" said a mild voice. Professor Lupin had just gotten out of the next carriage. Malfoy gave Professor Lupin an insolent stare, which took in the patches on his robes and the dilapidated suitcase.

With a tiny hint of sarcasm in his voice, he said, "Oh, no— er— Professor," then he smirked at Crabbe and Goyle, but then he looked at me and his eyes and smirk softened into what seemed like a tender smile before he turned around and led his two henchmen up the steps into the castle.

I scowled after him. Geez, he's worse than those slutty cheerleaders you find in a typical American school. I was starting to tense up again, this time in frustration, until I felt a soft warm hand, slightly bigger than mine, grab my own.

"Thanks, Deli," Harry whispered as I felt his warm chocolaty breath brush against my cheek making me look down in embarrassment to hide my blush. Man, I've been blushing a lot today.

I smiled at him and whispered, "You can call me Lilly if you want," making him smile brightly.

Hermione prodded us in the back to make us hurry, and the four of us joined the crowd swarming up the steps, through the giant oak front doors, into the cavernous entrance hall, which was lit with flaming torches and housed a magnificent marble staircase that led to the upper floors.

The door into the Great Hall stood open at the right; Harry followed the crowd toward it, pulling me along with him, but had barely glimpsed the enchanted ceiling, which was black and cloudy tonight, when a voice called,

"Potter! Granger! I want to see you both!"

Harry and Hermione turned around, seeming surprised. An old lady, whom I vaguely remembered to be Professor McGonagall, Transfiguration teacher and head of Gryffindor House, was calling over the heads of the crowd. She was a stern looking witch who wore her hair in a tight bun; her sharp eyes were framed with square spectacles. I was about to let go of Harry's hand until the woman said she wanted to speak to me as well. Harry fought his way over to her, once again pulling me along, with a feeling of foreboding: apparently, Professor McGonagall had a way of making him feel he must have done something wrong.

"There's no need to look so worried— I just want a word in my office," she told them. "Move along there, Weasley." Ron stared as Professor McGonagall ushered the three of us away from the chattering crowd; we accompanied her across the entrance hall, up the marble staircase, and along a corridor.

Once we were in her office, a small room with a large, welcoming fire, Professor McGonagall motioned for us to sit down. She settled herself behind her desk and said abruptly, "Professor Lupin sent an owl ahead to say that you were taken ill on the train, Potter."

Before Harry could reply, there was a soft knock on the door and Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, came bustling in. I looked at Harry sideways and I could see him going red in the face. It was bad enough that he'd passed out, or whatever he had done, without everyone making all this fuss. Ah, the cons of being famous. I squeezed his hand in reassurance and I could see a blush creeping up his face, making me smirk.

"I-I'm fine," he said, "I don't need anything."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Madam Pomfrey, ignoring this and bending down to stare closely at him, making me raise an eyebrow. "I suppose you've been doing something dangerous again?"
"It was a dementor, Poppy," said Professor McGonagall. They exchanged a dark look, and Madam Pomfrey clucked disapprovingly.

"Setting dementors around a school," she muttered, pushing back Harry's hair and feeling his forehead. "He won't be the last one who collapses. Yes, he's all clammy. Terrible things, they are, and the effect they have on people who are already delicate."

"I'm not delicate!" said Harry crossly.

"Of course you're not," said Madam Pomfrey absentmindedly, now taking his pulse.

"What does he need?" said Professor McGonagall crisply. "Bed rest? Should he perhaps spend tonight in the hospital wing?"

"I'm fine!" said Harry, jumping up. I'm pretty sure he was thinking of what pale face would say if he had to go to the hospital wing was torture.

"Well, he should have some chocolate, at the very least," said Madam Pomfrey, who was now trying to peer into Harry's eyes.

"I've already had some," said Harry. "Professor Lupin gave me some. He gave it to all of us."

"Did he, now?" said Madam Pomfrey approvingly. "So we've finally got a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher who knows his remedies?"

"Are you sure you feel all right, Potter?" Professor McGonagall said sharply.

"Yes, "said Harry.

"What about her? She was attacked too," Hermione pointed out. Gee, thanks, Hermione. Now I have to go through the same torture Harry just went through.

Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey turned to look at me with wide eyes as if just remembering I was here too, then, if possible, their eyes widened even more as they took in my appearance... probably recognizing me though I seriously wasn't in the mood for reunions yet.

"I'm perfectly fine," I quickly said. They seemed rather doubtful, but took my word for it and left me to myself. From the corner of my eye, I could see Harry's and Hermione's mouths drop open in shock as they stared at me wide-eyed.

"Very well. Kindly wait outside while I have a quick word with Miss Granger about her course schedule, then we can go down to the feast together."

I got up and pulled Harry along and lead him back into the corridor with Madam Pomfrey, who left for the hospital wing, muttering to herself.

He pulled me to a stop. "How is it you didn't get questioned or examined?" he demanded.

I smirked at him. "I have my ways," I replied, leaning against the wall while waiting for Hermione.

He smiled in a somewhat cocky way. "And may I know what those ways of yours are?" he asked huskily, closing the distance between us.

I leaned in until my breath was brushing against his lips. I saw him shiver, so I smirked. "No, you may not," I said before pulling away just as Hermione emerged looking very happy about something, followed by Professor McGonagall, and the three of us made our way back down the marble
staircase where Ron awaited for our return as we made our way to the Great Hall.

It was a sea of pointed black hats; each of the long House tables was lined with students, their faces glimmering by the light of thousands of candles, which were floating over the tables in midair. Professor Flitwick, who was a tiny little wizard with a shock of white hair, was carrying an ancient hat and a three-legged stool out of the hall.

"Oh," said Hermione softly, "the Sorting's about to start!"

I raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you guys already sorted?" I asked, confused by her excitement.

"Yeah, so are you, but it's just cool watching the younger ones getting sorted. It reminds us of our first time," Ron explained.

I nodded, biting my lip. "I'm getting sorted," I blurted out.

"You're getting sorted, again?!" Hermione asked in shock. I nodded.

I could see Harry was trying hard not to frown. "What house do you want to be in?" he asked, curiosity evident in his voice.

"Not in Slytherin, that's for sure," I muttered. We sat down at the Gryffindor table and I waited impatiently for them to call my name. I was having quite a hard time on focusing on the present as I kept zoning in and out, the memories I had regained earlier coming back to me; I thought they had called out the surname Dawn at some point, but maybe it was just my imagination. Or maybe it wasn't...

When the moment finally came around, I wanted to punch something.

"Dawn, Delilah!" they shouted out my name. I groaned then sighed. I guess it's time to put the show on the road.

I stood before Professor McGonagall and smiled sheepishly. "Actually... I'm mostly known as Delilah... Hawkins."

Everyone gasped. I looked around the room and had to stop myself from frowning when my eyes locked into a pair of violet orchidee eyes. Furrowing my brows as I looked away, I discreetly shook my head as if to clear my mind, and swept my gaze across the Great Hall, feeling slightly uncomfortable.

"Yeah... Hi, everyone... I'm back?" I awkwardly waved at everyone who was staring at me, which was basically everyone in the great hall.

"Uh... okay... er... before we proceed, I would just like to come clear: yes, I was missing for six months, yes, I sort of escaped from my captor after the first week except I had a few technical difficulties along the way and may or may have not lost my memory... uh... I got most of it back. The most recent thing I remember is a giant ugly snake for some reason," that made grins appear on a few faces. "I don't exactly remember what house I was in, so for the heck of it, I'll let the Mister hat over here sort me... again!"

Everyone cheered for a few minutes.

The last thing I saw before the hat dropped over my eyes was the hall full of people craning to get a good look at me as everyone went silent and that's when I got nervous and my vision went blurry.
Next second I was looking at the black inside of the hat. I waited.

"My dear, your mind is full of wonderful things... you are very powerful, yes, with and without a wand, and with a broom," the hat started.

I frowned in confusion. Why is he telling what pretty much everyone has been telling me since the past two weeks?

"You are very, very smart, aren't you? With a lot of sassiness and that comes with an attitude, with slyness so you have got Slytherin in you. But the smartness in you... casting a spell like blinking... it's so easy for you that you can be in Ravenclaw. You are loyal and a very good friend which is Hufflepuff. And there is also courage. You are very, very brave and you have hidden powers, but you will have to find that out by yourself. So, where to put you err... err."

There was a pause before the hat spoke again. "Gryhuffravyth," the hat said, louder this time. Puzzled, I turned to give grandpa D. a questioning look.

He frowned as well. "Sorting hat, pick a house," grandpa D. said.

"I have. 'Gry' for Gryffindor, 'Huff' for Hufflepuff, 'Rav' for Ravenclaw and 'Yth' for Slytherin. There. I picked a house for her." I was getting more and more confused so I glanced up at Professor McGonagall with the same questioning look. She shook her head with the same confused expression on her face.

"PICK A PROPER HOUSE, SORTING HAT," grandpa D. shouted.

"I need more time to figure this one out," Mister hat replied.

"Mister, eh? " said a voice inside my head. I instantly knew it belonged to the hat on my head.

"What else do you expect me to call you? I am not mean enough to simply call you the hat," I replied in my head.

"Hmmm..."

"So... why is it so hard to choose a house for me, again? "

"You carry the blood of an Alpha, Delilah. You possess the qualities of each house, but it's hard to choose one in particular because of you being an Alpha. Alphas don't like to have decisions made for them. It is against every natural law," he murmured, using my own words from ten years ago.

I narrowed my eyes. "Can I not choose? " Mister hat went silent, again. I almost fell off the stool when he laughed in victory. As if he had just made the biggest discovery of the century.

"Of course! That's brilliant! Why didn't I think of that before?!" he exclaimed himself.

I nodded and took a deep breath before rummaging through my brain. I knew exactly what house I had to choose. The perfect one that would make it easier for me to do the job I obliged myself to do.

"Gryffindor," I thought.

"Well, if you think that's best then it shall be none other than GRYFFINDOR!"

I heard the hat shout the last word to the whole hall. He took off the hat and walked shakily toward
There was a three-minute silence as I took off the hat before everyone at the Gryffindor table jumped up and cheered, even louder than they had cheered for Harry. As I made my way towards the Gryffindor table, the only redheaded twins, whom I recognized as the Weasley twins, being the most excited jumped around yelling,

"We got Hawkins! We got Hawkins!"

"She's a Hawk," one of the twins said.

"And she's in," the other continued.

"Gryffindor!" they both finished at the same time as another redhead whom I recognized as Percy once again got up to shake my hand quite vigorously before I sat down beside Harry who grinned at me along with the Weasley twins. I nodded at them and had to fight the urge to smile back and laugh at what the two redheads had said.

I was in Gryffindor, that was all I could think of. I took a deep breath and decided to look up at the black inside of the hat.

I waited.

"Mister hat... will I have to choose again? Or will you be able to sort me this time?"

"Hmm," said a small voice in my ear. "You have changed a lot, yet in some other ways, you're still the same. Hmm... Difficult. Very difficult. Your courage... bravery never leaves you, I see. Not a bad mind either. There's more talent, ah, my goodness, yes— and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that's interesting... So where shall I put you?"

Oh, sweet heavens, I beg you, Zeus and every other Greek god, don't let this hat put me in Slytherin. I know I'm a dangerous monster, but please, have some sympathy, anywhere but damned Slytherin. I gripped the edges of the stool and kept thinking, not Slytherin, not Slytherin.

"Anywhere but Slytherin, eh?" said the small voice.

"Oh, so you can still hear my thoughts? Then cooperate with me, mister," I growled lowly enough for only it to hear.

"Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that— no?"

"Quit playing with me. You heard me. I have nothing against snakes, but I don't wanna live with 'em," I muttered under my breath. "Once I make a choice, I never change my mind. I made my definite choice about this two Septembers ago."

Mister hat was silent for a moment before he started reciting. "A lot of courage. Very smart, very brave, a lot of talent. You should most definitely go to Slytherin," the hat murmured, making me groan.

"Love you too, but no," I replied casually.

"Are you sure? The whole family on your father's side was Slytherin," the hat told me. I frowned. What?
"No? B— wait! You've got Veela in your blood!" the hat exclaimed itself, loud enough for the whole crowd to hear. Many people gasped in shock.

"V— veela?" I asked in confusion before the image of a blond girl appeared into my mind along with the names Fleur and Gabrielle Delacour, making my frown deepen.

"And Wiccan!" he whispered in shock.

"Wic— what?" I asked, now in shock. How did he know about the Wiccans? Oh— wait, we're in Hogwarts so never mind, but how do I have it in me? I thought it was only those from my aunt's side who possessed it.

"Elemental," it whispered so only I would hear, making my eyes widen in shock. I was an Elemental too? Okay, seriously, what many more things am I?

"Metamorph... Yes...." the hat trailed off. How long has it been already? Ten minutes? What's taking so long? Why doesn't it just put me back in Gryffindor, damn it?

I sighed impatiently. The Hat was taking forever! I jumped when the Sorting Hat finally shouted, "I CAN'T SORT HER! TOO COMPLICATED! I'LL SORT HER AFTER EVERYONE ELSE IS FINISHED!"

"Are you kidding me?! You literally sorted me in every house in my first year and now you say you can't find one damn house that would be good for me?!!" I pretty much shouted.

Everyone just looked at me in shock, but I simply ignored them. My usual patience was thinning by the second and you can't really blame me after the day I've been having, all my memories rushing back to me and the damned dementor.

Flustered, I turned to look at Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall who were also looking at me in shock.

Professor McGonagall bent down and was about to whisper something at me but was cut off.

"Wait!" the whole hall went silent. "I found it! Sweet little miss Hawkins, you'd be better in... GRYFFINDOR!"

I sighed. All that just to place me back in Gryffindor, seriously?

"I'm not little," I muttered as I took off the hat and stood up off the chair.

Just as I was about to descend the small staircase, the whole crowd erupted into the loudest applause I have ever heard in my entire life. I could see the students from the Gryffindor table standing up and hooting as I made my way to the table. Yes, I was shocked, but thank Jesus I did not go to Slytherin! I was so relieved that even though I didn't choose this time, I was still put in Gryffindor and not in the snake's nest, I hardly noticed that I was getting the loudest cheer yet though I couldn't help but think... the sorting hat didn't mention about me having alpha blood running through my veins like he did in my first year.

"That's because you don't need to be reminded by it," a soothing voice whispered into my mind.

I smiled and looked back towards the front at the sorting hat that was smiling at me as Professor McGonagall was fumbling with her list, probably still dazed by what just happened, before turning my attention back to my table. Percy, one of Ron's older brothers, got up and shook my hand vigorously, while the Weasley twins yelled,
"We got Hawkins back! We got Hawkins back!"

"She's a Hawk," one of the twins said.

"And she's back in," the other continued.

"Gryffindor!" they both finished at the same time.

I chuckled, remembering them shouting something similar in my first year, and sat beside Harry in front of Ron and Hermione and suddenly the ghost in the ruff I'd seen earlier appeared from the middle of the table. The ghost patted my arm, making me feel slightly heavier. Harry seemed to want to tell me something afterward, but cut himself off the moment the headmaster stood up to speak.

Professor Dumbledore, though very old, always gave an impression of great energy. He had several feet of long silver hair and beard, half-moon spectacles, and an extremely crooked nose. He was often described as the greatest wizard of the age, but that wasn't why I respected him. You couldn't help trusting Albus Dumbledore, and as I watched him beaming around at the students, I felt really calm for the first time since my encounter with the dementor in the train.

"Welcome!" said Dumbledore, the candlelight shimmering on his beard.

"Welcome to another year at Hogwarts! I have a few things to say to you all, and as one of them is very serious, I think it best to get it out of the way before you become befuddled by our excellent feast...." Dumbledore cleared his throat and continued.

"As you will all be aware after their search of the Hogwarts Express, our school is presently playing host to some of the dementors of Azkaban, who are here on Ministry of Magic business." He paused, and I remembered what Hermione had said about Dumbledore not being happy with the Dementors guarding the school.

"They are stationed at every entrance to the grounds," Dumbledore continued, "and while they are with us, I must make it plain that nobody is to leave school without permission. Dementors are not to be fooled by tricks or disguises—or even Invisibility Cloaks," he added blandly and, for some reason, Harry and Ron glanced at each other.

"It is not in the nature of a dementor to understand pleading or excuses. I, therefore, warn each and every one of you to give them no reason to harm you. I look to the prefects, and our new Head Boy and Girl, to make sure that no student runs afoul of the dementors," he said.

Percy, who was sitting a few seats down from Harry, puffed out his chest again and stared around impressively. Dumbledore paused again; he looked very seriously around the hall, and nobody moved or made a sound.

"On a happier note," he continued, "I am pleased to welcome a new teacher to our ranks this year. First, Professor Lupin, who has kindly consented to fill the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher."

There was some scattered, rather unenthusiastic applause. Only those who had been in the compartment on the train with Professor Lupin clapped hard, Harry and I among them. Professor Lupin looked particularly shabby next to all the other teachers in their best robes.

"Look at Snape!" Ron hissed at us.

Professor Snape, the Potions master, was staring along the staff table at Professor Lupin. It was common knowledge that Snape wanted the Defense Against the Dark Arts job, but even Harry, who
hated Snape, seemed startled at the expression twisting his thin, sallow face. It was beyond anger: it was loathing. According to Ron, they knew that expression only too well; it was the look Snape wore every time he set eyes on Harry.

After the feast, Harry, Ron, Hermione and I joined the Gryffindors streaming up the marble staircase and, very tired now, along more corridors, up more and more stairs, to the hidden entrance to Gryffindor Tower's large portrait of a fat lady in a pink dress. She was singing.

I'm gonna tell you a little secret... she sings horribly!

"Coming through, coming through!" Percy called from behind the crowd. "The new password's 'Fortuna Major'!"

"Oh no," said Neville Longbottom sadly as I patted his arm and smiled at him encouragingly. From what I've been told and remember, he always had trouble remembering the passwords. Everyone sadly ignored him. "Fortuna Major," Harry said to her.

"No, wait," she replied and began singing again.

Seamus tried, "Fortuna Major."

"No, wait."

She tried to sing higher and higher to break a glass she soon realized she couldn't do it, so to act as though she had, she smashed the glass behind her. I started to giggle and Seamus smiled at me as Harry rolled his eyes and squeezed my hand which I honestly hadn't noticed he was holding, until now.

"Fortuna Major," Harry said again. The fat lady sighed and let us in. Through the portrait hole and across the common room, the girls and boys divided toward their separate staircases.

I was about to head to the girls' dorms but stopped when I felt someone tug my hand. I turned to look at Harry smiling shyly at me and blushing. I smiled at him and kissed his cheek before letting go of his hand and turning away from him. As I reached the staircase, I looked at it in amazement before climbing the spiral stair with no thought in my head except how glad I was to already have my three best friends back. Something I thought I never got the chance to have before, turns out I did.

As I reached the circular dormitory and I looked around. There was a king sized bed in the middle of my room with deep red, velvet curtains. My trunk, phoenix and other things had already been brought up. I felt I was home at last. I was lonely in my old room— I had a room to myself considering I'm not a simple witch— but I was glad to know that in the morning, I wouldn't be alone anymore.

Too tired to do anything else, I pulled on a pair of cut-off jeans, a plain white t-shirt and fell onto my bed. I rubbed my forearms, feeling my old scars and cringing at the memories of those I remembered before sighing.

At least I wouldn't have to go through any of it ever again.

Hopefully...
I got closer and could see the outline of two people, each step revealing more detail than the last. It was dark, but they had lanterns in a circle surrounding the trees. They looked similar to each other, but different. One was younger, about seven years old, if not a couple years older. He had a hard look, with jet black hair and bulging with muscles. The other looked like an older version of him, with cloudy gray and black hair. I could tell that they were related, father and son.

I got a sense in my stomach that something was off with this picture. It was late and why were they in the middle of nowhere?

"Go," the dad said.

I was close enough that I could hide behind a tree but still see them. The son stepped back, staring at the dad. He raised his fist as the Dad just stood there. He made a yelling noise before he lunged at the dad. The dad took a step forward before kicking the son in the gut. He landed with a thump on the ground.

I stared at them, I had never been in a serious fight, nor had I ever even seen one except for last night, but even then it was too dark for me to see. I could tell they were practicing, but it didn’t look like the dad was taking it easy on the son.

The son jumped up, lunging forward again and managed to land a punch before the dad backhanded him.

"Is this how you are planning on becoming an alpha in a few years?" the dad shouted at the son. "By being weak and pathetic?"

The son glared up at the dad. He took a step to the side, but the dad didn’t move.

"I will become Alpha," the son shouted at the dad.

"Really?" the dad said, a smirk playing on his lips.

Wait a minute... alpha? Shoot. If they aren’t what I think they are, then I have no idea what they could be, but either way, I seriously have to get out of here, now.

The son took a step back before taking a running start at the dad. He jumped in the air arms first. I felt a buzz in the air, but and looked with astonishment to see that the dad was wrestling with a wolf. A giant brown wolf was pinning the dad down.

Shoot, shoot, crazy gun, shoot! Werewolf incoming!

I was confused. One second I was standing there in the middle of nowhere, caught by two werewolves, the next I was... well, not in the middle of nowhere.

I was finishing packing up dinner before making my way up a flight stairs holding cleaning supplies.

I entered a room grabbing my cleaning basket on the way. I took a moment to examine the window, it’s huge, displaying the whole forest. The trees were at a distance but not that far, the moonlight making the droplets of water shine off of them. It was beautiful, breathtaking, and I loved it. I’d take some nights off and just sits in this room, thinking of a different world. One where I was never captured and was still in a school, another plot that runs into my mind is a dashing prince comes
and saves me, all them ending with me out of my hell hole. Tonight the moonlight lights up the whole room, I didn't even bother turning on the lights. I heard a slam downstairs. I guess somebody forgot something before they decided to go for the run. I didn't really know what they needed, but I was guessing a second pair of clothes. I just continued to dust the bookcase.

"What are you doing up here?" a voice said from the doorway. My breath got caught up in my throat. It was the boy I had seen seconds ago, standing in the doorway. One name instantly into my head.

Axel.

I don't know why, I instantly felt like I was always hated being in a room alone with him, but now, it seemed like the whole house. I didn't respond. It was like if I wasn't allowed to talk. Maybe that's why I chose to be mute at some point in my life.

I continued to clean the books, not looking away.

"Turn around," his voice sounded pissed. I slowly turned around, keeping my eyes on the floor.

"I don't know why I want you, but there is something about you. Look at me," Axel ordered. I looked up to see that Axel crossed the floor and was now standing right in front of me. He had a scratches across his face, blue and black covering the skin showing. I was happy to see him hurt. "I might not have won Alpha, but you will still be mine," he bellowed. I didn't even think when I grabbed my bleach spraying Axel in the eyes. He growled rubbing his eyes, but shoved me onto the ground not letting me get away.

I tried to start screaming, but no sound came out of my mouth. I knew this would happen, but it was one of the things that I wished never did.

"Shut up," Axel growled. He hit me, but it wasn't hard enough to knock me out. He was now on top of me straddling me, my hands caught in his. I kept on trying to scream, wiggling away from him. Axel was starting to get angry, I could see it in his gray eyes.

"Please," I tried to say, but nothing came out. I wanted to cry, but the darn tears wouldn't come out. I stopped for a second throwing him off guard, it was enough for me to throw myself to the side, getting about a foot away from him before I felt the most painful thing in the world. I looked at my side, to see Axel crouched over me with his teeth biting into my side.

"You will be mine," he hissed. He grabbed me throwing me on my back. This time, I let out an ear piercing scream, feeling him bite onto my neck. I could feel the blood oozing out of my side and neck, my back screaming in pain from the scratch of his nails. I wanted to black out, to pass out like I normally did when I start to feel a bit of pain, but my body wouldn’t.

I could feel his claws scratching against my stomach, a second later my shirt was ripped up more than it was before. I screamed but nobody was coming for me.

I felt each thrust, each scratch, and every time he decided to bite me somewhere else on my body. I stopped screaming after a while, my voice once again hoarse. I was tired, and just took it, thinking of the day I would finally die. Hoping it was this day.

He left me there, going to join the rest on the run. I just continued to lie there, staring expressionlessly at the blood next to me. Knowing it was mine, but I didn’t care. All I wanted was to die as my vision changed and I was no longer in that office.

I was in a room, a room that looked quite familiar. I was sitting on the edge of a bed and staring
down at my hands, shaken up about something that had just happened. After a few minutes passed, I
felt someone else enter the room. I looked up only to stare back in shock at the one person I seemed
to truly hate—the man of the house—and see him standing there, by the door closed behind him,
with his left hand curled up into a fist and the other holding a knife. He was Axel's father. The
werewolf I had seen merely minutes ago. I swallowed hard and instinctively gripped onto the edge of
the bed and started moving backwards as I looked at the man, only one name popping into my head.
Christophe.

I looked down at myself and gave one glance at my beat up clothes—my shorts pretty ripped up and
my shirt with holes in it covered in old bloodstains—before looking back up at him.

Why was I here? How did I get here?

I looked at him and swallowed hard. I knew what was coming.

"You little brat, why don't you understand? There. Is. No. Escape," he said as I tried to get away.
"You are not going away, so come back here so I can finish with you," he said, anger in his voice.

Breathing heavily, I looked down, again, at my upper arms and saw the scars that I have sustained
through the years I had spent here and had to go through the torture. My breathing hitched as he
came nearer again and held me by my waist.

"NOO!! PLEASE!!" I wanted to shout, but my lips wouldn't move. I wanted to start screaming but I
knew that no one will come for me nor hear me because this room was sound proof. If Alice and
Annabelle came earlier just in time before Axel went any further, it was just a mere coincidence. I
started prying his hands off but it didn’t work, he was way too strong.

He turned my body around in one fluid move and he sat on my thighs, he slipped my shorts off till I
was left in my underwear and he started cutting with sharp knife in the small of my back. I knew that
he was writing another word but I couldn’t make out the letters because of two reasons—one the
letters were too small and two it hurts so much that I couldn’t think about anything else than the
pain. I screamed and wriggled to come out of his grasp but he held my arms just above where he
was cutting with the knife and my body didn’t even move an inch.

I was screaming and was surprised that his ears didn’t start bleeding he shook me, probably to shut
me up. I didn’t cry because I couldn’t. He wouldn’t appreciate that and would only beat me up more.
I have to be completely still... I stood still, not wriggling or screaming anymore, I bit my lips and
shut my eyes tightly and counted every second that passed as I waited for it to be over and for the
darkness to take over me as it usually does...

My eyes snapped open and I was breathing heavily, my body completely shook up from that
nightmare. I sat up but instantly regretted it as I felt a familiar pain engulf my body. I looked down
and my breath got caught up in my throat.

My shirt and shorts were covered in... blood. Fresh blood. I looked up at the window and saw that
the sun had barely started to rise.

Great.

I slowly got up and made my way to my bathroom. Once there I shut the door and carefully took off
my clothes. I looked down at my body and saw that most of my old scars from when Christophe
used to torture me were... reopened. How was this possible? Closing my eyes, I shook my head
before opening them again and going to take a shower, avoiding the mirror. I didn't want to look at
myself in the mirror... I knew I was severely damaged, and I honestly didn't want to see how bad it
looked.

I think I stayed in the shower for about three hours because when I got back to my room to change
into my robes, the sun was up and shining brightly. I used magic to dry myself up before putting on
my uniform... well, part of it— I put on some jeans and a long-sleeve shirt under my school robes—
and braiding my hair into a long thick braid. My hair had grown longer since I cut it last week... it
now fell all the way to my mid-back.

I opened my window and let Blaze fly off, and left it open in case she came back or my family owl
decided to drop by, before making my way down to the Common room to wait patiently for Harry,
Ron, and Hermione.

I walked over to the fireplace and stared at the flames for a few minutes before turning around to take
a seat only to crash against something and fall onto the floor with whatever it was.

I grunted, rubbing my eyes.

"Oh, my god. I'm so sorry! I swear, I didn't mean to crash into you, I just wanted to talk, but I wasn't
sure how to confront you, and I may or may have not forgotten that I was standing right behind you
until you turned around, and—" I could tell it was a young boy who kept rambling on apologies.
Sighing, I shook my head, stood up and turned to face the fire again.

"It's fine, kid. Just don't stand behind someone for too long without letting them know you're there
because that is most likely to happen again," I replied, hoping that would shut him up and make him
leave.

It was silent for a moment and I was about to sigh again, this time in relief when I thought he was
gone, but then I stopped myself when a shiver ran down my spine as I felt a delicate shy tap on my
shoulder. I turned around and felt my breath get caught up in my throat once again as I stared back
into the most familiar, violet orchidee eyes I had ever seen. I couldn't help but gasp either as I
realized why I was so shocked. My eyes— mom's eyes— copied exactly into his perfect pale face
crowned with short-cropped jet black, slightly highlighted with a few hints of light brown here and
there, hair. This kid looked a hell lot like me... but that's impossible. I don't have any actual blood
relatives as far as I know... well, not anymore.

I looked at him with wide eyes then quickly said, "I gotta go... don't stand behind people for too long
in the future, kid!" before running off when I caught sight of my favorite trio coming down the stairs.

When Harry, Ron, Hermione and I entered the Great Hall for breakfast, the first thing we saw was
Malfoy, who seemed to be entertaining a large group of Slytherins with a very funny story. As we
passed, Malfoy did a ridiculous impression of a swooning fit and there was a roar of laughter.

"Ignore him," I whispered into Harry's ear, making him shiver. "Just ignore him, it's not worth it..."

"Hey, Potter!" shrieked Pansy Parkinson, a Slytherin girl with a face like a pug. "Potter! The
dementors are coming, Potter! Woooooowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww
were a green figi color, like my dad's.

I slammed my hands over my mouth and giggled as I heard grandpa, my daddy's dad, snoring loudly from his room. "Oops."

Andrew laughed. "You never change, Dels, do you?"

I grinned at him. "Nope!"

He chuckled and shook his head. "Good. Don't."

I smiled at myself before turning my attention to the idiots. Don't worry, bro, I changed once... from a really depressing state to... as normal as a supernatural girl can be— my point is, I changed once, so I'm not gone a change again... maybe I should speak properly again, though...

... Nah.

"Hey, Chimpanzee, Dracula, Crap, Boiling water," I called out to the four Slytherin folks, making them look puzzled at the names I just gave them. "Yeah, I'm talking to you four snakes. Shut your faces!" I shouted at them, making most students that were within earshot, laugh.

After my tiny insulting outburst, we headed towards the Gryffindor table. Harry dropped into a seat with George Weasley on his right as I followed to sit on his left while Ron and Hermione sat across the table in front of us.

Just then I realized, Ron was staring at me with his mouth hanging open. "What?" I asked innocently, suddenly feeling a tad bit self-conscious. Just a tad.

"Who are you and what have you done to our sweet, proper-speaking Deli?"

I rolled my eyes, fighting back a smirk. "I have spent almost six months with Americans... actually talking. You cannot really expect me to not gain any spunk from it."

He stared at me for a second before rolling his eyes. "Nope, she's still in there."

Hermione grinned. "I like the new you. It's like... you're still yourself, but a bit more outgoing and with hilarious comebacks for Malfoy instead of your usual glares and desires to beat him up."

I shook my head, groaning. "Oh, the desire to beat him up is still there, but I restrain myself. I do not want to have detention on my first day back to Hogwarts after so long... where are our schedules, by the way?"

"Right here! New third-year course schedules," said George, passing them, over. "What's up with you, Harry?"

I turned and looked at Harry then sighed. "Malfoy," Ron and I said at the same time as Ron looked behind me to glare at the Slytherin table. George looked up in time to see Malfoy pretending to faint with terror again until I glared at pale face, making him straighten up.

"I take it back... you still have your usual glares," Hermione muttered.

"That little git," George said calmly, shaking his head. "He wasn't so cocky last night when the dementors were down at our end of the train. Came running into our compartment, didn't he, Fred?"

"Nearly wet himself," said Fred, with a contemptuous glance at Malfoy.
"I wasn't too happy myself," said George. "They're horrible things, those dementors...."

"Sort of freeze your insides, don't they?" said Fred.

"You didn't pass out, though, did you?" said Harry in a low voice.

"Forget it, Harry," said George bracingly. "Dad had to go out to Azkaban one time, remember, Fred? And he said it was the worst place he'd ever been, he came back all weak and shaking... They suck the happiness out of a place, dementors. Most of the prisoners go mad in there."

"Anyway, we'll see how happy Malfoy looks after our first Quidditch match," said Fred. "Gryffindor versus Slytherin, first game of the season, remember?"

"Quidditch? What's that?" I asked, curiously. The name rang a bell. Fred looked at me in disbelief.

"You don't—"

"She lost her memory, you numptie," Ron snapped, kicking Fred's leg from under the table.

"It's our sport. Wizard sport. It's like— like soccer in the Muggle world— everyone follows Quidditch— played up in the air on broomsticks and there's four balls— sorta hard to explain the rules," Harry explained as I nodded in understanding. If it's played in the air, it's most likely like handball instead of soccer. That's cool then. I wouldn't mind playing, but then again I would prefer keeping both of my feet on the ground.

"You were a chaser," George said.

I looked at him puzzled. "What?"

"When you played with us, you played as a chaser," Fred said.

I bit my lip. "Oh... er... honestly... if I did, well, I don't think I'm going to play this year..."

"What?!" they exclaimed themselves.

"Look, I am sorry, but I have been on the ground for quite a while... I don't remember how to play, and even if I do further on... I don't think I'm ready to go back to flying... we'll see," I told them.

We kept on talking about it through our whole breakfast time. From what I remember, the only time Harry and Malfoy had faced each other in a Quidditch match, Malfoy had definitely come off worse. Feeling slightly more cheerful, I helped myself to some sausages and eggs and ate them quickly before we left for our first class of the day.

Hermione was examining her new schedule. "Ooh, good, we're starting some new subjects today," she said happily.

"Villains are these that trespass upon my private lands! Come, I scorn at my fall, perchance? Draw, you knaves, you dogs!" We watched in astonishment as the little knight tugged his sword out of its scabbard and began brandishing it violently, hopping up and down in rage. But the sword was too long for him; a particularly wild swing made him overbalance, and he landed face down in the grass.

"Are you all right?" said Harry, moving closer to the picture.

"Get back, you scurvy braggart! Back, you rogue!" The knight seized his sword again and used it to push himself back up, but the blade sank deeply into the grass and, though he pulled with all his might, he couldn't get it out again. Finally, he had to flop back down onto the grass and push up his
visor to mop his sweating face.

"Listen," said Harry, taking advantage of the knight's exhaustion, "we're looking for the North Tower. You don't know the way, do you?"

"A quest!" The knight's rage seemed to vanish instantly. He clanked to his feet and shouted, "Come follow me, dear friends, and we shall find our goal, or else shall perish bravely in the charge!"

He gave the sword another fruitless tug, tried and failed to mount the fat pony, gave up, and cried, "On foot then, good sirs and gentle ladies! On! On!" And he ran, clanking loudly, into the left side of the frame and out of sight. We hurried after him along the corridor, following the sound of his armor. Every now and then we spotted him running through a picture ahead.

"Be of stout heart, the worst is yet to come!" yelled the knight, and we saw him reappear in front of an alarmed group of women in crinolines, whose picture hung on the wall of a narrow spiral staircase. Puffing loudly, Harry, Ron, Hermione and I climbed the tightly spiraling steps, getting dizzier and dizzier, until at last we heard the murmur of voices above us and knew we had reached the classroom.

"Farewell!" cried the knight, popping his head into a painting of some sinister-looking monks. "Farewell, my comrades-in-arms! If ever you have need of a noble heart and steely sinew, call upon Sir Cadogan!"

"Yeah, we'll call you," muttered Ron as the knight disappeared, "if we ever need someone mental," he added as I playfully shoved him.

We climbed the last few steps and emerged onto a tiny landing, where most of the class was already assembled. There were no doors off this landing, but Ron nudged me and pointed at the ceiling and we all four looked up, where there was a circular trapdoor with a brass plaque on it.

"Sibyll Trelawney, Divination teacher," Harry read. "How're we supposed to get up there?"

As though in answer to his question, the trapdoor suddenly opened, and a silvery ladder descended right at Harry's feet. Everyone got quiet. Being brave, Hermione was the first to climb the ladder, followed by Ron, leaving Harry and me behind in an awkward silence.

Harry cleared his throat, making me look up at him. "After you, m' lady," he said, grinning, holding out a hand to help me up.

I grinned back. "Why, thank you, kind sir," I replied in a British accent as I took his hand and climbed up the ladder, pulling him along as well.

He chuckled. "My pleasure," he replied.

I emerged into the strangest-looking classroom I had ever seen. In fact, it didn't look like a classroom at all, more like a cross between someone's attic and an old-fashioned tea shop. At least twenty small, circular tables were crammed inside it, all surrounded by chintz armchairs and fat little poufs. Everything was lit with a dim, crimson light; the curtains at the windows were all closed, and the many lamps were draped with dark red scarves. It was stiflingly warm, and the fire that was burning under the crowded mantelpiece was giving off a heavy, sickly sort of perfume as it heated a large copper kettle. The shelves running around the circular walls were crammed with dusty-looking feathers, stubs of candles, many packs of tattered playing cards, countless silvery crystal balls, and a huge array of teacups. Ron appeared at Harry's shoulder as the class assembled around us, all talking in whispers.
"Where is she?" Ron said.

A voice came suddenly out of the shadows, a soft, misty sort of voice.

"Welcome," it said. "How nice to see you in the physical world at last."

The first impression I get of this teacher is very uncomfortable and creepy considering the fact that she looks like an insect. And apparently, I wasn't the only one to think that way, seeing everyone else's disgusted expressions. Professor Trelawney moved into the firelight, and we could see that she was very thin; her large glasses magnified her eyes to several times their natural size, and she was draped in a gauzy spangled shawl. Innumerable chains and beads hung around her spindly neck, and her arms and hands were encrusted with bangles and rings.

"Sit, my children, sit," she said, and we all climbed awkwardly into armchairs or sank onto poufs. Harry, Ron, Hermione and I sat around the same round table. I was going to sit elsewhere, but my three musketeers took a hold of me and dragged me along.

"Welcome to Divination," said Professor Trelawney, who had seated herself in a winged armchair in front of the fire. "My name is Professor Trelawney. You may not have seen me before. I find that descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye." I couldn't help but snort. Nobody said anything to this extraordinary pronouncement.

Professor Trelawney delicately rearranged her shawl and continued, "So you have chosen to study Divination, the most difficult of all magical arts. I must warn you at the outset that if you do not have the Sight, there is very little I will be able to teach you. Books can take you only so far in this field...."

At these words, I rolled my eyes as both Harry and Ron glanced, grinning, at Hermione, who looked startled at the news that books wouldn't be much help in this subject.

"Many witches and wizards, talented though they are in the area of loud bangs and smells and sudden disappearings, are yet unable to penetrate the veiled mysteries of the future," Professor Trelawney went on, her enormous, gleaming eyes moving from face to nervous face.

"It is a Gift granted to few. You, boy," she said suddenly to Neville, who almost toppled off his pouf. "Is your grandmother well?"

"I think so," said Neville tremulously.

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you, dear," said Professor Trelawney, the firelight glinting on her long emerald earrings. Neville gulped and I bit my lower lip trying to fight back a laugh.

Professor Trelawney continued placidly. "We will be covering the basic methods of Divination this year. The first term will be devoted to reading the tea leaves. Next term we shall progress to palmistry. By the way, my dear," she shot suddenly at Parvati Patil, "beware a red-haired man."

Parvati gave a startled look at Ron, who was right behind her and edged her chair away from him.

"In the second term," Professor Trelawney went on, "we shall progress to the crystal ball—if we have finished with fire omens, that is. Unfortunately, classes will be disrupted in February by a nasty bout of flu. I myself will lose my voice. And around Easter, one of our number will leave us forever." A very tense silence followed this pronouncement, but Professor Trelawney seemed unaware of it.

"I wonder, dear," she said to Lavender Brown, who was nearest and shrank back in her chair, "if
you could pass me the largest silver teapot?” Lavender, looking relieved, stood up, took an enormous teapot from the shelf, and put it down on the table in front of Professor Trelawney.

"Thank you, my dear. Incidentally, that thing you are dreading— it will happen on Friday the sixteenth of October.” Lavender trembled.

"Now, I want you all to divide into pairs. Collect a teacup from the shelf, come to me, and I will fill it. Then sit down and drink, drink until only the dregs remain. Swill these around the cup three times with the left hand, then turn the cup upside down on its saucer, wait for the last of the tea to drain away, then give your cup to your partner to read. You will interpret the patterns using pages five and six of Unfogging the Future. I shall move among you, helping and instructing. Oh, and dear”— she caught Neville by the arm as he made to stand up— "after you've broken your first cup, would you be so kind as to select one of the blue patterned ones? I'm rather attached to the pink."

Sure enough, Neville had no sooner reached the shelf of teacups when there was a tinkle of breaking china. Professor Trelawney swept over to him holding a dustpan and brush and said, "One of the blue ones, then, dear, if you wouldn't mind... thank you..."

When Harry, Ron, Hermione and I had had our teacups filled, we went back to our table and tried to drink the scalding tea quickly. We swilled the dregs around as Professor Trelawney had instructed, then drained the cups and swapped over.

"Right," said Ron as he and Harry both opened their books at pages five and six. "What can you see in mine?"

"A load of soggy brown stuff,” said Harry. I raised an eyebrow at him, fighting back a smile. "What? That's what I see," he exclaimed himself. As I saw his eyelids almost drooping close in exhaustion, I realized that the heavily perfumed smoke in the room is what was making him feel sleepy and stupid.

"Broaden your minds, my dears, and allow your eyes to see past the mundane!” Professor Trelawney cried through the gloom. Harry seemed to be trying to pull himself together.

"Right, you've got a crooked sort of cross...” He consulted 'Unfogging the Future'. "That means you're going to have 'trials and suffering'— sorry about that— but there's a thing that could be the sun... hang on... that means 'great happiness'... so you're going to suffer but be very happy...."

"You need your Inner Eye tested, if you ask me," I said, and we all three had to stifle our laughs as Professor Trelawney gazed in our direction.

"My turn...” Ron peered into Harry's teacup, his forehead wrinkled with effort. "There's a blob a bit like a bowler hat," he said. "Maybe you're going to work for the Ministry of Magic...” He turned the teacup the other way up.

"But this way it looks more like an acorn... What's that?” He scanned his copy of 'Unfogging the Future'. "'A windfall, unexpected gold.' Excellent, you can lend me some... and there's a thin, here,” he turned the cup again, "that looks like an animal... yeah, if that was its head... it looks like a hippo... no, a sheep..."

Professor Trelawney whirled around as Harry let out a snort of laughter as I narrowed my eyes. An animal?

"Let me see that, my dear," she said reprovingly to Ron, sweeping over and snatching Harry's cup from him. Everyone went quiet to watch. Professor Trelawney was staring into the teacup, rotating it counterclockwise.
"The falcon... my dear, you have a deadly enemy."

"But everyone knows that," said Hermione in a loud whisper. Professor Trelawney stared at her.

"Well, they do," said Hermione. "Everybody knows about Harry, Delilah, and You-Know-Who."

Harry and Ron stared at her with a mixture of amazement and admiration. Apparently, they had never heard Hermione speak to a teacher like that before. Professor Trelawney chose not to reply.

She lowered her huge eyes to Harry's cup again and continued to turn it. "The club... an attack. Dear, dear, this is not a happy cup...."

"I thought that was a bowler hat," said Ron sheepishly.

"The skull... danger in your path, my dear...."

Everyone was staring, transfixed, at Professor Trelawney, who gave the cup a final turn, gasped, and then screamed. There was another tinkle of breaking china; Neville had smashed his second cup. Professor Trelawney sank into a vacant armchair, her glittering hand at her heart and her eyes closed.

"My dear boy... my poor, dear boy no it is kinder not to say... no... don't ask me..."

"What is it, Professor?" said Dean Thomas at once. Everyone had got to their feet, and slowly they crowded around our table, pressing close to Professor Trelawney's chair to get a good look at Harry's cup.

"My dear," Professor Trelawney's huge eyes opened dramatically, "You have the Grim."

"The what?" said Harry. I could tell that he wasn't the only one who didn't understand; Dean shrugged at him and Lavender looked puzzled, but nearly everybody else clapped their hands to their mouths in horror.

"The grin? What's the grin?" Seamus asked stupidly.

I rolled my eyes. "Not the grin, you idiot. The Grim."

"Yes, the Grim, my dear, the Grim!" cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Harry hadn't understood. "The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen— the worst omen— of death!"

My stomach lurched. That dog on the cover of Death Omens in Flourish and Blotts... Lavender clapped her hands to her mouth too. Everyone was looking at Harry, everyone except Hermione, who had gotten up and moved around to the back of Professor Trelawney's chair and grabbed the cup.

She studied it for a few seconds before rolling her eyes. "I don't think it looks like a Grim," she said flatly.

Professor Trelawney surveyed Hermione with mounting dislike. "You'll forgive me for saying so, my dear, but I perceive very little aura around you. Very little receptivity to the resonances of the future." Seamus was tilting his head from side to side.

"It looks like a Grim if you do this," he said, with his eyes almost shut, "but it looks more like a donkey from here," he said, leaning to the left.

"When you've all finished deciding whether I'm going to die or not!" said Harry, taking us all by
surprise. Now nobody seemed to want to look at him. I sighed, got up and walked over to Hermione, and held out my hand.

"Let me see," I told her in an icy voice. From the corner of my eye, I could see people shivering at my tone. As Hermione handed me the teacup, I could feel everyone’s gaze on me. I took a deep breath before looking inside. As soon as my eyes landed on the shape, I instantly froze in horror. The shape... a wolf... No.

"Delilah, are you alright?" Harry asked, concern filling his voice.

"Yeah. You look pretty pale," I heard Seamus say. I wanted to answer them, but I couldn't. I was completely frozen and my sight started becoming blurry before it all became black.

As if opening my eyes. I looked around, only to realize I was standing there beside Lupin and Harry.

"So..." Professor Lupin had taken out his own wand and indicated that Harry should do the same. "The spell I am going to try and teach you is highly advanced magic, Harry— well beyond ordinary Wizarding Level. It is called the Patronus Charm."

"How does it work?" I asked, sounding nervous.

"Well, when it works correctly, it conjures up a Patronus," said Lupin, "which is a kind of anti-dementor—a guardian that acts as a shield between you and the dementor." For some reason, I had a sudden vision of Harry crouching behind a Hagrid-sized figure holding a large club.

"What does a Patronus look like?" said Harry curiously.

"Each one is unique to the wizard who conjures it."

"And how do you conjure it?" I asked.

"The incantation is this—" Lupin cleared his throat. "Expecto patronum!"

"Expecto patronum," Harry repeated under his breath as I repeated it in my head, "expecto patronum."

"Concentrating hard on your happy memory?"

"Oh— yeah—" said Harry, quickly forcing his thoughts back to something happy. "Expecto patrono— no, patronum— sorry— expecto patronum, expecto patronum."

Something whooshed suddenly out of the end of his wand; it looked like a wisp of silvery gas.

"Did you see that?" said Harry excitedly, I nodded with a smile. "Something happened!"

"Very good," said Lupin, smiling. "Right, then— ready to try it on a dementor?"

"Yes," Harry said, gripping his wand very tightly, and moving into the middle of the deserted classroom. He tried to keep his mind on flying, but something else kept intruding... Any second now, he might hear his mother again... but he shouldn't think that, or he would hear her again, and he didn't want to... or did he? Lupin grasped the lid of the packing case and pulled. A dementor rose slowly from the box, its hooded face turned toward Harry, one glistening, scabbed hand gripping its cloak. The lamps around the classroom flickered and went out. The dementor stepped from the box and started to sweep silently toward Harry, drawing a deep, rattling breath. A wave of piercing cold broke over him—
"Expecto patronum!" Harry yelled. "Expecto patronum! Expecto—" But the classroom and the dementor were dissolving...

Next, I could see Lupin's silhouette shimmering under the moonlight. He had gone rigid. Then his limbs began to shake.

"Oh, my—" Hermione gasped. "He didn't take his potion tonight! He's not safe!"

"What?!" I shrieked in disbelief.


But I couldn't run, and nor could Harry nor Hermione. Ron was chained to another creepy looking man and Lupin. He leapt forward, but Black caught him around the chest and threw him back.

"Leave it to me— RUN!"

There was a terrible snarling noise. Lupin's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws. Crookshanks's hair was on end again; he was backing away—

As the werewolf reared, snapping its long jaws, Sirius disappeared from Harry's side. He had transformed. The enormous, bearlike dog bounded forward. As the werewolf wrenched itself free of the manacle binding it, the dog seized it about the neck and pulled it backward, away from Ron and the other man. They were locked, jaw to jaw, claws ripping at each other.

Harry stood, transfixed by the sight, too intent upon the battle to notice anything else. It was Hermione's scream that alerted him— the other man had dived for Lupin's dropped wand. Ron, unsteady on his bandaged leg, fell. There was a bang, a burst of light— and Ron lay motionless on the ground.

But then the whomping willow, the werewolf, Harry, Hermione and Ron, Black, the other man and everything else were dissolving once again...

I heard many voices calling out my name right before I heard a small crash. Something broke. I blinked a few times before looking down at my hands only to realize that what had broken was a teacup. Then I looked up to find my fellow classmates looking at me with concerned looks on their faces. I then blinked a few more times, quickly, until I finally remembered what had happened and where I am.

"Delilah? Are you alright?" Hermione asked me. I tensed up and without a word over even thinking, I ran off using, making sure not to use much of my super speed, especially after so long. I had to get away, though, and ASAP.

**Harry's P.O.V.**

"My dear boy... my poor, dear boy no it is kinder not to say... no... don't ask me...."

"What is it, Professor?" said Dean at once. Everyone had got to their feet, and slowly they crowded around mine and Ron's table, pressing close to Professor Trelawney's chair to get a good look at my cup.

"My dear," Professor Trelawney's huge eyes opened dramatically, "You have the Grim."

"The what?" I asked, confused. I could tell that I wasn't the only one who didn't understand; Dean
shrugged at me and Lavender looked puzzled, but nearly everybody else clapped their hands to their mouths in horror.

"The grin? What's the grin?" Seamus asked stupidly.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Delilah roll her eyes. "Not the grin, you idiot. The Grim."

"Yes, the Grim, my dear, the Grim!" cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that I hadn't understood. "The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen— the worst omen— of death!"

My stomach lurched. That dog on the cover of Death Omens in Flourish and Blotts— the dog in the shadows of Magnolia Crescent... Lavender Brown clapped her hands to her mouth too. Everyone was looking at me, everyone except Hermione, who had gotten up and moved around to the back of Professor Trelawney's chair and grabbed the cup.

She studied it for a few seconds before rolling her eyes. "I don't think it looks like a Grim," she said flatly.

Professor Trelawney surveyed Hermione with mounting dislike. "You'll forgive me for saying so, my dear, but I perceive very little aura around you. Very little receptivity to the resonances of the future." Seamus was tilting his head from side to side.

"It looks like a Grim if you do this," he said, with his eyes almost shut, "but it looks more like a donkey from here," he said, leaning to the left.

"When you've all finished deciding whether I'm going to die or not!" I shouted, taking even myself by surprise. Now nobody seemed to want to look at me. I heard someone sigh, and I almost forgot Delilah had been here until she got up and walked over to Hermione and held out her hand to her.

"Let me see," she told her in an icy voice. I couldn't help but shiver at her tone. As Hermione handed her my teacup, I could see everyone's gaze on her, including mine was concentrated on nothing but her. She took a deep breath before looking inside. As soon as her gaze landed on the shape she instantly froze in horror.

"Delilah, are you alright?" I asked, feeling concerned.

"Yeah. You look pretty pale," I heard Seamus say. But she didn't answer. She just looked up at me, and her violet orchidee eyes went blank, almost glazed over as if she were in a trance of some sort.

I then realized that she wasn't exactly looking at me. After a few seconds of calling out her name, her beautiful eyes became a blue cornflower color, before going bloody orange, begonia, morning glory, and then finally a rare starlight color where we could barely see the violet specks in them. She was completely frozen. She wouldn't even blink. We tried to get her to talk or at least to move for about ten minutes, but we got no result. We even tried to push her all the way to her seat, but she wouldn't budge. Literally wouldn't move, not even a muscle.

After about fifteen minutes passed, the teacup slipped from her hands and she finally blinked. Blinking once, twice, then a third time, her eyes were back to their beautiful violet orchidee color with the few gray specks I hadn't noticed in them before. She looked down at her hands watching the broken cup with confusion. Then she looked up and spun her gaze around the room and at our fellow classmates, who seemed as worried as I was. Her eyes finally landed on me and then she blinked a few more times, quickly, until we could see realization finally hit her face. It's as if she had just remembered where she was.
"Delilah?" I asked, but she didn't answer.

"Delilah? Are you alright?" Hermione asked her. She seemed to tense up and without a word or even giving any of us the time to blink, she was gone, ran off super-fast, leaving us all dumbfounded.

The whole room was silent and no one spoke until someone cleared their throat.

"I think we will leave the lesson here for today," said Professor Trelawney in her mistiest voice. "Yes... please pack away your things...."

Silently the class took their teacups back to Professor Trelawney, packed away their books, and closed their bags. Even Ron was avoiding my eyes.

"Until we meet again," said Professor Trelawney faintly, "fair fortune be yours. Oh, and dear—" she pointed at Neville, "—you'll be late next time, so mind you work extra-hard to catch up."

Ron, Hermione and I descended Professor Trelawney's ladder and the winding stair in silence, then set off for Professor McGonagall's Transfiguration lesson. It took us so long to find her classroom that, early as we had left Divination, we were only just in time.

As we entered the classroom, I saw Delilah sitting at the far back of the room, so I practically ran to take the seat beside her. I wanted her to look at me with her strange yet beautiful eyes. I wanted to hear her soft velvety voice. But she wouldn't speak or even look at me. It was as if she were avoiding me. I felt sadness overwhelm me and hardly heard what Professor McGonagall was telling us about Animagi (wizards who could transform at will into animals), and wasn't even watching when she transformed herself.

As I kept sneaking glances at Delilah, I could see her body trembling— shaking ever so violently that it looked as if she was going to explode.

Worried I touched her shoulder and shook it a bit. "Delilah?" I whispered. She didn't turn. She straightened her position and looked towards the front of the class as if she was looking for someone. As I turned to look at the front as well, I realized she was looking at Professor McGonagall who, once she caught her glance, nodded, and before I knew it, Delilah was gone.

**Back to Delilah's P.O.V.**

"I don't understand what happened," I admitted, slumping down a chair in front of Dumbledore. Professor McGonagall had let me leave her classroom to see him after I told her what happened... well, more like thought to her. I explained to him what I saw, but apparently, I wasn't the only to not understand or know why I saw this, or why I was the one to see it.

"Tell me, what was it like again?" he asked me for what seemed like the millionth time.

I sighed. "It felt like if I was in a trance of some sort. It was as clear and vivid as my usual dreams and flashbacks. It... was like if what I saw... was a vision, a foresight. As in that might happen, you know?"

He pursed his lips and searched for something in a drawer of his desk. What he brought out caught my curiosity. He was holding a golden chain out, but as he moved his fingers, I saw a tiny, sparkling hourglass hanging from it.

"What is that hourglass thing?"

"It's called a Time-Turner," he corrected me.

"It gives us what we need," he replied. I gave him a puzzled look. What was this old man going on about?

He chuckled. "And what we need," continued slowly as his blue eyes looked deeply into mine, "is more time."

I nodded still trying to understand what he meant by that until it hit me and then my eyes became very round. "Oh."

He smiled and nodded in confirmation. "Now, pay attention," said Dumbledore, speaking very low, and very clearly. "When the time comes for you to use it, three turns should do it. But you must never be seen, understood, Miss Dawn?" I don't know why, but ever since I was back, I felt much more comfortable going by my mother's original surname... and it suited me quite well, so I told Dumbledore about it a while back, and he and the staff agreed to call me Delilah Dawn instead of Hawkins.

I nodded as he gave me the item, but I got confused when he gave me a ring along with it. The ring was gold and silver with a colorless diamond in the middle.

I gave him a funny look. Why would he give me a ring?

"I have a feeling you'll be wanting to go see your... father soon enough, so I want you to wear the ring at all times. You mustn't take it off when you go around muggleborns. You are a very wonderful and powerful creature. Alas, I cannot help you entirely, this ring will help with your magical side."

"What about my hybrid side?"

"You have already mastered your control over that side. But as a witch, you are also very powerful. You'll need this ring to help you control your powers. But you must pay attention to it. When you get mad, or overly happy, or excited, the ring will glow blue and your eyes would change color because of your powers as they already do. But you will be forewarned by the rings glow and that gives you the advantage to control your emotions. You must promise me you will take good care of it," he warned.

I looked into his blue eyes and I could see the trust he had towards me. I took a deep breath and nodded.

"I promise."
I left Dumbledore's office and joined the crowd thundering toward the Great Hall for lunch. I took a deep breath before heading towards Harry, Ron and Hermione. As I took a seat beside Harry, I instantly tensed up a bit until I felt the soft, warm hand take a hold of my own.

"Are you alright?" he asked as my three friends looked at me with concern clouding their faces.

I smiled halfheartedly and nodded. "I'm fine, really. I can't really tell you what happened now, but I promise I'll tell you if it does happen."

I looked at all three of them and sighed in relief when they nodded before helping myself to a plate of food. I frowned when I saw Ron's worried expression, and I was sure it wasn't about me anymore.

"Ron's not eating? Well that's a first," I muttered, making Harry chuckle from beside me.

Hermione heard as well and turned to look at him then sighed. "Ron, cheer up," she said, pushing a dish of stew toward him. "You heard what Professor McGonagall said."

I wanted to know what they were talking about, but didn't hover over the subject, not wanting to put more tension in the atmosphere. Ron spooned stew onto his plate and picked up his fork but didn't start.

"Harry," he said, in a low, serious voice, "You haven't seen a great black dog anywhere, have you?"

My eyes widened as I let my fork fall and my body went rigid. Ron let his fork fall with a clatter as well.

"Probably a stray," said Hermione calmly.

Ron looked at Hermione as though she had gone mad.

"Hermione, if Harry's seen a Grim, that's— that's bad," he said. "My— my uncle Bilius saw one and — and he died twenty-four hours later!"

"Coincidence," said Hermione airily, pouring herself some pumpkin juice.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" said Ron hotly.

"There you are, then," said Hermione in a superior tone. "They see the Grim and die of fright. The Grim's not an omen, it's the cause of death! And Harry's still with us because he's not stupid enough to see one and think, right, well, I'd better kick the bucket then!"

Ron mouthed wordlessly at Hermione, who opened her bag, took out her new Arithmancy book, and propped it open against the juice jug.

"I think Divination seems very woolly," she said, searching for her page. "A lot of guesswork, if you ask me."

"There was nothing woolly about the Grim in that cup!" said Ron hotly.
"You didn't seem quite so confident when you were telling Harry it was a sheep," said Hermione coolly.

"Professor Trelawney said you didn't have the right—"

"Ron, please... just— let's just stop talking about this. You know if you keep being insistent about it, you might jinx it. And I'm pretty sure no one here wants what Professor Trelawney said to happen, am I right?" I said, surprisingly calm. They shook their heads in shame.

"Good," I replied before digging into my plate.

I could tell we were all pleased to get out of the castle after lunch. Yesterday's rain had cleared; the sky was a clear, pale gray, and the grass was springy and damp underfoot as we set off for our first ever Care of Magical Creatures class.

Ron and Hermione weren't speaking to each other. I walked beside them in silence as we went down the sloping lawns to Hagrid's hut on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. It was only when I spotted three only-too-familiar backs ahead of us that I realized we must be having these lessons with the Slytherins. I cursed under my breath.

Harry took a hold of my hand and intertwined our fingers. "Are you okay?"

I nodded, calming myself. "Yeah, just not so thrilled to have the three sisters of Belleville in our class along with the rest of their nest," I replied, squeezing Harry's hand in reassurance before letting it go. Malfoy was talking animatedly to Crabbe and Goyle, who were chortling. I was somehow quite sure I knew what they were talking about.

Hagrid was waiting for his class at the door of his hut. He stood in his moleskin overcoat, with Fang the boarhound at his heels, looking impatient to start. As soon as the canine spotted me, he ran up to me, making me smile.

"Fang!" I exclaimed myself, leaning down to ruffle the dogs head. "How you doin' boy? You been good?" Fang barked. "Good boy. Go back to Hagrid before he get's worried about you." Barking excitedly, he licked my hand before running back to Hagrid. I smiled a small smile, straightening my position. It was sad to know that a dog was the only one to easily recognize me. Oh well, can't really blame anyone. I do look very different than what I used to, and I'm guessing Fang only recognized me because of my scent.

"C'mon, now, get a move on!" Hagrid called as the rest of the class approached. "Got a real treat for yeh today! Great lesson comin' up! Everyone here? Right, follow me!"

For one nasty moment, Harry seemed to panic at the thought of Hagrid leading us into the forest; according to Ron, he and Harry had had enough unpleasant experiences in there to last them a lifetime. However, Hagrid strolled off around the edge of the trees, and five minutes later, we found ourselves outside a kind of paddock. There was nothing in there.

"Everyone gather 'round the fence here!" he called. "That's it— make sure yeh can see— now, firs' thing yeh'll want ter do is open yer books—"

"How?" said the cold, drawling voice of Draco Malfoy.

"Eh?" said Hagrid.

"How do we open our books?" Malfoy repeated. He took out his copy of The Monster Book of Monsters, which he had bound shut with a length of rope. Other people took theirs out too; some,
like Harry, had belted their book shut; others had crammed them inside tight bags or clamped them together with binder clips. I, on the other hand, had an instinct that I should probably stroke the spine. As I did, it immediately became all calm.

Hermione looked at me in disbelief. "How did—" she started, but I cut her off.

"Stroke its fur," I told her. She copied my actions and just as she did, her book calmed down as well. We then grinned at each other.

"Hasn'— hasn' anyone bin able ter open their books?" said Hagrid, looking crestfallen.

The class all shook their heads, and Hermione and I smirked at each other.

"Yeh've got ter stroke 'em," said Hagrid, as though this was the most obvious thing in the world.

"How?" pale face repeated.

"Like this, Stormy," I snapped at him, before showing him how it's done.

Hagrid nodded. "That's right. Look—"

He took Hermione's copy and ripped off the Spellotape that bound it. The book tried to bite, but Hagrid ran a giant forefinger down its spine, and the book shivered, and then fell open and lay quiet in his hand.

"Oh, how silly we've all been!" Malfoy sneered. "We should have stroked them! Why didn't we guess!" I rolled my eyes at his sarcasm.

"I— I thought they were funny," Hagrid said uncertainly to Hermione and I.

"Oh, tremendously funny!" said Malfoy. "Really witty, giving us books that try and rip our hands off!"

"Shut up, Malfoy," said Harry quietly. Hagrid was looking downcast and Harry wanted Hagrid's first lesson to be a success.

"Righ' then," said Hagrid, who seemed to have lost his thread, "so— so yeh've got yer books an'— an'— now yeh need the Magical Creatures. Yeah. So I'll go an' get 'em. Hang on..."

He strode away from them into the forest and out of sight.

"God, this place is going to the dogs," said Malfoy loudly. "That oaf teaching classes, my father'll have a fit when I tell him—"

"Shut up, Malfoy," Harry repeated. Thank you, Harry, I was so close to shouting 'no one cares about your father, Malfoy'.

"Careful, Potter, there's a dementor behind you!"

"Ooooooooh!" squealed Lavender, pointing toward the opposite side of the paddock.

Trotting toward us were a dozen of the most bizarre creatures I had ever seen. They had the bodies, hind legs, and tails of horses, but the front legs, wings, and heads of what seemed to be giant eagles, with cruel, steel-colored beaks and large, brilliantly, orange eyes. The talons on their front legs were half a foot long and deadly looking. Each of the beasts had a thick leather collar around its neck, which was attached to a long chain, and the ends of all of these were held in the vast hands of
Hagrid, who came jogging into the paddock behind the creatures.

"Gee up, there!" he roared, shaking the chains and urging the creatures toward the fence where the class stood. Everyone drew back slightly as Hagrid reached them and tethered the creatures to the fence.

"Hippogriffs!" Hagrid roared happily, waving a hand at them. " Beau'iful, aren' they?"

I could clearly see what Hagrid meant. Once you got over the first shock of seeing something that was, half horse, half bird, you started to appreciate the hippogriffs' gleaming coats, changing smoothly from feather to hair, each of them a different color: stormy gray, bronze, pinkish roan, gleaming chestnut, and inky black.

"So," said Hagrid, rubbing his hands together and beaming around, "if yeh wan' ter come a bit nearer —"

No one seemed to want to. Harry, Ron, and Hermione, however, approached the fence cautiously while I approached it casually.

"Now, firs' thing yeh gotta know abou' hippogriffs is, they're proud," said Hagrid. "Easily offended, hippogriffs are. Don't never insult one, 'cause it might be the last thing yeh do."

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle weren't listening; they were talking in an undertone and I suddenly had a nasty feeling they were plotting how best to disrupt the lesson.

"Yeh always wait fer the hippogriff ter make the firs' move," Hagrid continued. "It's polite, see? Yeh walk toward him, and yeh bow, an' yeh wait. If he bows back, yeh're allowed ter touch him. If he doesn' bow, then get away from him sharpish, 'cause those talons hurt. Right— who wants ter go first?"

Most of the class backed farther away in reply. Even Harry, Ron, and Hermione had misgivings. The hippogriffs were tossing their fierce heads and flexing their powerful wings; they didn't seem to like being tethered like this.

"No one?" said Hagrid, with a pleading look. Without thinking I started slowly approaching the creature. As I got closer to it, Buckbeak had turned his great, sharp head and was staring at me with one fierce orange eye which immediately turned tender. I didn't understand what exactly was going on, but at least I recognized this feeling all to well. It was the same feeling I had when I first laid eyes on Blazealbumera. The look we shared explained it all. I had a deep connection with these creatures. From the corner of my eye, I could see Hagrid untie one of the chains, pull the gray hippogriff away from its fellows, and slip off its leather collar. The class on the other side of the paddock seemed to be holding its breath as the hippogriff now faced me completely.

"What is she doing?!" I heard Ron hiss.

"Is she trying to kill herself?" some other kid said.

"Delilah," I heard Harry whisper.

I decided to ignore them, and act on instincts. "Tu regium asservaretur," (You're a royal hippogriff) I whispered at it.

As soon as I said those words, the hippogriff straightened his position before suddenly bending his scaly front knees and sinking into what was an unmistakable bow. I was completely dazed that I couldn't help but bow back at it.
"Regia dimisso equo," (You're my royal steed) I told it, and its eyes shone in gratitude at the compliment.

The respect this wonder showed towards me made me almost feel as if I were being praised. It made me feel loved and admired. Happy to be feeling this feeling again, I slowly moved closer to the hippogriff and reached out towards it. I patted its beak several times and the hippogriff closed its eyes lazily, as though enjoying it. The class broke into series of whispers.

"Delilah, please be careful," Harry pleaded.

I turned to look at him. "Harry, he's not going to hurt me."

"Yes, it will," Draco snarled, making me turn to glare at him.

I rolled my eyes and resumed to petting Buckbeak who had leaned its head against my touch. I sighed before reciting,

"'Like a griffin, it has the head of an eagle, claws armed with talons, and wings covered with feathers, the rest of its body being that of a horse. This strange animal is called a Hippogriff. The hippogriff is said to be an evil spirit resting and possessing its soul in that of a horse and griffin.'" Buckbeak closed the distance between us and rested its head on my shoulder as I turned to face others.

"That quote has been said by many people, but there is one thing I know: not every quote is true," I said firmly, before petting the creature again as, for the first time in a long time, a truthful smile formed itself across my face. I was finally smiling after so many years. I heard people from my little audience gasp in shock. I guess it was because they never thought I would actually smile.

"She's smiling," someone whispered, making my smile brighten up as I continued giving Buckbeak more affection.

"Her smile... it's so beautiful," someone else whispered.

"Mesmerizing," I heard Harry whisper.

"Geez, I'm not an item at a museum," I muttered before rolling my eyes, turning to look at the crowd with a mischievous grin on my face. "So who's gonna give it a try?"

He instantly stepped forward and gave a short bow before then looked up.

The hippogriff stared haughtily at him. It didn't move. It turned to look at me as if trying to confirm that it was safe. I smiled and nodded. I wasn't sure if it would obey me, but then, to our enormous surprise, the hippogriff suddenly bent, once again, its scaly front knees and sank into what was an unmistakable bow. Then, Harry moving slowly toward the hippogriff and I, reached out toward it. He patted the beak several times and the hippogriff closed its eyes lazily again, as though enjoying it Harry's touch as well.

This time class broke into applause, all except for Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, who were looking deeply disappointed. Malfoy seemed to be looking at Harry with a hint of... jealousy, I think. Leaning against both of our touch, a deep rumbling sound emerged from the hippogriff's chest, as if a sound of pleasure. I couldn't help but grin at Harry. This had to be one of the best few moments of my life.

Hagrid clapped his big giant hands, making us slightly jump. "Righ' then, Harry," said Hagrid. "I reckon he might' let yeh an' Delilah ride him!"
"Do what, now?" I asked, unsure if I heard correctly.

"Yeh climb up there, jus' behind the wing joint," said Hagrid, "an' mind yeh don' pull any of his feathers out, he won' like that...."

Harry put his foot on the top of Buckbeak's wing and hoisted himself onto its back. I simply stood there staring at him in disbelief until I felt a set of giant hands pick me up and settle me on the hippogriff's back. Buckbeak stood up. Harry seemed to be unsure where to hold on; everything in front of him was covered with feathers.

"What?! No, no, no, no, no!" I exclaimed myself, getting ready to get off, but I found myself just looking around, panicked, because I had no idea how to dismount this creature.

"Go on, then!" roared Hagrid, slapping the hippogriffs hindquarters.

"Wha— wait, no!" I shouted, but it was too late.

Without warning, twelve-foot wings flapped open on either side of Harry, he just had time to seize the hippogriff around the neck and I barely had time to throw my hands around Harry's waist in fear before Buckbeak was soaring upward. It was nothing like a broomstick, and I knew which one I preferred; the hippogriff's wings beat uncomfortably on either side of us, catching Harry under his legs and making him seem as if he was about to be thrown off; the glossy feathers slipped under his fingers and he didn't dare get a stronger grip, I held onto Harry for dear life; instead of the smooth action of my Firebolt, I now felt myself rocking backward and forward as the hindquarters of the hippogriff rose and fell with its wings, and I had a feeling Harry felt the same way.

Buckbeak flew us once around the paddock and then headed back to the ground; this was the bit I had been dreading; I buried my face in Harry's back while he leaned back as the hippogriff's smooth neck lowered. It felt as if we were going to slip off over the beak, then felt a heavy thud as the four ill-assorted feet hit the ground. He just managed to hold on and push himself straight again.

"Good work, Deli and Harry!" roared Hagrid as everyone except Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle cheered. "Okay, who else wants a go?"

Emboldened by our success, the rest of the class climbed cautiously into the paddock. Hagrid untied the hippogriffs one by one, and soon people were bowing nervously, all over the paddock. Neville ran repeatedly backward from his, which didn't seem to want to bend its knees. Ron and Hermione practiced on the chestnut, while Harry and I watched.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had taken over Buckbeak. He had bowed to Malfoy, who was now patting his beak, looking disdainful.

"This is very easy," Malfoy drawled, loud enough for Harry to hear him. I rolled my eyes.

"I knew it must have been, if Potter could do it.... I bet you're not dangerous at all, are you?" he said to the hippogriff. "Are you, you great ugly brute?"

It happened in a flash of steely talons; Malfoy let out a high-pitched girly scream and next moment, Hagrid was wrestling Buckbeak back into his collar as he strained to get at Malfoy, who lay curled in the grass, blood blossoming over his robes.

"I'm dying!" Malfoy yelled as the class panicked. "I'm dying, look at me! It's killed me!"

"You're not dying, you idiot. You just got a scratch," I muttered under my breath while crossing my arms. I swear, this guy can be such a baby!
"Yer not dyin'!" said Hagrid, who had gone very white. "Someone help me— gotta get him outta here—"

Hermione ran to hold open the gate as Hagrid lifted Malfoy easily. As they passed, I saw that there was a long, deep gash on Malfoy's arm; blood splattered the grass and Hagrid ran with him, up the slope toward the castle. Very shaken, the Care of Magical Creatures class followed at a walk. The Slytherins were all shouting about Hagrid.

"They should fire him straight away!" said Pansy Parkinson, who was in tears.

"It was Malfoy's fault!" snapped Dean. Crabbe and Goyle flexed their muscles threateningly.

They all climbed the stone steps into the deserted entrance hall.

"I'm going to see if he's okay!" said Pansy, and they all watched her run up the marble staircase. The Slytherins, still muttering about Hagrid, headed away in the direction of their dungeon common room; Harry, Ron, and Hermione proceeded upstairs to Gryffindor Tower.

"Yeah, you do just that, chimp," I muttered.

"You think he'll be all right?" said Hermione nervously. I rolled my eyes. Jesus, I've had actual near death experiences and I've never complained. This guy just got a scratch and he's crying and screaming that he's dying. When will they grow up?

"Course he will. Madam Pomfrey can mend cuts in about a second," Harry answered.

"That was a really bad thing to happen in Hagrid's first class, though, wasn't it?" said Ron, looking worried. "Trust Malfoy to mess things up for him...." I nodded in agreement.

We were among the first to reach the Great Hall at dinnertime, hoping to see Hagrid, but he wasn't there.

I frowned. "They wouldn't fire him, would they?" I asked anxiously, not touching my steak-and-kidney pudding.

"They'd better not," said Ron, who wasn't eating either.

Looking sideways at Harry, I could see he was watching the Slytherin table. I turned around in my seat and saw that a large group including Crabbe and Goyle was huddled together, deep in conversation. I was pretty darn sure they were cooking up their own version of how Malfoy had been injured.

"Well, you can't say it wasn't an interesting first day back," said Ron gloomily.

We went up to the crowded Gryffindor common room after dinner and tried to do the homework Professor McGonagall had given us, but all four of us kept breaking off and glancing Out of the tower window.

"There's a light on in Hagrid's window," Harry said suddenly.

Ron looked at his watch. "If we hurried, we could go down and see him. It's still quite early..."

"I don't know," Hermione said slowly, and Harry saw her glance at him.

"I'm allowed to walk across the grounds," he said, pointedly, getting me slightly confused. "Sirius Black hasn't got past the dementors yet, has he?" I sighed in defeat. If only he knew that Sirius
wasn't really all that evil, but apparently there's nothing I can do to change anyone's mind about him.

We put our things away and headed out of the portrait hole, glad to meet nobody on our way to the front doors, as we weren't entirely sure we were supposed to be out. The grass was still wet and looked almost black in the twilight.

Hagrid had been drinking. With everything that happened today, I'm guessing that whatever news had waited for him must have been really tough for a strong man like him to handle. I felt really bad for him, but I also couldn't stop the uncomfortable atmosphere that was now surrounding me as much as the feeling that something bad is going to happen other than the events from the vision with Sirius. Something I'm going to use as an excuse to use the Time-Turner.

I sat on the window seat of my room that night, thinking my whole day through. Sure, it wasn't so bad... but it wasn't so great either, and there was still that kid from this morning— I couldn't get him out of my head. I opened my window and slightly smiled when Blaze flew through, accompanied by a black owl whom I'm guessing was Arrow, my family owl. They each flew to their own perches and looked over at me.

"Are you feeling alright, Delilah?" Blaze asked.

I smiled. "I'm fine, Blaze."

"Are you sure, Boss? 'Cause you seem pretty down," Arrow butt in.

I looked over at him and tilted my head to a side with an awkward smile on my face before chuckling and shaking my head. "I'm fine, you guys, really." I replied just as a knock was heard from my door. I frowned. Who could be coming to see me at such a late hour?

I glanced over at the mini fridge in the corner of my room and flicked my finger, making food appear for my companions before going over to the door.

When I opened the door, my breath got caught up in my throat when I found the young boy from earlier standing in front of me. I raised an eyebrow looking down at him since he was quite short. "Uh... can I help you?"

"Are you Delilah Dawn Hawkins?"

I furrowed my brows and looked pointedly at my door, where my name was elegantly carved onto it. "Well, my name is carved onto this wooden door and I've owned this room for three years now, so yeah. Who are you?"

He looked at my name before looked back up at me with a random smile forming on his lips. "Oh, yeah, my name's Seth. I'm your brother."

I froze momentarily then blinked about three times before looking at him weirdly. "No, really. Who are you?"

"I told you, I'm your brother," he said, slipping under my arm and walking into my room.

"Whoa, hey, kid! Kid!" I exclaimed myself. "I don't have a brother! I mean, I had brothers— b— they're d— they're gone. And they were all older than me, so whoever your parents are, they aren't mine, now go back to your dorm!"

"Twelve years ago, Anima Curatoria was ambushed," he started.
I stared at him in shock. "How do you—"

He held a hand up to stop me. "Let me finish." I sighed and motioned for him to continue. "Through the ambush, I don't know if you remember, but Ella-Grace Hawkins, formerly known as Ella-Grace Dawn, was having a hard time fighting. Why? Because she was carrying a little wolf in her stomach for, then, eight months already. That was me, long story short, I'm your baby brother."

I stared off into space for a moment before shaking my head, pacing back and forth. "No, no, no, no, no. Th-that's not possible— her stomach was flat— she was ill— throwing up for weeks..."

I looked over at him and swallowed hard as realization slapped me across the face. "Give me a minute." With that, I ran into my bathroom and locked myself up. My heart was pounding hard and loudly against my chest as I ran my fingers through my hair. I walked over to the mirror and stared at myself.

How is this possible? Having another brother, who is actually alive? And how is it that he's younger than me? How is it—

"Hey, do you have any milk? Never mind, found some." I let out a loud sigh through my nose before exiting the bathroom. "You know, we should probably get going."

I gave him a puzzled look. "Going where?"

"I want you to come home with me," he simply replied.

I clenched my jaw. "Okay, kid, I am so getting Dumbledore— the Ministry even," I said as I crossed the room to my bag lying on the corner and brought my wand out.

"And I'll tell them all you kidnapped me," he said.

"And they'll believe you because I'm your sister and we're in school," I said, putting my wand down. "Yep."

"You do see where your plan goes to shits there, right?" He blinked, and I snorted, shaking my head. "Even if it were to work— which it wouldn't because I'm not some crazed mother coming to kidnap her long lost son— I doubt you would actually take that route."

He coughed, cheeks flushing pink. "Try me."

I stared at him for a moment, chewing on my lower lip. "You're pretty brave, I'll give you that. Comes with being a Gryffindor, I guess. but here's the thing. There may not be a lot I'm good at in life, but, modesty aside, I am considered the most powerful witch in the world. And one of my specialties is... I can read minds. Another one is I can tell when anyone is lying, and you, kid, are," I replied nonchalantly, pulling my wand back up, ready to send a corporal telegraphic message to the Dumbledore, and hopefully, he'll contact the Ministry for me.

"Wait. Please don't call them. Please come home with me," he pleaded.

"Where's home?"

"Holmes Chapel, Cheshire East," he replied.

"Holmes Chapel?" I eyed him sceptically. "Seriously?"
Seth nodded. "... Sure." 'Cause that's very convincing... we're definitely not heading to Holmes Chapel... "Professor Dumbledore said we could use his fireplace."

I chuckled humorlessly and shook my head. Of course, the ol' man would know already. "Yeah... I'm not traveling by Floo powder."

"Then how are we going to get there? It's impossible to Apparate to or from Hogwarts."

Uncle Ab chuckled. "More deliberation, Delilah."

I scowled. "Load of bull. Deliberation! Pft! I don't need deliberation! I don't need to Apparate! I'll just use the 'instant transmission' thing I apparently already do or..."

I smirked. 'Instant transmission', eh? Good thing I remember Uncle Ab, man, what would I do without him?

"We're going to get there by one of my other specialties I like to call 'instant transmission'."

"Instant transmission?"

"Yep. If we're related—"

"Which we are," he piped in, but I ignored that.

"— then you'll eventually learn how to do it." I turned to look at him again. "If it turns out we're nowhere near related—"

"Again, we are."

"Then, I'll just make you forget."

"What?!"

"So, kid, how about an address?"

"Nineteen-fifty-nine, not-telling-you street," he retorted.

I rolled my eyes, allowing myself to peek into his mind. "Alrighty, then. I think it's time we get you back to Portree Drive."

He looked at me with wide eyes. "How did you—"

"Mind reader, remember?"

He stared at me for a moment before looking down at his feet in defeat, muttering "Damn."

"Language, kid," I warned, rolling my eyes, while sliding my wand up the right sleeve of my long sleeved shirt.

"I'm hungry. Can we eat something before we leave... and maybe take something for along the way?" he asked, eying the small refrigerator in the corner of my room.

I'm a growing soul shifting, witchy hybrid—don't judge me.

I rolled my eyes, heading over to my trunk and bringing out a sweater. "Why do you think I called my specialty 'instant transmission'?" I retorted, putting the sweater on. "It's instant traveling, not a
road trip; we're not stopping for snacks along the way and we're not taking any."

"Why not?"

"Quit complaining, kid. Remember, I could literally have the Ministry over."

The boy pouted slightly. "I have a name, you know; it's Seth."

"Yeah? Well, you see, this year I decided to give out as many nicknames as possible, and yours is 'kid', now come on," I said, nodding him over with my head.

Just when I was about to place a hand on his shoulder, he took me aback by grabbing a hold of it. It was different than when Harry would hold my hand but, for some reason, it wasn't uncomfortable at all. It was actually quite calming, which shocked me since the only ones who were actually ever able to calm me were usually my trio or any of the Weasleys. Shaking my head, I closed my eyes and took the image of his neighborhood from his mind and instantly popped us out of my room.

I cursed under my breath when we got to our destination because we didn't land where we were supposed to. We landed in Balmoral Drive, not too far from Portree Drive, but not exactly close. I was too tired to do it again so instead, I did the first thing that came into my mind.

I hijacked a car.

Don't judge me.

As soon as the vehicle was hotwired and ready for takeoff, we did just that.

"How do you know how to drive? You're thirteen!" Seth said in disbelief.

I sent him a sideways glance and shrugged. "I was born and lived in America for a long time. You pick up things there a lot quicker," I uttered distractedly, sighing sadly; Kenton, my adoptive father, was the one to teach me how to drive.

We were silent for a moment before I glanced towards him and noticed something.

"What's that?" I asked upon noticing him holding a large book.

"I'm not sure you're ready," he replied, grabbing my hand back when I let go.

I rolled my eyes but didn't pull my hand away. "Ready for what, some fairy tales?"

"They're not fairy tales." He frowned. "Besides prophecies, this book has some things about our family that we never knew. Everything in this book actually happened."

I scoffed. "Of course, they did," I retorted, eying him dubiously.

"Use your superpower. See if I'm lying," he challenged.

I looked at him for a long moment. "Just because you believe something doesn't make it true."

"That's exactly what makes it true," he insisted. "You should know more than anyone."

I raised my eyebrows at him. "And why's that?"

"Because you're in this book."
"What?"

"You're in this—"

"Oh, I heard you," I cut him off. "But how on earth am I in a fairy tale book?"

Seth groaned. "It's not a fairy tale book."

I sighed and shook my head. "Oh, kid. You've got problems."

Seth gave me a cheeky grin. "Yup. And you're going to fix them."

I felt more and more uncomfortable as we neared the house. I wasn't all surprised when a battered door emerged out of nowhere between numbers one-forty-six and one-forty-eight, followed swiftly by red wine brick walls and incredible clean windows. It was as though an extra house had inflated, pushing those on either side out of its way. I gave it an appreciative look; I should put a spell like that at my house. The stereo in number one-forty-six thudded on. Apparently the Muggles inside hadn't felt anything.

I watched as Seth sprinted eagerly out of the car and knocked on the door, slowing getting out of the vehicle myself, though not going any further than a few steps. The door opened, revealing a man who looked oddly familiar.

He was tall and built, skin slightly darker than mine—tanned or natural, it was hard to tell—his face crowned with short-cropped light brown hair. Something told me I knew who he was, but I just couldn't place it.

"Seth? What are you doing here? Is everything all right?" he asked, when an incredibly dark brown furred dog, which I recognized to be a Bernese Mountain dog, ran from behind the man and lunged toward Seth.

"I'm fine, Uncle Ren," Seth assured as he pet the dog. "Hey, Dopey."

I raised an eyebrow at the name, but couldn't help the small smile that tugged on the corner of my lips... that is, until the dog's head snapped in my direction and lunged toward me, knocking me to the ground in the process as he eagerly aimed his tongue toward my face, placing sloppy kisses all over it.

"No, please, not the face." I groaned. "If you wanted a kiss, you could've at least gone for the hand," I said as I pushed the dog away from my face to pet him when he nudged my hand.

"Who's this?" I heard the man asked.

"Just someone trying to give him a ride home," I uttered quickly, dismissively, glancing over my shoulder at the car, biting my lip as I fought the urge to make a run for it.

"She's someone very special, Uncle Ren."

Uncle Ren? What kind of name is that?

"Oh... I see." This 'Uncle Ren' seemed rather puzzled.

"Well, I brought you home, now I'm gonna go!" I said, spinning on my heels, ready to leave, but was stopped by Seth calling me back and the dog snagging the hem of my shirt between his teeth as he pulled me back.
I groaned and turned around. "What?" I snapped.

Seth rolled his eyes. "I didn't come to you just so you can bring me home, you know."

"I know," I said with an eye roll. "But you are having an oh, so beautiful family moment in which I shouldn't intrude, so I'll just be going, bye!"

I turned toward the car once more, but, this time, I was stopped by a large hand on my shoulder, which sent slight shivers down my spine. I wasn't so sure if I wanted to turn or not.

"Who are you?" the deep voice asked, barely above a whisper, as if the man was afraid of what my response would be.

I sighed and turned back around, my eyes boring into a familiar pair of lunara colored eyes. Taking a deep breath I plastered a fake smile on my face and held my hand out. "Hi! My name is Delilah Haw — Dawn."

As if on cue, the second I finished introducing myself, a crash was heard from the inside of the house as the man stared at me with wide eyes, mouth dropped open.

"You know, a bee can fly into your mouth, then sting you and die in your mouth, right?" I said, feeling slightly uncomfortable.

"You're alive?" he whispered in shock.

I gave him a blank look and shrugged. "I don't know, you tell me. Your hand is on my shoulder, I'm blinking, breathing and speaking to you right now, so am I?"

The next thing that happened caught me by surprise like when Seth had held my hand earlier. This man hugged me. The embrace was full of jumbled up feelings, though, in all honesty, all I could do was awkwardly pat him on the back. I mean, I'm being hugged by a stranger.

"Hey... you okay there, big guy?" I asked. My only response was a happy grin from Seth as he joined in the embrace, Dopey slobber all over my hand and the man sniffling in my hair.

"Okay, no, this is just too much," I said, shaking them off and stepping as far away from them as I could. "It's not fair that after basically my whole... hellish life, people whom I've never met before just walk up to me and claim to be my family. I don't care if you look as if you could be my fraternal twin or you look like you could be my uncle, you just can't do that. Seriously, people! What is wrong with you?!"

I hadn't noticed I started hyperventilating until the man placed a hand on my shoulder again, only for me to jerk away.

"Delilah..."

"No! Who even are you?" I demanded, staring the man down.

He sighed and gave me a hesitant look. "My name Daren Dawn Harrison. I'm your uncle."

I stared. That was all I could do. What did they expect me to do? To believe... I have believed I was alone for most of my life. I had people I cared about, yes, even though I denied it, but that was it. I thought I no longer had a family.

I blinked a few times, never moving my gaze from him, before I spoke.
"What do you want me to say?" My voice was unexpectedly groggy. "What do you expect to get from telling me... this?"

He stared at me, and the look on his face was enough to let me know that he did not know the answer to that either.

Jaw clenched, I looked over at Seth, who stared at me for a moment, a small frown on his face, before looking down at his feet.

This whole ordeal was supposed to make me go on a rampage— I was ready to go on a rampage, but I didn't. I kept my feet grounded and sucked it up.

I had to.

I needed to.

Sure, it'd be normal to freak out, and even though I kind of did— I'm just not normal. And, honestly, I'd rather overlook the whole me being kept in the dark about the fact that I still had family alive and accept them into my life than spend the rest of it alone because, let's face it, my dad— Kenton— is only human. He'll pass away sooner or later, if not because of me, then of old age, and I'd be left alone again.

Unclenching my jaw, then swallowing hard, I nodded back toward the road. "C'mon... bro. We've got school tomorrow."

He looked up at me and grinned, running over to me, throwing his arms around me.

I had never felt as awkward and uncomfortable as I felt now, but I managed to muster up enough courage to wrap my arms around the small boy and return the embrace.

Once we finally pulled away, I turned back Dar— Uncle Daren and nodded. "I'll try to make some time throughout the weekend to come and see you so we can... er... discuss what we've missed out on each other."

He gave me a small smile and nodded. Then, with that, I took Seth, brought us back to Hogwarts and called it a night because, frankly, I deserved it.
The Boggart in the wardrobe

Seth.

My brother.

It felt strange to call him that, and slightly painful, especially since Brady, but I couldn't just shrug him away— he had taken it upon him to glue himself to me every time he got the chance. Whether it was outside of classes, in the dining hall— he'd even sneak into my dorm and pull the stupid puppy dog eye stunt on me to convince me to spend some quality time with him.

Daren— Uncle Daren.

Turns out I had to make some time throughout the week instead of the weekend to see him. It was strange to be around him too. And awkward. I'd never actually had an uncle to call... well, Uncle. Actually, when I did— believed I did while living with Cynthia whom I thought was my mother at the time— I never called them so. I'd call them by a childish nickname or by their name, but I'd never called anyone aunt or uncle. Ever. It was so strange that I simply opted to call him by his first name; thank the goddess of the moon that he was okay with that.

It was now Thursday and Malfoy didn't reappear in classes until late in the morning, when the Slytherins and Gryffindors were halfway through double Potions. I had almost forgot about him being injured, what with the whole family reunion, until he swaggered into the dungeon, his right arm covered in bandages and bound up in a sling, acting, in Harry's opinion, as though he were the heroic survivor of some dreadful battle. I just had to laugh for felt like the first time in a long time when he told me that. What Harry had said made me suddenly think of that fake evil hero in that Mr. Incredible movie I remember seeing once back at Miss Kathie's orphanage. What was the dude's name again? Cinder? Syndrone? Anyway... it was something along those lines, I'd have to ask Seth later, he's probably seen it.

"How is it, Draco?" simpered Pansy Parkinson. "Does it hurt much?"

"Yeah," said Malfoy, putting on a brave sort of grimace. But Harry saw him wink at Crabbe and Goyle when Pansy had looked away, and he nudged me and Ron when pale face did so. I couldn't help but laugh, silently, this time shocking people with the news that I actually can laugh. That caught Pansy's attention, making her turn to look at me with curiosity instead of repulsion or disgust, which surprised me.

"Settle down, settle down," said Professor Snape idly.

Harry and Ron scowled at each other and I grimaced; Snape wouldn't have said "settle down" if they'd walked in late, from what I've seen, heard and remembered so far, he'd have given them detention. But Malfoy had always been able to get away with anything in Snape's classes; Snape was head of Slytherin House, and generality favored his own students above all others.

We were making a new potion today, a Shrinking Solution. Malfoy set up his cauldron right next to Harry, Ron and I so that we were preparing their ingredients on the same table. I couldn't stop myself from growling lowly at the fact that he had enough nerve to come here.

"Sir," Malfoy called, "Sir, I'll need help cutting up these daisy roots, because of my arm—"

"Dawn, cut up Malfoy's roots for him," said Snape without looking up.
"Do what, now?" I asked, looking at Snape in disbelief. I went brick red.

"There's nothing wrong with your arm," Ron hissed at Malfoy.

Malfoy smirked from across the table and I wanted to punch him so badly. It would be easy, he is in front of me after all...

I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself as best as I could—I have a little brother who looks up to me for some reason I don't know; I need to be a good sister—person—a good role model if I don't want him admiring me for nothing.

"Dawn, you heard Professor Snape; cut up these roots for me, sweetheart," he told me with a smug smile on his rotten little face.

The blood left my face.

Oh, screw being a good person!

I was about to lunge towards him, grab his head and bang it against the table, but instantly started to calm down the moment I felt the warm hand squeeze my own reassuringly. My breathing slowly started to go back to normal.

"Hey, ignore him. Do what Snape said to do, but don't pay attention to Malfoy. You told me yourself, 'he's not worth it'," Harry whispered in my ear, kissing my cheek in the process to calm me down. Right after he did, I turned to him and saw him blushing, which made me smile softly. My smile grew even into a smirk when I turned back to Malfoy and saw annoyance written all over his face, but that smirk instantly fell the second I remembered what I was meant to do.

Slipping my hand from Harry's, I groaned loudly, stormed around the table, stood beside pale face and angrily seized his knife, pulled Malfoy's roots toward me, and began to chop them roughly, so that they were all different sizes.

"Delilah," Malfoy complained, "why are you mutilating my roots?"

"Because, unfortunately, I can't chop your head off," I muttered, causing Harry and Ron to snicker at my comment. Snape approached our table, stared down his hooked nose at the roots, then gave Ron an unpleasant smile from beneath his long, greasy black hair.

"Change roots with Malfoy, Weasley."

"But, sir—" Ron had spent the last quarter of an hour carefully shredding his own roots into exactly equal pieces.

"Now," said Snape in his most dangerous voice. I sighed, shook my head at Ron, went to grab my own roots and started cutting them correctly before shoving my now beautifully cut roots to Snow White, taking the knife again and resuming to cut the previous ones.

"And, sir, I'll need this shrivelfig skinned," said Malfoy, his voice full of malicious laughter. I bit down my tongue, to stop myself from insulting him, and tightened my grip around the knife I was holding.

"Potter, you can skin Malfoy's shrivelfig," said Snape, giving Harry the look of loathing he always reserved just for him. Harry took Malfoy's shrivelfig as I began trying to repair the damage to the roots I now had to use. Harry skinned the shrivelfig as fast as he could and flung it back across the table at Malfoy without speaking. Malfoy was smirking more broadly than ever.
"Seen your pal Hagrid lately?" he asked them quietly.

"None of your business," said Ron jerkily, without looking up.

"I'm afraid he won't be a teacher much longer," said Malfoy in a tone of mock sorrow. "Father's not very happy about my injury—"

I practically threw the knife down onto the table, making it clatter disturbingly loud.

"Keep talking, Malfoy, and I'll give you a real injury," I muttered deadly low before walking around the table to sit back down beside Harry.

"— he's complained to the school governors. And to the Ministry of Magic. Father's got a lot of influence, you know. And a lasting injury like this—" he gave a huge, fake sigh, "—who knows if my arm'll ever be the same again?"

"So that's why you're putting it on," said Harry, accidentally beheading a dead caterpillar because his hand was shaking in anger. "To try to get Hagrid fired."

"Well," said Malfoy, lowering his voice to a whisper, "partly, Potter. But there are other benefits too. Weasley, slice my caterpillars for me."

"Slice it yourself, pale face!" I hissed angrily, making him step backward.

Bringing my attention back to my potion, I noticed that a few cauldrons away, Neville was in trouble. From what I've heard, Neville regularly went to pieces in Potions lessons; it was his worst subject, and his great fear of Professor Snape made things ten times worse. His potion, which was supposed to be a bright, acid green, had turned—

"Orange, Longbottom," said Snape, ladling some up and allowing to splash back into the cauldron, so that everyone could see. "Orange. Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Didn't you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one tat spleen was needed? Didn't I state plainly that a dash of leech juice would suffice? What do I have to do to make you understand, Longbottom?"

Neville was pink and trembling. He looked as though he was on the verge of tears.

"Please, sir," said Hermione, "please, I could help Neville put it right—"

"I don't remember asking you to show off, Miss Granger," said Snape coldly, and Hermione went as pink as Neville. "Longbottom, at the end of this lesson we will feed a few drops of this potion to your toad and see what happens. Perhaps that will encourage you to do it properly."

Snape moved away, leaving Neville breathless with fear. "Help me!" he moaned to Hermione. As she smiled an apologetic smile at him, I started honestly feeling sorry for him, so I thought a nice hand gesture would be good and make me feel better today. Concentrating on Neville's cauldron, I discreetly lifted my right hand and pointed my index at it.

"Puer in tribulatione, auxiliis indiget. Ut tandem potionem eius et... cum hoc fit alica," (This boy is in trouble, he needs help. Make his potion end up great... with this made up spell) I whispered, and just as I did, the kid's potion turned the bright, acid green it was originally supposed to be.

Satisfied, I turned back to resuming my potion making but stopped as I felt a few pairs of eyes on me. Eagerly, I looked up but instantly regretted it. Apparently, I wasn't as discreet as I thought I'd be. Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Neville were staring at me with shock clearly clouding their childish faces.
Neville was the first to gain back his composure before mouthing a quick 'Thank you' at me. I nodded before returning to my potion. I could feel my body automatically tense up as I was pretty sure my three friends were still staring at me. Swallowing hard, I finished my potion, poured it into a jar and quickly started writing down a report of my doing.

"Did you just seriously do what I think I saw you do?" Harry whispered at me in shock.

I narrowed my eyes, my lips curling down into a frown. "What exactly do you think you saw me do?" I whispered back, tightened my grip on my quill.

Ron rushed over to my other side with a distracted expression on his face, making it seem as if he was just looking for some missing ingredients. "Hand magic!" he whispered-yelled in my ear.

"Jesus, Ron! I'm right here," I hissed, rubbing my ear at the sudden trotting pain infiltrated into it.

"Answer!" he pressured.

I sighed in irritation. "I'll tell you later," I murmured low enough for only them to hear before grabbing my work and taking it to the oh, so gentle— not— Dracula number two... or senior.

"Here, Professor. I'm done," I told him in a calm voice.

He looked down at me with his usual cold expression, but something about it was off. I've seen the way he looks at some people— everyone— and the look he was giving me right now was somewhat softer.

I blinked a few times to make sure if it was only my imagination, but it was not. His expression was calm and... soft, and if I didn't know him and met him this way, I'm sure I would've probably thought of him as a good man. Soon, I was brought out of my thoughts when he spoke.

"Very well, Miss Dawn. If you are sure to be done with your assignment, you may be seated. And if you wish to help others, you may do as you please, just do not be of any disturbance," he replied, leaving me dumbstruck as his voice held no hint of his usual sneers.

His voice was calm, somewhat stern, but soft and... soothing? Okay, now I'm confused. I thought he hated everyone. Watching him curiously, I nodded before heading back to my seat slightly confused by his newfound tone. I never thought he was capable to actually be calm or soft. Shaking my head, I turned to Ron and Harry and helped them continue their potions, completely ignoring Malfoy.

"Hey, Harry," said Seamus Finnigan, leaning over to borrow Harry's brass scales, "have you heard? Daily Prophet this morning— they reckon Sirius Black's been sighted."

"Where?" said Harry and Ron quickly. On the other side of the table, Malfoy looked up, listening closely.

"Not too far from here," said Seamus, who looked excited. "It was a Muggle who saw him. 'Course, she didn't really understand. The Muggles think he's just an ordinary criminal, don't they? So she phoned the telephone hot line. By the time the Ministry of Magic got there, he was gone."

"Not too far from here..." Ron repeated, looking at me before we both turned to look significantly at Harry. We turned again around and saw Malfoy watching closely. "What, Malfoy? Need something else skinned?"

But Malfoy's eyes were shining malevolently, and they were fixed Harry. He leaned across the table. "Black single-handed, Potter?"
We all glared at ice man as he nonchalantly went on. "Thinking of trying to catch—"

"Yeah, that's right," said Harry offhandedly.

Malfoy's thin mouth was curving in a mean smile. "Of course, if it was me," he said quietly, "I'd have done something before now. I wouldn't be staying in school like a good boy, I'd be out there looking for him."

"What are you talking about, Malfoy?" said Ron roughly.

"Don't you know, Potter?" breathed Malfoy, his pate eyes narrowed.

"Know what?"

Malfoy let out a low, sneering laugh. "Maybe you'd rather not risk your neck," he said. "Want to leave it to the dementors, do you? But if it was me, I'd want revenge. I'd hunt him down myself."

"What are you talking about?" said Harry angrily.

"Nothing. Don't listen to him, Harry. He's making it up," I warned, grabbing a hold of his arm as Hermione joined us. "He's trying to make you do something stupid..." I continued, trailing off.

Just then, the end of the lesson came in sight, and Snape strode over to Neville, who was cowering by his cauldron somewhat less afraid since I had come to his aid earlier.

"Everyone gather 'round," said Snape, his black eyes glittering, and watch what happens to Longbottom's toad. If he has managed to produce a Shrinking Solution, it will shrink to a tadpole. If, as I don't doubt, he has done it wrong, his toad is likely to be poisoned."

The Gryffindors watched fearfully. The Slytherins looked excited. Snape picked up Trevor the toad in his left hand and dipped a small spoon into Neville's potion, which was now green. He trickled a few drops down Trevor's throat. There was a moment of hushed silence, in which Trevor gulped; then there was a small pop, and Trevor the tadpole was wriggling in Snape's palm. The Gryffindors burst into applause. Snape, looking sour, pulled a small bottle from the pocket of his robe, poured a few drops on top of Trevor, and he reappeared suddenly, fully grown. Neville sighed in relief, and I grinned at him once he caught me looking. He instantly smiled back at me, brightly.

"Five points from Gryffindor," said Snape, which wiped the smiles from every face. "I told you not to help him, Miss Granger. Class—"

"She didn't," I blurted out. Both Slytherins and Gryffindors turned to look at me. "I was watching them the whole time. Hermione didn't speak a word to Neville after your warning," I partly lied, smoothly, in a very calm voice. I could see everyone believed me except for my four witnesses, but other than that, Snape seemed to buy it so that's okay.

Snape's eyes tightened as he pursed his lips. "Very well, five points to Gryffindor for Longbottom's success. Class dismissed."

Harry, Ron, Hermione and I climbed the steps to the entrance hall. Harry was still thinking about what Malfoy had said, while Ron was seething about Snape.

"Five points from Gryffindor because the potion was all right! You could've said Neville did it all by himself!"

"Ron, in case you forgot, we ended up gaining the five points," I pointed out.
"Yeah, thanks to your brilliant lie! How do you lie so smoothly? And how did you get the old snake not to hiss back at you?" I shrugged.

"It is good we got the points, but still, Hermione should've lied. Why didn't you lie?" Ron asked Hermione. She didn't answer. Ron looked around.

"Where is she?"

I gave him a confused look before turning around the same time Harry did. We were at the top of the steps now, watching the rest of the class pass us, heading for the Great Hall and lunch.

"She was right behind us," said Ron, frowning.

Malfoy passed us, walking between Crabbe and Goyle. He smirked at Harry, smiled at me and disappeared.

"Well, that's uncomfortable," I muttered under my breath.

"There she is," said Harry.

Hermione was panting slightly, hurrying up the stairs; one hand clutched her bag, the other seemed to be tucking something down the front of her robes.

"How did you do that?" said Ron.

"What?" said Hermione, joining us.

"One minute you were right behind us, the next moment, you were back at the bottom of the stairs again."

"What?" Hermione looked slightly confused. "Oh— I had to go back for something. Oh no—"

A seam had split on Hermione's bag. I wasn't surprised and from the looks of it, neither were Harry and Ron; we could see that it was crammed with at least a dozen large and heavy books. I had a feeling her rushing had to do with a certain little Time-Turner...

"Why are you carrying all these around with you?" Ron asked her.

"You know how many subjects I'm taking," said Hermione breathlessly. "Couldn't hold these for me, could you?"

"But—" Ron was turning over the books she had handed him, looking at the covers. "You haven't got any of these subjects today. It's only Defense Against the Dark Arts this afternoon."

"Oh yes," said Hermione vaguely, but she packed all the books back into her bag just the same. "I hope there's something good for lunch, I'm starving," she added, and she marched off toward the Great Hall.

"D'you get the feeling Hermione's not telling us something?" Ron asked Harry.

Harry sighed. "She's not the only one," he muttered, looking at me and I quickly looked away, quickening my pace.

Professor Lupin wasn't there when we arrived at his first Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson. We all sat down, took out our books, quills, and parchment, and were talking when he finally entered the room. Lupin smiled vaguely and placed his tatty old briefcase on the teacher's desk. He was as
shabby as ever but looked healthier than he had on the train, as though he had had a few square meals.

"Good afternoon," he said. "Would you please put all your books back in your bags. Today's will be a practical lesson. You will need only your wands."

A few curious looks were exchanged as the class put away their books. They had never had a practical Defense Against the Dark Arts before unless you counted the memorable class last year when their old teacher had brought a cage full of pixies to class and set them loose.

"Right then," said Professor Lupin, when everyone was ready. "If you'd follow me."

Puzzled but interested, the class got to its feet and followed Professor Lupin out of the classroom. He led us along the deserted corridor and around a corner, where the first thing we saw was Peeves the Poltergeist, who was floating upside down in midair and stuffing the nearest keyhole with chewing gum. Peeves didn't look up until Professor Lupin was two feet away; then he wiggled his curly-toed feet and broke into song.

"Loony, loopy Lupin," Peeves sang. "Loony, loopy Lupin, loony, loopy Lupin—"

Rude and unmanageable as he almost always was, Peeves usually showed some respect toward the teachers. Everyone looked quickly at Professor Lupin to see how he would take this; to their surprise, he was still smiling.

"I'd take that gum out of the keyhole if I were you, Peeves," he said pleasantly. "Mr. Filch won't be able to get into his brooms." Filch was the Hogwarts caretaker, a bad-tempered, failed wizard who waged a constant war against the students and, indeed, Peeves. However, Peeves paid no attention to Professor Lupin's words, except to blow a loud wet raspberry. Professor Lupin gave a small sigh and took out his wand.

"This is a useful little spell," he told us over his shoulder. "Please watch closely."

He raised the wand to shoulder height, said, "Waddiwasi!" and pointed it at Peeves. With the force of a bullet, the wad of chewing gum shot out of the keyhole and straight down Peeves's left nostril; he whirled upright and zoomed away, cursing.

"Cool, sir!" said Dean Thomas in amazement.

"Thank you, Dean," said Professor Lupin, putting his wand away again. "Shall we proceed?"

We set off again, the class looking at shabby Professor Lupin with increased respect. He led them down a second corridor and stopped, right outside the staffroom door.

"Inside, please," said Professor Lupin, opening it and standing back.

The staffroom, a long, paneled room full of old, mismatched chairs, was empty except for one teacher. Professor Snape was sitting in a low armchair, and he looked around as the class filed in. His eyes were glittering and there was a nasty sneer playing around his mouth.

As Professor Lupin came in and made to close the door behind him, Snape said, "Leave it open, Lupin. I'd rather not witness this."

He got to his feet and strode past the class, his black robes billowing behind him. At the doorway, he turned on his heel and said, "Possibly no one's warned you, Lupin, but this class contains Neville Longbottom. I would advise you not to entrust him with anything difficult. Not unless Miss Granger
is hissing instructions in his ear."

Neville went scarlet. I noticed Harry glare at Snape; it was bad enough that he bullied Neville in his own classes, let alone doing it in front of other teachers. Professor Lupin had raised his eyebrows.

"I was hoping that Neville would assist me with the first stage of the operation," he said, "and I am sure he will perform it admirably."

Neville's face went, if possible, even redder. Snape's lip curled, but he left, shutting the door with a snap.

"Now, then," said Professor Lupin, beckoning the class toward the end of the room, where there was nothing but an old wardrobe where the teachers kept their spare robes. As Professor Lupin went to stand next to it, the wardrobe gave a sudden wobble, banging off the wall.

"Nothing to worry about," said Professor Lupin calmly because a few people had jumped backward in alarm. "There's a boggart in there." Most people seemed to feel that this was something to worry about.

Neville gave Professor Lupin a look of pure terror, and Seamus Finnigan eyed the now rattling doorknob apprehensively.

"Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces," said Professor Lupin. "Wardrobes, the gap beneath beds, the cupboards under sinks—I've even met one that had lodged itself in a grandfather clock. This one moved in yesterday afternoon, and I asked the headmaster if the staff would leave it to give my third years some practice. So, the first question we must ask ourselves is, what is a boggart?"

Hermione put up her hand.

"It's a shape-shifter," she said. I tensed up. "It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most." I, then, narrowed my eyes in curiosity. My first original form is a wolf... but maybe I can morph into something else other than my soul animals. Never thought of it, though I should try it sometime.

"Couldn't have put it better myself," said Professor Lupin, and Hermione glowed. "So the boggart sitting in the darkness within has not yet assumed a form. He does not yet know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door. Nobody knows what a boggart looks like when he is alone, but when I let him out, he will immediately become whatever each of us most fears."

"This means," said Professor Lupin, choosing to ignore Neville's 'mall sputter of terror, "that we have a huge advantage over the boggart before we begin. Have you spotted it, Harry?"

Trying to answer a question with Hermione next to him, bobbing up and down on the balls of her feet with her hand in the air, was very off-putting, but Harry had a go.

"Er— because there are so many of us, it won't know what shape it should be?"

"Precisely," said Professor Lupin, and Hermione put her hand down, looking a little disappointed. "It's always best to have company when you're dealing with a boggart. He becomes confused. Which should he become, a headless corpse or a flesh-eating slug? I once saw a boggart make that very mistake—tried to frighten two people at once and turned himself into half a slug. Not remotely frightening."

The charm that repels a boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find
"We will practice the charm without wands first. After me, please... Riddikulus!"

"Riddikulus!" said the class together.

"This class is ridiculous," I heard Malfoy mutter, and I'm pretty sure the professor heard him too, though he chose to ignore the little brat.

"Good," said Professor Lupin. "Very good. But that was the easy part, I'm afraid. You see, the word alone is not enough. And this is where you come in, Neville."

The wardrobe shook again, though not as much as Neville, who walked forward as though he were heading for the gallows.

"Right, Neville," said Professor Lupin. "First things first: what would you say is the thing that frightens you most in the world?" Neville's lips moved, but no noise came out. "Didn't catch that, Neville, sorry," said Professor Lupin cheerfully.

Neville looked around rather wildly, as though begging someone to help him, then said, in barely more than a whisper, "Professor Snape." Nearly everyone laughed. Even Neville grinned apologetically. Professor Lupin, however, looked thoughtful.

"Professor Snape... hmmm... Neville, I believe you live with your grandmother?"

"Er— yes," said Neville nervously. "But— I don't want the boggart to turn into her either."

"No, no, you misunderstand me," said Professor Lupin, now smiling. "I wonder, could you tell us what sort of clothes your grandmother usually wears?"

Neville looked startled, but said, "Well... always the same hat. A tall one with a stuffed vulture on top. And a long dress... green, normally... and sometimes a fox-fur scarf."

"And a handbag?" prompted Professor Lupin.

"A big red one," said Neville.

"Right then," said Professor Lupin. "Can you picture those clothes very clearly, Neville? Can you see them in your mind's eye?"

"Yes," said Neville uncertainty, plainly wondering what was coming next.

"When the boggart bursts out of this wardrobe, Neville, and sees you, it will assume the form of Professor Snape," said Lupin. "And you will raise your wand— thus— and cry 'Riddikulus'— and concentrate hard on your grandmother's clothes. If all goes well, Professor Boggart Snape will be forced into that vulture-topped hat, and that green dress, with that big red handbag."

There was a great shout of laughter. The wardrobe wobbled more violently.

"If Neville is successful, the boggart is likely to shift his attention to each of us in turn," said Professor Lupin. "I would like all of you to take a moment now to think of the thing that scares you most, and imagine how you might force it to look comical...."

"Neville, we're going to back away," said Professor Lupin. "Let you have a clear field, all right? I'll call the next person forward... Everyone back, now, so Neville can get a clear shot—"
We all retreated, backed against the walls, leaving Neville alone beside the wardrobe. He looked pale and frightened, but he had pushed up the sleeves of his robes and was holding his wand ready.

"On the count of three, Neville," said Professor Lupin, who was pointing his own wand at the handle of the wardrobe. "One two— three— now!"

A jet of sparks shot from the end of Professor Lupin's wand and hit the doorknob. The wardrobe burst open. Hook-nosed and menacing, Professor Snape stepped out, his eyes flashing at Neville. Neville backed away, his wand up, mouthing wordlessly. Snape was bearing down upon him, reaching inside his robes.

"R-r-riddikulus!" squeaked Neville.

There was a noise like a whip crack. Snape stumbled; he was wearing a long, lace-trimmed dress and a towering hat topped with a moth-eaten vulture, and he was swinging a huge crimson handbag.

There was a roar of laughter; the boggart paused, confused, and Professor Lupin shouted, "Parvati! Forward!"

Parvati walked forward, her face set. Snape rounded on her. There was another crack, and where he had stood was a bloodstained, bandaged mummy; its sightless face was turned to Parvati and it began to walk toward her very slowly, dragging its feet, its stiff arms rising—

"Riddikulus!" cried Parvati.

A bandage unraveled at the mummy's feet; it became entangled, fell face forward, and its head rolled off.

"Seamus!" roared Professor Lupin.

Seamus darted past Parvati.

Crack! Where the mummy had been was a woman with floor-length black hair and a skeletal, green-tinged face— a banshee. She opened her mouth wide and an unearthly sound filled the room, a long, wailing shriek that made Goosebumps rise all over my body—

"Riddikulus!" shouted Seamus.

The banshee made a rasping noise and clutched her throat; her voice was gone.

Crack! The banshee turned into a rat, which chased its tail in a circle, then— crack!- became a rattlesnake, which slithered and writhed before— crack!— becoming a single, bloody eyeball.

"It's confused!" shouted Lupin. "We're getting there! Dean!"

Dean hurried forward.

Crack! The eyeball became a severed hand, which flipped over and began to creep along the floor like a crab.

"Riddikulus!" yelled Dean.

There was a snap, and the hand was trapped in a mousetrap.

"Excellent! Ron, you next!"
Ron leaped forward.

Crack! Quite a few people screamed. A giant spider, six feet tall and covered in hair, was advancing on Ron, clicking its pincers menacingly. For a moment, I think Ron had frozen. Then—

"Riddikulus!" bellowed Ron, and the spider's legs vanished; it rolled over and over; Lavender Brown squealed and ran out of its way and it came to a halt at Harry's feet. He raised his wand, ready, but—

"Here!" shouted Professor Lupin suddenly, hurrying forward. Crack!

The legless spider had vanished. For a second, everyone looked wildly around to see where it was. Then they saw a silvery-white orb hanging in the air in front of Lupin, who said, "Riddikulus!" almost lazily.

Crack!

"Forward, Neville, and finish him off!" said Lupin as the boggart landed on the floor like a cockroach. Crack! Snape was back. This time Neville charged forward looking determined.

"Riddikulus!" he shouted, and they had a split second's view of Snape in his lacy dress before Neville let out a great "Ha!" of laughter, and the boggart exploded, burst into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone.

"Perfect! Deli, your turn!" cried Professor Lupin as the class broke into applause, again. I got up from my seat and walked quietly to the spot the previous participants had stood as the boggart reformed itself to its original form. It just stared at me and the room instantly went quiet.

I thought... What scares me most in the world?

My first thought was Lord Voldemort— a Voldemort returned to full strength. But now that I think of it, I don't actually know the guy enough to fear him. I didn't think of the evil witch who was going to kill me when I was a child, because the truth is, I was simply not scared of her. Sure, most people would fear her, but I just disliked her very much. My second thought was Regium. He tortured me for a long time. He had been after me the second I was born and the moment I had officially become more than a simple hybrid. And since I wouldn't give in, he decided it would be entertaining to watch the people I love die by his hands protecting me. But that's where the obvious comes in. I'm not afraid of him. I only fear what he does to those who have their heart in the right place. I fear the fact of him killing innocent beings just for entertainment. It's sickening.

I don't fear him. I hate him.

But then, what do I really fear?

That's when it hit me. Why are people after me? Why did Bellatrix try to kill me? Wait... never mind her, she wanted to know where Harry was even if I didn't know about him then because of the memory loss. She had insisted that I did know since he and I are the same age. Almost. I'm older by a few months... Anyway... back to the matter at hand. Why did Regium want me under his wing? Under his control? What was the reason that had made Dumbledore make me stay back and wait for a while before coming to attend Hogwarts again? Why were the people I cared about the most dying?

I guess I've known the answer all along since I've always known who to blame.

Me. Myself. I.
I'm the reason everything is happening. I don't deserve to have my prayers answered by any god or
goddess that may exist because I am a monster. The monster that almost killed her own mother while
still in her womb and at birth. The monster who didn't even cry while being under the Cruciatus
Curse. The monster who sank its teeth deep in the necks of those poor wild animals and drank them
dry. I am a monster and nothing and no one can change or deny that fact. I may fear losing the
people I love, but that's only the smallest speck of humanity I have left in me. Other than that, I'm a
dangerous bloodsucking hairy monster either I like it or not.

That's what I fear.

I fear the monster I was born to be.

I fear myself...

Though I can't keep fearing myself. I can change. So far I've locked the blood thirsty and mongrel
phasing sides of me. Now, I'm back in a world filled with magic. The only thing I can mingle myself
with now, so I might as well stick to it. I don't have to be a monster anymore.

But before I had even started to plan a possible counterattack the last thing I would have expected
happened. In front of the wardrobe, where had been floating the boggart only a few seconds ago,
was standing none other than... me...

There, my reflection stood, staring at me straight in the eyes, but it was only then that I realized that it
wasn't my exact complexion.

This... me... had a look that was only too familiar to me.

If you see me now, you'd see me as a normal girl... or so I think. I originally have light brown waist-
length hair, violet orchidee eyes, dark yet pale skin— almost russet, and I'm slim yet I have my
female curves in the right places. I wouldn't say I have the perfect body, but others do think so. As
for the way I looked at the time where I had been controlled... well it was similar to how I actually
look, but very different. The time I was evil... that was the time when I actually did look perfect. But
scary and murderous...

Fire red hair, crimson red eyes, slim yet quite a curvy body that anyone would find extremely
attractive, pale skin... that was the exact replica of how I had looked several months ago when I was
under his control. I was only 'six' years old and all I wanted to do was kill, kill and kill. Who would
have thought a paternal and a brotherly mortal, would be the ones to save me from that? How did
they do it? I have no idea. But the moment I was released from his death grip upon me, I couldn't
regret my existence any less than I ever had before. I killed for him. I killed many pure and innocent
beings for Proditorem.

*Proditorem*... Latin for 'traitor'. I've known that language my whole life. How did I learn it? I have
no idea, but I can't help but think how blind and stupid I was not to realize it immediately. How blind
and stupid I was to even trust him in the first place. To believe in his lies and let him compel me.

The one who thought it was a great idea to change me.

The one who thought: "Oh, hey! Look! It's a little girl. She looks tasty but more useful. I have a great
idea! I'm going to bite her!"

Yeah, I know it sounds stupid putting it that way, but it's true. I was already a danger, but it's his fault
I became a bigger monster than I ever was before. It's his fault I killed. The pure hatred I had towards
him was what made me strong enough to confront him.
Yes. I killed him. But that's the only crime I don't regret doing. If you could even call it that. After all, his heart hadn't been beating for about three centuries already, so it didn't matter. He was already supposed to be dead.

The boggart-me was just standing there, now smirking at me as I stood in front of it, all emotion wiped completely off my face, body and soul. I could care less of what I was supposed to do. What would I gain from ridiculing my arch nemesis? My antagonist? Myself? It was already bad enough that I had to look at my once complexion, now to make people laugh at it? It would revive her inside of me even if he is no longer here. I wouldn't want to risk that.

Without another thought or word, I turned on my heels, avoiding everyone's gaze, and ran off, frustrated that that seemed to be the only thing I ever did when something bad happened. Run away. But what do you expect?

I may be a monster, strong enough to fight against its enemies and keep standing even after being severely damaged or practically killed, but my humanity still has a big impact on my personality and feelings. It still lingers within me. That side is the only side that is weak and able to love. And that side is the only one I ever have, still do, and ever will cherish for the rest of eternity...

Harry's P.O.V.

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"Perfect! Deli, your turn!" cried Professor Lupin as the class broke into applause, again. Was it just me, or did he seriously call her Deli?

This time, I made sure that all of my attention was on her and only her. I watched her every move. Alright, I get it's a bit stalker like but you can't blame me. I watched closely as she got up from her seat and walked quietly to the spot the previous participants had stood as the boggart reformed itself to its original form. It just stared at her— if that's even possible— and the room instantly went quiet. I watched as her expression kept changing as her emotions changed every few seconds. After about a minute, her facial expression no longer changed as she stared back at the boggart with narrowed eyes. It's as if she were trying to decide what she was afraid of. I couldn't help but wonder that
myself. My first thought was Lord Voldemort—a Voldemort returned to full strength. But, then again, she doesn't even remember him well enough to fear him. Knowing her, she would take a while to figure what she feared, and she wouldn't fear just anything. She would want to know what or who the threat is well enough to know if she should be scared or not.

But before I had even started to think of any other possible thing she could be afraid of, the last thing anyone would have expected happened. In front of the wardrobe, where had been floating the boggart only a few seconds ago, was standing none other than... her...

Okay, something must be wrong with my glasses.

I shivered at the thought of seeing double, then looked around, hoping no one had noticed. Many people had their eyes shut tight while others had them practically falling out of their sockets. So I guess that means it's not my glasses.

Ron kept muttering to himself in a shaky voice, "What the bloody hell is happening?" That's how I knew that I wasn't the only one in shock or freaking out.

There, her reflection stood, staring at her straight in the eyes, but it was only then that I realized that it wasn't her exact complexion.

This... her... had a look that was telling you to run. There was a huge yet slight difference between my Delilah and the one standing before her. Though despite the difference, it was still scary to watch.

If you see Delilah now, you'd see her as a normal girl... oh, who am I kidding? You'd see her as an extraordinary girl. You'd easily fall for her just like almost every guy here at Hogwarts. She originally has light brown waist-length hair, violet orchidee eyes, dark yet pale skin— almost russet, and she's slim yet she has her female curves in the right places. She always denies the fact that she has the perfect body, but everyone knows she does. As for the way the boggart-Delilah looks, it looks as though she was being controlled... well it was similar to how she actually looks, but very different. The boggart-Delilah looks evil... yet actually does look perfect. But scary and murderous...

Fire red hair, crimson red eyes, slim yet quite a curvy body that anyone would find extremely attractive, pale skin... that was the exact replica of the way Delilah would look if she was actually evil. If all she'd wanted to do was kill, kill and kill.

The boggart-Delilah was just standing there, now smirking at her as she stood in front of it, all emotion wiped completely off her face. For the first time since I've met her, Delilah seemed completely... soulless.

She seemed not to care about what she was supposed to do. What frightened me the most at the moment was the way Delilah stared at it. She looked distraught. She looked at it with hate, remorse... Then, once again, she was emotionless. She looked at her reflective boggart as if it were her... arch nemesis? Her antagonist? As if it could actually be her. Though it couldn't be. She may be able to punch someone, but I know that she would never be evil.

Before I could think of anything else, without another word she turned on her heels, avoiding everyone's gaze, and ran off, not giving anyone a chance to even say something.

"Excellent. Well done, everyone... Let me see... five points to Gryffindor for every person to tackle the boggart— ten for Neville because he did it twice... and five each to Hermione and Harry."

"But I didn't do anything," I blurted out.
"You and Hermione answered my questions correctly at the start of the class, Harry," Lupin said lightly. "Very well, everyone, an excellent lesson. Homework, kindly read the chapter on boggarts and summarize it for me... to be handed in on Monday. That will be all."

Talking excitedly, the class left the staffroom. I, however, wasn't feeling cheerful. Professor Lupin had deliberately stopped me from tackling the boggart. Why? Was it because he'd seen me collapse on the train, and thought I wasn't up to much? Had he thought I would pass out again? What about Delilah? He had deliberately let her try. But no one else seemed to have noticed anything.

"Did you see me take that banshee?" shouted Seamus.

"And the hand!" said Dean, waving his own around.

"And Snape in that hat!"

"And my mummy!"

"I wonder why Professor Lupin's frightened of crystal balls?" said Lavender thoughtfully.

"That was the best Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson we've ever had, wasn't it?" said Ron excitedly as we made our way back to the classroom to get our bags.

"He seems like a very good teacher," said Hermione approvingly. "But I wish I could have had a turn with the boggart—"

"What would it have been for you?" said Ron, sniggering. "A piece of homework that only got nine out of ten?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I don't know. But what I would like to know is what that was with Delilah. I have a feeling she won't tell us just yet. But I don't care. If she waits until next year to tell us, so be it. I'll wait as long as I have to. I just hope she does open up," Hermione said.

Hermione's right. I would wait all the time in the world for her. I just hope she will open up, as Hermione stated...

**Back to Delilah's P.O.V.**

So I ran off.

I wasn't completely in the mood for anything. All I wanted was to be alone, but I always have been. I was starting to think that maybe I should tell Harry, Ron and Hermione, soon, about me.—about Seth, which I'm sure they have been wondering who the hell he is as they have often seen him with me— because the longer I wait, the bigger the possibilities of them rejecting me are. I won't tell them tomorrow, that's for sure, but I'll tell them soon enough.

That is my newfound goal.
Flight of the Fat Lady

In no time at all, Defense Against the Dark Arts had become most people's favorite class. Only Dracula and his gang of basta— I mean, his of gang of Slytherins had anything bad to say about Professor Lupin.

"Look at the state of his robes," Malfoy would say in a loud whisper as Professor Lupin passed. "He dresses like our old house elf."

But no one else cared that Professor Lupin's robes were patched and frayed. His next few lessons were just as interesting as the first.

After boggarts, I was pretty relieved as we started to study Red Caps, nasty little goblin-like creatures that lurked wherever there had been bloodshed: in the dungeons of castles and the potholes of deserted battlefields, waiting to bludgeon those who had gotten lost. It was creepy, but it was better than the whole boggart assignment that had only gotten me more emotionless and depressed.

It seemed as though the only one who was lucky enough to face me or break through my passionless attitude was Seth. I guess the only reason it was so was because he was my brother, though that shouldn't even be why. I mean, yes, he's my sibling, but I'd only known him for a few days, whereas I've known the trio for three years now... well, almost three.

Anyhow, from Red Caps we moved on to kappas, creepy water-dwellers that looked like scaly monkeys, with webbed hands itching to strangle unwitting waders in their ponds.

From what I could see, Harry only wished he was as happy with some of his other classes. Worst of all was Potions. Snape was in a particularly vindictive mood these days, and no one was in any doubt why. The story of the boggart assuming Snape's shape, and the way that Neville had dressed it in his grandmother's clothes, had traveled through the school like wildfire. Snape didn't seem to find it funny. His eyes flashed menacingly at the very mention of Professor Lupin's name, and he was bullying Neville worse than ever.

Harry was also growing to dread the hours he spent in Professor Trelawney's stifling tower room, deciphering lopsided shapes and symbols, trying to ignore the way Professor Trelawney's enormous eyes filled with tears every time she looked at him. I wouldn't even bother offering to join him for that, basically, because every time I did, I either tensed up from the memory of my first class there, or had another damned vision including Lupin, and Sirius. Other than the crappy visions I kept to myself and Dumbledore, I wouldn't speak a word to Harry when he'd head to Trelawney's lair. I refused to believe that he was actually enjoying himself there even if he kept insisting that he hated that class and that he couldn't possibly like Professor Trelawney, even though she was treated with respect bordering on reverence by many of the class. Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown had taken to haunting Professor Trelawney's tower room at lunchtimes and always returned with annoyingly superior looks on their faces, as though they knew things the others didn't. They had also started using hushed voices whenever they spoke to Harry, as though he were on his deathbed, which was stupid because he wouldn't be as long as I'm around.

Nobody really liked Care of Magical Creatures, which, after the action-packed first class, had become extremely dull. Hagrid seemed to have lost his confidence. We were now spending lesson after lesson learning how to look after flobberworms, which had to be some of the most boring creatures in existence.

"Why would anyone bother looking after them?" said Ron, after yet another hour of poking
shredded lettuce down the flobberworms' throats.

At the start of October, however, Harry had something else to occupy him, something so enjoyable it more than made up for his unsatisfactory classes. The Quidditch season was approaching— and my birthday as well, I'd be turning fourteen— and Oliver Wood, Captain of the Gryffindor team, called a meeting on Thursday evening to discuss tactics for the new season. For once, I was actually excited about the upcoming events. I felt guilty for not taking up my old post in the team, but I pushed it aside; watching the Quidditch match and cheering Gryffindor on was, presently, enough for me; though it was kind of hard when Seth was jumping around like a bunny, pressing on the subject.

"Hey! I heard you were part of the Quidditch team since your first year!" he'd exclaimed, bouncing around me. "You were, weren't you? Weren't you?"

I'd raised my brows as I'd turn to look at him. "I wonder if one of your soul animals will be a bunny," I'd mused. That'd get him to tone the bouncing down. "Or maybe you're going to disguise yourself as one for Halloween?"

That would usually get him to fully stop bouncing, then grimace as he probably pictured it in his mind the moment I said it.

Halloween. I also couldn't wait for that event; we were going to be able to go into the villages and I just couldn't wait to finally be out and explore.

"One moment, please!" Professor McGonagall called as the class made to leave. "As you're all in my House, you should hand Hogsmeade permission forms to me before Halloween. No form, no visiting the village, so don't forget!" Neville put up his hand.

"Please, Professor, I-I think I've lost—"

"Your grandmother sent yours to me directly, Longbottom," said Professor McGonagall. "She seemed to think it was safer. Well, that's all, you may leave."

"Ask her now," Ron hissed at Harry.

"Oh, but—" Hermione began.

"Go for it, Harry," said Ron stubbornly.

Harry waited for the rest of the class to disappear, then headed nervously for Professor McGonagall's desk.

"Yes, Potter?" Harry took a deep breath.

"Professor, my aunt, and uncle— er— forgot to sign my form," he said.

Professor McGonagall looked over her square spectacles at him but didn't say anything.

"So— er d'you think it would be all right mean, will it be okay if I— if I go to Hogsmeade?"

Professor McGonagall looked down and began shuffling papers on her desk.

"I'm afraid not, Potter," she said. "You heard what I said. No form, no visiting the village. That's the rule."

"But— Professor, my aunt, and uncle— you know, they're Muggles, they don't really understand about— about Hogwarts forms and stuff," Harry said, while Ron egged him on with vigorous nods.
"If you said I could go—"

"But I don't say so," said Professor McGonagall, standing up and piling her papers neatly into a drawer. "The form clearly states that the parent or guardian must give permission." She turned to look at him, with an odd expression on her face. Was it pity? "I'm sorry, Potter, but that's my final word. You had better hurry, or you'll be late for your next lesson."

There was nothing to be done. Ron called Professor McGonagall a lot of names that greatly annoyed Hermione; Hermione assumed an "all-for-the-best" expression that made Ron even angrier, and Harry had to endure everyone in the class talking loudly and happily about what they were going to do first, once they got into Hogsmeade.

"There's always the feast," said Ron, in an effort to cheer Harry up. "You know, the Halloween feast, in the evening."

"Yeah," said Harry gloomily, "great."

Feeling guilty, I took his hand and lead him to our next class. "Hey, don't worry, I'll stay with you if you want," I proposed.

"You're staying?!" a voice exclaimed from behind us. We spun around to see whom it came from, and I groaned when I saw it was Seth. "Why are you staying?"

I shut my eyes, letting out a long sigh through my nose. "Seth, not now..."

He pouted. "Why are you staying?" he repeated.

"Seth, if you let this go now, I promise I'll try to find the time to... find a way that will get you to finally phase," I said slowly, as if talking to a three-year-old, which, honestly, felt so, often, when I spoke to him. He was a very persistent boy and it took something he liked greatly to get him to leave me alone.

His pout faded into a cheesy grin as he eagerly nodded. "Okay! See you later!" He smiled at my friends before smiling at me one last time, then ran off with some of his own friends.

I turned back to the trio and groaned at their confused faces. "Need to know basis," I said before Ron could even say anything. I turned my attention back to Harry and waited.

His face, despite the confusion on what had just happened, had lit up at my earlier proposition, but he was still hesitant. "Are you sure? Are you sure you don't prefer going with them?" he asked, hesitantly. "Or... with him?" He nodded his head in the direction Seth had run off.

"I'm sure... unless you want me to go wi—"

"No!" he shouted, making me raise an eyebrow at him. He cleared his throat nervously and blushed. "I mean, no. Please. I'd like it if we'd spend some time here together," he said, shyly looking down.

Beaming at him, I grabbed his hand and gently squeezed it, making him blush harder. "I'm glad you appreciate my company. Now come on or we'll be late," I said before dragging him along.

I was told the Halloween feast would actually be pretty good... and, well, I was hoping it would be since the last two and only ones I spent didn't really end well. I mean, my first Halloween at Hogwarts, my friends and I had to fight a troll. Last Halloween, there were the many attacks from the basilisk. Before that, I never really had a Halloween; no one at the orphanage made a big deal about it, and before that... well, I didn't even know what Halloween was when I was at the Adams.
I was sad that I wouldn't get to go to Hogsmeade with the others, but Harry's my best friend and I promised him I would stay with him, so it didn't really matter much to me if I didn't go with them.

They had tried to convince me otherwise, even Seth whom I knew simply wanted to spend some more quality time with me as siblings, but I gently let them down telling them it'd be better if I stayed at least this once. I just hope that next time they go, Harry will be able to go too so I would be able to explore as well. I was feeling pretty bad about him not being able to go because nothing anyone said made him feel any better about being left behind. Dean Thomas, who was good with a quill, had offered to forge Uncle Vernon's signature on the form, but as Harry had already told Professor McGonagall he hadn't had it signed, that was no good. Ron halfheartedly suggested the Invisibility Cloak, but Hermione stamped on that one, reminding Ron what Dumbledore had told them about the dementors being able to see through them. Percy had what were possibly the least helpful words of comfort.

On Halloween morning, I awoke with the rest and went down to breakfast, feeling thoroughly depressed about the whole boggart thing which I hadn't managed to get out of my head, though I was doing my best to act normally.

"We'll bring you lots of sweets back from Honeydukes," said Hermione, looking desperately sorry for Harry. I chuckled, shaking my head.

"Yeah, loads," said Ron. He and Hermione had finally forgotten their squabble about Crookshanks in the face of Harry's difficulties.

"Don't worry about me," said Harry, in what he hoped was an offhand voice. But then, for some reason, his face lit up. "Delilah is staying here with me, so I'll be fine. I'll see you at the feast. Have a good time."

We accompanied them to the entrance hall, where Filch, the caretaker, was standing inside the front doors, checking off names against a long list, peering suspiciously into every face, and making sure that no one was sneaking out who shouldn't be going.

Seth ran over to me and threw his arms around me. I looked around, slightly uncomfortable, even more when I noticed people watching. I lifted my hand and awkwardly patted my brother's back.

"Hey now, this ain't the last time you'll be seeing me, it's just a field trip," I said.

He pulled away but didn't remove his arms from around me. "I know, but I... it's just that I wanted to go with you. But I get it, Harry's your Cliens and your best friend. You want to stay here with him to make sure he stays safe."

I blinked, surprised by his answer. "How do you know about him being my Cliens?"

"I told you the book wasn't about fairy tales," he replied, a small grin on his face.

I groaned, pulling myself away from his grasp. "Can you cut it with the book crap?" I snapped, though mentally slapped myself. I didn't mean to sound too harsh, but he had seriously been annoying about the stupid book. I hadn't looked into it, but that's because, if it actually talks about the future... or whatever, well, I'd rather not know; I've had enough with the visions.

Seth grinned cheekily. "You don't have to be hostile, I know you like me. I can tell. You're just pushing me away 'cause I somehow make you feel guilty. It's okay — I know why you try to avoid the whole quality time thing. You'd rather I forget about you and move on with my life because you think you're not good enough. You wanted to give me my best chance."
I paused, feeling... anguished. "How do you know that?"

His grin turned into a small smile as he shrugged. "We're siblings, not only by blood, but also by soul. I get you... I know because I want to. You get me too, you just try not to because you're still pained about the whole not knowing."

I looked at him for a moment, then sighed, placing a hand on his head. "Goddess.... you are so lucky I don't..." I sighed again. "I'd go with you..."

He fully grinned this time. "I know." He hugged me again, and, this time, I fully returned the gesture. His grin was still there when he pulled back. "I'll bring you some souvenirs."

I rolled my eyes at him, and gently and playfully pushed him away. "You're going to Hogsmeade, not Japan, kid."

He giggled. "I know, but I'll still bring you something." He kissed my cheek, then ran off with his friends. I rolled my eyes again and shook my head as I watched his retreating form. I swear, this kid is like a waterproof flame.

"Staying here, Potter?" shouted Malfoy, who was standing in line with Crabbe and Goyle. "Scared of passing the dementors?"

"Shut it, pale face," I snarled, grabbing Harry's hand and dragging him up the marble staircase, through the deserted corridors, and back to Gryffindor Tower.

"Password?" said the Fat Lady, jerking out of a doze.

"Fortuna Major," Harry answered in a more cheerful tone.

The portrait swung open and we climbed through the hole into the common room. It was full of chattering first and second years, and a few older students, who had obviously visited Hogsmeade so often the novelty had worn off.

"Harry! Harry! Hi, Harry!"

Some weird kid who seemed younger than us, maybe a year— Seth's year— came running to stand right in front of us, barely leaving an inch for us to breathe. From the looks of it, he seemed to be a Harry Potter fan. I couldn't help but chuckle at that. It was quite cute to watch.

"Aren't you going to Hogs—" the kid cut himself off. His eyes had drifted over to me and his mouth instantly fell open, making a popping sound. I stared at him weirdly because this isn't the first time someone's looked at me this way, that's pretty much why I was instantly friends with Harry, Ron, and Hermione, and actually got along with Seth better than I thought I would. Sure, they were in slight awe when we met, but they didn't look at me as if I were a rare lost jewel. I hated it when people looked at me that way, and, the thing is that those people were usually older than me thinking I was some extraordinary, young genius. But the difference was that this kid stared at me a little differently. His gaze was full of curiosity, amazement, and somehow, admiration... I really don't get what there is to admire about me.

Deciding to get him out of his little trance, I smiled and held my hand out to him. "I'm Delilah. Delilah Dawn. I'm in, mindly my first, yet actually in my third year here. What's your name?" I asked him.

Looking stunned, he blinked a few times before grinning back at me and shaking my hand.
"I'm Colin Creevey. I don't know if you remember me... I'm in my second year," he answered in a cheery voice before shifting his eyes back to Harry with what seemed like deep awe of my friend. This boy seemed to be the kind to never miss an opportunity to speak to him. It was so darn adorable! Jesus! What's happening to me? I'm becoming very Barbie-like. Ew...

"Anyway, as I was saying before," Collin blushed while smiling shyly at me. "Are you going to Hogsmeade, Harry? Why not? Hey—" he repeated himself, looking eagerly around at his friends. "You can come and sit with us along, with Delilah," he blushed again after saying my name. I swear, this is just too funny to watch.

"Er— no, thanks, Colin," said Harry. "I— I've got to go to the library, got to get some work done." I raised an eyebrow at him as he simply shrugged and pulled me away from the now disappointed looking kid. After that, we had no choice but to turn right around and head back out of the portrait hole again.

"What was the point in waking me up?" the Fat Lady called grumpily after him as we walked away.

"What was that about?" I asked, curiously.

He shrugged and intertwined our fingers together like he does most of the time. "I'm just not in the mood to have a lot of people staring avidly at the scar on my forehead," he answered.

"Well, the kid seemed like the right person to cheer you up," I replied, playfully nudging him.

He chuckled. "Not likely."

"Well, I think he's a great kid. Very cheery, and smiley. Kinda like Seth, you know?" I mused.

"Yeah." He groaned, stopping in his tracks.

"What?"

"I think he has a crush on you," he said, almost growling.

"Crush?" I furrowed my brows as I tried to recall what that meant.

I sat the armchair in the living room, with Ami and Bella. We'd been making some decorations for one of the kid's birthday and then Jonah had tried to spend some time with me, practically gluing his way into my personal space. When Miss Kathie had come and taken him away with Jacob and some other boys to help her clean around, Bella had said he had a crush on me.

I grabbed my board and wrote a question before turning it for the girls to see. "What is a crush?"

Ami and Bella shared a look before looking back at me.

"A crush is... well, it's like a brief but intense infatuation for someone," Ami said.

Bella nodded. "It's like... there's liking someone as a friend, and there's liking someone as more than just a friend."

"Romantically?"

The girls nodded. "Yeah, a crush is liking someone as more than just a friend in a slightly romantic way," said Bella.

"Oh."
Ami and Bella laughed.

I raised an eyebrow. "What makes you say that?"

He rolled his eyes. "He kept blushing every time he looked at you. Even when he said your name!"


"No I don't," he quickly replied in a nervous tone.

"Really? So if I... pecked your cheek, you wouldn't blush," I taunted.

"No."

I stepped forward and took my time kissing both of his cheeks. When I pulled away, I couldn't help but chuckle. He was blushing so much, he was as red as a tomato. "No, I don't," I mimicked.

"I know what effect I have on people, now, and I know you well enough to know that it affects you as well," I said. Pointing at his face I added sweetly, "and there's my proof, Harold James Potter."

"Harold?" he asked, startled.

"Harry is usually short for Harold," I explained.

"Not in this case," he objected.

"Oh, I know. I just thought it'd be best for me to call you something else since I've been doing so for most people I know, lately," I replied.

"Really? Why?"

"I don't know. Just for fun?"

He snorted. "Okay, tell me who and what do you call them."

"Well, Seth is 'kid' because... well, let's face it: he's a kid at heart and soul... and... well, literally. Hermione is either browny, browny bush or cotton candy, Ron is ketchup since he's a messy pal, Ginny is strawberry or little red, the twins are Twizzlers, Crab is crap, Goyle is boiling water, yet I call them both tweedle dee and tweedle dum, Pansy is chimpanzee and Dracula... geez, you do not want to know what is in the long list I have for him," I exclaimed myself over dramatically.

Harry laughed before shaking his head, still chuckling. "You are a girl full of wonders."

I chuckled and shrugged nonchalantly. "I know."

We grinned at each other before wandering dispiritedly toward the library, but halfway there he eventually changed his mind; I don't blame him, I don't really feel like working either. We turned around and came face-to-face with Filch, who had obviously just sent off the last of the Hogsmeade visitors.

"What are you doing?" Filch snarled suspiciously.

"Nothing," said Harry truthfully.

"Nothing!" spat Filch, his jowls quivering unpleasantly. "A likely story! Sneaking around on your own— why aren't you in Hogsmeade buying Stink Pellets and Belch Powder and Whizzing Worms
like the rest of your nasty little friends?"

Harry shrugged. "Well, get back to your common room where you belong!" snapped Filch, and he stood glaring until Harry and had passed out of sight.

"Jesus, he needs Jesus," I muttered, making Harry chuckle.

But we didn't go back to the common room; we climbed a staircase, and Harry proposed we'd go visit the Owlery to see Hedwig, his owl, and we started walking along another corridor when a voice from inside one of the rooms said,

"Harry? Delilah?" We doubled back to see who had spoken and met Professor Lupin, looking around his office door. "What are you doing?" said Lupin, though in a very different voice from Filch. "Where are Ron and Hermione... and Seth."

He must still be trying to get used to the idea that I have a brother. I don't blame him; so am I.

Professor Lupin was the only one, besides Dumbledore and a few others in the staff, to have made the link between Seth and I. It actually surprised me how no one else could— we have the same freakin' surname.

"Hogsmeade," Harry replied, in a would-be casual voice.

"Ah," said Lupin. He seemed to consider us for a moment. "Why don't you come in? I've just taken delivery of a grindylow for our next lesson."

"A what?" I asked.

We followed Lupin into his office. In the corner stood a very large tank of water. A sickly green creature with sharp little horns had its face pressed against the glass, pulling faces and flexing its long, spindly fingers.

"Water demon," said Lupin, surveying the grindylow thoughtfully.

I blinked. "Oh."

He nodded. "We shouldn't have much difficulty with him, not after the kappas. The trick is to break his grip. You notice the abnormally long fingers? Strong, but very brittle."

The grindylow bared its green teeth and then buried itself in a tangle of weeds in a corner.

"Cup of tea?" Lupin said, looking around for his kettle. "I was just thinking of making one."

"All right," said Harry awkwardly.

Lupin looked at me, expectantly. "Sure," I said, just as awkward as Harry.

Lupin tapped the kettle with his wand and a blast of steam issued suddenly from the spout.

"Sit down," said Lupin, taking the lid off a dusty tin. "I've only got teabags, I'm afraid— but I daresay you've had enough of tea leaves?"

I tensed up but kept staring at the kettle, once again emotionless, while Harry looked at him. Lupin's eyes were twinkling.

"How did you know about that?" Harry asked.
"Professor McGonagall told me," said Lupin, passing Harry and I a chipped mug of tea. "You're not worried, are you?"

"No," Harry said, cautiously, turning look at me sideways.

I was pretty sure he was thinking of telling Lupin either, about the whole Trelawney situation where I basically froze for God knows how long, or about the dog he'd seen in Magnolia Crescent but decided not to. Though I'm guessing he didn't want Lupin to think he was a coward, especially since Lupin already seemed to think he couldn't cope with a boggart, leaving him the last to face it.

Something of Harry's thoughts seemed to have shown on his face, because Lupin suddenly asked, "Anything worrying you, Harry?"

"No," Harry replied, but I knew he was lying. I'm not the only who keeps secrets around here.

He drank a bit of tea and watched the grindylow brandishing a fist at him.

"Yes," he said suddenly, putting his tea down on Lupin's desk. "You know that day we fought the boggart?"

"Yes," said Lupin slowly.

"Why didn't you let me fight it?" said Harry abruptly.

I didn't know about this, so curiously, I turned only to find Lupin raising his eyebrows.

"I would have thought that was obvious, Harry," he said, sounding surprised.

Harry, who had probably expected Lupin to deny that he'd done any such thing, seemed taken aback.

"Why?" he said again.

"Well," said Lupin, frowning slightly, "I assumed that if the boggart faced you, it would assume the shape of Lord Voldemort."

Oh. Yeah. We wouldn't want Harry to faint again and me storming back in and going all Monsters Inc. Harry stared. I'll bet he wasn't expecting that remark. Not only was this the last answer anyone would expect, but Lupin had said Voldemort's name. The only person we had probably ever heard say the name aloud (apart from Harry and myself) was Professor Dumbledore. The old man's never scared for himself.

"Clearly, I was wrong," said Lupin, still frowning at Harry. "But I didn't think it would be a good idea for Lord Voldemort to materialize in the staffroom. I imagined that people would panic."

"True say," I muttered under my breath, taking a sip of my tea which by the way is delicious.

"I didn't think of Voldemort," said Harry honestly. "I— I remembered those dementors."

"I see," said Lupin thoughtfully. "Well, well... I'm impressed." He smiled slightly at the look of surprise on Harry's face. "That suggests that what you fear most of all is— fear. Very wise, Harry."

Harry seemed speechless to that, so he drank some more tea.

"So you've been thinking that I didn't believe you capable of fighting the boggart?" said Lupin shrewdly.
"Well... yeah," said Harry. He was suddenly feeling a lot happier. "Professor Lupin, you know the dementors—" He was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come in," called Lupin.

The door opened, and in came Snape. He was carrying a goblet, which was smoking faintly, and stopped at the sight of Harry, his black eyes narrowing, then softening when he saw I was there. I was seriously starting to get creeped out by this guy...

"Ah, Severus," said Lupin, smiling. "Thanks very much. Could you leave it here on the desk for me?"

Snape set down the smoking goblet, his eyes wandering between Lupin, Harry and I.

"I was just showing Harry and Delilah my grindylow," said Lupin pleasantly, pointing at the tank.

"Fascinating," said Snape, without looking at it. "You should drink that directly, Lupin."

"Yes, yes, I will," said Lupin.

"I made an entire cauldron full," Snape continued. "If you need more."

"I should probably take some again tomorrow. Thanks very much, Severus."

"Not at all," said Snape, but there was a look in his eye Harry didn't seem to like. He backed out of the room, unsmiling and watchful.

Harry looked curiously at the goblet. Lupin smiled.

"Professor Snape has very kindly concocted a potion for me," he said. "I have never been much of a potion-brewer and this one is particularly complex." He picked up the goblet and sniffed it. "Pity sugar makes it useless," he added, taking a sip and shuddering.

"Why—?" Harry began. Lupin looked at him and answered the unfinished question.

"I've been feeling a bit off-color," he said. "This potion is the only thing that helps. I am very lucky to be working alongside Professor Snape; there aren't many wizards who are up to making it."

Professor Lupin took another sip and Harry had a crazy look on his face.

"Professor Snape's very interested in the Dark Arts," he blurted out. I raised an eyebrow at him. I knew what he was intending to tell Lupin just as much as I knew what that potion was and what it was for.

Lupin drained the goblet and pulled a face.

"Disgusting," he said. "Well, Harry, Delilah, I'd better get back to work. See you at the feast later."

"Right," said Harry, putting down his empty teacup. With that, he grabbed my hand and we left without another word.

The empty goblet was still smoking.
"There you go," said Ron. "We got as much as we could carry."

A shower of brilliantly colored sweets fell into Harry's lap. It was dusk, and Ron and Hermione had just turned up in the common room, pink-faced from the cold wind and looking as though they'd had the time of their lives.

Hermione checked her watch.

"We'd better go down, you know, the feast'll be starting in five minutes." We hurried through the portrait hole and into the crowd, still discussing Snape.

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"But if he— you know"— Hermione dropped her voice, glancing nervously around— "if he was trying to poison Lupin— he wouldn't have done it in front of Harry."

"And from the looks of it, especially not in front of Deli. He seems to be.... nicer in front of her," Ron added.

"Yeah, maybe," said Harry as we reached the entrance hall and crossed into the Great Hall. It had been decorated with hundreds and hundreds of candle-filled pumpkins, a cloud of fluttering live bats, and many flaming orange streamers, which were swimming lazily across the stormy ceiling like brilliant water snakes.

The food was delicious; even Hermione and Ron, who were full to bursting with Honeydukes sweets, managed second helpings of everything. I glanced down the table and caught Seth, who was, though properly eating, stuffing his face with the delicacy before him; he was probably up to his fourth or fifth serving— perks of being a shifter. Harry kept glancing at the staff table. Professor Lupin looked cheerful and as well as he ever did; he was talking animatedly to tiny little Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher.

I guessed, since he's a werewolf— European kind— that the potion Uncle Sev gave him was wolfsbane.

Harry moved his eyes along the table, to the place where the latter sat. I think he was becoming more suspicious since Snape's eyes kept flickering toward Lupin more often than was natural. Though concentrating on the moment, for some reason I felt quite... off.

The feast finished with an entertainment provided by the Hogwarts ghosts. They popped out of the walls and tables to do a bit of formation gliding; Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor ghost, had a great success with a reenactment of his own botched beheading, cheering me up.

It had been such a pleasant evening that my good mood couldn't even be spoiled by Malfoy, who shouted through the crowd as they all left the hall, "The dementors send their love, Potter!"

Harry, Ron, Hermione and I followed the rest of the Gryffindors along the usual path to Gryffindor Tower. I sighed when I recognized Seth's feet bounding against the stone floor as he ran toward me.

"Deli!" He'd taken to calling me by my nickname. He slowed his pace when he finally caught up to us. He reached a hand into the pocket of his robe and brought out a small pouch, and held it out to me. "Here! I told you I'd get you something."

I gave him a surprised look as I grabbed the sack, though before I could open it, I had to fight the urge to stab myself with something when Seth simply blurted out what was supposed to stay on the down-low at least for a while.
"Hi, I'm Seth Dawn! Deli, little brother."


He gave me a sheepish look. "I thought they already knew."

I gave him a look. "They'd be talking to you a little more often if they did instead of simply acknowledging your presence, kid."

"Sorry?"

I sighed and shook my head.

"Deli?" Ron asked, voice full of confusion.

I groaned. "Not now, Ron, I beg you. Just not..." I trailed off, then let out a relieved sigh when they let it go. Though I knew it was only for now, I was thankful that they were this understanding.

Putting the pouch in the pocket of my robe, we continued walking in silence, following our fellow Gryffindors, though when we reached the corridor that ended with the portrait of the Fat Lady, we found it jammed with students.

"Why isn't anyone going in?" said, Ron curiously.

I peered over the heads in front of him. The portrait seemed to be closed. Harry, then, took hold of my hand and pulled me closer to him.

"Let me through, please," came Percy's voice, and he came bustling importantly through the crowd. "What's the holdup here? You can't all have forgotten the password— excuse me, I'm Head Boy—"

And then a silence fell over the crowd, from the front first, so that a chill seemed to spread down the corridor. We heard Percy say, in a sudden sharp voice, "Somebody get Professor Dumbledore. Quick."

People's heads turned; those at the back were standing on tiptoe.

"What's going on?" said Ginny, who had just arrived. She came up beside me and took my free hand. Just like most of the other Weasleys, I was pretty close to her. She's like a sister to me, and she seems to consider me so, too. I was flattered she looked up to me, too... well, at least to the part of me she knows. And I kept trying to keep a close eye on her, especially after I had remembered what had happened to her last year with Voldylocks.

"Go stand beside Neville," I whispered. She pouted a bit before nodding, letting go of my hand and going to stand beside him. Seth took up her place, grabbing my hand. I sighed but didn't interject anything. He's my little brother, I have to take care of him... even if that includes accepting the affection he deliberately shows toward me.

A moment later, Professor Dumbledore was there, sweeping toward the portrait; the Gryffindors squeezed together to let him through, and Harry, Ron, Hermione and I moved closer to see what the trouble was.

"Oh, my—" Hermione grabbed Harry's arm. Harry squeezed my hand reassuringly and the twins came out of nowhere and stood behind me in a protective stance... as if they were trying to protect
me. Confused, I looked at the portrait and cursed in the languages I know and some that I never thought I knew.

"Damn it! How did I not see that?" I hissed at myself. Seth squeezed my hand softly.

The Fat Lady had vanished from her portrait, which had been slashed so viciously that strips of canvas littered the floor; great chunks of it had been torn away completely. Dumbledore took one quick look at the ruined painting and turned, his eyes somber, to see Professors McGonagall, Lupin, and Snape hurrying toward him.

"We need to find her," said Dumbledore. "Professor McGonagall, please go to Mr. Filch at once and tell him to search every painting in the castle for the Fat Lady."

"You'll be lucky!" said a cackling voice.

It was Peeves the Poltergeist, bobbing over the crowd and looking delighted, as he always did, at the sight of wreckage or worry.

"What do you mean, Peeves?" said Dumbledore calmly, and Peeves' grin faded a little. He didn't dare taunt Dumbledore. Instead, he adopted an oily voice that was no better than his cackle. "Ashamed, Your Headship, sit. Doesn't want to be seen. She's a horrible mess. Saw her running through the landscape up on the fourth floor, sir, dodging between the trees. Crying something dreadful," he said happily. "Poor thing," he added unconvincingly.

"Did she say who did it?" said Dumbledore quietly.

"Oh yes, Professorhead," said Peeves, with the air of one cradling a large bombshell in his arms. "He got very angry when she wouldn't let him in, you see." Peeves flipped over and grinned at Dumbledore from between his own legs. "Nasty temper he's got, that Sirius Black."

I let go of my brother's hand and wrapped my arm around him, bringing him closer to me as he wrapped his arms around my waist in return, Harry squeezing once again the hand he held.

I know there is the possibility that Sirius is innocent from what I've seen in my visions, but there is no way I am going to let my guard down. There is no way I am going to let anyone harm my friends... and family.

Especially not Harry and Seth.
Grim defeat

Professor Dumbledore sent all the Gryffindors back to the Great Hall, where we were joined ten minutes later by the students from Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, who all looked extremely confused.

"The teachers and I need to conduct a thorough search of the castle," he told us all as Professors McGonagall and Flitwick closed all doors into the hall. "I'm afraid that, for your own safety, you will have to spend the night here. I want the prefects to stand guard over the entrances to the hall and I am leaving the Head Boy and Girl in charge. Any disturbance should be reported to me immediately," he added to Percy, who was looking immensely proud and important. "Send word with one of the ghosts."

Professor Dumbledore paused, about to leave the hall, and said, "Oh, yes, you'll be needing..."

One casual wave of his wand and the long tables flew to the edges of the hall and stood themselves against the walls; another wave, and the floor was covered with hundreds of squishy purple sleeping bags.

"Sleep well," said Professor Dumbledore, closing the door behind him.

The hall immediately began to buzz excitedly; the Gryffindors were telling the rest of the school what had just happened.

"Everyone into their sleeping bags!" shouted Percy. "Come on, now, no more talking! Lights out in ten minutes!"

"C'mon," Ron said to Harry, Hermione and I; we seized four sleeping bags and dragged them into a corner.

I looked around anxiously and finally caught sight of Seth. I only whispered his name, knowing he could perfectly hear me even through all the noise and him being a few 20 people behind me. I nodded my head for him to come over and he obliged, grabbing a sleeping bag and making his way through to me.

"Please stay close to me, okay?" I murmured as he stood before me. He eyed me curiously and questioningly. "If something happens, I don't want you to get hurt." He grinned. "Oh, shut up," I grumbled.

"I didn't say anything." He was still grinning.

"You were about to," I replied before rolling my eyes as his grin only widened. "Now, come on. And stop grinning or I'll make you."

"You know, your threats don't really work when you were all 'I don't want you to get hurt' a few seconds ago."

I rolled my eyes and bumped my shoulder against his. "Shut up, kid."

We settled down in the corner and climbed into our bags.

"Do you think Black's still in the castle?" Hermione whispered anxiously.
"Dumbledore obviously thinks he might be," said Ron.

"It's very lucky he picked tonight, you know," said Hermione as they climbed fully dressed into their sleeping bags and propped themselves on their elbows to talk. "The one night we weren't in the tower...."

"I reckon he's lost track of time, being on the run," said Ron. "Didn't realize it was Halloween. Otherwise, he'd have come bursting in here." Hermione shuddered.

All around us, people were asking one another the same question: "How did he get in?"

"Maybe he knows how to Apparate," said a Ravenclaw a few feet away, "Just appear out of thin air, you know."

"Disguised himself, probably," said a Hufflepuff fifth year. "He could've flown in," suggested Dean.

Annoyed, all I did was lay there, staring at the ceiling and listen, uninterestedly, to the others. The room was dark and I couldn't sleep so that was pretty much the only thing I could do. I felt a bit better knowing that I had Harry, Ron, and Hermione by my side, but even they were starting to annoy me pretty badly. Seth was surprisingly calm; maybe he was already asleep.

"Deli," I heard someone whisper. "Deli, are you asleep?"

I rolled my eyes and sighed. "I can't exactly sleep with everyone here talking and you whisper-yelling out my name, Hermione," I pointed out.

Seth snickered, making me kick him. "Ow!"

"Then stop laughing," I muttered before turning my attention to Hermione. "What, Browny?"

"Sorry," she said, and I was pretty sure she was blushing right now even if I wasn't looking at her. "I just wanted to know what you think. How do you think he got in, I mean."

I cursed under my breath, rolling over to face Hermione, knowing I'll regret saying what I was about to say. "He's an Animagus," I whispered.

Her eyes widened. "How do you—" she cut herself off, understanding crossing her face, seeing the look I was giving her. "The promise."

I nodded before rolling back on my back. I could still feel her eyes on me along with Harry's and Ron's. "I'll probably start tomorrow."

It was silent for a moment, then a voice caught me off guard as it spoke in another language. "Quid eis promisit?" (What did you promise them?)

I groaned and hit my head backward onto the floor that was covered by my sleeping bag, repeatedly. "Tell me you did not learn that damned language," I moaned.

"I'm not a pro. I understand it fine, I can't talk it well, though. And Uncle Ren doesn't wanna teach me anymore, for some reason."

"Ugh, I am so doomed!" I exclaimed, only to be hushed by someone else in the Hall. "Sorry!"

"It's okay!"

Seth and I shared a weird look in the dark.
"Anyway... *Quid tibi promisit?*" (What did you promise?)

I sighed. "It's none of your business, Seth."

"You're my sister, of course, it is."

I gritted my teeth. "Seth."

"Fine, fine, but, whatever it is, will I at least get to know someday? I mean, come on, we're siblings. There shouldn't be any secrets between us, right?"

I contemplated it for a moment. He was right. We're siblings, there shouldn't be any secrets between us. But there are. There is so much about me he doesn't know... I'm afraid of telling him. Everything I've been through— everything I've done, it's all horrible. I don't want to put that weight on his shoulders. But then, if I don't tell him, would he hate me for keeping it all from him? I don't want to be hated, especially not by my... by my little brother.

"Maybe," I murmured.

He was silent for a moment; I actually thought he'd fallen asleep, but then I felt a warm hand, slightly smaller than mine, take a hold of mine. "I love you Lee-Lee," I heard him whisper.

I closed my eyes and sighed. I wanted to tell him, but I wasn't ready. "Sleep, Seth," was the last thing I said before letting the darkness take over me.

I woke extremely early the next morning; so early that it was still dark. It was three in the morning and everyone was still asleep. For a moment I thought the roaring of the wind had woken me. Then I felt a warm breeze on the back of my neck and bolted upright— Harry's face was inches from mine, his warm breath tickling my neck, making me shiver.

"Are you alright?" he whispered, concern written all over his face and tone. But now that he mentioned it, I felt pretty... off. This feeling was familiar, but it was hard to tell because it was still somehow distant.

I frowned. "I don't know," I answered, completely confused as to why I'm feeling like this. I glanced over at Seth and saw him sleeping soundly, a small smile on his face. It made me want to smile, but, instead, I frowned.

"Hey," Harry started as he reached out for my hand, but just as his fingers brushed against my skin, he hissed in surprise and snatched his hand away in shock. "Shit, Deli. You're hot!" he whispered-shouted.

I rolled my eyes. "Gee, thanks," I muttered, sarcastically.

"I meant your burning up, Deli. I think your temperature rose to one where anyone would actually be dead by now," he whispered. I froze at those words. I knew exactly what that meant. Damn it! This can't come back now. After working so hard to keep it at bay? Why now, damn it?

"Delilah? Do you happen to know why—"

"I've probably just got a fever," I said, cutting him off. I took a deep breath, started to relax my muscles and sighed in relief as I felt my temperature start to drop slowly.

"Hey, you alright?" he asked softly, wrapping his arms around me and pulling me close, completely ignoring the fact that my skin was still hot, until I was practically sitting on his lap.
I leaned my head against his shoulder and sighed in defeat and sudden exhaustion. "I don't know," I whispered back.

He sighed and kissed my temple. "Whatever is wrong, I promise it'll get better," he assured me, tightening his grip on me.

"I wish. If only it were that easy," I choked out, turning to face him and burying my face in his chest as he buried his own in the crook of my neck and breathed in my scent. Breathing in his woody scent, I felt my muscles instantly relax as my body melted against his. I felt happy yet sad because I was glad to have him as a best friend along with the two others, but sad because I knew that by being here, by breathing the same air as them and by thinking or doing anything that has to do with them, I was endangering their lives. Especially Harry's since he was the one I was the most around, and Seth's—he was my brother, of course, he'd be in danger.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"If I ever did something bad... or was something bad... would you hate me?" I whispered, gripping his shirt, too afraid to look up.

"I would never hate you, Deli. You should know that by now. Why would you even think that?" he asked. I didn't answer as I started silently sobbing tearlessly until I felt a warm hand and under my chin. I knew he wanted me to look at him, but I couldn't so I turned my face away from his.

"Lilly, look at me," he said. I shook my head. He pulled my chin back to him and locked his eyes with mine. He gasped. I know what he saw... he saw dark blue midnight eyes full of sorrow. "I would never, ever hate you," he whispered, looking at me tenderly.

I could no longer look away. "Would you still like me? Would you still be my best friend?" I asked, barely whispering it.

"I will always love you," he whispered back. I couldn't help it. I threw my arms around his neck and held on for dear life as he tightened his grip around me, securely.

"Thank you," I whispered into his ear, feeling him shiver against me.

He pulled away to look into my eyes. "For what?" he asked, curiously.

"For being there for me. For being my best friend, Harry," I answered softly as I felt my eyes slightly change colors. I knew exactly what color it was right now. They were yellow goldenrod, meaning I was slightly happier.

He smiled at me. "I will always be there for you, Lilly," he replied, kissing my temple before we both laid back down, my head rested on his chest and his arms snaking their way around my waist.

"Lilly?"

"Hmmm?"

"..."

I chuckled. "Harry?"

"Yeah?"
"Just to give you a heads up, I may or may not start being snappier and crankier starting tomorrow," I said in a calm, casual tone.

"What? Why?" he asked, and I could hear the confusion in his voice.

I chuckled. "I *might* start telling you and the others tomorrow. About Seth, about me... I might..."

"Oh," he paused. "Okay."

A long—awkward, might I add—silence followed after that, but I knew he wasn't sleeping just yet.

"Lilly?"

"Hmmm?"

"Goodnight," he whispered, making me smile.

I then leaned up to kiss his cheek and chuckled as I saw him blush. "Goodnight, Harry Potter," I whispered back before letting the darkness take over me once again, dragging me into a dreamless sleep.

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I saw a blinding flash behind my eyelids and a strange click. A camera.

"Ooh! That's a keeper!"

"Shh, Fred, you'll wake them!"

"Awe, they look so cute together!"

"Do you think they...?" I heard someone slap George.

"Of course they didn't! They're thirteen, we're all in the Great Hall, if you hadn't noticed. And they're both still wearing clothes!" cried Ginny.

"Oh, yeah," George said sheepishly. I felt Harry stir from beside me and recoil his hands from my waist. I felt strangely cold without them there around me.

"Harry's awake!" Hermione squealed as I opened my eyes. "Delilah! You're up too!" I raised an eyebrow at her and she just gave me a sheepish look. Gathered around us were Fred, George, Ginny, Seth, Ron, and Hermione.

"What was that strange flash I saw," I demanded.

"N-nothing," they stuttered.

"Really?" they nodded. "Then why the hell are Fred and George holding cameras?!!" I practically shouted. "How did you even *get* cameras?"

"We-um... we—"

"Forget it!" I glared over at Seth who gave me a rather sheepish look. The little mutt... "But, I swear, if anyone else finds out about this and thinks what's not because of you six, so God help me, you will not like what I do!" I exclaimed myself, storming out of the Great Hall, feeling myself heat up in frustration.
My birthday wasn't for another month. I didn't bring it up— not that I ever do—hoping they would all overlook it, but they didn't. Seth, especially kept babbling about how he and Daren could make a birthday party, where I would get to meet the others. Who the 'others' were, I did not know, but, either way, I refused as I had already planned to spend my Christmas with Dad. I felt bad as I knew he just wanted to spend more time with me and act more like family, but I had already promised Kenton I'd be home... well, 'home' with him, not my home here... Anyway, they all simply put my birthday in a to-do/to-remember list as they, along with the school, talked of nothing but Sirius Black for the next few days. The theories about how he had entered the castle became wilder and wilder; Hannah Abbott, from Hufflepuff, spent much of our next Herbology class telling anyone who'd listen that Black could turn into a flowering shrub. I couldn't help but roll my eyes at that one. I mean, seriously, are they stupid or are they stupid? Jesus! Everyone knows that an Animagus only turns into one animal and that Sirius' Animagus is a black dog... well they don't know it's black, but they know it's a dog... I think...

Anyway, the Fat Lady's ripped canvas had been taken off the wall and replaced with the portrait of Sir Cadogan and his fat gray pony. Nobody was very happy about this. Sir Cadogan spent half his time challenging people to duels, and the rest thinking up ridiculously complicated passwords, which he changed at least twice a day.

"He's a complete lunatic," said Seamus angrily to Percy. "Can't we get anyone else?"

"None of the other pictures wanted the job," said Percy. "Frightened of what happened to the Fat Lady. Sir Cadogan was the only one brave enough to volunteer."

"Ugh! They're all just stinkin' cowards," I muttered in annoyance as Harry, Ron, and Hermione nodded in agreement.

Sir Cadogan, however, seemed to be the least of Harry's worries. I can't really blame him; he was now being closely watched. Teachers found excuses to walk along corridors with him, and Percy (acting, I suspected, on his mother's orders) was tailing him everywhere like an extremely pompous guard dog. To cap it all, Professor McGonagall summoned Harry into her office, with such a somber expression on her face Harry thought someone must have died. I felt pretty uncomfortable as well since every time he was summoned, I had to go with him. Ugh! I get it that Dumbledore trusts me enough to ensure me with Harry's security— I get it that it's my responsibility to look after him since I'm his Curatoria, but seriously, I have a life too! I have a freakin' devilish, monstrous side, which is threatening to come out at any moment, and he knows that!

"There's no point hiding it from you any longer, Potter," she said in a very serious voice. "I know this will come as a shock to you, but Sirius Black—"

I seriously hate the fact that they're all too oblivious to Sirius' possible innocence. It makes me want to punch someone in the gut...

"I know he's after me," said Harry wearily. "I heard Ron's dad telling his mum. Mr. Weasley works for the Ministry of Magic."

Professor McGonagall seemed very taken aback. She stared at Harry for a moment or two, then said, "I see! Well, in that case, Potter, you'll understand why I don't think it's a good idea for you to be practicing Quidditch in the evenings. Out on the field with only your team members, it's very exposed, Potter—"

"We've got our first match on Saturday!" said Harry, outraged. I don't blame him. I may not want to play this year, but Quidditch is like hockey to Canadians; you can't take that away from someone even if their life is in danger... at least not people like us. "I've got to train, Professor!"
Professor McGonagall considered him intently. Harry knew she was deeply interested in the Gryffindor team's prospects; it had been she, after all, who'd suggested him as Seeker in the first Place. He waited, holding his breath.

"Hmm..." Professor McGonagall stood up and stared out of the window at the Quidditch field, just visible through the rain. "Well... goodness knows, I'd like to see us win the Cup at last... but all the same, Potter... I'd be happier if a teacher were present. I'll ask Madam Hooch to—"

"I could do it." They turned to me in surprise. I think they forgot I was still here. "I'm not playing anymore, but I can be the referee of their training sessions," I offered.

McGonagall seemed to go deep in thought, looking at the chandelier hanging on the ceiling before looking back down at me and nodding in confirmation. "Alright, Miss Dawn. I trust you to keep a close eye on the team, especially on your friend, here. You have my word and I will sign a slip for you in case anyone asks questions."

With that, I pretty much became the Gryffindor's Quidditch team's coach. I was pretty nervous at first, but what surprised me was that they all seemed relieved to have me there, even if I wasn't playing. I helped them out with some tips I had read in a few books about Quidditch, with some new tricks I had come up with on my own, and with a few spells. I was glad that nothing I did gave away what I really am. They all simply thought of me as a very powerful and brilliant young witch... which I kind of am. Hermione seemed excited about this title given to me by most of the Gryffindor students. She was the one who surprised me the most, because knowing her, I thought she would get pissed off that I might be better than her, but instead she was thrilled that there was finally someone else on her level. Guess that's what you get for being famous. It seriously sucks being famous just because you survived the killing curse... or are the most powerful magic folk in the world. That's like being famous for being the most fat person in the world... one could die from all three, dammit!

The weather worsened steadily as the first Quidditch match drew nearer. Undaunted, the Gryffindor team was training harder than ever under my eyes. Kind of creepy when they kept changing colors...

Then, at their final training session before Saturday's match, Oliver Wood gave the team some unwelcome news.

"We're not playing Slytherin!" he told them, looking very angry. "Flint's just been to see me. We're playing Hufflepuff instead."

"What, now?" I practically shouted.

"What, now?" I practically shouted.

"What, now?" chorused the rest of the team.

"Flint's excuse is that their Seeker's arm's still injured," said Wood, grinding his teeth furiously. "But it's obvious why they're doing it. Don't want to play in this weather. Think it'll damage their chances...."

There had been strong winds and heavy rain all day, and as Wood spoke, we heard a distant rumble of thunder.

"There's nothing wrong with Malfoy's arm!" said Harry furiously. "He's faking it!"

"I know that, but we can't prove it," said Wood bitterly, "and we've been practicing all those moves assuming we're playing Slytherin, and instead it's Hufflepuff, and their style's quite different. They've got a new Captain and Seeker, Cedric Diggory—"

Angelina, Alicia, and Katie suddenly giggled. I rolled my eyes and shook my head, a knowing smile
“What?” said Wood, frowning at this lighthearted behavior.

“He’s that tall, good-looking one, isn’t he?” said Angelina.

“Strong and silent,” said Katie, and they started to giggle again.

“Okay... that is creepy.” I muttered, making the guys snort. I think I was the only girl who didn’t go all Barbie-like over a guy and that's probably why they like hanging around me.

“He’s only silent because he's too thick to string two words together,” said Fred impatiently, making me choke back a laugh. "I don't know why you're worried, Oliver, Hufflepuff is a pushover. Last time we played them, Harry caught the Snitch in about five minutes, remember?"

"We were playing in completely different conditions!" Wood shouted, his eyes bulging slightly. "Diggory's put a very strong side together! He's an excellent Seeker! I was afraid you'd take it like this! We mustn't relax! We must keep our focus! Slytherin is trying to wrong-foot us! We must win!"

"Oliver, calm down!” said Fred, looking slightly alarmed. "We're taking Hufflepuff very seriously. Seriously."

"Girls, girls, you're all pretty, now calm down and hush,” I said, gaining their attention. "You've all improved over the last few weeks. I've seen Hufflepuff practice... and I can remember them playing. They're good but not as great as us. It would be a shock if they won, and if they did, it would surely be because of the weather. From what I remember, they would only have that as an advantage, but that's because the weather usually hits them this hard when they play. They're used to it. But we have new tactics that will help us, big time. So cheer up and let's turn in because you guys are going to need a lot of rest, got it?" I asked. They all nodded and cheered at my speech.

I grinned. "Alright. Let's go Gryffindor! Woo!" I shouted, throwing my hands in the air as they all laughed at my enthusiasm before copying my actions and hooting along.

The day before the match, the winds reached a howling point and the rain fell harder than ever. It was so dark inside the corridors and classrooms that extra torches and lanterns were lit. The Slytherin team was looking very smug indeed, and none more so than Stormy.

"Ah, if only my arm was feeling a bit better!” he sighed as the gale outside pounded the windows.

I rushed to stand before him with my three musketeers by my side and sighed dramatically. "Ah, if only I could break again," I said in a British accent, making almost everyone within earshot, laugh.

I tried to cheer Harry up and tell him that he didn't need to worry about anything, but he just had to keep had on worrying about tomorrow’s match. I felt a bit insulted as Wood kept hurrying up to him between classes and giving him tips I had already given them. The third time this happened, Wood talked for so long that Harry suddenly realized he was ten minutes late for Defense Against the Dark Arts, and set off at a run with Wood shouting after him, "Diggory's got a very fast swerve, Harry, so you might want to try looping him—"

I could hear them thanks to my super hearing that was enhancing, even more, every day. It was almost as good as it was when I was just a soul shifter, but I knew it would keep going till it was as good and clear as it is for my normal hybrid self.

Defense Against the Dark Arts was currently beginning. Snape was teaching and Harry's not here, yet. He was at Quidditch practice the last time I saw him, today. I didn't go because I didn't feel like
they needed much of me today. Everyone was wondering where Lupin was because no one had seen him through the whole day. Of course, I knew why he wasn't here. Full moon is tonight, you should know from there.

About one minute had passed and we were about to start the class when the door burst open.

"Sorry, I'm late, Professor Lupin, I—"

To his misfortune, it wasn't Professor Lupin who looked up at him from the teacher's desk; it was Snape... as I clarified earlier.

"This lesson began ten minutes ago, Potter, so I think we'll make it ten points from Gryffindor. Sit down."

But Harry didn't move.

"Where's Professor Lupin?" he said.

"He says he is feeling too ill to teach today," said Snape with a twisted smile. "I believe I told you to sit down?"

But Harry stayed where he was.

"What's wrong with him?" Harry asked.

Snape's black eyes glittered.

"Nothing life-threatening," he said, looking as though he wished it were. "Five more points from Gryffindor, and if I have to ask you to sit down again, it will be fifty."

I cursed under my breath before grasping his hand and yanking him down next to me.

"As I was saying before Potter interrupted, Professor Lupin has not left any record of the topics you have covered so far—"

"Sir? We've done boggarts, Red Caps, kappas, and grindylows," I said quickly.

"And we're just about to start—" Hermione began.

"Be quiet, Granger," Snape said coolly, leaving me out on purpose, making me raise an eyebrow at him in disbelief. "I did not ask for information. I was merely commenting on Professor Lupin's lack of organization."

"He's the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher we've ever had," said Dean boldly, and there was a murmur of agreement from the rest of the class. Shit. Snape looked pissed.

"You are easily satisfied. Lupin is hardly overtaxing you— I would expect first years to be able to deal with Red Caps and grindylows. Today we shall discuss—" He flicked through the textbook, to the very back chapter, which he knows we haven't covered yet. "—werewolves."

"But, sir," Hermione said, she seemed unable to restrain herself. "We're not supposed to do werewolves yet, were due to start hinkypunks—"

"Miss Granger," said Snape in a voice of deadly calm, "I was under the impression that I am teaching this lesson, not you. And I am telling you all to turn to page 394." He glanced around again. "All of you! Now!"
With many bitter sidelong looks and some sullen muttering, the class opened their books.

"Which of you can tell me how we distinguish between the werewolf and the true wolf?" said Snape.

Everyone sat in motionless silence; everyone except Hermione, whose hand, as it so often did, had shot straight into the air. And to everyone's surprise and my own, I had also lifted my hand to answer. Snape gave me an apologetic look, confusing me, and moved on, purposely ignoring Hermione. Puzzled, I put my hand down.

"Anyone?" Snape said, ignoring Hermione. His twisted smile was back. "Are you telling me that Professor Lupin hasn't even taught you the basic distinction between—"

"We told you," said Parvati suddenly, "we haven't got as far as werewolves yet, we're still on—"

"Silence!" snarled Snape. "Well, well, well, I never thought I'd meet a third-year class who wouldn't even recognize a werewolf when they saw one. I shall make a point of informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are...."

I knew what he was doing. He was trying to fill us all in about werewolves, realize that Lupin is one and fear his kind enough to tell him off.

"Please, sir," Hermione said, her hand still in the air, "the werewolf differs from the true wild in several ways. The shout of the werewolf—"

"That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger," Snape said coolly. "Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all." What? That's not even a valuable excuse to take points off!

Hermione went very red, put down her hand, and stared at the floor with her eyes full of tears. It was a mark of how much the class loathed Snape that they were all glaring at him, because every one of them had called Hermione a know-it-all at least once, and I, who has heard Ron tell her she was a know-it-all at least twice a week, stood up, walked over to Hermione's side and snapped at Snape loudly, "You asked us a question and she knows the answer! Why ask if you don't want to be told?"

The class knew instantly I'd gone too far. Snape advanced on me slowly, and the room held its breath, but I didn't feel threatened as I stood my ground and looked him straight in the eye.

"If I ever hear you criticize the way I teach class again, you will be sorry indeed," Snape said, rounding on me. What shocked me the most was that twinkle in his coal black eyes that were usually emotionless. I narrowed my eyes at him; he was in on something, I just knew it.

After that, no one made a sound, I kissed Hermione's head and gave her a hug then went back to sit with Harry. But then he pretty much took me aback as I heard him mutter to himself,

"I need to cry more often if I get that kind of treatment." I turned my face away from him and stifled back a laugh. Did he seriously just say that?

No one made a sound throughout the rest of the lesson. We sat and made notes on werewolves from the textbook, while Snape prowled up and down the rows of desks, examining the work we had been doing with Professor Lupin.

"Very poorly explained... That is incorrect, the kappa is more commonly found in Mongolia... Professor Lupin gave this eight out of ten? I wouldn't have given it three... Delilah, best as always..." I raised an eyebrow. "... Potter got nine out of ten? I would give him a one."
When the bell rang, at last, Snape held us back. "You will each write an essay, to be handed into me, on the ways you recognize and kill werewolves. I want two rolls of parchment on the subject, and I want them by Monday morning. It is time somebody took this class in hand. Weasley, stay behind, we need to arrange your detention."

I was slightly confused. "What did you do?" I asked Ron.

He groaned. "Insulted him about hurting Hermione, when you weren't paying attention—"

"WEASLEY!" Snape yelled.

"Oh, come on. I was asking him a question!" I exclaimed myself in frustration.

"Gotta go!" Ron said in a high pitch voice.

"Yeah, okay, no problem. Just leave me hangin' here," I muttered before following Harry and Hermione out of the room with the rest of the class, who waited until we were well out of earshot, then burst into a furious tirade about Snape.

"Snape's never been like this with any of our other Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers, even if he did want the job," Harry said to Hermione. "Why's he got it in for Lupin? D'you think this is all because of the boggart?"

"I don't know," said Hermione pensively. "But I really hope Professor Lupin gets better soon...."

"Speaking of which, Hermione, can I talk to you?" I said, interrupting Harry as he was about to say something.

"What is it?" Hermione asked.

I pulled her into an empty classroom.

"Did you get the hint?" I asked urgently. Knowing she was the cleverest student in Hogwarts, she probably already figured out what Snape was trying to say in DADA.

"About how Lupin's a werewolf, yeah I got the hint," Hermione said.

"Good, we can't tell anyone, okay?"

"Why not?"

"Hermione, I promise I'll tell you soon, but not now, alright?"

She looked at me for a moment, lips pursed and brows furrowed, then nodded. "Alright. Besides, it would be wrong. It's, not only, not our secret to tell, but it's also wrong to prejudice against werewolves. I'm sure they're not all that bad. I mean, Professor Lupin like an okay man, and—"

"Hermione," I cut her off. "I get, you got it, let's go."

I took her hand and dragged her out of the empty classroom, making our way to the Gryffindor common room, where Harry was.

Harry was sitting in his favorite seat by the fire. I walked over and sat next to him, Hermione sat down on the floor in front of me.

"Want to practice some spells?" Hermione asked.

"Sure, why not?" I said as we pulled out our wands.
I wasn't sure who to throw a spell on, but then I remembered Fred and George playing a prank on me earlier this week, so once I saw them making their way towards us, I pointed my wand at their shoes and whispered, "Evincio."

Fred's shoelaces got untied and mingled with George's, making them both trip and fall onto each other. Hermione and I laughed.

"Not bad," Fred started.

"But you have to do better than that," George finished grinned mischievously.

I smirked at them. "Don't worry, I will," I said, making them gulp. Just then, Ron joined us in a towering rage.

"D'you know what that bastard—"

"Ron!" Hermione shouted, but he ignored her.

"—is making me do? I've got to scrub out the bedpans in the hospital wing. Without magic!" He was breathing deeply, his fists clenched. "Why couldn't Black have hidden in Snape's office, eh? He could have finished him off for us!"

I snorted. "Anyway, I'm going to bed. See y'all in the morning. Quidditch mates, off to bed as well. There's a big game tomorrow!" I shouted, before heading towards my dorm.

"What's up with her?" I heard Ron and Hermione ask at the same time.

"Ah, that beautiful gal," Fred started.

"Is growing up on us!" George finished in a shout as both brothers hooted. Smiling to myself I laid down on my bed and sighed.

"Dang, what a day!" I exclaimed myself.

"Had fun?" Blaze asked.

"...ish? Though I haven't seen much of Seth today. I wonder what the kid's been up to"

She squawked what seemed like a laugh. "You're really taking on the big sister role, aren't you?"

I shrugged. "He grows on ya, ya know?" I sighed.

Blaze squawked again. "There's a letter from your father on your desk along with a few gifts for your anniversary," she announced, making me bolt upright and jump off my bed.

"Dad wrote back?" I asked with a huge smile on my face.

"Yes, and, by the way, gaudeamus igitur, filius." (Happy anniversary, child)

"Thanks, Blaze," I said, before grabbing the letter from my desk, flopping myself back on my enormous bed and opening the envelope.

Dear Deli,

Geez, I really hope you get this, but anyway, I just want to let you know that I miss you so much, kiddo, and I can't wait to see you again this Christmas. I know your birthday isn't until after
Christmas, but since I miss you so dang much, I thought I could send you a few things you might like. I hope you like them. From what you've told me, Quidditch seems like a fun sport. I'm proud of you for acquiring the coaching role, Dels. I always knew you had some leadership in you. And, again, even if it still hasn't come around, happy birthday, kid. I love you and I miss you so much, and so do Jack and Skipper. I can't speak to animals like you do, but I can see them mopping around your room all the time. Keep up the good work and stay alive for your old man, will ya?

Take care, and lots of love,

Yours truly,

Big Daddy.

I couldn't help but laugh at this. I now felt complete knowing that he was okay. I wanted to write back, but I was so tired, so instead, I tucked the letter under my pillow and laid back down onto my bed.

"I'll write to him on the weekend. Goodnight Blaze," I said in a soft voice.

"Bonum note, filius," (Goodnight, child) was the last thing I heard before darkness took over me.

I woke up really early, and it was still dark outside. It still is. It's raining and the wind is blowing really hard. I would've liked going back to sleep, but every day I find it harder and harder to do so.

Deciding to look a bit more different, I grabbed a small bag of makeup I'd bought before school started, some clothes and ran into the bathroom. I had put on a bit of black eyeliner and mascara and some lip balm that made my lips look slightly pinker than they already were. After that, I put on a pair of black skinny jeans with black ankle-length boots, a violet shirt and grabbed a black jacket and a purple beanie which I put in my shoulder bag for later. Once I was done, I walked out of the bathroom and headed back towards my room, but stopped myself the moment I heard talking from the common room.

Narrowing my eyes, I quietly walked down the stairs.

"You know, I reckon Ron was right about you," I heard Harry say. "There are plenty of mice around this place— go and chase them go on," confused, I walked down a little further and saw Harry talking to Crookshanks. "Leave Scabbers alone."

The storm was louder in the common room.

"Uh... why are you talking to a cat?" I asked.

Harry's head snapped towards me. He blushed and sat down on the couch by the fire.

"I don't know?" He said.

Chuckling, I walked over and sat next to him, he leaned my head against his shoulder and hugged my legs up to my chest. I felt him lift his arm and put it around me, he rested his head on mine, sighing. After a few minutes, it was my turn to sigh. How do I tell him what I am?

"Hey, is something wrong?" he asked.

"No— I just— thanks," I ended up saying.

"For what?"
"Again, for being there for me. Don't think I've forgotten my promise from the other night, Harry."

"Oh... right. You're welcome," he whispered. I smiled.

"You're really a..." I looked up and saw my face was inches away from his, "good person," I whispered back.

Harry gazed into my eyes and me in his. His beautiful bright green eyes traveled down to my lips then back up into my eyes. He started to lean in, never looking away as I felt his hot breath brush against my lips, he was just inches away. I don't know what came over me, but I inched closer as well—

"Ready for the big game today, Harry?" Fred's voice boomed from the staircase making Harry and I jump apart and blush like mad.

"Yeah, ready to kick some Hufflepuff butts?" George added. The twins stopped short when they spotted me. They looked at each other, then back at me and then they wolf-whistled.

"Why haven't we seen you like this before, princess?" Fred asked.

"Because you don't deserve to see me like this," I said, getting up and walking past them, but George decided to grab my wrist and spin me around, practically smashing me against him.

"And why is that?" he asked.

I leaned closer and decided to tease him like I've seen many girls do. "Georgie?"

"Hmmm?"

"Next time, why don't you ask your twin and your fellow pranks," I replied, before pulling away and heading towards the portrait to get out, leaving the Twizzlers dumbfounded. I don't mind their pranking, they're quite amusing and entertaining, but it often becomes annoying; as if my hair didn't already change colors. And I am not acting girly again, that just feels... weird.

~~#~~

He flew backward and forward across the field past blurred red and yellow shapes; he seemed to have no idea of what was happening in the rest of the game. The crowd was hidden beneath a sea of cloaks and battered umbrellas. Twice Harry came very close to being unseated by a Bludger; his vision was probably so clouded by the rain on his glasses he hadn't seen them coming. He was losing track of time. It was getting harder and harder to hold his broom straight. The sky was getting darker, as though night had decided to come early. Twice Harry nearly hit another player, without knowing whether it was a teammate or opponent; everyone was now so wet, and the rain so thick, you could hardly tell any of them apart....

With the first flash of lightning came the sound of Madam Hooch's whistle; Harry could just see the outline of Wood through the thick rain, gesturing him to the ground. The whole team splashed down into the mud.

"I called for a time-out!" Wood roared at his team. "Come on, under here—"

They huddled at the edge of the field under a large umbrella; Harry took off his glasses and wiped them hurriedly on his robes. "What's the score?"

"We're fifty points up," said Wood, "but unless we get the Snitch soon, we'll be playing into the
"I've got no chance with these on," Harry said exasperatedly, waving his glasses.

At that very moment, I decided to make my appearance and looked over his shoulder with Hermione right behind me. We shared a look and nodded at each other with grins on both our faces.

"I've had an idea, Harry! Give me your glasses, quick!" He handed them to me, and as the team watched in amazement, I tapped them with my wand and said, "Impervius!"

"There!" I said, handing them back to Harry.

"They'll repel water!" Hermione explained.

Wood looked as though he could have kissed me, which by the way would be disgusting, but I gave him a look and he simply blushed.

"Brilliant!" he called hoarsely after me as Cotton Candy and I disappeared into the crowd.

"Okay, team, let's go for it!" Hermione and my spell had done the trick. I could see Harry was still numb with cold, probably wetter than he'd ever been in his life, but he could see. Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes for a few thirteen seconds. I could feel Hermione and Ron looking at me in confusion. As I opened my eyes again, I heard them gasp. I knew my eyes were now a violet morning glory.

"Calefieri," I whispered, though loud enough for only my two friends to hear.

The team let out a synchronized sigh of satisfaction but then had puzzled looks on their faces. They turned to look at me then grinned once they saw my smirk.

"What spell is that?" Ron asked, puzzled.

"Yeah, I never heard or read of it before," Hermione said, with the same hint of puzzlement in her tone.

I snorted as my smirk grew wider. "That's 'cause I just made it up," I replied.

They both raised an eyebrow at me and cocked their heads to the side. "What does it do?" Ron asked, curiously.

I grinned at them. "It warms up."

They gave me a confused look before realization finally hit them. Hermione laughed. "Brilliant!" she exclaimed herself, throwing her arms around me and jumping up and down.

I laughed with her. "I get that you love me 'Mione, don't get me wrong, I love you too, but I also love breathing!" I exclaimed myself. With that, we all three laughed before turning our attention back to the game and cheering Gryffindor on.

Full of fresh determination, Harry urged his broom through the turbulent air, staring in every direction for the Snitch, avoiding a Bludger, ducking beneath Diggory— a really cute Hufflepuff student, by the way— who was streaking in the opposite direction...

There was another clap of thunder, followed immediately by forked lightning. This was getting more and more dangerous. Harry needed to get the Snitch quickly. He turned, intending to head back toward the middle of the field, but at that moment, another flash of lightning illuminated the stands,
and Harry saw something that distracted him completely, the silhouette of an enormous shaggy black
dog, clearly imprinted against the sky, motionless in the topmost, empty row of seats.

Harry's numb hands slipped on the broom handle and his Nimbus dropped a few feet. Shaking his
sodden bangs out of his eyes, he squinted back into the stands. The dog had vanished.

"Harry!" came Wood's anguished yell from the Gryffindor goal posts.

"Harry, behind you!" Harry looked wildly around. The Hufflepuff seeker was pelting up the field,
and a tiny speck of gold was shimmering in the rain-filled air between them. With a jolt of panic, Harry threw himself flat to the broom handle and zoomed toward the Snitch.

"Come on!" he growled at his Nimbus as the rain whipped his face. But something odd was
happening. An eerie silence was falling across the stadium. The wind, though as strong as ever, was
forgetting to roar. It was as though someone had turned off the sound, as though Harry had gone
suddenly deaf— what was going on? And then a horribly familiar wave of cold swept over me,
inside me, just as I became aware of something moving on the field below... I knew exactly what
was happening and from the looks of it so did Harry. But before he'd had time to think, he had taken
his eyes off the Snitch and looked down.

I followed his gaze and widened my eyes as I saw at least a hundred dementors, their hidden faces
pointing up at him, were standing beneath him. It was as though freezing water were rising in my
chest, cutting at my insides. And then I heard it... Someone was screaming, screaming inside my
head... a woman...

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

"Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now...."

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead—"

Numbing, swirling white mist was filling my brain... What was I doing? Why was I just standing
there? I needed to help her... She was going to die... She was going to be murdered... I could see
Harry falling, falling through the icy mist.

"Not Harry! Please... have mercy... have mercy..."

I didn't stop myself this time. I pointed my wand up at the dementors and shouted, "Expecto
Patronum!"

And at the end of my wands burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver
animal. I squinted my eyes to see what it was. It looked like a horse, though I knew it wasn't. It was
something else, though I couldn't quite place my finger on it. It galloped silently away from me and
across the Quidditch pitch up to where Harry is. I saw it charge at the Dementors. It galloped around
and around the black shapes on the ground, and the Dementors were flying back, scattering,
retreating into the darkness... They left. With that, I felt my body suddenly weaken as darkness
gained on me.

Harry' P.O.V.

A shrill voice was laughing, the woman was screaming, and I knew no more.

"Lucky the ground was so soft."

"I thought he was dead for sure."
"But he didn't even break his glasses."

I could hear the voices whispering, but they made no sense whatsoever. I didn't have a clue where I was, or how I'd got there, or what I'd been doing before I got there. All I knew was that every inch of me was aching as though it had been beaten.

"That was the scariest thing I've ever seen in my life." Scariest... the scariest thing... hooded black figures... cold ... screaming... my eyes snapped open. I was lying in the hospital wing. The Gryffindor Quidditch team, spattered with mud from head to foot, was gathered around my bed. Ron and Hermione were also there, even Seth, looking as though they'd just climbed out of a swimming pool, but there was no sign of Delilah. I frowned.

"Harry!" said Fred, who looked extremely white underneath, the mud.

"How're you feeling?" It was as though my memory was on fast forward. The lightning— the Grim — the Snitch— and the dementors...

"What happened?" he said, sitting up so suddenly they all gasped.

"You fell off," said Fred. "Must've been— what— fifty feet?"

"We thought you'd died," said Alicia, who was shaking. Hermione made a small, squeaky noise. Her eyes were extremely bloodshot.

"But the match," I asked. "What happened? Are we doing a replay?"

No one said anything. The horrible truth sank into me like a stone. "We didn't— lose?"

"Diggory got the Snitch," said George. "Just after you fell. He didn't realize what had happened. When he looked back and saw you on the ground, he tried to call it off. Wanted a rematch. But they won fair and square... even Wood admits it."

"Where is Wood?" I asked, suddenly realizing he wasn't there.

"Still in the showers," said Fred. "We think he's trying to drown himself."

I put my face to my knees, my hands gripping my hair. Fred grabbed my shoulder and shook it roughly. "C'mon, Harry, you've never missed the Snitch before."

"There had to be one time you didn't get it," said George.

"It's not over yet," said Fred. "We lost by a hundred points"

"Right? So if Hufflepuff loses to Ravenclaw and we beat Ravenclaw and Slytherin—"

"Hufflepuff'll have to lose by at least two hundred points," said George.

"But if they beat Ravenclaw..."

"No Way, Ravenclaw is too good. But if Slytherin loses against Hufflepuff..."

"It all depends on the points— a margin of a hundred either way."

"You guys! None of what you're saying is helping, or even matters!" Seth exclaimed, before muttering to himself in a different language.
I lay there, not saying a word. We had lost... for the first time ever, I had lost a Quidditch match. After ten minutes or so, Madam Pomfrey came over to tell the team to leave me in peace.

"We'll come and see you later," Fred told him. "Don't beat yourself up, Harry, you're still the best Seeker we've ever had." The team trooped out, trailing mud behind them. Madam Pomfrey shut the door behind them, looking disapproving. Seth, Ron, and Hermione moved nearer to my bed.

"Dumbledore was really angry," Hermione said in a quaking voice. "I've never seen him like that before. He ran onto the field as you fell, waved his wand, and you sort of slowed down before you hit the ground. Then Deli came along beside him, whirled her wand at the dementors. Shot silver stuff at them. They left the stadium right away... He was furious they'd come onto the grounds. We heard him—"

"Then he magicked you onto a stretcher," said Ron. "And walked up to school with you floating on it. Everyone thought you were—" His voice faded, but I hardly noticed.

I was thinking about what the dementors had done to me... about the screaming voice. I looked up and saw Ron and Hermione looking at me so anxiously that I quickly cast around for something matter-of-fact to say. I frowned when I noticed Seth had suddenly disappeared, and I would've asked, out of curiosity, where he'd gone seeing as he always seemed to hang around us lately, but that wasn't what was on my mind at the moment.

"Did someone get my Nimbus?" Ron and Hermione looked quickly at each other.

"Er—"

"What?" I asked, looking from one to the other.

"Well... when you fell off, it got blown away," said Hermione hesitantly.

"And?"

"And it hit— it hit— oh, Harry— it hit the Whomping Willow."

My insides lurched. The Whomping Willow was a very violent tree that stood alone in the middle of the grounds.

"And?" I urged, dreading the answer.

"Well, you know the Whomping Willow," said Ron. "It— it doesn't like being hit."

"Professor Flitwick brought it back just before you came around, said Hermione in a very small voice. Slowly, she reached down for a bag at her feet, turned it upside down, and tipped a dozen bits of splintered wood and twig onto the bed, the only remains of my faithful, finally beaten broomstick.

I felt my heart drop, but then I remembered something. "Where's Delilah?"

"Uh..."

"Where. Is. She?"

Taking a deep breath, Hermione pulled the bedside curtain, which revealed another bed that was occupied, Seth standing there, looking down at the unconscious figure with worry etched all over his face.

I stood from my bed and rushed over once I saw how pale she looked. My Delilah looked so... dead.
Her light brown waist-length wavy hair was now a lighter shade of brown, her skin looked smoother, but it was completely pale, almost as white as snow. You would've thought she was dead... if it weren't for her blazing temperature. She never did say why it was like that...

"Dumbledore said she'll be alright," Seth murmured. I looked over at him and saw him staring at his sister with so much worry... it almost made him look older than he actually is. "Though it might take her a few days."

I sighed. I just hope that's true.

Back to Delilah's P.O.V.

I was in a coma for seven days, so I spent the whole week after the match at the hospital wing. I was so frustrated when Madame Pomfrey insisted in Dumbledore's presence that I stay here for another week. Seth, Harry, Ron, and Hermione were the only ones who'd visit me every day. Harry would even sometimes come to see me at night wearing his invisibility cloak. After the four of them, it would be the Quidditch team, some random people I don't know, Malfoy... though I don't know why he even bothers... and the teachers, mostly McGonagall and Dumbledore. Even Lupin would come thoroughly. He was impressed that I could do the Patronus charm so well at such a young age. That's pretty much what we discussed every time he'd visit.

With Dumbledore, I would discuss my newfound powers, like the mind reading I had forgotten I could do right after I had woken up... though you wouldn't believe how relieved I was to remember what it was afterward, considering the fact that I had been freaking out when I woke up, thinking I was hearing things. I couldn't control it at first, but then Dumbledore eventually came up with the idea of a charm bracelet that would help me block others thoughts when I'd want to until I can control it on my own.
Attempts and hesitations

"No."

"Awe, please?"

"No."

"Please, please, please, please, pretty please!"

"Fine."

"Really?"

"No."

Seth let his arms fall to his sides, lips jutted out in a pout. "Why not?"

"Because you don't need it."

"But I—"

I stopped in front of the portrait hole, spun on my heels and looked Seth dead in the eyes. "I will not teach you how to phase, Seth. You don't need to learn it. If it hasn't come naturally yet, then leave it at that."

"But it's not fair!" he said. "Every shifter and soul shifter I know has phased at a young age— my senses aren't even enhanced yet."

"Don't lie to yourself, you and I both know you could hear me from across the Great Hall," I said flatly.

"Hearing is nothing!" he pressed. "My eyesight isn't enhanced, I'm as slow and weak as a human."

I rolled my eyes. "That's because you are human."

"So are you, but I don't see you panting like a dog from going up the stairs." He gave me his puppy dog eyes, causing me to roll my eyes again.

"We're part dog, you dummy. Puppy dog eyes don't work on those who actually know about that."

He grinned. "You faltered, so I know it still works on you."

"Don't you have homework to do?"

"Don't change the subject," he countered with another pout. "Please, Lee-Lee!"

I sighed, stepped toward him and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Seth, as cool as turning into a giant animal appears to be... it's not. Okay? It's painful, not only physically, but mentally too. It's a burden. A burden I don't want you to carry. You're only twelve. I may have phased at nine for the first time, but, trust me, even that's not young enough. There were plenty of others I remember had phased way before that, but the only reason we do it's because we're living through one hell of a moment in our lives, and that was pretty much the case back then. We were soul shifters— we were hunted by the wolves and the blood drinkers. We were under extinction. Now, I'm the only one left— thank the
Goddess you're not like me."

Seth frowned. "But what if I want to be like you?"

I froze and just stared at him. "You do not want to be like me. You don't know..."

"Then tell me, Delilah, because I want to know. I want to know you."

I stared at him a while longer as I let go of his shoulders. He really made this hard for me. "I have to go," I muttered, turning my back to him. "Make sure you're with someone—a friend, anyone. Do not stay alone. I'll see you later." And with that, I climbed into the portrait hole and left the Gryffindor tower.

I was wandering around for a while, looking about, before I finally decided to go to the owl tower to pay a visit to Arrow, my family owl. It had been a while since I last saw him. Once I got there, I brought a piece of parchment and a modern pen out of my pocket and began writing a letter to Kenton. When I was done, I pet Arrow for a few minutes, then, just as I was about to attach the letter to his foot, the voice that had been annoying me since before my first day at Hogwarts came from the staircase.

"What are you doing here?" Dracula asked.

"What does it look like I'm doing?"

"Sending a letter?"

"No shit, Sherlock," I replied sarcastically, petting Arrow a bit more.

Malfoy came to sit beside me. "Why do you hate me so much?" he asked.

I sighed, exasperated. "I don't hate you."

"Could've convinced me otherwise," he muttered.

"I don't I-just-ugh!" I groaned as Arrow, feeling the slight change in my mood, leaned against my touch in a way to comfort me.

"Are you alright, Delilah?"

"Ego valero, Arrow," (I'm fine, Arrow) I murmured.

"Did you just talk to that bird?" pale face asked in disbelief.

"That bird is an owl and has a name, and it's Arrow. And yes, I just spoke to him," I replied through my now clenched teeth. He didn't say anything. Ignoring him, I decided to feed Arrow some seeds before putting the letter in his beak.

"Kenton mittam litteras ad Americam. Ne videatur omnibus cavere Dementors latens circa castra, revertar in pace. Intellexit, Arrow?" (Take this letter to Kenton in the States. You mustn't be seen, avoid all dementors lurking around the castle, and come back safely. Understood Arrow?) I instructed my owl. He nodded before flying off.

I sat there for a while longer as I watched Arrow fly away. Sighing loudly, I got up and headed for the staircase, but Stormy decided it would be a good idea to grab my arm and yank me back towards him, practically smashing me against him, though it didn't seem to bother him.
I pulled myself away. "What?" I demanded coldly, making him cringe at my tone.

"Why do you hate me?" he repeated.

"Why do you hate everyone?" I countered.

"I don't hate everyone!" he protested.

I raised an eyebrow at him, stepping further away from his reach, and crossed my arms over my chest.

"Oh, come on! At least it's not everyone," he muttered, defending himself.

"Sure, 'cause that just makes it much better!" I said, sarcastically. I took a deep breath and sighed. "Why don't you hate me?"

"I don't know, I..."

"Malfoy."

He sighed before sitting down. "I don't know," he repeated, running a big pale hand through his whitish blond hair. "It's just... you're different than everyone else. You're not like any other Gryffindor or any other person in Hogwarts for that matter," he said.

I sat down beside him. "What do you mean?"

"I... honestly don't know. I'm sort of confusing myself," he admitted, making me chuckle. "You're finally giving me right for a real conversation with you," he noted, grinning at me.

I chuckled and shook my head, slightly smiling at him. "I guess you're right, but don't get so used to it," I warned, teasingly.

"Awe, I was just getting used to it," he complained just as teasingly, bumping his shoulder against mine. We looked at each other and started laughing lightly.

"So we really are having a conversation," he said as if still trying to believe it.

I shrugged. "I guess so," I replied, getting up and walking towards the balcony with him at my heels.

"Why?"

I shrugged again. "I don't know. Maybe there simply isn't something for me to argue about against you as there usually is, right now," I said.

He shook his head. "I meant why aren't you storming off or yelling profanities at me for nothing as you usually do? You hate me," he said.

I rolled my eyes and sighed in exasperation. "As I told you before, I don't hate you... you hate me... don't you?"

He stared at me in shock. "What makes you think I hate you?"

I raised an eyebrow at him. "I'm a Gryffindor, I'm friends with Harry Potter, your sworn enemy, the entire Weasley family, and a muggleborn student, plus Neville Longbottom and all the other people you despise, which is basically... everyone."
He shook his head violently. "I really don't care who you're friends—"

"Why?"

"Well, for starters, despite the fact that you say you're 'friends' with them, you barely last a whole day with them without sneaking away, you are very reserved, not only around practically everyone, but when they ask you what's wrong, you avoid saying anything that will give you away for God knows what, you cringe and flinch slightly away every time any of them touch you, and you barely ever speak," he counted down. "You were mute for, at least, our two first years of Hogwarts and God knows how much longer before then."

Wow— stalker much... Jesus... this guy really needs Jesus...

"You pay a lot of attention, don't you?" I muttered.

He smirked. "Just because I'm a cocky Slytherin doesn't mean life's that exciting."

I rolled my eyes at him. "So you finally admit you're cocky." He rolled his eyes. "Anyhow... why the hell are you talking to me like a... human?" I asked, cringing a bit at the word. Fortunately, he didn't see me doing so.

He shrugged and looked at me sideways. "I... I really don't know. There's something about you that's just... I don't know what, but I can never really seem to hate you."

"So, shall we put an end to the fighting then?" I asked sarcastically. Does he seriously expect me to give in so easily?

"Well, as much as life as a Slytherin is dull, I still have a reputation to uphold."

I scoffed. "Of course you do."

"You still hate me," he muttered, sighing loudly.

I groaned, then sighed in exasperation, throwing my hands up in the air before dropping them at my sides in frustration. "Again! As I told you before, I don't hate you," I said. I looked up at the sky and took a deep breath, calming myself down. "I assure you that if that were the case, I would've beaten the crap out of you by now," I said, nudging him playfully, trying to lighten up the tension.

"So you admit you've actually hated me." I gave him a puzzled look. "You punched me last year... and the year before."

I blinked a few times, just staring at him. "I punched you?" I asked as a grin started spreading across my face.

He groaned. "Shut up."

I sighed, rolling my eyes. "Look, okay, so I punched you... twice, but I didn't beat the crap out of you. I don't hate you."

He was silent for a few minutes before asking, "Why are you talking to me so calmly?"

I rolled my eyes again... yeah, this is definitely making me dizzy. "Because I know. I finally realized it."

He gave me a puzzled look. "Know what? Realized what?"
"I know you aren't really bad! You're just hiding in your father's shadow," I replied.

"No—" I made him look me in the eyes.

I spun around to face him. "You look me in the eye, and say that you are really that heartless cold Malfoy everyone talks about, I won't even dare to talk to you, ever again."

Our eyes connected and stayed locked with each other for a long moment, before he said, "I'm not."

"Yay! See? I'm a human lie detector!" He chuckled.

Then I looked at him dead in the eye, with nothing but seriousness in my face and tone. "This doesn't mean we're friends, does it?" he asked.

I shrugged. "I'd be willing to take a step that way, Malfoy, but you'd have to be willing to change for the better."

"Cha—"

"You'd have to prove yourself... worthy of my friendship. I won't tell you how, that's up to you to figure that out. I won't even give you a hint. For now, I'll just be a girl who happens to know you and who you happen to know, here at Hogwarts. I'm not your friend, not even your frenemy, we just know each other. We're acquaintances. If you're smart enough and willing to take a step further into this... acquaintance-ship, and perhaps become friends, then I suggest you start now. Good luck, by the way," I said before spinning around and leaving the owl tower. I don't want any more enemies, so let's just hope that at the very least we'd end up as acquaintances...

Making my way down the corridor, I felt my body starting to shake. My hand over my shoulder, I started quickening my pace.

I had to get out.

Now.

Almost running to nowhere in particular, I stumbled over my own feet and dropped my bag. All my things flew out and I quickly dove down to pick them up. I was trying to hurry up, but the pain and heat were increasing and it was slowing me down, and to top it all off, my things were pretty much scattered around, so it was impossible for me to get it all quickly! I tried to control my anger as best as I could as I tried to quickly pick up my things. Suddenly, as I reached out for one of my notebooks, another pale hand reached out for it at the same time.

"Here," I heard someone say. "Let me help you." Someone wants to help me? A snappy, weird... random— well, not so random as I am famous, but anyway— girl?

"Oh, no, it's alright," I managed to choke out, afraid to look up. "You don't have to—" I stopped short and looked up, only to find myself getting lost in one of the softest gray eyes I have ever seen. They might've been familiar, but I shook that feeling of familiarity off as my body heat shot up in a milk-second as many feelings and memories came flooding back to me. I stopped shaking for a moment as I was clearly picturing Brady in front of me, but I knew it wasn't him.

"No, it's okay. I've got it," I said, trying to act casual.

He smiled instead and that's when reality hit me. Right in front of me was standing a tall boy who seemed slightly older than me, about Fred and George's age. He had pale skin, rosy cheeks, and brownish bronze hair.
"No, let me help."

I didn't say anything, but let him help me as I started shaking again. Soon enough, I had all my things inside my bag, all clean.

"Thanks," I muttered before running out of the castle and into the forbidden forest, not giving him a chance to even speak.

I fell onto the forest ground, forgetting about my bag. I started panting and then gasped in pain as I could hear the breaking of my bones, each one by one, blood rushing everywhere. It took hours, and the moon started to lower before the pain eased up. I looked down at myself and saw what I hadn't seen in a long time.

What frustrated yet somehow relieved me completely.

I saw paws, giant black ones.

I stood up and wobbled a bit before sprinting off, deeper into the forest. As I hit the trees, my clothes mending into my fur till it disappeared completely, I started to empty my mind.

I felt free.

So free, so much better. Now I could hear the faint rustle of the matted leaves beneath my toenails, the whisper of an owl’s wings above me, the water— far, far in the west— moaning against the beach near the Black Lake. Hear this, and nothing more. Feel nothing but speed, nothing but the pull of muscle, sinew, and bone, working together in harmony as the miles disappeared behind me.

If the silence lasted, I would never go back. I wouldn’t be the first one to choose this form over the other. Maybe, if I ran far enough away, I would never have to hear again...

I pushed my legs faster, letting Delilah Keren Aleah Hawkins... Dawn disappear behind me.

I was flying...

The trees blurred into a sea of black flowing around me. My muscles bunched and released in an effortless rhythm. I could run like this for days and I would not be tired. Maybe, this time, I wouldn’t stop. But I did because I remembered something.

If I didn't stop, I'd be alone.

I wouldn't mind considering I'm mostly a monster, but I still cared about people. And that's why... I have to tell these people I care about, what I truly am.

I ran as fast as I could till I reached the edge of Black Lake. That's when I let it out. I howled in pain, in sorrow, for what I am, for what I had and lost, for what I have and can lose.

I got back to the Common Room that Sunday night, around eleven thirty and found Harry, Ron, and Hermione there waiting for me. I tried to get by them unnoticed, but apparently, with my exhaustion, I couldn't be discreet enough.

"Where were you?" Ron demanded as all three of them rushed over to me.

Hermione engulfed me in a bone-crushing hug, and with my present condition, that didn't help me a lot. "Oh, we were so worried! How could you do this to us?" She pulled away, though, just as she did, I lost my balance and was about to collapse but was thankfully caught by Ron.
"Blimey, what happened to you?" he muttered, practically dragging me to a couch. I was about to fall in front of it, but Harry helped Ron help me sit down before they both sat as well, each at my side, Hermione in front of me.

She studied me, pursed her lips and leaned forward, pressing the back of her hand against my forehead head, but quickly snatched her hand away as my skin burned her.

"Holy cricket! Your skin is burning!" she exclaimed herself, eyes wide in shock.

I sighed, cringing at my cracking rib cage. "I know."

They stared at me, dumbstruck. "You're not denying it?" Harry asked in surprise.

"No. Why would I?"

"Because you have been ever since we've met you," Ron said.

Hermione nodded. "You, either, wouldn't talk, or, when you would, you'd avoid every question we asked."

I sighed again, wrapping my arms around my stomach, in pain. "Alright, you caught me. Since I promised you, I will tell you, but not tonight, considering we have classes tomorrow." They nodded in agreement, waiting for me to continue.

I yawned. "I'll tell you... Friday, or at the very least on the weekend." With that, Ron and Hermione went up to their dorms, leaving me and Harry alone.

I suddenly felt a pair of strong warm arms around me. "Promise me you won't leave me again," Harry whispered, burying his face in the crook of my neck and inhaling my scent.

I groaned. "After the many times I have run off, you should know by now that that is pretty much the last thing I could ever promise anyone, Harry," I whispered back.

He sighed and looked up at me, tightening his grip around me. "Fair enough. But at least try to warn me next time you're about to make a run for it," he pleaded, locking his bright green eyes with my, once again, violet orchidee eyes. How is it that I felt so... human around these people?

I leaned my head against his shoulder. "I'll try..." was the last thing I said before welcoming the darkness, feeling safe in my best friend's arms.
Burning

It was a relief to return to the noise and bustle of the school on Monday, where Delilah was forced to think about other things, even if she, along with the rest of her golden quartet, had to endure Malfoy’s taunting. The latter was almost beside himself with glee at Gryffindor's defeat. He had finally taken off his bandages, and celebrated having the full use of both arms again by doing spirited imitations of Harry falling off his broom. He spent much of their next Potions class doing dementor imitations across the dungeon; Ron finally cracked and flung a large, slippery crocodile heart at Malfoy, which hit him in the face and caused Delilah to cheer him on, but Snape to take fifty points from Gryffindor. Git.

"If Snape's teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts again, I'm skiving off," said Ron as they headed toward Lupin's classroom after lunch. "Check who's in there, Hermione."

Hermione peered around the classroom door. "It's okay!"

Professor Lupin was back at work. It certainly looked as though he had been ill, but, then again, Delilah knew better. His old robes were hanging more loosely on him and there were dark shadows beneath his eyes; nevertheless, he smiled at the class as they took their seats, and everyone pretty much just burst all at once into an explosion of complaints about Snape's behavior while Lupin had been 'ill'.

"It's not fair, he was only filling in, why should he give us homework?"

"We don't know anything about werewolves— two rolls of parchment!"

"Did you tell Professor Snape we haven't covered them yet?" Lupin asked, frowning slightly.

The babble broke out again.

"Yes, but he said we were really behind, he wouldn't listen—"

"— two rolls of parchment!"

Professor Lupin smiled at the look of indignation on every face. "Don't worry. I'll speak to Professor Snape. You don't have to do the essay."

"Oh no," said Hermione, looking very disappointed. "I've already finished it!" Delilah empathetically patted her arm; she had finished it too.

They had a very enjoyable lesson. Professor Lupin had brought along a glass box containing a hinkypunk, a little one-legged creature who looked as though he were made of wisps of smoke, rather frail and harmless looking.

"Lures travelers into bogs," said Professor Lupin as they took notes. "You notice the lantern dangling from his hand? Hops ahead— people follow the light— then—"

The hinkypunk made a horrible squelching noise against the glass.

When the bell rang, everyone gathered up their things and headed for the door, Harry among them, but—

"Wait a moment, Harry," Lupin called. "I'd like a word."
Delilah smiled encouragingly at Harry before turning to follow Ron and Hermione, but—

"You too, Delilah," he called after her too. She stopped short and cursed under her breath. She already knew what this was about; she already tried it and it worked. What more could he want?

Harry and Delilah doubled back and watched Professor Lupin covering the hinkypunk's box with a cloth.

"I heard about the match," said Lupin, turning back to his desk and starting to pile books into his briefcase, "and I'm sorry about your broomstick, Harry. Is there any chance of fixing it?"

"No," said Harry. "The tree smashed it to bits."

Lupin sighed.

"They planted the Whomping Willow the same year that I arrived at Hogwarts. People used to play a game, trying to get near enough to touch the trunk. In the end, a boy called Davey Gudgeon nearly lost an eye, and we were forbidden to go near it. No broomstick would have a chance."

"And that story was meant to help in what way?" Delilah muttered, causing the Professor to chuckle.

"Did you hear about the dementors too?" Harry asked, quickly taking his friend's hand in his and intertwining their fingers.

Lupin looked at him quickly.

"Yes, I did. I don't think any of us have seen Professor Dumbledore that angry. They have been growing restless for some time— furious at his refusal to let them inside the grounds.... I suppose they were the reason you fell?"

"Yes," said Harry. He hesitated, and then the question he had to ask burst from him before he could stop himself. "Why? Why do they affect me like that? Am I just—?" Delilah squeezed Harry's hand reassuringly, but bit her lower lip in worry at what Lupin might say next.

"It has nothing to do with weakness," said Professor Lupin sharply, as though he had read Harry's mind. "The dementors affect you worse than the others because there are horrors in your past that the others don't have."

A ray of wintery sunlight fell across the classroom, illuminating Lupin's gray hairs and the lines on his young face.

"Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. Even Muggles feel their presence, though they can't see them. Get too near a dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself... soul-less and evil. You'll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life. And the worst that happened to you, Harry, is enough to make anyone fall off their broom. You have nothing to feel ashamed of."

"When they get near me—" Harry stared at Lupin's desk, his throat tight. "I can hear Voldemort murdering my mum."

Lupin made a sudden motion with his arm as though to grip Harry's shoulder, but thought better of it. There was a moment's silence, then—
"Why did they have to come to the match?" said Harry bitterly.

"They're getting hungry," said Lupin coolly, shutting his briefcase with a snap. "Dumbledore won't let them into the school, so their supply of human prey has dried up.... I don't think they could resist the large crowd around the Quidditch field. All that excitement ... emotions running high... it was their idea of a feast."

"Azkaban must be terrible," Harry muttered. Lupin nodded grimly.

"The fortress is set on a tiny island, way out to sea, but they don't need walls and water to keep the prisoners in, not when they're all trapped inside their own heads, incapable of a single cheery thought. Most of them go mad within weeks."

"But Sirius Black escaped from them," Harry said slowly. "He got away..."

Lupin's briefcase slipped from the desk; he had to stoop quickly to catch it.

"Yes," he said, straightening up, "Black must have found a way to fight them. I wouldn't have believed it possible.... Dementors are supposed to drain a wizard of his powers if he is left with them too long...."

Delilah Black...

Delilah blinked in confusion as the name came in a whisper into her mind. She frowned, lips pursed in anticipation, before shrugging it off; she would worry about that later.

"You made that dementor on the train back off," said Harry suddenly.

"There are— certain defenses one can use," said Lupin. "But there was only one—"

"Two, with the one that attacked me. But that wasn't a lot and they were on the train with over a thousand people. It was easy because they were both kind of outnumbered. The more there are, the more difficult it becomes to resist," Delilah cut in. Lupin nodded.

"What defenses?" said Harry at once. "Can you teach me?" Delilah tensed up, but he squeezed her hand reassuringly. "Us?"

*I kind of already know,* Delilah thought, biting her lip.

Lupin sighed. "I don't pretend to be an expert at fighting dementors, Harry, quite the contrary..."

"But if the dementors come to another Quidditch match, I need to be able to fight them—"

Lupin looked into Harry's determined face, hesitated, then said, "Well... alright. I'll try and help. But it'll have to wait until next term, I'm afraid. I have a lot to do before the holidays. I chose a very inconvenient time to fall ill."

What with the promise of anti-dementor lessons from Lupin, the thought that he might never have to hear his mother's death again, and the fact that Ravenclaw flattened Hufflepuff in their Quidditch match at the end of November, Harry's mood took a definite upturn. Gryffindor was not out of the running after all, although they could not afford to lose another match. Wood became repossessed of his manic energy, and worked the team as hard as ever in the chilly haze of rain that persisted into December. Delilah saw no hint of a dementor within the grounds. Dumbledore's anger seemed to be keeping them at their stations at the entrances.
Delilah pretty much avoided as much as possible the subject about what she is, and she did pretty well as it was now two weeks before the end of the term; the sky lightened suddenly to a dazzling, opaline white and the muddy grounds were revealed one morning covered in glittering frost.

Inside the castle, there was a buzz of Christmas in the air. Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, had already decorated his classroom with shimmering lights that turned out to be real, fluttering fairies. The students were all happily discussing their plans for the holidays. Both Ron and Hermione had decided to remain at Hogwarts, and though Ron said it was because he couldn't stand two weeks with Percy, and Hermione insisted she needed to use the library, Harry and Delilah weren't fooled; they were doing it to keep them company, and Delilah was very grateful, but she wasn't planning on staying... nor was she planning to go with Seth and Daren.

"Awe, why not?" he'd complained, a pout on his face.

She'd sighed and said again, "I already told you, Seth, I'm going to see my dad."

Seth would perk up and ask, "Is he my dad too?"

Letting out another long sigh through her nose, Delilah would answer, "No, Seth, he's not even my real dad."

"But then why—"

"He adopted me."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

"Awe, man!"

Another sigh. "I'll be there next year, I promise."

Then he'd give Delilah a full-blown grin and run off with his friends, whom, now that she's realized, she hadn't met yet. Anyway, back to the current events, there was to be another Hogsmeade trip on the very last weekend of the term much to everyone's delight... except Harry's.

"We can do all their Christmas shopping there!" said Hermione. "Mum and Dad would really love those Toothflossing Stringmints from Honeydukes!"

Resigned to the fact that he would be the only third year staying behind again, Harry borrowed a copy of Which Broomstick from Wood, and decided to spend the day reading up on the different makes. He had been riding one of the school brooms at team practice, an ancient Shooting Star, which was very slow and jerky; he definitely needed a new broom of his own, he did not want to bother Delilah by asking to borrow hers, even though he knew she would gladly lend it to him.

On the Saturday morning of the Hogsmeade trip, Harry and Delilah bid goodbyes to Ron and Hermione, who were wrapped in cloaks and scarves, and Seth, who did not miss out on almost hugging the life out of Delilah and kissing her cheek before running off, then turned up the marble staircase alone, and headed back toward Gryffindor Tower. Snow had started to fall outside the windows, and the castle was very still and quiet.

"Psst— Harry! Deli!"

They turned, halfway along the third-floor corridor, to see Fred and George peering out at them from
behind a statue of a humpbacked, one-eyed witch.

"What are you doing?" said Harry curiously. "How come you're not going to Hogsmeade?"

"We've come to give you a bit of festive cheer before we go," said Fred, with a serious wink. "Come in here...."

They nodded toward an empty classroom to the left of the one-eyed statue. Harry and Delilah followed Fred and George inside. George closed the door quietly and then turned, beaming, to look at them.

"Early Christmas present for you, Harry," he said and winked at Delilah, making her raise an eyebrow at him.

Fred pulled something from inside his cloak with a flourish and laid it on one of the desks. It was a large, square, very worn piece of parchment with nothing written on it. Harry, suspecting one of Fred and George's jokes, stared at it while Delilah just rolled her eyes at them.

"What's that supposed to be?"

"This, Harry, is the secret of our success," said George, patting the parchment fondly.

"It's a wrench, giving it to you," said Fred, "but we decided last night, your need's greater than ours."

"Anyway, we know it by heart," said George. "We bequeath it to you. We don't really need it anymore."

"And what do I need with a bit of old parchment?" said Harry.

"A bit of old parchment!" said Fred, closing his eyes with a grimace as though Harry had mortally offended him. "Explain, George."

"Well... when we were in our first year, Harry— young, carefree, and innocent—"

The two third-year students snorted. Harry doubted whether Fred and George had ever been innocent and Delilah knew that if they had ever been innocent, it was probably only when they were babies. Even then, they were probably already mischievous.

"Well, more innocent than we are now— we got into a spot of bother with Filch."

"We let off a Dungbomb in the corridor and it upset him for some reason—"

"So he hauled us off to his office and started threatening us with the usual— detention disembowelment and we couldn't help noticing a drawer in one of his filing cabinets marked Confiscated and Highly Dangerous."

"Don't tell me—" said Harry, starting to grin.

"Well, what would you've done?" said Fred. "George caused a diversion by dropping another Dungbomb, I whipped the drawer open, and grabbed— this."

"It's not as bad as it sounds, you know," said George. "We don't reckon Filch ever found out how to work it. He probably suspected what it was, though, or he wouldn't have confiscated it."

"And you know how to work it?"
"Oh yes," said Fred, smirking. "This little beauty's taught us more than all the teachers in this school."

"You're winding us up," said Harry, looking at the ragged old bit of parchment.

"Oh, are we?" said George.

Delilah rolled her eyes and stepped forward, drawing her wand out. "Let me guess, you touch the parchment with your wand and say 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good'."

The twins grinned pridefully at her as suddenly, thin ink lines began to spread like a spider's web from the point that her wand had touched. They joined each other, they crisscrossed, they fanned into every corner of the parchment; then words began to blossom across the top, great, curly green words, that proclaimed:


Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers are proud to present THE MARAUDER'S MAP.

It was a map showing every detail of the Hogwarts castle and grounds. But the truly remarkable thing were the tiny ink dots moving around it, each labeled with a name in minuscule writing. Delilah's eyebrows raised as she gave the magical parchment and appreciative look. Astounded, Harry bent over it. A labeled dot in the top left corner showed that Professor Dumbledore was pacing his study; the caretaker's cat, Mrs. Norris, was prowling the second floor; and Peeves the Poltergeist was currently bouncing around the trophy room. And as Harry's eyes traveled up and down the familiar corridors, he noticed something else. Delilah followed his gaze and she, too, realized that this map showed a set of passages they had never entered. And many of them seemed to lead—

"Right into Hogsmeade," said Fred, tracing one of them with his finger. "There are seven in all. Now, Filch knows about these four—" he pointed them out "—but we're sure we're the only ones who know about these. Don't bother with the one behind the mirror on the fourth floor. We used it until last winter, but it's caved in— completely blocked. And we don't reckon anyone's ever used this one, because the Whomping Willow's planted right over the entrance. But this one here, this one leads right into the cellar of Honeydukes. We've used it loads of times. And as you might've noticed, the entrance is right outside this room, through that one-eyed old crone's hump."

"Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, Phantom, and Prongs," sighed George, patting the heading of the map. "We owe them so much."

"Noble men, working tirelessly to help a new generation of lawbreakers," said Fred solemnly.

"Right," said George briskly. "Don't forget to wipe it after you've used it or anyone can read it," Fred said warningly.

"Just tap it again and say, 'Mischief managed!' And it'll go blank."

"So, young Harry," said Fred, in an uncanny impersonation of Percy, "mind you behave yourself."

"See you in Honeydukes," said George, winking.

They left the room, both smirking in a satisfied sort of way.

Harry stood there, gazing at the miraculous map as Delilah crossed her arms and waited patiently for what he was going to plan next. But suddenly, that old burning feeling reached her throat again. It was starting to be hard for her to breathe, but she did her best to ignore it as she watched Harry
watching the tiny ink Mrs. Norris turn left and pause to sniff at something on the floor. If Filch really
didn't know... he wouldn't have to pass the dementors at all....

But even as he stood there, flooded with excitement, something Harry had told her about once
hearing Mr. Weasley say to him came floating out of her memory, and from the looks of it, he
remembered as well. Never trust anything that can think for itself, if you can't see where it keeps its
brain.

This map was probably one of those dangerous magical objects Mr. Weasley had been warning
against.... Aids for Magical Mischief Makers... but then, Delilah thought deeply and realized that
Harry only wanted to use it to get into Hogsmeade, it wasn't as though he wanted to steal anything or
attack anyone... and Fred and George had been using it for years without anything horrible
happening....

Harry traced the secret passage to Honeydukes with his finger and then looked up at Delilah. She
threw her hands up in a surrendering motion and started to walk backwards, shaking her head as the
burning increased. She had to leave, and fast.

"Don't look at me, Potter. You're on your own with this one," was all she said before she ran up
towards the Gryffindor tower.

As soon as she was out of sight, she didn't bother to use the stairs, she simply flicked her finger and
appeared first into her room. She changed into an old pair of sneakers, a pair of washed out short
jeans and a plain brown t-shirt before flicking her finger again and appearing in Dumbledore's office
where he was waiting for her.

"I have to leave," said Delilah, rushing to stand right in front of him.

"Can't you hunt here in the forest?" he asked, curiously.

She shook her head. "The creatures here have magic in their blood. It's too tempting, but it will
undoubtedly become overly irresistible and that would be dangerous. I wouldn't be able to stop
myself and may end up losing control any place at any time. Back at home I can at least charm the
blood I take in a way so I wouldn't lose it," she explained quickly.

Professor Dumbledore sighed before nodding. "Alright, but please do come back. I need you here to
keep a close eye on Harry," he said.

Delilah nodded before jumping out through his door-sized window into the water below and instant-
transmission herself to the La Push beach. She didn't know which way would lead her to the surface,
but she couldn't care any less than she did as darkness engulfed her.

Harry slid a considerable way down what felt like a stone slide, then landed on cold, damp earth. He
stood up, looking around. It was pitch dark.

He held up his wand, muttered, "Lumos! " and saw that he was in a very narrow, low, earthy
passageway.

He raised the map, tapped it with the tip of his wand, and muttered, "Mischief managed!" The map
went blank at once. He folded it carefully, tucked it inside his robes, then, heart beating fast, both
excited and apprehensive, he set off.

The passage twisted and turned, more like the burrow of a giant rabbit than anything else. Harry
hurried along it, stumbling now and then on the uneven floor, holding his wand out in front of him.
It took ages, but Harry had the thought of Honeydukes to sustain him. After what felt like an hour, the passage began to rise. Panting, Harry sped up, his face hot, his feet very cold. Ten minutes later, he came to the foot of some worn stone steps, which rose out of sight above him. Careful not to make any noise, Harry began to climb. A hundred steps, two hundred steps, he lost count as he climbed, watching his feet... Then, without warning, his head hit something hard.

It seemed to be a trapdoor. Harry stood there, massaging the top of his head, listening. He couldn't hear any sounds above him. Very slowly, he pushed the trapdoor open and peered over the edge. He was in a cellar, which was full of wooden crates and boxes. Harry climbed out of the trapdoor and replaced it— it blended so perfectly with the dusty floor that it was impossible to tell it was there. Harry crept slowly toward the wooden staircase that led upstairs. Now he could definitely hear voices, not to mention the tinkle of a bell and the opening and shutting of a door.

Wondering what he ought to do, he suddenly heard a door open much closer at hand; somebody was about to come downstairs. "And get another box of Jelly Slugs, dear, they've nearly cleaned us out —" said a woman's voice.

A pair of feet was coming down the staircase. Harry leapt behind an enormous crate and waited for the footsteps to pass. He heard the man shifting boxes against the opposite wall. He might not get another chance—

Quickly and silently, Harry dodged out from his hiding place and climbed the stairs; looking back, he saw an enormous backside and shiny bald head, buried in a box. Harry reached the door at the top of the stairs, slipped through it, and found himself behind the counter of Honeydukes—he ducked, crept sideways, and then straightened up.

Honeydukes was so crowded with Hogwarts students that no one looked twice at Harry. He edged among them, looking around, and suppressed a laugh as he imagined the look that would spread over Dudley's piggy face if he could see where Harry was now.

There were shelves upon shelves of the most succulent-looking sweets imaginable. Creamy chunks of nougat, shimmering pink squares of coconut ice, fat, honey-colored toffees; hundreds of different kinds of chocolate in neat rows; there was a large barrel of Every Flavor Beans, had mentioned; along yet another wall were "Special Effects"— sweets: Droobles Best Blowing Gum (which filled a room with bluebell-colored bubbles that refused to pop for days), the strange, splinterly Toothflossing Stringmints, tiny black Pepper Imps ("breathe fire for your friends!"), Ice Mice ("hear your teeth chatter and squeak!"), peppermint creams shaped like toads ("hop realistically in the stomach!") , fragile sugar-spun quills, and exploding bonbons.

Harry squeezed himself through a crowd of sixth years and saw a sign hanging in the farthest corner of the shop (UNUSUAL TASTES). Ron and Hermione were standing underneath it, examining a tray of blood-flavored lollipops. Harry sneaked up behind them.

"Ugh, no, Harry won't want one of those, they're for vampires, I expect," Hermione was saying.

"How about these?" said Ron, shoving a jar of Cockroach Clusters under Hermione's nose.

"Definitely not," said Harry.

Ron nearly dropped the jar.

"Harry!" squealed Hermione. "What are you doing here? How—how did you—?

"Wow!" said Ron, looking very impressed, "you've learned to Apparate!"
"'Course I haven't," said Harry.

Hermione frowned. "How are you here, then. I'm sure if Delilah knew she wouldn't have let you come— she may have changed, but she still has a sense of responsibility."

Harry fought back a grin. "Actually, her exact words were 'Don't look at me, Potter. You're on your own with this one.' He then dropped his voice so that none of the sixth years could hear him and told them all about the Marauder's Map.

"How come Fred and George never gave it to me!" said Ron, outraged. "I'm their brother!"

"But Harry isn't going to keep it!" said Hermione, as though the idea were ludicrous. "He's going to hand it into Professor McGonagall, aren't you, Harry?"

"No, I'm not!" said Harry.

"Are you mad?" said Ron, goggling at Hermione. "Hand in something that good?"

"If I hand it in, I'll have to say where I got it! Filch would know Fred and George had nicked it!"

"But what about Sirius Black?" Hermione hissed. "He could be using one of the passages on that map to get into the castle! The teachers have got to know!"

"He can't be getting in through a passage," said Harry quickly. "There are seven secret tunnels on the map, right? Fred and George reckon Filch already knows about four of them. And of the other three—one of them's caved in, so no one can get through it. One of them's got the Whomping Willow planted over the entrance, so you can't get out of it. And the one I just came through— well— it's really hard to see the entrance to it down in the cellar, so unless he knew it was there..." Harry hesitated. What if Black did know the passage was there?

Ron, however, cleared his throat significantly, and pointed to a notice pasted on the inside of the sweetshop:

———BY ORDER OF THE MINISTRY OF MAGIC———

Customers are reminded that until further notice, dementors will be patrolling the streets of Hogsmeade every night after sundown. This measure has been put in place for the safety of Hogsmeade residents and will be lifted upon the recapture of Sirius Black. It is therefore advisable that you complete your shopping well before nightfall.

Merry Christmas!

"See?" said Ron quietly. "I'd like to see Black try and break into Honeydukes with dementors swarming all over the village. Anyway, Hermione, the Honeydukes owners would hear a break-in, wouldn't they? They live over the shop!"

"That's the post office."

"Zonko's is up there—"

"We could go up to the Shrieking Shack—"

"Tell you what," said Ron, his teeth chattering, "shall we go for a butterbeer in the Three Broomsticks?"
Harry was more than willing; the wind was fierce and his hands were freezing, so they crossed the road, and in a few minutes were entering the tiny inn. It was extremely crowded, noisy, warm, and smoky. A curvy sort of woman with a pretty face was serving a bunch of rowdy warlock’ up at the bar.

"That's Madam Rosmerta," said Ron. "I'll get the drinks," he added, going slightly red.

Harry and Hermione made their way to the back of the room, where there was a small, vacant table between the window and a handsome Christmas tree, which stood next to the fireplace. Ron came back five minutes later, carrying three foaming tankards of hot butterbeer.

"Merry Christmas!" he said happily, raising his tankard.

Before Harry could even take a sip from his drink, he heard a voice, coated with confusion, call out his name.

Stiffening, Harry tried to slide down his chair—he'd really hoped no one would notice him at Hogsmeade.

"Harry!" The called boy finally turned, noting the hushed tone the person was using to call him. When he turned, he was really surprised to see the young boy who claimed to be his best friend's little brother.

Rosy cheeks, jet-black hair covered in snow, Seth stood there, head tilted to the side, causing some snow to fall off his hair, and eyes wide with confusion and curiosity as they stared at the older boy. "Aren't you supposed to be back at Hogwarts?"

Harry chuckled nervously. "Uh... yeah... I sort of sneaked out. Please, don't tell anyone." He didn't know Seth very much, so he hoped that, if Delilah was his sister, that at least he'd be somewhat like her when it came to secrecy.

Seth furrowed his brows, ignoring the whispered questions his friends, who stood behind him, sent his way. "Where's Deli?"

Harry frowned. Now that he thought of it, he didn't even bother to ask his best friend where she'd be off to as he had been too caught up in the excitement of being able to leave the school. "I don't know, I didn't ask. Why?"

It was Seth who frowned this time as he felt an unfamiliar tug in the pit of his stomach. "Uh... no reason." He liked the trio very much, even though he'd only been in their presence whenever he tried to hang out with Delilah, but he didn't know them well enough to ask them if they knew about their family secret. Even if they did, it wasn't something he could actually talk to them about in such a public place.

Seth turned to his friends and whispered something. They complained about something, causing the trio to share a look. His friends finally gave in to whatever they'd been discussing and left the Three Broomsticks, leaving Seth with the trio.

He turned to look at them and decided to use the charm that ran in his family. "May I join you?" he asked, though adorable it seemed, it also seemed quite charming and hard to decline too.

The trio nodded and let him order himself a hot chocolate before sitting between Hermione and Ron, every now and then glancing straight at Harry. The latter finally drank deeply. Butterbeer; it was the most delicious thing he'd ever tasted and seemed to heat every bit of him from the inside.
She was surrounded by darkness and pain...

The darkness remained, but the pain changed.

On the bright side, it started to fade from her fingertips and toes. Fading slowly, but at least it was doing something new. This was good—*great* even; the pain was on its way out...

The bad news was that the fire in her throat wasn’t the same as before. She wasn’t only on fire, but she was now parched, too. Dry as bone. So thirsty. Burning fire, and burning thirst…

Also bad news: The fire inside her heart and body got hotter.

How was that *possible*? It just was when it came to her.

Her heartbeat, already too fast, grew faster, pounding harder—the fire drove its rhythm to a new frantic pace. The fire retreated from her palms, leaving them blissfully pain-free and cool. But it retreated to her heart, which blazed hot as the sun and beat at a furious new speed. Well, not exactly new as the speed was rather familiar to her.

Her fingers, heavy against an inexplicable force, twitched— the irritation breaking through her perfect façade. Wherever she was, that place went silent besides the jack-hammering of her heart.

Her heart took off, beating like a woodpecker, the sound almost a single sustained note; it felt like it would grind through her ribs. The fire flared up in the center of her chest, sucking the last remnants of the flames from the rest of her body to fuel the most scorching blaze yet. The pain was enough to stun her, to break through her iron grip on the stake. Her back arched, bowed as if the fire was dragging her upward by her heart. She allowed no other piece of her body to break rank as her torso slumped back to the now sandy ground.

There was a battle going on inside of her, now— her hastened heart racing against the attacking fire. Both were losing. The fire was doomed, having consumed everything that was combustible; her heart galloped toward its last beat.

The fire constricted, concentrating inside that one remaining human organ with a final, unbearable surge. The surge was answered by a deep, hollow-sounding thud. Her heart stuttered twice and then thudded quietly again just once more.

There was no sound other than the waves of the beach washing over her. No breathing. Not even hers.

For a moment, the absence of pain was all she could comprehend.

And then she opened her eyes and gazed above her in wonder.

Everything was so clear *again*. 
Hunting the truth

Everything was so clear again, though despite how blinding-bright the light overhead still was, she could plainly see the glowing strands of the filaments around the aura surrounding the round orb that shone in the sky almost every day. She could see each color of the rainbow in the yellowish light, and, at the very edge of the spectrum, an eighth color she had no name for.

In front of her, she could see dust motes in the air, the sides the light touched, and the dark sides, distinct and separate. They spun like little planets, moving around each other as if they were dancing. The dust was so beautiful that she inhaled in shock; the air whistled down her throat, swirling the motes into a vortex. The action felt wrong yet right. She considered, and realized the problem was that there was no relief tied to the action. She didn’t need the air. She didn’t need it, but she loved it. Her wolf loved it. In it, she could taste every speck of her surroundings— taste the lovely dust motes. Taste the salty water washing over the seashore. Taste a lush whiff pine trees and all the woods from the forest rooted on the outskirts of the beach. Taste a faint hint of something warm and desirable, something that should be moist, but wasn’t... That smell made her throat burn dryly, a faint echo of the venom burn, though the scent was tainted by the bite of chlorine and ammonia. And most of all, she could taste an almost-honey-lilac-and-sun-flavored scent that was the strongest thing, the closest thing to her.

She could suddenly distinguish different scents that were something just off honey and lilac and sunshine, bringing new flavors. Cinnamon, hyacinth, pear, seawater, rising bread, pine, vanilla, leather, apple, moss, lavender, chocolate... she traded a dozen different comparisons in her mind, but none of them fit exactly. So sweet and pleasant.

After that first frozen second of shock, her body responded to an unfamiliar touch in a way that shocked her even more. Air hissed up her throat, spitting through her clenched teeth with a low, menacing sound like a swarm of bees. Before the sound was out, her muscles bunched and arched, twisting away from the unknown. She flipped off her back in a spin so fast it should have turned wherever she was into an incomprehensible blur— but it did not. She saw every dust mote, every grain of sand, every loose thread in microscopic detail as her eyes whirled past them. So by the time she found herself crouched against the seashore defensively— about a sixteenth of a second later— she already understood what had startled her, and why she had overreacted.

Before her stood a little boy— about a year or two of age— trembling in the arms of a girl who was slightly older than him— probably around five or six years old— a visibly identical girl standing at her side, clinging to her arm, all three frozen in front of a couple who seemed to be in their mid-twenties. By the looks on their faces, she understood that she scared them, though there was a distinctive look on the sole man’s face.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

Without giving them a chance to react, she burst into a run again, a flat-out sprint straight north, concentrating solely on the uncomfortable feeling of sensory deprivation that seemed to be her body’s only response to the lack of air. her one goal was to run far enough away that their scent behind her would be completely lost. Impossible to find, even if she changed her mind...

A new thought occurred to her, and she stopped dead, her feet planted. She was sure it must be safe here, but she held her breath just in case. When she opened her mouth, she could taste the air— it was unpolluted now, with no trace of the compelling perfume to torment her thirst, though just as she was about to take a cautious breath, it echoed in the air.
**Black...**

She let out a surprised gasp, but paid no mind to the new scents that slapped her right in the face because the millisecond she blinked, she heard it again.

*De... li... lah... Black...*

She remembered; just the previous year, she'd been surnamed Black by Tom Riddle, and that same year, Dumbledore had almost called her that so many times as well. Did that have anything to do with... with Sirius Black?

*Delilah... Black...*

What was going on?

Harry's heart was pounding uncomfortably in his throat. Why hadn't it occurred to him that this was the last weekend of term for the teachers too? And how long were they going to sit there? He needed time to sneak back into Honeydukes if he wanted to return to school tonight....

Hermione's leg gave a nervous twitch next to him.

"So, what brings you to this neck of the woods, Minister?" came Madam Rosmerta's voice.

Harry saw the lower part of Fudge's thick body twist in his chair as though he were checking for eavesdroppers. Then he said in a quiet voice, "What else, m'dear, but Sirius Black? I daresay you heard what happened up at the school at Halloween?"

*Jo... seph... Black...*

Seth jumped in surprise, hitting his leg against the table, groaning at the slight pain, fighting back the curses that were about to leave his mouth. The trio had also jumped, but for them, it was more out of fright and nervousness; he really scared them with his sudden, unexpected reaction.

"Seth!" Hermione hissed lowly.

"Sorry," he mumbled.

"I did hear a rumor," admitted Madam Rosmerta.

"Did you tell the whole pub, Hagrid?" said Professor McGonagall exasperatedly.

"Do you think Blacks still in the area, Minister?" whispered Madam Rosmerta.

*Joseph... Black...*

Seth jumped again, though, this time, he made sure not to startle his companions as to not give their presence away.

Hermione and Ron sent him a questioning look, but he shook his head and tried to focus back on the conversation the adults were having. He

"I'm sure of it," said Fudge shortly.

"You know that the dementors have searched the whole village twice?" said Madam Rosmerta, a slight edge to her voice. "Scared all my customers away... It's very bad for business, Minister."
"Rosmerta, dear, I don't like them any more than you do," said Fudge uncomfortably. "Necessary precaution... unfortunate, but there YOU are.... I've just met some of them. They're in a fury against Dumbledore—he won't let them inside the castle grounds."

"I should think not," said Professor McGonagall sharply. "How are we supposed to teach with those horrors floating around?"

"Hear, hear!" squeaked tiny Professor Flitwick, whose feet were dangling a foot from the ground.

"All the same," demurred Fudge, "they are here to protect you all from something much worse.... We all know what Black's capable of..."

"Do you know, I still have trouble believing it," said Madam Rosmerta thoughtfully. "Of all the people to go over to the Dark Side, Sirius Black was the last I'd have thought... I mean, I remember him when he was a boy at Hogwarts. If you'd told me then what he was going to become, I'd have said you'd had too much mead."

"You don't know the half of it, Rosmerta," Fudge said gruffly. "The worst he did isn't widely known."

"The worst?" said Madam Rosmerta, her voice alive with curiosity, "Worse than murdering all those poor people, you mean?"

"I certainly do," said Fudge.

"I can't believe that. What could possibly be worse?"

"You say you remember him at Hogwarts, Rosmerta," murmured Professor McGonagall.

"Do you remember who his best friend was?"

"Naturally," said Madam Rosmerta, with a small laugh. "Never saw one without the other, did you? The number of times I had them in here—ooh, they used to make me laugh. Quite the double act, Sirius Black and James Potter!"

Seth stiffened subconsciously. Harry dropped his tankard with a loud clunk. Ron kicked him.

"Precisely," said Professor McGonagall. "Black and Potter. Ringleaders of their little gang. Both very bright, of course—exceptionally bright, in fact—but I don't think we've ever had such a pair of troublemakers—"

"I dunno," chuckled Hagrid. "Fred and George Weasley could give 'em a run fer their money."

"You'd have thought Black and Potter were brothers!" chimed in Professor Flitwick. "Inseparable!"

"Of course they were," said Fudge. "Potter trusted Black beyond all his other friends... well, besides Ella-Grace."

Seth frowned, puzzled. Are they talking about my mom?

"Nothing changed when they left school. Black was best man and Ella-Grace was maid of honor when James married Lily. And it would have been the same if Black and Ella ended together... if it weren't for that mongrel..." The Minister cleared his throat a bit, shaking his head at the straying conversation. "Then they named Black and Ella godparents to Harry. Harry has no idea, of course. And James and Lily were Ella's daughter's, though, of course, she has no idea either. They would've
been her son's as well, but they... they didn't even get the chance to see him. Her daughter! She witnessed more than a girl her age should ever witness since a very young age. Godric knows how she'll react if she knew what mess she was in paternally. Her brother, at the very least, had a somewhat normal life, though he would surely be just as traumatized. You can imagine how the idea would torment all three of them."

Seth and the trio were all very confused at this point.

"Because Black turned out to be in league with You-Know-Who?" whispered Madam Rosmerta.

"Worse even than that, m'dear...." Fudge dropped his voice and proceeded in a sort of low rumble. "Not many people are aware that the Potters knew You-Know-Who was after them. Dumbledore, who was, of course, working tirelessly against You-Know-Who, had a number of useful spies. One of them tipped him off, and he alerted James and Lily at once. He advised them to go into hiding. Well, of course, You-Know-Who wasn't an easy person to hide from. Dumbledore told them that their best chance was the Fidelius Charm."

"How does that work?" said Madam Rosmerta, breathless with interest. Professor Flitwick cleared his throat.

"An immensely complex spell," he said squeakily, "involving the magical concealment of a secret inside a single, living soul. The information is hidden inside the chosen person, or Secret-Keeper, and is henceforth impossible to find— unless, of course, the Secret-Keeper chooses to divulge it. As long as the Secret-Keeper refused to speak, You-Know-Who could search the village where Lily and James were staying for years and never find them, not even if he had his nose pressed against their sitting room window!"

"So Black was the Potters' Secret-Keeper?" whispered Madam Rosmerta.

"Naturally," said Professor McGonagall. "James Potter told Dumbledore that Black would die rather than tell where they were, that Black was planning to go into hiding himself... and yet, Dumbledore remained worried. I remember him offering to be the Potters' Secret-Keeper himself."

"He suspected Black?" gasped Madam Rosmerta.

"He was sure that somebody close to the Potters had been keeping You-Know-Who informed of their movements," said Professor McGonagall darkly. "Indeed, he had suspected for some time that someone on our side had turned traitor and was passing a lot of information to You-Know-Who."

"But James Potter insisted on using Black?"

"He did," said Fudge heavily. "And then, barely a week after the Fidelius Charm had been performed—"

"Black betrayed them?" breathed Madam Rosmerta.

"He did indeed. Black was tired of his double-agent role, he was ready to declare his support openly for You-Know-Who, and he seems to have planned this for the moment of the Potters' death. But, as we all know, You-Know-Who met his downfall in little Harry Potter. Powers gone, horribly weakened, he fled. And this left Black in a very nasty position indeed. His master had fallen at the very moment when he, Black, had shown his true colors as a traitor. He had no choice but to run for it—"

"Filthy, stinkin' turncoat!" Hagrid said, so loudly that half the bar went quiet.
"Shh!" said Professor McGonagall.

"I met him!" growled Hagrid. "I musta bin the last ter see him before he killed all them people! It was me what rescued Harry from Lily an' James's house after they was killed! jus' got him outta the ruins, poor little thing, with a great slash across his forehead, an' his parents dead... an' Sirius Black turns up, on that flyin' motorbike he used ter ride. Never occurred ter me what he was doin' there. I didn' know he'd bin Lily an' James's Secret-Keeper. Thought he'd jus' heard the news o' You-Know-Who's attack an' come ter see what he could do. White an' shakin', he was. An' yeh know what I did? I COMFORTED THE MURDERIN' TRAITOR!" Hagrid roared.

"Hagrid, please!" said Professor McGonagall. "Keep your voice down!"

But Hagrid paid her no mind as he rambled on with his story. "How was I ter know he wasn' upset abou' Lily an' James? It was You-Know-Who he cared abou'! An' then he says, 'Give Harry ter me, Hagrid, I'm his godfather, I'll look after him—' Ha! But I'd had me orders from Dumbledore, an' I told Black no, Dumbledore said Harry was ter go ter his aunt an' uncle's. Black argued, but in the end he gave in. Told me ter take his motorbike ter get Harry there. 'I won't need it anymore,' he says."

The giant huffed, then sighed.

"I shoulda known there was somethin' fishy goin' on then. He loved that motorbike, what was he givin' it ter me for? Why wouldn' he need it anymore? Fact was, it was too easy ter trace. Dumbledore knew he'd bin the Potters' Secret-Keeper. Black knew he was goin' ter have ter run fer it that night, knew it was a matter o' hours before the Ministry was after him."

He paused for a moment, wondering. "But what if I'd given Harry to him, eh? I bet he'd 've pitched him off the bike halfway out ter sea. His bes' friends' son! But when a wizard goes ter the Dark Side, there's nothin' and no one that matters to em anymore...."

A long silence followed Hagrid's story. Then Madam Rosmerta said with some satisfaction, "But he didn't manage to disappear, did he? The Ministry of Magic caught up with him next day!"

"Alas, if only we had," said Fudge bitterly. "It was not we who found him. It was little Peter Pettigrew— another of the Potters' friends. Maddened by grief, no doubt, and knowing that Black had been the Potters' Secret-Keeper, he went after Black himself."

"Pettigrew... that fat little boy who was always tagging around after them at Hogwarts?" said Madam Rosmerta.

"Hero-worshipped Black and Potter," said Professor McGonagall. "Never quite in their league, talent-wise. I was often rather sharp with him. You can imagine how I— how I regret that now..." She sounded as though she had a sudden head cold.

"There, now, Minerva," said Fudge kindly, "Pettigrew died a hero's death. Eyewitnesses— Muggles, of course, we wiped their, memories later— told us how Pettigrew cornered Black. They say he was sobbing, 'Lily and James, Sirius! How could you?' And then he went for his wand. Well, of course, Black was quicker. Blew Pettigrew to smithereens...."

Professor McGonagall blew her nose and said thickly, "Stupid boy... foolish boy... he was always hopeless at dueling... should have left it to the Ministry...."

Seth had stopped listening, lost in his scattered thoughts, though it wasn't until the adults began to leave that his interest in their conversation was spiked back up.
“Minister!” Madam Rosmerta called out. “You mentioned Black having two children... who are they?”

“They’re both students at Hogwarts… the girl is friends with Potter, aren’t I right, Minerva?” he answered.

“Yes, maybe you have seen her, but she is a spitting image of her mother, Ella,” said Professor McGonagall in a sad voice. "She met her brother just this year."

Friends with Harry... She met her brother just this year...

Seth felt his heart drop and his throat become dry as the blood drained from his face.

“What are their names?” Madam Rosmerta insisted. There were over thousands of students in Hogwarts, surely they did not expect her to know who the children were.

"Their names are..."

Seth didn’t even bother to listen; he knew exactly what the Minister was going to reply; as he stood from the table he was at, and dashed out of the Three Brooksticks, only one destination in mind, and only one person.

Delilah didn't understand why, excluding the fact that she was a total mess, she felt more and more uneasy as she neared the house. She leaned slightly forward in anticipation, struggling to stay on her feet as she wobbled forward, when the battered door emerged between numbers one-forty-six and one-forty-eight, followed swiftly by red wine brick walls and the usually incredibly clean windows.

As she walked up the steps, she tiredly waved her hand, magically opening the door soundlessly and stepping inside, only to be greeted by murmurs coming from the parlor, one of them she recognized as her uncle Daren's voice, though the other remained unknown to her.

"How long has he been out now?" asked a female voice.

"Lara, calm down—"

"It's been... months? He could—"

"Clarisse, calm down!"

"I can't, Daren! I can't calm down! One of our old schoolmates, who's been locked up in Azkaban for over twelve years, is out there, probably gone mad! He could be after his own godson because of what happened to him! Or worse! Them! Does he even know about them? I bet he doesn't— I bet he only knows them as the random people that hang around Harry—"

"Clarisse, seriously, shut up!"

The latter sighed. "I'm sorry. I just... I just can't help but worry."

"I know."

"They're the only family we have left... or at least that we know are still alive."

Daren chuckled darkly. "So you heard about what happened to the Starlight Pack?"

"Heard about it? I saw the wreck that bastard left behind." It was silent for a moment before she continued. "It was a spitting image of what happened twelve years ago in Anima Curatoria. Less
wrecked... but almost as much. Everything was ruined... Daren, I could smell the burnt skin, rotting..."

"Shh," Daren hushed her, pulling her into a hug.

Delilah stood in the shadows, brows furrowed as she wondered who this Clarisse was and why she looked to be related to them.

"How do you think Delilah and Seth will react?" Clarisse asked.

Daren looked down at her intently, unaware of the fact that they were being watched. "To what? To the fact that Sirius is their father?" Clarisse hummed, nodding her head. "I don't know."

Delilah let out a gasp and stumbled backward against a wooden cabinet, causing it to fall and the vase that stood upon it to break, as the news hit her, catching the attention of the two other people.

She was confused; it couldn't be true. Sirius Black couldn't possibly be her father... unless... No. He couldn't, but, then again, what if it was true? What if that man really was her father and Seth's? But, then, why would Daren keep something like this from them? That made her angry.

"D-Delilah?" The girl, who had been staring down at the broken vase, looked up, nose flaring and eyes narrowed down into a glare as she stared at her uncle and the woman she still did not know in fury.

"Why?" she growled.

The door suddenly slammed open.

"Uncle Daren? Uncle Daren, are you there? You ought to be, cause you got a lot of explaining to do, old man," said Seth's young voice from the door as he neared their destination. The second he saw his sister glaring down at Daren and the woman standing behind him, he stopped dead on his tracks. "Deli..." By the look on her face, he can already guess she found out as well.

But she paid him no mind. "Why?" she repeated. "Why the hell would you keep something like that from me?"

Daren sighed. "Delilah, you have to understand—"

"Understand what? What is there to understand?" It was then that Seth and Daren finally noticed how different her voice sounded, but they both had no choice but to dismiss that matter due to the current circumstances. "We made a deal. No more secrets. And there you go, behind my back, talking to whoever she is—"

"Actually, I'm your—"

"I. Don't. Care," Delilah's eyes now had a furious animalistic glint to them.

"Delilah," Daren warned, knowing what that look in her eyes meant.

Every muscle in her body locked into place. A feather of heat seemed to brush down her back. She hadn't noticed she'd been holding onto a small round table, let alone that there was even one there to begin with, to keep her hands steady as she breathed hard.

With barely one look, you could tell the table was old. Her fingers were clamped down on the wood hard enough that it really was in danger.
"Delilah," Daren repeated, his voice still holding that warning edge. She loosened her fingers one by one, concentrating on that action alone, and then clenched her hands together so she couldn’t break anything as she tried to steady her breath which, despite how heavy it came out, it came out fast, in a rush— she was practically panting, gasping for air.

"Delilah, just hear me out, okay?" her uncle continued, but she wasn’t going to have it. She spun on her heels and blurred her way over to the door, which she punched open, not caring at all that she literally broke it. Seth ran after her, but the moment he was but about five feet away from her, she was gone. He didn’t blame her at all. He was angry too. He turned to look at his uncle and the woman he hadn’t seen in what felt like forever.

"Uncle Daren, Aunt Clarisse," he said quietly, his face cold. "You both have a lot of explaining to do."

She couldn’t help but feel relieved the second her feet hit the sand-covered ground of the La Push beach. She was getting better at her instant-transmission, but that wasn’t what was currently on her mind. All she could think about was was her life. How she’d grown up the slave of a werewolf family, thinking hers was dead; how she’d only had about a year in her life that was normal, which was when she’d been at the orphanage, but even then nothing in her life was normal as she had begun to phase into her soul animals and could speak telepathically; how she had a brother, whom she’d never known until a while ago, an uncle she didn’t even know existed until now, and then there was that woman who might as well be another aunt she never knew existed either, like with Cynthia, who had turned out to be her mother’s twin sister. And then there was also the whole Sirius Black being her father— she didn’t want to think about any of that anymore.

As she ran from the beach and hit the trees, her clothes mending into her fur till it disappeared completely, she started to empty her mind. It was almost too easy now to phase. She didn’t have to think. Her body already knew where she was going and, before she asked it to, it gave her what she wanted. The pain of her bones shifting was still there— it will never be gone, but it wasn’t as painful as it usually is when she restrains herself from shifting.

She tried to swallow and then sighed, closing her eyes, like she had once long ago, to help her concentrate. she let her senses range out around her, tensed this time in case of another onslaught of the delicious scent.

Not even breathing while she listened farther and farther out into the web of green life, sifting through the scents and sounds for something not totally repellent to her thirst. There was a hint of something different, a faint trail to the east...

Her eyes flashed open, but her focus was still on sharper senses as she turned and darted silently eastward. The ground sloped steeply upward almost at once, and she ran in a hunting crouch, close to the ground, taking to the trees when that was easier. The vegetation thinned as she climbed higher; the scent of pitch and resin grew more powerful, as did the trail she followed— it was a warm scent, sharper than the smell of an elk and more appealing. A few seconds more and she could hear the muted padding of immense feet, so much subtler than the crunch of hooves. The sound was up— in the branches rather than on the ground. Automatically she darted into the boughs as well, gaining the strategic higher position, halfway up a towering silver fir.

The soft thud of paws continued stealthily beneath her now; the rich scent was very close. Her eyes pinpointed the movement linked with the sound, and she saw the tawny hide of the great cat slinking along the wide branch of a spruce just down and to the left of her perch. He was big— easily twice her mass. His eyes were intent on the ground beneath; the cat hunted, too. She caught the smell of
something smaller, bland next to the aroma of her prey, cowering in the bush below the tree. The lion’s tail twitched spasmodically as he prepared to spring.

With a light bound, she sailed through the air and landed on the lion’s branch. He felt the shiver of the wood and whirled, shrieking surprise and defiance. He clawed the space between us, his eyes bright with fury. Half-crazed with thirst, she ignored the exposed fangs and the hooked claws and launched herself at him, knocking them both to the forest floor.

It wasn’t much of a fight.

His raking claws could have been caressing fingers for all the impact they had on her fur-covered skin. His teeth could find no purchase against her shoulder or her throat. His weight was nothing. Her teeth unerringly sought his throat, and his instinctive resistance was pitifully feeble against her strength. Her large, canid jaws locked easily over the precise point where the heat flow concentrated.

It was effortless as biting into butter. Her teeth were like steel razors; they cut through the fur and fat and sinews like they weren’t there. The flavor was wrong, but the blood was hot and wet and it soothed the ragged, itching thirst as she drank in an eager rush. The cat’s struggles grew more and more feeble, and his screams choked off with a gurgle. The warmth of the blood radiated throughout her whole body, heating her paws.

The lion was finished before she was. The thirst flared again before dropping completely when he ran dry, and, with one head shake, she shoved his carcass off her body in disgust. Despite her being at her wild state, she felt bad for what she just did; her mind wasn’t all that empty. Part of her didn’t care that she had to feed herself blood as that part was the bloodsucking demon she had become, but the other part— her wolf, her soul animals— herself, she hated it. She felt ashamed, disgusted with herself.

She wrenched herself erect in one quick move. Letting out a tired breath, she rolled onto her stomach and shifted back into her human form. She groaned as she stood; she was a mess. She wiped her face off on the back of her arm and tried to fix her shirt and shorts. The claws that had been so ineffectual against her skin had had more success with the thin fabric, which confused her; her clothes were never affected before when she’d phased and fought.

Her head snapped up when a familiar scent suddenly filled her nostrils, breaking her away from my thoughts. Letting her wolf’s tracking skills out, she started running in that direction, hoping she could stop whatever he’d be planning to do. There was a note caught by an arrow on a huge tree trunk in the middle of the forest. She snatched it, not caring if a bit of the paper got ripped.

_Dear sweet Delilah... or Deli as you prefer,_

_Here is an early Christmas present that will hopefully change your mind into finally joining us,_

_Lots of love from yours truly,_

_Regium_

No. He wouldn't. He wouldn't have touched the slightest hair of them. He wouldn't act so weak by attacking his victims’ treasure, would he?
She was angry.

No, that's an understatement. She was furious, enraged, though it was just when she was about to rip the paper that she stopped herself as the smell reached her nostrils. The scent she knew, that if she didn't follow it now, would make her regret her existence even more than she already did.

She ran as fast as she could, heading north. As she reached the end of the forest, she couldn't help but let out an ear-piercing scream at the sight awaiting before her. She pushed her legs and burst through the broken wooden door of the house engulfed by unstoppable savage flames. Despite the smoke and flames, she could see clearly, but it was all confusing that she didn't know which way to go. Of course, that didn't stop her from trying. She couldn't give up; she had to save them.

"Dad?!" she shouted, looking around. She went to search the living room and then the kitchen, but only found Skipper. She quickly took the unconscious duckling and ran up the stairs to her father's room. She threw the door open, and her breath got caught up in her throat.

Kenton Turnbull, her beloved adoptive father, lay there on the ground, unbreathing and motionless, with Jack, her husky, by his side.

"No!" she shouted before letting herself fall onto the ground beside him. She couldn't believe it. His heart, the one she had fought so hard for to keep beating, no longer made a sound.

This couldn't possibly be happening to me, could it? No. She wouldn't accept it. She took him into her arms and hugged his body as tight as she could; as if that would bring him back to life.

"Daddy, please... wake up. I need you now more than ever. You can't leave me... You just can't..." she choked out in a pleading tearless sob, but she got no answer in return: no breath, no heartbeat.

That's it. He's gone...

Knowing there was really nothing she could do to bring him back, she threw him over her shoulder, picked Jack up in her arms, resting Skipper on him and ran out as fast as she could as the house came crumbling down. She ran and ran until she finally made it to the heart of the forest. She stood there in front the biggest pine tree she had once called her own, along with Brady and Kenton. She merely stared at it for a few minutes before closing her eyes. Once she opened them again, there, in front of our tree, on top of a big newly formed bolder, laid three glass coffins she had created with her Wiccan magic. She took a deep breath before stepping forward and placing Jack in the one on the right. She then put Skipper on the smallest one on the left before finally placing the man she had gotten to call 'father,' in the biggest coffin, between the other two. She used her Wiccan magic to clean them up and change Kenton's clothes before closing the coffins and creating a garden around them, burying them deep below it.

She decided this garden should be protected and honored for the people it now pertained, so she called, from deep within her heart, the forest spirits. She ordered them to look after and take care of this garden and attack only those who seem like a threat or would want to destroy it. As for the name, she named this garden 'Optimum Praelia,' meaning 'The Best Warriors' and made sure people knew about it, so she created a path leading to it and a wooden sign with its name carved onto it.

This would be a remembrance, not only of them, but of her. She was there, and she wanted to make that clear to anyone who will try to take over her. This will be their sign, what will let them know...
why she will be fighting. She'll be fighting for those she had started to love and for those she had loved and lost. She will avenge them...

~~~*~~~

Five weeks.

She spent five weeks there, just sitting in that meadow—the garden she created— not moving an inch unless it was to hunt, but that was it. The Christmas vacation, along with her birthday, had already past and ended; she should've gone back about two weeks ago. As broken as she was, however, anyone would understand why she missed a whole month of school—the week she left, which was a week before the holiday break, add the two weeks of Christmas and then the other two weeks she decided to spend changing between her wolf and herself.

She had gotten into a few battles, fighting alongside the pack of shifters situated in La Push, but other than that, she kept up her depressing routine. She was pretty much herself now, despite how emotionless she was being. Ever since she got them out of the burning house, she hadn't shown the slightest bit of emotion. There was already the fact that she couldn't cry since forever, but add the fact that she didn't even let out a tearless sob... well, you'd understand why she was so depressed about that.

She decided it was time to go back. She stood up and created a portal on the tree that would close forever once she went through it. She took a deep breath and glanced at her meadow one last time, making her heart shatter even more.

"Gaudete, absque misericordia," (Farewell, my loved ones) she whispered before going through the portal and instant-transmissioning herself into the forbidden forest.

She didn't run, this time. She didn't feel like it anymore. She looked up at the sky and cringed at how bright and blue she was sure it was going to be the next morning, compared to where she had just come from. She made her way out of the woods and took a deep breath before entering the one place where her destiny now lies...

Harry was remembering what the woman at the Magical Menagerie had said about rats living only three years, and couldn't help feeling that unless Scabbers had powers he had never revealed, he was reaching the end of his life. And despite Ron's frequent complaints that Scabbers was both annoyingly boring and utterly useless, he was sure Ron would be very miserable if Scabbers died.

Christmas spirit had been thin on every house in Hogwarts. Since the beginning of the holidays, Hermione had shut Crookshanks in her dormitory and hadn't let him out, not even now that the holidays were over. She remained, however, quite furious with Ron for trying to kick the cat multiple times; Ron was still fuming about Crookshanks's fresh attempt to eat Scabbers. Harry had given up trying to make them talk to each other and tried to devote himself to examining the Firebolt, which he had brought down to the common room with him, but he couldn't take that one thought out of my mind. Delilah. His Delilah. She'd been missing for about a month now, and that was worrying him. He missed her. He missed telling her how he felt, her smile, laughter... her burning hand against his, keeping it warm.

Where could she be?

Harry seemed not to be the only one to feel this way about her departure. Hermione would barely study anymore or talk for that matter. It was the same with Ron, except he would eat less. Even Malfoy... he wouldn't even try to insult the three of them anymore. He wouldn't even speak; he would look at them, expectantly, then walk away. Seth... well, he was a whole different story. After
he'd run off on the trio that day at the Three Broomsticks, he didn't show up till a week later. And when he did, he was practically as mute as Delilah was toward the end of her first year at Hogwarts, only speaking when he absolutely had to. What surprised Harry was that, despite the younger boy talking vaguely, he had opted to spend his time with the trio rather than with his friends, though there must've been a serious reason behind that as Seth would act as though he were their bodyguard.

At lunchtime, the four of them went down to the Great Hall. The House tables weren't against the walls as they had been through the holidays; they were back in their place, each House having their rows. The single table, set for eight, that had stood in the middle of the room on Christmas was back at the end of the Great Hall, opposing the giant doors. Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Sprout, and Flitwick were there, along with Filch, the caretaker, were all seated there; only two seats were empty, but neither the trio or Seth, nor really anyone else could find it in themselves to care.

"Merry Christmas!" said Dumbledore, though the holiday was over; he was trying to brighten the atmosphere.

Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Seth sat down side by side at the end of the Gryffindor table.

"Crackers!" said Dumbledore enthusiastically, offering the end of a large silver noisemaker to Snape, who took it reluctantly and tugged.

With a bang like a gunshot, the cracker flew apart to reveal a large, pointed witches' hat topped with a stuffed vulture. Harry, remembering the Boggart, caught Ron's eye and they both shared a halfhearted grin; Snape's mouth thinned, and he pushed the hat toward Dumbledore, who swapped it for his wizard's hat at once. That cracked a small smile on each student, even the Slytherins.

"Dig in!" he advised the table, beaming around.

As Harry was helping himself to roast potatoes, the doors of the Great Hall opened again. It was Professor Trelawney, gliding toward them as though on wheels. She had put on a green sequined dress in honor of the occasion, making her look more than ever like a glittering, oversized dragonfly. But that wasn't what caught his attention or thus of his friends. It was the whispers that came from behind the large doors that led in and out of the Great Hall.

"Could she really be back?"

"I heard someone saw her coming out of the forbidden forest."

"Apparently she looks as though she had just come back from a battle or something."

"Do you think she did?"

"Maybe..."

"Look! She's coming towards the entrance!"

"She's back!"

"Delilah Dawn is back!"

Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Seth looked at each other with wide eyes before running towards the entrance of the castle along with many other students who were just as curious as the four of them. The giant doors had burst open, but it was hard to see because everyone was crowded around it, jumping and pushing to try to see if the rumors were true. After a few minutes of this crazy crowd, those who were standing right in front of the doors moved back to make way for whoever was there.
After separating into two rows, Harry felt himself freeze out of shock.

There she stood, right in the middle, staring blankly at the stone floor, hands curled up into fists at her sides. Dirt and blood covered her ripped short jeans and shirt, along with her sneakers that were just as ruined. Eyes a dark shade of midnight blue, skin pale and covered in scars, her light brown, waist-length hair that appeared to had been burnt now fell just above her shoulders and was a dark shade of brown almost black...

Harry was relieved to see her, but he was also scared and worried. The look in her eyes... the color... it was somehow darker than that night they had had to sleep in the Great Hall. He remembered that night—she had been really sad, but now... it was more than sadness that she was feeling. He didn't know for sure, but he could see the pain, the hurt, the sorrow in the dark blue midnight color her eyes had transfigured into. She was there, standing right there at the entrance of this school... she was alive, but, even so, she looked completely dead. She looked as though someone very dear to her had been killed. As though she were killed. As though she could kill someone, not in the way it seemed with her Boggart, but she looked so torn.

She was in deep pain; that Harry knew.

He wasn't afraid of her, not one bit. He was only scared of why she looked like this. What it—whatever it was had done to her, what it could make her do to herself. He wanted to know what was hurting her this way. He wanted to know so he could be able to grab her in his arms and comfort her, to tell her that he would do anything in his power to keep her safe and to make her happy. He wanted to look at her real eyes, her violet orchidee eyes, to run his fingers through her silky light brown hair, to wrap his arms around her, hold her tight against him and never let go. He wanted to look into those beautiful eyes of hers and let her know that he'll always be there for her.

She suddenly looked up. Her eyes met Ron, and her face lit up a bit, then she moved her gaze onto Hermione, and her hair color and eyes lightened up a bit more. Her hair was now simply dark brown — dark but you could see it was brown— and her eyes were now a beautiful, breathtaking Caribbean blue. Her gaze shifted once more, over to Seth and, though they saddened a bit, they also lit up even more. Her eyes then finally flickered over to Harry and instantly turned violet lilac, her hair becoming the light brown it used to be, and although she wasn't smiling, she seemed to have lit up completely. His heart fluttered as their gaze locked with each other's, but, after a few seconds had passed, her broken expression returned and so did her pale skin, dark hair and mourning dark midnight eyes. She looked as though she would cry but couldn't, so as she has done so many times before, she ran, though Harry found himself sighing in relief as she ran up towards their common room instead of outside the castle once again.

Hermione was the first to snap out of her daze as she turned to her best friend's little brother. "Hey, Seth, do you think Deli..." Unfortunately, she found herself trailing off when she noticed the young boy was gone. She sighed. "Of course," she mumbled. He had probably run after his sister.

Seth ran past muttering portraits and creaking suits of armor, then up the narrow flights of stone stairs, until, at last, he reached the passage where the secret entrance to the Gryffindor Tower was hidden, behind the oil painting of Sir Cadogan and his fat gray pony.

"Villains are these that trespass upon my private lands! Come, I scorn at my fall, perchance? Draw, you knave, you dog!" Seth gave the knight an exasperated look as the latter tugged his sword out of its sheath and began brandishing it violently, hopping up and down in rage.

"Oh, my goddess of the moon." Seth groaned. "I'm a Gryffindor, you idiot," he snapped.

"No matter! On guard—" Though the sword the knight had now was a new one, it was too long for
him; a particularly wild swing made him overbalance, and he landed face down in the grass.

Seth huffed with impatience. "Dude, seriously!"

The knight sighed in defeat. "Fine. I know you're a Gryffindor, and that you're here for your sister, but, come on! Just one challenge—"

"Cadogan," Seth growled warningly.

"Oh, alright! I still have to ask for—"

"I know, I know, for the school policy, blah, blah, blah," Seth cut her off. "Go on."

"Password?"

"Flibbertigibbet," he answered quickly.

The portrait swung open, and he quickly climbed through the hole into the common room, which was empty at that moment as everyone was in their classes. Skipping past the cozy round room, he ran toward the spiral staircase that led toward the girls' dormitory, though, barely five steps up, the stairs gave out beneath him, turning into a slide on which he slid back down to the bottom with a groan.

"Ugh! Forgot boys couldn't go to the girls' dorm." He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck as he got back up on his feet. "What was the spell again?" he wondered.

He bit his lip as he thought quickly. "Oh, right!" He cleared his throat before flicking his finger. "*Levitatus Liquidatus*.

Suddenly, he felt himself sinking into the floor. He looked down at himself and groaned. "Wrong spell," he muttered. Sure enough, his whole lower body had turned into a puddle of his liquefied self and was floating over the stone floor.

"*Hoc conlectus, iam non, solidum corpus inferius debet socors testam eius implebis,*" *(This puddle is now not, a solid lower body should fill its slot)* he muttered, flicking his finger again. In less than two seconds, he was standing on his feet again, both touching the ground.

He glanced desperately up the spiral staircase as he searched through his mind for the right spell. "I guess I'll go with walking on walls." Clearing his throat again, he raised his hand and pointed his finger at himself. "Havity, no gravity."

He felt himself become a lot less heavy as the gravitational pull that kept him grounded eased until he could jump in the air and stay there. He jumped, pushing himself toward the staircase and grabbing onto the handrail, which he used to pull himself up to his sister's room.

"Havity, gravity," he mumbled once he reached the large wooden door with the single name carved onto it. He sighed when he felt his weight go back to normal, then face-palmed himself when he finally remembered the spell he'd been trying to remember. He groaned, rubbing his forehead in anticipation as he prepared himself to knock on the door.

A tiny, slightly chubby hand reached up and patted the top of an old man's head, the owner of the small arm babbling nonsense as the child did not know how to speak proper words yet. The old man, who wouldn't have been thought to be as old as he was if it weren't for his gray hair, grabbed the small hand, chuckling, and brought it down to his lips, placing a kiss on it as gently as possible as though she would break if he'd proceeded harder.
"Yes, I am tall, aren't I?" he mumbled, his cornflower colored eyes staring with love and sorrow into her orange-pink morning glory begonian orbs, which were filled with curiosity as they looked at him.

"Labor does that to one's body," he continued, caressing the child's cheek. "Just like difficulties strengthen the mind."

The girl stared at him for a moment, head tilted to one side, before she reached her free hand and patted her own head, as if saying that she was tall as well, even though she was but a baby girl.

He chuckled. "If you aren't in over your head, how do you know how tall you are?"

She pouted slightly and began to babble. After a few moments, it seemed her mind had merely dismissed the height ordeal and was now struck on magic as she was flicking her hand as though she were waving a wand.

"Ma... mag..."

The old man chuckled again, understanding what she was trying to say. He brought his wand out and waved it a tad bit, murmuring, "Lumos." A narrow beam of light appeared within seconds and shone from the tip of his wand, like a torch.

The baby girl's mouth dropped open as she stared at the light in awe. "Pwe... pwett..." she babbled, earning herself a smile from the old man.

He suddenly began to feel that familiar buzz in the back of his head. "I know, magic does have its beauty," he mumbled, his smile turned bemused, as she reached out a hand toward the light. "But, magic is also dangerous."

She looked back at him, tilting her head to the side, as she gazed at him with confusion and curiosity, as though she were asking how magic could possibly be dangerous.

She frowned and pointed at the lit wand. "Pwe... pwetty..."

"Maybe." He sighed. "I know you're but a baby, but you and I both know— everybody knows you're smarter than the regular baby, so remember this Delilah: magic is dangerous— it always comes with a price. And sometimes— most of the time... the price is..." He swallowed hard before saying, "Death."

"Nox," he then whispered, and the light at the end of his wand went out, causing her to frown and him to chuckle and smile slightly.

"Erick?!" The old man's head snapped up, his smiling face dropping into an alarmed look. Standing at the door of the room was his wife, a breathtakingly beautiful woman with violet orchidee eyes and long, light brown, slightly reddish hair stroke with gray of age.

"What's wrong, Eloisa?" he asked, eyes hard, but filled with concern.

Her breathing was ragged and heavy, her eyes tearing up. "They're here. He's here. They've all come to end her. We can't let them—"

"I know," he cut her off. "Send a signal to Ella. Let her know to come as quickly as possible. We might not be here anymore, but that doesn't mean Delilah won't."

Eloisa nodded her head shakily; it had been so long since she'd felt genuine fear for, not only herself,
but also someone else. "I'll be right back." With that said, she ran out of the room, leaving her husband to have one last moment of privacy with their granddaughter.

"I must go, princess," he whispered, feeling a tear trickle down his cheek. Delilah, the baby girl, reached her tiny hand up and caught the tear as if to tell him not to go. He grabbed her tiny hand in his and softly kissed it. She frowned, she could tell he was going to leave her, but she didn't want him to leave.

"I have to, I'm sorry," he whispered, letting go of her hand and placing her gently in her crib.

Delilah tried to reach out for him, tears threatening to fall from her eyes that were no longer orange-pink morning glory begonian, but a dull violet lunara. It was a beautiful color for a girl's eyes, but its beauty wasn't something to think about when the reason behind the eye color transfiguration was evident; though she was a baby, she understood something terrible was happening, or, at least, was going to happen. She knew she was going to lose something, and something inside of her told her her grandparents were that something.

"Magic is dangerous, princess," he repeated. "That is why one must always sacrifice themself."

Her frown never left, though it did turn somewhat desperate as she kept trying to reach out for him. By now, she was no longer laying in her crib but sitting. Whatever sacrifice was, she knew it was bad; she didn't want him to do it. She didn't want him to sacrifice himself.

"Don't worry, Delilah—don't look at it as a sacrifice. After all, it's not sacrifice if you love what you are doing. If you choose to do something, then you should not call it a sacrifice, because it was nothing but a willing gesture towards someone you love."

Grabbing her small hand and kissing it one last time, he reluctantly let go of her and backed away towards the exit, turning his back to her as soon as he reached the door as he couldn't bear looking at the broken look on the three-month-old baby.

She began to cry somewhat soundlessly as the door closed. Why did he leave her?

"Tom... don't do this," she could hear her grandfather say.

"Don't tell me what to do or not do," hissed an unfamiliar voice. Delilah pushed herself to her feet and wobbled her way to the railing of her crib and held onto it, her tears still falling as she stared at the dim light that shone through the space under the door.

Then came her grandmother's voice. "Tom, she's just a baby—"

"I care not of what she is, now stand aside, you foul woman... stand aside, now...."

"I will not let you—"

Her grandfather was cut off mid-sentence, and now, for what felt like forever, all that could be heard was but utter silence. Delilah leaned forward in anticipation; her cries had stopped, but her tears were still falling.

The door suddenly slammed open, a dark cloaked figure standing there, staring at her with empty eyes.

He raised a hand, holding a stick that looked an awful lot like a wand, and hissed, "Avada Kedavra." His words were followed by a blinding flash of green light, a rushing noise, and an excruciating pain Delilah had never felt before that reached the left side of her neck; that was the
last thing Delilah saw, heard and felt that night before everything around her dimmed and went black.

Her eyes snapped open, a rebel tear running down her cheek as she breathed heavily, her body thoroughly shaking from the memory. She found herself wincing when she saw she completely ruined the stitch she was sewing on a large cut in her arm. She sighed; at this rate, with all the flashbacks she was having, she'd never finish patching herself up. At least, though painfully, she had already showered.

Before she could fall into another flashback, someone knocked lightly on her door. She sighed again; she didn't want to leave anyone hanging— she'd felt enough guilt to last her a lifetime— but she wasn't up for talking to anyone yet.

Deli. Seth called her name in his head and had her attention at once. It was just the same as having her name called aloud. She didn't move; her eyes stuck on her body full of wounds.

Hey... can I come in?

Delilah finally looked up, her eyes absentmindedly wandering over to Blaze, who was soundlessly snoozing on her perch. She wished she could do that— sleep peacefully, but, by the way her life was put out for her, she had no doubt that possibility would always remain thin for her.

"Dels... please," Seth pleaded softly, aloud this time.

Delilah quickly grabbed her navy colored bathrobe and slipped it on, wrapping it quickly yet cautiously around her tall frame to hide her injuries as much as possible. She didn't speak, nor did she make any noise as she moved backward to lay in a fetus position on her bed. Despite her silence, Seth knew she was silently telling him to leave her be. He couldn't, though. He couldn't just walk away, especially while knowing his sister was in so much pain.

"I'm coming it," he said. When he heard no reply, he waved his finger, magically unlocking and pushing open the heavy wooden door a tad bit, poking his head to peek inside. He let his eyes wander around the dimly lit room, passing Blazealbumera before finally settling upon the curled up figure on the large bed in the middle of the room.

Eyes softening, he stepped into her quarters, slowly closing the large door behind himself before walking over to her. He stopped a few feet away from her bed and took a deep breath before speaking.

"Hey."
"Hey."

It was a simple word, but it seemed to soothe Delilah more than expected. As much as she would undoubtedly deny it, she had missed her brother. Maybe her longing for solitude was finally sipping away from her. It was a nice feeling to know that she could finally start depending on someone, but it was also frightening, especially after depending on herself for basically her whole life. Yes, she had been taken care of at the orphanage by Miss Kathie and the other workers, all making sure she didn't end up harming herself, or anything close to that, and was taught bits of ways of a Muggle life. It was useful to her as she used that bit of knowledge when she traveled on her own and interacted with other packs later on, such as the Celticus Pack, otherwise known as Alpha Brian's pack. But, to not endanger them, she had to leave them. Some part of her surprisingly missed them. They taught her how to write better, how to read without difficulties, they showed her movies and music, and though the atmosphere was somewhat dull as it was an orphanage, it had still been slightly very welcoming, very comfortable.

She could easily say the orphanage had been her first real home ever since Anima Curatoria had faced its end.

Then there were the past few months before she'd started her third year at Hogwarts, when she'd had to regrow while living with her mother's twin, having no memory of who she was. Yes, she had somewhat depended on the Hayes family throughout her time with them, and on Kenton and Brady when she was with them— they made her feel normal, human. She depended on them because they made her feel special in a good way, they made her feel as though she were, yes, different, but the same as everyone else— as though she could be the same as everybody else if she wanted to. She loved feeling that way, but it was also depending on all those people that blinded her of the danger she was putting them in. It was depending on them that resulted in her losing them, Kenton, Jack and Skipper's loss proving just that. She didn't know what she would do if she lost her brother, or her best friends, or the people she had begun to gaze upon as a family in the past three years. That was why she tried to distance herself. That was why she tried to not fall within the depths of any form of attachment, but it was just so hard not to; after all, no matter what sort of blood she has running through her veins, she is still human.

She shut her eyes tight as though that would make her disappear. She actually could, but with the state she was in, she didn't have enough energy within herself to do so. Besides, she really didn't care if she was seen as she was or not, anymore; she had only come back to protect the ones she loved, who are still alive, not to rekindle anything, or become self-conscious.

You shouldn't have come, her soft voice echoed in his mind.

"I still did," Seth replied, walking closer to her bed.

You didn't need to come see me, she tried.

But he wasn't having any of that.

He had just found his sister after spending his whole life thinking she had perished along with his mother's pack. And he had just gotten her to accept him, or, at least, a bit more than she had at first. He had just gotten her to act more natural, to laugh and smile with him— he was not going to back down now.
"Yes, I did," he replied, his tone firm.

She felt the bed sink behind her as her brother sat down, close, yet at a safe distance from her. They were silent for a moment, Seth's eyes practically burning holes at the back of his sister's head while she remained in a fetus position, eyes now open, staring at nothing.

"He really is our father, isn't he?" she mumbled. It wasn't a question as she already knew the answer, but she still couldn't believe it, or probably just didn't want to. Seth didn't blame her. Though his aunt, whom he viewed as such even though she was really his mother's cousin thus being his and his sister's second cousin, and his uncle had explained it all to him, he still couldn't wrap his head around it either.

"Yeah," he said, looking over at Blaze. The Phoenix looked more beautiful in the moonlight. "Uncle Ren and Aunt Lara explained it to me."

_Something happened between them._ She paused a moment before continuing; _between Mom and Sirius._

Seth glanced back at his sister, whose back was still facing him. "Yeah," he admitted.

_Something happened between them._ She paused a moment before continuing; _between Mom and Sirius._

Seth didn't reply, his gaze not once wavering from his sister's figure.

She sat up but did not turn around. "I don't know what it was," she said aloud, her soft voice as soothing and breezy as air. "But I can guess she was already married when whatever happened did."

Her eyes glazed over as she remembered her mother's smile from when she was born. She had looked so different back then— so much different than Cynthia, who was supposedly her identical twin sister. Of course, she knew why now.

"You're saying she had an affair with our dad?"

Delilah blinked, looking down at her hands, suddenly feeling confused. Then, she looked up and spun her gaze around the room and at Blaze, who had suddenly woken up and was gazing back at her with worry clouding her small eyes. Her eyes finally landed on Seth and then she blinked a few more times, quickly, until realization seemed to have hit her face. It was as though she had forgotten everything for a second there, then remembered where she was.

She blinked again, frowning, before looking at Seth questioningly. He only stared back with uncertainty; this was the first time something like this happened. Not just that, but he was stuck in shock at the scars on his sister's face, scars he hadn't noticed when he had seen her return to Hogwarts and had walked through the giant doors that led into the castle. After a few more seconds, she looked away, only nodding.

"I wouldn't say she was cheating on... Hawkins, even though it would be considered so. She was in love with Sirius. For a long time. I'm guessing it must've been stronger than the mate bond she shared with..." She cleared her throat, feeling a bit uncomfortable about the matter being spoken. "Her mark must've faded before she... spent the night with Sirius."

"And Hawkins caught on after she got back home, marked her again and therefore became your dad as well through the magic bonding mate shifters," Seth finished, scrunching his nose in disgust and anger— he didn't like the idea of someone forcing themselves on others, even less if that someone did so on their mother.
Delilah's hands balled up into fists as she shut her eyes to stop the anger that was beginning to boil within her from making her explode.

*Don't hate, don't hate, don't hate,* she kept repeating to herself. She didn't like hating things, especially people. Hate only brought the worst out of her, and she'd worked so hard to restrain it after Brady's death.

"I can't believe that man did that to Mom— just took her away from what she loved," Seth began to mutter. "Never mind the stupid mate bond— supposed to care what the mate wants— shouldn't force them against—"

"Can it, Seth," she mumbled, pushing herself off the bed and limping her way over to the window. It wasn't until now while walking calmly and slightly laid back, that she felt the pain in her body. She still didn't understand why her regenerative healing factor was delaying.

Seth hadn't heard her mumble and kept on rambling about his new dislike toward his sister's other father.

"Shut up, Seth," she snarled, subconsciously letting her Alpha power sip through each word, causing her younger brother to shut his mouth immediately and flinch slightly away.

Her voice may now be more angelic than it used to be, but the power an Alpha voice carried was extraordinarily intimidating and, at times, frightening. Delilah hated to use it, but, sometimes, she just couldn't help it; sometimes, she didn't even realize she used it.

Confused, Delilah frowned. She knew her brother always listened to her, but the whimper that emitted from his throat was new.

Craning her neck, she glanced back at him and felt her expression immediately softened, though the pain in her eyes that were once again a dark midnight blue remained. She sat up and, almost shyly, scooted closer to her younger brother and reached out to the sleeve of his robe, slightly tugging it, causing his tense shoulders to relax.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, looking back towards the wall she'd been previously facing. Seth could see her frowning at it as she bit her lower lip as she usually did out of habit. They remained that way for a moment, her hand lightly grasping his sleeve while looking away from him, trying to ignore his eyes that were staring intently at the back of her head.

"Tell me." Though his voice was quiet, it held that pleading edge it usually did when he spoke to her. "Please, Dels. *I want to know you,*" he added, repeating what he had told her the last time he'd asked her to teach him how to phase, before she left.

She was hesitant again, but, finally, after a few long seconds, she scooted closer to him and turned her body until she was fully facing him. She placed her soft hands on either side of his face, then
placed her forehead on his before closed her eyes. He felt a sudden rush of energy flood into him, as his sight became blurry till the point where he had to close his eyes.

As the minutes ticked by, his heart began pounding louder and harder against his chest as he watched from behind his closed lids, his body twitching every now and then as he watched and practically felt her pain, as he watched and cursed himself for not being able to do anything but just watch. When the last moment came to an end, he felt himself being dragged out of the memory, as the powerful energy drained. He opened his eyes and found himself back with his sister in her room, her soft hands still cupping his cheeks and her warm breath brushing against his face, his eyes blurry as they gazed upon her. It took him a moment to realize why his vision was so.

He was crying.

He'd cried before, yes, but it had always been for himself. Always when he'd imagined what would have been if he still had his parents, if his sister had been alive and he'd gotten to meet her. When he found out she was and finally did meet her, he'd only cry sometimes when alone because she wouldn't let him in. But now she did. And now, it was for her that he was crying. He'd known she'd had it rough in life, but not this rough. He wished she didn't have to go through everything she did, but he didn't say that because he knew that, no matter how much she didn't like her past and wished to change it, even if she did have the chance to, she wouldn't. She would just shrug and say something wistful, like: "The wells on the floor of my life pertained to the awareness I have today. I wouldn't change that for anything in the world, especially if that means I would end up with a lower intelligence quotient."

At least now, he finally understood why she'd been pushing him away, why she'd been pushing her three best friends away.

Now he realized what kind of person she really was.

She was the kind of person who would put other people's feelings before hers, who would make a pretty good assumption on how those feelings would turn out if this or that happened and would want and try to change it so that they don't suffer as badly as she did. Though she viewed herself as a pretty selfish person, she was selfless, and Seth couldn't help but idolize her even more for that. She'd practically had a ransom flanking over her head since before she was born, chased since she was born, tortured asleep and awake, and yet she pushed that behind to save other people's lives.

She was incredibly exceptional.

He looked at his sister, the tears escaping his eyes, and leaned forward, placing a soft kiss on her cheek before wrapping his arms around her waist, which felt thinner than it had felt the last time he'd embraced her, ever so gently as though the slightest squeeze would break her.

Her eyes fluttered open, and she stared blankly ahead for a moment, her hands having slipped from her brother's face when he pulled her in a hug. Feeling started to pour back into her injured body, and emotions began to spark their way back into her eyes. She blinked, her vision slowly going blurry, and it took her a moment to realize she had begun to cry. She pulled back from her brother and her eyes softened when she saw him crying as well. She suddenly felt warm inside, she thought for a moment that it might be because of her naturally high body temperature, but then she remembered that she wouldn't actually be able to feel her own body temperature. Nevertheless, it was a good feeling. She looked at her brother for a second longer before slowly wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him in for another embrace, something that took him by surprise but reciprocated nonetheless.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled against her short hair. He felt her body slightly rumble against his, and
smiled as he guessed that she'd probably chuckled.

"Why are you sorry? It wasn't your fault," she replied softly.

"I wasn't there for you," he protested.

Delilah pulled away from her brother and gave him a tender look, placing a hand on his cheek. "You didn't know."

Seth sighed sadly, looking down at the ground before looking back at his sister and frowning as he finally noticed the state she was in. "You're hurt," he said.

"I'm healing," she said, pulling completely away and wiping the remaining tears from her face.

"Slowly," he replied, wiping the tears from his own face. "Take off your robe."

He got up from her bed and glanced around the room, spotting the first-aid kit on her other side. He busied himself with it for a moment, but, when he turned back to face his sister, his heart practically stopped when he saw her. Her being in nothing but her undergarments wasn't what made him freeze like that. No. She was his sister; there was nothing to be disgusted about; if they'd grown up together, they would've undoubtedly had bubble baths together as naked babies, so the lack of clothing wasn't an issue.

It was the scars on her body that made his heart stop. Apart from the ones Voldemort left on her, there were some other old ones he guessed were from before her first phase; those never fade. Delilah caught his stare and blinked blankly, the blankness in her eyes bringing him back to reality.

"... Damn, I'm gonna need more than just a basic first-aid kit," he muttered, running a hand through his hair, which Delilah just noticed had grown longer, as he looked back at the old medical box.

She stared at him for a moment, then said in a soft voice, "Language, kid."

Seth's head snapped back her way, and he felt himself suddenly grin when he saw that 'something' began to sparkle in her now violet orbs. Though it was halfhearted, it was a grin all the same—a grin he'd missed giving his sister.

No one saw Seth for a whole other week, even less Delilah. They'd catch a glimpse of the young boy every now, and then, at breakfast, lunch and dinner, but he would only be caught for a second before disappearing back to his sister's room before one could even blink. No one knew what was going on and were practically dying from curiosity, but the siblings paid no mind to what people would be thinking. Despite Delilah's reason for coming back not being to rekindle anything, she came to notice how inevitable that was. She'd spent the week bonding with her brother while he nursed her back to health... well, as healthy as she can get within a week, not forgetting her slowed down usually powerful regenerative healing factor. He hadn't managed to make her smile yet, but he wasn't worrying much about it anymore; he knew that her smile would come back once she was entirely better.

Throughout that week, Harry felt as though he was dying; he wanted to see her, hold her close... he wanted to comfort his best friend, to make her smile. He wished she would just tell him already what's biting her! Monday morning, he hoped she would finally come down and eat with them, just like old times, but she wasn't there. Once dinner time came around though, Hermione, Ron, and Harry went down to the Great Hall, they found the Gryffindor table looking slightly more cheerful. Narrowing his eyes in confusion, Harry looked around the table to see what was the source of the sudden happiness.
That was when he finally saw her.

"Deliilah!" Hermione squealed.

The beautiful brunette looked up with a forced smile that ended up as a grimace. She got up from her seat, her brother following closely behind, and started making her way toward the trio that completely her quartet, but didn't make it very far as Hermione had run up to her and practically threw herself at Delilah, engulfing her in a tight hug. A look of shock had crossed the brunette's face as she tensed up a bit, but soon relaxed in the embrace and wrapped her arms around Hermione, hugging her back just as tightly.

Once they pulled away, Harry felt his heart instantly melt when he saw Delilah smile at Hermione, even if it was a small smile, it was beautiful. Her hair was almost back to its normal light brown color and had quickly grown all the way to her mid-back, and all burnt tips were gone. Her skin was back to its normal dark yet pale color and her eyes were a dull violet lunara, but that was good enough for Harry because he knew that that meant she was almost back to her usual self.

"Oh, Deli! I missed you so much! I won't go insisting for you to tell me everything that's happened from your side, but I just-I..." Hermione choked out before bursting into tears. Everyone within earshot seemed shocked, but not as much as Delilah, whose mouth had fallen open and eyes widened in surprise.

"Don't ever do this to me again! Don't you dare leave me again, Delilah Keren Aleah Dawn Hawkins!" Hermione cried out, wrapping her arms around Delilah again and holding onto her for dear life.

Harry and Ron knew why Hermione was so, why out of the three, Delilah was the one she was the closest to. It had nothing to do with the fact that they were both girls, it was more because it was actually Delilah who had been her first real friend at Hogwarts, and probably ever. Though Delilah didn't speak at the time, when they had met her, and was practically an emotionless doll, with a simple hand on the shoulder, a simple, calm look, she managed to comfort people, Hermione being one of them. Delilah was the first to look past the latter's 'know-it-all'ness and accept her without a word needed to show that. Though Delilah was often oblivious of the effect she had on people and the impression she left behind, she knew when someone saw her as a good friend, and though she frowned at the 'good,' she never turned her head on the 'friend' even though it never seemed to cease surprising her.

The shock left Delilah's face proved it, though a soft and tender expression replaced it. The expression an older sister would show towards her younger sibling or a mother would show her child. The expression she would regularly give to her brother.

She smiled and squeezed Hermione reassuringly, threading her fingers through our friend's bushy hair. "I won't, I promise, Mione," she said, leaving them all shocked at her voice. It sounded so angelic, like if she was singing.

"I don't believe you," Hermione said childishly, but it came out a bit muffled since her face was buried in Delilah's shoulder.

Delilah sighed. "Mione, look at me," she said in her voice that rang and shimmered like a bell. Hermione shook her head and kept on crying.

"Hermione, look at me," Delilah repeated sternly, though it was hard to take her seriously because of her soft and bell-like voice.
Hermione looked up at her, sniffling. "I promise I won't leave, okay?" she said. Hermione studied her face for a moment before nodding.

The whole best friend exchange between them made Harry want to join in and hug the life out of Delilah—well, not literally, but you get what I mean—but Ron beat him to it. He ran over to her and engulfed her in a tight brotherly hug.

"How could you leave like that? I've been starving myself because of you," he accused, playfully as they pulled away.

She laughed lightly, and it sounded like a chorus of bells. "You never change, Ronald, do you?" she said, shaking her head and Harry saw her eyes go brighter.

"Don't ever leave again," Ron pressed.

She grinned, making Harry's heart flip. "I won't; I already said that."

"You promised Hermione, but you didn't promise me," Ron pointed out, crossing his arms trying hard to look mad, but you could see he was fighting back a smile.

She chuckled. "Fine, Ron. I promise you I won't leave again so you won't end up in a coma for starving yourself," she said, making Fred and George snicker. She playfully slapped the back of their heads making them yelp at the same time before sharing wicked grins, then engulfed her in a group hug, practically sandwiching her.

She groaned. "Guys, love you too, but I also love breathing, as I might've mentioned a few times over the last two years and Jesus knows how many times I said it over and over again, today," she said.

The twins laughed. "We love you too, little lioness," the replied at the same time. As soon as they let go, another pair of arms caught her and squeezed her in a tight hug.

"Delilah!" squealed a tiny voice, making Delilah chuckle before turning around and hugging Ginny back.

"Hey, little red," she said, grinning.

"I missed you! You have to promise you'll stay with us over the summer," Ginny pleaded.

Delilah tensed up a bit before smiling again and nodding. "I promise," she answered, kissing Ginny's head before letting go.

Ginny squealed, jumping up and down like a crazy little girl. She turned to the twins and stuck her tongue out at them childishly. "I told you she would say yes!" she said before turning back to Delilah, kissing her cheek then running off to her other friends.

Delilah chuckled once again before finally flickering her gaze to Harry's. She stood there motionless and expressionless for a few seconds before a breathtaking, heart-stopping smile broke across her perfect face. Without wasting another second, he ran towards her at the same time as she ran over to him and as soon as they were in front of each other, she threw her arms around his neck as he wrapped his around her waist and spun her around in pure happiness, both of them laughing.

When Harry stopped spinning her, he didn't let go. "I missed you so much, Delilah," he whispered.

With his arms wrapped around her, he felt whole again as he buried his face in the crook of her neck.
and let her subtle scent slowly flow its way to his nostrils. When it reached him... well, he didn't know how to describe it, really— a warmth that glowed brighter than the sun seemed to ignite in his chest.

Her scent was heavenly.

Flowery.

A delicate aroma that seemed to penetrate to the very core of the fears and doubts he had and lift them away, leaving only a pleasant calm in its wake.

Lilies.

She smelled like lilies, along with a plethora of other things, such as a hint of mint and strawberries, the scent of the air flowing through a forest just after a rainstorm... a woody, musky scent — it fit her perfectly as she seemed like the kind of girl to love to run and just lose herself in the woods. It was nice, calming. Very pleasant.

"I missed you too," she whispered back, before pulling away, but keeping her arms around his neck. He grinned once he saw that her eyes were back to their normal violet orchidee color.

He opened his mouth to say something, but she cut him off waving a hand around dramatically.
"Yeah, yeah, I know, I promise, Harry, that I won't leave," she said, rolling her eyes.

"Ever again?"

She smiled brightly. "Ever again," she replied before grabbing his hand and leading him towards the table, where she sat between him and her brother.

That evening was the best Harry had had in what felt like forever. Everyone was happy and smiling, and even though Delilah wasn't very talkative, at least she was there, smiling. Harry was afraid she would pull away and walk out on him when he had grabbed her hand and held it under the table, but to his surprise, she only smiled at him and squeezed his hand, making him blush.

After dinner, they all went straight to their dorms since it was already late, though as he went there, Harry couldn't wipe the smile off his face after she had kissed him on the cheek a few minutes before.

He felt like the happiest boy alive.

Despite his happiness though, Harry couldn't sleep that night. Something was bothering him yet he didn't know what that 'something' was. He needed to clear his head, so he pushed himself out of his bed and made his way down to the Common Room where, to his surprise, he found Delilah there, sitting all alone staring blankly at the flames battling within the fireplace.

Harry sat down beside her but made sure to keep— much to his own dismay— some distance between them to give her some space as he searched through his head for a way to comfort her.

"Are you alright?" he asked softly.

She didn't answer.

"Lilly," Harry whispered.

Her head snapped his way, and she looked at him with anger. "What?" she snarled, as Harry
flinched a bit away. Her voice may now be more angelic than it used to be, but that only made it hurt more when she spoke so coldly. Her expression immediately softened, though Harry could see the pain in her eyes that were once again a midnight blue but not as dark as they were when she had come back.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, looking back towards the fire. Harry could see her frowning at it as she bit her lower lip in a way that made his heart jump quite a few times. They stayed that way, in silence, for a few minutes before Harry decided to finally speak up.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Harry asked, and she shocked him by coming closer to him. She placed her soft, warm hands on either side of his face, just as she had done with her brother the day she'd come back, then placed her forehead on his before closed her eyes. Harry felt a rush of energy flood into him, as his sight became blurry till the point where Harry had to close his eyes.

"Momma?" He heard a tiny voice ask. The voice seemed to be coming from a little girl, and it sounded so angelic that Harry had to open his eyes.

He was in a room, slightly bigger than the Gryffindor Common Room. There, by its fireplace, was a two seated sofa that was occupied by a girl who could easily pass as a little nine-year-old Delilah, and a woman who could be her mother. How could the girl be Delilah, though? Hadn't she been missing until Dumbledore found her when she was eleven? Hadn't her parents died a long time ago?

The woman looked down at the girl, who was snuggled up beside her, with loving eyes.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Can you tell me a bit more about the magic stuff you and daddy do?" the girl asked.

"Well, Lilah, there isn't really much to say other than the fact that witches and wizards do exist, but of course they are nothing like they are in fairy tales."

Little Delilah giggled and jumped off the sofa to stand in front of her mother. "Of course not! You're nothing like those ugly witches. You're beautiful! You could even be a queen!" she exclaimed herself, throwing her hands up in the air.

"Calm down, Dels. You're gonna wake gramps up," said a boy as he came to sit beside little Delilah's mother. The boy seemed slightly older than her and could easily pass as her brother for the facial features they shared. He, like her, had light brown hair, dark yet pale skin though his eyes were a green figi color, though they weren't as similar looking at Delilah and Seth, who could easily pass as twins if it weren't for their height and gender.

Delilah clamped her hands over her mouth and giggled. "Oops."

The boy laughed. "You never change, Dels, do you?"

She grinned at him. "Nope!"

He chuckled and shook his head. "Good. Don't." She, then, crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes as she seemed to be in deep thought.

"Momma, am I a witch?"

The woman smiled down at her little girl and hesitated for a moment before replying in a tone that only meant she was telling half a truth. "We don't know, sweetheart. The powers emerging from can
probably only be your gifts from your sou— your shifter side."

Harry couldn't understand how they could speak to the little girl so diplomatically— she's only a child!

"If I was, would I be able to look like my true age?" she asked, tilting her head to the side.

"Why don't you try?" the boy said.

"That doesn't sound like such a bad idea," said a man as he joined the family sitting on the sofa's armrest beside Delilah's mother. Maybe he was her father since he did have the same eyes as the boy. But, then again, there was the whole Sirius Black ordeal. Did she know about it?

"I don't think she sh—"

"It wouldn't hurt to give it a try, Cynthia," he said, cutting the woman off.

Cynthia sighed. "Alright, Carl."

They turned to look at Delilah who was smiling brightly. "Awesome! I'm tired of being a one-year-old who looks like a nine-year-old."

Whoa... Harry sure did not see that coming. She was one? How is that possible?

She took a deep breath then closed her eyes. Her brows furrowed and her lips curled down into a frown as her body went stiff. After a few minutes, her body started shrinking until she looked like a two-year-old. She opened her eyes and looked at her appearance in the mirror that hung above the fireplace then scowled.

"Never mind, I look retarded," she muttered before growing back up but only until she looked like a five-year-old. She frowned and turned to her family in confusion.

"It seems that your body has decided to adopt the appearance of your five-year-old self and slow down the growing process," Carl said.

They all looked at each other with similar serious expressions on their faces for a few minutes, then grinned at each other before Harry's vision got blurry once again, and he had to close his eyes.

When he opened them again, he was standing in a bedroom. The walls were painted purple— one had a 'Happy 2nd birthday!' banner hanging on it— the sealing was spiked in a very decorative way and the floor was wooden. He looked up and saw little Delilah, snuggled by her mother's side on a queen-sized bed.

"Momma? Are we in danger?" she asked in her two-year-old voice.

Cynthia smiled sadly at her. "Yes, sweetheart. But I promise it will be over soon," she said, holding her tighter against her.

Sighing in relief at the news, Delilah snuggled deeper into her blankets and tightened her hold on her mother. She seemed to have a feeling that even if her mother said that, something bad was going to happen. She seemed so scared and vulnerable.

"Momma, I don't want to lose you, daddy or Andrew," she whispered in a tiny voice.

"You won't Delilah, I promise," she assured her, kissing her forehead before singing a song.
"Just close your eyes, the sun is going down... you'll be alright, no one can hurt you now. Come morning light, you and I'll be safe and sound..."

Harry frowned a little when he listened to the song. He'd heard it before... but where? When?

Then the room disappeared and Harry found himself in front of a burning house.

"Mommy, Daddy! Where are you?" shouted a little voice, coughing roughly because of the smoke. He turned around and saw little Delilah looking around, panicked and confused.

"Run, Lilah, run!" someone shouted.

Delilah turned, looking for someone, though Harry could not tell who it was. "Kyle? Where are you?"

"Doesn't matter, just run and don't let them catch you!" a girl shouted.

"No, Kayla! I can't leave you guys here!" Delilah protested.

A hand suddenly caught onto to Andrew's shoulder and yanked him back away from Delilah. She stopped and shouted, "Andrew!"

"Don't stop, just keep going!" he shouted before she was surrounded by the hooded figures.

"No! I ca—"

"GO!" he managed to shout before a pair of pair hands twisted his neck, creating an ear-splitting 'crack' before dropping the boy's now limp body, causing Delilah to scream out in pain.

"ANDREW!" was the last thing Harry heard before the scenery changed and he was now standing in a clearing.

There, stood many hooded figures, not the same ones as the ones from the previous scene, but similar since they occupied the same dark atmosphere.

"Tell, me where is he?! Where is the boy?!" shrieked an ear piercing voice, making Harry shiver as he approached the crowd. Once he was near enough to see who they were questioning, he gasped in horror.

There, within the crowd, lay on the floor none other than Delilah, still looking like a five-year-old, yet for some reason, I had a feeling that she had looked so when she around three.

She curled her hands into fists and clenched her jaw. "I don't know," she snarled, though her voice sounded broken.
The woman shrieked. "Crucio!" she shouted, pointing her wand at Delilah. Harry cringed as she screamed in pain. He balled his hands up into fists and bit his tongue while fighting back a few tears as this made him remember the time Voldemort had tortured her in her sleep, two years ago. His heart was pounding hard as her body twitched and twisted before the scene changed again.

In front of him were standing a man, who appeared to be in his mid-thirties and a boy who seemed to be around twelve or thirteen years old. To Harry's shock, they were facing a horse sized dark brown wolf who seemed very hungry.

As the wolf was about to pounce, Delilah burst out of nowhere and attacked it. He started panicking as he saw the little girl—despite being rather tall for her age, she was still really small—confront the monster. As they were fighting, Harry examined the wolf and he realized that it seemed to be trying to figure out a way to go around her and attack the Muggles. Finally deciding itself, it clawed her arm, making her scream in pain before bouncing towards the man and boy who were slammed, the next second, against a tree. Harry looked back at Delilah and saw her starting to shake violently, though it seemed as though it were not out of fear that she was doing so. Seconds later, an ear-splitting ripping sound erupted from her, and where Delilah had once stood was now standing another horse sized wolf, slightly taller than the brown one, but this one had pure silvery fur.

The silvery wolf attacked the brown one with so much rage that it injured it and made it run away before the scene changed.

In the same clearing, there she stood. She seemed older than the previous one so she was probably six, here. She was thrown against a tree and she let out an ear piercing scream as a rippling crack emanating from her body caused the impact.

"I told you not to hurt her, Sicarius," said a voice just as a boy appearing to be in his mid-teens emerged from the trees.

"I never said I wouldn't, Proditorem. And in case you forgot, I never really listen to any of your orders," said a big bulky guy, whom Harry was sure was the one called Sicarius and the one who threw Delilah.

Proditorem chuckled. "Touché," he said before closing the distance there was between Delilah and himself. Harry wanted to rip his head off.

Delilah leaned further against the tree trunk as if trying to get away, but there was no way out. Proditorem stood right in front of her, barely two inches separated them and somehow feeling overconfident, he lifted a hand and caressed her cheek.

You could see the fear in her eyes, which was something rare to see when it came to Delilah, and that made Harry worry as he continued to watch.

"I won't hurt you," Proditorem whispered, and somehow seemed to relax her.

"I'll run the perimeter, Pro," Sicarius said before running off.

"You say you won't hurt me, yet you sent your 'friend' there to do it for you," Delilah said in a small voice. Harry didn't know why he had the feeling that she's six years old here if she already looks like a twelve-year-old, but then again, everything was a bit confusing now.

Proditorem shook his head and smiled down at her, still caressing her cheek. "I sent him to find you, not to hurt you. That idiot only likes to twist my words," he replied, wrapping his arms around her.

"Will you come with me?" he asked.
"Where?"

"Everywhere. I could make you feel happy and like yourself," he said. She looked at him and seemed to be contemplating his request before she nodded with a small smile, which was visibly forced.

"Good. You're mine now, beautiful," he said in a husky voice before crashing his lips to hers and that's when Harry noticed her suddenly changing her appearance through the kiss, though before he could make any further thought or predicament on that scene, his vision became once again blurry before changing.

He stood in a chamber that looked a lot like the Great Hall back at Hogwarts, but it was slightly smaller and there were no tables. It actually looked more like a ballroom, or throne room as there were royal looking chairs at the other end of the room, placed in a way so they were facing the doors, but that was not what had Harry's attention.

Right in the center of it stood Delilah looking exactly like her Boggart self he had seen in their first DADA class.

What confused him at the moment was that she didn't look as evil as he expected her to seem or as he saw from her boggart.

True, she did have that fire red hair, those crimson red eyes, that pale skin and that slim yet quite a curvy body that was extremely dazzling... but the evil look he had been expecting wasn't there. She wasn't even smirking devilishly. Her facial expression held only confusion, and she seemed to be battling internally with herself. But that was when he realized that the only reason she seemed so confused was because she was looking at something. He followed her gaze and finally noticed the man from the wolf attack was there and so was the boy, but there was something different about him. His skin seemed a lot paler and his hair a lot darker, but Harry couldn't see his eyes, due to the fact that he was trying hard to gain more distance between his father and himself— they were being held by other men and were struggling to get away, panting.

"Lilah! Fight back! This isn't you!" the boy hissed in pain.

"Yes, Delilah! Look what they've done to Brady!" the man continued.

Harry looked back at Delilah and started getting worried about her conflicting expression. She shook her head violently before gripping her hair by its roots and falling down onto her knees. She suddenly started shaking and a weird type of aura was starting to appear around her like a light. It was a silvery gray kind of color.

"Lilah," Brady choked out.

"No! Stop! Make it stop!" she shrieked, practically pulling her hair out.

"Look at me," he whispered hoarsely.

She shook her head again, whimpering as the guy from earlier, Proditorem, stepped forward, in front of her. "Silence," he shouted, his voice booming loudly around the room. He turned to that Sicarius guy and smirked. "Carius, why don't you take dear old Kenton for a little change. We could use some extra men," he said as Sicarius smirked back and tightened his grip on Brady's father.

"NO!" Delilah suddenly shouted, smashing her hands against the marble floor breaking it into bits under her fists. They all turned to look at her, slightly panicked but then Proditorem sighed in relief as he saw her shaking her head again at herself.
Delilah's body started shaking even more violently as she gripped the roots of her hair.

"Alright, Sicarius, you take our dear Kenton to the mutatio chamber and the others take little Brandon to the—"

"It's Brady!" Brady hissed at him.

"Imperium chamber," he finished, ignoring Brady's interruption.

"NO!" Delilah shouted before lunging towards Proditorem and slamming him against the marble floor, breaking it under the impact once again. Harry's vision soon started blurring up again, so he closed his eyes as he felt himself being dragged out of the memory, as the powerful energy drained.

Harry opened his eyes and saw that he was back in the Common Room with Delilah. Her warm hands were still cupping his face and her warm breath, unbeknown to her, was brushing against his lips. Harry didn't know what came over him, but he immediately wrapped an arm around her waist and ran his free hand through her long silky brown hair. She opened her eyes and Harry saw a sparkle in them as the hardness and sorrow seemed to soften, changing her eye color from midnight blue to a violet lunara once again.

She took a deep breath before releasing her hold of his face and pulling away, leaning against the other side of the sofa as if she was afraid she would hurt him if she sat too close. Sighing, Harry leaned against his own side and simply stared at her beautiful figure. She was the most beautiful girl Harry had ever seen, and he didn't know if it was even believable or at the very least possible, but every time he saw her, she just seemed to be getting more and more beautiful...

She seemed like such a delicate person— like a fragile rose petal— that it was almost hard to believe that she would go through all of that and still smile. His best friend is truly amazing. She is also amazingly beautiful, with her insanely, gorgeously angelic smile, her ringing laugh that sounds like singing and amazingly strong, keeping her head held up high even through the darkest times, recovering as quickly as she can to then take care of others... Harry knew something now. He was falling. Hard. Actually, Harry fell since the first day he saw her aboard the train on their first journey from platform nine and three-quarters, and all over again when he bumped into her at Diagon Alley before the start of their third year— when he sadly snapped at her and made her go away. Harry had become sure of it on the train ride this year. The only one who remained oblivious about it was her. She didn't know how she made his heart jump every time he saw her. She has no idea... while Harry does.

It's official.

Harry is insanely in love with Delilah Keren Aleah Dawn Hawkins.
Delilah made sure to stay as far away from Harry as possible because she was, indeed, afraid that she would hurt him by being too close to him. She knew she could control herself better now, but, even so, she was afraid of losing him, her first best friend. He, just like Hermione and Ron, had been there for her from the start, not giving up, but now that she showed him her story— not all of it of course, but she still showed him what had happened to her when she went missing— she was more afraid now that he might reject her. That he might not want to be her friend anymore. She wouldn't blame him if he didn't want to hear, talk or see her ever again, though. She would grant him that wish, but she would still be there to make sure that her first and only best friends are safe and sound. It was her job, after all, as a Curatoria. That, and she would never forgive herself if something happened to them too and she couldn't do anything about it like the many times she had failed to protect her past loved ones.

She stared at him as he leaned against his own side and simply stared back at her. There was something about his expression that confused her. He stared at her as though she dazzled him, amazed him... as though she were the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life. Then, she realized that his expression was even filled with admiration. How could someone admire a monster like her? How is it that people even find her dazzling or amazing? How was she even dazzling or amazing? Wait— part veela... right. Either way, this was the first time he'd ever looked at her this way, or, at least, the first time she'd been aware of it. That was why she was confused and couldn't help but tense up at that idea.

She gazed into his mesmerizing bright green eyes, then, almost instantly, looked away, frowning at the flames roaring silently in the fireplace.

"I would understand if you never want to see me or speak to me again," she spoke in a dull voice. She risked a sideways glance his way and saw he was about to say something, but she beat him to it. "If you think of me as a monster."

He opened his mouth to speak, but, again, she beat him to it, looking him dead straight in the eyes. "I would voluntarily grant your wish."

His eyes widened in shock. "Why would you think I would ever want that? I don't want you to go!" he exclaimed himself, closing the distance between them and gripping her arm and if that would keep him alive.

Delilah's brows furrowed in confusion. "You don't want me to go?" she asked in a small voice, entirely confused. Why would he want her there?

He shook his head quickly and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her closer to him. He buried his face in the crook of her neck and inhaled her scent, something she noticed he did quite often when they hugged. "In case you forgot, I made you promise me to never leave me again," he said, looking up at her.

His face was inches from hers as she stared deeply into his eyes, just now noticing how they weren't just a simple bright green color. They were a beautiful bright ocean green color with a deeper emerald hue surrounding it. She could stare into them for hours, if it weren't for the many thoughts running through her head.

"Why?" she choked out.
"You're my best friend, Delilah. My first best friend. I don't know how we managed to become so after the very first day—" Since you didn't really talk. "— but ever since we met, I felt some sort of connection with you. I finally found someone who understands me more than anyone. I mean, sure, from what you showed me, you've been through so much more than I have, but you understand how I feel. You always see the good in everyone like you did with Malfoy at the owl—"

"You were there?!” Delilah exclaimed herself completely alarmed by the news. How come she didn't sense him there?

Harry blushed. "I sort of followed you before going to Hogsmeade," he said shyly. Delilah blinked a few times in disbelief.

"Y-you... but I—" she cut herself off, not sure what to say anymore.

Albeit the unexpected revelation, Harry continued, "You see the good in everyone, you stand up for others and always comfort anyone, even those you don't know. You always seem to know everything, but you never show or brag about it... You're different, but you try your best and manage to act normal. And I'm glad to have you here," he admitted.

Not really sure what to say or do, she simply hid her face in his chest, but then turned to frown at the fireplace.

She wanted to cry. She wanted to be more human and cry deliberately, for no reason even. She wished she was more human instead of having to pretend to be... she wished she didn't have to pretend at all. But maybe she didn't need to anymore. Harry knew now. Not everything. Not yet. But he knew... maybe she didn't have to keep pretending to be something she wasn't anymore, but... how? She was—

"But I'm dangerous," she practically growled more to herself. How can he still want her there? How can he still want her in his life when she could easily rip him apart with her own teeth?

"It doesn't matter," he whispered.

"It doesn't matter?" her tone made him look down at her and realize that he had finally broken through her carefully composed mask. She looked at him with an incredulous expression, with just a hint of anger he seemed to fear.

"No," he said softly. "It doesn't matter to me what you are."

Delilah had no idea what came over her, but suddenly a hard, mocking edge entered her voice. "You don't care if I'm a monster? If I'm not human!"

"No."

She was silent, staring straight ahead at the flames roaring silently again, her face going bleak and cold.

"You're angry," he sighed, tightening his grip on her. "I shouldn't have said anything."

"No," she said, but her tone came out as hard as her face. "I would rather know what you are thinking without having to get in— even if what you are thinking is completely insane."

"So I'm wrong then?" he challenged.

"That is not what I was referring to. 'It doesn't matter'!" she quoted, gritting her teeth together. She
pulled away from his hold and looked him dead straight in the eyes. "How could it not matter? I killed many innocent people while being with him! I didn't even show pity! I gave them no mercy and just sank my teeth into their necks and ripped them apart! I'm not human like you, Harry. I can't keep pretending to be something that I'm not," she hissed.

"Why not? You have up till now. And besides, I don't care what you are. You came into my life and filled that empty hole, you stitched me up, Delilah. I won't... I won't be able to live with myself if you leave... if you—" he cut himself off.

She saw something. Something tiny and shiny slide down his cheek from his left eye. Though her marble expression softened, her heart started pounding as confusion filled her whole body, blaring hot like the flames of the fireplace. He was crying. Just like her brother had been the previous week. He was crying...

For her.

She could feel her heart chatter as the realization hit her like a ton of bricks. She couldn't believe that so many people could actually care so much about her. People she'd let down and others she was letting down by trying to leave instead of staying to protect them up close.

She scooted closer to him and rested her head on his shoulder. "You really don't want me to leave, do you?" she asked softly as she felt him rest his head on top of hers.

"No," he whispered, wrapping his arms around her once again, hugging her.

She pulled away a few inches and kissed his cheek. "Then I'll stay, I promise," she whispered back, resting her head on his chest as they layed down on the sofa.

At this moment, Delilah couldn't help but smile at how human he was making her feel. How human her brother had made her feel that other day when they cried together. How human he made her feel throughout their week of bonding together.

Maybe she could be human after all.

"Thank you," he murmured against her forehead.


Harry chuckled. "Goodnight, Delilah Keren Aleah... Dawn," was the last thing she heard before happily welcoming the darkness.

The next morning was pretty awkward for Delilah because she woke up to the sound of people pushing each other, and, when she opened her eyes, there were many Gryffindors surrounding the sofa she and Harry were laying on. Her eyes had widened and she had nudged Harry pretty hard making him wake up with a yelp. He looked around confused and had tightened his grip on her, making their small crowd 'awe' and her blush deep red as she hid her face against his chest in embarrassment.

Thankfully, the twins had made everyone leave, threatening of pranking them if they didn't, leaving her with Harry, Hermione and Ron there alone, Seth joining them only a few seconds later. Delilah used her telepathic powers like the previous night, but proceeded a little differently when she showed Hermione and Ron everything she had shown Harry by placing her right palm on Ron's left cheek and her left palm on Hermione's right cheek. She could see their facial expressions change so many times as they went through every single memory, finally settling into shock and awe once she had
"C-could you... um.... summarize?" Hermione asked hesitantly, in a small voice.

Delilah sent her a small smile before nodding. "My family... well... okay, here's the thing. Cynthia was not my mother," she began, but that only made them more confused.

"Cynthia was our aunt," Seth said. "She was our mum's twin."

That seemed to make things a bit more clearer.

"I still don't remember how I ended up with them... but, anyway, her family and pack were killed by the 'Ius Rex' followers who were after me because of the prophecy they had heard about me. They wanted me, but Cynthia and her pack wouldn't let them and sacrificed themselves for me," Delilah went on slowly, looking down at her hands.

"What does Ius Rex mean?" Ron asked curiously.

Delilah chuckled humorlessly. "It means law ruler. Those followers are part of Regium's coven—"

"A coven? As in vampires?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

Delilah nodded. "Their coven is one of the most powerful covens in the entire world. A myth—a legend; that's why they call themselves 'Ius Rex.' They think they're the only ones who can rule the vampire race and all others since they're the only coven to concede just and only vampires with extra special abilities. They've been after me ever since I was born. They were planning on waiting, to see how strong I'd get. To see if the prophecy was true, but..."

Delilah frowned; she'd been the target in two of the biggest ambushes in the history of soul shifters, but, from what she remembered, the first time, it hadn't been the Ius Rex. Why would they— "They waited quite a while longer than they had planned..."

"Who was the woman who was... using the... curse on you? She looked familiar..." Ron said.

Delilah tensed up, and so did Seth, though he instantly relaxed when he saw his sister had when Harry wrapped an arm securely around her. She leaned her head against his shoulder and sighed, cringing slightly at the memory.

"Bellatrix," she whispered.

Ron's eyes widened as her two other friends simply stared at them in confusion.

She shook her head at them. "You'll know when it's your time to know," she said and smiled as they didn't push any further on that topic and just nodded at me to continue. She straightened her posture but didn't dare to move away from Harry, knowing she wouldn't be able to continue if she did.

"So yeah, I was kidnapped by Bellatrix and... some of Voldemort's followers," she continued, muttering the last four words while looking down at her hands again as Ron gasped at the news, and, of course, the name being said. "They knew who I was and were dead set on the idea that I knew everything, but I didn't. Not at the time, but they wouldn't take 'I don't know' for an answer..."

"Who were they after?" Harry whispered, tightening his grip around her like he usually does.

She swallowed hard before looking up at him with a broken expression on her face. "You," she whispered back.
She stared at him, waiting to see his reaction, but he more than shocked me; he cursed under his breath before muttering, "Damn Voldemort sending his stupid followers after you just for me. Why does everyone have to be in danger because of me? You could've died bec—"

Delilah shook her head and blurted out, "I can't die."

He blinked a few times. "What?!" he, Hermione and Ron exclaimed themselves at the same time.

Seth didn't react like them, but he still stared at his sister confused. He knew she was some sort of hybrid on a whole new level, but was she really immortal? Her heart was still beating like any other — it beat extremely fast, but it beat all the same, she couldn't possibly not be able to die, right?

"I don't know how, but I think it has something to do with what I am. I can sort of die, but I come back all the time... okay, that didn't really make sense, but... yeah, that's the only explanation I've got," she said, grimacing. "I mean... you guys have seen it, remember?"

Harry, Hermione, and Ron nodded, remembering their first and second year. Not all three of them have been there when it happened, only Harry, but they knew what had happened. Seth only stared at them blankly, feeling a bit out of the loop, then just shrugged it off; he'd ask his sister some other time about that; she was already making immense progress by letting more people know about her.

"Alright, I guess... we'll figure that out in time... go on," Harry said, swallowing hard.

Delilah nodded. "Anyway, the Bellatrix event happened when I looked the way I looked when I was three, I managed to shield myself from the curse after a while, and knock her and her companions unconscious before erasing our... little encounter from their memories.

"There's really no need to worry about them anyway," Seth said. "I've read somewhere in the Daily Prophet, a few weeks after school started, that they were recently caught and put back in Azkaban."

Delilah nodded in confirmation. "Anyhow, before that encounter till then, since my family's sacrifice, I spent the proceeding months on my own feeding myself on some berries and herbs, before I met Kenton and Brady when I looked the way I looked when I was five, when I phased into my wolf for what I thought then was my first time."

She stopped for a moment to make sure they were keeping up with everything she was saying. When they nodded, she continued.

"I met Proditorem when I looked the way I looked when I was six. His scent had freaked my wolf out because it was unfamiliar to me. It wasn't like any other creature I had come across through my years, so it confused me. I had run off trying to get away because my wolf said 'danger', but he sent Sicarius after me, and, as you noticed, Sicarius was a sucker for violence. He hated catching his preys without a chase or a fight, that's why he was so thrilled to go after me. I fought against him, but he managed to throw me at a tree, damaging most of my spine. I could've beaten him with my strength, but strength doesn't always beats brains. And I still wasn't skilled enough in fighting then. Anyway, Proditorem got to me, and me being naive and insecure, I believed in every word he said and let my guard down, giving him the advantage to use his gift on me. Compulsion. Then he... he bit me."

Their eyes widened in shock. "Y-you... were—"

"The crimson red eyes. That's the color of a newborn vampire," Delilah said, cutting Hermione off. "That eye color eventually changed to one of my mood-swinging-eye-color-changing-thingy... I still don't know what to call it, but when my eyes go crimson red or close to it, nowadays, it means I'm..."
really angry, though it's rare you'd see me that frustrated. They usually go black when I'm mad or... thirsty... or my wolf or the other is yearning to come out."

"How?" the trio asked at the same time.

Delilah and Seth shared a smile. "I'm originally a shifter from my... father's side and soul shifter from my mother's side, a witch from both, since my dad was a wizard while my mother was a witch, tinted quite profoundly by wiccan magic."

Seth raised his eyebrows at her explanation as he noticed the emphasis she put on certain words she used.

"Wiccan? I thought all wiccan lines and traces... faded centuries. Didn't they?" Hermione asked, the interest evident in her voice.

Delilah chuckled. "My family from my mother's side was the last family to inherit Wicca. And, like the soul shifters, they were being hunted down, so they kept the whole Wicca stuff a secret. Now, since they're all gone, and it's mostly only the females who get that magic, I am now, officially, the last wiccan witch alive."

Seth nodded in confirmation. "Our aunt Lara comes from the same bloodline, but the wiccan magic didn't reach her. I guess you can say it chooses its wielders. I can do a bit of that magic, but it's not as strong enough to be labeled a wiccan wizard."

Hermione smiled in amazement. "Wow, that's..."

"Wicked," the trio said at the same time, grinning. The Dawn siblings smiled back at them.

"My..." Delilah paused for a moment, swallowing hard. It had been so long since she'd spoken or even thought of them. "... my brothers were different. They had only gotten to be shifters, and my cousin Andrew, whom I thought was my brother for a while, only got to be a shifter and wizard. He didn't have the wiccan in him nor the ancestor gene to become a new type of hybrid."

"New type of hybrid?" Ron asked, confused.

Delilah nodded and Seth perked up at the new information. His uncle and aunt taught him a lot of things, but they always made sure there was a limit to what they taught him; it was as though they didn't want him to know everything.

"Normally, hybrids are born the way they are, and in a way, my cousin and I were born hybrids, Andrew being half shifter and half wizard." She didn't add anything about her brothers as, now that she recalled, she actually never got to know whether they were more than just shifters or just that. "But somewhere in our precedent ancestors time, one of the first members of our family was a vampire and a werewolf and a soul shifter, as shifters are descendants of the soul shifters. Then it went from werewolves and shifters down to adding wiccan wielders, then the regular witch and wizard we know of." And Veelas and Elementals... "I somehow caught all genes making me... sort of... indestructible."

They blinked a few times and stared at her with a bit of comprehension in their faces.

Delilah sighed. "If I were just a witch and I was bitten, I would've turned into a vampire and lost my magic. Being only a wiccan, I would be a vampire with wiccan magic because that magic never actually fades unless you die and... or weren't able to pass it on down your bloodline. As a werewolf or a shifter... I would have died being bitten because vampires are their natural enemies, so their bite
is poisonous, and vice versa. But I carried the genes of all of those different creatures. The vampire side of me was simply dormant and wasn't awoken until—"

"Until Proditorem bit you," Harry finished for her in a whisper. She nodded.

"Kenton and Brady knew the real me... well, not completely, but they knew more than anyone about when it came down to what I am. And once they saw my change, they immediately came after me. How did they find me? I never asked. But once they had me under their wing, one of his men bit Brady. He went crazy over it but surprisingly stayed in control of himself. They were planning on changing Kenton as well, but that was when I snapped out of it. Sense had come back to me, and I was shocked and furious when I realized that I had spent almost an entire half a year under the control of some stupid rebellious vampire. I was furious, and that fury rose once I had noticed that they had changed Brady. Brady and I fought against them, but they got to him and used a vampire that had a gift of torture. It's very similar to the... to the curse. I acquired it as well and used it against him, but once I re-focused on the situation, I... I froze at what I saw before me..."

Seth took her hand and squeezed it reassuringly.

"What did you see?" Hermione asked softly.

Delilah felt her heart shatter like a mirror into a million pieces at the memory. "He killed Brady and burnt him into ashes," she whispered.

Ron clapped a hand over his mouth in shock. "Bloody hell," he muttered.

"What did I do? I just ki— I wasn't— this wasn't supposed to— oh, my goddess..."

"Shh. It's okay, Lilah. You didn't mean—"

"So? That doesn't make a difference! Even an alpha shouldn't... I-I just ki..."

"I killed him right after," the hybrid blurted out. They looked at her, speechless. "I was completely out of it that I phased... into a black wolf."

"Black?" they asked dumbfounded.

Delilah nodded. "I'm not sure what the real color of my fur is, but my fur was black at first. Then it became silver last year. It went back to black when I... when I killed him, but it's silver again, now. I'm not sure if this is my phase, I mean, it could just mean that I'm still in the process and soon becoming what I really am," she explained. They kept staring at her, speechless once again, so she decided to not elaborate on that matter and tell them about her being an alpha, and continued.

"So, yes. I killed him... but that's... that's the only crime I don't regret committing. If you could even call it that. After all, his heart hadn't been beating for about three centuries already, so it didn't matter. He was already supposed to be dead."

"Good, you shouldn't regret it," Hermione said. The four of them stared at her in shock. Whoever thought they would one day hear sweet ol' Hermione speak with so much hate? "What? He deserved it. He did make you kill against your own will," she exclaimed herself.

"I agree," Harry and Ron said at the same time as Seth nodded in agreement.

Delilah smiled slightly at that. "After killing him. I was imagining myself and Kenton back at our home in Forks and, then, the next second, there we were! The next night... was the first time I had met Dumbledore... well, not really the first time, but you know what I mean. He told me about
Hogwarts, and what I apparently forgot—"

"This happened when you were missing?!" Ron exclaimed. Delilah nodded. "But that was only like six months."

Delilah gave out a light shrug, though it was clear she was nowhere close to being nonchalant. "I basically grew up again. I don't know how, but I just did. I guess we can say I was sort of reborn." She paused, biting her lip for a moment, before continuing. "I was reborn and grew up again in a period of six months. I really have no idea how that happened—"

"So? That doesn't make a difference! Even an alpha shouldn't... I-I just ki... I don't want to remember this... I want to forget..."

"Deli?"

_I was two years old when I became an orphan, though some part of me felt like I had already gone through that. Like I had already been an orphan before I became one. I was three when I was kidnapped. When she'd had her first glimpse back at the Cruciatux Curse. I was five when I phased for what felt like the first time. It was scary and painful..."

"Lilah?"

At the age of six, I was bitten, and compelled. The change... the pain... it was bewildering. It felt as if I was being burned alive, yet I couldn't do anything. I was seven when he was killed right before my eyes—I showed the first signs of magic again...

"Delilah?"

She blinked, looking back up at them, and a puzzled expression took over her face.

"Who are—" she cut herself, the look of confusion deepening on her dark yet pale features as she looked at Harry first. "Harry?" She turned and looked at the redheaded boy and the brunette. "Ron? Hermione?" she mumbled.

It took a few seconds for her to recompose herself, though, all the while, all Seth could do was frown. This was the second time this happened... what was happening to his sister? It was as though one minute she was there, then, the next, she was yet wasn't there, then she forgot practically who everyone is before finally remembering and going on as though nothing happened.

"I was reborn and grew up again in a period of six months. I really have no idea how that happened," she found herself repeating. "A part of me knew about my regrowth—of my rebirth, but I honestly don't know how I knew that—I just did."

As she went on, she was completely oblivious to the dumbfounded expression on her brother's and friend's faces at what had just occurred. She'd practically just spaced out and began mumbling to herself.

"... all I could remember was my name and my new life. She was aware of having forgotten something, of having regrown, but I just couldn't put sense into it." Delilah sighed and shook her head, as though that would clear her mind. "Anyway, Dumbledore had told me how I might have to lay low for a while longer before I start back at school. I guess it was something to do with my prophecy being pretty well known. That, and it was already enough that I had over ten werewolf packs and about fifty vampire covens after me."

"Ten werewolf packs and fifty vampire coven?!" Hermione shrieked, jumping to her feet with wide
Delilah nodded. "Werewolves are more possessive and territorial... like vampires. Shifters don't really attack unless they see you a threat. Basically they only protect their pack and, on occasion, form alliances with other packs and help each other out; they've become quite cautious since the extinction of the soul shifters who were pretty close to them," she said in a sad tone. "The vampires and werewolves that were after me wanted me for my powers to be the most powerful pack or coven in the world, but they're all pretty subtle about it. The one who is all too obvious is—"

"Regium," they said at the same time with as much venom in their voices as Delilah would have put in her own while saying his damned name.

She nodded. "I forbid myself from phasing or hunting again. It was painful to the point where I was literally dying—" Harry's grip on her tightened. "— but I managed to stay alive thanks to my magic and the thought that I had to protect Kenton, because whether I liked it or not, I already loved him as a father. And I couldn't bare the idea of losing him too. So with the help of my husky, Jack, and my duckling, Skipper, we looked after him and made sure to keep him safe." They nodded and seemed to be thinking of what more to ask.

"What happened after your last encounter with Malfoy?" Harry asked.

Delilah narrowed her eyes, trying to remember what he was talking about. "The night I came back tripping over my own feet?" she asked. He nodded. She looked at Hermione and Ron, who nodded in approval, and stole a quick glance from Seth, who looked at her curiously.

"Well, I had gone to the owl tower to send a letter and when I was about to give the letter to my owl, Arrow, Dracula walked up and started pissing me off. Then the conversation took a turn into why I hate him— which I don't, he only annoys the crap out of me— and why he hates everyone. Then we laughed for no reason and he tried to befriend me. I told him he would have to prove himself deserving of my friendship and, until he can do that, we are people who simply happen to know each other. After that, I left and started making my way towards the forbidden forest since no one is allowed to go in there and phased after ten months."

"Ten months?!" Hermione exclaimed. "I thought one couldn't..."

"Phase after not doing so for a long time?" Delilah finished. Hermione nodded. "That's true, but since it wasn't for years and I still haven't changed into all of my animals, well, I guess that's why I couldn't exactly not phase anymore. That night was way more painful than my first time, though. The first time I ever phased was painful, but, then again, everyone's first time is. Of course, it depends on the moment as well. One could be going through some sort of emotional breakthrough, or have one really strong emotion flowing through their body, and change instantly. Kind of like when I met Kenton and Brady. My body reacted immediately and changed without hesitation on instinct, but since I had been pushing my wolf away for so long, the change came in more painful and that's why you guys found me tripping over my own feet on my way back," she explained as they stared at her, mouth open and eyes widened in shock.

"Ten months..." Hermione repeated in a whisper in disbelief.

"That must have been really painful," Seth mumbled while his sister simply nodded and gave them a halfhearted smile.

"What about when you were gone for the past month?" Ron asked in a whisper, her smile instantly fading at the question.
Delilah frowned. "I-I was..." she choked out, feeling her heart shatter once again at the memory.

Hermione rubbed her knee comfortingly, Seth squeezed her hand gently and Harry tightened his grip on her as the four of them gave her encouraging smiles. She smiled back, though she pretty sure it came out as a grimace.

She took a deep breath, looking down at her hands and frowning. "While Fred and George were showing Harry and I the many ways to escape the castle unnoticed, I was starting to have that... familiar burning sensation," she started, swallowing hard as her frown deepened.

"Harry wanted me to sneak out with him but I refused and... as usual, I ran off. I went to Dumbledore to let him know that I had to leave."

"Why?" they asked at the same time.

She looked up at them. "I was getting thirsty," she simply answered.

They blinked a few times until realization finally hit them. "B-but why didn't you just do it in the forbidden forest?" Harry asked curiously.

Delilah smiled meekly. "The blood inside every creature here contains magic. It would become too irresistible and would start feeling like enough to... satisfy my thirst and I would lose control while being at Hogwarts. At Forks, I can find a normal animal and charm its blood according to my needs and wants. Sometimes, I don't even have to charm it at all," she explained.

"Y-you don't drink human blood?!" Ron exclaimed himself.

"Ron!" Hermione scolded him, causing Delilah to laugh a tad bit humorlessly.

"I did once, while being under Proditorem's control, but even then my mind seemed repulsed by the idea of drinking blood, let alone human blood, though I had to calm my thirst in order not to hurt anyone. So I changed into a diet of animal blood then went on a riot quitting it completely. It was hard at first, but I managed. I guess I was wrong when I thought I would no longer need it," I said, chuckling.

"So you don't drink human blood?" Ron repeated as if to make sure he wasn't in any danger.

"Ron!" Hermione warned, but Delilah just chuckled and shook her head in response. They nodded and smiled for her to continue.

She frowned again before taking a deep breath. "I went hunting in the forest connecting the La Push reservation and Forks and just as I was done... I smelt him."

"Proditorem?" Harry asked.

Delilah shook her head. "Regium," she said. She flicked a finger and a second later the note appeared on her lap. She tensed up, but, not wanting to read it again, she passed it to Hermione who read it out loud. A look of confusion then crossed their faces as they looked at Delilah questioningly.

She swallowed hard and closed her eyes. "He killed them," she whispered.

They stayed silent for a few minutes before Harry decided to break the silence. "Who? Who did he kill, Deli?" Harry asked softly.

"He killed them." And a tearless sob escaped her lips. "My daddy... He killed Kenton, and my husky
"and— and my duckling," she answered, burying her face in Harry's chest. She pulled away from them and walked to the window, balling her hands into fists.

"I was supposed to be there. I was supposed to protect them. I promised them, but I let them die!" she shouted, slamming her fists against the brick wall leaving it slightly breaking a few pieces off.

"It's not your fault, Deli—"

"Not my fault?!" she asked, with a mocking edge in her tone; the same tone she'd used the previous night with Harry. "Me being alive is what caused their lives to be endangered. Me being alive is what caused their death!" she hissed.

"Did you want them to be in danger? Did you want them to die? I reckon the only thing you really wanted was for them to be safe, so don't you go around, blaming yourself for something that isn't your fault!" Seth said, taking the quartet quite aback with his stern tone.

Silence surrounded them for a few more minutes. "What happened after that?" Harry asked calmly.

Delilah took a deep breath before she turned to face them, leaning her back against the wall. "I made glass coffins for them and buried them in the heart of the forest." She smiled. "I created a meadow over it," she added projecting an image of the meadow into their minds making them gasp in daze.

"I called it 'Optimum Praelia', it means 'The best warriors'. I named it to honor what they represented in my life. I may have only known them for a short while... but they were warriors to my eyes... they still are. They gave their lives for mine, how can I not consider them as that?" she replied with a sad smile.

Running a hand through her now long hair, she sighed and closed her eyes again. "I wish I could've saved them," she muttered to herself before opening her eyes again and going on. "After that I spent my time phasing back and forth, though I stayed in my wolf form most of the time. I also fought in a few battles here and there, siding with the other few packs of shifters there at the reservation, in Forks and some others in Seattle, Olympia and Lakewood... and a few other places, which names I forgot..." she said, shrugging.

"You got fought battles?!" three voices shouted, and the trio and the Dawn siblings immediately snapped their heads up to look where the voices came from.

Delilah and Seth's eyes widened in shock as the two twins and Ginny stood by the steps of the dorms.

"How long have you been there?!" Delilah asked, starting to have a panic attack. Harry instantly got up from his seat, rushed over to her and wrapped an arm around her waist to calm her down.

"Since we chased everyone—" Fred started.

"—out of the Common room," George finished.

They all looked at Ginny except the twins.

She shrugged. "I punched them so they wouldn't blow our cover," she said. Delilah opened her mouth but instantly closed it, not knowing what to say. Suddenly she was engulfed by a pair of thin arms.

"Please don't leave! I don't care what you are, I just don't want to lose you. You're already my sister, so please don't go," Ginny pleaded.
Delilah felt something wet drop on the crook of her neck and realized Ginny was crying, so she immediately wrapped her arms around her in a way that would hopefully be enough to comfort her. The Wiccan witch had no idea what to say, so this seemed to be the only thing to do. Her heart was shattering at all the affection and love; she hadn't had it in long time that she was starting to forget what it was like to love and to be loved.

The twins suddenly joined in the hug. "Yeah! Who will be the inspiration to our pranks, if you're gone?" they said at the same time, making her laugh after so long a real laugh.

"Oi! They're right. Who's going to motivate me to keep on eating," Ron said, joining in the group hug.

Delilah laughed again. "I'm pretty sure you already ate like a pig before we met, ketchup," she teased.

Hermione laughed from somewhere in the room. "Yes, he always has!" she exclaimed herself, joining the hug as well, Seth following suit.

"Who else wouldn't be willing to go through so much to help anyone?" Harry, who still had an arm around her waist, whispered in her ear, wrapping his other arm around her waist and squeezing her slightly, burying his face on the crook of neck.

Delilah smiled brightly. For the first time in a long time, she felt so loved. She felt like she belonged, she felt accepted. Even if they aren't what she is, part of her is more like them; that's what makes her feel like she belongs.

"Alright, alright! First of all, you're all suffocating me," she started as they laughed and only tightened their grip on her.

She rolled her eyes and chuckled. "Second of all... I'll stay, but only because you begged," she joked.

"Promise?" they asked at the same time.

Delilah sighed. "Yes, I promise. I give you my word that I won't leave ever again." They cheered and she couldn't help but smile.

This is the kind of family her heart had been yearning for all these years.
The Patronus

After the little heart to heart event Delilah had with the four youngest Weasleys, Harry, Hermione, and her brother, everything was back to normal... Well, almost.

Ron was furious with Hermione because, from what Delilah had been told, through the holidays Harry had gotten a Firebolt whom everyone suspected was from Sirius Black and Hermione got all over the place at the fact that it may be jinxed or whatnot, so she reported it to McGonagall, who confiscated it to examine it. As far as Ron was concerned, the stripping-down of a brand-new Firebolt was nothing less than criminal damage. Hermione, who remained convinced that she had acted for the best, started avoiding the common room unless Delilah and Seth were there, but, other than that, she wouldn't dare even to sit there.

Harry and Ron supposed she had taken refuge in the library and didn't try to persuade her to come back. All in all, they were glad when the rest of the school returned shortly to its normal state, and Gryffindor Tower became crowded and noisy again. Wood sought Harry out in the morning before breakfast.

"I've been, doing some thinking over Christmas, Harry. After last match, you know. If the dementors come to the next one... I mean... We can't afford you to— well—" Wood broke off, looking awkward.

"I'm working on it," said Harry quickly. "Professor Lupin said he'd train me to ward off the dementors. We should be starting this week. He said he'd have time after Christmas."

"Ah," said Wood, his expression clearing. "Well, in that case— I really didn't want to lose you as Seeker, Harry. And have you ordered a new broom yet?"

"No," said Harry.

"What! You'd better get a move on, you know— you can't ride that Shooting Star against Ravenclaw!"

"He got a Firebolt for Christmas," said Ron.

"A Firebolt? No! Seriously? A— a real Firebolt?"

"Don't get excited, Oliver," said Harry gloomily. "I haven't got it anymore. It was confiscated."

And he explained all about how the Firebolt was now being checked for jinxes. "Jinxed? How could it be jinxed?"

"Sirius Black," Harry said wearily. "He's supposed to be after me. So McGonagall reckons he might have sent it."

Waving aside the information that a famous murderer was after his Seeker, Wood said, "But Black couldn't have bought a Firebolt! He's on the run! The whole country's on the lookout for him! How could he just walk into Quality Quidditch Supplies and buy a broomstick?"

"I know," said Harry, "but McGonagall still wants to strip it down—" Wood went pale.

"I'll go and talk to her, Harry," he promised. "I'll make her see reason.... A Firebolt... a real Firebolt, on our team... She wants Gryffindor to win as much as we do.... I'll make her see sense. A
"Oh, my goddess of the moon!" Delilah sighed in exasperation. "Calm your ADHD, boys! I've got a Firebolt I could lend."

"You what?!" they shouted at the same time.

She rolled her eyes and looked at Wood. "I bought a Firebolt when I bought my school supplies in August. I have a feeling Harry will have his back by the match. So in the meanwhile, I could let him use it, and till then, when the match comes, he'll be on his own Firebolt, and I could lend mine to you, if you want."

"You would do that?" he asked not even waiting for her answer. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" he exclaimed himself, picking her up and spinning her around before setting her back on her feet and running off ever so joyful.

Harry and Ron stared at her wide-eyed. "What? At least another Gryffindor is smiling, and skipping around," she said, shrugging before linking her arms with theirs and walking out of the portrait hole towards the Great Hall.

Classes continued rather normally, the next day. The last thing anyone felt like doing was spending two hours on the grounds on a raw January morning, but Hagrid had provided a bonfire full of salamanders for their enjoyment, and they spent an unusually good lesson collecting dry wood and leaves to keep the fire blazing while the flame-loving lizards scampered up and down the crumbling, white-hot logs. The first Divination lesson of the new term was much less fun; Professor Trelawney was now teaching them palmistry, and she lost no time in informing Harry that he had the shortest life line she had ever seen.

It was Defense Against the Dark Arts that Harry seemed so keen to get to; after his conversation with Wood, he told Delilah he wanted to get started on his anti-dementor lessons as soon as possible, dragging her along as well, of course.

"Ah yes," said Lupin, when Harry reminded him of his promise at the end of class. "Let her see... how about eight o'clock on Thursday evening? The History of Magic classroom should be large enough.... I'll have to think carefully about how we're going to do this.... They can't bring a real dementor into the castle to practice on...."

"Still looks ill, doesn't he?" said Ron as they walked down the corridor, heading to dinner. "What d'you reckon's the matter with him?"

There was a loud and impatient "tuh" from behind them. It was Hermione, who had been sitting at the feet of a suit of armor, repacking her bag, which was so full of books it wouldn't close.

"And what are you tutting at us for?" said Ron irritably.

"Nothing," said Hermione in a lofty voice, sending Delilah a knowing look before heaving her bag back over her shoulder.

"Yes, you were," said Ron. "I said I wonder what's wrong with Lupin, and you—"

"Well, isn't it obvious?" said Hermione, with a look of maddening superiority.

"Hermione." Delilah sent her her a warning look, making her slightly pout.

"If you don't want to tell us, don't," snapped Ron.
"Fine," said Hermione haughtily, and she marched off.

"She doesn't know," said Ron, staring resentfully after Hermione. "She's just trying to get us to talk to her again."

At eight o'clock on Thursday evening, Harry took Delilah's hand and dragged her away from the Gryffindor Tower for the History of Magic classroom. It was dark and empty when they arrived, but he lit the lamps with his wand and they waited only five minutes when Professor Lupin turned up, carrying a large packing case, which he heaved onto Professor Binn's desk.

"What's that?" said Harry.

"Another boggart," said Lupin, stripping off his cloak. "I've been combing the castle ever since Tuesday, and very luckily, I found this one lurking inside Mr. Filch's filing cabinet. It's the nearest we'll get to a real dementor. The boggart will turn into a dementor when he sees you, so we'll be able to practice on him. I can store him in my office when we're not using him; there's a cupboard under my desk he'll like."

"Okay," said Harry, trying to sound as though he wasn't apprehensive at all and merely glad that Lupin had found such a good substitute for a real dementor.

"So..." Professor Lupin had taken out his own wand, and indicated that Harry should do the same. "The spell I am going to try and teach you is highly advanced magic, Harry— well beyond ordinary Wizarding Level. It is called the Patronus Charm."

"How does it work?" said Harry nervously.

"Well, when it works correctly, it conjures up a Patronus," said Lupin, "which is a kind of anti-dementor—a guardian that acts as a shield between you and the dementor, isn't that right, Delilah?" he said, smiling brightly at her as she smiled back and nodded.

Professor Lupin continued, "The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the dementor feeds upon— hope, happiness, the desire to survive— but it cannot feel despair, as real humans can, so the dementors can't hurt it. But I must warn you, Harry, that the charm might be too advanced for you. Many qualified wizards have difficulty with it."

"What does a Patronus look like?" said Harry curiously.

"Each one is unique to the wizard who conjures it."

"And how do you conjure it?" Harry asked. Delilah didn't ask because she already knew, so, instead, she answered.

"With an incantation, which will work only if you are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory," she said.

Delilah wondered what Harry's happy memory would be. Certainly, nothing that had happened to him at the Dursleys' was going to do. Maybe she should try to read his mind like Dumbledore often does. Though she felt guilty for invading his mind, she couldn't help the small smile that formed on her lips as she sneaked in and found an eleven year old Harry learning how to fly a broomstick.

"Right," he said, trying to recall as exactly as possible the wonderful, soaring sensation of his stomach.

"The incantation is this—" Lupin cleared his throat. "Expecto patronum!"
"Expecto patronum," Harry repeated under his breath, "expecto patronum."

"Concentrating hard on your happy memory?" Delilah asked softly, letting go of his hand and making her way to stand beside Professor Lupin.

"Oh— yeah—" Harry answered, quickly forcing his thoughts back to that first broom ride. "Expecto patrono— no, patronum— sorry— expecto patronum, expecto patronum."

Something whooshed suddenly out of the end of his wand; it looked like a wisp of silvery gas.

"Did you see that?" said Harry excitedly, Delilah nodded with a smile. "Something happened!"

"Very good," said Lupin, smiling. "Right, then— ready to try it on a dementor?"

"Yes," Harry said, gripping his wand very tightly, and moving into the middle of the deserted classroom. He tried to keep his mind on flying, but something else kept intruding... Any second now, he might hear his mother again... but he shouldn't think that, or he would hear her again, and he didn't want to... or did he? Lupin grasped the lid of the packing case and pulled. A dementor rose slowly from the box, its hooded face turned toward Harry, one glistening, scabbed hand gripping its cloak. The lamps around the classroom flickered and went out. The dementor stepped from the box and started to sweep silently toward Harry, drawing a deep, rattling breath. A wave of piercing cold broke over him—

"Expecto patronum!" Harry yelled. "Expecto patronum! Expecto—"

But the classroom and the dementor were dissolving.... Delilah's eyes widened as she realized what was happening; Harry was failing again through thick white fog, and a woman's voice— his mother — was louder than ever, echoing inside his head—

"Not Harry! Not Harry! please— I'll do anything!"

"Stand aside. Stand aside, girl!"

Shit! Not now, not again!

"Harry!" shouted Delilah, before rushing over to him and catching him before he could collapse. She shook him softly, calling his name but then sighed in annoyance as she felt the boggart-dementor hovering over them. She looked up at it and it instantly turned into her boggart-self.

She rolled her eyes, gently laid Harry on the ground before getting up, snatching her wand out of her boot. "Oh, I don't have time for this. Praemorior!"

The boggart whooshed its way back into the packing case, snapping it close behind it as she rushed back to Harry with Lupin. He hovered over him as she looked around the room for water or at least a bowl. She saw one on Lupin's desk so she used her telekinesis and brought it over.

She pointed her wand at it and said, "Aguamenti," before ripping off a sleeve of her acrylic-made sweater, damping it in the water before wiping off the cold sweat that now covered Harry's forehead.

"What was that?" Lupin asked, referring to the spell she used to make the dementor vanish.

Delilah looked up at the Professor, and stared at him intently for a moment. "I think we can stop pretending and just admit that you know all about me, Professor," she replied quietly. "After all, you did know my parents... all three of them." She returned gaze down to her friend. "If you have some chocolate, now would be a good time to bring it, he'll be waking up soon."
Professor Lupin looked at her for a moment, then nodded and accioed the chocolate. Harry, then, jerked back to life. He was lying flat on his back on the floor. He didn't ask what had happened.

"Sorry," he muttered, as Delilah helped him sit up.

"Are you all right?" Lupin asked.

"Yes..." Harry pulled himself up on one of the desks and leaned against it as Delilah sat on it beside him.

"Here—" Lupin handed him a Chocolate Frog. "Eat this before we try again. I didn't expect you to do it your first time; in fact, I would have been astounded if you had."

"It's getting worse," Harry muttered, biting off the Frog's head.

Delilah wrapped an arm around his shoulders and squeezed them reassuringly. "I know," she whispered softly as he rested his head on her shoulder.

"I could hear her louder that time— and him— Voldemort," he chocked out as she kissed his forehead.

"It's going to be alright. He won't hurt you," she whispered before looking up at the Professor.

He looked paler than usual. "Harry, if you don't want to continue, I will more than understand—"

"I do!" said Harry fiercely, stuffing the rest of the Chocolate Frog into his mouth. "I've got to! What if the dementors turn up at our match against Ravenclaw? I can't afford to fall off again. If we lose this game we've lost the Quidditch Cup!"

"All right then..." said Lupin. "You might want to select 'other memory, a happy memory, I mean, to concentrate on... That one doesn't seem to have been strong enough...."

Unable to help herself, Delilah sneaked another peek into Harry's and saw him settle for when Gryffindor had won the House Championship last year had definitely qualified as very happy. He gripped his wand tightly again and she let go of him as he took up his position in the middle of the classroom.

"Ready?" said Lupin, gripping the box lid.

"Ready," said Harry; trying hard to fill his head with happy thoughts about Gryffindor winning, and not dark thoughts about what was going to happen when the box opened.

"Go!" said Lupin, pulling off the lid. The room went icily cold and dark once more. The dementor glided forward, drawing its breath; one rotting hand was extending toward Harry.

"Expecto patronum!" Harry yelled. "Expecto patronum! Expecto Pat—" yeah... he's not going to make it...

Worried, Delilah searched through his mind and saw white fog obscure his senses... big, blurred shapes were moving around him... then came a new voice, a man's voice, shouting, panicking—

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off—"

The sounds of someone stumbling from a room— a door bursting open— a cackle of high-pitched laughter—
She quickly snapped out of it and rushed over to Harry with Lupin by her side.

"Harry! Harry... wake up...." Lupin was tapping Harry hard on the face. This time it was a minute before Harry understood why he was lying on a dusty classroom floor.

"I heard my dad," Harry mumbled as a tear slipped from his eye.

Delilah frowned when she felt a tear slip from her own eye, though it didn't surprise her. It hurt her how similar the death of her best friend's parents was to thus of her own grandparents. It hurt to remember. Wiping the tear away rather quickly, she leaned down toward Harry and wrapped her arms around him and hugged him. He instantly hugged back, burying his face in the crook of her neck for a few seconds before pulling a bit away, enough to look up at the both of them.

"That's the first time I've ever heard him— he tried to take on Voldemort himself, to give her mum time to run for it...."

Harry suddenly realized that there were tears on his face mingling with the sweat. He bent his face as low as possible, wiping them off on his robes, pretending to do up his shoelace, so that Delilah nor Lupin wouldn't see.

Delilah used her telekinesis once again, making the water-filled bowl came flying towards her. She had no idea where she had left the sleeve she'd ripped off, so she simply ripped the one she had left and did the same as before, whipping Harry's sweat and tears away with the slightly damp cloth.

"You heard James?" said Lupin in a strange voice.

The young hybrid gave him one of her famous warning looks. The sight actually reminded him of her mother scolding him, from the time they'd been students at Hogwarts as well, and that made him slightly pout. Delilah didn't know what was going on in her professor's head to make him to a childish face, but she found herself fighting the urge to laugh; it's not every day you see a grown man pout because of a young teenage girl.

"Yeah...." Face dry; Harry looked up. "Why— you didn't know my dad, did you?"

"I— I did, as a matter of fact," said Lupin. "We were friends at Hogwarts. Listen, Harry— perhaps we should leave it here for tonight. This charm is ridiculously advanced.... I shouldn't have suggested putting you through this...."

Delilah huffed. She hated being underestimated, and she had no doubt Harry hated being underestimated as well.

"Advanced, pfft, I did it, didn't I?" she muttered, feeling slightly offended.

"No!" said Harry. He got up again. "I'll have one more go! I'm not thinking of happy enough things, that's what it is... Hang on...."

She peeked one last time into his mind and hid her face behind the lone curtains of her hair as a small grin made its way into her lips. That seemed like a really, really happy memory... one that he could turn into a good, strong Patronus... it was such an adorable memory too...

The moment when he'd first found out he was a wizard and would be leaving the Dursleys for Hogwarts! If that wasn't a happy memory, I don't know what was... Concentrating very hard on how he had felt then, Harry got to his feet and faced the packing case once more.

"Ready?" said Lupin, who looked as though he were doing this against his better judgment.
"Concentrating hard? All right— go!"

He pulled off the lid of the case for the third time, and the dementor rose out of it; the room fell cold and dark.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Harry bellowed. "EXPECTO PATRONUM! EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

The screaming inside Harry's head had started again, ringing through her own— except this time, it sounded as though it were coming from a poorly tuned radio— softer and louder and softer again. Still, he could see the dementor— it had halted— and then a huge, silver shadow came bursting out of the end of Harry's wand, to hover between him and the dementor, and though Harry's legs were wobbling, he was still on his feet— though for how much longer, I wasn't sure—

"Riddikulus!" roared Lupin, springing forward.

There was a loud crack, and Harry's cloudy Patronus vanished along with the dementor; he sank into a chair, feeling as exhausted as if he'd just run a mile, and felt his legs shaking. Then he looked up at Delilah and mirrored her grin before running to her, picking her up and spinning her around as they both laughed.

"I did it!" he exclaimed himself after he set her back down on her feet.

She laughed at his enthusiasm and hugged him. "I know. That was awesome, Harry."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Professor Lupin forcing the boggart back into the packing case with his wand; it had turned into a silvery orb again before being shoved into the case.

"Excellent!" Lupin said, striding over to where Harry and she stood. "Excellent, Harry! That was definitely a start!"

"Can we have another go? Just one more go?"

Lupin looked at Delilah, and she was thinking the same as him when she shook her head. "Not now," said Lupin firmly. "You've had enough for one night. Here—" He handed Harry a large bar of Honeydukes' best chocolate. "Eat the lot, or Madam Pomfrey will be after her blood. Same time next week?"

"Okay," said Harry. He took a bite of the chocolate and watched Lupin extinguishing the lamps that had rekindled with the disappearance of the dementor. A thought seemed to have just occurred to him. "Professor Lupin?" he said. "If you knew my dad, you must've known Sirius Black as well."

Delilah mentally face-palmed herself just as Lupin turned very quickly around to face them.

"What gives you that idea?" he said sharply.

"Nothing— I mean, I just knew they were friends at Hogwarts too..."

Lupin's face relaxed. "Yes, I knew him," he said shortly. "Or I thought I did. You'd better be off, Harry, Delilah, it's getting late."

Harry left the classroom, walking along the corridor and around a corner, then took a detour behind a suit of armor and sank on its plinth to finish his chocolate.

"I think I shouldn't have mentioned Black. Professor Lupin was obviously not keen on the subject," he said with a small pout playing on his lips.
Delilah rolled her eyes and gave him a sympathetic pat on the shoulder. "Hey, don't beat yourself up over it. I know almost everyone says 'curiosity killed the cat,' but sometimes it's better to know than to be oblivious in certain situations," she said. She bent down to kiss his cheek before turning around and heading down the hall to find the closest exit.

"Where are you going?" he asked, with a slight edge of panic in his voice.

She turned back to face him and smiled. "Relax, I'm not leaving forever, I'm just going out into the forest for a while. I need to stretch a bit."

He blinked a few times before realization finally dawned on him. "Oh, okay. But please don't come too late and be careful out there," he said.

She chuckled at his concern. "Don't worry, lightning bolt; I will. I always am, aren't I?" she teased. "Go back to your dorm and sleep, okay?"

He nodded. "Okay," he replied, getting up off the ground.

"Oh, and can you let Seth know? Knowing him, he'll look for me at every inch of the castle."

"Alright."

Delilah grinned as she started backing out towards an exit she spotted. "Great. Night, lightning bolt," she said before turning around.

He chuckled. "Goodnight wolf girl," was the last thing she heard him say before she ran off into the forest and let her wolf come out.

After a few three hours of running, Delilah casually made her way back into the castle. She felt so good back then that she was tempted to turn around and make her way back out. Since she didn't feel like going back just yet, she decided, instead, to wander a bit around the castle not really caring if she got caught since she knew she wouldn't get into so much trouble.

She was staring at the ceiling while walking, and she was so caught up in her thoughts that she didn't notice anyone else was there until she bumped into someone. She looked down to see who it was and instantly groaned, regretting the stupid idea of going on a walk.

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She turned around and was about to make her way to the Gryffindor tower, but he grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

"Ugh! What do you want, pale face?" she whined, yanking her arm away and crossing her arms while pouting.

He chuckled. "You look cute when you pout," he said amused, making her hiss very vampire-like.

She scoffed. "I'll show you cute," she muttered before turning to leave.

"Wait!"

"What. Do. You. Want?" she repeated, annoyance clear in her tone.

"I-I... I just wanted to say that I'm glad that you're back and that you're—"

She rolled her eyes. "Your point, white sheet," she said, crossing her arms again.
He sighed. "I've been thinking about our last conversation—"

"I'm sure you have," she muttered sarcastically.

"— and I.. well, I was thinking that... I do want to start a friendship with you," he quickly finished catching her completely off guard.

Her eyes widened as she dropped her arms to her sides and her mouth dropped open in shock. "Y-you wa— what, now?" she stammered, not sure if she heard correctly what he had just said.

He took a deep breath before looking into her eyes. "I want to become your friend."

She blinked a few times, trying to make sure this is really happening. "Are you serious?" she asked in disbelief.

He nodded. "Yes."

She raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure? Are you sure you want to be... my friend?"

"Yes," he replied, nodding again.

She snorted and crossed her arms again. "You do remember everything else I said, right?"

He nodded. "I have to prove myself worthy of your friendship, and I will, I promise," he said quickly.

She looked at him for a long moment, then nodded and grinned. "You've already made the first step. Now step two," she said before holding her right hand in front of her. "Hi, my name is Delilah Dawn, it's nice to meet you. What's your name?"

He grinned and shook her hand. "Draco Malfoy, it's nice to meet you too," he said, chuckling. She then pulled him close into a hug surely shocking him, but she really didn't care. She had to get this out of her chest.

"Just promise her something," she whispered.

"What?" Draco found himself whispering back, subconsciously wrapping his arms around her waist.

She took a deep breath before wrapping her arms around his neck to hug him correctly. "If Voldemort returns, you promise you won't become a death eater?" she asked.

"What?"

"Promise?" she asked. This was the first time, he noticed, she let her guard down in front of someone other than her best friends and brother and sounded so vulnerable as she practically begged.

He sighed, burying his face in her in the crook of her neck, subconsciously inhaling her flowery scent. Lilies. She smelled like lilies, along with many other things, the scent of the air flowing through a forest just after a rainstorm being a part of it... a woodsy, musky scent. It was nice, a calming delicate aroma. Very pleasant.

"Delilah—"

"Please," she whispered, closing her eyes as she waited for his answer.

She didn't want to be his friend at first because of his family history and the way he always acted, but
he was making an effort. He really wanted them to be okay, and so did she, but they can't if the possibility of him becoming fully evil was still in the way.

"Fine, I promise," he whispered back.

She pulled back and smiled. "Good. Thank you. You promised, now you can't back out, goodnight Draco," she chirped. She kissed his cheek and ran off towards the Gryffindor tower leaving him dumbstruck, shocked and blushing like the idiot friend he now is.

Once she went through the portrait hole and entered the Common room, she saw Harry sitting in the armchair beside the fireplace. He was staring at the flame with a torn expression on his face. He seemed so drained and strangely empty. She didn't have to listen in on his thoughts; she had a pretty good idea of what was in his mind at the moment—his parents. Terrible though it was to hear his parents' last moments replayed inside his head, these were the only times Harry had heard their voices since he was a tiny child. But he'd never be able to produce a proper Patronus if he half wanted to hear his parents again...

"They're dead," he told himself sternly. "They're dead and listening to echoes of them won't bring them back. You'd better get a grip on yourself if you want that Quidditch Cup."

She crossed the Common room and sat on his lap, resting her on his shoulder. She knew she took him by surprise because he stiffened the moment she sat down, but he immediately relaxed the second he realized it was her and rested his head on top of hers.

"Hey," she said quietly.

"Hey."

"They're still here, you know. They're watching over you," she said softly.

He sighed. "I know," he whispered.

"And don't worry, you've also got Hermione and Ron," she continued.

"Yeah" he groaned.

"And Seth... and you've got me," she finished softly.

She pulled away and kissed his cheek. "Go to bed and sleep. You're gonna to have to be in good shape if you want Slytherin's asses to be kicked tomorrow," she said.

He grinned and nodded. "Right. Goodnight, Deli," he said, hugging her.

She smiled and hugged back before heading towards the bottom steps that lead to her room. "Goodnight, Harry."

A week after the start of term, Ravenclaw played Slytherin. Slytherin won, though narrowly. According to Wood, this was good news for Gryffindor, who would take second place if they beat Ravenclaw too. He, therefore, increased the number of team practices to five a week. This meant that with Lupin's anti-dementor classes, which in themselves were more draining than six Quidditch practices, Harry had just one night a week to do all his homework. Even so, he was showing the strain nearly as much as Hermione, whose immense workload finally seemed to be getting to her. Every night, without fail, Hermione was to be seen in the corner of the common room, several tables spread with books, Arithmancy charts, rune dictionaries, diagrams of Muggles lifting heavy objects, and file upon file of extensive notes; she barely spoke to anybody and snapped when she was
interrupted.

"How's she doing it?" Ron muttered to Harry one evening as Harry sat finishing a nasty essay on Undetectable Poisons for Snape. Harry looked up. Hermione was barely visible behind a tottering pile of books.

"Doing what?"

"Getting to all her classes!" Ron said as Delilah looked down at her notebook and smirked. She knew exactly how Hermione was doing it. "I heard her talking to Professor Vector, that Arithmancy witch, this morning. They were going on about yesterday's lesson, but Hermione can't've been there, because she was with us in Care of Magical Creatures! And Ernie McMillan told her she's never missed a Muggle Studies class, but half of them are at the same time as Divination, and she's never missed one of them either!"

Harry didn't have time to fathom the mystery of Hermione's impossible schedule at the moment; he really needed to get on with Snape's essay. Two seconds later, however, he was interrupted again, this time by Wood.

"Bad news, Harry. I've just been to see Professor McGonagall about the Firebolt. She— er— got a bit shirty with me. Told me I'd got my priorities wrong. Seemed to think I cared more about winning the Cup than I do about you staying alive. Just because I told her I didn't care if it threw you off, as long as you caught the Snitch first." Wood shook his head in disbelief. "Honestly, the way she was yelling at me... you'd think I'd said something terrible... then I asked her how much longer she was going to keep it."

Delilah chuckled and shook her head as he screwed up his face and imitated Professor McGonagall's stern voice. "As long as necessary, Wood'... I reckon it's time you ordered a new broom, Harry. There's an order form at the back of Which Broomstick... you could get a Nimbus Two Thousand and One, like Malfoy's got."

"I'm not buying anything Malfoy thinks is good," Harry said flatly as Delilah sympathetically rubbed his arm to comfort him.

January quickly faded into February, with no change in the bitterly cold weather. The match against Ravenclaw was drawing nearer and nearer, but Harry still hadn't ordered a new broom. He was now asking Professor McGonagall for news of the Firebolt after every Transfiguration lesson, Ron standing hopefully at his shoulder, Hermione rushing past with her face averted and Delilah standing back casually as she usually does.

"No, Potter, you can't have it back yet," Professor McGonagall told him the twelfth time this happened before he'd even opened his mouth. "We've checked for most of the usual curses, but Professor Flitwick believes the broom might be carrying a Hurling Hex. I shall tell you once we've finished checking it. Now, please stop badgering me."

To make matters even worse, Harry's anti-dementor lessons were not going nearly as well as he had hoped and as Delilah expected. Several sessions on, he was able to produce a faint, silvery shadow every time the boggart-dementor approached him, but his Patronus was too feeble to drive the dementor away. All it did was hover, like a semitransparent cloud, draining Harry of energy as he fought to keep it there. Harry felt angry with himself, guilty about his secret desire to hear his parents' voices again.

"You're expecting too much of yourself," said Professor Lupin, sternly in their fourth week of practice. "For a thirteen-year-old wizard, even an indistinct Patronus is a huge achievement. You
aren't passing out anymore, are you?"

"I thought a Patronus would— charge the dementors down or something," said Harry dispiritedly. "Make them disappear—"

"The true Patronus does do that," said Lupin. "But you've achieved a great deal in a concise space of time. If the dementors put in an appearance at your next Quidditch match, you will be able to keep them at bay long enough to get back to the ground."

"You said it's harder if there are loads of them," said Harry.

"I have complete confidence in you," said Lupin, smiling. "Here— you've earned a drink— something from the Three Broomsticks. You won't have tried it before—"

He pulled three bottles out of his briefcase.

"Butterbeer!" said Harry, without thinking. "Yeah, I like that stuff!"

Lupin raised an eyebrow and Delilah looked at him weirdly. When did he ever taste that?

"Oh— Ron and Hermione brought me some back from Hogsmeade," Harry said quickly, though Delilah could easily see he was lying.

"I see," said Lupin, though he still looked slightly suspicious. "Well— let's drink to a Gryffindor victory against Ravenclaw! Not that I'm supposed to take sides, as a teacher..." he added hastily.

We drank the butterbeer in silence until Harry voiced something he'd seem to have been wondering for a while.

"What's under a dementor's hood?"

Professor Lupin lowered his bottle thoughtfully.

"Hmmm... Well, the only people who really know are in no condition to tell us. You see, the dementor lowers its hood only to use its last and worst weapon."

"What's that?"

"They call it the Dementor's Kiss," said Lupin, with a slightly twisted smile. "It's what dementors do to those they wish to destroy utterly. I suppose there must be some kind of mouth under there because they clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and— and suck out his soul."

Harry accidentally spat out a bit of butterbeer as Delilah's eyes merely widened in shock. Those depressing ghosts can kill?!

"What— they kill—?"

"Oh no," said Lupin. "Much worse than that. You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no... anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever... lost."

Delilah had an idea of what that would feel like. It would be very much like the supernatural ability vampires can manipulate to remove or dull their emotions by turning off their humanity. That allows them to block out their more negative emotions, allowing them to feed and kill without remorse, go against any enemy without fear, and relieve themselves of painful feelings. However, the vampire
can become a remorseless killer, and are almost unrecognizable from the person they indeed are, as blocking out negative emotions also causes their positive emotions to go as far as becoming nonexistent.

Delilah has that ability. She'd never tried it as, before she even know about what she really is, she'd fallen into the habit of just numbing herself from any type of pain, physical or emotional, throughout her time with the Adams. She'd been tempted many times to shut off her humanity completely, but she would never do it. She values her humanity too much to lose it. That, and, she had so many people that kept her grounded, something she was grateful of.

Lupin drank a little more butterbeer, then said, "It's the fate that awaits Sirius Black. It was in the Daily Prophet this morning. The Ministry have given the dementors permission to perform it if they find him."

Delilah felt her heart drop. She'd never known the man personally, and he probably didn't know she even existed, and , if he did, he probably didn't know she was his daughter, but he was innocent. Even if he weren't, she would never want him dead, or anything remotely close to it; he was her father after all. The only parent alive now.

But Harry wasn't thinking of that. In fact, he didn't know whether Delilah knew of Sirius being her father or not. No, his mind wasn't in that point. He was stunned. Simply stunned for a moment at the idea of someone having their soul sucked out through their mouth. But then he thought of Black.

"He deserves it," he said suddenly. Frustrated by his statement, Delilah's grip on her glass bottle tightened to a point where the glass broke into pieces, cutting her skin. They looked at her as she instantly averted her gaze to the floor.

"Sorry," she muttered, heading over to the sink in his bathroom to wash off the blood. Of course he doesn't know, she thought.

"He deserves it," she heard Harry repeat.

"You think so?" said Lupin lightly. "Do you really think anyone deserves that?"

"Yes," said Harry defiantly. "For... for some things..."

Out of frustration, Delilah freely glanced through Harry's mind. He wanted to tell Lupin about the conversation he'd overheard about Black in the Three Broomsticks, about Black betraying his mother and father, but it would have involved revealing that he'd gone to Hogsmeade without permission, and he knew Lupin wouldn't be very impressed by that. Unbeknown to Delilah though, he kept out of his mind the part where he'd heard about Black being her father. Maybe it had to do with him not wanting to believe that the father of his best friend was a murderer. Shaking his head as though to clear his thoughts, he finished his butterbeer, thanked Lupin, came over to her, grabbed her hand and they left the History of Magic classroom.

Delilah didn't bother to shut down her mind-reading powers as she kept finding out what she had to know. Harry half wished that he hadn't asked what was under a dementor's hood; the answer had been so horrible, and he was so lost in unpleasant thoughts of what it would feel like to have your soul sucked out of you that we walked headlong into Professor McGonagall halfway up the stairs—him for being lost in thought and her for being lost in his thoughts.

"Do watch where you're going, Potter and Dawn!"

Delilah silently nodded while Harry stuttered apologies. "Sorry, Professor—"
"I've just been looking for you in the Gryffindor common room, well, here it is, we've done everything we could think of, and there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it at all. You've got a very good friend somewhere, Potter..."

Delilah rolled her eyes as Harry's jaw dropped. She was holding out his Firebolt, and it looked as magnificent as ever.

"I can have it back?" Harry said weakly. "Seriously?"

"Seriously," said Professor McGonagall, and she was actually smiling. "I daresay you'll need to get the feel of it before Saturday's match, won't you? And Potter— do try and win, won't you? Or we'll be out of the running for the eighth year, in a row, as Professor Snape was kind enough to remind me only last night...." Delilah smiled at her and grabbed Harry's free hand and dragged him back upstairs toward Gryffindor Tower. As they turned a corner, they saw Ron dashing toward them, grinning from ear to ear.

"She gave it to you? Excellent! Listen, can I still have a go on it? Tomorrow?"

"Yeah... anything," said Harry, his heart lighter than it had been in a month. "You know what— we should make up with Hermione... She was only trying to help...."

"Yeah, all right," said Ron. "She's in the common room now working, for a change—"

"About time you three made up! This was getting ridiculous, and tiring for me. Can you image what it's like to act like an owl?!" Delilah exclaimed herself, throwing her hands up in the air in exasperation.

They turned into the corridor to Gryffindor Tower and saw Neville, pleading with Sir Cadogan, who seemed to be refusing him entrance.

"I wrote them down!" Neville was saying tearfully. "But I must've dropped them somewhere!"

"A likely tale!" roared Sir Cadogan. Then, spotting Harry, Ron and Delilah: "Good evening, my fine young yeoman and lady! Come clap this loon in irons. He is trying to force entry to the chambers within!"

"Oh, shut up," said Ron as he and Harry drew level with Neville.

"I've lost the passwords!" Neville told them miserably. "I made him tell me what passwords he was going to use this week, because he keeps changing them, and now I don't know what I've done with them!"

"Odds bodikins," Delilah said to Sir Cadogan, who looked extremely disappointed and reluctantly swung forward to let them into the common room.

There was a sudden, excited murmur as every head turned and the next moment, Harry was surrounded by people exclaiming over his Firebolt. Delilah walked to the window, where Seth was standing watching the crowd around his sister's best friend, and simply stared out through it, deciding to only listen and not butt into his moment.

"Where'd you get it, Harry?"

"Will you let her have a go?"

"Have you ridden it yet, Harry?"
"Ravenclaw'll have no chance, they're all on Cleansweep Sevens!"

"Can I just hold it, Harry?"

After ten minutes or so, during which the Firebolt was passed around and admired from every angle, the crowd dispersed and Harry and Ron had a clear view of Hermione, the only person who hadn't rushed over to them, bent over her work and carefully avoiding their eyes.

"Do you think they'll make up?" Seth asked quietly.

Delilah turned around to see Harry and Ron approaching her table and at last and smiled. "That's what they were planning to do," she replied just as quietly as they watched Hermione look up at the boys.

"I got it back," said Harry, grinning at her and holding up the Firebolt.

"See, Hermione? There wasn't anything wrong with it!" said Ron.

"Well— there might have been!" said Hermione. "I mean, at least you know now that it's safe!"

"Yeah, I suppose so," said Harry. "I'd better put it upstairs."

"I'll take it!" said Ron eagerly. "I've got to give Scabbers his rat tonic."

"What the heck is a rat tonic?" Seth muttered as he and his sister watched Ron take the Firebolt and, holding it as if it were made of glass, carried it away up the boys' staircase.

Delilah shrugged. "I don't know. Never had a rat," she replied, looking at him. She stared at him for a moment, then said, "Kid, you need a haircut."

He scoffed, glancing at her long hair. "And you don't?"

"Can I sit down, then?" Harry asked Hermione.

"I suppose so," said Hermione, moving a great stack of parchment off a chair.

Harry looked around at the cluttered table, at the long Arithmancy essay on which the ink was still glistening, at the even longer Muggle Studies essay "Explain Why Muggles Need Electricity" and at the rune translation Hermione was now poring over.

"How are you getting through all this stuff?" Harry asked her as Delilah and Seth joined them, Delilah taking a seat beside Hermione and Seth standing behind her, resting his chin on his sister's head, his arms dangling from her shoulders. They've become quite close, Harry noticed.

"Oh, well— you know— working hard," said Hermione. Close-up, we could see that she looked almost as tired as Lupin.

"Why don't you just drop a couple of subjects?" Harry asked, watching her lifting books as she searched for her rune dictionary.

"I couldn't do that!" said Hermione, looking scandalized.

"Arithmancy looks terrible," said Harry, picking up a very complicated-looking number chart.

"Oh no, it's wonderful!" said Hermione earnestly. "It's her favorite subject! It's—"
But exactly what was wonderful about Arithmancy, they never found out. At that precise moment, a strangled yell echoed down the boys' staircase. The whole common room fell silent, staring, petrified, at the entrance. Then came hurried footsteps, growing louder and louder—and then Ron came leaping into view, dragging with him a bed sheet.

"LOOK!" he bellowed, striding over to Hermione's table.

"LOOK!" he yelled, shaking the sheets in her face. Delilah and Seth shared a frown. What the hell was going on?

"Ron, what—?"

"SCABBERS! LOOK! SCABBERS!"

Hermione was leaning away from Ron, looking utterly bewildered. Harry looked down at the sheet Ron was holding. There was something red on it. Something that looked horribly like—

"BLOOD!" Ron yelled into the stunned silence. "HE'S GONE! AND YOU KNOW WHAT WAS ON THE FLOOR?"

"N— no," said Hermione in a trembling voice.

Ron threw something down onto Hermione's rune translation. Hermione, Harry, Delilah and Seth leaned forward. Lying on top of the weird, spiky shapes were several long, ginger cat hairs.

Something was seriously wrong with this scene...
Gryffindor vs. Ravenclaw

It looked like the end of Ron and Hermione's friendship. Each was so angry with the other that Harry and Delilah couldn't see how they'd ever make up, this time. Ron was enraged that Hermione had never taken Crookshanks's attempts to eat Scabbers seriously, hadn't bothered to keep a close enough watch on him, and was still trying to pretend that Crookshanks was innocent by suggesting that Ron look for Scabbers under all the boys' beds. Hermione, meanwhile, maintained fiercely that Ron had no proof that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers, that the ginger hairs might have been there since Christmas, and that Ron had been prejudiced against her cat ever since Crookshanks had landed on Ron's head in the Magical Menagerie.

Delilah was quite suspicious as the entire ordeal seemed off. She believed that this was all a setup having something to do with Sirius, and Seth agreed, not because it was basically in his nature to agree to everything she said or believed, but because he actually believed it himself. In fact, he was the one that mentioned it to her, and she just so happened to be thinking the same thing. She was glad someone thought very much like her. Harry, however, was sure that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers, and when he tried to point out to Hermione that the evidence all pointed that way, she lost her temper with Harry too.

"Okay, side with Ron, I knew you would!" she said shrilly. "First the Firebolt, now Scabbers, everything's my fault, isn't it! Just leave me alone, Harry, I've got a lot of work to do!"

Ron had taken the loss of his rat very hard indeed.

"Come on, Ron, you were always saying how boring Scabbers was," said Fred bracingly. "And he's been off-color for ages, he was wasting away. It was probably better for him to snuff it quickly—one swallow—he probably didn't feel a thing."

"Fred!" Ginny and Delilah exclaimed themselves indignantly.

"All he did was eat and sleep, Ron, you said it yourself," said George.

"He bit Goyle for us once!" Ron said miserably as Delilah mentally face-palmed herself. "Remember, Harry? Deli?"

"Yeah, that's true," said Harry.

"Oh, my goddess of the moon," Delilah sighed in exasperation.

"His finest hour," said Fred, unable to keep a straight face while Delilah really face-palmed myself this time. "Let the scar on Goyle's finger stand as a lasting tribute to his memory. Oh, come on, Ron, get yourself down to Hogsmeade and buy a new rat, what's the point of moaning?"

"Oh, would you guys shut up? Ron, listen, the rat was old, it was his time to leave. If it makes you feel any better, I'll buy you a dog that'll be chasing Crookshanks around. And you can call him Chaser," Delilah proposed, annoyed by all the pointless moaning. Seth couldn't help but snort at that.

"Well that is a better name than Scabbers," Ginny muttered.

"And a dog is better than a fat rat," Seth added, causing Ginny to glance at him and blush to the roots of her hair.

In a last-ditch attempt to cheer Ron up, Harry persuaded him to come along to the Gryffindor team's
final practice before the Ravenclaw match, so that he could have a ride on the Firebolt after they'd finished. This did seem to take Ron's mind off Scabbers for a moment.

"Great! Can I try and shoot a few goals on it?" So they set off for the Quidditch field together as I trailed off behind.

Madam Hooch, who was now, along with Delilah (and Seth as he took that as an opportunity to, not only spend more time with his sister, but also know learn a bit more about Quidditch for when his time comes to try out), overseeing Gryffindor practices to keep an eye on Harry, was just as impressed with the Firebolt as everyone else had been. Madam Hooch took it in her hands before takeoff and gave them the benefit of her professional opinion.

"Look at the balance on it! If the Nimbus series has a fault, it's a slight list to the tail end— you often find they develop a drag after a few years. They've updated the handle too, a bit slimmer than the Cleansweeps, reminds me of the old Silver Arrows— a Pity they've stopped making them. I learned to fly on one, and a very fine old broom it was too..."

She continued in this vein for some time, until Wood said, "Er— Madam Hooch? Is it okay if Harry has the Firebolt back? We need to practice..." Delilah and Seth snickered at the dreamy expression clouding the professor's face.

"Oh— right— here you are, then, Potter," said Madam Hooch. "I'll sit over here with Weasley... you coming, Dawn?"

"Oh, no. My brother and I will stay down here to keep a closer eye on Harry and be ready to help any injured if the practice goes overboard," Delilah reassured her.

Madam Hooch and Ron, then, left the field to sit in the stadium, and the Gryffindor team gathered around Wood for his final instructions for tomorrow's match.

"Harry, I've just found out who Ravenclaw is playing as Seeker. It's Cho Chang. She's a fourth year, and she's pretty good.... I really hoped she wouldn't be fit; she's had some problems with injuries..." Wood scowled his displeasure... she probably made a full recovery.

"On the other hand, she rides a Comet Two Sixty, which is going to look like a joke next to the Firebolt." He gave Harry's broom a look of fervent admiration, then looked at me.

Delilah rolled her eyes and chuckled, flicking a finger in the air while saying, "Accio Firebolt." Just then, her Firebolt came flying in and dropped into her hands.

"You have a Firebolt?" Seth asked surprised.

Delilah gave him a look. "You're kidding, right? You've been in my room more times than I have this year and you didn't notice it?" She shook her head, feigning sadness. "I believe your sight is failing you, brother."

"It is not!"

Delilah rolled her eyes. "Whatever helps you sleep at night." She turned back to Wood and said, "Here you go Oliver Twist," she said, making Seth laugh at the reference.

Wood didn't get it, but he laughed all the same out of excitement, giving Delilah a vice tight hug before grabbing it, turning back to the team and saying, "Okay, everyone, let's go—"

And at long last, Harry mounted his Firebolt and kicked off from the ground.
The Firebolt turned with the lightest touch; it seemed to obey his thoughts rather than his grip; it sped across the field at such speed that the stadium turned into a green-and-gray blur; Harry turned it so sharply that Alicia Spinnet screamed, then he went into a perfectly controlled dive, brushing the grassy field with his toes before rising thirty, forty, fifty feet into the air again.

"Harry, I'm letting the Snitch out!" Wood called.

Harry turned and raced a Bludger toward the goal posts; he outstripped it quickly, saw the Snitch dart out from behind Wood, and within ten seconds had caught it tightly in his hand.

The team cheered madly. Harry let the Snitch go again, gave it a minute's head start, then tore after it, weaving in and out of the others; he spotted it lurking near Katie Bell's knee, looped her easily, and caught it again.

It was the best practice ever; the team, inspired by the presence of the Firebolts in their midst, performed their best moves faultlessly, and by the time they hit the ground again, Wood didn't have a single criticism to make, which, as George pointed out, was a first. He handed Delilah back her Firebolt back, and she flicked her finger again so it would appear back in her room.

"You gotta teach me how to do that," Seth said.

"Some other time, kid."

"I can't see what's going to stop us tomorrow!" said Wood. "Not unless— Harry, you've sorted out your dementor problem, haven't you?"

"Yeah," said Harry, grinning— though it didn't reach his ears— while taking hold of my hand, squeezing it.

"The dementors won't turn up again, Oliver. Dumbledore'd go ballistic," said Fred confidently.

"And our sweet little Lee-lee here would too, wouldn't she?" George teased, placing an arm around her shoulders.

Delilah's cheeks went red with embarrassment— a new emotion. "Wha— I don't always go ballistic." She paused, then glanced at Seth. "Do I?" He simply shrugged, not wanting to admit that she did tend to go a little overboard when she was protective.

"Well, let's hope not," said Wood. "Anyway— good work, everyone. Let's get back to the tower... turn in early—"

"I'm staying out for a bit; Ron wants a go on the Firebolt," Harry told Wood.

"He could've just asked me," Delilah muttered while the rest of the team headed off to the locker rooms. Harry tugged her hand and they strode over to Ron, who vaulted the barrier to the stands and came to meet them. Madam Hooch had fallen asleep in her seat and Seth had taken to poking her.

"Seth, what are you doing?" she asked him, sighed tiredly.

He looked at her and shrugged. "Practicing my hobby."

"Poking things?"

"Yep."

Rolling her eyes, she walked over to her brother and began to poke him till he became ticklish and
began to giggle. "Well, go poke somewhere else. We won't be here for long, so you might as well head in now."

Pouting a bit, Seth gave in and nodded. "Fine, see ya." And with that, he left the three friends alone in the field along with a sleeping Madam Hooch.

"Here you go," said Harry, handing Ron the Firebolt, as soon as Seth was gone.

Ron, an expression of ecstasy on his face, mounted the broom and zoomed off into the gathering darkness while Harry and Delilah walked around the edge of the field, watching him. Night had fallen before Madam Hooch awoke with a start, told Harry, Ron and Delilah off for not waking her, and insisted that they go back to the castle.

Harry shouldered the Firebolt and he, Ron and Delilah walked out of the shadowy stadium, Ron and Harry discussing the Firebolt's superbly smooth action, its phenomenal acceleration, and its pinpoint turning as Delilah traileled behind, her mind filled with the desire of wanting to go out again tonight for another run. She never thought she would actually end up missing this feeling so much. They were halfway toward the castle when Harry suddenly stopped ear on his tracks making her bump into is back since she was walking right behind him. Whatever he saw must've really creeped him out— Delilah could hear his heart banging against his ribs.

"What's the matter?" Ron asked. Harry pointed to his left. Delilah followed his gaze and saw a pair of eyes, gleaming out of the darkness. She rolled her eyes already knowing what it was.

Ron pulled out his wand and muttered, "Lumos!"

A beam of light fell across the grass, hit the bottom of a tree, and illuminated its branches; there, crouching among the budding leaves, was Crookshanks.

"Get out of here!" Ron roared, and he stooped down and seized a stone lying on the grass, but before he could do anything else, Crookshanks had vanished with one swish of his long ginger tail.

"See?" Ron said furiously, chucking the stone down again. "She's still letting him wander about wherever he wants— probably washing down Scabbers with a couple of birds now..."

Harry didn't say anything. He took a deep breath as relief seeped through him.

Delilah sighed in frustration. "Why do the stupidest things happen when I'm around?" she muttered, shaking her head.

They set off for the castle once more. Slightly ashamed of his moment of panic, Harry didn't say anything to Ron— nor did he look left or right until they had reached the well-lit entrance hall.

The next morning Delilah decided not to wait for the boys and go down to breakfast with Hermione, Ginny and two other girls Hermione shared her dorm with; Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown. Harry came down a few moments later along with the rest of the boys in his dormitory, all of whom seemed to think the Firebolt deserved a sort of guard of honor. As Harry entered the Great Hall, heads turned in the direction of the Firebolt, and there was a good deal of excited muttering. Harry looked to his left and Delilah followed his gaze and realized he was looking at the Slytherin team, with enormous satisfaction, who were all looking at thunderstruck.

"Did you see his face?" she heard Ron say gleefully, looking back at Malfoy. "He can't believe it! This is brilliant!"

Wood, too, was basking in the reflected glory of the Firebolt Harry possessed and the one Delilah
"Put it here, Harry," he said, laying both brooms in the middle of the table and carefully turning it so that its name faced upward. People from the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables were soon coming over to look.

A tall bronze haired boy who looked slightly familiar came over to congratulate Harry on having acquired such a superb replacement for his Nimbus, and Percy's Ravenclaw girlfriend, Penelope Clearwater, asked if she could actually hold the Firebolt.

"Now, now, Penny, no sabotage!" said Percy heartily as she examined the Firebolt closely. "Penelope and I have got a bet on," he told the team. "Ten Galleons on the outcome of the match!"

Penelope put the Firebolt down again, thanked Harry, and went back to her table.

"Harry— make sure you win," said Percy, in an urgent whisper. "I haven't got ten Galleons. Yes, I'm coming, Penny!" And he bustled off to join her in a piece of toast.

"Sure you can manage that broom, Potter?" said a cold, drawling voice. Draco Malfoy had arrived for a closer look, Crabbe and Goyle right behind him.

"Yeah, reckon so," said Harry casually.

"Got plenty of special features, hasn't it?" said Malfoy, eyes glittering maliciously. "Shame it doesn't come with a parachute— in case you get too near to a dementor." Crabbe and Goyle sniggered.

"Pity you can't attach an extra arm to yours, Malfoy," said Harry. "Then it could catch the Snitch for you."

The Gryffindor team laughed loudly. Malfoy's pale eyes narrowed, and he started to advance on Harry, but Delilah quickly butt in from her seat.

"Oh, give it a rest, you two!" she exclaimed herself, making them turn to look her way. Harry was slightly pouting while Draco's cold stare turned into a full blown mischievous grin. Delilah rolled her eyes and sighed in exasperation. "Jesus! You guys are worse than Crookshanks and Scabbers... heck! Worse than American cheerleader rivalry!"

Malfoy's grin turned into a smirk as he walked over to her and hugged her from behind, making her roll her eyes and groan.

"Get off, Malfoy," she hissed as Harry, Ron, the twins and Wood came over looking really pissed off.

"Let her go," Harry said in the coldest tone Delilah had ever heard him use.

"Yeah, let her go, Malfoy. And leave, no one wants you, here," Ron added.

"Little Aleah here does want me here," he replied smugly.

Delilah growled. She'd never been called by her middle name unless it was something serious and she was being called by her full name, but, even so, she hated it when people call did that just out of the blue.

"Don't you ever dare to call me that, again. And just... buzz off!" she hissed very vampire like. From the corner of her eye she could see Hermione and Ginny's eyes widen in shock and worry. Delilah
just realized what they realized before her; she was close to losing control... and she was pretty much sinking her nails in the wood of the table, like she had done the previous year.

Taking a deep breath, she let go of the table. "Just let go, Dracula," she said calmly as she saw Hermione and Ginny grin slightly in relief.

"Hey, I thought we were friends," he said childishly, resting his chin on her shoulder.

Delilah rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. "Just because we're friends doesn't mean I'm gonna stop calling you names, ice boy," she said, playfully nudging him as he finally let go. "Now go and don't ever hug me again... unless I initiate it.... which I doubt I will... anyway go before I re-break your arm," she teased as he shook his head, smiling before turning around and following his other friends out, but not before sending one last glare at her friends, making roll her eyes again.

She shook her head and saw her friends staring at wide-eyed and mouths open in shock. She had to resist the urge to roll my eyes again. "Later," she mouthed, and they simply nodded before turning back to their activities completely dumbstruck.

At a quarter to eleven, the Gryffindor team set off for the locker rooms as Delilah trailed behind, waiting for them to get ready. The weather couldn't have been more different from their match against Hufflepuff. It was a clear, cool day with a very light breeze; there would be no visibility problems this time, and Harry, though nervous, was starting to feel the excitement only a Quidditch match could bring. They could hear the rest of the school moving into the stadium beyond. Harry took off his black school robes, removed his wand from his pocket, and stuck it inside the T-shirt he was going to wear under his Quidditch robes. He only hoped he wouldn't need it. He wondered suddenly whether Professor Lupin was in the crowd, watching.

"You know what we've got to do," said Wood as they prepared to leave the locker rooms. "If we lose this match, we're out of the running. Just— just fly like you did in practice yesterday, and we'll be okay!"

"Way to cheer up the team, Wood," Delilah muttered under her breath, making the twins snicker before putting on their serious expressions.

They all walked out and Delilah went to join some random student as the rest of the team went onto the field to tumultuous applause. The Ravenclaw team, dressed in blue, were already standing in the middle of the field. Their Seeker, Cho Chang, was the only girl on their team. She was shorter than Harry by about a head, and Harry seemed to be getting nervous... maybe it was because he thought she was extremely pretty. She smiled at Harry as the teams faced each other behind their captains.

"Wood, Davies, shake hands," Madam Hooch said briskly, and Wood shook hands with the Ravenclaw Captain.

"Mount your brooms... on my whistle... three— two— one—"

Harry kicked off into the air, and the Firebolt zoomed higher and faster than any other broom; he soared around the stadium and began squinting around for the Snitch, listening all the while to the commentary, which was being provided by the Weasley twins' friend Lee Jordan.

"They're off, and the big excitement this match is the Firebolts that Harry Potter and Oliver Wood are flying for Gryffindor. According to Which Broomstick, the Firebolt's going to be the broom of choice for the national teams at this year's World Championship—"

"Jordan, would you mind telling us what's going on in the match?" interrupted Professor
McGonagall's voice.

"Right you are, Professor— just giving a bit of background information— the Firebolt, incidentally, has a built-in auto-brake and—"

"Jordan!"

"Okay, okay, Gryffindor in possession, Katie Bell of Gryffindor, heading for goal..."

Harry streaked past Katie in the opposite direction, gazing around for a glint of gold and noticing that Cho Chang was tailing him closely. She was undoubtedly a very good flier— she kept cutting across him, forcing him to change direction.

"Show her your acceleration, Harry!" Fred yelled as he whooshed past in pursuit of a Bludger that was aiming for Alicia.

Harry urged the Firebolt forward as they rounded the Ravenclaw goal posts and Cho fell behind. Just as Katie succeeded in scoring the first goal of the match, and the Gryffindor end of the field went wild, he saw it— the Snitch was close to the ground, flitting near one of the barriers.

Harry dived; Cho saw what he was doing and tore after him— Harry was speeding up, excitement seemed to be flooding him; dives were his specialty, he was ten feet away—

Then a Bludger, hit by one of the Ravenclaw Beaters, came pelting out of nowhere; Harry veered off course, avoiding it by an inch, and in those few, crucial seconds, the Snitch had vanished.

There was a great "Oooooooh" of disappointment from the Gryffindor supporters, but much applause for their Beater from the Ravenclaw end. George Weasley vented his feelings by hitting the second Bludger directly at the offending Beater, who was forced to roll right over in midair to avoid it.

"Gryffindor leads by eighty points to zero, and look at that Firebolt go! Potter's really putting it through its paces now, see it turn— Chang's Comet is just no match for it, the Firebolt's precision— balance is really noticeable in these long—"

"JORDAN! ARE YOU BEING PAID TO ADVERTISE FIREBOLTS? GET ON WITH THE COMMENTARY!"

Ravenclaw was pulling back; they had now scored three goals, which put Gryffindor only fifty points ahead— if Cho got the Snitch before him, Ravenclaw would win. Harry dropped lower, narrowly avoiding a Ravenclaw Chaser, scanning the field frantically— a glint of gold, a flutter of tiny wings— the Snitch was circling the Gryffindor goal post—

Harry accelerated, eyes fixed on the speck of gold ahead— but just then, Cho appeared out of thin air, blocking him—

"HARRY, THIS IS NO TIME TO BE A GENTLEMAN!" Wood roared as Harry swerved to avoid a collision. "KNock her off her broom if you have to!"

Harry turned and caught sight of Cho; she was grinning. The Snitch had vanished again. Harry turned his Firebolt upward and was soon twenty feet above the game. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Cho following him... Why the hell is she following him? She's supposed to be searching for the snitch as well, though it seems she'd decided to mark him rather than search for the Snitch herself...
All right, then... if she wanted to tail him, she'd have to take the consequences...

He dived again, and Cho, thinking he'd seen the Snitch, tried to follow; Harry pulled out of the dive very sharply; she hurtled downward; he rose fast as a bullet once more, and then saw it, for the third time—the Snitch was glittering way above the field at the Ravenclaw end. He accelerated; so, many feet below, did Cho. He was winning, gaining on the Snitch with every second—then—

"Oh!" screamed Cho, pointing.

Distracted, Harry looked down, and Delilah followed his gaze from where she stood and cursed under her breath.

Three dementors, three tall, black, hooded dementors, were looking up at him. Delilah searched her robe for her wand, but then she remembered she had left it in her room.

Panicked, Delilah looked back up and sighed in relief as she saw Harry's reaction. He didn't stop to think. Plunging a hand down the neck of his robes, he whipped out his wand and roared, "Expecto patronum!"

Something silver-white, something enormous, erupted from the end of his wand. He knew it had shot directly at the dementors but didn't pause to watch; he looked ahead—he was nearly there. He stretched out the hand still grasping his wand and just managed to close his fingers over the small, struggling Snitch.

Madam Hooch's whistle sounded. Harry turned around in midair and the next moment, the whole team was hugging him so hard he was nearly pulled off his broom. Behind Delilah, she could hear the roars of the Gryffindors in the crowd.

"That's my boy!" Wood kept yelling.

Alicia, Angelina, and Katie had all kissed Harry; Fred had him in a grip so tight, the team managed to make its way back to the ground. Harry got off his broom and looked up to see the gaggle of Gryffindor supporters sprinting onto the field, Ron in the lead. He was soon engulfed by the cheering crowd.

"Yes!" Ron yelled, yanking Harry's arm into the air. "Yes! Yes!"

"Well done, Harry!" said Percy, looking delighted. "Ten Galleons to me! Must find Penelope, excuse me—"

"Good for you, Harry!" roared Seamus Finnigan.

"Ruddy brilliant!" boomed Hagrid over the heads of the milling Gryffindors. Delilah caught sight of Lupin heading towards the crowd and followed him.

"That was quite some Patronus," he said in Harry's ear.

Harry turned around to look at Professor Lupin and noticed he looked both shaken and pleased.

"The dementors didn't affect me at all!" Harry said excitedly. "I didn't feel a thing!"

"That would be because they—er—weren't dementors," said Professor Lupin. "Come and see—"

Harry quickly took hold of Delilah's hand and pulled her along as Lupin led him out of the crowd until they were able to see the edge of the field.
"You gave Mr. Malfoy quite a fright," said Lupin.

Harry stared. Lying in a crumpled heap on the ground were Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, and Marcus Flint, the Slytherin team Captain, all struggling to remove themselves from long, black, hooded robes. It looked as though Malfoy had been standing on Goyle's shoulders. Standing over them, with an expression of the utmost fury on her face, was Professor McGonagall.

"An unworthy trick!" she was shouting. "A low and cowardly attempt to sabotage the Gryffindor Seeker! Detention for all of you, and fifty points from Slytherin! I shall be speaking to Professor Dumbledore about this, make no mistake! Ah, here he comes now!"

If anything could have set the seal on Gryffindor's victory, it was this. Ron, who had fought his way through to Harry's side, doubled up with laughter as they watched Malfoy fighting to extricate himself from the robe, Goyle's head still stuck inside it.

Wide-eyed, Delilah stared at them in shock. "What the hell?!" she exclaimed herself. They stopped struggling and turned to look at her as everyone went quiet.

She marched over to Malfoy and slapped him right across the face. "What the hell is wrong with you?! You could've gotten yourself killed! You could've killed someone! Do you want me to have a heart attack? Are you trying to get yourself killed?" She was ready to strangle him now. "Are you tryin—"

A pair of long arms were suddenly around her waist and then the next thing she knew, she was thrown over someone shoulder. "Hey! I wasn't done! Put me down!" she shouted trashing around and struggling to get out of whoever's grip it was. By the looks of it, it was someone from the team, so it was probably Fred, George, Wood, or Harry, but she didn't care. She hated being carried. She despised being interrupted when she was the one giving out lectures.

"Whoever you are, put me down!" she shouted.

"Come on, Harry!" said George, fighting his way through the crowd. "Party! Gryffindor common room, now!" George was the one caring her... Great, just great! Note the sarcasm.

"Right," said Harry, and seemed happier than he had been in ages, he and the rest of the team led the way, still in their scarlet robes, out of the stadium and back up to the castle.

"Harry, Ron, help!" Delilah whined. They both sent me an apologetic look and she finally gave up struggling, sighing in defeat.

It felt as though they had already won the Quidditch Cup; the party went on all day and well into the night. George threw Delilah on a sofa before joining Fred and both of them disappearing for a couple of hours before returning with armfuls of bottles of butterbeer, pumpkin fizz, and several bags full of Honeydukes sweets.

"How did you do that?" squealed Angelina as George started throwing Peppermint Toads into the crowd.

"With a little help from Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, Phantom, and Prongs," Fred muttered in Harry's ear.

Only one person wasn't joining in the festivities. Hermione, incredibly, was sitting in a corner, attempting to read an enormous book entitled Home Life and Social Habits of British Muggles. Harry broke away from the table where Fred and George had started juggling butterbeer bottles and went over to her.
"Did you even come to the match?" he asked her.

"Of course I did," said Hermione in a strangely high-pitched voice, not looking up. "And I'm very glad we won, and I think you did really well, but I need to read this by Monday."

"Come on, Hermione, come and have some food," Harry said, looking over at Ron and wondering whether he was in a good enough mood to bury the hatchet.

"I can't, Harry. I've still got four hundred and twenty-two pages to read!" said Hermione, now sounding slightly hysterical. "Anyway..." She glanced over at Ron too. "He doesn't want me to join in."

There was no arguing with this, as Ron chose that moment to say loudly,

"If Scabbers hadn't just been eaten, he could have had some of those Fudge Flies. He used to really like them—"

Delilah rolled her eyes and slapped the back of his head just as Hermione burst into tears. Before Harry or Delilah could say or do anything, she tucked the enormous book under her arm, and, still sobbing, ran toward the staircase to the girls' dormitories and out of sight.

"Can't you give her a break?" Harry asked Ron quietly.

"No," said Ron flatly. "If she just acted like she was sorry— but she'll never admit she's wrong, Harry. She's still acting like Scabbers has gone on vacation or something."

Delilah groaned. "Ugh! You are so childish! It's just a freakin' rat! You are taking it too far, Ronald," she snarled.

If it hadn't been for Seth standing by and putting a hand on her shoulder to calm her down, she probably would've lunged at Ron and punched him hard, no matter him being one of her best friends. Growling slightly under her breath, Delilah spun on her heel and ran off to her room since she knew Hermione wouldn't really want to talk to anyone, right now.

She didn't sleep. She simply sat on her window seat and stared out at the night sky. She kept her ears open, hoping they would all just go to sleep already, but, of course, it the party just went on. It was a few minutes before her attention was torn away from the party downstairs as her brother came knocking on her door and entered before she could even answer him.

Delilah groaned. "Why do you even knock if you know you're gonna come in and make yourself at home anyway?" she mumbled.

"I don't know," Seth replied with a shrug as closed the door behind himself.

Delilah shook her head and sighed as she pressed her forehead against the window, muttering to herself, "It's like you live here— don't you have a room? Friends?"

"Of course I do," he replied in an obvious tone. "But I would like to spend some time with my sister, thank you."

Rolling her eyes, Delilah got up from the window seat and walked over to where her brother was now sitting on her bed. "What do you want?"

"Do you know 'go fish'?"
Delilah gave him a blank look. "Go what?"

"'Go Fish.'" Her look remained blank. "Card game?" Nothing changed. "Do you know any game at all?"

"Fetch?"

Seth groaned. "And you say I'm the puppy," he grumbled. "Come on, I'll show you."

He pulled her to sit on the bed, facing him, before pulling out a deck of cards and teaching her the rules of the game.

The Gryffindor party ended when Professor McGonagall turned up in her tartan dressing gown and hair net at one in the morning, to insist that they all go to bed. Harry and Ron climbed up the stairs to their dormitory, still discussing the match. Seth and Delilah were still up playing their game. They played for over three hours and, each round, Seth only grew more frustrated. He practically shoved the deck of cards off the bed, making them fly and scatted on the ground as he dropped his body backwards so he was laying on his sister's bed.

"I thought you said you never played!" he whined.

Delilah shrugging her shoulders and gave him an innocent look. "Beginner's luck?"

Seth shook his head. "No, that only applies the first round. We've been at this for— what? Three hours? And you've won each round. Against me. And I'm, like, the best player in the world!"

Delilah grinned as she dropped beside her brother. She never thought she'd have so much fun with playing something boring with her brother.

"Are you sure you don't mean cheater?" she asked, though it was clear in her tone that she was merely jesting.

"I don't cheat!" He began to grumble nonsense, and Delilah laughed when she heard him mumble, "Not anymore."

"Give me a break, kid," she said softly. "I'm new to this stuff."

Seth turned onto his side, looked at her and sighed softly. "I know." Sighing again, he scooted closer and rested his head on her shoulder. "I wish we'd grown up together," he mumbled. "We wouldn't be so messed up... or, at least, less than we already are."

Delilah looked down at him, unsure of what to say, but, before thinking any further, she stopped herself and smiled softly when she noticed the sleepy look on her brother's face.

She sighed. He never met their mother, so he never got to hear her sing. Sighing again, she wrapped her arms around him protectively and began to hum softly. The humming soon turned into singing.

"Just close your eyes, the sun is going down... you'll be alright, no one can hurt you now. Come morning light, you and I'll be safe and sound..."

Seth fell asleep within seconds, Delilah following suite, both too tired to pay any mind to the new presence in the Gryffindor tower. The visitor was an enormous, pale-eyed, jet black dog. It had its mind set on where it was going, but it stopped short on its way when a somewhat familiar scent made its way to its nostrils. It snapped its head toward its right and instantly stepped toward the spiral staircase, only to stop once again, gaze torn between its previous destination and the one the scent
came from. Making up its mind, turned toward the spiral staircase and, though hesitant at first, it marched the first few steps and waited, as though it was expecting something. When nothing happened, the dog silently marched its way up the staircase with a satisfied grin on its face, which soon faded when it came upon a familiar door.

Delilah Dawn was carved in cursive, yet big bold letters. The name Hawkins, which brought what looked like a scowl on the dog's face, was written right after Dawn, though it seemed as though someone had scratched it out.

Focusing back on the first two names, the dog tilted its head to the side, thinking for a moment before taking a few steps back as its body started to shake in a way that seemed as though it were convulsing. Its figure grew taller and taller until it was no longer a dog who was standing there but a man. Though tall as he was, he stood tired, wasted, shoulders hunched with a gaunt, sunken face, waxy skin, long, matted hair, and though striking as his gray eyes were, they were filled with pain and sorrow from years of depression and maltreatment he underwent. Twelve years.

He reached a bony hand out to the doorknob and slowly turned it as to not make so much noise. The large wooden door creaked a bit, earning a few tired moans. Swallowing hard, the man pushed the door further and silently walked in, making sure to lift his feet high enough so he wasn't dragging them across the floor. He curiously yet cautiously approached the large bed, where the scent that had caught his attention was coming from, only to freeze when he saw her.

Though she was laying, asleep, on her bed, it wasn't hard to tell that she was tall and slender. Looking past the perfectly developed female curves she had in all the right places, if you looked at her face while she was asleep and looked peaceful despite the fact that she would subconsciously frown every now and then, you could tell she was young, probably around thirteen or fourteen.

He reached a hand forward and brushed a strand of hair away from her face, then froze for a moment when she stirred slightly under his touch, eyes fluttering open for a second before closing again, sleep overtaking her. He sighed softly, retreating his hand to his side. She was beautiful, with her brown hair cascading down to her waist, creating a slight beautiful contrast against her dark yet pale skin— almost russet. He could only imagine her eyes to be a beautiful violet orchidee color. She was a lot like her.

He glanced at the figure beside her and frowned in curiosity and surprise. There, beside her, lay a boy about a year or two younger than her, hand in hers, fingers intertwined. He was the definition of a boyish beauty; he looked very much like his sister— they could pass off as fraternal twins if it weren't for his hair being black and him looking younger than her.

Looking one last time at the girl who looked very much like his lost love, he headed back toward the door and closed it silently behind himself before morphing back into his animagus.

Delilah's P.O.V.

"AAARRGGHH! NOOO!"

Startled, my eyes snapped open as I instinctively rolled on my bed and fell off, groaning as my body hit the cold stone floor.

"Five more minutes, Uncle Ren," I heard Seth groan from my bed.

I rolled my eyes and shushed him as I slowly sat up, then listened carefully to know where the scream came from.
"What's going on?" a young male voice asked, which I recognized as Seamus'. I realized that all the commotion was happening in the boys' dormitory. What could possibly be going on in there at this time of day?

"Black! Sirius Black! With a knife!" I heard Ron scream. I frowned, looking over at Seth to see him mirroring my confused frown.

"What?"

"Here! Just now! Slashed the curtains! Woke me up!" he insisted.

"You sure you weren't dreaming, Ron?" said Dean.

"Look at the curtains! I tell you, he was here!"

I heard them all scrambled out of bed; someone reached the dormitory door first, and they sprinted back down the staircase. I quickly got up on my feet, grabbed my wand from the night table, grabbed Seth's hand, and readied myself to flash us downstairs, though I hesitated for a moment when I felt something different in my room. I quickly glanced around, but nothing was different. I sniffed the air and felt my heart drop as a foreign scent reached my nostrils. Brows furrowed, I shook my head and flicked my wand, flashing Seth and myself down at the bottom of the staircase of the boys' dormitory. I would worry about the scent in my room later.

More doors opened, and sleepy voices called after them.

"Who shouted?"

"What're you doing?"

The common room was lit with the glow of the dying fire, still littered with the debris from the party. It was deserted.

"Are you sure you weren't dreaming, Ron?"

"I'm telling you, I saw him!"

"What's all the noise?"

"Professor McGonagall told us to go to bed!"

A few of the girls had come down their staircase, pulling on dressing gowns and yawning. Boys, too, were reappearing.

"Excellent, are we carrying on?" said Fred brightly.

"Everyone back upstairs!" said Percy, hurrying into the common room and pinning his Head Boy badge to his pajamas as he spoke.

"What's going on?" I asked Harry. He shrugged, putting an arm securely around my waist as I sleepily leaned into his side, resting my head on his shoulder. I felt Seth squeeze my hand for a moment, so, to reassure him, I pulled him in front of me and placed my hands on his shoulders, that way, I can keep a closer eye on him.

"Perce— Sirius Black!" said Ron faintly. "In our dormitory! With a knife! Woke me up!"

The common room went very still.
"Nonsense!" said Percy, looking startled. "You had too much to eat, Ron— had a nightmare—"

"I'm telling you—"

"Now, really, enough's enough!"

Professor McGonagall was back. She slammed the portrait behind her as she entered the common room and stared furiously around.

"I am delighted that Gryffindor won the match, but this is getting ridiculous! Percy, I expected better of you!"

"I certainly didn't authorize this, Professor!" said Percy, puffing himself up indignantly. "I was just telling them all to get back to bed! My brother Ron here had a nightmare—"

"IT WASN'T A NIGHTMARE!" Ron yelled. "PROFESSOR, I WOKE UP, AND SIRIUS BLACK WAS STANDING OVER ME, HOLDING A KNIFE!"

Professor McGonagall stared at him.

"Don't be ridiculous, Weasley, how could he possibly have gotten through the portrait hole?"

"Ask him!" said Ron, pointing a shaking finger at the back of Sir Cadogan's picture. "Ask him if he saw—"

I discreetly sniffed the air and an unfamiliar woodsy sent filled my nostrils. It was the same as the one in my room. She didn't know who'd been up in her room while she and Seth were sleeping, but, if it was the same scent that lead to the boys' dormitory and Ron said that Sirius Black was there, so it must be him who was in my room too.

I frowned. "He's telling the truth," I whispered into Harry's ear as he shivered.

"How do you know?" he whispered back.

"His scent," Seth mumbled, loud enough for only Harry and I to hear. "It's distant, but he was here."

"Oh, my goddess of the moon," I muttered under my breath, wrapping my arms around my brother and pulling him closer to me. I felt him place his hands over my forearms and gently squeeze them, but I barely paid any attention to his action as I was lost in my own confusion.

I've been having all these visions about Sirius being innocent since this year started, and, then, there are the many secrets I'd had to find out, like Seth being my brother, and Daren and Clarisse being my relatives, Sirius being my father and Seth's, and— my goddess! Why is all of this happening?

Glaring suspiciously at Ron, Professor McGonagall pushed the Portrait back open and went outside. The whole common room listened with bated breath. "Sir Cadogan, did you just let a man enter Gryffindor Tower?"

"Certainly, good lady!" cried Sir Cadogan.

There was a stunned silence, both inside and outside the common room.

"You— you did?" said Professor McGonagall. "But— but the password!"

"He had 'em!" said Sir Cadogan proudly. "Had the whole week's, my lady! Read 'em off a little piece of paper!"
Professor McGonagall pulled herself back through the portrait hole to face the stunned crowd. She was white as chalk.

"Which person," she said, her voice shaking, "which abysmally foolish person wrote down this week's passwords and left them lying around?"

There was utter silence, broken by the smallest of terrified squeaks. Neville Longbottom, trembling from head to fluffy slippered toes, raised his hand slowly into the air.

No one in Gryffindor Tower slept that night. We knew that the castle was being searched again, and the whole House stayed awake in the common room, waiting to hear whether Black had been caught. Professor McGonagall came back at dawn, to tell us that he had again escaped.

Throughout the day, everywhere we went we saw signs of tighter security; Professor Flitwick could be seen teaching the front doors to recognize a large picture of Sirius Black; Filch was suddenly bustling up and down the corridors, boarding up everything from tiny cracks in the walls to mouse holes. Sir Cadogan had been fired. His portrait had been taken back to its lonely landing on the seventh floor, and the Fat Lady was back. She had been expertly restored, but was still extremely nervous, and had agreed to return to her job only on condition that she was given extra protection. A bunch of surly security trolls had been hired to guard her. They paced the corridor in a menacing group, talking in grunts and comparing the size of their clubs.

I couldn't help noticing that the statue of the one-eyed witch on the third floor remained unguarded and unblocked. It seemed that Fred and George had been right in thinking that they—and now Harry, Ron, Hermione and I—were the only ones who knew about the hidden passageway within it.

Ron had become an instant celebrity. For the first time in his life, people were paying more attention to him than to Harry, and it was clear that Ron was rather enjoying the experience. Though still severely shaken by the night's events, he was happy to tell anyone who asked what had happened, with a wealth of detail.

"... I was asleep, and I heard this ripping noise, and I thought it was in my dream, you know? But then there was this draft... I woke up and one side of the hangings on my bed had been pulled down... I rolled over... and I saw him standing over me... like a skeleton, with loads of filthy hair... holding this great long knife, must've been twelve inches... and he looked at me, and I looked at him, and then I yelled, and then he scampere..."

"Why, though?" Ron added to Harry and I as the group of second year girls who had been listening to his chilling tale departed. "Why did he run?" I wanted to slap Ron. He is seriously, melodramatically stupid, can you blame me? No.

"He must've known he'd have a job getting back out of the castle once you'd yelled and woken people up," said Harry thoughtfully. "He'd've had to kill the whole House to get back through the portrait hole... then he would've met the teachers...."

Neville was in total disgrace, I felt bad for him. Professor McGonagall was so furious with him she had banned him from all future Hogsmeade visits, given him a detention, and forbidden anyone to give him the password into the tower. Poor Neville was forced to wait outside the common room every night for somebody to let him in, while the security trolls leered unpleasantly at him. None of these punishments, however, came close to matching the one his grandmother had in store for him. Two days after Black's break-in, she sent Neville the very worst thing a Hogwarts student could receive over breakfast—a Howler.
The school owls swooped into the Great Hall carrying the mail as usual, and Neville choked as a huge barn owl landed in front of him, a scarlet envelope clutched in its beak. Harry and Ron, who were sitting opposite him, recognized the letter as a Howler at once—Ron had got one from his mother the year before. I just stared at it in wonder.

"Run for it, Neville," Ron advised.

Neville didn't need telling twice. He seized the envelope, and holding it before him like a bomb, sprinted out of the hall, while the Slytherin table exploded with laughter at the sight of him. We heard the Howler go off in the entrance hall—Neville's grandmother's voice, magically magnified to a hundred times its usual volume, shrieking about how he had brought shame on the whole family.

Harry was too busy feeling sorry for Neville, but I lightly nudged him to get his attention when I noticed immediately that he had gotten a letter too. Hedwig got his attention too by nipping him sharply on the wrist.

"Ouch! Oh—thanks, Hedwig."

Harry tore open the envelope while Hedwig helped herself to some of Neville's cornflakes. The note inside said:

Dear Harry, Deli and Ron,

How about having tea with me this afternoon 'round six? I'll come collect you from the castle.

WAIT FOR ME IN THE ENTRANCE HALL; YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED OUT ON YOUR OWN.

Cheers, Hagrid.

"He probably wants to hear all about Black!" said Ron.

I shrugged before sighing. "You guys go and tell me what it's about when you come back, okay? I need to calm the burn..." I trailed off as I realized they understood what I meant more quickly than they usually did. At least that's improvement.

Buckbeak's trial was coming up soon as well as Ron and Hermione's making up. That's why Hagrid had been wanting to see us. After instant-transmissioning myself to Lakewood and hunting there, and their visit at Hagrid's, we met up at the entrance and made our way to the Gryffindor tower.

A large group of people was bunched around the bulletin board when we returned to the common room.

"Hogsmeade, next weekend!" said Ron, craning over the heads to read the new notice. "What d'you reckon?" he added quietly to us as we went to sit down.

"Well, Filch hasn't done anything about the passage into Honeydukes..." Harry said, even more quietly.

"Harry!" said a voice right behind us. We turned to look around and saw Hermione, sitting at the table right behind us and clearing a space in the wall of books that had been hiding her.

"Harry, if you go into Hogsmeade again... I'll tell Professor McGonagall about that map!" said Hermione.

"Can you hear someone talking, Harry?" growled Ron, not looking at Hermione.
"Ron, how can you let him go with you? After what Sirius Black nearly did to you! I mean it, I'll tell
—"

"So now you're trying to get Harry expelled!" said Ron furiously. "Haven't you done enough
damage this year?"

"Ron, shut up, she's just trying to keep Harry safe," I said to Ron before turning to look at Hermione.
"Mione, I'm with Harry literally all the time doing... my obligations. Have a little more faith in me,
please. Your lack of confidence in me is a little insulting."

Then I went to averting my gaze from one to the other. "And one more thing. This quarrel going on
between the two of you has got to stop. What happened between Crookshanks and Scabbers is what
happens between any cat and rat. It's natural. It's the circle of life. So get over it Ron, it wasn't
Hermione's fault. Not everyone can control their pets," I snapped before getting up and walking off
to my room.

On Saturday morning, Harry packed his Invisibility Cloak in his bag, slipped the Marauder's Map
into his pocket— I know because I peeked into his mind— and went down to breakfast with
everyone else. Hermione kept shooting suspicious looks down the table at him, but he avoided her
eye and was careful to let her see him walking back up the marble staircase in the entrance hall as
everybody else proceeded to the front doors.

"Bye!" Harry called to Ron. "See you when you get back!"

Ron grinned and winked.

Harry hurried up to the third floor— I followed, making myself invisible— slipping the Marauder's
Map out of his pocket as he went. Crouching behind the one-eyed witch, he smoothed it out.

The third-floor corridor seemed to be deserted. Harry scanned the map carefully and saw, that the
tiny dot labeled Snape was now back in its office.

He sprinted back to the one-eyed witch, opened her hump, heaved himself inside, and slid down to
meet his bag at the bottom of the stone chute. He wiped the Marauder's Map blank again, then set off
at a run.

Harry, completely hidden beneath the Invisibility Cloak, emerged into the sunlight outside
Honeydukes and prodded Ron in the back.

"It's me," he muttered.

"What kept you?" Ron hissed.

"Snape was hanging around."

They set off up the High Street.

"Where are you?" Ron kept muttering out of the corner of his mouth. "Are you still there? This feels
weird...."

Rolling my eyes and deciding that there was nothing more to see, I made my way back to the castle
and decided to hang out with Hermione.
The Quidditch final

I hadn't found Hermione when I'd wanted to, so, instead, I hung out with some friends I had made from Ravenclaw. After a while though, I went off to see Harry and Ron again, and, together, we made our way quickly back to the Gryffindor Tower as it was getting late.

As we reached the corridor where the security trolls were pacing, we found Hermione walking toward us.

"Come to have a good gloat?" said Ron savagely as she stopped in front of us. "Or have you just been to tell on us?"

"No," said Hermione. She was holding a letter in her hands, and her lip was trembling. "I just thought you ought to know... Hagrid lost his case. Buckbeak is going to be executed."

"What?" I asked in disbelief.

"He sent me this," Hermione said, holding out the letter. Harry took it.

The parchment was damp, and enormous teardrops had smudged the ink so badly in places that it was very difficult to read.

_Dear Hermione,_

_We lost. I'm allowed to bring him back to Hogwarts. Execution date to be fixed. Beaky has enjoyed London._

_I won't forget all the help you gave us._

_Hagrid_

"What? No! They— they can't! He didn't do anything wrong; it was all Dra..." I trailed off, not able to finish.

"They can't do this," Harry agreed, wrapping an arm around my waist and pulling me close to him. "They can't. Buckbeak isn't dangerous."

"Malfoy's dad's frightened the Committee into it," said Hermione, wiping her eyes. "You know what he's like. They're a bunch of doddering old fools, and they were scared. There'll be an appeal, though, there always is. Only I can't see any hope... Nothing will have changed."

"Yeah, it will," said Ron fiercely. "You won't have to do all the work alone this time, Hermione. I'll help."

"Oh, Ron!" Hermione flung her arms around Ron's neck and broke down completely. Ron, looking quite terrified, patted her very awkwardly on the top of the head.

Finally, Hermione drew away. "Ron, I'm really, really sorry about Scabbers..." she sobbed.

"Oh— well— he was old," said Ron, looking thoroughly relieved that she had let go of him. "And he was a bit useless. You never know, Mum and Dad might get me an owl now."

The safety measures imposed on the students since Black's second break-in made it impossible for Harry, Ron, Hermione and I to go and visit Hagrid in the evenings. Our only chance of talking to him was during Care of Magical Creatures lessons.
He seemed numb with shock at the verdict. "S'all my fault. Got all tongue-tied. They was all sittin' there in black robes an' I kep' droppin' me notes and forgettin' all them dates yeh looked up fer me, Hermione. An' then Lucius Malfoy stood up an' said his bit, and the Committee jus' did exac'ly what he told 'em..."

"There's still the appeal!" said Ron fiercely.

"Yeah, Hagrid. Don't give up yet; we're working on it!" I interjected.

We were walking back up to the castle with the rest of the class. Ahead we could see Malfoy— even though we'd become friends, I seriously just wanted to punch him, right now— who was walking with Crabbe and Goyle, and kept looking back, laughing derisively.

"S'no good, Ron," said Hagrid sadly as we reached the castle steps. "That Committee's in Lucius Malfoy's pocket. I'm jus' gonna make sure the rest o' Beaky's time is the happiest he's ever had. I owe him that..."

Hagrid turned around and hurried back toward his cabin, his face buried in his handkerchief.

"Look at him blubber!" Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had been standing just inside the castle doors, listening.

"Have you ever seen anything quite as pathetic?" said Malfoy. "And he's supposed to be our teacher!"

They turned around and finally noticed us, smirks making their way onto their faces.

"Ah. Come to see the show?" said Malfoy in a mocking manner.

Tired of his mocking, Harry, Ron and I made furious moves toward Malfoy, but Hermione got there first—

SMACK!

She had slapped Malfoy across the face with all the strength she could muster. Malfoy staggered. Harry, Ron, Crabbe, and Goyle stood flabbergasted as Hermione raised her hand again. I smirked proudly. The little girl is growing up on me.

"She so learned from the best," I muttered under my breath, choking back a laugh. I know it was rude to laugh at someone getting hurt, but, right now, I just couldn't help it, especially with the look on Draco's face. Priceless!

"Don't you dare call Hagrid pathetic— You... foul... loathsome... evil... little cockroach... "

"Hermione!" said Ron weakly, and he tried to grab her hand as she swung it back.

"Get off, Ron!" Hermione pulled out her wand. Malfoy stepped backward. Crabbe and Goyle looked at him for instructions, thoroughly bewildered.

I rolled my eyes and sighed loudly, stepping in front of Hermione. "Oh— just—" I swung my hand back and let it snap against Malfoy's nose, making him let out a girly scream. I can't believe I hugged this guy!

"Don't you dare call Hagrid pathetic. If anyone's pathetic, it's you. And if I see you provoke either of my friends, again, I won't stop them from punching you, pale face! Now go," I hissed menacingly,
glaring at him.

He held his bloody nose and looked at me with an unreadable expression before turning around.
"C'mon," Malfoy muttered, and in a moment, all three of them had disappeared into the passageway to the dungeons.

"Deli..." Ron and Harry said, sounding both stunned and impressed while Hermione gave me an approving nod. I wasn't sure why though; maybe because I kept better control over myself than I had the previous year?

I looked at them. "What? You knew that would come sooner or later," I said, slightly shrugging, crossing my arms over my chest.

"Harry, you'd better beat him in the Quidditch final!" Hermione said shrilly. "You just better had, because I can't stand it if Slytherin wins!"

"We're due in Charms," said Ron, still goggling at Hermione. "We'd better go."

We hurried up the marble staircase toward Professor Flitwick's classroom, but at the last second, Hermione and I quickly ran off; I decided to take a few extra classes with her— the Time-Turner helps a lot. I don't know how much time had past, but, suddenly, I felt something snake its way around my waist, and bolted upright on my seat, hitting my knee against the table.

"Damn it!" I hissed, letting my head fall—slam—onto the table while rubbing my throbbing knee— I had injured it over my 'absence' pretty badly, and it still hurt a little, now and then.

"What? What?" said Hermione, waking with a start and staring wildly around. "Is it time to go? W— which lesson have we got now?"

"Divination, but it's not for another twenty minutes," said Harry. "Hermione, Deli, why didn't you come to Charms?"

"What? Oh no!" Hermione squeaked. "I forgot to go to Charms!"

"Shit, Charms?" I groaned. I realized it was Harry's arm that was around my waist.

"But how could you forget?" said Harry. "You were with us till we were right outside the classroom!"

"I don't believe it!" Hermione wailed. "Was Professor Flitwick angry?"

I groaned again. "Damn Malfoy. We were sort of thinking about him and lost track of things."

"You know what, Hermione? You too, Deli," said Ron, looking down at the enormous Arithmancy books Hermione and I had been using as pillow. "I reckon you're cracking up. You're trying to do too much."

"No, we're not!" Hermione and I said at the same time, brushing our hair out of our eyes and staring hopelessly around for our bags.

"We just made a mistake, that's all! We'd better go and see Professor Flitwick and say sorry..."

"I agree, see you in Divination!"

Hermione and I joined them at the foot of the ladder to Professor Trelawney's classroom twenty minutes later.
"I can't believe I missed Cheering Charms! And I bet they come up in our exams; Professor Flitwick hinted they might!"

"Don't beat yourself over it; I missed it too. We'll just use the... double 't' and get more time to study and sleep," I said happily as her face lit up at the realization that we can actually do that. We grinned at each other and nudged each other playfully.

Together we climbed the ladder into the dim, stifling tower room. Glowing on every little table was a crystal ball full of pearly white mist. Harry, Ron, Hermione and I sat down together at the same rickety table.

"I thought we weren't starting crystal balls until next term," Ron muttered, casting a wary eye around for Professor Trelawney, in case she was lurking nearby.

"Don't complain, this means we've finished palmistry," Harry muttered back. "I was getting sick of her flinching every time she looked at my hands." I chuckled.

"Good day to you!" said the familiar, misty voice, and Professor Trelawney made her usual dramatic entrance out of the shadows. Parvati and Lavender quivered with excitement, their faces lit by the milky glow of their crystal ball.

"I have decided to introduce the crystal ball a little earlier than I had planned," said Professor Trelawney, sitting with her back to the fire and gazing around. "The fates have informed me that your examination in June will concern the Orb, and I am anxious to give you sufficient practice."

Hermione and I snorted. "Well, honestly... 'the fates have informed her,'" Hermione started loudly. "Yeah, right? I mean, who sets the exam? She does! What an amazing prediction!" I said, not troubling to keep my voice low. Harry and Ron choked back laughs.

It was hard to tell whether Professor Trelawney had heard us as her face was hidden in shadow. She continued, however, as though she had not heard a thing.

"Crystal gazing is a particularly refined art," she said dreamily. "I do not expect any of you to see when first you peer into the Orb's infinite depths. We shall start by practicing relaxing the conscious mind and external eyes)— Ron began to snigger uncontrollably and had to stuff his fist in his mouth to stifle the noise— "so as to clear the Inner Eye and the superconscious—"

"Superconscious— is that even a word?" I asked Hermione, who merely snorted and shrugged.

"— perhaps, if we are lucky, some of you will see before the end of the class," said Trelawney.

And so we began. Harry told me he felt extremely foolish, staring blankly at the crystal ball, trying to keep his mind empty when thoughts such as "this is stupid" kept drifting across it. It didn't help that Ron kept breaking into silent giggles and Hermione kept tutting.

"Seen anything yet?" Harry asked us after a quarter of an hour's quiet crystal gazing.

"Yeah, there's a burn on this table," said Ron, pointing. "Someone's spilled their candle."

I snorted. "Yeah, and I see a crystal ball," I said sarcastically before sighing. "I'm trying not to see anything, as the last time."

"Can you—"
"No," I said, cutting Harry and Ron off. "I told you, not until it's close to really happening." I sighed. I have no idea when it's going to happen.

"This is such a waste of time," Hermione hissed. "I could be practicing something useful. I could be catching up on Cheering Charms—"

Professor Trelawney rustled past.

"Would anyone like me to help them interpret the shadowy portents within their Orb?" she murmured over the clinking of her bangles.

"I don't need help," Ron whispered. "It's obvious what this means. There's going to be loads of fog tonight."

Harry, Hermione and I burst out laughing.

"Now, really!" said Trelawney as everyone's heads turned in our direction. Parvati and Lavender were looking scandalized. "You are disturbing the clairvoyant vibrations!" She approached our table and peered into our crystal ball. I felt my heart sinking. I was sure I knew what was coming—

"There is something here!" Trelawney whispered, lowering her face to the ball so that it was reflected twice in her huge glasses.

"Something moving... but what is it?"

"My dear," Trelawney breathed, gazing up at Harry. "It is here, plainer than ever before... my dear, stalking toward you, growing ever closer... the Gr—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" said Hermione loudly. "Not that ridiculous Grim again!"

Trelawney raised her enormous eyes to Hermione's face. Parvati whispered something to Lavender, and they both glared at Hermione too. Professor Trelawney stood up, surveying Hermione with unmistakable anger.

"I am sorry to say that from the moment you have arrived in this class my dear, it has been apparent that you do not have what the noble art of Divination requires. Indeed, I don't remember ever meeting a student whose mind was so hopelessly mundane."

There was a moment's silence. Then—

"Mundane?! You've got to be joking! You're the one who hasn't even made a real prediction since the first class we've had, so don't you dare tell Hermione her mind is hopelessly mundane because she predicts ions better than you!"

Everyone stared at me in shock. "I mean, sure, you have the gift of prediction, but not everyone has it. And you've got to stop saying you've foreseen things all the time, because that is theoretically and logically impossible. One only predicts when times are most dangerous, not someone arriving late to class!" I exclaimed myself, standing up and starting to pack my things.

"And, sure, Harry's life is in danger, but really? The Grim? Couldn't you have found anything else to foresee?"

"You are questioning my predictions?"

"Sibyl," I sighed. "If I may call you that— scratch that, I am going to call you that." Some people
snorted. "I've actually foreseen things, like the dementor's at the Quidditch match against Hufflepuff." People looked at me in shock. "That was why I learned the Patronus Charm beforehand so that I could fight them off Harry. I know what a prediction is, and even Hermione can predict things this obvious."

Nobody spoke, so I went on. "How do I know you haven't really predicted anything? Well let's see, shall we?" I ran a hand through my hair.

"One, you didn't see me speaking up to you right now. Two, you didn't see me saying 'hasta la vista, loop!'... pretty much because I wasn't going to say it anyway." Ron snorted. "And three, you didn't see me walking out, and if you know I'll be walking out of this class once I'm done speaking, don't you say you foresaw it because you only guessed since you saw me get up and pack my things all the while talking to you. So yeah... that's it."

I grabbed my bag and nodded at my friends. "If you'll excuse me, I will now be escorting myself out the door," I said. Just as I took a step, a hand caught my arm, causing me to stop.

"Wait," Hermione said, grabbing her bag as well. "I give up, I'm leaving too."

I nodded. "Great, then... hasta la vista, loop!" And with that, Hermione and I strode over to the trap door, kicked it open and climbed down the ladder, leaving the whole class staring after us in amazement.

The Easter holidays were not exactly relaxing. The third years had never had so much homework. Neville seemed close to a nervous collapse, and he wasn't the only one.

"Call this a holiday!" Seamus roared at the common room one afternoon. "The exams are ages away, what're they playing at?"

But nobody had as much to do as Hermione and I. Even without Divination; we were taking more subjects than anybody else. We were usually last to leave the common room at night, first to arrive at the library the next morning; Hermione had shadows like Lupin's under her eyes and seemed constantly close to tears, and I just looked paler than usual, my eyes being a dull chocolate brown.

Ron had taken over responsibility for Buckbeak's appeal. When he wasn't doing his own work, he was poring over enormously thick volumes with names like The Handbook of Hippogriff Psychology and Fowl or Foul? A Study of Hippogriff Brutality. He was so absorbed; he even forgot to be horrible to Crookshanks.

Harry, meanwhile, had to fit in his homework around Quidditch practice every day, not to mention endless discussions of tactics with Wood. The Gryffindor-Slytherin match would take place on the first Saturday after the Easter holidays. Slytherin was leading the tournament by exactly two hundred points. This meant (as Wood constantly reminded his team) that they needed to win the match by more than that amount to win the Cup. It also meant that the burden of winning fell largely on Harry, because capturing the Snitch was worth one hundred and fifty points.

The whole of Gryffindor House was obsessed with the coming match. Gryffindor hadn't won the Quidditch Cup since the legendary Charlie Weasley (Ron's second oldest brother) had been seeker. But I doubted whether any of them, even Wood, wanted to win as much as Harry did. The enmity between Harry and Malfoy was at its highest point ever. Malfoy was still smarting, bout the mud-throwing incident in Hogsmeade and was even more furious that Harry had somehow wormed his way out of punishment. Harry hadn't forgotten Malfoy's attempt to sabotage him in the match against Ravenclaw, but it was the matter of Buckbeak that made him most determined to beat Malfoy in front of the entire school. I was once again on Harry's side, furious with Malfoy's behavior. He
already broke part of his promise.

Never, in anyone's memory, had a match approached in such a highly charged atmosphere. By the time the holidays were over, the tension between the two teams and our Houses was at the breaking point. Some small scuffles broke out in the corridors, culminating in a nasty incident in which a Gryffindor fourth year and a Slytherin sixth year ended up in the hospital wing with leeks sprouting out of their ears.

Harry was having a particularly bad time of it. He couldn't walk to class without Slytherins sticking out their legs and trying to trip him up; Crabbe and Goyle kept popping up wherever he went and slouching away looking disappointed when they saw him surrounded by people. Wood had given instructions that Harry should be accompanied everywhere he went, in case the Slytherins tried to put him out of action. The whole of Gryffindor House took up the challenge enthusiastically, so that it was impossible for Harry to get to classes on time because he was surrounded by a vast, chattering crowd.

All usual pursuits were abandoned in the Gryffindor common room the night before the match. Even Hermione had put down her books, me following her actions, completely annoyed by the situation.

"I can't work, I can't concentrate," she said nervously as I nodded in agreement.

There was a great deal of noise. Fred and George were dealing with the pressure by being louder and more exuberant than ever. Wood was crouched over a model of a Quidditch field in the corner, prodding little figures across it with his wand and muttering to himself. Angelina, Alicia, and Katie were laughing at Fred's and George's jokes. Harry was sitting with Ron, Hermione and I, removed from the center of things, trying not to think about the next day.

"You're going to be fine," Hermione told him, though she looked positively terrified.

"You've got a Firebolt!" said Ron. "Wait... now there's two in the team."

"Yeah..." said Harry.

It came as a relief when Wood suddenly stood up and yelled, "Team! Bed!"

Everyone got up and headed towards their dorms, though Harry trailed slowly behind, looking seriously terrified. I smiled, walked over to him and gave him a small hug.

"You're going to be fine, Harry. Now stop worrying and go to bed," I said softly, kissing his cheek. He slightly blushed as he nodded before we let go of each other and headed off towards our rooms.

The Gryffindor team, Harry and I entered the Great Hall the next day to enormous applause. Harry grinned broadly as we saw that both the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables were applauding our team too. The Slytherin table hissed loudly as they passed. I noticed that Malfoy looked even paler than usual.

Wood spent the whole of breakfast urging the team and me to eat while touching nothing himself. Then he hurried us off to the field before anyone else had finished so that they could get an idea of the conditions. As they left the Great Hall, everyone applauded again.

"Hey, Deli," Cho Chang said, smiling at me.

I had gotten to know her a bit more over my Muggle Studies class, but I haven't gotten to talk much with her since I had been kind of on the run with phasing, hunting, coaching our Quidditch team, doing my homework and making sure that Harry was safe, while trying to catch up with my brother
on the years we'd lived without each other.

I smiled back. "Hey, Cho."

"It's really nice to see you around, again. Wouldn't be the same without you," she said, grinning.

I laughed lightly and grinned back. "Thanks, Cho, it's good to see you again, too."

We grinned at each other for a moment before she turned to look at Harry and smiled kindly at him. "Good luck, Harry!" she said. Harry blushed a little as she walked off. I chuckled and shook my head.

"She's pretty," I heard a voice say from behind me in a dreamy tone. I turned around and rolled my eyes, playfully shoving my brother out of his daze before turning back to Harry.

I stepped towards him and lightly kissed his cheek. "Good luck, Harry," I said softly, kissing his cheek again, a faint pink color tinting his cheeks as I turned on my heels and went to stand beside Lee.

The Gryffindor team walked out onto the field to a tidal wave of noise. Three-quarters of the crowd were wearing scarlet rosettes, waving scarlet flags with the Gryffindor lion upon them, or brandishing banners with slogans like "GO GRYFFINDOR!" and "LIONS FOR THE CUK."

Behind the Slytherin goal posts, however, two hundred people were wearing green; the silver serpent of Slytherin glittered on their flags, and Professor Snape sat in the very front row, wearing green like everyone else, and a very grim smile.

"And here are the Gryffindors!" yelled Lee Jordan, who was acting as a commentator as usual. "Potter, Bell, Johnson, Spinnet, Weasley, Weasley, and Wood. Widely acknowledged as the best team Hogwarts has seen in a good few years—"

Lee's comments were drowned by a tide of "boos" from the Slytherin end.

"And here come the Slytherin team, led by Captain Flint. He's made some changes in the lineup and seems to be going for size rather than skill—"

More boos from the Slytherin crowd. I, however, thought Lee had a point. Malfoy was easily the smallest person on the Slytherin team; the rest of them were enormous.

"Captains, shake hands!" said Madam Hooch.

Flint and Wood approached each other and grasped each other's hand very tightly; it looked as though each was trying to break the other's fingers.

"Mount your brooms!" said Madam Hooch. "Three... two... one..."

Malfoy had thrown himself forward, grabbed hold of Harry's Firebolt's tail, and was pulling it back. What the hell? He can't do that!

Harry seemed angry enough to hit Malfoy, but couldn't reach— Malfoy was panting with the effort of holding onto the Firebolt, but his eyes were sparkling maliciously. He had achieved what he'd wanted to do— the Snitch had disappeared again.

"Penalty! Penalty to Gryffindor! I've never seen such tactics," Madam Hooch screeched, shooting up to where Malfoy was sliding back onto his Nimbus Two Thousand and One.
"Damn right, penalty!" I exclaimed myself.

"YOU CHEATING SCUM!" Lee Jordan was howling into the megaphone, dancing out of Professor McGonagall's reach. "YOU FILTHY, CHEATING B—"

McGonagall didn't even bother to tell him off; she was actually shaking her finger in Malfoy's direction, her hat had fallen off, and she too was shouting furiously.

Alicia took Gryffindor's penalty, but she was so angry she missed by several feet. The Gryffindor team was losing concentration and the Slytherins, delighted by Malfoy's foul on Harry, were being spurred on to greater heights.

"Slytherin in possession, Slytherin heading for goal— Montague scores—" Lee groaned. "Seventy-twenty to Gryffindor..."

Harry was now marking Malfoy so closely their knees kept hitting each other.

"Angelina Johnson gets the Quaffle for Gryffindor, come on, Angelina, COME ON!"

Every single Slytherin player apart from Malfoy was streaking up the pitch toward Angelina, including the Slytherin Keeper— they were all going to block her—

Harry wheeled the Firebolt around, bent so low he was lying flat along the handle and kicked it forward. Like a bullet, he shot toward the Slytherins.

"AAAAAAAAARRRGH!"

They scattered as the Firebolt zoomed toward them; Angelina's way was clear.

"SHE SCORES! SHE SCORES! Gryffindor leads by eighty Points to twenty!"

Harry, who had almost pelted headlong into the stands, skidded to a halt in midair, reversed, and zoomed back into the middle of the field. And then he saw something to make his heart stand still. Malfoy was diving, a look of triumph on his face -- there, a few feet above the grass below, was a tiny, golden glimmer—

Harry urged the Firebolt downward, but Malfoy was miles ahead—

He was gaining on Malfoy— Harry flattened himself to the broom handle as Bole sent a Bludger at him— he was at Malfoy's ankles— he was level—

Harry threw himself forward, took both hands off his broom. He knocked Malfoy's arm out of the way and—

"YES!"

"Yes! Go, Harry!" I cheered, jumping up and down in excitement.

He pulled out of his dive, his hand in the air, and the stadium exploded. Harry soared above the crowd— the tiny golden ball was held tight in his fist, beating its wings hopelessly against his fingers.

Then Wood was speeding toward him, half-blinded by tears; he seized Harry around the neck and sobbed unrestrainedly into his shoulder. Fred and George hit them; then Angelina's, Alicia's, and Katie's voices, "We've won the Cup! We've won the Cup!" Tangled together in a many-armed hug, the Gryffindor team sank, yelling hoarsely, back to earth.
Wave upon wave of crimson supporters was pouring over the barriers onto the field. Hands were raining down on their backs. Harry had a confused impression of noise and bodies pressing in on him. Then he, and the rest of the team, were hoisted onto the shoulders of the crowd. Thrust into the light, he saw Hagrid a well, plastered with crimson rosettes—

"Yeh beat 'em, Harry, yeh beat 'em! Wait till I tell Buckbeak!"

There was Percy, jumping up and down like a maniac, all dignity forgotten. Professor McGonagall was sobbing harder even than Wood, wiping her eyes with an enormous Gryffindor flag; and there, fighting their way toward Harry, were Ron, Hermione and I. Words failed us. We simply beamed as Harry was borne toward the stands, where Dumbledore stood waiting with the enormous Quidditch Cup.

If only there had been a dementor around... As a sobbing Wood passed Harry the Cup, as he lifted it into the air, I felt Harry could have produced the world's best Patronus.
It's still alive?

Harry and Ron had given up asking Hermione and me how we were managing to attend several classes at once, but they couldn't restrain themselves when they saw the exam schedule we had drawn up for ourselves. The first column read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 o'clock, Arithmancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 o'clock, Transfiguration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 o'clock, Charms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 o'clock, Ancient Runes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

"Hermione? Deli?" Ron said cautiously because we sure were liable to explode when interrupted these days. Even my brother knew to stay away from me, lately, and, though that made me feel a tad bit guilty, I was grateful for the space he was giving me. "Er— are you sure you've copied down these times right?"

"What?" Hermione and I snapped, picking up our exam schedules and examining them. "Yes, of course, we have."

"Is there any point asking how you're going to sit for two exams at once?" said Harry.

"No," we replied shortly.

We had Potions that afternoon, which was an unqualified disaster. Try as Harry might, he couldn't get his Confusing Concoction to thicken, and Snape, standing watch with an air of vindictive pleasure, scribbled something that looked suspiciously like a zero onto his notes before moving away. I felt terrible, though I couldn't do much without giving myself away.

Then came Astronomy at midnight, up on the tallest tower; History of Magic on Wednesday morning, in which Harry scribbled everything Florean Fortescue had ever told him about medieval witch-hunts, while I wished I could have had one of Fortescue's choco-nut sundaes with me in the stifling classroom. Wednesday afternoon meant Herbology, in the greenhouses under a baking-hot sun; then back to the common room once more, with sunburnt necks and an annoying yet irresistible little brother who wouldn't shut up while I'm staring at the flaming fireplace, thinking longingly of this time the next day, when it would all be over.

Our second to last exam, on Thursday morning, was Defense Against the Dark Arts. Professor Lupin had compiled the most unusual exam any of us had ever taken; a sort of obstacle course outside in the sun, where we had to wade across a deep paddling pool containing a grindylow, cross a series of potholes full of Red Caps, squish our way across a patch of marsh while ignoring misleading directions from a hinkypunk, then climb into an old trunk and battle with a new boggart.

Harry and I had full marks, so after our success, we hung around to watch Ron and Hermione.

Ron did very well until he reached the hinkypunk, which successfully confused him into sinking waist-high into the quagmire. Hermione did everything perfectly until she reached the trunk with the boggart in it. After about a minute inside it, she burst out again, screaming.

"Hermione!" said Lupin, startled. "What's the matter?"
"P— P— Professor McGonagall!" Hermione gasped, pointing into the trunk. "Sh-she said I'd failed everything!"

It took a little while to calm Hermione down. When at last she had regained a grip on herself, she, Harry, Ron and I went back to the castle. Ron was still slightly inclined to laugh at Hermione's boggart, but an argument was averted by the sight that met us on the top of the steps.

An old man, sweating slightly in his pinstriped cloak, was standing there staring out at the grounds. He started at the sight of Harry.

"Who the hell is that?" I muttered under my breath.

"Cornelius Fudge, Minister of magic," Ron replied in a whisper as I nodded, fighting back a flashback at the mentioning of the man's name.

"Hello there, Harry! Delilah!" Cornelius said. "Just had an exam, I expect? Nearly finished?"

"Yes," said Harry as I just nodded, my lips in a straight line. Hermione and Ron, not being on speaking terms with the Minister of Magic, hovered awkwardly in the background.

"Lovely day," said Fudge, casting an eye over the lake. "Pity... pity..."

He sighed deeply and looked down at Harry and me.

"I'm here on an unpleasant mission. The Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures required a witness to the execution of a mad hippogriff. As I needed to visit Hogwarts to check on the Black situation, I was asked to step in."

My brows furrowed a bit; I didn't like the way he said Sirius' name. He spat it out as though it were a deadly poison.

"Does that mean the appeal's already happened?" Ron interrupted, stepping forward.

"No, no, it's scheduled for this afternoon," said Fudge, looking curiously at Ron.

"Then you might not have to witness an execution!" said Ron loudly. "The hippogriff might get off!"

Before Fudge could answer, two wizards came through the castle doors behind him. One was so ancient he appeared to be withering before our very eyes; the other was tall and strapping, with a thin back mustache.

I gathered that they were representatives of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures because the ancient wizard squinted toward Hagrid's cabin and said in a feeble voice, "Dear, dear, I'm getting too old for this... Two o'clock, isn't it, Fudge?"

The black-mustached man was fingering something in his belt; I looked and saw that he was running one broad thumb along the blade of a shining ax. Ron opened his mouth to say something, but Hermione and Harry nudged him hard in the ribs and jerked their head toward the entrance hall.

"Why'd you stop me?" said Ron angrily as we entered the Great Hall for lunch. "Did you see them? They've even got the ax ready! This isn't justice!"

"Ron, your dad works for the Ministry, you can't go saying things like that to his boss!" said Hermione, but she too looked distraught. "As long as Hagrid keeps his head this time, and argue his case properly, they can't possibly execute Buckbeak...."
But I could tell Hermione didn't really believe what she was saying.

All around us, people were talking excitedly as they ate their lunch, happily anticipating the end of the exams that afternoon, but Harry, Ron, Hermione and I, lost in worry about Hagrid and Buckbeak, didn't join in.

**Hermione's P.O.V.**

Harry's and Ron's last exam was Divination; Delilah's and mine, Muggle Studies. We walked up the marble staircase together; Delilah and I left them on the first floor, and Harry and Ron proceeded all the way up to the seventh.

Our Muggle Studies exam was quite easy that Delilah and I were the first to finish. After gathering our things, we left the classroom and started making our way towards the common room when I stopped after noticing Delilah wasn't following me anymore. I turned to look at her and found her frozen, a few feet away, eyes glazed and distant as they stared off into space.

I called out her name several times but got no reaction. It wasn't until about an hour later that I got a reaction out of her, though it was nothing I was expecting. Her glazed and distant violet orchidee eyes began to pale till the point where they were no longer at their usual violet orchidee but a very light gray, almost white itself. Then, I jumped, startled when she began speaking in a monotonous voice. I listened carefully, but everything she said only brought more questions into my head.

Suddenly, she stopped, then collapsed onto the ground, making me jump back in surprise. I watched closely, worried, as her eyes fluttered open and she blinked several times. Realization crossed her features as she looked up at me.

She gave me a confused look— probably wondering how she ended up lying on the floor. She sat up quickly, then groaned, bringing her hands up to her head.

"Ow," she mumbled, dazed, clutching her head.

Unable to help myself, I dropped down onto my knees and pulled her into a tight hug, sighing in relief. "Deli, are you alright? God, you scared me!" I uttered admittedly.

"What happened?" she asked, shaking her head as if that would make the pain go away.

I pulled back and stared at her with wide eyes in disbelief. "Wh-w— you don't remember?" I asked.

She gave me a puzzled look. "Remember? Remember what, Hermione? All I know is that we've just finished our Muggle Studies exam."

"That was an hour ago! You've been on the floor since we got out. I was going to get some help, but I couldn't leave you here alone," I explained quickly. She frowned and seemed to be thinking hard, for a moment.

She looked back at me and grabbed me by the shoulders. "What happened exactly after we were done with the exam and left class?"

"Well... when we had just left the classroom after we turned down the hall on our way to the Gryffindor tower, you just froze on the spot. I kept talking to you, asking you if you were okay when you just collapsed. You were staring at nothing in particular... just thin air... as if you were in a trance or something like that," I said.

"A trance?" she asked, confused.
I nodded. "Yes, and then your eyes became silver, and you started speaking in monotone and—"

"Whoa, whoa, wait. I started speaking?" I nodded again. "What did I say?"

I bit her lower lip. "It was quite—"

"Hermione," she said in a warning tone.

I sighed. "Oh, alright. You said: *Tonight, the full moon, a start, and an end; tonight is the night it will all happen. The truth revealed makes no difference; until the true culprit is caught; only then, freedom and happiness would either be gained or lost'*... do you know what that means?" I asked.

"No." I could tell she was lying, no matter how seriously she spoke. Her right brow tended to twitch a tad bit when she lied unless she was lying and believing it as well. I raised an eyebrow at her. "Okay, I know what *it is*, but I don't know for sure what *it means*," she admitted.

"Well?" I pressed, helping her up on her feet.

"Hermione, I just predicted something. I didn't have a vision as I'd usually have. I didn't foresee anything; I made a prediction."

"Y-you mean like—"

"Yes, like Trelawney would do when she'd predict," she said.

"But she doesn't—"

"Funny thing is: she does. But she doesn't know when that's why—"

"That's why most of the time she makes things up."

She nodded. "Because she doesn't get predictions thoroughly and when she does, she doesn't know or remember."

I felt my breathing hitched as I turned around and started walking away. "We've got to tell—"

She cut me off, grabbing my arm and yanking me back. "No. We'll tell them when it's close to happening. Then, I'll explain."

"But when—"

"Remember what it said," she said.

I scrunched my nose. "*Tonight, the full moon, a start, and an end; tonight, is the night it will all happen,*' that means we'd have to do something by the end of the afternoon."

She nodded. "Now let's go before the guys start wondering where we are. And remember—"

"Not a word to either of them. Got it," I finished with a sigh.

And with that, we made our way towards the Gryffindor tower where Ron was waiting for us.

"What's that you've got?" Delilah asked, sitting across from him as I sat beside him.

He frowned and passed her the note he was holding. I leaned forward a bit and read along with her.

It was a note from Hagrid. It note was dry this time, no tears had splattered it, yet his hand seemed to
have shaken so much as he wrote that it was hardly legible.

Lost appeal. They're going to execute at sunset. Nothing you can do. Don't come down. I don't want you to see it.

Hagrid

I felt my heart drop, though, by the look on Delilah's face, she felt even worse than I did. She had really connected with that wondrous creature.

"Where's Harry?" she asked, frowning. "He has to see this."

"He— is coming right now," Ron replied, nodding his head towards the portrait hole where, sure enough, Harry was just climbing out from.

"Professor Trelawney," Harry panted, "just told me—"

But he stopped abruptly at the sight of our faces.

"Buckbeak lost," said Ron weakly. "Hagrid's just sent this." Harry read the note and any emotions crossed his face, it was hard to distinguish only one.

"We've got to go," said Harry at once. "He can't just sit there on his own, waiting for the executioner!"

"Sunset, though," said Ron, who was staring out the window in a glazed sort of way. "We'd never be allowed... 'specially you, Harry..."

Harry sank his head into his hands, thinking.

"If we only had the Invisibility Cloak...."

"Where is it?" Delilah asked.

Harry told us about leaving it in the passageway under the one-eyed witch.

"... if Snape sees me anywhere near there again, I'm in serious trouble," he finished.

"That's true," she said, getting to her feet. "If he sees you... How do you open the witch's hump again?"

"You— you tap it and say, 'Dissendium'," said Harry. "But—"

She didn't wait for the rest of his sentence; she strode across the room, pushed open the Fat Lady's portrait and vanished from our sight. She returned a quarter of an hour later with the silvery cloak folded carefully under her robes.

"Deli, I don't know what's gotten into you lately!" said Ron, astounded. "First you hit Malfoy again... though that wasn't really unexpected, then you walk out on Professor Trelawney—"

She seemed rather flattered, and I had to agree with Ron. It's true that she was... different, but she had never acted this rebellious before.

We went down to dinner with everybody else but did not return to Gryffindor Tower afterward. Harry had the cloak hidden down the front of his robes; he had to keep his arms folded to hide the lump. We skulked in an empty chamber off the entrance hall, listening, until we were sure it was
deserted. We heard one last pair of people hurrying across the hall and a door slamming. I poked my head around the door and saw the coast was clear.

"Okay," she whispered, "no one there."

Delilah nodded. "Alright, put the cloak on guys. I'll make myself invisible and—"

We stared at her with wide eyes. "What?" she asked.

"You can still make yourself invisible?" Ron exclaimed himself.

She rolled her eyes and patted his cheek. "I haven't changed that much, Ronald."

Walking very close together so that nobody would see us, we crossed the hall on tiptoe beneath the cloak with, I assumed, Delilah following behind, then walked down the stone front steps into the grounds. The sun was already sinking behind the Forbidden Forest, gilding the top branches of the trees.

We reached Hagrid's cabin and knocked. He was a minute in answering, and when he did, he looked all around, pale-faced and trembling.

"It's us," I hissed. "We're wearing the Invisibility Cloak, and Deli made herself invisible. Let us in, and we can take it off."

Back to Delilah's P.O.V.

"Yeh shouldn've come!" Hagrid whispered, but he stood back, and we stepped inside. Hagrid shut the door quickly, and Harry pulled off the cloak as I made myself visible again.

Hagrid was not crying, nor did he throw himself upon our necks. He looked like a man who did not know where he was or what to do. This helplessness was worse to watch than tears.

"Wan' some tea?" he said. His great hands were shaking as he reached for the kettle.

"Where's Buckbeak, Hagrid?" said Hermione hesitantly.

"I— I took him outside," said Hagrid, spilling milk all over the table as he filled up the jug. "He's tethered in me pumpkin patch. Thought he oughta see the trees an'— an' smell fresh air— before—"

Hagrid's hand trembled so violently that the milk jug slipped from his grasp and shattered all over the floor.

"I'll do it, Hagrid," said Hermione quickly, hurrying over and starting to clean up the mess.

"There's another one in the cupboard," Hagrid said, sitting down and wiping his forehead on his sleeve. Harry glanced at Ron and me, who looked back hopelessly.

"Isn't there anything anyone can do, Hagrid?" Harry asked fiercely, sitting down next to him. "Dumbledore—"

"He's tried," said Hagrid. "He's got no power ter overrule the Committee. He told 'em Buckbeak's all right, but they're scared... Yeh know what Lucius Malfoy's like... threatened 'em, I expect... an' the executioner, Macnair, he's an old pal o' Malfoy's... but it'll be quick an' clean... an' I'll be beside him..."

Hagrid swallowed. His eyes were darting all over the cabin as though looking for some shred of
hope or comfort.

"Dumbledore's gonna come down while it— while it happens. Wrote me this mornin'. Said he wants ter— ter be with me. Great man, Dumbledore...."

Hermione, who had been rummaging in Hagrid's cupboard for another milk jug, let out a small, quickly stifled sob. She straightened up with the new jug in her hands, fighting back tears.

"We'll stay with you too, Hagrid," she began, but Hagrid shook his shaggy head.

"Yeh're ter go back up ter the castle. I told yeh; I don' wan' yeh watchin'. An' yeh shouldn' be down here anyway... If Fudge an' Dumbledore catch yeh out without permission, Harry, yeh'll be in big trouble."

Silent tears were now streaming down Hermione's face, but she hid them from Hagrid, bustling around making tea. Then, as she picked up the milk bottle to pour some into the jug, she let out a shriek.

"Ron, I don't believe it— it's Scabbers!"

I stared at her in confusion as Ron gaped at her. "What are you talking about?"

Hermione carried the milk jug over to the table and turned it upside down. With a frantic squeak, and much scrambling to get back inside, Scabbers the rat came sliding out onto the table.

"Scabbers!" said Ron blankly. "Scabbers, what are you doing here?"

"It's still alive?" I asked, staring at the disgusting rat in disbelief.

He grabbed the struggling rat and held him up to the light. Scabbers looked dreadful. He was thinner than ever, large tufts of hair had fallen out leaving wide bald patches, and he writhed in Ron's hands as though desperate to free himself.

"It's okay, Scabbers!" said Ron. "No cats! There's nothing here to hurt you!"

Hagrid suddenly stood up, his eyes fixed on the window. His normally ruddy face had gone the color of parchment.

"They're comin'..."

Harry, Ron, Hermione and I whipped around. A group of men was walking down the distant castle steps. In front was Albus Dumbledore, his silver beard gleaming in the dying sun. Next to him trotted Cornelius Fudge. Behind them came the feeble old Committee member and the executioner, Macnair.

"Yeh gotta go," said Hagrid. Every inch of him was trembling. "They mustn' find yeh here... Go now..."

Ron stuffed Scabbers into his pocket, and Hermione picked up the cloak. "I'll let yeh out the back way," said Hagrid.

We followed him to the door into his back garden. It felt strangely unreal, and even more so when I saw Buckbeak a few yards away, tethered to a tree behind Hagrid's Pumpkin patch. Buckbeak seemed to know something was happening. He turned his sharp head from side to side and pawed the ground nervously.
"It's okay, Beaky," said Hagrid softly. "It's okay..." He turned to Harry, Ron, Hermione, and I. "Go on," he said. "Get goin'."

But we didn't move. "Hagrid, we can't—"

"We'll tell them what really happened—"

"They can't kill him—"

"Go!" said Hagrid fiercely. "It's bad enough without you lot in trouble an' all!"

We had no choice. As Hermione threw the cloak over Harry and Ron and I made myself invisible, we heard voices at the front of the cabin.

Hagrid looked at the place where we had just vanished from sight.

"Go quick," he said hoarsely. "Don' listen...."

And he strode back into his cabin as someone knocked at the front door.

Slowly, in a kind of horrified trance, Harry, Ron, and Hermione— me following right behind— set off silently around Hagrid's house. As we reached the other side, the front door closed with a sharp snap.

"Please, let's hurry," Hermione whispered. "I can't stand it; I can't bear it..."

We started up the sloping lawn toward the castle. The sun was sinking fast now; the sky had turned to a clear, purple-tinged grey, but to the west, there was a ruby-red glow.

Ron stopped dead.

"Ron!" I hissed.

"Oh, please, Ron," Hermione began.

"It's Scabbers— he won't— stay put—"

Ron was bent over, trying to keep Scabbers in his pocket, but the rat was going berserk; squeaking madly, twisting and flailing, trying to sink his teeth into Ron's hand.

"Scabbers, it's me, you idiot, it's Ron," Ron hissed.

We heard a door open behind them and men's voices.

"Oh, Ron, please let's move, they're going to do it!" Hermione breathed.

"Okay— Scabbers, stay put—"

We walked forward; Harry, like Hermione and I, was trying not to listen to the rumble of voices behind us. Ron stopped again.

"I can't hold him— Scabbers, shut up, everyone'll hear us—"

The rat was squealing wildly, but not loudly enough to cover up the sounds drifting from Hagrid's garden. There was a jumble of indistinct male voices, a silence, and then, without warning, the unmistakable swish and thud of an ax.
I swayed on the spot, my eyes widening. I quickly grabbed hold of Harry's arm, choking back a tearless sob. He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me closer against his chest, resting my head on his shoulder as he kissed my forehead.

"It's okay. It's going to be f—"

"No! They did it!" I whispered. "I d— don't believe it— they did it!"

My mind had gone blank with shock. The four of us stood transfixed with horror. The very last rays of the setting sun were casting a bloody light over the long, shadowed grounds. Then, behind us, we heard a wild howling.

"Hagrid," Harry muttered. Without thinking about what he was doing, he let go of me and spun around to turn back, but both Ron and Hermione seized his arms.

"We can't," said Ron, who was paper-white. "He'll be in worse trouble if they know we've been to see him..."

My breathing was shallow and uneven. "How could they?" I choked. "How could they..." I trailed off, frowning as I felt something wrong. Something was really wrong. They just— yet I still feel Buckbeak's life energy... how come?

"Come on," said Ron, whose teeth seemed to be chattering.

We set off back toward the castle, walking slowly to keep themselves hidden under the cloak while I stayed behind to make sure we didn't get caught. The light was fading fast now.
By the time we reached open ground, darkness was settling like a spell around us.

"Scabbers, keep still," Ron hissed, clamping his hand over his chest.

The rat was wriggling madly. Ron came to a sudden halt, trying to force Scabbers deeper into his pocket. "What's the matter with you, you stupid rat? Stay still— OUCH! He bit me!"

"Ron, be quiet!" Hermione whispered urgently. "Fudge'll be out here in a minute—"

"He won't— stay— put—"

Scabbers was terrified. He was writhing with all his might, trying to break free of Ron's grip.

"What's the matter with him?"

Suddenly, I saw— stinking toward us, his body low to the ground, wide yellow eyes glinting eerily in the darkness— Crookshanks. Whether he could see us or was following the sound of Scabbers's squeaks, I couldn't tell.

"Crookshanks!" Hermione moaned. "No, go away, Crookshanks! Go away!"

But the cat was getting nearer—

"Scabbers— NO!"

Too late— the rat had slipped from between Ron's clutching fingers, hit the ground, and scampered away. In one bound, Crookshanks sprang after him, and before Harry or Hermione could stop him, Ron had thrown the Invisibility Cloak off himself and pelted away into the darkness.

"Ron!" Hermione moaned.

Sighing, I made myself visible again and looked at Harry and Hermione, who were still under the cloak, before following Ron at a sprint; it was impossible for them to run full out like me from under the cloak. They pulled it off, and it streamed behind them like a banner as we hurtled after Ron; we could hear his feet thundering along ahead and his shouts at Crookshanks.

"Get away from him— get away— Scabbers, come here—" There was a loud thud.

"Gotcha! Get off, you stinking cat—"

Harry and Hermione almost fell over Ron; they skidded to a stop right in front of him. He was sprawled on the ground, but Scabbers was back in his pocket; he had both hands held tight over the quivering lump.

"Ron— come on back under the cloak—" Hermione panted. "Dumbledore, the Minister— they'll be coming back out in a minute—"

But before they could cover themselves again, before I could make myself invisible again, before we could even catch our breath, we heard the soft pounding of massive paws... Something was bounding toward us, quiet as a shadow— an enormous, pale-eyed, jet black dog. If I had to compare it to any of my soul animals or my wolf, it was small, but, for a regular dog, it was enormous.
Harry reached for his wand, but too late— the dog had made an enormous leap, and the front paws hit him on the chest; he keeled over backward in a whirl of hair; he felt its hot breath, saw inch—long teeth—

"No, stop! I can change th—"

I cut myself off when I could clearly see the force of its leap had carried it too far; it rolled off him. Heat building up inside of me, I ran to Harry and carefully helped him stand up; we could hear the dog growling as it skidded around for a new attack. I swear, for a man, he is really doing whatever he's thinking of doing, stupidly.

Ron was on his feet. As the dog sprang back toward us he pushed Harry and I aside; the dog's jaws fastened instead around Ron's outstretched arm. Harry lunged forward, he seized a handful of the brute's hair, but it was dragging Ron away as easily as though he were a rag doll—

Then, out of nowhere, something hit me so hard across the face and knocked me off my feet again. I heard Hermione shriek with pain and Harry shout as they fell too.

Harry groped for his wand. "Lumos!" he whispered.

The wand light showed the trunk of a thick tree; we had chased Scabbers into the shadow of the Whomping Willow, and its branches were creaking as though in a high wind, whipping backward and forward to stop us going nearer.

Damn.

And there, at the base of the trunk, was the idiot dog, dragging Ron backward into a large gap in the roots—Ron was fighting furiously, but his head and torso were slipping out of sight—

"Ron!" I shouted, trying to follow, but a heavy branch whipped lethally through the air, and I was forced backward again.

All we could see now was one of Ron's legs, which he had hooked around a root in an effort to stop the dog from pulling him farther underground—but a horrible crack cut the air like a gunshot; Ron's leg had broken, and a moment later, his foot vanished from sight.

"Harry, Deli—we've got to go for help—" Hermione gasped; she was bleeding too; the Willow had cut her across the shoulder.

"No! That thing's big enough to eat him; we haven't got time—"

"Harry—we're never going to get through without help—"

Another branch whipped down at us, twigs clenched like knuckles.

"If that dog can get in, we can," Harry panted, darting here and there, trying to find a way through the vicious, swishing branches, but he couldn't get an inch nearer to the tree roots without being in range of the tree's blows.

"Oh, help, help," Hermione whispered frantically, dancing uncertainly on the spot, "Please..."

Crookshanks darted forward. He slithered between the battering branches like a snake and placed his front paws upon a knot on the trunk.

Abruptly, as though the tree had been turned to marble, it stopped moving. Not a leaf twitched or
"Crookshanks!" Hermione whispered uncertainly. She now grasped Harry's arm and mine painfully hard. "How did he know—"

"He's friends with that dog," said Harry grimly. "I've seen them together. Come on— and keep your wand out—"

We covered the distance to the trunk in seconds, but before we had reached the gap in the roots, Crookshanks had slid into it with a flick of his bottlebrush tail. I followed the feline; I crawled forward, head first, and slid down an earthy slope to the bottom of a very tunnel. As I started getting up, some weight brought me back down again— Harry had gone in after me... I looked up and saw him laying on top of me, blushing almost as red as Ginny often does. He got up and pulled me out of the way as Hermione slithered in, seconds later, down beside me.

"Where's Ron?" she whispered in a terrified voice, grabbing hold of my arm.

"This way," said Harry. He grabbed my free hand and slightly tugged me forward, setting off, bent-backed, after Crookshanks.

"Where does this tunnel come out?" Hermione asked breathlessly from behind us.

"I don't know... It's marked on the Marauder's Map, but Fred and George said no one's ever gotten into it... It goes off the edge of the map, but it looked like it was heading for Hogsmeade..."

We moved as fast as we could, bent almost double; ahead of us, Crookshanks's tail bobbed in and out of view. On and on went the passage; it felt at least as long as the one to Honeydukes...

And then the tunnel began to rise; moments later it twisted, and Crookshanks had gone. Instead, I could see a patch of dim light through a small opening.

Harry, Hermione and I paused, gasping for breath, edging forward. We raised our wands to see what lay beyond.

It was a room, a very disordered, dusty room. Paper was peeling from the walls; there were stains all over the floor; every piece of furniture was broken as though somebody had smashed it. The windows were all boarded up.

I glanced at Hermione, who looked very frightened but nodded.

Harry pulled himself out of the hole— dragging me along with him— staring around. The room was deserted, but a door to our right stood open, leading to a shadowy hallway. It looked exactly like it did in my vision. I recognized the place all too well— the place I had discovered a while after I had come back. Hermione suddenly grabbed my arm again. Her wide eyes were traveling around the boarded windows. I decided it was time to break the silence.

"Guys," I started, "We're in the Shrieking Shack."

I looked around. My eyes fell on a wooden chair near us. Large chunks had been torn out of it; one of the legs had been ripped off entirely.

"Ghosts didn't do that," Harry said slowly, staring at the chair too.

At that moment, there was a creak overhead. Something had moved upstairs. We looked up at the ceiling. Hermione's grip on my arm was so tight— if I weren't a hybrid with super-strength, I would...
be losing feeling in my fingers. I raised my eyebrows at her; she nodded again and let go.

Quietly, we crept out into the hall and up the crumbling staircase. Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust except the floor, where a wide shiny stripe had been made by something being dragged upstairs.

We reached the dark landing.

"Nox," we whispered together, and the lights at the end of our wands went out. Only one door was open. I put my wand in my back pocket as we crept toward the door, we heard movement from behind it; a low moan, and then a deep, loud purring. We exchanged one last look and one last affirming nod.

Wand held tightly before him, Harry kicked the door wide open.

On a magnificent four-poster bed with dusty hangings lay Crookshanks, purring loudly at the sight of us. On the floor beside him, clutching his leg, which stuck out at a strange angle, was Ron.

Harry and Hermione dashed across to him, me trailing right behind them.

"Ron—are you okay?"

"Where's the dog?"

"Not a dog," Ron moaned. His teeth were gritted with pain. "Harry, it's a trap—"

"What—"

"He's the dog... he's an Animagus."

Ron was staring over Harry's shoulder. I wheeled around. With a snap, the man in the shadows closed the door behind us.

A mass of filthy, matted hair hung to his elbows. If eyes hadn't been shining out of the deep, dark sockets, he might have been a corpse. The waxy skin was stretched so tightly over the bones of his face, it looked like a skull. His yellow teeth were bared in a grin.

It was—

"Sirius Black," I murmured, utterly flabbergasted by the mere sight of him; Jesus— this guy's my father?

"Expelliarmus!" he croaked, pointing Ron's wand at us.

Harry's and Hermione's wands shot out of their hands, high in the air, and Black caught them. Then he took a step closer. His eyes were fixed on Harry. I couldn't understand why, at the moment, I was unable to penetrate his mind. I've done it with dozens of people. Plus, he's my father, shouldn't it be easy?

"I thought you'd come and help your friend," he said hoarsely.

His voice sounded as though he had long since lost the habit of using it. "Your father would have done the same for me. Brave of you not to run for a teacher. I'm grateful... it will make everything much easier...."

The taunt about his father rang in Harry's ears as though Black had bellowed it. I could feel the
boiling hate erupting in Harry's chest, leaving no place for fear. For the first time in his life, he wanted his wand back in his hand, not to defend himself, but to attack... to kill and that shocked the hell out of me. Without knowing what he was doing, he started forward, but I stepped in front of him and put both of my hands on either side of him, grabbing him and pushing him back, though I wasn't the only one; Hermione and Ron had held onto him as well.

"No, Harry!" Hermione gasped in a petrified whisper for me; Ron, however, spoke to Black.

"If you want to kill Harry, you'll have to kill us too!" he said fiercely, though the effort of standing upright was draining him of still more color, and he swayed slightly as he spoke.

Something flickered in Black's shadowed eyes.

"Lie down," he said quietly to Ron. "You will damage that leg even more."

"Did you hear me?" Ron said weakly, though he was clinging painfully to Harry to stay upright. "You'll have to kill all three of us!"

"What am I? A dead bug on a windshield?" I muttered to myself, low enough for no one to hear.

"All four of us!" Ron corrected himself. Apparently, I didn't speak as low as I thought.

"There'll be only one murder here tonight," said Black, and his grin widened.

"Why's that?" Harry spat, trying to wrench himself free of Ron, Hermione and I. "Didn't care last time, did you? Didn't mind slaughtering all those Muggles to get at Pettigrew... What's the matter, gone soft in Azkaban?"

"Harry!" Hermione whimpered. "Be quiet!"

"HE KILLED MY MUM AND DAD!" Harry roared, and with a considerable effort he broke free of Hermione's, Ron's and my restraint and lunged forward—

I watched in horror and shock as one of Harry's hands fastened over his wasted wrist, forcing the wand tips away; the knuckles of Harry's other hand collided with the side of Sirius' head, and they fell, backward, into the wall— Sirius didn't raise the wands in time. I could've done something to stop this, to make it all come to the clear, but I still didn't know everything— who Sirius was really after.

I continued to watch as Harry was beating up his godfather; Hermione was screaming; Ron was yelling. At one point, there was a blinding flash as the wand in Sirius' hand sent a jet of sparks into the air that missed Harry's face by inches; Harry the shrunken arm under his fingers twisting madly, but he clung on, his other hand punching every part of Black it could find.

But Sirius' free hand had found Harry's throat.

"No," he hissed, "I've waited too long—"

The fingers tightened, Harry choked, his glasses askew.

Then I saw Hermione's foot swing out of nowhere. Black let go of Harry with a grunt of pain; Ron had thrown himself on Black's wand hand, and I heard a faint clatter. He fought free of the tangle of bodies, and I saw his wand rolling across the floor; he threw himself toward it but—

"Argh!"
Crookshanks had joined the fray; both sets of front claws had sunk themselves deep into Harry's arm; Harry threw him off, but the damned cat had now darted toward Harry's wand—

"NO YOU DON'T!" roared Harry, and he aimed a kick at Crookshanks that made the cat leap aside, spitting; Harry snatched up his wand and turned.

"Get out of the way!" he shouted at Ron and Hermione.

They didn't need telling twice. Hermione, gasping for breath, her lip bleeding, scrambled aside, snatching up her and Ron's wands. Ron crawled to the four-poster and collapsed onto it, panting, his white face now tinged with green, both hands clutching his broken leg.

Black was sprawled at the bottom of the wall. His thin chest rose and fell rapidly as he watched Harry ambling nearer, his wand pointing straight at Black's heart, though I quickly grabbed my wand from my pocket and pointed it at Harry's back. I wasn't going to let him kill what he had left—what we had left.

"Going to kill me, Harry?" he whispered.

Harry stopped right above him, his wand still pointing at Black's chest, looking down at him while I stayed a bit behind, still pointing my wand at his back. Of course, I wasn't going to do anything to Harry— I'm meant to protect him with my life, but I couldn't have him do anything he might regret, especially not to the only parent I had left. A livid bruise was rising around Black's left eye, and his nose was bleeding.

His wand quite steady, Harry said in a slightly shaky voice. "You killed my parents." Did he really?

Black stared up at him out of those sunken eyes, then looked over Harry's shoulder at me and his eyes widened.

"I don't deny it," he said very quietly. "But if you knew the whole story."

"The whole story?" Harry repeated, a furious pounding in his ears. "You sold them to Voldemort. That's all I need to know."

"You've got to listen to me," Black said, and there was a note of urgency in his voice now. "You'll regret it if you don't... You don't understand...."

"I understand a lot better than you think," said Harry, and his voice shook more than ever. "You never heard her, did you? My mum... trying to stop Voldemort killing me... and you did that... you did it...."

"Harry," I spoke up for the first time, though what caught me by surprise was how cold my voice sounded. "You only think you understand because of what you heard from other people you don't even know, but the thing is, they weren't there. They only continued to pass on the first rumor ever made about this mess. You need to listen to Sirius. He's telling the tr—"

Before I could add anything else—before either of them could say another word, something ginger streaked past me; Crookshanks leaped onto Black's chest and settled himself there, right over Black's heart. Black blinked and looked down at the cat.

"Get off," he murmured, trying to push Crookshanks off him.

But Crookshanks sank his claws into Black's robes and wouldn't shift. He turned his ugly, squashed face to Harry and looked up at him with those great yellow eyes. To his right, Hermione gave a dry
Harry stared down at Black and Crookshanks, his grip tightening on the wand. This was not good. I knew exactly what he was thinking. So what if he had to kill the cat too? It was in league with Black... If it was prepared to die, trying to protect Black, that wasn't Harry's business... If Black wanted to save it, that only proved he cared more for Crookshanks than for Harry's parents...

Harry raised the wand. Black shifted his eyes to me and shook his head 'no.' But I paid no attention to him; I only focused on my wand that was pointed at my best friend's back. He was going to kill Black, and this was his chance... but I won't let him.

When Harry is about to kill him, he will be blasted back.

The seconds lengthened. And still Harry stood frozen there, my wand on his back, his wand poised, Black staring up at us, Crookshanks on his chest. Ron's ragged breathing came from near the bed; Hermione was rather silent.

And then came a new sound—

Muffled footsteps were echoing up through the floor— someone was moving downstairs. I sniffed the air as discreetly as possible and instantly recognized the heavy scent of wet dog covered in sweat — I could also hear his the rate of his heartbeat quickening. Remus Lupin was on his way.

"WE'RE UP HERE!" Hermione screamed suddenly. "WE'RE UP HERE— SIRIUS BLACK— QUICK!"

Black made a startled movement that almost dislodged Crookshanks; Harry gripped his wand convulsively, but the footsteps were thundering up the stairs, and Harry still hadn't done it which relieved me, I didn't want to have to blast my best friend into cinders.

The door of the room burst open in a shower of red sparks and Harry wheeled around as Professor Lupin came hurtling into the room, his face bloodless, his wand raised and ready. His eyes flickered over Ron, lying on the floor, over Hermione, cowering next to the door, to me, pointing my wand at Harry, to Harry, standing there with his wand covering Black, and then to Black himself, crumpled and bleeding at Harry's feet.

"Expelliarmus!" Lupin shouted.

Harry's wand flew once more out of his hand; so did the two Hermione was holding as I put mine in my back pocket. Lupin caught them all deftly, then moved into the room, staring at Black, who still had Crookshanks lying protectively across his chest.

I stepped in front of Harry and pushed him behind me as he merely stood there, looking suddenly empty. Maybe because he hadn't done it. His nerve had failed him. Black was going to be handed back to the dementors. I pressed my back against his chest and felt him wrap his arms around my waist as if that would keep him on his feet.

Then Lupin spoke, in a very tense voice.

"Where is he, Sirius?"

Harry and I glanced at Lupin. We didn't understand what Lupin meant. Who was Lupin talking about? We turned to look at Black again.

Black's face was quite expressionless. For a few seconds, he didn't move at all. Then, very slowly,
he raised his empty hand and pointed straight at Ron. Mystified, Harry glanced around at Ron, who looked bewildered. I looked at my redhead friend too then a few pieces started to click inside my head.

"But then..." Lupin muttered, staring at Black so intently it seemed he was trying to read his mind, "...why hasn't he shown himself before now? Unless—" Lupin's eyes suddenly widened, as though he saw something beyond Black, something none of us could see, "— unless he was the one... unless you switched... without telling me?"

Very slowly, his sunken gaze never leaving Lupin's face, Black nodded.

"Professor," Harry interrupted loudly, "what's going on—"

But he never finished the question, because apparently what we saw next made his voice die in his throat. Lupin was lowering his wand, gazing fixed at Black. The Professor walked to Black's side, seized his hand, pulled him to his feet so that Crookshanks fell to the floor, and embraced Black like a brother.

"NO! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!" Hermione screamed.

Lupin let go of Black and turned to her. She had raised herself off the floor and was pointing at Lupin, wild-eyed. "You— you—"

"Hermione—"

"— you and him!"

"Hermione, calm down—"

"I didn't tell anyone!" Hermione shrieked, now looking at me. "Just like Delilah asked! I've been covering up for you—"

"Hermione, listen to me, please," Lupin shouted. "I can explain—"

I could feel Harry shaking against me, not with fear, but with a fresh wave of fury.

"I trusted you," he shouted at Lupin, tightening his grip on me. His voice was wavering, out of control, "and all this time you've been his friend!"

"You're wrong," said Lupin. "I haven't been Sirius's friend, but I am now— Let me explain..."

"NO!" Hermione screamed. "Harry, don't trust him, he's been helping Black get into the castle, he wants you dead too— he's a werewolf!"

I deadpanned, utterly unsure of what to think anymore.

Were they being serious— pun totally intended, despite the dire situation— or was this a fuckin' joke?

I tell them I'm a freakin' bloodsucking, hairy hybrid who is very dangerous and they hug me, but when they find out about a man being a simple werewolf, they freak out. I am way more dangerous than him! I mean, sure I can control myself, and I don't go ballistic at every full moon, but I don't even need to phase to snap someone's neck.

There was a ringing silence. Everyone's eyes were now on Lupin, who looked remarkably calm, though slightly pale. I was trying to remember why, but I kept coming up blank; I blame my lack of
"Not at all up to your usual standard, Hermione," he said. "Only one out of three, I'm afraid. I have not been helping Sirius get into the castle, and I certainly don't want Harry dead." An odd shiver passed over his face. "But I won't deny that I am a werewolf."

Ron made a valiant effort to get up again but fell back with a whimper of pain. Lupin made his way toward him, looking concerned, but Ron gasped, "Get away from me, werewolf!"

"Ron!" I said angrily, but still weakly. There was one short beat of total silence as I balled my hands up into fists and clenched my jaw, shaking my head.

"You have no right to correct me," Ron bellowed.

I found I could not move a muscle, or even to blink. I waited to see if he would calm down, but then —

"You knew all along, didn't you? You're a traitor!" he screamed.

I was furious now, and I was all alone with my hatred and the pain that was so bad it was like being tortured. That one simple word brought back so many awful memories; I had been a traitor once, when I joined Proditoreum, but I no longer was. Still, remembering that pained me to no end by simply reminding me how much I had lost because of that one betrayal. It made me think further back, when I ran as I was told to and left my family to die. Both. The pain was immense within me. Agonizing. It felt like being dragged slowly across a bed of razor blades.

Pain so bad you'd take death with a smile just to get away from it.

The heat unlocked my frozen muscles, and I pulled myself away from Harry's grip. I didn't know what I was doing; I stood there, trembling, ready to bolt for the very first escape that I could think of as all I saw was red. I could feel the crimson liquid pouring into my irises, my skin burning up yet freezing up like a corpse, my hair going thicker and darker— that was how much a single one of my memories could affect me. I walked to the other side of the room, in the corner, and leaned against the wall, taking a deep breath to calm myself down, staring up at the opposite wall and never taking my eyes off of it. I needed space. I needed to breathe.

No had said anything.

Then, with an obvious mountful of effort, Lupin turned to Hermione and said, "How long have you known?"

"Ages," Hermione whispered. "Since we did Professor Snape's essay..."

"He'll be delighted," Lupin uttered plainly. "He assigned that essay hoping someone would realize what my symptoms meant... Did you check the lunar chart and realize that I was always ill at the full moon? Or did you realize that the boggart changed into the moon when it saw me?"

"Both," Hermione said quietly.

Lupin forced a laugh. "You're one of the cleverest witches of your age I've ever met, Hermione."

"I'm not," Hermione whispered. "If I'd been a bit cleverer, I'd have told everyone what you are!"

"But they already know," said Lupin. "At least, the staff do." From the corner of my eyes, I saw him turn in my direction. "How long have you known, Delilah?"
I gave him a sideways glance and shrugged. "Since I saw you on the train," I mumbled, feeling no need to hide; I figured if they'd been so close to my mother, they probably knew of her magical inheritance— ergo, they'd have some idea of what I am and can do.

They all looked at me, stunned by my revelation, Ron being the first to snap out of his shock.

"Dumbledore hired you when he knew you were a werewolf." Ron gasped. "Is he mad?"

"Some of the staff thought so," said Lupin. "He had to work very hard to convince certain teachers that I'm trustworthy --"

"AND HE WAS WRONG!" Harry yelled. "YOU'VE BEEN HELPING HIM ALL THE TIME!" He was pointing at Black, who suddenly crossed to the four-poster bed and sank onto it, his face hidden in one shaking hand. Crookshanks leapt up beside him and stepped onto his lap, purring. Ron edged away from both of them, dragging his leg.

"I have not been helping Sirius," said Lupin. "If you'll give me a chance, I'll explain. Look—"

He separated Harry's, Ron's and Hermione's wands and threw each back to its owner; Harry caught his, stunned.

"There," said Lupin, sticking his own wand back into his belt. "You're armed, we're not. Now, will you listen?"

"If you haven't been helping him," Harry said, with a furious glance at Black, "how did you know he was here?"

"The map," said Lupin. "The Marauder's Map. I was in my office examining it—"

"You know how to work it?" Harry said suspiciously.

"Of course I know how to work it," said Lupin, waving his hand impatiently. "I helped write it."

Realization slapped me across the face. "... you're Moony."

Lupin nodded. "That was my friends' nickname for me at school."

Sirius sported a smug grin at his words. "I came up with it," he said proudly.

I deadpanned. "How can you afford to be smug right now?" I uttered plainly. "... or proud?"

Completely ignoring the two of us, Harry looked at Lupin with wide eyes. "You wrote—"

"The important thing is, I was watching it carefully this evening, because I had an idea that you, Ron, Hermione and Delilah might try and sneak out of the castle to visit Hagrid before his hippogriff was executed. And I was right, wasn't I?"

"I feel I should be insulted by the claiming implication that I'm impulsive..." I mumbled to myself. "But then again, I did jump off a cliff having no idea how to swim..."

"You don't know how to swim?" Hermione uttered surprised, after having overheard my mumbles.

I shook my head in reply and shrugged listlessly at the trivial, fun fact about myself. I turned my gaze back to Lupin and found he had started to pace up and down, for a moment, before looking at us.

"You might have been wearing your father's old cloak, Harry—"
"How d'you know about the cloak?"

"Seriously?" Hermione uttered breathily. "I'm surprised no one else knows or has confiscated it..."

"I know right—"

"You numbnuts, shut up!!!" Ron hissed at us.

Huh, that's a first; usually, Hermione's doing the scolding...

"The number of times I saw James disappearing under it..." said Lupin, waving an impatient hand again. "The point is, even if you're wearing an Invisibility Cloak, you still show up on the Marauder's Map. I watched you cross the grounds and enter Hagrid's hut. Twenty minutes later, you left Hagrid, and set off back toward the castle." That sounds like something a stalker would submit so elaborately. "But you were now accompanied by somebody else."

"What?" said Harry. "No, we weren't!"

"I couldn't believe my eyes," said Lupin, still pacing, and ignoring Harry's interruption. "I thought the map must be malfunctioning. How could he be with you?"

"No one was with us!" said Harry.

"And then I saw another dot, moving fast toward you, labeled Sirius Black... I saw him collide with you; I watched as he pulled two of you into the Whomping Willow—"

"One of us!" Ron snarled. I straightened up my position and walked back to stand beside Harry, not caring that my appearance hadn't changed back.

I looked at Ron and shook my head. "No, Ron," I said. "Two of you."

Lupin had stopped his pacing, his eyes moving over Ron. "Do you think I could have a look at the rat?" he said evenly.

"What?" said Ron. "What's Scabbers got to do with it?"

"Everything," I said.

"Could I see him, please?" Lupin asked.

Ron hesitated, then put a hand inside his robes. Scabbers emerged, thrashing desperately; Ron had to seize his long bald tail to stop him escaping. Crookshanks stood up on Black's leg and made a soft hissing noise.

Lupin moved closer to Ron. He seemed to be holding his breath as he gazed intently at Scabbers.

"What?" Ron said again, holding Scabbers close to him, looking scared. "What's my rat got to do with anything?"

"That's not a rat," croaked Sirius Black suddenly.

"What d'you mean— of course he's a rat—"

"No, he's not," said Lupin quietly. "He's a wizard."

I gasped as, once again, realization slapped me across the face. "Oh, my goddess..." I whispered.
Black and Lupin nodded. "An Animagus," said Black, "by the name of Peter Pettigrew."
Stories and Realizations

3rd person P.O.V.

It took a few seconds for the absurdity of this statement to sink in. Then Ron voiced what Harry was thinking.

"You're both mental."

"Ridiculous!" said Hermione faintly.

"Peter Pettigrew's dead!" said Harry. "He killed him twelve years ago!"

"I meant to," he growled, his face twitching convulsively while he bared his yellow teeth, "but little Peter got the better of me... not this time, though!"

And Crookshanks was thrown to the floor as Black lunged at Scabbers; Ron yelled with pain as Black's weight fell on his broken leg.

"Sirius, NO!" Lupin yelled, launching himself forwards and dragging Black away from Ron again, "WAIT!"

"I did my waiting!" Black shouted. "Twelve years of it! In Azkaban! Trust me; you wouldn't have lasted a week!"

Lupin sighed. "You can't do it just like that— they need to understand— we've got to explain—"

"We can explain afterwards!" snarled Black, trying to throw Lupin off.

One hand was still clawing the air as it tried to reach Scabbers, who was squealing like a piglet, scratching Ron's face and neck as he tried to escape.

"They've— got— a— right— to— know—— everything!" Lupin panted, still trying to restrain Black. "Ron's kept him as a pet! There are parts of it even I don't understand, and Harry and Del— you owe Harry and Delfah the truth, Sirius!"

Black stopped struggling, though his hollowed eyes were still fixed on Scabbers, who was clamped tightly under Ron's bitten, scratched, and bleeding hands.

"All right, then," Black said, without taking his eyes off the rat.

"Tell them whatever you like. But make it quick, Remus. I want to commit the murder I was imprisoned for..."

"You're nutters, both of you," said Ron shakily, looking round at Harry and Hermione for support. "I've had enough of this. I'm off."

He tried to heave himself up on his good leg, but Lupin raised his wand again, pointing it at Scabbers.

"You're going to hear me out, Ron," he said quietly. "Just keep a tight hold on Peter while you listen."

"HE'S NOT PETER! HE'S SCABBERS!" Ron yelled, trying to fore the rat back into his front
pocket, but Scabbers was fighting too hard; Ron swayed and overbalanced, and Harry caught him and pushed him back down to the bed.

Then, ignoring Black, Harry turned to Lupin. "There were witnesses who saw Pettigrew die," he said. "A whole street full of them..."

"They didn't see what they thought they saw!" said Black savagely, still watching Scabbers struggling in Ron's hands.

"Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter," said Lupin, nodding. "I believed it myself— until I saw the map tonight. Because the Marauder's map never lies... Peter's alive. Ron's holding him, Harry."

Harry looked down at Ron, and as their eyes met, they agreed, silently: Black and Lupin were both out of their minds. Their story made no sense whatsoever. How could Scabbers be Peter Pettigrew? Azkaban must have unhinged Black after all— but why was Lupin playing along with him?

Then Hermione spoke, in a trembling, would-be calm sort of voice, as though trying to will Professor Lupin to talk sensibly. "But Professor Lupin... Scabbers can't be Pettigrew... it just can't be true, you know it can't..."

"Why can't it be true?" Lupin said calmly, as though they were in class, and Hermione had simply spotted a problem in an experiment with grindylows.

"Because... because people would know if Peter Pettigrew had been an Animagus. We did Animagi in class with Professor McGonagall. And I looked them up when I did my homework— the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there's a register showing what animal they become, and their markings and things... and I went and looked Professor McGonagall up on the register, and there have been only seven Animagi this century, and Pettigrew's name wasn't on the list."

Harry had barely had time to marvel inwardly at the effort Hermione put into her homework when Lupin started to laugh.

"Right again, Hermione!" he said.

"But," Delilah spoke up, bringing everyone's attention upon her, as she stared at the rat, with an intense gaze. "If his name wasn't on the list... and if what these two are implying is true... then— he was simply unregistered."

"You've got it; the Ministry never knew that here used to be four unregistered Animagi running around Hogwarts," said Lupin.

Delilah internally groaned. She could guess who three of them were, but— Who the hell was the fourth one?

"If you're going to tell them the story, get a move on, Remus." Black kept watching Scabbers' every desperate move. "I've waited twelve years; I'm not going to wait much longer," he repeated.

"All right... but you'll need to help me, Sirius," said Lupin, "I only know how it began..." Lupin broke off. There had been a loud creak behind him.

The bedroom door had opened of its own accord. All six of them stared at it. Then Lupin strode toward it and looked out into the landing.

"No one there..."
"This place is haunted!" said Ron.

Delilah felt it. That new, slightly confusing aura. But as she tried to catch a scent, she only felt faint and nauseous in anticipation. Something was going to happen, and, now, she wasn't exactly sure if she could even rely on her visions as they weren't completely accurate anymore.

"It's not," said Lupin, still looking at the door in a puzzled way. "The Shrieking Shack was never haunted... The screams and howls the villagers used to hear were made by me."

He pushed his graying hair out of his eyes, thought for a moment then said, "That's where all of this starts— with my becoming a werewolf. None of this could have happened if I hadn't been bitter... and if I hadn't been so foolhardy..."

He looked sober and tired.

Ron started to interrupt, but Hermione, said, "Shh!" She was watching Lupin very intently.

"I was a very small boy when I received the bite. My parents tried everything, but in those days there was no cure. The potion that Professor Snape has been making for me is a very recent discovery. It makes me safe, you see. As long as I take it in the week, preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform... I'm able to curl up in my office, a harmless wolf, and wait for the moon to wane again."

"Before the Wolfsbane Potion was discovered, however, I became a fully fledged monster once a month. It seemed impossible that I would be able to come to Hogwarts. Other parents weren't likely to want their children exposed to me. But then Dumbledore became Headmaster, and he was sympathetic. He said that as long as we took certain precautions, there was no reason I shouldn't come to school...."

Lupin sighed and looked directly at Harry. "I told you, months ago, that the Whomping Willow was planted the year I came to Hogwarts. The truth is that it was planted because I came to Hogwarts. This house—" Lupin looked miserably around the room. "— the tunnel that leads to it— they were built for my use. Once a month, I was smuggled out of the castle, into this place, to transform. The tree was placed at the tunnel mouth to stop anyone coming across me while I was dangerous."

Delilah felt sympathetic; she had experienced phasing for the first time, it wasn't exactly a relaxing massage. Harry couldn't see where this story was going, but he was listening raptly all the same. The only sound apart from Lupin's voice was Scabbers' frightened squeaking.

"My transformations in those days were— were terrible. Turning into a werewolf is harrowing. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and scratched myself instead. The villagers heard the noise and the screaming and thought they were hearing particularly violent spirits. Dumbledore encouraged the rumor... Even now, when the house has been silent for years, the villagers don't dare approach it...."

"But apart from my transformations, I was happier than I had ever been in my life. For the first time, I had friends, four great friends. Sirius Black... Peter Pettigrew... your father, Harry— James Potter." He glanced toward Delilah and gave a slightly warm yet tight smile. "And, of course, your mother, Delilah: Ella-Grace Dawn."

Delilah felt her heart stop at the mentioning of the name. Hearing no word coming out of their best friend, Ron and Hermione both risked a glance toward the young hybrid and saw her blink slowly, a blank look taking over her face.
She then sighed, running a hand through her hair. *I should've known my mother would choose to get involved in such things, and put on a cover, passing as one of the guys to not give herself away.*

"Now, three of my friends could hardly fail to notice that I disappeared once a month. I made up all sorts of stories. I told them my mother was ill, and that I had to go home to see her... I was terrified they would desert me the moment they found out what I was. But Ella knew. From the start."

"I know what you are, Remus, and I can tell you now, you're not a monster."

Remus' face turned grim. "If you know what I am, then you know that's not true."

She frowned, lips pursed, then sighed, running a hand through her hair. "You wanna call yourself a monster? Fine then, but let me tell you something, Remus."

If he knew what she was going on about, he would've replied long ago, but this girl was just so unpredictable. She smiled, whether it was at his puzzlement or an inside joke, he could not tell. Tilting her head to the side, lips pursed, she looked at him with intense eyes as she leaned her back onto the stone wall, propping one leg backward up on it while crossing her arms over her chest.

"She gave me hope, reassured me that they would never do such a thing..."

"People adore monsters, Remus. They fill their songs and stories with them. They define themselves in relation to them. You know what a monster is? Power. Power and choice. Monsters make choices. Monsters shape the world. Monsters force us to become stronger, smarter, better."

She let her head fall back and rest against the wall as she absentmindedly looked up at the ceiling. "They sift the weak from the strong and provide a forge for the steeling of souls. Even as we curse monsters, we admire them. Seek to become them, in some ways." Her eyes became distant for a moment before falling back upon him. "If you'd chosen what you do on every full moon, then you'd be a monster. But you never have, and you're not."

She paused for a moment, pursing her lips, before standing straighter, a small smile lighting up her face. "You are human. As long as you have a beating heart, a breath— feelings, you're human. And even if you weren't, I wouldn't care," she said, stepping closer, "because it's who we are inside that makes us what we are, and not the other way around."

"And if it's James and the others you're worried about, they won't reject you or think of you as a monster. Look, I know James can be very mischievous, and arrogant and even boastful. And I know how he often bullies and jinxes other students, particularly Severus, even being the arrogant little prick he is, he still has many positive qualities. Like... like despite the fact that he's a pure-blood, he disagrees with the whole blood purity crap, and— and he doesn't like any prejudice towards Muggleborns, and he doesn't hold prejudice towards anyone for what they are. Trust me, Remus, I would know; I've known him since we were in diapers. He would never think of you any differently than he does now if you came to tell him what you are. I don't know Sirius or Peter very well, but I can tell they cherish very much the friendship they share with you; not even your furry little problem would be able to change the way they've looked at you for the past year."

"Especially not James as they had known each other far longer than we had..."

"How do you know?" Remus asked, voice trembling.

"But, even then I paid no mind to it and took her word..."

Ella gave him a small, lopsided grin and shrugged. "I don't really know... I just do. Either way, you can trust me when I tell you they will look at you as you are— Remus John Lupin, Second Year
"Hogwarts student—"

"How do you know my middle—"

"Don't ask," she cut him off before resuming what she was telling him. "They will see you as who you are, and not the monster you have deemed yourself to be. And even if they did, there's not really much to worry about; there are far, far worse things to be than a monster. Trust me on that."

"Eventually, they, like you, Hermione, worked out the truth..." A small smile made its way back onto his face. "And they didn't desert me at all. Instead, they did something for me that would make my transformations not only bearable but the best times of my life. They became Animagi."

"My dad too?" said Harry, astounded.

"Yes, indeed," said Lupin. "It took them the best part of three years to work out how to do it. Ella, your father, and Sirius here were the cleverest students in the school, and lucky they were because the Animagus transformation can go horribly wrong— one reason the Ministry keeps a close watch on those attempting to do it. Peter needed all the help he could get from the three. Finally, in our fifth year, they managed it... well, them three; Ella had got it done long before we even started our first year. They could each turn into a different animal at will."

"But how did that help you?" said Hermione, sounding puzzled.

"They couldn't keep me company as humans, so they kept me company as animals," said Lupin. "A werewolf is only a danger to people. They sneaked out of the castle every month under James' Invisibility Cloak. They transformed... Peter, as the smallest, could slip beneath the Willow's attacking branches and touch the knot that freezes it. They would then slip down the tunnel and join me. Under their influence, I became less dangerous. My body was still wolfish, but my mind seemed to become less so while I was with them."

"Hurry up, Remus," snarled Black, who was still watching Scabbers with a horrible sort of hunger on his face.

"I'm getting there, Sirius, I'm getting there... well, highly exciting possibilities were open to us now that we could all transform. Soon we were leaving the Shrieking Shack and roaming the school grounds and the village by night. Sirius and James transformed into such large animals; they were able to keep a werewolf in check. I doubt whether any Hogwarts students ever found out more about the Hogwarts grounds and Hogsmeade than we did... And that's how we came to write the Marauder's Map, and sign it with our nicknames. Sirius is Padfoot. Peter is Wormtail. Ella was Phantom. James was Prongs."

"Of course Mom would choose such a name," Delilah muttered to herself.

"What sort of animal—" Harry began, but Hermione cut him off.

"That was still really dangerous! Running around in the dark with a werewolf! What if you'd given the others the slip, and bitten somebody?"

"A thought that still haunts me," said Lupin heavily. "And there were near misses, many of them. We laughed about them afterwards. We were young, thoughtless— carried away with our own cleverness."

"I sometimes felt guilty about betraying Dumbledore's trust, of course... he had admitted me to Hogwarts when no other headmaster would have done so, and he had no idea I was breaking the
rules he had set down for my own and others' safety. He never knew I had led four fellow students into becoming Animagi illegally. But I always managed to forget my guilty feelings every time we sat down to plan our next month's adventure. And I haven't changed..."

Lupin's face had hardened, and there was self-disgust in his voice. "All this year, I have been battling with myself, wondering whether I should tell Dumbledore that Sirius was an Animagus. But I didn't do it. Why? Because I was too cowardly. It would have meant admitting that I'd betrayed his trust while I was at school, admitting that I'd led others along with me... and Dumbledore's trust has meant everything to me. He let me into Hogwarts as a boy, and he gave me a job when I have been shunned all my adult life, unable to find paid work because of what I am. And so I convinced myself that Sirius was getting into the school using dark arts he learned from Voldemort, that being an Animagus had nothing to do with it... so, in a way, Snape's been right about me all along."

"Snape?" said Black harshly, taking his eyes off Scabbers; for the first time in minutes and looking up at Lupin. "What's Snape got to do with it?"

"He's here, Sirius," said Lupin heavily. "He's teaching here as well." He looked up at Harry, Delilah, Ron, and Hermione.

"Professor Snape was at school with us. He fought very hard against my appointment to the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. He has been telling Dumbledore all year that I am not to be trusted. He has his reasons... you see, Sirius here played a trick on him which nearly killed him, a trick which involved me—"

Black made a derisive noise.

"It served him right," he sneered. "Sneaking around, trying to find out what we were up to... hoping he could get us expelled...."

"Severus was very interested in where I went every month," Lupin told the quartet. "We were in the same year, you know, and we— er— didn't like each other very much. He especially disliked James, even more Sirius. Jealous, I think, of their talent on the Quidditch field... anyway Snape had seen me crossing the grounds with Madam Pomfrey one evening as she led me toward the Whomping Willow to transform. Sirius thought it would be— er— amusing, to tell Snape all he had to do was prod the knot on the tree trunk with a long stick, and he'd be able to get in after me. Well, of course, Snape tried it— if he'd got as far as this house, he'd have met a fully grown werewolf— but your father, who'd heard what Sirius had done, went after Snape and pulled him back, at great risk to his life... Snape glimpsed me, though, at the end of the tunnel. He was forbidden by Dumbledore to tell anybody, but from that time on he knew what I was...."

"So that's why Snape doesn't like you," said Harry slowly, "because he thought you were in on the joke?"

"That's right," sneered a cold voice from the wall behind Lupin.

Severus Snape was pulling off the Invisibility Cloak, his wand pointing, directly at Lupin.

Delilah blinked owlishly. Hermione screamed. Black leaped to his feet. Harry felt as though he'd received a massive electric shock.

"I found this at the base of the Whomping Willow," said Snape, throwing the cloak aside, careful to keep this wand pointing directly at Lupin's chest. "Very useful, Potter, I thank you...."

Snape was slightly breathless, but his face was full of suppressed triumph. "You're wondering,
perhaps, how I knew you were here?" he said, his eyes glittering. "I've just been to your office, Lupin. You forgot to take your potion tonight, so I took a gobletfull along. And very lucky I did... lucky for me, I mean. Lying on your desk was a certain map. One glance at it told me all I needed to know. I saw you running along this passageway and out of sight."

"Severus—" Lupin began, but Snape overrode him.

"I've told the headmaster again and again that you're helping your old friend Black into the castle, Lupin, and here's the proof. Not even I dreamed you would have the nerve to use this old place as your hideout—"

"Severus, you're making a mistake," said Lupin urgently. "You haven't heard everything— I can explain— Sirius is not here to kill Harry, nor Delilah—"

And once again I'm brought up into this, Delilah thought with a groan.

"Two more for Azkaban tonight," said Snape, his eyes now gleaming fanatically. "I shall be interested to see how Dumbledore takes this... He was quite convinced you were harmless, you know, Lupin... a tame werewolf—"

"You fool," said Lupin softly. "Is a schoolboy grudge worth putting an innocent man back inside Azkaban?"

BANG!

Thin, snakelike cords burst from the end of Snape's wand and twisted themselves around Lupin's mouth, wrists, and ankles; he overbalanced and fell to the floor, unable to move. With a roar of rage, Black started toward Snape, but Snape pointed his wand straight between Black's eyes.

"Give me a reason," he whispered. "Give me a reason to do it, and I swear I will."

Black stopped dead. It would have been impossible to say which face showed more hatred.

Harry stood there, paralyzed, not knowing what to do or whom to believe. He glanced around at Delilah, Ron, and Hermione. Delilah had frozen as well, hesitation clear all over her face. Ron looked just as confused as he did, still fighting to keep a hold on the struggling Scabbers.

Hermione, however, took an uncertain step toward Snape and said, in a very breathless voice, "Professor Snape— i-it wouldn't hurt to hear what they've got to say, w— would it?"

"Miss Granger, you are already facing suspension from this school," Snape spat. "You, Potter, and Weasley are out-of-bounds, in the company of a convicted murderer and a werewolf. For once in your life, hold your tongue."

Delilah frowned. She did not like the tone he was using on her best friend. Taking it upon herself to back up the brunette, she stepped forward, from where she stood far away from the group and spoke up.

"But, Professor, if there was a mistake—"

"KEEP QUIET, YOU STUPID GIRL!" Snape shouted, looking suddenly quite deranged. "DON'T TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!"

A few sparks shot out of the end of his wand, which was still pointed at Black's face. Black stole a glance toward Delilah and turned back to Snape with a harsh glare when he'd caught the look on her
face. She stood there, practically shaking in rage as she glared at Snape as well. No one speaks to her like that. No one orders her around or tells her she's in the wrong. Albeit her instant fury from submerging from the Alpha within her, she did nothing but subtly breathe in deeply to calm herself down when she felt Hermione grab onto her wrist from what seemed to be out of instinct.

"Vengeance is very sweet," Snape breathed. "How I hoped I would be the one to catch you...."

"The joke's on you again, Severus," Black snarled. "As long as this boy brings his rat up to the castle —" He jerked his head at Ron. "—I'll come quietly...."

"Up to the castle?" said Snape silkily. "I don't think we need to go that far. All I have to do is call the Dementors once we get out of the Willow. They'll be very pleased to see you, Black... pleased enough to give you a little kiss, I daresay... I—"

Harry noticed that what little color there was in Black's face left it. He also felt Delilah, who was once again standing right behind him, go as rigid as a statue.

"You— you've got to hear me out," he croaked. "The rat— look at the rat—"

But there was a mad glint in Snape's eyes that Harry had never seen before. He seemed beyond reason.

"Come on, all of you," he said. He clicked his fingers, and the ends of the cords that bound Lupin flew to his hands. "I'll drag the werewolf. Perhaps the Dementors will have a kiss for him too—"

Before he knew what he was doing, Harry had crossed the room in three strides and blocked the door, Delilah automatically following him and standing in front of him in a subtle protective stance, her arms crossed over her chest.

"Hawkins—" Oh, I know he did not just call me that. "—Potter, get out of the way—"

"The name's Black. Delilah Dawn Black," the young hybrid cut him off in a cool tone. The man before her stiffened a tad bit, a glint of surprise glazing through his eyes, though it left as soon as it came, a glare replacing it.

"You're in enough trouble already," he snarled. "If I hadn't been here to save your skin—"

"Professor Lupin could have killed us about a hundred times this year," Harry said. "We've been alone with him loads of times, having defense lessons against the Dementors. If he was helping Black, why didn't he just finish us off then?"

And that leaves a big burn in your face, Snape.

"Don't ask me to fathom the way a werewolf's mind works," hissed Snape. "Get out of the way, Potter."

"YOU'RE PATHETIC!" Harry yelled. "JUST BECAUSE THEY MADE A FOOL OF YOU AT SCHOOL YOU WON'T EVEN LISTEN—"

"SILENCE! I WILL NOT BE SPOKEN TO LIKE THAT!" Snape shrieked, looking madder than ever. "Like father, like son, Potter! I have just saved your neck; you should be thanking me on bended knee! You would have been well served if he'd killed you! You'd have died like your father, too arrogant to believe you might be mistaken in Black— now get out of the way, or I will make you. GET OUT OF THE WAY!"
Without a second thought, Delilah made her move; before Snape could take even one step toward then, she had raised her wand.

"Expelliarmus!" she thought— except she wasn't the only one to have thought of that move, so it seems, as there were multiple voices who had shouted the same spell. There was a blast that made the door rattle on its hinges; Snape was lifted off his feet and slammed into the wall, then slid down it to the floor, a trickle of blood oozing from under his hair. He had been knocked out.

Delilah looked around. Harry, from behind her, and Ron and Hermione had tried to disarm Snape at the same moment. Snape's wand soared in a high arc and landed on the bed next to Crookshanks.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Black, looking at Harry and Delilah. "You should have left him to me...."

"Well, if we take the fact that you had a wand pointed at your head into consideration... yeah, I don't think you could've done anything," said Delilah.

Black could not help himself from smiling at that. This was probably the first time in the entire night his daughter spoke to him. His daughter. The thought brought warmth to his chest.

Harry, on the other hand, avoided Black's eyes. He wasn't sure, even now, that he'd done the right thing.

"We attacked a teacher... We attacked a teacher..." Hermione whimpered, staring at the lifeless Snape with frightened eyes. "Oh, we're going to be in so much trouble—"

Lupin was struggling against his bonds. Black bent down quickly and untied him. Lupin straightened up, rubbing his arms where the ropes had cut into them.

"Thank you, Harry, Delilah," he said.

"I'm still not saying I believe you," he told Lupin.

"I'm neutral in this whole shit until I see the truth," Delilah said, putting her wand in her back pocket.

"Then it's time we offered you some proof," said Lupin. "You, boy— give me Peter, please. Now."

Ron clutched Scabbers closer to his chest.

"Come off it," he said weakly. "Are you trying to say he broke out of Azkaban just to get his hands on Scabbers? I mean..." He looked up at Delilah, Harry and Hermione for support, "Okay, say Pettigrew could turn into a rat— there are millions of rats— how's he supposed to know which one he's after if he was locked up in Azkaban?"

"He's got a point," Delilah muttered.

Lupin nodded in agreement. "That is a fair question," he said, turning to Black and frowning slightly. "How did you find out where he was?"

Black put one of his claw-like hands inside his robes and took out a crumpled piece of paper, which he smoothed flat and held out to show the others. It was the photograph of Ron and his family that had appeared in the Daily Prophet the previous summer, and there, on Ron's shoulder, was Scabbers.

"How did you get this?" Lupin asked Black, thunderstruck.

"Fudge," said Black. "When he came to inspect Azkaban last year, he gave me his paper. And there
was Peter, on the front page on this boy's shoulder... I knew him at once... how many times had I seen him transform? And the caption said the boy would be going back to Hogwarts... to where Delilah and Harry were...

Delilah blinked, stunned. *He's known about me all along?*

"My God," said Lupin softly, staring from Scabbers to the picture in the paper and back again. "His front paw..."

"What about it?" said Ron defiantly.

"He's missing a toe, isn't he?" said Black.

"So what?" Ron demanded.

"Of course," Lupin breathed. "So simple... so brilliant... he cut it off himself?"

"Just before he transformed," said Black. "When I cornered him, he yelled for the whole street to hear that I'd betrayed Lily and James. Then, before I could curse him, he blew apart the street with the wand behind his back, killed everyone within twenty feet of himself— and sped down into the sewer with the other rats...."

"Didn't you ever hear, Ron?" said Lupin. "The biggest bit of Peter they found was his finger."

Black sneered, glaring at the rat. "Dirty coward cut it off so everyone would think he was dead."

Of course, Ron refused to believe any of it to be true. "Look, Scabbers probably had a fight with another rat or something! He's been in my family for ages, right—"

"Twelve years, in fact," said Lupin.

"Twelve years, indeed," said Black. "A curiously long life for a common garden rat, don't you think?"

"We— we've been taking good care of him!" said Ron, making Delilah roll her eyes.

"Not looking too good at the moment, though, is he?" said Lupin. "I'd guess he's been losing weight ever since he heard Sirius was on the loose again...."

"He's been scared of that mad cat!" said Ron, nodding toward Crookshanks, who was still purring on the bed.

*But that wasn't right,* Harry thought suddenly. Scabbers had been looking ill before he met Crookshanks... ever since Ron's return from Egypt... since Black had escaped...

"This cat isn't mad," said Black hoarsely. He reached out a bony hand and stroked Crookshanks's fluffy head. "He's the most intelligent of his kind I've ever met. He recognized Peter for what he was right away. And when he met me, he knew I was no dog. It was a while before he trusted me... Finally, I managed to communicate to him what I was after, and he's been helping me."

"What do you mean?" breathed Hermione.

"He tried to bring Peter to me, but couldn't... so he stole the passwords into Gryffindor Tower for me... As I understand it, he took them from a boy's bedside table...."  

Harry's brain seemed to be sagging under the weight of what he was hearing. It was absurd... and
"But Peter got wind of what was going on and ran for it." croaked Black. "This cat— Crookshanks, did you call him?— told me Peter had left blood on the sheets... I supposed he bit himself... Well, faking his own death had worked once."

These words jolted Harry to his senses.

"And why did he fake his death?" he said furiously. "Because he knew you were about to kill him like you killed my parents!"

"No," said Lupin, "Harry—"

"And now you've come to finish him off!"

"Yes, I have," said Black, with an evil look at Scabbers.

"Then I should've let Snape take you!" Harry shouted.

"Harry," said Lupin hurriedly, "don't you see? All this time we've thought Sirius betrayed your parents, and Peter tracked him down— but it was the other way around, don't you see? Peter betrayed your mother and father— Sirius tracked Peter down—"

"THAT'S NOT TRUE!" Harry yelled. Delilah, startled, stumbled back a bit. "HE WAS THEIR SECRET-KEEPER! HE SAID SO BEFORE YOU TURNED UP. HE SAID HE KILLED THEM!" He was pointing at Black, who shook his head slowly; the sunken eyes were suddenly over bright.

"Harry... I as good as killed them," he croaked. "I persuaded Lily and James to change to Peter at the last moment, persuaded them to use him as Secret-Keeper instead of me... I'm to blame, I know it... The night they died, I'd arranged to check on Peter, make sure he was still safe, but when I arrived at his hiding place, he'd gone. Yet there was no sign of a struggle. It didn't feel right. I was scared. I set out for your parents' house straight away. And when I saw their house, destroyed, and their bodies... I realized what Peter must've done... what I'd done...."

His voice broke. He turned away.

"Enough of this," said Lupin, and there was a steely note in his voice Delilah had never heard before. "There's one certain way to prove what really happened. Ron, give me that rat."

"What are you going to do with him if I give him to you?" Ron asked Lupin tensely.

"Force him to show himself," said Lupin. "If he really is a rat, it won't hurt him."

Ron hesitated. Then at long last, he held out Scabbers and Lupin took him. Scabbers began to squeak without stopping, twisting and turning, his tiny black eyes bulging in his head. "Ready, Sirius?" said Lupin.

Black had already retrieved Snape's wand from the bed. He approached Lupin and the struggling rat, and his wet eyes suddenly seemed to be burning in his face.

"Together?" he said quietly.

"I think so," said Lupin, holding Scabbers tightly in one hand and his wand in the other. "On the count of three. One— two— THREE!"
A flash of blue-white light erupted from both wands; for a moment, Scabbers was frozen in midair, his small gray form twisting madly—Ron yelled—the rat fell and hit the floor. There was another blinding flash of light and then—

It was like watching a sped-up film of a growing tree. A head was shooting upward from the ground; limbs were sprouting; a moment later, a man was standing where Scabbers had been, cringing and wringing his hands. Crookshanks was spitting and snarling on the bed; the hair on his back was standing up.

He was a very short man, hardly taller than Harry and Hermione. His thin, colorless hair was unkempt, and there was a large bald patch on top. He had the shrunken appearance of a plump man who has lost a lot of weight in a short time. His skin looked grubby, almost like Scabbers' fur, and something of the rat lingered around his pointed nose and his very small, watery eyes. He looked around at them all, his breathing fast and shallow. Harry saw his eyes dart to the door and back again.

"Well, hello, Peter," said Lupin pleasantly, as though rats frequently erupted into old school friends around him. "Long time, no see."

Delilah had to look away to stop herself from throwing up. "Well, that was rather disturbing," she muttered under her breath.

"S-Sirius... R-Remus..." Even Pettigrew's voice was squeaky. Again, his eyes darted toward the door. "My friends... my old friends..."

Black's wand arm rose, but Lupin seized him around the wrist, gave him a warning took, then turned again to Pettigrew, his voice light and casual.

"We've been having a little chat, Peter, about what happened the night Lily and James died. You might have missed the finer points while you were squeaking around down there on the bed—"

"Remus," gasped Pettigrew, and Harry could see beads of sweat breaking out over his pasty face, "you don't believe him, do you... He tried to kill me, Remus...."

"So we've heard," said Lupin, more coldly. "I'd like to clear up one or two little matters with you, Peter, if you'll be so—"

"He's come to try and kill me again!" Pettigrew squeaked suddenly, pointing at Black, and Harry saw that he used his middle finger, because his index was missing. "He killed Lily and James, even the family of the woman he loved!" That brought a growl from both Delilah and Sirius. "And now he's going to kill me too... You've got to help me, Remus...."

Black's face looked more skull-like than ever as he stared at Pettigrew with his fathomless eyes.

"No one's going to try and kill you until we've sorted a few things out," said Lupin.

"Sorted things out?" squealed Pettigrew, looking wildly about him once more, eyes taking in the boarded windows and, again' the only door. "I knew he'd come after me! I knew he'd be back for me! I've been waiting for this for twelve years!"

"You knew Sirius was going to break out of Azkaban?" said Lupin, his brow furrowed. "When nobody has ever done it before?"

"He's got dark powers the rest of us can only dream of!" Pettigrew shouted shrilly. "How else did he get out of there? I suppose He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named taught him a few tricks!"
Black started to laugh, a horrible, mirthless laugh that filled the whole room. "Voldemort, teach me tricks?" he said.

Pettigrew flinched as though Black had brandished a whip at him.

"What, scared to hear your old master's name?" said Black. "I don't blame you, Peter. His lot aren't pleased with you, are they?"

"Don't know what you mean, Sirius—" muttered Pettigrew, his breathing faster than ever. His whole face was shining with sweat now.

"You haven't been hiding from me for twelve years," said Black. "You've been hiding from Voldemort's old supporters. I heard things in Azkaban, Peter... They all think you're dead, or you'd have to answer to them... I've heard them screaming all sorts of things in their sleep. Sounds like they think the double-crosser double-crossed them. Voldemort met his downfall there. And not all Voldemort's supporters ended up in Azkaban, did they? There are still plenty out there, biding their time, pretending they've seen the error of their ways. If they ever got wind that you were still alive, Peter—"

"Don't know... what you're talking about..." repeated Pettigrew, more shrilly than ever. He wiped his face on his sleeve and looked up at Lupin. "You don't believe this—this madness, Remus—"

"I must admit, Peter, I have difficulty in understanding why an innocent man would want to spend twelve years as a rat," said Lupin evenly.

"Innocent, but scared!" squealed Pettigrew. "If Voldemort's supporters were after me, it was because I put one of their best men in Azkaban— the spy, Sirius Black!"

Black's face contorted with anger. "How dare you," he growled, sounding suddenly like the bear-sized dog he had been. "I, a spy for Voldemort? When did I ever sneak around people who were stronger and more powerful than myself? But you, Peter— I'll never understand why I didn't see you were the spy from the start. You always liked big friends who'd look after you, didn't you? It used to be us... me and Remus... and James...."

Pettigrew wiped his face again; he was almost panting for breath. "Me, a spy... must be out of your mind... never... don't know how you can say such a—"

"Lily and James only made you Secret-Keeper because I suggested it," Black hissed, so venomously that Pettigrew took a step backward. "I thought it was the perfect plan... a bluff... Voldemort would be sure to come after me, would never dream they'd use a weak, talentless thing like you... It must have been the finest moment of your miserable life, telling Voldemort you could hand him the Potters."

Pettigrew was muttering distractedly; Delilah caught words like "far-fetched" and "lunacy," but she couldn't help paying more attention to the ashen color of Pettigrew's face and the way his eyes continued to dart toward the windows and door.

"Professor Lupin?" said Hermione timidly. "Can—can I say something?"

"Certainly, Hermione," said Lupin courteously.

"Well— Scabbers— I mean, this— this man— he's been sleeping in Harry's dormitory for three years. If he's working for You-Know-Who, how come he never tried to hurt Harry before now?"

"There!" said Pettigrew shrilly, pointing at Ron with his maimed hand. "Thank you! You see,
Remus? I have never hurt a hair of Harry's head! Why should I?"

"I'll tell you why," said Black. "Because you never did anything for anyone unless you could see what was in it for you. Voldemort's been in hiding for fifteen years; they say he's half dead. You weren't about to commit murder right under Albus Dumbledore's nose, for a wreck of a wizard who'd lost all of his power, were you? You'd want to be quite sure he was the biggest bully in the playground before you went back to him, wouldn't you? Why else did you find a wizard family to take you in? Keeping an ear out for news, weren't YOU, Peter? Just in case your old protector regained strength, and it was safe to rejoin him...."

Pettigrew opened his mouth and closed it several times. He seemed to have lost the ability to talk.

"Er— Mr. Black— Sirius?" said Delilah. Black jumped at being addressed like this and stared at her as though he had never seen anything quite like her. Delilah only looked back at him, slightly uncomfortable, and partly embarrassed as well; he was her father, yes, but this was the first time she'd met him in any way; she had no idea how to address him.

"If you don't mind me asking, er— how did you get out of Azkaban, if you didn't use Dark Magic?"

"Thank you!" gasped Pettigrew, nodding frantically at her question, though still not taking a good look at her. "Exactly! Precisely what I—"

But Lupin silenced him with a look. Black was frowning slightly at her, but not as though he were annoyed with her. He seemed to be pondering his answer.

"I don't know how I did it," he said slowly. "I think the only reason I never lost my mind is that I knew I was innocent. That wasn't a happy thought, so the Dementors couldn't suck it out of me... but it kept me sane and knowing who I am... helped me keep my powers... so when it all became... too much... I could transform in my cell... become a dog. Dementors can't see, you know...." He swallowed. "They feel their way toward people by feeding off their emotions... They could tell that my feelings were less— less human, less complex when I was a dog... but they thought, of course, that I was losing my mind like everyone else in there, so it didn't trouble them. But I was weak, very weak, and I had no hope of driving them away from me without a wand... But then I saw Peter in that picture... I realized he was at Hogwarts with Delilah, and, of course, Harry... perfectly positioned to act, if one hint reached his ears that the Dark Side was gathering strength again...."

Delilah was yearning to ask him how he knew of her, and if he knew of Seth, but she kept that to herself for the time being, and simply nodded as his answer.

Pettigrew was shaking his head, mouthing noiselessly, but staring all the while at Black as though hypnotized.

"... ready to strike at the moment he could be sure of allies... and to deliver the last Potter to them."

"But he wouldn't be able to," said Delilah.

"Why's that?" asked Sirius.

"I'd stop him," she said rather casually.

"A thirteen-year-old girl, against a fully grown wizard?" he uttered, amused.

Delilah let a smirk make its way onto her face. "I'm fourteen. And besides, I wouldn't worry about my age; it's all about what's up here," she said, tapping her forehead. "I've known a hell lot more than the regular young witch and wizard before I even knew I was a witch, so don't test me."
Sirius chuckled. "If he gave them Harry, who'd dare say he'd betrayed Lord Voldemort? He'd be welcomed back with honors... So you see, I had to do something. I was the only one who knew Peter was still alive...."

Harry remembered what Mr. Weasley had told Mrs. Weasley. "The guards say he's been talking in his sleep... always the same words... 'He's at Hogwarts.'"

"It was as if someone had lit a fire in my head, and the Dementors couldn't destroy it... It wasn't a happy feeling... it was an obsession... but it gave me strength, it cleared my mind. So, one night when they opened my door to bring food, I slipped past them as a dog... It's so much harder for them to sense animal emotions that they were confused... I was thin, very thin... thin enough to slip through the bars... I swam as a dog back to the mainland... I journeyed north and slipped into the Hogwarts grounds as a dog. I've been living in the forest ever since, except when I came to watch the Quidditch, of course. You fly as well as your father did, Harry..."

He looked at Harry, who did not look away.

"Believe me," croaked Black. "Believe me, Harry." He turned his glance toward the hybrid. "Delilah." It was as though he knew that Harry would only believe him if she did. "I never betrayed James and Lily. I would have died before I betrayed them."

Delilah, though filled with doubt, had believed him from the start. Of course, if asked if it had anything to do with him being her father, she would deny it, because it really had nothing to do with it. She'd had visions of him far before even seeing his 'wanted' picture, and had known he was innocent far before knowing he was her father.

"Harry," Delilah said softly.

He looked at her and saw it clear in her eyes. "You believe him."

She was silent for a moment before finally replying. "I've believed him innocent long before tonight, Harry," she admitted.

He stared at her for a few more seconds before finally making his decision; Harry believed him. Throat too tight to speak, he took hold of Delilah's hand out of instinct and nodded.

"No!"

Pettigrew had fallen to his knees as though Harry's nod had been his own death sentence. He shuffled forward on his knees, groveling, his hands clasped in front of him as though praying.

"Sirius—it's me... it's Peter... your friend... you wouldn't—"

Black kicked out, and Pettigrew recoiled. "There's enough filth on my robes without you touching them," said Black.

"Remus!" Pettigrew squeaked, turning to Lupin instead, writhing imploringly in front of him. "You don't believe this... wouldn't Sirius have told you they'd changed the plan?"

"Not if he thought I was the spy, Peter," said Lupin. "I assume that's why you didn't tell me, Sirius?" he said casually over Pettigrew's head.

"Forgive me, Remus," said Black.

"Not at all, Padfoot, old friend," said Lupin, who was now rolling up his sleeves. "And will you, in
"Of course," said Black, and the ghost of a grin flitted across his gaunt face. He, too, began rolling up his sleeves. "Shall we kill him together?"

"Yes, I think so," said Lupin grimly.

"You wouldn't... you won't..." gasped Pettigrew. And he scrambled around to Ron. "Ron... haven't I been a good friend... a good pet? You won't let them kill me, Ron, will you... you're on my side, aren't you?"

But Ron was staring at Pettigrew with the utmost revulsion. "I let you sleep in my bed!" he said.

"Kind boy... kind master..." Pettigrew crawled toward Ron "You won't let them do it... I was your rat... I was a good pet...."

"If you made a better rat than a human, it's not much to boast about, Peter," said Black harshly. Ron, going still paler with pain, wrenched his broken leg out of Pettigrew's reach. Pettigrew turned on his knees, staggered forward, and seized the hem of Hermione's sweatshirt.

"Sweet girl... clever girl... you—you won't let them... Help me...."

Hermione pulled herself away and out of Pettigrew's clutching hands and backed away against the wall, looking horrified.

Pettigrew knelt, trembling uncontrollably, and turned his head slowly toward Harry. "Harry... Harry... you look just like your father... just like him...."

"Get away from him!" Delilah growled, once again taking on a protective stance in front of him. Pettigrew's attention finally fell upon the latter, and his eyes practically became as wide as saucers.

"Ella! My dear, old friend. Always so kind, considerate... and understanding, a-and— you believe me, don't y—"

"Wrong person, and get away from me, you creep," she snarled, calming down a tad bit when Harry grabbed her hand again.

"HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO THEM?" roared Black. "HOW DARE YOU FACE THEM? HOW DARE YOU TALK ABOUT JAMES AND ELLA IN FRONT OF THEM?"

"Harry, Delilah," whispered Pettigrew, shuffling toward them, hands outstretched. Delilah scoffed; *so now he knows my name*. "Harry, Delilah, Ella, and James wouldn't have wanted me killed... They would have understood... they would have shown me mercy..."

Both Black and Lupin strode forward, seized Pettigrew's shoulders, and threw him backward onto the floor. He sat there, twitching with terror, staring up at them.

"You sold Lily and James to Voldemort," said Black, who was shaking too. "I bet you even sold Erick and Eloisa." Delilah's head snapped his way at the mention of her grandparents. "Do you deny it?"

Pettigrew burst into tears. It was horrible to watch, like an oversized, balding baby, cowering on the floor.

"Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done? The Dark Lord... you have no idea... he has weapons you
can't imagine... I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named forced me—"

"DON'T LIE!" bellowed Black. "YOU'VE BEEN PASSING INFORMATION TO HIM FOR A YEAR BEFORE LILY AND JAMES DIED! YOU WERE HIS SPY!"

"H-he was taking over everywhere!" gasped Pettigrew. "Wh-what was there to be gained by refusing him?"

"What was there to be gained by fighting the most evil wizard who has ever existed?" said Black, with a terrible fury in his face. "Only innocent lives, Peter!"

"You don't understand!" whined Pettigrew. "He would have killed me, Sirius!"

"THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED!" roared Black. "DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!"

Black and Lupin stood shoulder to shoulder, wands raised.

"You should have realized," said Lupin quietly, "if Voldemort didn't kill you, we would. Goodbye, Peter."

Hermione covered her face with her hands and turned to the wall.

"NO!" Delilah exclaimed herself. She snatched her hand from Harry's grasp and ran forward, placing herself in front Pettigrew, facing the wands. "You can't kill him. You can't."

Black and Lupin both looked staggered.

"Delilah, this piece of vermin is the reason Harry has no parents, and the reason your grandparents were ruthlessly murdered," Black snarled. "This cringing bit of filth would have seen you both die too, without turning a hair. You heard him. His own stinking skin meant more to him than either of your families."

"I know," she said, swallowing hard. "But I also know what you'll feel if you do that."

Sirius stared at her with an unreadable expression.

"I thought you said you wanted to be an Alpha."

Ella sighed. "That was before I knew the many things I'd have to give up."

Sirius only stared at her for a moment before saying, "Look, I don't know what exactly an Alpha does, but I know it's a leader and, you, love, are one hell of a leader."

"Never mind if I'm a good leader or not. When you're an Alpha, it's pack before family, even if your family is part of the pack. And when you're the leader of a pack, you always have to rely on your animal-self... and that... that means... if you have to kill—" She swallowed hard. "— you have to kill, never mind your age or what it's for." She sighed. "And that's just not me. I don't want to have to do that because that'll only mean that I won't be human anymore; and I know that, if it comes to that, I'll miss it more than anything in the world."

Sirius blink, eyes still on Delilah. I also know what you'll feel if you do that, she said. What did that mean? Did it mean that this thir— fourteen-year-old girl had already... killed someone? That would be hard to believe; she had a brave face— a confident, valiant posture— though, even so, everything
about her practically screamed 'innocent'... well, whenever she wasn't glaring.

The latter cleared her throat, snapping Sirius out of his reverie. "We'll take him up to the castle. We'll hand him over to the Dementors... He can go to Azkaban... but don't kill him."

"Deli!" gasped Pettigrew, and he flung his arms around her knees. "You— thank you— it's more than I deserve— thank you —"

"Get off me," she spat, throwing Pettigrew's hands off her in disgust. "And don't call me that. I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it because I don't believe my mother, even less Harry's father, would've wanted them to become killers— just for you."

No one moved or made a sound except Pettigrew, whose breath was coming in wheezes as he clutched his chest. Black and Lupin were looking at each other. Then, with one movement, they lowered their wands.

"You're two are the only people who have the right to decide," said Black. "But think... think what he did...."

"He can go to Azkaban," Harry said, supporting Delilah's reasoning, as he stepped forward to stand beside her, throwing Pettigrew a glare along the way. "If anyone deserves that place, he does...."

Pettigrew was still wheezing behind him.


Delilah grabbed his hand and gently tugged on it, pulling him with her as she, too, stepped out of the way. Thin cords shot from Lupin's wand this time, and next moment, Pettigrew was wriggling on the floor, bound and gagged.

"But if you transform, Peter," growled Black, his own wand pointing at Pettigrew too, "we will kill you. You two agree?" Harry looked down at the pitiful figure on the floor and nodded so that Pettigrew could see him. Delilah only looked away, trying to get the word out of her head. She'd already done it, and she didn't want to think of it again.

"Right," said Lupin, suddenly businesslike. "Ron, I can't mend bones nearly as well as Madam Pomfrey, so I think it's best if we just strap your leg up until we can get you to the hospital wing."

He hurried over to Ron, bent down, tapped Ron's leg with his wand, and muttered, "Ferula." Bandages spun up Ron's leg, strapping it tightly to a splint. Lupin helped him to his feet; Ron put his weight gingerly on the leg and didn't wince.

"That's better," he said. "Thanks."

"What about Professor Snape?" said Hermione in a small voice, looking down at Snape's prone figure.

"There's nothing seriously wrong with him," said Lupin, bending over Snape and checking his pulse. "You were just a little overenthusiastic. Still out cold. Er— perhaps it will be best if we don't revive him until we're safely back in the castle. We can take him like this...."

He muttered, "Mobilicorpus." As though invisible strings were tied to Snape's wrists, neck, and knees, he was pulled into a standing position, head still lolling unpleasantly, like a grotesque puppet. He hung a few inches above the ground, his limp feet dangling. Lupin picked up the Invisibility
Cloak and tucked it safely into his pocket.

"And two of us should be chained to this," said Black, nudging Pettigrew with his toe. "Just to make sure."

"I'll do it," said Lupin.

"And me," said Ron savagely, limping forward.

Black conjured heavy manacles from thin air; soon Pettigrew was upright again, left arm chained to Lupin's right, right arm to Ron's left. Ron's face was set. He seemed to have taken Scabbers' true identity as a personal insult. Crookshanks leapt lightly off the bed and led the way out of the room, his bottle-brush tail held jauntily high.
Delilah had always been part of a strange group; she came from a pack composed of supernatural creatures gone extinct. But here, surrounded with these people—of course excluding Pettigrew—though they made her feel a tad bit more normal, the group also made her feel stranger. Crookshanks led the way down the stairs; Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron went next, looking like entrants in a six-legged race. Next came Professor Snape, drifting creepily along, his toes hitting each stair as they descended, held up by his own wand, which was being pointed at him by Sirius. Delilah, Harry, and Hermione brought up the rear.

Getting back into the tunnel was difficult. Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron had to turn sideways to manage it; Lupin still had Pettigrew covered with his wand. Harry could see them, from where he walked behind Delilah, edging awkwardly along the tunnel in single file. Crookshanks was still in the lead. Delilah went right after Sirius, who was still making Snape drift along ahead of them; he kept bumping his lolling head on the low ceiling. Delilah had the impression he was making no effort to prevent this. She bit her lower lip; she didn't exactly like the teacher, but she didn't hate him either, and she was starting to worry that he may end up with brain damage, or, even worse: end up like Lockhart.

They were all silent as they followed the cat, though, as soon as the Willow's exit became clearer, Pettigrew began muttering to himself, and, frankly, that was pretty much creeping out everyone.

He prattled desperately, "Turn me into a maggot. A dung beetle. A Flobberworm! Anything but the Dementors..." Then he turned to the redheaded boy. "Ron!"

Delilah rolled her eyes and sighed. *Is he seriously going to be repeating himself all over again? Oh, my goddess...*

"I've been a good friend, haven't I? A good pet? You won't let them kill me, will you? I was your rat..."

Ron drew back in disgust and irritation as Sirius bumped Snape's head on the ceiling again.

Noticing the concern on the brunette's face, Hermione said, "Don't worry. He's under the Somnambulist Charm. It's primarily used to transport the seriously deranged."

As Delilah let out a small, halfhearted chuckle, Pettigrew's pleading eyes found Hermione once again, causing both girls to groan. "Sweet girl. Clever girl. Surely you won't let them..."

Cheeks puffing in irritation, Hermione stepped closer to Delilah, glaring at the human-sized rat. Delilah turned and saw Black glancing back toward her already.

"That was a noble thing you did back there. He doesn't deserve it."

Delilah shook her head. "Death would've been too kind."
"But, you know what this means?" Black said. "Turning Pettigrew in?"

"You're free," Delilah said softly.

"Yes..." said Black. "But I'm also..." He paused, studying Harry, for a moment, with calculating eyes. "I don't know if you know, Harry, but when you were born, James and Lily made me your guardian..."

"I know," said Harry.

"And, well, I'll understand if you choose to stay with your aunt and uncle, but, so you know, you could—"

Some sort of explosion took place in the pit of Harry's stomach. "What— live with you?" he said, accidentally cracking his head on a bit of rock protruding from the ceiling. "Leave the Dursleys?"

"I understand if you don't want to, I just thought I'd—"

"Are you insane?" said Harry, his voice easily as croaky as Black's. "Of course I want to leave the Dursleys! Have you got a house? When can I move in?"

Black turned right around to look at him; Snape's head was scraping the ceiling, but Black didn't seem to care. "You want to?" he said. "You mean it?"

"Yeah, I mean it!" said Harry.

Black's gaunt face broke into the first true smile Harry had seen upon it. The difference it made was startling, as though a person ten years younger were shining through the starved mask; for a moment, he was recognizable as the man who had laughed at Harry's parents' wedding.

They were silent the rest of the way out, though the tension had subdued completely as they had reached the end of the tunnel. Crookshanks darted up first; he had evidently pressed his paw to the knot on the trunk, because Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron clambered upward without any sound of savaging branches.

Black saw Snape up through the hole, then stood back for Delilah, Harry and Hermione to pass. At last, all of them were out.

The grounds were very dark now; the only light came from the distant windows of the castle. Without a word, they set off. Pettigrew was still wheezing and occasionally whimpering. Harry's mind was buzzing. He was going to leave the Dursleys. He was going to leave the Dursleys. He was going to live with Sirius Black, his parents' best friend... He felt dazed... What would happen when he told the Dursleys he was going to live with the convict they'd seen on television?

"One wrong move, Peter," said Lupin threateningly ahead. His wand was still pointed sideways at Pettigrew's chest.

Silently they tramped through the grounds, the castle lights growing slowly larger. Snape was still drifting weirdly ahead of Black, his chin bumping on his chest. A moment passed though, and Sirius stopped and stared in wonder at the castle, shining radiantly under the bright bowl of the night sky.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he mumbled as Delilah stepped behind him. "I'll never forget the first time I walked through those doors. It'll be nice to do it again. Freely."

*Her pale russet skinned tiny, slightly chubby hand reached up to the beautiful woman hovering her*
as she tiredly babbled nonsense. The woman—her mother—let out a small chuckled, grabbing the small arm and kissing the palm of her hand.

"You really are a beauty, my little Lillyflower," she cooed, placing another gently kiss on the small palm her newborn's hand, before letting out a small laugh. "Oh, my goddess, I sound like James when he’d obsess over Lily." The child giggled, bringing a small smile onto her face. "You would’ve looked like him, you know."

She gently traced a finger under her daughter's eye. "You would’ve had those striking gray eyes of his..." She caressed the bit of black hair on the baby's head. "His raven black hair, though I’m sure that is something you'll get... you've grown as tall as him... or, I guess, as me as well since I am fairly tall," she added with a soft chuckle.

She sighed, caressing her daughter's cheek. "Close your eyes, baby girl." The little girl caught her finger and began to play with it. Ella laughed, shaking her head as she pulled her finger away, causing the child to pout. "Close your eyes, formosus... just... just close your eyes, the sun is going down... you'll be alright, no one can hurt you now. Come morning light, you and I'll be safe and sound..."

Delilah blinked, looking over at Sirius, who was still staring at the castle in wonder. Finally deciding to break the silence, she said, "She used to talk about you quite a lot, you know."

Black turned to the young girl, brows furrowed in confusion.

Catching the look on his face, she added, "My mother. I don't remember much of her..." She paused, looking down at her shoes, almost shyly. "But, the bits and pieces I do remember the most are the times she would tuck me in, in my crib. She would talk about you—dream aloud of how I would've looked like if I had looked like you—before singing me to sleep."

Sirius looked at her for a good long moment before chuckling softly. "She always did have an inexplicable passion for singing how she felt. 'Life might not be a musical, but I sure as hell can make it one' she'd say." He chuckled again. "How is she now?"

Delilah looked up, expression unreadable as she blinked owlishly. "You... you don't know."

Sirius frowned. "Know what?"

Delilah looked away, brows furrowed in pain. "She... she's gone."

"Gone?"

Delilah nodded. "For the past twelve years, after she had your son."

Sirius blinked owlishly. "Son?"

"Seth," Delilah said with a nod. "The boy who was in my dorm the night you were about to pull the whole Jack the Ripper act." She caught the look on his face. "Don't worry, it took us almost a whole week to get in over our heads and understand it too; if you know the mark, then you'll get it too."

"Alpha's mark?" She hummed in response. Sirius' brows furrowed as he let out a small sigh through his nose. "You know, what I told Harry... you could... I mean, well, if you want to, you could—"

"Live with you?" Delilah finished in a whisper.

"Of course, I thought you wouldn't want to," said Black quickly. "I understand, I just thought I'd—"
"No, no, it's... it's not that. It's just..." She sighed. "I've chosen to be on my own for quite some time now because whoever I do stay with usually ends up... well, meeting their end. And... well, there's also the fact that I promised my... my brother that I would stay with him and his— I mean, our uncle and aunt for the summer." She looked at him. "But I wouldn't mind staying with you for a while too after we both settle down."

He looked her in the eyes and gave her a genuine smile. He reached a hand up and patted her head. "You did get our height," he mused, making her let out a small chuckle as they both looked back at the castle.

"You know, this year... I got quite a lot of shock. I found out I had another brother alive, whom I had never even heard of before. I found out my father wasn't really my father... I found I had more family than I'd known, and though it's not so big..." She looked at him as she grabbed her hand in his and gave it a gentle squeeze. "I'm glad to know I'm not completely alone anymore."

"With someone as persistent as myself, there is no way you'll be alone again," he said softly, giving her own hand a gentle squeeze.

They both shared a small smile before gazing back at the castle, unaware of the young boy in spectacles smiling at the sight of them together. Delilah probably wouldn't admit it ever, but he knew she was happy now. However, the smile on Delilah's face did not stay there for long; it was soon replaced with a frown as she suddenly felt a shift in her body, which began to overheat. Sirius felt the contrasting temperature of Delilah's hand against his own and instantly let go as he felt as though her hand was burning his. He looked at her and stepped closer in concern when he noticed her shoulders hunched over and her nose scrunched in pain. Before he could do or say anything, Hermione's voice suddenly rose on the air, quivering with fear.

"Delilah..."

The young hybrid turned and saw Hermione staring at the full moon. Her vision sharpened and her body began to shake in pain, but she pushed her situation to the back of her mind as her eyes shifted to Lupin's silhouette shimmering under the moonlight. He had gone rigid. Then, his limbs began to shake, his fingers twitching.

"Oh, my—" Hermione gasped. "He didn't..."

Delilah swallowed hard as she fought back a wolfish growl.


But Delilah couldn't run, and nor could Harry nor Hermione. Ron was chained to Pettigrew and Lupin. She let out a small sigh when Sirius ran over to him and got away from her as she knew she was about to burst any second now, and the first few moments of her change, she was never really herself. He leapt forward, but Black caught him around the chest and threw him back.

"Leave it to me— RUN!" He turned to Lupin, eyes desperate. "Remus, old friend... did you take your potion tonight?"

Lupin, twitching, shook his head.

There was a terrible snarling noise. Lupin's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws. Crookshanks's hair was on end again; he was backing away—
As the werewolf reared, snapping its long jaws, Sirius disappeared from where he once stood. He had transformed. The enormous, bearlike dog bounded forward. As the werewolf wrenched itself free of the manacle binding it, the dog seized it about the neck and pulled it backward, away from Ron and Pettigrew. Harry stood, transfixed by the sight, unsure of how to react. After a long while of them locking, jaw to jaw, claws ripping at each other, Sirius was thrown back, a loud crack resonating through the night, followed by an even louder one.

CRACK!

The werewolf was getting ready to go after him and pounce at him again, when, suddenly, an overly large dark figure came out of nowhere and countered its attack, throwing the werewolf a few feet away, growling wildly. The growl turned into a roar, but it wasn't the kind you would hear from a lion. Slightly squinting his eyes, Harry recognized the creature as the giant black wolf that had saved him and Ron the previous year from the giant spiders. It was clear it strode fear within the werewolf, but either way, it did not back down. It went to attack Black again, but the attempt only made it, and the black wolf engage into a battle.

Black seemed to try to interfere but was only knocked backward, in a slightly more gentle way, by the black wolf. Harry reeled as the two wolves crashed into each other, snarling and ramming one another. The sound was deafening, their teeth flashing at each other’s throats.

Harry stood, transfixed by the sight, too intent upon the battle to notice anything else. It was Hermione's scream that alerted him—

Pettigrew had dived for Lupin's dropped wand. Ron, unsteady on his bandaged leg, fell. There was a bang, a burst of light—and Ron lay motionless on the ground. Another bang—Crookshanks flew into the air and back to the earth in a heap.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry yelled, pointing his own wand at Pettigrew; Lupin's wand flew high into the air and out of sight. "Stay where you are!" Harry shouted, running forward.

Too late. Pettigrew had transformed. Harry saw his bald tail whip through the manacle on Ron's outstretched arm and heard a scurrying through the grass.

There was a howl and a rumbling growl; Harry turned, glancing around, only realizing just then that Delilah was nowhere in sight. It was when he remembered the black wolf's eyes, which he had gotten to look at the previous year, that the realization hit him, and struck him as he looked back at the battle.

Delilah was the black wolf.

Harry stumbled backward as the fight carried the two wolves beyond the small clearing beside the Willow and into the woods. Harry wanted to go; he wanted to help her, but, as though reading his mind, through mid-strike, the black wolf's violet orchidee eyes glanced back at Harry with a wild but stern glint shining in them.

She was basically shouting, GET OUT OF HERE! at him through her stern gaze before she had to drag the fight deeper and deeper into the darkness of the forest until she and the werewolf disappeared from their sight, the horrible sounds of the battle still echoing through the night.

Remembering the other matter at hand, he glanced around frantically. "Sirius, he's gone, Pettigrew transformed!" Harry yelled.

Black was bleeding; there were gashes across his muzzle and back, but at Harry's words he
scrambled up again, and in an instant, the sound of his paws faded to silence as he pounded away across the grounds.

Harry and Hermione dashed over to Ron.

"What did he do to him?" Hermione whispered. Ron's eyes were only half-closed, his mouth hung open; he was definitely alive, they could hear him breathing, but he didn't seem to recognize them.

"I don't know...."

Harry looked desperately around. Black, Delilah, and Lupin were all gone... they had no one but Snape for company, still hanging, unconscious, in midair.

"We'd better get them up to the castle and tell someone," said Harry, pushing his hair out of his eyes, trying to think straight. "Come—"

But then, from beyond the range of their vision, they heard a yelping, a whining: a dog in pain...

Harry couldn't even tell who it was anymore, though his focus faded even more as he suddenly felt a painful tug in his heart. Harry swallowed, staring into the darkness. He had a moment's indecision, but there was nothing they could do for Ron at the moment, and by the sound of it, either Delilah or Black was in trouble. Probably both of them.

Harry set off at a run, Hermione right behind him.

The yelping seemed to be coming from the ground near the edge of the lake. They pelted toward it, and Harry, running flat out, felt the cold without realizing what it must mean.

Sirius!

The black wolf limped as it glanced around frantically; she had lost her focus to an internal pain, and the werewolf had taken advantage of that, injuring her rather deeply on the side before running off into oblivion. She knew what that internal pain meant— her father was in trouble.

Sirius! she tried calling out to him again through her mind.

Del...

There! She heard him! It was faint, but he had still managed to reply. Pushing the pain she felt to the back of her mind, she set off in a sprint, following his faint aura, though her pace almost instantly slowed painfully as the atmosphere around her thickened, and she felt as though her soul was being ripped right out of her living being. It was excruciatingly painful, especially for someone like her.

Any happy thought she'd had a moment ago when she spoke with Sirius and any she might've had was gone.

The yelping stopped abruptly.

It felt as though the life surrounding her was leaving... disappearing. At this point, she wasn't even sure anymore if she was going to survive the night to see the sun rising the next day. Every cell in her overly large body, pulsating with the hot sticky fear and sweat from under the black fur wrapped around her skin that won’t shelter me from harm, but she wished it could. That was when she felt it, for the first time. She couldn’t breathe. Was she dying? The only things she could do were lay, sweat, and forget to breathe. She needed to howl, to scream. She was a loner, but, now, for the first time in what seemed like forever, she wanted people around. She didn't want to be alone...
She wanted to be saved.

She was with the large black dog which had, at this point, turned back into his human form and was mumbling and moaning in pain. He, too, wanted to scream. He knew Delilah was there, but he couldn't look up, he couldn't move.

He wanted to scream as loud as he possibly could, call her name—let her know he was fine, even though he clearly wasn't. He wanted to be strong for the child he had always wanted to have since the day he had met Ella-Grace those two decades and a half ago. But his voice was caught in his throat, and all he could do was mumble. Though he knew of her overly sensitive hearing, he wasn't sure anymore if she could hear him now as she, too, was now back as her human-self, crouched on all fours, body shaking, probably even overheating as it had done a while ago before she phased and fought against Lupin.

She tried.

She tried to get back on her feet like she had done on her first year when she faced the troll, like she had done on her second year when she faced the basilisk, like the many times before Hogwarts when she had had to get back onto her feet after being torture practically every day. But she couldn't. It was as though her entire life was crashing down on her all at once. The past, the present, and the future she fears. She couldn't think of a happy thought, though, even if she could, what good would that do? She probably lost her wand back near the Willow; her body had become too weak she couldn't even control her movements anymore—every time she tried to stand or at the very least crawl her way over to her father, she would crumble down. And to top it all, her focus was far too gone for her to think or even make up a Wiccan spell to make them go away. Her hope was fading with her life, but she didn't it to leave.

Drowsily, she dragged herself across the ground. It felt like forever had passed when she finally reached him; she slumped down onto the floor, her body rolling onto her back throughout the process. She hated it. She hated being weak, vulnerable; it made her feel as though she was incapable of doing anything.

She could feel her body starting to shake again, though there wasn't much she could do about now; she was falling into unconsciousness. Sleep decided to spare her after the many midnight hours she'd spent awake in the past few weeks, either doing schoolwork or trying to avoid having nightmares. Her heart, for the first time that night, slowed.

As Harry and Hermione reached the lakeside, they saw why—Sirius had turned back into a man. He was crouched on all fours, his hands over his head, Delilah lying beside him, her clothes wrecked on her body.

"Nooo," he moaned. "Nooo... please...."

He had just gotten to finally meet his daughter, he had yet to meet his son and, and if Ella was as strong as he remembered her to be, she was probably still out there somewhere, alive, and he wanted to see her. He wanted to hold his daughter, son, and love of his life, and live his happy ending, the one he and Ella-Grace had promised each other all those years ago.

Delilah was merely what you would call alive; she couldn't think; she was breathing, though she felt as though she couldn't; she was just there, empty, her body only shaking, practically convulsing.

And then Harry saw them. Dementors, at least a hundred of them, gliding in a black mass around the lake toward them. He spun around, the familiar, icy cold penetrating his insides, fog starting to obscure his vision; more were appearing out of the darkness on every side; they were encircling
"Hermione, think of something happy!" Harry yelled, raising his wand, blinking furiously to try and clear his vision, shaking his head to rid it of the faint screaming that had started inside it— I'm going to live with my godfather, and maybe even Delilah if she accepts to come. I'm leaving the Dursleys.

He forced himself to think of Delilah and Sirius, and only them, and began to chant: "Expecto patronum! Expecto patronum!"

Delilah's shaking ceased. Black gave a shudder, rolled over, and lay motionless on the ground, pale as death, side touching Delilah's who lay there limply, hair gone coal black, skin pale as snow.

They'll be all right. I'm going to go and live with them.

"Expecto patronum! Hermione, help me! Expecto patronum!"

"Expecto—" Hermione whispered, "expecto— expecto—" But she couldn't do it.

The Dementors were closing in, barely ten feet from them. They formed a solid wall around Harry and Hermione and were getting closer...

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Harry yelled, trying to blot the screaming from his ears. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

A thin wisp of silver escaped his wand and hovered like mist before him. At the same moment, Harry felt Hermione collapse next to him. He was alone... completely alone...

"Expecto— expecto patronum—"

Harry felt his knees hit the cold grass. Fog was clouding his eyes. With a huge effort, he fought to remember: Sirius was innocent— innocent— we'll be okay— I'm going to live with him and Deli—

"Expecto patronum!" he gasped.

By the feeble light of his formless Patronus, he saw a Dementor halt, very close to him. It couldn't walk through the cloud of silver mist Harry had conjured. A dead, slimy hand slid out from under the cloak. It made a gesture as though to sweep the Patronus aside.

"No— no—" Harry gasped. "He's innocent... expect— expecto patronum—"

He could feel them watching him, hear their rattling breath like an evil wind around him. The nearest Dementor seemed to be considering him. Then it raised both its rotting hands and lowered its hood.

Where there should have been eyes, there was only thin, gray scabbed skin, stretched blankly over empty sockets. But there was a mouth... a gaping, shapeless hole, sucking the air with the sound of a death rattle.

A paralyzing terror filled Harry so that he couldn't move or speak.

His Patronus flickered and died.

White fog was blinding him. He had to fight... expecto patronum... he couldn't see... and in the distance, he heard the familiar screaming... expecto patronum... he grooped in the mist for Delilah and Sirius, and found Sirius' arm, slumping over him, feeling Delilah's thin arm... they weren't going to take them from him....
But a pair of strong, clammy hands suddenly attached themselves around Harry's neck. They were forcing his face upward. He could feel its breath—it was going to get rid of him first. He could feel its putrid breath; his mother was screaming in his ears... she was going to be the last thing he ever heard—

And then, through the fog that was drowning him, he thought he saw a silvery light growing brighter and brighter... He felt himself fall forward onto the grass, in between the father and daughter. Face down, too weak to move, sick and shaking, Harry opened his eyes. The Dementor must have released him. The blinding light was illuminating the grass around him... The screaming had stopped, the cold was ebbing away...

Something was driving the Dementors back... It was circling him and Delilah and Sirius and Hermione... They were leaving...

The air was warm again...

With every ounce of strength he could muster, Harry raised his head a few inches and saw an animal amid the light, galloping away across the lake, with another smaller yet larger one, dashing behind it. Eyes blurred with sweat, Harry tried to make out what it was; they were as bright as unicorns. Fighting to stay conscious, Harry watched them canter to a halt as they reached the opposite shore. For a moment, Harry saw, by its brightness, somebody welcoming them back, raising his hand to pat them... someone who looked strangely familiar... but it couldn't be...

Harry didn't understand. He couldn't think anymore. He felt the last of his strength leave him, and his head hit the ground as he fainted.
"Shocking business... shocking... miracle none of them died... never heard the like... by thunder, it was lucky you were there, Snape...."

"Thank you, Minister."

"Order of Merlin, Second Class, I'd say. First Class, if I can wangle it!"

"Thank you very much indeed, Minister."

"Nasty cut you've got there... Black's work, I suppose?"

"As a matter of fact, it was Potter, Weasley, and Granger, Minister...."

"No!"

"... And Dawn; Black had bewitched them, I saw it immediately. A Confundus Charm, to judge by their behavior. They seemed to think there was a possibility he was innocent. They weren't responsible for their actions. On the other hand, their interference might have permitted Black to escape... They obviously thought they were going to catch Black single-handed. They've got away with a great deal before now... I'm afraid it's given them a rather high opinion of themselves... and of course, Potter has always been allowed an extraordinary amount of license by the headmaster—"

"Ah, well, Snape... Harry Potter, you know... he's always trying to impress that Dawn girl... and we've all got a bit of a blind spot where he's concerned."

"And yet— is it good for him to be given so much special treatment? Personally, I try and treat him like any other student. And any other student would be suspended—at the very least—for leading his friends into such danger. Consider, Minister—against all school rules—after all the precautions put in place for his protection—out-of-bounds, at night, consorting with a werewolf and a murderer—and I have reason to believe he has been visiting Hogsmeade illegally too—"

"Well, well... we shall see, Snape, we shall see... The boy has undoubtedly been foolish...."

Harry lay listening with his eyes tight shut. He felt very groggy. The words he was hearing seemed to be traveling very slowly from his ears to his brain so that it was difficult to understand. His limbs felt like lead; his eyelids too heavy to lift... He wanted to lie here, on this comfortable bed, forever...

"What amazes me most is the behavior of the dementors... you've really no idea what made them retreat, Snape?"

"No, Minister... by the time I had come 'round they were heading back to their positions at the entrances...."

"Extraordinary. And yet Black, Harry, Delilah, and the girl—"

"All unconscious by the time I reached them. I bound and gagged Black, naturally, conjured stretchers, and brought them all straight back to the castle."

There was a pause. Harry's brain seemed to be moving a little faster, and as it did, a gnawing sensation grew in the pit of his stomach... He opened his eyes.

Everything was slightly blurred. Somebody had removed his glasses. He was lying in the dark
hospital wing. At the very end of the ward, he could make out Madam Pomfrey with her back to him, bending over a bed. Harry squinted. Ron's red hair was visible beneath Madam Pomfrey's arm.

Harry moved his head over on the pillow. In the bed to his right lay Hermione. Moonlight was falling across her bed. Her eyes were open too. She looked petrified, and when she saw that Harry was awake, pressed a finger to her lips, then pointed to the hospital wing door. It was ajar, and the voices of Cornelius Fudge and Snape were coming through it from the corridor outside. Frowning, Harry looked to his left and found a very pale looking Delilah, eyes shut tight, a pained look on her face.

Madam Pomfrey now came walking briskly up the dark ward to Harry's bed. He turned to look at her. She was carrying the largest block of chocolate he had ever seen in his life. It looked like a small boulder.

"Ah, you're awake!" she said briskly.

She placed the chocolate on Harry's bedside table and began breaking it apart with a small hammer.

Before either could ask a question, a soft yet raspy voice asked, "How's Ron?"

Harry looked to his left, Hermione looked over him, and both saw Delilah sitting on her bed, trying to fight back a wince. They watched as she patted her neck, a frown etching onto her face.

"Where's my locket?" she wondered in slight panic.

"He'll live, said Madam Pomfrey grimly. "As for you three you'll be staying here until I'm satisfied you're— Potter, what do you think you're doing?"

Harry was sitting up, putting his glasses back on, and picking up his wand. "I need to see the headmaster," he said.

"Potter," said Madam Pomfrey soothingly, "it's all right. They've got Black. He's locked away upstairs. The dementors will be performing the kiss any moment now—"

"WHAT?" Harry jumped up out of bed; Delilah and Hermione had done the same. But Harry's shout had been heard in the corridor outside; next second, Cornelius Fudge and Snape had entered the ward.

"Harry, Harry, what's this?" said Fudge, looking agitated. "You should be in bed— has he had any chocolate?" he asked Madam Pomfrey anxiously.

"Minister, listen!" Harry said. "Sirius Black's innocent! Peter Pettigrew faked his own death! We saw him tonight! You can't let the dementors do that thing to Sirius, he's—"

But Fudge was shaking his head with a small smile on his face.

"Harry, Harry, you're very confused, you've been through a dreadful ordeal, lie back down, now, we've got everything under control...."

"YOU HAVEN'T!" Harry yelled.

"You've got the wrong man!" Delilah added, instinctively stepping forward and standing beside Harry.

"Minister, listen, please," Hermione said; she had hurried to Harry and Delilah's side and was gazing
imploringly into Fudge's face. "I saw him too. It was Ron's rat; he's an Animagus, Pettigrew, I mean, and—"

"You see, Minister?" said Snape. "Confunded, all three of them... Black's done a very good job on them...."

"WE'RE NOT CONFUNDED!" Delilah found herself roaring, all pain forgotten.

"Minister! Professor!" said Madam Pomfrey angrily. "I must insist that you leave. Potter and Dawn are my patients, and they should not be distressed!"

"We're not distressed!" the young wizard and hybrid shouted in sync, before the young girl continued furiously, "We're trying to tell them what happened!"

Harry nodded in agreement. "If they'd just listen—"

But Madam Pomfrey suddenly stuffed a large chunk of chocolate into his mouth; he choked, and she seized the opportunity to force him back onto the bed.

"Now, please, Minister, these children need care. Please leave."

The door opened again. It was Dumbledore. Harry swallowed his mouthful of chocolate with great difficulty and got up again.

"Professor Dumbledore, Sirius Black—"

"For heaven's sake!" said Madam Pomfrey hysterically. "Is this a hospital wing or not? Headmaster, I must insist—"

"My apologies, Poppy, but I need a word with Mr. Potter, Miss Dawn, and Miss Granger," said Dumbledore calmly. "I have just been talking to Sirius Black—"

"I suppose he's told you the same fairy tale he's planted in Potter's mind?" spat Snape. "Something about a rat, and Pettigrew being alive—"

"That, indeed, is Black's story," said Dumbledore, surveying Snape closely through his half-moon spectacles.

"And does my evidence count for nothing?" snarled Snape. "Peter Pettigrew was not in the Shrieking Shack, nor did I see any sign of him on the grounds."

"That was because you were knocked out, Professor!" said Hermione earnestly. "You didn't arrive in time to hear—"

"Miss Granger, HOLD YOUR TONGUE!"

Delilah fought back a growl when Hermione had quickly taken hold of her arm to stop her from doing anything rash.

"Now, Snape," said Fudge, startled, "the young lady is disturbed in her mind, we must make allowances—"

"I would like to speak to Harry, Delilah, and Hermione alone," said Dumbledore abruptly. "Cornelius, Severus, Poppy— please leave us."

"Headmaster!" sputtered Madam Pomfrey. "They need treatment; they need rest—"
"This cannot wait," said Dumbledore. "I must insist."

Madam Pomfrey pursed her lips and strode away into her office at the end of the ward, slamming the door behind her. Fudge consulted the large gold pocket watch dangling from his waistcoat.

"The dementors should have arrived by now," he said. "I'll go and meet them. Dumbledore, I'll see you upstairs."

He crossed to the door and held it open for Snape, but Snape hadn't moved.

"You surely don't believe a word of Black's story?" Snape whispered, his eyes fixed on Dumbledore's face.

"I wish to speak to Harry and Hermione alone," Dumbledore repeated.

Snape took a step toward Dumbledore. "Sirius Black showed he was capable of murder at the age of sixteen," he breathed. "You haven't forgotten that, Headmaster? You haven't forgotten that he once tried to kill me?"

"My memory is as good as it ever was, Severus," said Dumbledore quietly.

Snape turned on his heel and marched through the door Fudge was still holding. It closed behind them, and Dumbledore turned to Delilah, Harry, and Hermione. Both, Harry and Hermione, burst into speech at the same time, Delilah remaining silent as she studied the look on the elder's wistful face.

"Professor, Black's telling the truth— we saw Pettigrew— he escaped when Professor Lupin turned into a werewolf—"

"— he's a rat—"

"— Pettigrew's front paw, I mean, finger, he cut it off—"

"— Pettigrew attacked Ron, it wasn't Sirius—"

But Dumbledore held up his hand to stem the flood of explanations.

"It is your turn to listen, and I beg you will not interrupt me because there is very little time," he said quietly. "There is not a shred of proof to support Black's story, except your word— and the word of four thirteen and fourteen-year-old wizards will not convince anybody. A street full of eyewitnesses swore they saw Sirius murder Pettigrew. I myself gave evidence to the Ministry that Sirius had been the Potters' Secret-Keeper."

"Professor Lupin can tell you—" Harry said, unable to stop himself

"Professor Lupin is currently deep in the forest, unable to tell anyone anything. By the time he is human again, it will be too late, Sirius will be worse than dead. I might add that werewolves are so mistrusted by most of our kind that his support will count for very little— and the fact that he and Sirius are old friends—"

"But—"

"Listen to me, Harry. It is too late, you understand me? You must see that Professor Snape's version of events is far more convincing than yours."

"He hates Sirius," Hermione said desperately. "All because of some stupid trick Sirius played on him
"Sirius has not acted like an innocent man. The attack on the Fat Lady— entering Gryffindor Tower with a knife— without Pettigrew, alive or dead, we have no chance of overturning Sirius's sentence."

"But you believe us," Delilah finally spoke.

"Yes, I do," said Dumbledore quietly. "But I have no power to make other men see the truth, or to overrule the Minister of Magic...."

Harry stared up into the grave face and felt as though the ground beneath him were falling sharply away. He had grown used to the idea that Dumbledore could solve anything. He had expected Dumbledore to pull some amazing solution out of the air. But no ... their last hope was gone.

"What we need," said Dumbledore slowly, and his light blue eyes moved from Harry to Delilah and Hermione, "is more time."

"But—" Delilah began. And then her eyes became very round as she shared a look with Hermione. "Oh!"

"Now, pay attention," said Dumbledore, speaking very low, and very clearly. "Sirius is locked in Professor Flitwick's office on the seventh floor. Thirteenth window from the right of the West Tower. If all goes well, you will be able to save more than one innocent life tonight. But remember this: you must not be seen. Miss Dawn, Miss Granger, you know the law— you know what is at stake... You. Must. Not. Be. Seen."

Harry didn't have a clue what was going on.

Hermione turned to Delilah. "I'll stay."

"Wait, what? Why?"

"You have to go, Delilah. He's your father. I-I can't, I shouldn't—"

Delilah raised a hand to cut her off and sighed, nodding. "It's fine, I understand. Stay with Ron and make sure he's fine, and rest, alright?"

Nodding, Hermione hugged the latter, gave Harry's shoulder a gentle, encouraging squeeze. "Be careful," she told the pair before making her way over to Ron's bedside.

Dumbledore had turned on his heel and looked back as he reached the door. Noticing Hermione walking away, he looked back at Harry and Delilah.

"I am going to lock you in. It is—" he consulted his watch, "five minutes to midnight. Miss Dawn, three turns should do it. Good luck."

She nodded. "Thank you, Professor."

"Good luck?" Harry repeated as the door closed behind Dumbledore. "Three turns? What's he talking about? What are we supposed to do?"

But Delilah was fumbling with the neck of the robes she had been put in. Grunting, she slipped the robe off and let out a small sigh, relieved that whoever dressed her at least had the sense to dress her in something comfortable and adequate for what she was about to do; she was now wearing a black linen long sleeved shirt, with a pair of dark green camouflaged pants, with the same sneakers she'd
been wearing earlier. She pulled from beneath her shirt a very long, very fine gold chain and sighed in relief once more; at least she didn't lose it.

"Harry, come here," she said urgently. "Quick!"

Harry moved toward her, completely bewildered. She was holding the chain out. He saw a tiny, sparkling hourglass hanging from it, and frowned; he was too confused to even think of blushing at the short distance left between them.

"Here—" She had thrown the chain around his neck too. "Ready?" she said breathlessly.

"What are we doing?" Harry said, completely lost.

Delilah turned the hourglass over three times. The dark ward dissolved. Harry had the sensation that he was flying very fast, backward. A blur of colors and shapes rushed past him; his ears were pounding, he tried to yell but couldn't hear his own voice—

And then he felt solid ground beneath his feet, and everything came into focus again—

He was standing next to Delilah in the deserted entrance hall, and a stream of golden sunlight was falling across the paved floor from the open front doors. He looked wildly around at Delilah, the chain of the hourglass cutting into his neck.

"Delilah, what—"

"In here!" Delilah seized Harry's arm, as gently as she could as to not break it, and dragged him across the hall to the door of a broom closet; she opened it, pushed him inside among the buckets and mops, then slammed the door behind them.

"What— how— Delilah, what happened?"

"We've gone back in time," Delilah whispered, lifting the chain off Harry's neck in the darkness. "Three hours back..."

Harry found his own leg and gave it a very hard pinch. It hurt a lot, which seemed to rule out the possibility that he was having a very bizarre dream. "But—"

"Shh! Listen! Someone's coming! I think— I think it might be us!" Delilah had craned her neck so she could listen better, but, for some odd reason, the pain from her latter transformation had seemed to dull her senses a bit, so she pressed her ear against the cupboard door.

"Footsteps across the hall... yes, I think it's us going down to Hagrid's!"

"Are you telling me," Harry whispered, "that we're here in this cupboard and we're out there too?"

"Yes," said Delilah, her ear still glued to the cupboard door. "I'm sure it's us. It doesn't sound like more than four people... and we're walking slowly because you, Hermione and Ron are under the Invisibility Cloak, and I'm behind so I can keep a lookout—" She broke off, still listening intently. "We've gone down the front steps...."

Delilah slumped forward, resting her burning forehead against the cold wooden door, looking desperately anxious, but Harry wanted a few questions answered.

"Where did you get that hourglass thing?"

"It's called a Time-Turner," Delilah whispered, "Hermione's got one too; she got it from Professor
McGonagall on our first day back. I got mine after our first Transfiguration class, from Dumbledore, because of what had happened in Divination."

She looked back at him from the corner of her eye. "Remember the incident with the tea leaves?" Harry nodded. "I'd started having visions—"

"Visions? About what? The future?"

Delilah nodded. "Not all've been exactly accurate, I mean, I didn't see the Dementors attack during the match against Hufflepuff, but I saw us getting Patronus lessons from Lupin, so I learned that on an earlier basis just in case." She sighed. "Then the whole Peter Pettigrew thing, I didn't see that either, but... yeah."

She raked a hand through her long hair. "Dumbledore gave it to me then, though I never knew why I would need it until I changed my schedule when I came back and started using it to get to all my lessons. Only Hermione and I knew of these, and Professor McGonagall made us swear we wouldn't tell anyone. She and Dumbledore had to write all sorts of letters to the Ministry of Magic so we could have one each. She had to tell them that we were model students and that we'd never, ever use it for anything except our studies... I've been turning it back so I could do hours over again, Hermione too, that's how we've been doing several lessons at once, see? But..."

She turned to look at him, face inches from his. "Harry, I don't get what Dumbledore wants us to do." She huffed, running a hand through her hair. "Oh, my goddess— this is pissing me off. Why did he tell us to go back three hours? How's that going to help Sirius?" She felt anxious; she was usually good at figuring things out and was always ahead of people.

Harry stared at her shadowy face. "There must be something that happened around now he wants us to change," he said slowly. "What happened? We were walking down to Hagrid's three hours ago...."

"This is three hours ago," she reminded him. "And we are walking down to Hagrid's. We just heard ourselves leaving...."

Harry frowned; he felt as though he were screwing up his whole brain in concentration.

"Dumbledore just said— just said we could save more than one innocent life...." And then it hit him. "Delilah, we're going to save Buckbeak!"

She gave him a weird look. She was all for saving the hippogriff, but— "How will that help Sirius?"

"Dumbledore said— he just told us where the window is— the window of Flitwick's office! Where they've got Sirius locked up!"

Delilah frowned. "But I can turn..." Into a phoenix. She groaned. She's strong, but as a phoenix, she isn't big enough; she can't have Sirius hanging from her while she helps him escape; with the bit of force he's got left, she wouldn't be surprised if he ended up letting go.

"I see where you're going with this."

Harry nodded. "We've got to fly Buckbeak up to the window and rescue Sirius. Sirius can escape on Buckbeak— they can escape together!"

From what Harry could see of Delilah's face, she looked terrified. "If we manage that without being seen, it'll be a miracle!"
"Well, we've got to try, haven't we?" said Harry. He stepped forward, past her, and pressed his ear against the door. "Doesn't sound like anyone's there... Come on, let's go."

Harry pushed open the closet door. The entrance hall was deserted. As quietly and quickly as they could, they darted out of the closet and down the stone steps. The shadows were already lengthening, the tops of the trees in the Forbidden Forest gilded once more with gold.

"If anyone's looking out of the window—" Delilah started, looking up at the castle behind them.

"We'll run for it," Harry finished. Delilah nodded. "Straight into the forest, right? We'll have to hide behind a tree or something and keep a lookout—"

"Okay, but we'll go around by the greenhouses!" said Delilah. "We need to keep out of sight of Hagrid's front door, or we'll see us! We must be nearly at Hagrid's by now!"

Still working out what she meant, Harry set off at a sprint, Delilah right at his heels. They tore across the vegetable gardens to the greenhouses, paused for a moment behind them, then set off again, fast as they could, skirting around the Whomping Willow, tearing toward the shelter of the forest.

Safe in the shadows of the trees, Harry turned around, breathless; seconds later, Delilah arrived beside him, breathing just fine. How is it that she— oh, right...

"Right," she said in a low voice. "We need to sneak over to Hagrid's. Keep out of sight, Harry."

They made their way silently through the trees, keeping to the very edge of the forest. Then, as they glimpsed the front of Hagrid's house, they heard a knock upon his door. They moved quickly behind a wide oak trunk and peered out from either side. Hagrid had appeared in his doorway, shaking and white, looking around to see who had knocked. And Harry heard his own voice.

"It's us. We're wearing the Invisibility Cloak, and Deli made herself invisible. Let us in, and we can take it off."

"Yeh shouldn've come!" Hagrid whispered. He stood back, then shut the door quickly.

"This is the weirdest thing we've ever done," Harry said fervently.

Delilah rolled her eyes. "Says the boy who went to a Deathday party last Halloween." Squinting her eyes slightly, she whispered, "Let's move along a bit. We need to get nearer to Buckbeak!"

They crept through the trees until they saw the nervous hippogriff, tethered to the fence around Hagrid's pumpkin patch.

"Now?" Harry whispered.

"What? No!" said Delilah. "If we steal him now, those Committee people will think Hagrid set him free! We've got to wait until they've seen he's tied outside!"

"That's going to give us about sixty seconds," said Harry. This was starting to seem impossible.

At that moment, there was a crash of breaking china from inside Hagrid's cabin.

"That's Hagrid breaking the milk jug," Delilah whispered. "Hermione's going to find Scabbers in a moment—"

Sure enough, a few minutes later, they heard Hermione's shriek of surprise.
"Deli," said Harry suddenly, "what if we— we just run in there and grab Pettigrew—"

"No!" said Delilah in a terrified whisper. "Don't you understand? We're breaking one of the most important wizarding laws! Nobody's supposed to change time, nobody! You heard Dumbledore; if we're seen—"

"We'd only be seen by ourselves and Hagrid!"

"Harry, what do you think you'd do if you saw yourself bursting into Hagrid's house?" said Delilah.

"I'd—I'd think I'd gone mad," said Harry, "or I'd think there was some Dark Magic going on—"

"Exactly! You wouldn't understand, you might even attack yourself! Don't you see? Grandpa—Dumbledore told me what awful things have happened when wizards have meddled with time... Loads of them ended up killing their past or future selves by mistake!"

"Okay!" said Harry. "It was just an idea, I just thought—"

"I know," Delilah said softly.

She then nudged him gently and pointed toward the castle. Harry moved his head a few inches to get a clear view of the distant front doors. Dumbledore, Fudge, the old Committee member, and Macnair the executioner were coming down the steps.

"We're about to come out!" she whispered.

And sure enough, moments later, Hagrid's back door opened, and Harry saw himself, Delilah, Ron, and Hermione walking out of it with Hagrid. It was, without a doubt, the strangest sensation of his life, standing behind the tree, and watching himself in the pumpkin patch.

"It's okay, Beaky, it's okay..." Hagrid said to Buckbeak. Then he turned to Harry, Delilah, Ron, and Hermione. "Go on. Get goin'."

"Hagrid, we can't—"

"We'll tell them what really happened—"

"They can't kill him—"

"Go! It's bad enough without you lot in trouble an' all!"

Harry watched the Hermione in the pumpkin patch throw the Invisibility Cloak over him and Ron, and Delilah turned herself invisible.

"Go quick. Don' listen...."

There was a knock on Hagrid's front door. The execution party had arrived. Hagrid turned, around and headed back into his cabin, leaving the back door ajar. Harry watched the grass flatten in patches all around the cabin and heard three pairs of feet retreating. He, Delilah, Ron, and Hermione had gone... but the Harry and Delilah hidden in the trees could now hear what was happening inside the cabin through the back door.

"Where is the beast?" came the cold voice of Macnair.

"Out— outside," Hagrid croaked.
Harry pulled his head out of sight as Macnair's face appeared at Hagrid's window, staring out at Buckbeak. Then they heard Fudge.

"We— er— have to read you the official notice of execution, Hagrid. I'll make it quick. And then you and Macnair need to sign it. Macnair, You're supposed to listen too, that's procedure—"

Macnair's face vanished from the window. It was now or never.

"Wait here," Harry whispered to Delilah. "I'll do it."

She frowned. "Harry—"

"Please," he cut her off, looking her straight in the eyes. "Let me do this."

She stared at him for a long moment before finally giving in. "Fine, but be careful."

With a nod, as Fudge's voice started again, Harry darted out from behind his tree, vaulted the fence into the pumpkin patch, and approached Buckbeak.

"It is the decision of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures that the hippogriff Buckbeak, hereafter called the condemned, shall be executed on the sixth of June at sundown—"

Careful not to blink, Harry stared up into Buckbeak's fierce orange eyes once more and bowed. Buckbeak sank to his scaly knees and then stood up again. Harry began to fumble with the knot of rope tying Buckbeak to the fence.

"... sentenced to execution by beheading, to be carried out by the Committee's appointed executioner, Walden Macnair..."

"Come on, Buckbeak," Harry murmured, "come on, we're going to help you. Quietly... quietly..."

"... as witnessed below. Hagrid, you sign here..."

Harry threw all his weight onto the rope, but Buckbeak had dug in his front feet.

"Well, let's get this over with," said the reedy voice of the Committee member from inside Hagrid's cabin. "Hagrid, perhaps it will be better if you stay inside—"

"No, I— I wan' ter be with him... I don' wan' him ter be alone—"

Footsteps echoed from within the cabin.

"Buckbeak, move!" Harry hissed.

Harry tugged harder on the rope around Buckbeak's neck. The hippogriff began to walk, rustling its wings irritably. They were still ten feet away from the forest, in plain view of Hagrid's back door.


Delilah's white face was sticking out from behind a tree. "Harry, hurry!" she mouthed.

Harry could still hear Dumbledore's voice talking from within the cabin. He gave the rope another wrench. Buckbeak broke into a grudging trot. They had reached the trees...

"Quick!" Delilah moaned, darting out from behind her tree, seizing the rope too and adding her
weight to make Buckbeak move faster. Harry looked over his shoulder; they were now blocked from sight; they couldn't see Hagrid's garden at all.

"Stop!" he whispered to Delilah. "They might hear us."

Hagrid's back door had opened with a bang. Harry, Delilah, and Buckbeak stood quite still; even the hippogriff seemed to be listening intently.

Silence... then—

"Where is it?" said the reedy voice of the Committee member. "Where is the beast?"

"It was tied here!" said the executioner furiously. I saw it! just here!"

"How extraordinary," said Dumbledore. There was a note of amusement in his voice.

"Beaky!" said Hagrid huskily.

There was a swishing noise and the thud of an ax. The executioner seemed to have swung it into the fence in anger. And then came the howling, and this time they could hear Hagrid's words through his sobs.

"Gone! Gone! Bless his little beak; he's gone! Musta pulled himself free! Beaky, yeh clever boy!"

Buckbeak started to strain against the rope, trying to get back to Hagrid. Harry and Delilah tightened their grip and dug their heels into the forest floor to stop him.

"Someone untied him!" the executioner was snarling. "We should search the grounds, the forest."

"Macnair, if Buckbeak has indeed been stolen, do you really think the thief will have led him away on foot?" said Dumbledore, still sounding amused. "Search the skies, if you will... Hagrid, I could do with a cup of tea. Or a large brandy."

"O— o' course, Professor," said Hagrid, who sounded weak with happiness. "Come in, come in...."

Harry and Delilah listened closely. They heard footsteps, the soft cursing of the executioner, the snap of the door, and then silence once more.

"Now what?" whispered Harry, looking around.

"We'll have to hide in here," said Delilah. "We need to wait until they've gone back to the castle. Then we wait until it's safe to fly Buckbeak up to Sirius's window. He won't be there for another couple of hours... Oh, my goddess— this is going to be difficult...."

She looked nervously over her shoulder into the depths of the forest. The sun was setting now, and she was starting to feel on edge again; she didn't want to phase again, but her wolf yearned to come out once more.

"We're going to have to move," said Harry, thinking hard. "We've got to be able to see the Whomping Willow, or we won't know what's going on."

"Okay," said Delilah, getting a firmer grip on Buckbeak's rope. "But we've got to keep out of sight, Harry, remember...."

They moved around the edge of the forest, darkness falling thickly around them until they were hidden behind a clump of trees through which they could make out the Willow.
"There's Ron!" said Harry suddenly.

A dark figure was sprinting across the lawn, and its shout echoed through the still night air.

"Get away from him— get away— Scabbers, come here—"

And then they saw two more figures materialize out of nowhere. Harry watched himself and Hermione, running right after Delilah, who was chasing after Ron. Then he saw Ron dive.

"Gotta! Get off, you stinking cat—"

"There's Sirius!" said Harry. The great shape of the dog had bounded out from the roots of the Willow. They saw him bowl Harry over, then seize Ron...

"Looks even worse from here, doesn't it?" said Harry, watching the dog pulling Ron into the roots. "Ouch— look, I just got walloped by the tree— and so did you— this is weird—"

"You keep saying aloud, it's going to feel weirder," Delilah muttered.

The Whomping Willow was creaking and lashing out with its lower branches; they could see themselves darting here and there, trying to reach the trunk. And then the tree froze.

"That was Crookshanks pressing the knot," said Delilah.

"And there we go..." Harry muttered. "We're in."

The moment they disappeared, the tree began to move again. Seconds later, they heard footsteps quite close by. Dumbledore, Macnair, Fudge, and the old Committee member were making their way up to the castle.

"Right after we'd gone down into the passage!" Delilah huffed in disbelief. "If only Dumbledore had come with us..."

"Macnair and Fudge would've come too," said Harry bitterly. "I bet you anything Fudge would've told Macnair to murder Sirius on the spot...."

They watched the four men climb the castle steps and disappear from view. For a few minutes, the scene was deserted. Then—

"Here comes Lupin!" said Harry as they saw another figure sprinting down the stone steps and hating toward the Willow. Harry looked up at the sky. Clouds were obscuring the moon completely.

They watched Lupin seize a broken branch from the ground and prod the knot on the trunk. The tree stopped fighting, and Lupin, too, disappeared into the gap in its roots.

"If he'd only grabbed the cloak," said Harry. "It's just lying there...."

He turned to Delilah.

"If I just dashed out now and grabbed it, Snape'd never be able to get it and—"

"Harry, we can't be seen!"

"How can you stand this?" he asked Delilah fiercely. She looked at him with almost savage, though she contained herself, pushing back whatever memory was trying to make its way back into her mind. "Just standing here and watching it happen?" He hesitated. "I'm going to grab the cloak!"
"Harry, no!"

Delilah seized the back of Harry's sweatshirt not a moment too soon. Just then, they heard a burst of song. It was Hagrid, making his way up to the castle, singing at the top of his voice, and weaving slightly as he walked. A large bottle was swinging from his hands.

"See?" Delilah whispered. "See what would have happened? We've got to keep out of sight! No, Buckbeak!"

The hippogriff was making frantic attempts to get to Hagrid again; Harry seized his rope too, straining to hold Buckbeak back. They watched Hagrid meander tipsily up to the castle. He was gone. Buckbeak stopped fighting to get away. His head drooped sadly.

 Barely two minutes later, the castle doors flew open yet again, and Snape came charging out of them, running toward the Willow.

Harry's fists clenched as they watched Snape skid to a halt next to the tree, looking around. He grabbed the cloak and held it up.

"Get your filthy hands off it," Harry snarled under his breath.

"Shh!"

Snape seized the branch Lupin had used to freeze the tree, prodded the knot, and vanished from view as he put on the cloak.

"So that's it," said Delilah quietly. "We're all down there... and now we've just got to wait until we come back up again...."

She took the end of Buckbeak's rope and tied it securely around the nearest tree, then sat down on the dry ground, arms around her knees. Sighing, Harry settled down beside her, their arms slightly brushing against each other. Harry found himself scooting a bit closer; she was warm.

He looked at her and saw the hard look on her face; her mind was dwelling hard on something. "What is it?"

"I..." She bit her lip, staring up at the darkened sky. "I just... there's something I don't get."

"Must be killing you to not know something." Harry gently nudged his shoulder against hers in a teasing manner, an effort to lighten up the atmosphere a bit. She looked at him and gave him a small smile, though, it was clear it was forced. "What is it?" he repeated.

Biting her lip again, she looked down at the ground. "It's just..." Her brows furrowed. "When the Dementors came..."

"Yeah?"

"They..." Her frown deepened, clouding itself with slight confusion. "They didn't get Sirius... well, I think they didn't. I remember them coming toward us, and then I think I passed out... there were so many of them... I felt like.... like..." Like I was being stripped of my souls; it was so painful...

Harry pursed his lips, thinking for a moment before liberating; he explained what he'd seen; how, as the nearest dementor had lowered its mouth to Harry's, two large silver... somethings had come galloping across the lake and forced the Dementors to retreat.
Delilah's mouth was slightly open by the time Harry had finished. "Wow. There's only one thing it could have been, to make the Dementors go," she said.

Harry nodded absentmindedly, already knowing what she was thinking about without having to be a mind reader. "A real Patronus. And they were both really powerful ones."

"But who could've conjured them?"

Harry didn't say anything. He was thinking back to the person he'd seen on the other bank of the lake. He knew there'd been two, though he only saw one. And he knew who he thought it had been... but how could it have been?

"Didn't you see what they looked like?" said Delilah eagerly; she knew she could conjure a Patronus, but, the many times she'd done so in the past, she'd always ended up fainting, so she had no idea what an actual Patronus looked like, not even her own. "Was it one of the teachers?"

"No," said Harry. "He wasn't a teacher."

"But it must have been a really powerful witch or wizard, to drive all those Dementors away... If the Patronuses were shining so brightly, didn't they light them up? Couldn't you see—"

"Yeah, I saw one of them," said Harry slowly. "But... maybe I imagined it... I wasn't thinking straight... I passed out right afterward..."

"Who did you think it was?"

"I think—" Harry swallowed, knowing how strange this was going to sound. "I think it was my dad."

Harry glanced up at Delilah and saw that her lips had pursed, and her eyes were held an unreadable emotion.

"Harry, your dad is... not with us," she said quietly.

"I know that," said Harry quickly.

"You think you saw his ghost?"

"I don't know... no... he looked solid..."

"But then—"

"Maybe I was seeing things," said Harry. "But... from what I could see... it looked like him... I've got photos of him..."

Delilah sighed, running a hand through her long brown hair. "Harry..."

"I know it sounds crazy," said Harry flatly. He turned to look at Buckbeak, who was digging his beak into the ground, apparently searching for worms. But he wasn't really watching Buckbeak.

He was thinking about his father and about his father's four oldest friends... Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, Phantom, and Prongs... Had all five of them been out on the grounds tonight? Wormtail had reappeared this evening when everyone had thought he was dead... Was it so impossible his father had done the same? Was it possible that even Delilah's mother could've too? Had he been seeing things across the lake? The figures had been too far away to see distinctly... yet he had felt sure, for a moment, before he'd lost consciousness...
"No, it doesn't."

Harry looked back at Delilah, who was already staring at him with soft eyes. She grabbed his hand in hers and gave it a small squeeze.

"It doesn't sound crazy. It sounds impossible, but, Harry, we live in a world of magic, something you and I both probably thought to be impossible a few years ago until we got our letters, then, on the first of September, ran through that wall in between platform nine and ten. Then when those boats pulled us to Hogwarts and we saw ghosts and... felt rather uncomfortable when they walked through us." They shared a small laugh. "And when we met the talking sorting hat that put us in Gryffindor. When we soared through the air on broomsticks for the first time, when we fought a troll... when we met centaurs and went through our first big adventure to battle against a two-faced freak in the end."

"When Ron and I flew to school in his dad's car."

"That was stupid."

"At least we made it," Harry interjected, a small grin on his lips.

Delilah smiled softly, resting her head on his shoulder. "At least there's that."

They were silent for a moment before Harry continued her enumeration. "When Ron and I followed the spiders into the forest... and you saved us."

Delilah sighed. "I guess even my wolf finds you to be quite reckless, sometimes." They shared another small laugh. "How you fought the Basilisk and defeated Riddle for the third time." She pulled her head from his shoulder and looked at him. "My point is, Harry—don't lose hope. Whether it was your father or not, never lose hope. Because that... whether you believe it or not, that is what keeps you alive, just like faith gives your life meaning, blessings, and a good end. Hope is passion for what is possible; everything is possible, just like the word impossible says so itself: I'm possible."

Harry stared deeply into Delilah's eyes for a moment, practically in a trance. When she gave him a small smile, a little more genuine this time, he finally snapped out of his hypnosis and gave her one right back.

"Thanks, Lilly," he said softly.

She leaned forward and placed a small kiss on his cheek, her lips lingering there for a moment. "Anytime," she whispered, pulling away, turning her attention back to the spot their other selves were meant to come out from any time soon now.

Suddenly, the leaves overhead rustled faintly in the breeze. The moon drifted in and out of sight behind the shifting clouds. Delilah sat up straighter, with her face turned toward the Willow, as she waited.

And then, at last, after over an hour.

"Here we come!" she whispered.

She and Harry got to their feet. Buckbeak raised his head. They saw Lupin, Ron, and Pettigrew clambering awkwardly out of the hole in the roots. Then came the unconscious Snape, drifting weirdly upward, followed by Black. Next came Delilah, Harry, and Hermione. They all began to walk toward the castle.

Harry's heart was starting to beat very fast. He glanced up at the sky. Any moment now, that cloud
was going to move aside and show the moon...

"Harry," Delilah muttered; she knew exactly what he was thinking, "we've got to stay put. We mustn't be seen. There's nothing we can do...."

"So we're just going to let Pettigrew escape all over again... said Harry quietly.

"How do you expect to find a rat in the dark?" she snapped.

"Well, you've got your—"

"Harry, there's nothing we can do! We came back to help Sirius; we're not supposed to be doing anything else, alright?!"

He sighed. "Alright!"

The moon slid out from behind its cloud. They saw the tiny figures across the grounds stop. Then they saw movement—

"There goes Lupin," she whispered. "He's transforming."

"Delilah!" said Harry suddenly. "We've got to move!"

"We can't; I keep telling you—"

"Not to interfere! Lupin's going to run into the forest, with you right behind him, both right at us!"

Delilah's eyes widened at the realization. "Shoot, shoot, crazy gun, shoot." She glanced around, rapidly. "Quick!" she hissed, dashing to untie Buckbeak. "Quick! Where are we going to go? Where are we going to hide? The Dementors wilt be coming any moment—"

"Back to Hagrid's!" Harry said. "It's empty now— come on!"

They ran as fast as they could, Buckbeak cantering along behind them. They could hear the werewolf and Delilah's wolfish self howling behind them. The cabin was in sight; Harry skidded to the door, wrenched it open, and Delilah and Buckbeak flashed past him; Harry threw himself in after them and bolted the door. Fang, the boar-hound, barked loudly.

"Shh, Fang, it's us!" said Delilah, hurrying over and scratching his ears to quieten him. "That was really close!" she said to Harry.

"Yeah..."

Harry was looking out of the window. It was much harder to see what was going on from here. Buckbeak seemed very happy to find himself back inside Hagrid's house. He lay down in front of the fire, folded his wings contentedly, and seemed ready for a good nap.

"I think I'd better go outside again, you know," said Harry slowly. "I can't see what's going on—we won't know when it's time—"

Delilah looked up. Her expression was suspicious.

"I'm not going to try and interfere," said Harry quickly. "But if we don't see what's going on, how're we going to know when it's time to rescue Sirius?"

Biting her lip for a moment as she contemplated his reasoning, she finally gave in and nodded.
slowly. "Well... okay, fine... I'll wait here with Buckbeak... but Harry, be careful— there's a werewolf out there— and... and me... and the Dementors."

Harry stepped outside again and edged around the cabin. He could hear yelping in the distance. That meant the Dementors were closing in on Sirius and Delilah... He and Hermione would be running to him at any moment now...

Delilah sat on the armchair beside the fire and stared emptily at the flames. Her mind had suddenly gone blank as she tried to control the wolf within her. She was snapped back to reality by Buckbeak who had started pecking at her leg to get her attention.

"Quid est?" (What is it?) she asked.

The large creature turned its gaze from her to the window. She bit her lip, knowing what he was implying.

"You think I should go?"

He simply looked at her with anxious orange eyes.

She sighed. "Look, I know I'm his Curatoria, but I can't hover all the time. He can be reckless, but he's shown me that he is very well capable of taking care of himself..." she trailed off, shifting her eyes toward the window to look at the dark sky.

Harry stared out toward the lake, his heart doing a kind of drum roll in his chest; whoever had sent those Patronuses would be appearing at any moment. For a fraction of a second, he stood, irresolute, in front of Hagrid's door. You must not be seen. But he didn't want to be seen. He wanted to do the seeing... He had to know...

And there were the Dementors. They were emerging out of the darkness from every direction, gliding around the edges of the lake... They were moving away from where Harry stood, to the opposite bank... He wouldn't have to get near them...

Harry began to run. He had no thought in his head except his father... If it was him... if it really was him... he had to know, had to find out...

Delilah's breath suddenly got caught up in her throat when she caught sight of the Dementors soaring their way toward the lake.

"Okay, maybe I can." And with that, she was gone.

The lake was coming nearer and nearer, but there was no sign of anybody. On the opposite bank, he could see tiny glimmers of silver— his own attempts at a Patronus—

There was a bush at the very edge of the water. Harry threw himself behind it, peering desperately through the leaves. On the opposite bank, the glimmers of silver were suddenly extinguished. A terrified excitement shot through him— any moment now—

"Come on!" he muttered, staring about. "Where are you? Dad, come on—"

"Harry!" a voice hissed from behind him. He turned his head rather quickly, almost getting a whiplash, and saw her, having the same look that was probably on his face. It was just them two; nobody else came.

Harry and Delilah raised their heads to look at the circle of Dementors across the lake. One of them
was lowering its hood.

"We've got to do something," Delilah whispered. "If we don't, we'll die, but if we change something..."

Just a few more seconds Harry wanted to wait. Just a few more. It was time for the rescuer to appear — but no one was coming to help this time—

And then it hit him— he understood. He hadn't seen his father— he had seen himself—

"Harry!"

Not only himself.

"Now!"

He'd seen them.

They flung themselves out from behind the bush and pulled out their wands.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" they yelled in perfect sync.

And out of the end of Harry's wand burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver animal. He screwed up his eyes, trying to see what it was. It looked like a horse. From beside him, out of the end of Delilah's wand burst another blinding, dazzling, silver animal.

His was galloping, and Delilah's was dashing silently away from them, across the black surface of the lake. He saw his lower its head, and Delilah's crouch slightly in an offensive posture, and charge at the swarming dementors. Now they were galloping around and around the black shapes on the ground, and the dementors were falling back, scattering, retreating into the darkness... They were gone.

The Patronuses turned. They were cantering back toward Harry and Delilah across the still surface of the water. Neither were horses. Neither were unicorns, either. It was a stag and overly large wolf. They were both shining brightly as the moon above... they were coming back to them...

They stopped on the bank. The stag's hooves made no mark on the soft ground, nor did the wolf's paws, as they stared at Delilah and Harry with their large, silver eyes. Slowly, both bowed their heads. And Harry realized...

"Prongs," he whispered. But as his trembling fingertips stretched toward the creature, it vanished.

Harry stood there, hand still outstretched. Lowering his hand, he glanced over at Delilah who was staring at the spot her Patronus had previously been standing on, a broken look on her face; the wolf had looked very much like her mother's. Of course, no one but herself knew that.

Stuffing her wand into the back pocket of her trousers, she simply stood there, for a moment, frowning at the ground. Feeling eyes upon her, she turned and found Harry looking at her.

They stared into each other's eyes for God knows how long, never breaking their gaze. Harry knew what he was feeling as his heart accelerated every time he remembered how close to each other they were at that moment. He had always felt this way around her: nervous, forgetful, random, protective, and he always knew why.

Without thinking, he grabbed her face between his hands and crashed his lips onto hers. She was
shocked and confused though it didn't take long for her to kiss him back. It started gentle, and after a few moments something seemed to change, their lips became more urgent, somewhat desperate.

He pressed her against his body, his hands running down her back. Their tongues met in the fiery kiss. The heat between their lips made a moan escape Delilah's lips. She gently caressed his neck, somehow not wanting to pull away. He placed his hands on her waist, deepening the kiss. She breathed heavily as their tongues grazed each other. She felt the hot friction between them become unbearable, yet they didn't stop as they were so lost into each other.

Then, with a great leap of their heart, they heard hooves not far way— they pulled apart, breathing heavily, whirled around and saw Buckbeak trotting toward them. They glanced back at each other and blushed, looking away.

Referring to their actions preceding the kiss, Delilah said, "Did we just..."

"Just saved all our lives?" Harry nodded. "Get behind here— behind this bush— can't be seen."

"I can't believe it... We conjured up Patronuses that drove away all those dementors!" she muttered, following him behind the bush, dragging Buckbeak along.

"That's very, very advanced magic. I knew I could do it this time," said Harry, the lingering tingling sensation on his lips slowly disappearing. "I knew it because I'd already done it... Does that make sense?"

Delilah looked at him, the kiss far gone from her mind as she let out a breathy chuckle. "I don't know — Harry, look at Snape!

Together they peered around the bush at the other bank. Snape had regained consciousness. He was conjuring stretchers and lifting the limp forms of Delilah, Harry, Hermione, and Black onto them. A fifth stretcher, no doubt bearing Ron, was already floating at his side. Then, wand held out in front of him; he moved them away toward the castle.

"Right, it's nearly time," said Delilah tensely, looking up at the sky, navigating time through the moon. "We've got about forty-five minutes until Dumbledore locks the door to the hospital wing. We've got to rescue Sirius and get back into the ward before anybody realizes we're missing..."

They waited, watching the moving clouds reflected in the lake, while the bush next to them whispered in the breeze. Buckbeak, bored, was ferreting for worms again.

"D' you reckon he's up there yet?" said Harry, checking his watch. He looked up at the castle and began counting the windows to the right of the West Tower.

"Look!" Delilah whispered. ",Who's that? Someone's coming back out of the castle!"

Harry stared through the darkness. The man was hurrying across the grounds, toward one of the entrances. Something shiny glinted in his belt.

"Macnair!" said Harry. "The executioner! He's gone to get the dementors! This is it, Delilah—"

Delilah put her hands on Buckbeak's back, and Harry gave her a leg up. Then he placed his foot on one of the lower branches of the bush and climbed up in front of her. He pulled Buckbeak's rope back over his neck and tied it to the other side of his collar like reins.

"Ready?" he whispered to Delilah. "You better hold on to me—" He nudged Buckbeak's sides with his heels.
Buckbeak soared straight into the dark air. Harry gripped his flanks with his knees, feeling the great wings rising powerfully beneath them. Delilah was cantering a strong yet gentle hold around Harry's waist. He urged Buckbeak forward. They were gliding quietly toward the upper floors of the castle... Harry pulled hard on the left-hand side of the rope, and Buckbeak turned. Harry was trying to count the windows flashing past—

"Whoa!" he said, pulling back as hard as he could.

Buckbeak slowed down, and they found themselves at a stop unless you counted the fact that they kept rising up and down several feet as the hippogriff beat his wings to remain airborne.

"He's there!" Harry said, spotting Sirius as they rose up beside the window. He reached out, and as Buckbeak's wings fell, was able to tap sharply on the glass.

Black looked up. Harry saw his jaw drop. He leapt from his chair, hurried to the window and tried to open it, but it was locked.

"Stand back!" Delilah called to him, and she took out her wand, still gripping the back of Harry's sweatshirt with her left hand. "Alohomora!"

The window sprang open.

"How— how—" said Black weakly, staring at the hippogriff.

"Get on— there's not much time," said Delilah as Harry gripped Buckbeak firmly on either side of his sleek neck to hold him steady. "You've got to get out of here— the dementors are coming— Macnair's gone to get them."

Black placed a hand on either side of the window frame and heaved his head and shoulders out of it. It was very lucky he was so thin. In seconds, he had managed to fling one leg over Buckbeak's back and pull himself onto the hippogriff behind Delilah.

"Okay, Buckbeak, up!" said Harry, shaking the rope. "Up to the tower— come on."

The hippogriff just stayed there.

Sighing, Delilah leaned forward. "Ascende!" (Go up!)

As though awakening from an open-eyed sleep, the hippogriff gave one sweep of its mighty wings and they were soaring upward again, high as the top of the West Tower. Buckbeak landed with a clatter on the battlements, and Harry and Delilah slid off him at once.

She walked up front to face Buckbeak and patted his beak. "Bonus es domi asservaretur, vos scitis quoniam ab?" (You're a good hippogriff, you know that?) she said softly. The hippogriff closed its eyes lazily, enjoying her praise and gentle touch. Smiling slightly, Delilah sighed and turned her attention back to Sirius.

"Sirius, you'd better go, quick," Harry panted. "They'll reach Flitwick's office any moment; they'll find out you're gone."

Buckbeak pawed the ground, tossing his sharp head.

"What happened to the other boy? Ron?" croaked Sirius.

"He's going to be okay," Delilah reassured him, softly. "He's still out of it, but he's with Hermione,
and, besides, Madam Pomfrey says she'll be able to make him better. Quick— go—"

But Black was still staring down at Harry and Delilah.

"How can I ever thank—"

"GO!" Harry and Delilah shouted together.

Black wheeled Buckbeak around, facing the open sky.

"We'll see each other again," he said. "You are— truly your father's son, Harry...." He glanced back at Delilah. "I hope we meet again, as planned."

Delilah shrugged. "Schedule's a bit tight and messy, but it's in there. Let's just hope I'll be the same height next time we meet," she joked halfheartedly.

Black chuckled, shaking his head. He squeezed Buckbeak's sides with his heels. Harry and Delilah jumped back as the enormous wings rose once more and took off into the air. He and his rider became smaller and smaller as Harry gazed after them... then a cloud drifted across the moon...

They were gone.
"Harry!"

Delilah was tugging at his sleeve, staring up at Hogwarts' enormous clock. "We've got exactly ten minutes to get back down to the hospital wing without anybody seeing us— before Dumbledore locks the door—"

"Okay," said Harry, wrenching his gaze from the sky, "let's go...."

They slipped through the doorway behind them and down a tightly spiraling stone staircase. As they reached the bottom of it, they heard voices. They flattened themselves against the wall and listened. It sounded like Fudge and Snape. They were walking quickly along the corridor at the foot of the staircase.

"... only hope Dumbledore's not going to make difficulties," Snape was saying. "The Kiss will be performed immediately?"

"As soon as Macnair returns with the dementors. This whole Black affair has been highly embarrassing. I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to informing the Daily Prophet that we've got him at last... I daresay they'll want to interview you, Snape... and once young Harry and Delilah are back in their right minds, I expect they'll want to tell the Prophet exactly how you saved them...."

Delilah rolled her eyes. Harry clenched his teeth. He caught a glimpse of Snape's smirk as he and Fudge passed their hiding place. Their footsteps died away. Harry and Delilah waited a few moments to make sure they'd really gone, then started to run in the opposite direction. Down one staircase, then another, along a new, corridor— then they heard a cackling ahead.

"Peeves!" Harry muttered, grabbing Delilah's wrist. "In here!"

They tore into a deserted classroom to their left just in time. Peeves seemed to be bouncing along the corridor in boisterous good spirits, laughing his head off.

"Oh, he's horrible," whispered Delilah, her ear to the door.

"Well, you're lucky he isn't that horrible to you," Harry muttered.

Delilah rolled her eyes and huffed. "I bet he's all excited because the Dementors are going to finish off Sirius...." She grabbed Harry's wrist and checked his watch. "Three minutes, Harry!"

They waited until Peeves's gloating voice had faded into the distance, then slid back out of the room and broke into a run again.

"Delilah— what'll happen— if we don't get back inside before Dumbledore locks the door?" Harry panted.

"I don't want to think about it!" she moaned, checking his watch again. "One minute!"

They had reached the end of the corridor with the hospital wing entrance. "Okay— I can hear Dumbledore," said Delilah tensely. "Come on, Harry!"

They crept along the corridor. The door opened. Dumbledore's back appeared.
"I am going to lock you in," they heard him saying. "it is five minutes to midnight. Miss Dawn, three turns should do it. Good luck."

Dumbledore backed out of the room, closed the door, and took out his wand to magically lock it. Panicking, Harry and Delilah ran forward. Dumbledore looked up, and a wide smile appeared under the long silver mustache.

"Well?" he said quietly.

"We did it!" said Harry breathlessly. "Sirius has gone, on Buckbeak...."

Dumbledore beamed at them.

"Well done. I think—" He listened intently for any sound within the hospital wing. "Yes, I think you've gone too— get inside— I'll lock you in—"

Harry and Delilah slipped back inside the dormitory. It was empty except for Ron, who was still lying motionless in the end bed, and Hermione, who sat on a chair beside him. She looked up, hearing two pairs of faint footsteps and grinned when she saw the other half of her quartet sneaking back in.

"You did it?" she mouthed at Delilah as she rushed over to her bed. The latter grinned back and nodded.

Delilah grabbed her robes she had left laying on the ground and quickly slipped them on. Then, as the lock clicked behind them, Harry and Delilah crept back to their own beds, Delilah tucking the Time-Turner back under her robes. A moment later, Madam Pomfrey came striding back out of her office.

"Did I hear the headmaster leaving? Am I allowed to look after my patients now?"

She was in a very bad mood. Harry and Delilah thought it best to accept their chocolate quietly. Madam Pomfrey stood over them, making sure they ate it. But Harry could hardly swallow. He and Delilah were waiting, listening, their nerves jangling. Hermione pretended to sleep, as she, too, waited, her back to them, so no one could see her face. And then, as Harry and Delilah both took a fourth piece of chocolate from Madam Pomfrey, they heard a distant roar of fury echoing from somewhere above them.

"What was that?" said Madam Pomfrey in alarm.

"Whoa, even I don't make such a noise," Delilah muttered.

Hearing what Delilah had said, Hermione covered her laugh with a tired moan, moving a bit on her bed, pretending to still be fast asleep.

Now they could hear angry voices, growing louder and louder.

Madam Pomfrey was staring at the door. "Really— they'll wake everybody up! What do they think they're doing?"

Delilah's enhanced hearing was coming to her, so she no longer had a problem in hearing the commotion emitting from behind the door of the hospital wing. Harry didn't have the same advantage, though; he was craning his neck as subtly as he could as he tried to hear what the voices were saying. They were drawing nearer—
"He must have Disapparated, Severus. We should have left somebody in the room with him. When this gets out—"

"HE DIDN'T DISAPPARATE!" Snape roared, now very close at hand. "YOU CAN'T APPARATE OR DISAPPARATE INSIDE THIS CASTLE! THIS— HAS— SOMETHING— TO— DO— WITH— POTTER!"

"Severus— be reasonable— Harry has been locked up—"

*BAM.*

The door of the hospital wing burst open.

Fudge, Snape, and Dumbledore came striding into the ward. Dumbledore alone looked calm. Indeed, he looked as though he was quite enjoying himself. Fudge appeared angry. But Snape was beside himself.

"OUT WITH IT, POTTER!" he bellowed. "WHAT DID YOU DO?"

"Professor Snape!" shrieked Madam Pomfrey. "Control yourself!"

"See here, Snape, be reasonable," said Fudge. "This door's been locked, we just saw—"

"THEY HELPED HIM ESCAPE, I KNOW IT!" Snape howled, pointing at Harry and Delilah. His face was twisted; spit was flying from his mouth.

"Calm down, man!" Fudge barked. "You're talking nonsense!"

"YOU DON'T KNOW POTTER!" shrieked Snape. "HE DID IT! I KNOW HE DID IT—"

"That will do, Severus," said Dumbledore quietly.

"Think about what you are saying. This door has been locked since I left the ward ten minutes ago. Madam Pomfrey, have these students left their beds?"

"Of course not!" said Madam Pomfrey, bristling. "I would have heard them!"

"Well, there you have it, Severus," said Dumbledore calmly. "Unless you are suggesting that Harry and Delilah can be in two places at once, I'm afraid I don't see any point in troubling them further."

Hermione just couldn't help herself; she was silently snickering, though no one knew, as they all thought she was asleep. Delilah's lip twitched slightly; she knew that sneaky girl was hearing everything.

Snape stood there, seething, staring from Fudge, who looked thoroughly shocked at his behavior, to Dumbledore, whose eyes were twinkling behind his glasses. Snape whirled about, robes swishing behind him, and stormed out of the ward.

"Fellow seems quite unbalanced," said Fudge, staring after him. "I'd watch out for him if I were you, Dumbledore."

"Chocked on the chocolate." And she
lifted the piece of chocolate she was still holding.

Harry had to clear his throat to not choke on his own piece of chocolate. The men looked at him now, and he gave them a sheepish look.

"Didn't want to choke on my piece," he reasoned, lifting his own.

Eyes twinkling with amusement behind those half-moon spectacles of his, Dumbledore turned back to the Minister, calm and composed as always. "Oh, he's not unbalanced," he said quietly. "He's just suffered a severe disappointment."

"He's not the only one!" puffed Fudge. "The Daily Prophet's going to have a field day! We had Black cornered, and he slipped through our fingers yet again! All it needs now is for the story of that hippogriff's escape to get out, and I'll be a laughingstock! Well... I'd better go and notify the Ministry..."

"And the dementors?" said Dumbledore. "They'll be removed from the school, I trust?"

"Oh, yes, they'll have to go." Fudge ran his fingers distractedly through his hair. "Never dreamed they'd attempt to administer the Kiss on two innocent children..." he said, referring to Harry and Delilah.

Delilah held back a sigh. *Innocent, me? Ha, if only you knew...*

"Completely out of control..." Fudge went on. "No, I'll have them packed off back to Azkaban tonight... Perhaps we should think about dragons at the school entrance..."

"Hagrid would like that," said Dumbledore, smiling at Harry and Delilah. As he and Fudge left the dormitory, Madam Pomfrey hurried to the door and locked it again. Muttering angrily to herself, she headed back to her office.

Hermione finally sat up, an amused smile playing on her lips as she looked at the rather nonchalant-looking pair beside her. Suddenly, there was a low moan from the other end of the ward. Ron had woken up.

They could see him sitting up, rubbing his head, looking around.


Harry, Delilah, and Hermione looked at each other.

"You explain," said Harry to Delilah, helping himself to some more chocolate. Both girls only laughed.

When Delilah, Harry, Ron, and Hermione left the hospital wing at noon the next day, it was to find an almost deserted castle. The sweltering, heat and the end of the exams meant that everyone was taking full advantage of another Hogsmeade visit. Neither Ron nor Hermione felt like going, however, so they, along with Seth, who wouldn't leave Delilah alone after hearing she'd been in the hospital wing, and Delilah and Harry wandered onto the grounds, still talking about the extraordinary events of the previous night and wondering where Sirius and Buckbeak were now.

Sitting near the lake, watching the giant squid waving its tentacles lazily above the water, Harry lost the thread of the conversation as he looked across to the opposite bank. The stag and the wolf had cantered toward him and Delilah from there just last night... and, just last night, they both...
A shadow fell across them, and they looked up to see a very bleary-eyed Hagrid, mopping his sweaty face with one of his tablecloth-sized handkerchiefs and beaming down at them.

"Know I shouldn' feel happy, after wha' happened las' night," he said. "I mean, Black escapin' again, an', everythin'— but guess what?"

"What?" they said, pretending to look curious.

"Beaky! He escaped! He's free! Bin celebratin' all night!"

Seth, though he had already heard so from Harry and Delilah, couldn't help but lighten up. "Awesome!"

Delilah nodded. "That's great."

"That's wonderful!" agreed Hermione, giving Ron a reproving look because he looked as though he was close to laughing.

"Yeah... can't've tied him up properly," said Hagrid, gazing happily out over the grounds. "I was worried this mornin', mind... thought he mighta met Professor Lupin on the grounds, but Lupin says he never ate anythin' las' night...."

"What?" said Harry quickly.

"Blimey, haven' yeh heard?" said Hagrid, his smile fading a little. He lowered his voice, even though there was nobody in sight. "Er— Snape told all the Slytherins this mornin'... Thought everyone'd know by now... Professor Lupin's a werewolf, see. An' he was loose on the grounds las' night... He's packin' now, o' course."

"He's packing?" said Delilah, alarmed. "Why?"

She never liked werewolves due to the bad history she shared with them, but she was glad and proud to say that Lupin was an exception, not only because he had been close friends with her mother and Sirius, but also because he had proven that, albeit him losing his human conscious at every full moon, he was a man of trust.

"Leavin', isn' he?" said Hagrid, looking surprised that Harry had to ask. "Resigned firs' thing this mornin'. Says he can't risk it happenin again."

Delilah scrambled to her feet, Harry following suit.

"I'm going to see him," Delilah said to Seth, Ron and Hermione.

"But if he's resigned—"

"— doesn't sound like there's anything we can do—"

"I don't care. I still want to see him."

"Me too," said Harry.

Delilah nodded. "We'll meet you back here."

As both Harry and Delilah turned to leave, Seth jumped to his feet. "Wait! I'm coming with you!"

And the three were on their way.
"Has Daren told you about werewolves yet?" Delilah asked her brother as the three of them made their way up the stairs.

"'Bout how they're our mortal enemies, just like all the nasty bloodsuckers in the world?" Delilah chuckled but nodded. "Yeah. I know it's pretty much in our nature to hate them, but I can't seem to hate Mr. Lupin. I guess it's because he's the first werewolf I've met, and probably the only nice and cool one I'll ever meet." He looked at his sister. "Have you ever met one before him?"

Delilah chuckled, though Harry did not fail to miss the falling edge in that chortle. "You have no idea," she said darkly, not noticing the curious looks both boys threw her way, and she kept her eyes ahead.

Harry and Seth looked at each other, though, not knowing what else to say or do, they simply shrugged at each other and followed Delilah toward their destination.

Lupin's office door was open. He had already packed most of his things. The grindylow's empty tank stood next to his battered old suitcase, which was open and nearly full. Lupin was bending over something on his desk and looked up only when Delilah knocked on the door.

"I saw you coming," said Lupin, smiling. He pointed to the parchment he had been poring over. It was the Marauder's Map.

"We just saw Hagrid," said Harry. "And he said you'd resigned. It's not true, is it?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Lupin. He started opening his desk drawers and taking out the contents.

"Why?" said Harry. "The Ministry of Magic don't think you were helping Sirius, do they?"

Lupin crossed to the door and closed it behind Harry, who'd been the last one to step in.

"No. Professor Dumbledore managed to convince Fudge that I was trying to save your lives." He sighed. "That was the final straw for Severus. I think the loss of the Order of Merlin hit him hard. So he— er— accidentally let it slip that I am a werewolf this morning at breakfast."

Delilah gave him a skeptical look. "Accidentally?" She scoffed. "We're talking about Severus, here; it was anything but accidental."

"You're not leaving just because of that!" said Seth.

Lupin smiled wryly. "This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents... They will not want a werewolf teaching their children. And after last night, I see their point. I could have bitten any of you... That must never happen again."

"But you— and we— and you— wha— You're the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher we've ever had!" said Delilah. "You can't leave!"

Lupin shook his head and didn't speak. He carried on emptying his drawers. Then, while the three students were trying to think of a good argument to make him stay, Lupin said, "From what the headmaster told me this morning, Harry, Delilah, you both saved a lot of lives last night. If I'm proud of anything I've done this year, it's how much you've learned... Tell me about your Patronuses."

Seth stood straighter; neither told him anything about anyone conjuring any Patronuses.

"How d'you know about that?" said Harry, distracted.
"What else could have driven the dementors back?"

Harry told Lupin what had happened. When he'd finished, Lupin was smiling again. "Yes, your father was always a stag when he transformed. You guessed right... that's why we called him Prongs," he said, turning to look at Delilah. "And your mother's Patronus used to be a wolf since her first phase had been into so."

Delilah gave him a curious look. Why was he bringing up her mother?

"Harry thought his father was there last night; I'm assuming you had the same feel about your mother."

Understanding what he meant, Delilah's lips twitched only a bit on the corner, into a small halfhearted smile of admission. "I'm guessing she was nicknamed Phantom for being as silent as a wolf can be?"

Lupin returned her halfhearted smile, nodding, eyes softening even more when he noticed the subtle sibling exchange between Delilah and Seth, who had taken her hand in his in a comforting manner. They reminded him so much of their mother and uncle. With a sigh, Lupin threw his last few books into his case, closed the desk drawers, and turned to look at Harry.

"Here— I brought this from the Shrieking Shack last night," he said, handing Harry back the Invisibility Cloak. "And..." He hesitated, then held out the Marauder's Map too. "I am no longer your teacher, so I don't feel guilty about giving you back this as well. It's no use to me, and I daresay you three, Ron, and Hermione will find uses for it."

Harry took the map and grinned. "You told me Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, Phantom, and Prongs would've wanted to lure me out of school... you said they'd have thought it was funny."

"And so we would have," said Lupin, now reaching down to close his case. "I have no hesitation in saying that James would have been highly disappointed if his son had never found any of the secret passages out of the castle."

There was a knock on the door. Harry hastily stuffed the Marauder's Map and the Invisibility Cloak into his pocket.

It was Professor Dumbledore. He didn't look surprised to see Delilah, Harry, or even Seth there. "Your carriage is at the gates, Remus," he said.

"Thank You, Headmaster." Lupin picked up his old suitcase and the empty grindylow tank. "Well— goodbye," he said, smiling. "It has been a real pleasure teaching you three. I feel sure we'll meet again sometime. Headmaster, there is no need to see me to the gates, I can manage...."

Delilah had the impression that Lupin wanted to leave as quickly as possible.

"Goodbye, then, Remus," said Dumbledore soberly. Lupin shifted the grindylow tank slightly so that he and Dumbledore could shake hands. Then, with a final nod to the trio and a swift smile, Lupin left the office.

Seth just stood there, leaning against the desk with a small pout on his lips, while Harry sat down in his vacated chair, staring glumly at the floor. They heard the door close and looked up. Dumbledore was still there, but Delilah was nowhere in sight. Seth glanced around, then frowned; where had his sister gone now?

"Professor! Profes— Remus!"
The former Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher had just been making his way across the flagged stone floor toward the giant doors that led one outside grounds of the castle when he heard his name being called out. He slowly turned around and found himself looking down at the young hybrid that looked so much like his old friend. She was speeding down the stairs, nowhere near being breathless, and stopped when she stood about two feet away from him.

"Profes— Mr. Lupi— sorry, I have no idea what to call you anymore," she told him with a small sheepish grin.

He let out a soft chuckle, waving her off. "Remus is just fine now. Was there something you needed?"

"Yea— well, it's more... something you might need? I don't know, something you might consider needing some time in the future? Or... uh... dang, I really don't know how to put it there..."

Lupin smiled. "You're a lot like your mother; you know that?"

Delilah let out a small sigh, returning the smile with a fond one of her own. "Yeah, I've been getting that a lot lately."

She looked down at the ground for a moment, her brows furrowing with a bit of uncertainty, before looking back up at him while bringing out a small folded piece of parchment out of the pocket of her robes. She held it out to him and let out a small laugh when she saw him give her a curious look as he took it.

"It's in case you don't have a place to stay. No one knows where it is... well, except maybe Daren, though I haven't gotten around to asking him that yet," she admitted, absentmindedly rubbing the right side of her neck, wincing slightly.

"It's on the outskirts of Holmes Chapel. You can just follow the directions that lead to the edge of the forest, and then you can just follow the forest spirits... well, really they're wood nymphs, but for some reason they seem to feel insulted when people call them that," she instructed, shrugging toward the end. "Though if you don't feel comfortable with them, you can always call out to Blaze."

Lupin's brows furrowed in confusion. "Blaze?"

Delilah smiled and nodded. "Blaze!" Not even a second later, a flame emerged out of thin air, right beside Delilah's head, and there appeared a rather familiar creature with fiery red and a few multicolored feathers that landed on her shoulder.

"Blaze, meet Remus Lupin. Remus, meet Blazealbumera. If you ever decide to go there, you can just call out her name, and she'll be there," she told him as the phoenix flew off her shoulder and landed on his, rubbing its small head against his cheek, causing both, the werewolf and the hybrid to chuckle. "I see she likes you already, so she'll undoubtedly be there much more quickly."

They both shared a small laugh. "I... I don't know what to say, Delilah."

She shrugged, shoving her hands into the pockets of her trousers. "You don't have to say anything. Just... consider it; the door will always be open for an old friend. Just a heads up, though, if you go there this summer, you might not see me there, since I promised Seth I would stay with him and Daren for that time, but I might pop in sometime and then." She then held out her hand for him to shake as Blaze flew back toward her and landed on her shoulder. "It was awesome learning from you this year, Professor," she said with a smile.

He chuckled, shaking her hand. "It was a pleasure teaching you, Miss Dawn."
And with that, they both went their separate ways.

"Why so miserable, Harry?" Seth heard Dumbledore say quietly. "You should be very proud of yourself after last night."

"It didn't make any difference," said Harry bitterly. "Pettigrew got away."

"Didn't make any difference?" said Dumbledore quietly. "It made all the difference in the world, Harry. You and Delilah helped uncover the truth. You have both saved an innocent man from a terrible fate."

Terrible. Something stirred in Harry's memory. Greater and more terrible than ever before...

Professor Trelawney's prediction!

"Professor Dumbledore— yesterday, when I was having my Divination exam, Professor Trelawney went very— very strange." Seth looked over at him, brows furrowed as he watched him curiously.

"Indeed?" said Dumbledore. "Er— stranger than usual, you mean?"

"Yes... her voice went all deep, and her eyes rolled, and she said... she said Voldemort's servant was going to set out to return to him before midnight... She said the servant would help him come back to power." Harry stared up at Dumbledore. "And then she sort of became normal again, and she couldn't remember anything she'd said. Was it..."

"Was she making a real prediction?" Seth finished for him.

Dumbledore looked mildly impressed. "Do you know, Harry, I think she might have been," he said thoughtfully. "Who'd have thought it? That brings her total of real predictions up to two. I should offer her a pay raise..."

"But—" Harry looked at him, aghast.

Seth fought back a childish giggle— he didn't need to be a mind reader like his sister, to know what Harry was thinking; how could Dumbledore take this so calmly?

"But— Delilah and I stopped Sirius and Professor Lupin from killing Pettigrew! That makes it our fault if Voldemort comes back!"

"It does not, and Delilah, though she quite often blames herself for bad results, she knows it is neither of your faults," said Dumbledore quietly. "Hasn't your experience with the Time-Turner taught you anything, Harry? The consequences of our actions are always so complicated, so diverse, that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed... Professor Trelawney, bless her, is living proof of that... You both did a very noble thing, in saving Pettigrew's life."

"But if he helps Voldemort back to power—"

"Pettigrew owes his life to you. You have sent Voldemort a deputy who is in your debt. When one wizard saves another wizard's life, it creates a certain bond between them... and I'm much mistaken if Voldemort wants his servant in the debt of Harry Potter and Delilah Dawn."

"I don't want a connection with Pettigrew! And I'm sure as hell that Delilah doesn't either!" said Harry, mentally face-palming himself for saying a curse word in front of Dumbledore, but— hey, he was on a roll here. "He betrayed our parents!"

"This is magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable, Harry. But trust me... the time may come when
you will be very glad you saved Pettigrew's life."

Harry couldn't imagine when that would be. Dumbledore looked as though he knew what Harry was thinking.

"I knew your father very well, both at Hogwarts and later, Harry," he said gently. "He would have saved Pettigrew too, and so would have Delilah's mother; I am sure of it."

Harry looked up at him. Dumbledore wouldn't laugh— he could tell Dumbledore...

"I thought it was my dad who'd conjured my Patronus. I mean, when I saw myself across the lake ... I thought I was seeing him."

"An easy mistake to make," said Dumbledore softly. "I expect you'll tire of hearing it, but you do look extraordinarily like James. Except for the eyes... you have your mother's eyes."

Harry shook his head. "It was stupid, thinking it was him," he muttered. "I mean, I knew he was dead."

"You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that particular Patronus? Prongs rode again last night."

It took a moment for Harry to realize what Dumbledore had said.

"Last night Sirius told me all about how they became Animagi," said Dumbledore, smiling. "An extraordinary achievement— not least, keeping it quiet from me. And then I remembered the most unusual form your Patronus took, when it charged Mr. Malfoy down at your Quidditch match against Ravenclaw. You know, Harry, in a way, you did see your father last night... You found him inside yourself."

And Dumbledore left the office, leaving Harry and Seth to their very confused thoughts.

"Thanks, Grandpa D."

Dumbledore turned and found the young girl one could easily tell he'd taken under his wing, standing right outside the office, leaning against the wall beside the door, with her phoenix nestled on her shoulder.

He chuckled. "What ever for, Delilah?" he asked, his blue eyes holding that usual bright twinkle in them.

She smiled. "For making him feel better," she said, nodding her head toward the office, where Harry was. "For everything. If it weren't for you finding me and the help you've given me, I probably would've been roaming around America unintentionally causing chaos like a complete nutter about now. And if it weren't for your guidance, there would've been three losses last night."

He gave her a soft smile, blue eyes twinkling like they usually did. "There is no need to thank me, Miss Dawn; I am simply doing my job."
Delilah laughed lightly. "Not really, but thank you, either way, Professor."

With a nod and another smile, the wise man left her to join her best friend and brother, going off on his own, down the daylit halls of the castle.

Nobody at Hogwarts now knew the truth of what had happened the night that Sirius, Buckbeak, and Pettigrew had vanished except Harry, Delilah, Ron, Hermione, Seth, and Professor Dumbledore. As the end of term approached, Harry and Delilah heard many different theories about what had really happened, but none of them came close to the truth. Malfoy was furious about Buckbeak. He was convinced that Hagrid had found a way of smuggling the hippogriff to safety, and seemed outraged that he and his father had been outwitted by a gamekeeper.

Percy Weasley, meanwhile, had much to say on the subject of Sirius's escape.

"If I manage to get into the Ministry, I'll have a lot of proposals to make about Magical Law Enforcement!" he told the only person who would listen— his girlfriend, Penelope.

Though the weather was perfect, though the atmosphere was so cheerful, though he knew they had achieved the near impossible in helping Sirius to freedom, Harry had never approached the end of a school year in worse spirits. He certainly wasn't the only one who was sorry to see Professor Lupin go. The whole of Harry's Defense Against the Dark Arts class was miserable about his resignation.

"Wonder what they'll give us next year?" said Seamus gloomily.

"Maybe a vampire," suggested Dean hopefully.

Delilah shuddered. "Dean, just... just don't." One witchy hybrid is enough.

It wasn't only Professor Lupin's departure that was weighing on Harry's mind. He couldn't help thinking a lot about Professor Trelawney's prediction. He kept wondering where Pettigrew was now, whether he had sought sanctuary with Voldemort yet. But the thing that was lowering Harry's spirits most of all was the prospect of returning to the Dursleys. For maybe half an hour, a glorious half hour, he had believed he would be living with Sirius, and maybe Delilah, from now on... his parents' best friend... his best friend's father... It would have been the next best thing to having his own father back. And while no news of Sirius was definitely good news, because it meant he had successfully gone into hiding, Harry couldn't help feeling miserable when he thought of the home he might have had, and the fact that it was now impossible.

The exam results came out on the last day of term. Delilah, Harry, Ron, and Hermione had passed every subject. Delilah was actually quite surprised that she had passed everything with flying grades as she had missed a lot of classes, then, when she got back on track, she had overloaded herself with subjects like Hermione. Harry was amazed that he had got through Potions. He had a shrewd suspicion that Dumbledore might have stepped in to stop Snape failing him on purpose. Snape's behavior toward Harry over the past week had been quite alarming. Harry wouldn't have thought it possible that Snape's dislike for him could increase, but it certainly had. A muscle twitched unpleasantly at the corner of Snape's thin mouth every time he looked at Harry, and he was constantly flexing his fingers, as though itching to place them around Harry's throat. He didn't seem to be able to be as cold toward Delilah or Seth, but he wasn't exactly being as soft as he had been with them before the revelation of their connection to Sirius.

Percy had got his top-grade N.E.W.T.s; Fred and George had scraped a handful of O.W.L.s each. Gryffindor House, meanwhile, largely thanks to their spectacular performance in the Quidditch Cup, had won the House championship for the third year running. This meant that the end of term feast took place amid decorations of scarlet and gold, and that the Gryffindor table was the noisiest of the
lot, as everybody celebrated. Even Harry managed to forget about the journey back to the Dursleys the next day as he ate, drank, talked, and laughed with the rest.

As the Hogwarts Express pulled out of the station the next morning,

Delilah and Hermione gave Harry and Ron some surprising news.

"We went to see Professor McGonagall this morning, just before breakfast. We've decided to drop Muggle Studies."

"But you passed your exam with three hundred and twenty percent!" said Ron.

"I know," sighed Hermione, "but I can't stand another year like this one. That Time-Turner, it was driving me mad. I've handed it in. Without Muggle Studies and Divination, I'll be able to have a normal schedule again."

"Same here. Besides, if I had kept the Time-Turner, I would've undoubtedly done something I might regret later on."

"I still can't believe you two didn't tell us about it," said Ron grumpily. "We're supposed to be your friends."

The girls sighed. "We promised we wouldn't tell anyone," said Delilah, unusually severe before looking out the window. Hermione looked around from Delilah to Harry, who was also watching Hogwarts disappear from view behind a mountain.

Two whole months before they'd see it again...

"Oh, cheer up, you two!" said Hermione sadly.

"I'm fine, Herme," Delilah said softly.

"I'm okay," said Harry quickly. "Just thinking about the holidays."

"Yeah, I've been thinking about them too," said Ron. "Harry, Delilah, you two've got to come and stay with us. I'll fix it up with Mum and Dad, then I'll call you. I know how to use a fellytone now —"

"A telephone, Ron," said Hermione. "Honestly, you should take Muggle Studies next year...."

Ron ignored her. "It's the Quidditch World Cup this summer! How about it, Harry? Come and stay, and we'll go and see it! Dad can usually get tickets from work."

This proposal had the effect of cheering Harry up a great deal. "Yeah... I bet the Dursleys'd be pleased to let me come... especially after what I did to Aunt Marge...."

"What about you, Deli?"

She let out a small laugh. "I don't know. I'd love to, but I'd have to look it up with Seth and Dar—my uncle. I promised I'd stay with them over the summer. But maybe I can work something out and come for the Quidditch World Cup. I'd like to see a game."

Feeling considerably more cheerful, Delilah and Harry joined Ron and Hermione in several games of Exploding Snap, and when the witch with the tea cart arrived, they bought themselves a very large lunch, though nothing with chocolate in it.
But it was late in the afternoon before the thing that made them truly happy turned up...

"Deli," said Hermione suddenly, peering over her shoulder. "What's that thing outside your window?"

Delilah turned to look outside. Something very small and gray was bobbing in and out of sight beyond the glass. She stood up for a better look and saw that it was a tiny owl, carrying a letter that was much too big for it. The owl was so small, in fact, that it kept tumbling over in the air, buffeted this way and that in the train's slipstream. Delilah quickly pulled down the window, stretched out her arm, and caught it. It felt like a very fluffy Snitch. She brought it carefully inside. The owl dropped its letter onto Harry's lap and began zooming around their compartment, apparently very pleased with itself for accomplishing its task. Hedwig clicked her beak with a sort of dignified disapproval, while Arrow did a distinct noise that made it seem as though he were laughing at the tiny owl. Crookshanks sat up in his seat, following the owl with his great yellow eyes. Ron, noticing this, snatched the owl safely out of harm's way.

Harry picked up the letter. It was addressed to him and Delilah. He ripped open the letter, and shouted, "It's from Sirius!"

"What?" said Ron and Hermione excitedly. "Read it aloud!"

Dear Harry and Delilah,

I hope this finds you both before you, Harry, reach your aunt and uncle. I don't know whether they're used to owl post.

Buckbeak and I are in hiding. I won't tell you where in case this owl falls into the wrong hands. I have some doubt about his reliability, but he is the best I could find, and he did seem eager for the job.

I believe the dementors are still searching for me, but they haven't a hope of finding me here. I am planning to allow some Muggles to glimpse me soon, a long way from Hogwarts, so that the security on the castle will be lifted.

There is something I never got around to telling either of you during our brief meeting. It was I who sent you the Firebolt—

"Ha!" said Hermione triumphantly. "See! I told you it was from him!"

"Yes, but he hadn't jinxed it, had he?" said Ron. "Ouch!" The tiny owl, now hooting hapily in his hand, had nibbled one of his fingers in what it seemed to think was an affectionate way.

Crookshanks took the order to the Owl Office for me. I used both your names but told them to take the gold from my own Gringotts vault. Please consider it as thirteen and fourteen birthdays' worth of presents from your godfather/father.

I would also like to apologize for the fright I think I gave you that night last year, Harry, when you left your uncle's house. I had only hoped to get a glimpse of you before starting my journey north, but I think the sight of me alarmed you. And Delilah, I am sorry if I alarmed you and your brother as well, that night in the Gryffindor tower. I just needed to be sure...

Delilah let a small smile make its way onto her face, knowing what he meant by that.

I am enclosing something else for you both, which I think will make your next year at Hogwarts more enjoyable.
If ever you need me, send word. Your owl will find me.

I’ll write again soon.

Sirius

Harry and Delilah looked eagerly inside the envelope. There were two other pieces of parchment in there. He read it through quickly and felt suddenly as warm and contented as though he’d swallowed a bottle of hot butterbeer in one gulp.

I, Sirius Black, Harry Potter's godfather, hereby give him permission to visit Hogsmeade on weekends.

Delilah's smile widened a bit as she read hers; I, Sirius Black, Delilah Dawn's father, hereby give her permission to visit Hogsmeade on weekends.

"That'll be good enough for Dumbledore!" said Harry happily. He looked back at Sirius's letter. "Hang on; there's an RS...."

I thought your friend Ron might like to keep this owl, as it's my fault he no longer has a rat.

Ron's eyes widened. The minute owl was still hooting excitedly. "Keep him?" he said uncertainly.

"Oh, come on, Ronnie, you know you want him," Delilah uttered, gently nudging his calf with her foot playfully.

"Ronnie?" She merely grinned at him, shrugging lightly. He looked closely at the owl for a moment; then, to Harry's and Hermione's great surprise, he held him out for Crookshanks to sniff. "What do you reckon?" Ron asked the cat. "Definitely an owl?"

Crookshanks purred.

"That's good enough for me," said Ron happily. "He's mine." And Delilah and Hermione laughed.

Harry read and reread the letter from Sirius all the way back into King's Cross station. It was still clutched tightly in his hand as he, Delilah, Ron, and Hermione stepped back through the barrier of platform nine and three-quarters. Harry spotted Uncle Vernon at once. He was standing a good distance from Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, eyeing them suspiciously, and when Mrs. Weasley hugged Harry in greeting, his worst suspicions about them seemed confirmed.

"I'll call about the World Cup!" Ron yelled after Harry as Harry bid him and Hermione goodbye, then wheeled the trolley bearing his trunk and Hedwig's cage toward Uncle Vernon, who greeted him in his usual fashion.

"What's that?" he snarled, staring at the envelope Harry was still clutching in his hand. "If it's another form for me to sign, you've got another—"

"It's not," said Harry cheerfully. "It's a letter from my godfather."

"Godfather?" sputtered Uncle Vernon. "You haven't got a godfather!"

"Yes, I have," said Harry brightly. "He was my mum and dad's best friend."

"And our father," said a familiar boyish voice from behind him. Harry found himself grinning when his best friend's voice continued after the younger boy.
"He's also a convicted murderer, but he's broken out of wizard prison, and he's on the run. He likes to keep in touch with us, though... keep up with our news... check if we're happy, while I'm around to personally make sure that my bestest friend in the whole wide world is happy," said Delilah, throwing her arm, lazily, around Harry, resting her chin on his shoulder.

"You'll keep him smiling, won't ya?" she asked the terrified looking Dursleys. "My brother here," she motioned toward the grinning Seth standing behind her, "and I have already planned to visit Harry as much as we can, and I really hope to hear he was spending an awesome summer." Delilah placed a soft kiss on Harry's cheek then left with Seth, but not before telling him she'd contact him soon.

Then, grinning broadly at the look of horror on Uncle Vernon's face, Harry set off toward the station exit, Hedwig rattling along in front of him, for what looked like a much better summer than the last.

End Notes

**ATTENTION** I DO NOT OWN ANY OF J.K. ROWLING'S ORIGINAL CHARACTERS FROM THE ORIGINAL HARRY POTTER. I ONLY OWN DELILAH, HER FAMILY, THE KIDS FROM THE ORPHANAGE, THE ADAMS, AND SOME OTHERS I MIGHT CREATE FURTHER ON.

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