Kali Black and the Prisoner of Azkaban

by Hemlockconium

Summary

When Sirius Black escapes from Azkaban, the first place the Aurors look for him is on the other side of the Atlantic where his daughter and ex-boyfriend are trying to get on with their lives. A moral dilemma is placed upon Kali Black and Remus Lupin as they decide where their loyalties lie. But in the meantime, a new school year has begun, and Hogwarts offers them both fresh possibilities, new adventures, and plenty of mischief to get into while dark forces guard the castle and an escaped convict struggles to commit the crime he was imprisoned for.
This is my first fic on this website, it’s part of a series that will follow Kali Black through her years at Hogwarts and will include multiple POV ranging from Remus Lupin and Minerva McGonagall, to Neville Longbottom and Draco Malfoy. These chapters will serve as character studies and will introduce some personalized expansions to the wizarding world as it’s written in the books. Hope you enjoy the read ;)

Chapter Notes

This is my first fic on this website, it’s part of a series that will follow Kali Black through her years at Hogwarts and will include multiple POV ranging from Remus Lupin and Minerva McGonagall, to Ginny Weasley and Draco Malfoy. These chapters will serve as character studies and will introduce some personalized expansions to the wizarding world as it’s written in the books. Hope you enjoy the read ;)

List of the POVs:

Tuesday, July 27th, 1993,

USA, New York, Manhattan, Freyja Morrigan’s apartment,

Remus J. Lupin,

Remus couldn’t sleep. He’d been tossing and turning for hours now. He’d gone to check on Kali and Pan twice, he’d made tea, burnt his tongue on the first sip and poured the rest of it down the drain. He was restless, and he couldn’t figure out why. The full moon wasn’t for another week, and he hadn’t gotten this jittery before a full since he was a teenager. Even then the nervousness had only crept up on him a couple of days before, not an entire week. It felt different from his usual moon jitters, unrelated even, but that meant that some deep-seated instinct was warning him that something else was wrong, and he couldn’t figure out what.

He’d called Kali’s step-grandfather in Hawaii, but everyone was fine there; he’d checked in with her maternal grandparents in Israel; her great-grandmother in Norway; her great-aunt in Argentina; he’d even rung his own father in Wales, but other than some complaints over the early wake up there was nothing amiss to report. All was well. So why did Remus feel like he was about to jump out of his own skin?

He thought for a second whether it might have something to do with Kali’s father, whether the nervousness was not Remus’s own, but was being transmitted to him through the primal bond, that was more animal than human, and which connected him to a man he hadn’t seen in twelve years. He wanted to dismiss that idea. The link had been quiet for over a decade, and even if it was choosing this moment to wake up again, there was an entire ocean separating them. It wasn’t possible.

Remus shook off the dread that formed in the pit of his stomach when a small voice inside his head asked a question he’d rather have ignored: but what if it was possible? Because if it was, and if it was the cause of this restlessness, then it meant something bad was coming, something that would sweep into Remus’s and Kali’s lives and send everything into shambles.
He went to go check on Kali again, but stopped himself. The last thing he wanted was to wake her and infect her with his worrying. He headed to his bedroom instead, and got back into bed, hoping his mind would slow down long enough to let him get some sleep.

***

He woke up to the sound of loud banging. His sleep deprived mind struggled to free itself from the pleasant fog of slumber, but a loud crash and Kali shouting his name had him vaulting out of bed, grabbing his wand from the nightstand, and sprinting into the living room before his brain had the chance to process the information.

Eight men stood in the large, open living room, their wands pointed at Remus, Kali, and Pan - who'd taken on the shape of a large dog for the occasion. His brain registered the threat and instinct demanded that he react, but thankfully common sense won out, and he took in a more detailed view of the men in front of him. The remains of the front door sat in a pile of splinters at Kali’s feet and blood trickled down from her cheek where one of the pieces had hit her. That alone had him gripping his wand tighter. But one other detail overrode his impulse to attack: the intruders were wearing Auror robes.

“Where is Sirius Black?” one of the men demanded.

Remus flinched upon hearing his name and struggled to lower his wand and appear non-threatening. On the one hand, Aurors were the good guys, on the other they’d broken into his home and hurt his god-daughter.

“In a prison cell in Azkaban,” Remus answered, finally managing to point his wand away from the intruders, although his grip didn’t lessen.

“He escaped earlier today,” said the man. “We suspect you may be harbouring him.”

Remus’s mind whirred as he felt his reality slip away from him. It couldn’t be.

“That isn’t possible,” he said quietly. “No one can escape from Azkaban, not even him.”

“Well he managed it somehow,” the man snapped, and Kali slipped her hand into Remus’s as Pan growled too softly for the Aurors to hear. “Now where is he?”

“Not here,” said Remus, struggling to keep the growl out of his own voice, and squeezing Kali’s hand reassuringly.

“We know you’re hiding him,” said another of the men.

“You don’t, though,” said Remus. “You only suspect it, but you have no proof.”

“She’s all the proof we need,” said the second man, jabbing his wand in Kali’s direction. Pan’s growl was definitely audible now, but the men ignored it. “She’s the closest family he has left. If he’s going anywhere, he’s coming here.”

“To the first place he knew you’d look?” said Remus. “Sirius Black is a lot of things, but he’s not without intelligence. He won’t come here.”

“He has nowhere else to go,” sneered one of the men.

“Even so, I can’t imagine Azkaban left him in the best of shape, and you think he could somehow manage to make the trip all the way from there to here without being spotted. If so your investigative
work needs improving.”

“He escaped didn’t he? Who knows what he’s capable of?”

“He’s not here,” Remus said slowly, forcing the words out passed the pit of anger in his stomach.

The first man took a menacing step toward them. “If you don’t tell us where he is, right now, then you’ll be charged with obstruction of justice, and you and the kid will be under arrest, and you’ll enjoy a nice stay in that psychopath’s old cell at Azkaban while we hunt the murderous bastard down, then he’ll join you there.”

Remus held back a roar of outrage as fury thundered through him. It was enough to pique his darker side’s interest, and he felt the wolf emerging from the depths of his body. A small part of him tried to stop it, knowing that if he let go of his control this could only end in blood. But he couldn’t let them go after Kali. He couldn’t. The raging battle within him ground to a halt, however, when a soft voice penetrated the clamour in his head.

“Do not threaten us,” said Kali forcefully, drawing all the Aurors attention to her. “You have no right.”

“Your father murdered thirteen people, girlie, and now he’s on the loose,” one of them spat, “we have every right.”

Kali took a step toward them and stared each of them down in turn. It didn’t matter that she was only thirteen, or that everyone else in the room was at least half a head taller than her, that she was wandless and wearing flowery pyjamas, she stood with confidence and control, and a glare that could melt steel. It was enough to make the Aurors stand straighter, grip their wands tighter, and take a hesitant step away from her.

“You are on American soil, any action you wish to see through must first be approved by the Magical Congress of the United States of America, unless you’re willing to cause an international incident,” she said calmly. “Until you get the proper approval, you may leave and not come back. You may also expect that we will be suing the Auror Division of your Ministry of Magic for damages, injuries, and plain rudeness. Now leave.”

The Aurors stared at her, their mouths hanging open in shock and disbelief. Remus doubted they’d ever been spoken to like that before, let alone by a child. Some of them snapped themselves out of their stupor and cast nervous glances to their leader, awaiting orders, but he was at as much of a loss as they were.

“Get out,” Kali said when they still hadn’t reacted after a couple of minutes, her voice low and calm. Her tone, not one to be argued with, and they didn’t.

The leader muttered something incomprehensible about being back soon, and they left, shuffling awkwardly through the broken door, and leaving Remus, Kali, and Pan alone.

With a flick of his wand, Remus fixed the door and stood staring at it for awhile. The restlessness that had been plaguing him had been coming from Sirius after all. He’d found a way out; he’d escaped from an inescapable prison, and in doing so he’d put Kali at risk. Remus closed his fist against a new onslaught of anger. After what Sirius Black had done to them, how dare he barge into their lives again. Remus hoped that murderous bastard would get caught before he could cause anymore damage, before he could ruin Kali’s life like he’d ruined his own.

Kali…
He turned to find that she hadn’t moved. Her gaze was far off as she ran her fingers through Pan’s fur. They were having a conversation, a telepathic one that only they could be a part of. Remus had learned to read the signs, to recognize when Kali was not withdrawing into long, drawn out silences, but was in fact in the middle of a mental sparring match with her familiar. Remus went to make tea, knowing full well none of them would be going back to bed tonight, and he kept an eye on Kali as she finished up her conversation with Pan, and they joined him in the kitchen.

“What do you think we should do?” she asked as she sat at the counter and thanked Remus for the steaming mug he handed her.

“About what, sweetheart?” he asked, but a gut-wrenching feeling told him he already knew.

“About Dad,” she said, confirming his suspicions.

Ever since Sirius had gotten himself locked up when Kali was barely a year and a half old, Remus had been trying to convince her to stop calling that madman ‘Dad’, he was undeserving of the title, and Kali didn’t need the weight of being related to such a man on her shoulders. But she was stubborn, and still blindly loyal to a man she could barely remember.

“Nothing,” he said, staring into his tea cup.

“We can’t just leave him,” she said.

Remus shook his head, but he couldn’t look up at her. “There’s nothing we can do for him.”

“Not if we don’t try, there isn’t.”.

Remus bit his tongue to keep the anger in. There were very few things that he and Kali argued about, but Sirius Black was one of them. The mere thought of him was too painful for Remus, and the fact that every time he was brought up, Kali insisted he was innocent of the crimes he’d committed, had caused more than one shouting match.

“He killed people, Kali.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.”

“Were you there?”

“There were witnesses.”

“Muggle witnesses,” she said. “Eyewitness accounts aren’t reliable at the best of times. What someone sees and what they remember is not the same thing. Memory accuracy is influenced by various factors including stress and panic and world view. When Muggles witness magic, their minds distort what they see, because they don’t understand it. You cannot condemn a man based solely on what other people thought they saw.”

It was a capricious and spiteful force of nature that had allowed for Asherah Morrigan’s intelligence and Sirius Black’s articulacy to exist together in a single human being, making her nearly impossible to argue with.

“He was the only person who knew where Lily and James were hiding, he was the only one who could have sold them out.”
“How sure are you that he was the only one who knew?”

“Kali -”

“Making Dad the Secret Keeper wouldn’t have made sense. He was the obvious choice. Too obvious. And if Lily and James were half as smart as you say they were, they would have picked someone else.”

“Who? If not Sirius then who?”

“The person who set Dad off in such a rage that he dropped everything and went to confront him out in the open for all to see. The person no one would suspect.”

Remus had to take a minute to plan out his next move. This argument always went down the same way, it was predictable because everything had been said a thousand times before. But this was new. Kali had never before given him a concrete answer to the question of who else could have betrayed Lily and James. Now, though, she did, and she said it with the same stubborn confidence she said everything else with.

“You think it was Peter?” Remus asked, running his hand through his hair in frustration.

“I think it’s awfully convenient that he disappeared that day.”

“He didn’t disappear, Kali, he died. Sirius killed him as well as twelve other people.”

“You can’t just assume he’s dead because the Aurors found one of his fingers. It isn’t conclusive. All things considered, the fact that they found one finger and immediately closed the investigation, declared him dead, and concluded that the only possible explanation as to why they only found a single finger was that he was killed so hard that the rest of him was obliterated speaks volumes about why it is common knowledge that the British Ministry of Magic is useless.”

Remus scoffed. “He laughed! He killed all those people, and he laughed. He was still laughing when the Aurors took him away.”

“His life had just fallen to pieces. What else was he supposed to do to not shatter?”

“I don’t understand how you can trust him, you don’t even know him.”

“I don’t need to trust him. I trust you, and I trust that even back when you were at school you were smart enough to love the right people,” she said, her eyes blazing.

Remus shook his head quickly; he did not want to get into his feelings, past or present, for Sirius Black. “I’ve made mistakes, trusting him was one of them.”

“Mum trusted him, too,” she said hotly, and Remus drank down a mouthful of scalding hot tea to avoid saying anything rash that he would later regret.

He owed a lot to Asherah Morrigan. She was there for him when his entire world fell apart, she’d kicked his arse back to health and happiness with all the bedside manner of an angry bear, she’d welcomed him with open arms into her family, and she’d given him a reason to get up in the morning. Now that reason was sitting on the other side of the kitchen island, glaring at him with vivid grey eyes that were so much brighter than her father’s, but filled with the same temper and bullheadedness that had gotten Sirius into so much trouble during his time at school and after.

“What would you have me do?” he asked weakly. He’d never been able to talk Sirius out of any of
his mad schemes either.

Finally, a hint of uncertainty broke through her brashness. She wanted to help, but she had no idea how. “We could go to the U.K. with Gran. She could get in touch with some of her contacts there.”

“And then what?” He might not be able to talk her out of this, but he could make her realize how futile it was to try to save a man who could not be saved. “Everyone knows he’s guilty. Not even your Gran can convince them to help him.”

She looked down at her full mug of tea, lips pressed together in a pout so heartbreaking that he wanted to take it all back.

“He at least deserves a trial,” she said, so softly he barely heard. “You might hate him, but you can’t deny that.”

He couldn’t argue with her, not if he didn’t want to see that hurt, reproachful look in her eyes that was worse than all her shouting and snapping ever could be.

“Go get dressed, I’ll call Freyja.”

She didn’t say anything more, didn’t nod or smile at him for giving in, but she did do as she was told, Pan trailing after her, and Remus poured himself something stronger than tea.

_Sirius Black had escaped from Azkaban._ The words played in his head like a cruel, taunting litany.

No one had ever escaped from Azkaban before, and for good reason: it was an impossible feat. The prison sat atop a small, rocky island in the middle of the North Sea, it was warded with more charms and curses than any other place in Europe, and guarded by the most dreaded creatures on the planet. It was a fortress, yet that man had somehow gotten out, and Remus dreaded to think what he might do with his newfound freedom.

He used the office phone to call Freyja; it was a far faster and more efficient method of communication than sending an owl. It rang through three times before she picked up, sounding snappish and ill-tempered.

“You’d better have a damn fine reason for calling me at this hour.”

“Sirius escaped from Azkaban,” he said. “Aurors came by the apartment a few minutes ago, they thought we might be hiding him.”

“Remus?” she said uncertainly, but who else would it be? “Is Kali alright?”

“She’s a little shaken.”

A short pause as though she was wondering whether or not to ask. “And you?”

“I’ll live,” he said shortly. “She wants to help him.”

“He is her father.”

“Barely.” He couldn’t stop the growl that crept into his voice. “After what he did to us, he doesn’t deserve our help.”

Freyja sighed through the receiver. “Give me ten minutes and I’ll Floo over, we can discuss it then.” She hung up without waiting for his agreement, and Remus downed the rest of his whiskey in one.
Kali was rummaging around in the fridge, and she must still have been upset with him because she didn’t acknowledge him as he walked through the living area to his room. He almost stopped, but he didn’t know what to say, her temper was such a delicate thing, he stood more chance of making things worse than he did of making them better. So he ducked his head and said nothing as he shuffled away.

Kali had been a very easy child to raise. She was respectful, kind, self-sufficient, and very mature. Yes, she’d gotten into her fair share of trouble, but she was so disarmingly charming that, most of the time, she’d gotten away with it. However, there were certain difficulties in living with a child that was smarter than average: she questioned everything; she was incapable of holding her tongue, and every argument felt like a court case against the best attorney in town. It had only gotten worse when Kali had found Pan, and he'd chosen her, and their minds had melded together, because suddenly she’d had two recipients into which she could pour her knowledge and power. She’d gotten smarter, more independent, more streetwise, and Remus hadn't had a hope of keeping up. It had been easier back when it had been three against two, when Asherah and her boyfriend, Nahele, had still been in the picture, at least then Remus had known he’d had backup. Now he was alone. He’d never imagined himself as a single parent, hell, with his condition he hadn't planned on being a parent, full stop. But he wouldn’t have given up Kali for the world, even if she did insist on loving a murderer.

Remus had barely finished getting dressed when he heard the roar of flames, followed by the sharp slap of stiletto heels on the marble floor. The apartment’s Floo connection could only be used by a handful of people as neither Freyja nor Remus appreciated unexpected visitors, but even if that had not been the case, he would have recognized that purposeful march anywhere.

Freyja stood next to the fireplace, talking lowly with Kali. She was a formidable-looking woman: statuesque and handsome, exuding poise, dignity, and strength in droves. She was sixty-eight, but ageless, capable of passing for someone twenty years younger due to a combination of magical longevity, great genes, and healthy living. She held her head high and stood with the same confidence Kali had inherited, her dark eyes were insistent, and perceptive, and capable of piercing your very soul. She was intimidating, to say the least.

She didn’t smile at him as he approached, she didn’t move to hug him or even shake his hand, a curt nod was all he got from her and he expected nothing more. Freyja’s love had always been cool and distant, but it was still far more pleasant than her indifference which was glacial and unforgiving.

“I’ll schedule for the jet to take us to London in a few days,” she said without preamble. “We’ll be able to do more for him there than we can here.”

“Kali, could you go to your room for a bit, please?” he asked, earning him a glare. Only very rarely had Kali been asked to leave the room to let the adults talk. Asherah’s philosophy had been that a child could not be expected to act like an adult if they were not treated like one. So Kali had been included in every conversation, in every debate, and in every argument. But this was one exchange that Remus felt Kali was better off not being a part of.

She didn’t argue which was a surprise, but if she already had Freyja on her side, then her presence wasn’t absolutely necessary and she knew it. Remus made sure that Pan left with her, before focussing back on Freyja.

“We can’t go to London,” he said.

“Why is that?” she asked, sitting down on the leather couch, and indicating that he take the armchair across from her.

“Because it will get her hopes up,” he said as he sat.
“If we do nothing she’ll never forgive us,” she argued. “She’s a bright girl. We’ll explain beforehand that the chances of a favourable result are slim, but even so we will do everything within our power to ensure that he at least gets a fair trial.”

Remus scoffed. There was that talk of a trial again.

The reason Sirius hadn’t gotten one in the first place was because the evidence against him was so plenty and so irrefutable it would have been a waste of everyone's time. Even Albus Dumbledore, who was well-known for giving people second chance, had believed that Sirius was guilty beyond any and all doubt. The British Ministry wasn’t about to hold a trial now, nearly twelve years after the crime was committed, and certainly not following the accused convict's Houdini act out of Azkaban. Unless someone found compelling evidence, there would be no trial, and all the people who could have proved his innocence were long dead: James, Lily, Peter…

“Kali thinks it was Peter who betrayed James and Lily to Voldemort.” He wasn’t sure why he said it. Perhaps he needed someone to tell him how mad that sounded, or maybe he wanted the exact opposite.

Freyja didn’t respond straight away, she mulled the possibility over in her head thoughtfully first.

“He does make for a far more probable suspect,” she said dispassionately. “I must say, I never quite believed that Sirius had it in him to betray James. Or you for that matter. He struck me as far too loyal.”

“But he did betray us. He sold James out to Voldemort, and he left me…” His voice caught, and he had to swallow hard to keep it steady. “He killed Peter and all those Muggles. He deserves to be in Azkaban.”

Freyja regarded him, and only years of practice allowed him to not squirm under her appraisal. “Is it really so unthinkable that Peter was the spy?”

“Peter’s dead,” he snapped. She raised one thin eyebrow at him, but didn’t jinx him or curse him for his disrespectful tone which was an indication of how much she liked him.

“Never count someone as dead unless you have the body right in front of you,” she said evenly.

“This isn’t a TV show, people don’t die and come back for dramatic effect,” he said, fighting to keep his voice calm. “No one could have survived that explosion.”

“Don’t you find it convenient that just enough of Peter was left behind to identify him?” she mused. “Odd, really, how the explosion was so violent that it tore every cell in his body apart, but left that one finger completely intact.”

“Why do you want Peter to be guilty so badly?”

“Why would you rather it be Sirius?” she asked back, and he forced his jaw shut and looked away.

Sirius was guilty. He had to be. No matter what Freyja and Kali thought, no matter what Asherah and Nahele had thought, their convictions and persuasiveness could not change the facts. Remus had loved a killer. Sirius had fooled them all, but he'd fooled Remus the most; he'd pretended to love him and he'd made Remus love him back. Their relationship hadn't been perfect, but that was what had made it feel so real. It hadn't been real, though, just another lie, one of Sirius’s sick fabrications to get them all to trust him, to love him… Remus had fallen for it. He'd been blind to the signs, and that made him just as much to blame for the deaths of Lily, James, and Peter as Sirius was.
Freyja stood up and smoothed out the creases in her pencil skirt. “I will get my affairs in order, and Kali and I will leave for London in four days. You are welcome to join us if you wish.”

“How long will you be gone?” he asked, rubbing his face. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad, if he got the flat to himself for a couple of weeks, he could finish his paper on how Lethifolds interact with Dementors and what the best countermeasures were against both creatures.

Freyja had other plans, though. “However long it takes.”

Remus’s head snapped up to look at her. “Kali has to be back at school in September.” He wouldn’t put it past Freyja to forget about something as trivial as her granddaughter’s education.

“I’m sure Hogwarts’ curriculum can keep her occupied for a year,” she said, heading toward her bedroom.

Remus leapt to his feet and vaulted over the couch into her path. “You’re taking her away from me?”

She wasn’t the least bit bothered by his sudden show of athleticism. “Like I said, you’re welcome to join us. In fact, I believe Hogwarts is looking for a new Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor. If you’re interested.”

She sidestepped around him, leaving him rooted to the spot.

Freyja may not be deliberately cruel to those whose company she enjoyed, but it had never stopped her from getting her way. Every. Single. Time. Just once he’d like to outmanoeuvre her, just to see how she’d react. But he couldn’t risk it this time, not with Kali so involved.

He sighed and went to break the news to Kali and Pan, knowing he was in for one hell of a year.
Diagon Alley

Chapter Summary

Kali takes her first steps into wizarding London.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was easy to write which is how I managed to post it so quickly. I won't be posting a chapter a day for the rest of the story, I don't think, but right now I'm putting off studying and this is the perfect little project to keep my mind busy. Thank you for the kudos, it felt lovely seeing those this morning, and, of course, enjoy the chapter!

Sunday, August 1st, 1993,

United Kingdom, England, London, Diagon Alley,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

Kali had never been to wizarding London. She’d been wanting to visit it ever since she could remember, but despite the yearly trips to the city when she was younger, her family had always avoided this part of it. They’d never disclosed why they’d chosen to steer clear, but Kali could hazard a guess, and if she was right, she thought they were being a bit silly, but that was adults for you. Either way, she was about to get her first glimpse of this much dreamed of place and she was buzzing with excitement.

“Do you think that book store Remus is always talking about is still open?” asked Pan, his voice sounding only in her mind.

“I hope so,” she thought back. “And I hope the ice cream parlor is still open, too.

“Of course you do,” he said teasingly, nipping lightly at her fingers as she stroked him.

The Leaky Cauldron looked very unassuming from the outside, although it was even more so for the Muggles, to whom the old pub looked so inconspicuous they couldn’t even see it. The brick facade was grimy, so covered in centuries worth of soot and pollution that it was almost black. There weren’t any windows facing this side of the street that might have helped break up the monotony and blandness of it. The architecture was simplistic, reflecting its 16th century origins with its timber frame and its uneven brick wall. It didn’t look like the gateway to the magical world, but then again, that was kind of the point.

“I do hate the English weather,” said Gran, giving the cloudy grey sky a disdainful look as icy raindrops pelted the ground around them, but failed to fall on the four of them.
“We should get inside,” said Remus. “We don’t want to keep Professor McGonagall waiting.”

The inside of the pub was just as gloomy and shabby as the outside was. The high windows were coated in dirt, and that, combined with the overcast sky, meant that little natural light made it into the large room. The artificial lighting was provided by candles and oil-burning lamps that did little to disperse the shadows. A roaring fire chased away the chill and provided a little extra brightness, but its illumination was constantly being interrupted by wizards and witches using the Floo system, making the flames flash green, and casting an eerie glow around the bar.

As Kali gave the pub a more thorough once-over, she started thinking that perhaps the lack of lighting was done on purpose to hide the extent of the dilapidation of the building. The beams were rotted away by the ages and layers of plaster were missing from the walls. The dust and grime seemed to be ingrained into every visible surface and nothing but the strongest cleaning charm would be able to get rid of it, and Kali wasn’t sure even that could do the job. Owls swooped in from an open window every so often, depositing an envelope or package in someone’s lap, as well as feathers and droppings onto the floor. Kali could hear the mice and rats scurrying from one dark corner of the room to the next - there were enough of them to keep Pan well fed for years.

Clearly the pub’s health and safety regulations hadn’t evolved much since it had been built, but the other patrons didn’t seem to be all that bothered by it. A raucous group of middle-aged men was sitting in a corner, waving their drinks around as they shouted and laughed, spilling most of the content of their pints on the floor. A few old women were sat a couple of tables away, drinking from tiny shot glasses that had smoke billowing out of them. A little man in a top hat was leaning against the bar, smoking a long pipe which puffed out blue smoke. The old bartender, who was bald and lacking in teeth, was very dexterously serving drinks to two girls who barely looked old enough to drink.

The low buzz of chatter quietened when they walked in as everyone turned to get a look at the motley trio that had joined their midsts. The quick glances turned into stares, and Kali wasn’t sure who held their attention the most. Gran with her statuesque figure, towering over most people at 6 feet tall, and overshadowing just about everyone with the high heels she always wore. Remus with his scars and glowing eyes that had turned from golden green into amber as the full moon approached. Or Kali herself, who had an oncilla draped over her shoulder – Pan categorically refused to be put down in case he got squashed – and who looked an awful lot like the man in the wanted posters that were plastered all over the pub’s interior.

One woman rose and started toward them, and Kali felt Remus relax ever so slightly. The woman’s square spectacles glinted in the weak light, and the flickering flames made her prim expression look even more severe. She was tall, but not tall enough to look Remus and Gran in the eye without craning her neck.

“Hello, Mister Lupin,” she said. “It’s been a long time. You look well.”

“Yes, it has, Professor. Thank you,” said Remus, then, pointing to Gran, Kali, and Pan in turn, he introduced them. “This is Freyja Morrigan, and her granddaughter Kali, and on Kali’s shoulder is Pandoran.”

The Professor shook first Gran’s hand then Kali’s, her attention resting on Kali longer than it had on the girl’s grandmother. “Is it Kali Morrigan or Kali Black?”

She’d asked the question quietly, but in the dead silence that had enveloped the pub, she could have been shouting for all the difference it made. The whispers broke out immediately.

“Did she just say Black?”
“As in…”

“Murderer’s daughter…”

“She looks just like him…”

“Didn’t even know the bastard had a child…”

“She’ll turn out just like him, just you watch…”

As expected, it didn’t take anyone very long to figure it out. Until this very moment, as far as they were aware, there was only one Black left, the man from the posters, the murderer who’d killed thirteen people and betrayed his closest friends. It wasn’t much of a stretch then, to see a young girl bearing his name and his facial features and to connect the dots.

The whispers didn’t bother Kali; they weren’t particularly pleasant, but it was nothing she hadn’t already mentally prepared herself for. These people didn’t know her, and if they were going to judge her on whom her father was, then they weren’t worth the time of day. The nasty comments did, however, bother Remus who was getting more and more tense as the seconds passed, his teeth grinding together so hard Kali could hear them.

“Both,” answered Kali, leaning into Remus in the hopes of distracting him. His arm went around her shoulders protectively, but he didn’t relax much. “But Black is fine.”

McGonagall’s raised her eyebrows. “Are you sure?”

Kali could feel Remus’s hold on her tightening, she knew he wanted her to change her mind, but she also knew that she wouldn’t. She had four surnames to choose from – her mother’s: Morrigan; her father’s: Black; her step-father’s: Kalakaua; and Remus’s: Lupin – and only one of them came attached with connotations so dark they would likely affect Kali negatively if she chose to use it, yet that was the one she was going with. Call it stupidity or stubbornness, but she had her reasons, and she wasn’t going to let a bit of name calling deflect her from them.

“Yes, ma’am,” she said with the flash of a smile.

The smile seemed the catch the Professor off guard, her eyes widened and her mouth fell open slightly, but within a couple of blinks the look was gone and her dignified expression was back in place.

“Very well,” said the Professor. “I have reserved a private parlor for us to conduct our business. Follow me.”

She led them away from the still whispering crowd, down a narrow passageway, and into a room that looked just as decrepit as the rest of the pub.

“Tom will be by shortly with tea and biscuits,” said McGonagall. “Please, sit.”

Without the various flames from the main room throwing shadows over the Professor’s features she looked younger, although it was still difficult to say how old she actually was.

Wizard-kind aged differently from Muggles, with a life expectancy of 137¾ years. And while certain wizards and witches aged at the same rate as Muggles did - and ended up looking like glorified corpses after awhile - others, like Gran, benefited from prolonged youth. This was often a source of envy for those who had not been so lucky. And while Professor McGonagall’s black hair, held in a strict bun, boasted no white strands and her face had very few lines, her eyes were harsh and ancient
and very old indeed.

“Usually, it is Professor Dumbledore who handles the job interviews,” said Professor McGonagall to Remus. “But your past job experience and the glowing recommendation letters he has received convinced him you would be perfect for the position. Which makes this merely a formality.”

Remus lost some of the tension in his shoulders as the interview progressed, if it could be called an interview at all. It looked more like old friends catching up after a few years apart. When McGonagall ran out of questions that could be deemed – at a stretch – work-related, and Remus gave a demonstration of his skill, they moved on to the next matter at hand.

“So you wish to transfer to Hogwarts, is that right, Miss Black?” asked Professor McGonagall, looking through some of her papers.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Kali.

“Your formal education has been quite… unique,” said the Professor going through Kali’s transcript. “You started attending a Muggle school in Hawaii when you were five and continued there until you were eleven, all the while receiving an after school magical education provided by various adults, none of whom appear to be professional teachers, other than Mister Lupin. During those years, you also irregularly attended Escuela Primaria Para Jóvenes Mágicos in Argentina and a magical primary school in Israel, the name of which I cannot read, let alone pronounce. You then attended Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry for a year when you were eleven, and last year you were enrolled at the San Francisco Institute of Magic…” She glanced at Kali over the rim of her glasses. “Is that correct?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Kali answered.

She returned to her reading, summarizing as she went. “Your test results have always been excellent; top of your class in every school; plenty of extracurricular activities; your teachers have all given glowing assessments of your work ethic and capabilities, as well as your attitude and personality. You’re an outstanding student, Miss Black. Hogwarts would be happy to have you.”

“Thank you, Professor,” said Kali with a grin.

“You’re welcome, Miss Black,” said McGonagall, handing Kali an envelope. “In there you’ll find your acceptance letter, a list of school supplies which you can buy in Diagon Alley, and your train ticket for the 1st of September.”

“Where should she go after the train?” asked Remus. “Should she follow the First Years to the boats and join them for the Sorting ceremony?”

Professor McGonagall nodded. “Yes. Hogwarts doesn’t get many transfer students, but that is generally how it is done. She will be the first to be Sorted, and I will announce what year she’ll be in when I call her name. Do you have any question, Miss Black?”

She didn’t. As McGonagall was packing up her papers, Gran invited her to join them for dinner, McGonagall declined, but Gran insisted, and she was not the kind of person you said no to.

Pan stayed at the Leaky Cauldron after spotting a particularly big rat, and the rest of them headed through the secret entrance into Diagon Alley. The narrow street was practically empty at this time of day, especially with the weather being so dismal. The rain fell like mist on the dark alley lit only by oil lamps and the light seeping out of the second story windows of rickety, old buildings. The only sounds to be heard were the light patter of rain falling on roof shingles and cobblestones, the flapping
wings and soft hoots of busy owls, and the distant yowling of fighting cats. Kali felt sure that with the bustle and noise of the daytime, the street would take on a whole new appearance, nevertheless, her first impression of it was that of a dark and hazy dream.

Gran had only been to Diagon Alley a handful of times when she was much younger, but that didn’t mean she didn’t know exactly where the best restaurant on the street was or that she couldn’t get them a table, despite the lack of a reservation. The restaurant had a roof terrace, but most people had chosen to eat indoors to avoid the rain, Gran, however, was perfectly willing to face the dreadful weather if it meant extra privacy. She cast the same umbrella charm as she had earlier over their table to keep it dry, as well as some floating orbs of light to brighten the gloom.

McGonagall took a great interest in the first spell that they apparently didn’t have in the U.K. which was shocking given the amount of rain they got here, and that started them all off on an amiable conversation about local and international magic. Professor McGonagall became more comfortable as the evening progressed and Kali decided that she liked her. The Professor may have been prim and strict, and Kali didn’t doubt that she made for a demanding teacher, but she was also intelligent, and she hadn’t looked down on Kali when she’d joined in on the conversation, as some adults had been known to do.

The emerald green robes the Professor wore were a source of fascination for Kali who’d only very rarely seen these kinds of wizarding clothes, and McGonagall was quick to explain the ins and outs of wizarding fashion trends in the U.K. as well as list the ups and downs of wizarding robes.

By the time they parted ways from the Professor, it was very late. The rain had cleared, the owls had gone hunting elsewhere, and even the cats had called it a night. The silence and emptiness of the street had gone from mystical and enchanting to eerie and mysterious. It felt like there was an adventure waiting to happen just around the corner.

Kali ran ahead of Remus and Gran, jumping over puddles and peering into darkened shop windows, all the while staying well within Remus’s line of sight because she knew what he was like.

This hidden realm was the size of a small town, stretching well beyond Diagon Alley, branching off into other side-streets and alleyways, expanding outward right in the centre of London. Kali was eager to explore every last inch of it, but Gran insisted they find a hotel – not the Leaky Cauldron, she refused to set foot back in there unless absolutely necessary – and get some sleep because they had an early start tomorrow. They had to leave the High Street to find somewhere suitable, but they did eventually encounter an acceptable place. However, calling it a hotel was a bit of an overstatement. Wizarding London had yet to catch up with the modern age, so the best they could find was an old-fashioned inn. Gran grudgingly gave it her approval only because she was tired, otherwise Kali was sure that she would have marched right back out into Muggle London and booked a suite at The Ritz or Claridge’s or somewhere equally as luxurious.

Frogspawn Inn – perhaps it was the name that was putting Gran off more than anything – could best be described as quaint. The bricks of the stone wall were charmingly off-kilter, and the entire building seemed to lean to the right a little. There were mismatched flower pots filled with mismatched flowers on every windowsill, and the front door was made of heavy oak and painted a vibrant red and the colour was chipping off in places.

Within, the panelled walls were hung with scenic paintings of lakes and mountains and fields. One little farmer who’d been busy shepherding his sheep, waved merrily at the newcomers from inside his frame, unwittingly losing two of his lambs who made a run for it the minute his back was turned. The carpet that covered the tilled floor was worn and faded, and the furniture was well-used. But it was clean and homely, and the woman at the front desk smiled at them warmly when they stopped in
“I suppose it would be too much to hope for a suite,” said Gran wearily.

“’Fraid so, Madam,” said the innkeeper. “But I have some very comfortable adjoining rooms, if you’d like.”

“Three rooms, then, with at least two adjoining,” said Gran, removing several gold Galleons from her purse.

“That’s too much, Madam,” said the innkeeper, eyeing the stack of gold coins half fearfully, half hungrily.

“There is water damage to the ceiling and walls,” said Gran, not even looking at the woman as she removed her leather gloves, “as well as strategically placed buckets in case of dripping. The problem is recent, but still you ought to get it fixed.”

Kali’s gaze darted around the room taking in these details she’d missed on her first sweep of the place. She’d been too occupied finding all the nice things about the inn that she’d missed the flaws. Whereas those were all her Gran had seen, it would seem.

“I can’t take your money,” said the woman, looking horrified and embarrassed.

Gran scoffed. “Don’t be ridiculous. You have small children to feed, and an inn collapsing in on itself, now is not the time for pride. Take the money, I ask for nothing in return.”

The innkeeper looked shaken, but Gran was using her no-nonsense voice and she would not be argued with. The woman nodded meekly and handed Remus three room keys. Remus hurriedly guided Kali and Gran out of the reception area and up the stairs.

“You came this close to getting us kicked out,” Remus said to Gran as he checked the room numbers on the key tags.

“I don’t see what the problem is with offering money to those in need,” said Gran indifferently.

“You’re not offering it, though,” he said as they walked past ball of yarn and two knitting needles that were busy making what looked like a mile-long scarf. “That would imply that they can refuse. You’re forcing it on them.”

“Only because their misplaced pride won’t allow them to take it.”

Gran and Remus often argued about money. Mum used to say that it was because Remus had grown up with very little, which had made him self-reliant, and Gran had grown up with everything she could ever have wanted, which had made her very generous, and those two traits clashed rather spectacularly especially when combined with the natural stubbornness of both Remus and Gran.

Kali’s room was nice. Sparsely decorated and small, but still nice. One door led to a tiny on-suite bathroom where the mirror sang her praise tunelessly as she brushed her teeth:

“Oh, you have such lovely hair, so dark, so long! Ah, and your skin! Lovely, beautiful, the sun-kissed look suits you! And what striking eyes you have, absolutely captivating! Keep on brushing those pearly whites, now, you stunning girl, I bet your smile is to die for! My, you could cut someone with that jawline. Flawless bone structure! Flawless, I say! Such strong cheekbones, so intense! Oh, and that blush warms your cheeks so nicely -”
It kept loudly exalting every part of her face even as she hurried out of the room and closed the door behind her.

The other door led to Remus’s room. She could hear him pacing through the thin wall. She wanted to go through there and tell him to go to bed, he’d be up all night tomorrow because of the full moon, and he needed his rest. But she knew that if she did, he would try to convince her to leave, to go back to the States, where it was nice and safe and far away from anything too emotionally messy. She didn’t feel up to arguing with him again, so she tried to ignore those frantic steps of an anxious man.

She hopped onto her bed and sank a little lower than expected as the springs groaned beneath her. She snickered as she imagined Gran next door staring at her own bed distastefully, and expertly transfiguring it into a mahogany four-poster with silk sheets – which was something Kali had seen her do before, more than once.

Kali avidly tore into her acceptance letter and read through it:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

Headmaster: ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)

Dear Ms. Black,

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.

Third-years are permitted to visit the village of Hogsmeade at certain weekends. Please give the enclosed permission form to your parent or guardian to sign.

Term begins on September 1. The Hogwarts Express will leave from King’s Cross Station, platform nine and three-quarters, at eleven o’clock.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

Kali browsed over the letter and the accompanying book list and permission slip over and over, letting it all sink in.

“We’re going to Hogwarts,” she said to Pan as he prowled one of the dark streets below in search of easy prey. “We’re finally going to see where Remus and Dad went to school.”

“Don’t get too excited,” he said. “This could still go terribly wrong, and if the reaction of the people at the Leaky Cauldron is any indication, it will.”
“We’ll be fine. We just have to clear Dad’s name. How difficult can it be?”

Pan didn’t have an answer to that, but she knew he wasn’t optimistic. It didn’t matter, though, she knew what she had to do. She would prove her father’s innocence. She had to.
Freyja Morrigan was an imposing and striking woman. She’d been told this many times over the
course of her life, and was quite willing to believe it. She’d been top of her class at Durmstrang, had
fought on the front lines during the war against Grindelwald, and had built up her family’s mildly
lucrative hotel chain, creating a business empire, all before the age of twenty-five. She was an
impressive person, and felt that to downplay that for the sake of modesty was tantamount to lying to
herself and to others. Her mother disagreed with her. During an argument a long time ago, her
mother had called her arrogant and self-serving, and they had stopped speaking to each other for
three years. It would have been longer had Freyja not become pregnant with the child of a man who
valued family above all else. As it turned out, Lilith Morrigan made for a far better grandmother than
she had a mother.

This was not the case for Freyja, who was not the motherly type and nor was she the grandmotherly
type: she was not maternal, nor warm and caring, and she saw no reason to occupy herself with
people who were incapable of intelligent conversation, including children. Thus, Ezra became their
daughter’s main caregiver, and Freyja was the first to admit that he had done a wonderful job.
Asherah had been ambitious, talented, resourceful, honest, and kind. She’d been a far better person
than Freyja was, and still Fate had snatched her away through some mindless act of violence. It was
a terrible thing to lose one’s child, painful beyond belief, and to live with the knowledge that she
would grieve for a lifetime and that the emptiness inside her will never be full again was
devastatingly cruel.

But when you knew such deep sorrow, it was easier to recognize that which brought you
unspeakable joy and to treasure it.

Freyja’s unspeakable joy came in the form of her granddaughter. Kali was a beautiful child:
vivacious and witty and so clever. She didn’t mind that Freyja seldom hugged her nor praised her
undeservedly. She never took it the wrong way when Freyja’s attention was focused elsewhere,
never batted an eye when Freyja lost her temper, never flinched when Freyja started ranting and
raving and shouting and cursing. She forgave her grandmother’s flaws without comment or hesitation, and Freyja adored her for it.

She would do anything for that little girl, and if Kali wanted her father back, Freyja would get him back, one way or another.

***

The rain clouds had cleared by morning and weak rays of sunlight stretched against the far wall of the dining room making the place a little less gloomy and desolate. Both Kali and Remus were on their second serving of eggs and toast, and Freyja watched them eat with mild fascination as she sipped her tea. Remus always became ravenous around full moons, and if given the chance, she was sure he could eat his entire body weight’s worth in food quite happily, and Kali somehow managed to keep up with him, all the while chattering away about everything Pan had seen on his adventures through the streets of wizarding London the night before. The girl had inherited her mother’s metabolism, lucky little thing.

“We’ll go shopping for your school things tomorrow,” said Freyja, eyeing the bags under Remus’s eyes. “As for today, Kali and I will go for a walk around the neighbourhood while you get some more sleep. We will meet up for lunch, then you and Kali will Apparate to the Lake House while I go to the Ministry.”

“I don’t like Apparating,” said Kali, screwing her nose up in distaste.

“Then create a new method of speedy transportation,” said Freyja.

Remus smiled tiredly. “Don’t say that, she might just do it.”

Kali grinned brightly, and pounced on him, hugging him tightly, before he went back up to his room, and she and Freyja stepped out into the cool summer air.

Freyja could count on one hand the number of times she had visited wizarding London. The last time had been in 1944, when hastily built watchtowers had dotted the streets, manned by bored Aurors, tasked with vanishing the Muggle bombs that came a little too close to the wizarding settlement. Those were all gone now, but other than that, little had changed over the past forty-nine years. In fact, little had changed here since the sixteenth century. Stepping through these streets felt like stepping back in time, fortunately, though, the sanitation system and general cleanliness was much improved.

Kali ran off, dashing in and out of sight around shop corners and behind groups of people. Freyja kept up her leisurely pace, knowing that Kali wouldn’t wander too far ahead: the girl was, after all, far too used to Remus’s over-protective worrying. Freyja had worried after the incident at the Leaky Cauldron that Kali’s confidence and high spirits would take a hit, but she had underestimated the girl. Kali was just as exuberant and boisterous as ever, having been unbothered by the cruel words of crueler people who had judged a child without knowing the full truths. Remus, however, had not been so untouched.

“We can’t let her go to Hogwarts,” he’d said last night, after Kali had fallen asleep. “It’ll be ten times worse there.”

“She won’t run from this, Remus, she was never taught how,” Freyja said exasperatedly. “Besides, the news will reach the rest of the world soon enough, and then that kind of talk will follow her around regardless of where she is.”
“Not if she changes her surname, it won’t.”

“She won’t do that. She won’t hide herself. Sirius may not have left a positive impression on our world, but she will. She won’t live in the shadow of her father’s deeds, because you raised her to have tougher skin and a stronger backbone than that. You ought to be proud.”

Remus had muttered darkly and stalked out of her room after that. But regardless of what he may prefer, he knew that there was no stopping Kali when she had an idea planned out in her head.

“Gran, look,” Kali shouted from the other end of the path, “books!”

People glanced over at Kali, drawn toward her lively cry, and they stared: not because they recognized the familial traits she shared with one of Britain’s Most Wanted as Remus had feared people would, but rather because she was very pretty, especially with that smile and those wide eyes as she gazed into a small book store tucked away in between a barber’s shop and a café. Remus’s worrying had been unfounded, it turned out, and Kali was just another anonymous face in a sea of people, all too busy with their own affairs to pay much attention to another child weaving through the crowd.

Kali bought three books from the shop, and the storekeeper gave her another one for free because she was so polite. Remus met them at the café, and they had an enjoyable meal on the terrace. They could see the enter length of the alley from their table, so Kali could wander off when she got bored.

Despite Kali’s dislike for it, she let Remus Apparate her to the Lake House in Oxfordshire without a fuss. It was an unnecessary precaution - sending Remus somewhere private and out of the way during the full moon - the Wolfsbane Potion made his transformations safe for himself and for others, but he still felt more comfortable getting away from the crowds, just in case. He and Kali would spend the afternoon cleaning up the big house and making it liveable after years of it getting no use at all.

Freyja had other business to attend to.

The British Ministry of Magic was a sprawling underground building, stretching from Whitehall to Charing Cross Road and burrowing deep beneath the surface. There were a number of entry points, but Freyja preferred the one behind Gringotts. A narrow, winding alley next to the bank led to a small, neatly kept garden with marble statues that waved as you walked past. A large green door framed by Roman columns was guarded by two burly Aurors who pushed the double door open as Freyja approached. A short, empty hallway led to an elevator with delicate gold bars like a giant bird cage.

“Please state your name and business,” chimed the elevator as she stepped within.

“Freyja Morrigan,” she said, speaking clearly. “I have an appointment with Cornelius Fudge.”

The elevator doors clanked shut and Freyja started the slow descent toward the Minister’s office; the only place this particular elevator stopped at. It opened onto another short corridor at the end of which was another green door not dissimilar to the one at street level.

A buxom young woman with glossy brown curls pinned atop her head sat at a cluttered desk next to the door. “You’re right on time, Madam Morrigan, the Minister is waiting for you.” With a flick of her wand, the door swung open, and the young woman waved her in.

The office was a large circular room with a domed ceiling and a big round window off to the side that was currently showing a scenic beach on a sunny day - you could almost hear the waves
crashing against the shore. A lot of very old, rather ugly portraits took up the rest of the wall, some partially hidden behind filling cabinets and armoires and bookshelves. These portraits overlooked a heavy wooden desk that could comfortably sit a giant, and a plush, high-backed chair that was equally as large. Two other, far smaller chairs with deep purple upholstery sat in front of the desk.

“Madam Morrigan, it’s a pleasure seeing you again,” said Fudge. His suit matched the big chair’s padding so well that she hadn’t noticed him at first.

She glided across the room, footsteps muffled by the thick rug. She did not take the proffered hand, but she did return the pleasantry, and sat in one of the proposed chairs. “It’s been too long.”

Fudge’s eyes shifted, but he didn’t voice his disagreement. The last time she’d seen Fudge had been over two years ago during her annual Yule Ball when she’d had to rescue him from a debate he was having with Kali. She couldn’t recall the exact topic, but knew that it had been something political and that Fudge had been completely out of his depth. The scene had drawn quite the crowd before Freyja had decided to break it up. It had not been his most brilliant moment – not that Freyja had witnessed many of those from him – and he had politely declined both following invitations.

“Thank you for fitting me in on such short notice,” she said.

“It didn’t sound like you were giving me much of a choice,” he said, smiling uncomfortably. He cleared his throat. “How is your granddaughter?”

“Thriv ing.”

“I hear she’ll be attending Hogwarts this year.”

“Good news travels fast.”

“That it does.” He forced a chuckle. “Bit of an odd time to have her change schools, though. May I ask why now?”

“Of course, you may. But first, let me say how attractive your receptionist is,” Freyja said smoothly. Fudge’s eyes widened and a few of the portraits sniggered.

“On second thought, perhaps it would be best if we get straight down to business,” he said, the jovial tone so clearly forced it made his voice squeak.

“Perhaps,” she agreed with a cool smile. “How is the Ministry’s search for Sirius Black going?”

Fudge tutted. “You know I can’t disclose that information, Madam Morrigan.”

“You went to the Muggle Prime Minister and asked for his help, so I take it it isn’t going well.”

“The Auror Division has gathered every resource at its disposal and has maximized its effort to capture the prisoner and return him to Azkaban,” he said stiffly.

“Oh, I noticed what kind of effort the Auror Division is putting into this case: breaking into homes before the crack of dawn and injuring little girls.”

He squawked. “They didn’t intend to harm your granddaughter and they issued a formal apology for their actions.”

“Yes, you were very quick to apologize after she threatened to sue,” she said coolly. “You wouldn’t do well with another media scandal on your plate right now, would you, Minister?”
Fudge paled and shrank down in his seat. He understood who had the stronger hand. Good.

“What can I do for you, Madam Morrigan?” he asked meekly, not quite meeting her gaze.

“Once Sirius Black is captured, I would like the Ministry to organize a trial for him.”

That got his attention. “What on Earth for?”

“Due process,” she answered. “No matter how guilty a suspect may seem, they have a right to a fair trial. Sirius Black was denied that right twelve years ago, and that is an error you are going to correct.”

He looked positively scandalized. “I can’t do that.”

“Need I define ‘due process’ for you, Minister?” she said. “You don’t have a choice in the matter.”

“Do you realize what kind of precedent this would set?”

She raised an eyebrow at him. “Are you saying that Sirius Black is not the only inmate in Azkaban who never received a trial?”

“No,” he said a little too quickly to be believable.

Freyja stared him down. “In that case, it shouldn’t be a problem.”

But Fudge shook his head frantically. “The press would never let me live it down.”

“The press will eat what you feed it,” she snapped. She disliked spinelessness. “Frame the story to make yourself out to be the good guy, if you must, tell them you’re righting old wrongs, giving convicts who may be innocent after all a second chance. I don’t care how, but you will get it done.”

Fudge was trembling under her glare. “I can’t,” he squeaked.

Freyja rose to her feet, Fudge did his best to straighten his spine and stiffen his shaking chin, but he did not follow her lead; he’d made that mistake before. She was half a foot taller than him after all, and it wasn’t easy to look menacing and superior when you had to crane your neck backward to look your adversary in the eye.

“I am someone you want on your side, Minister,” she said evenly. “You will make sure Sirius gets a trial, and after you’ve done that, I will help you find him.”

“Are you hiding him?” he asked accusingly.

“No, but if I was able to track down Grindelwald when he was at his most powerful. Sirius Black oughtn’t pose much of a challenge.”

Mentioning Grindelwald was not done offhandedly: while Freyja had been heavily involved in that particular war, Fudge had only been a child, not even of age to attend Hogwarts by the time Grindelwald was finally stopped. Fudge needed to be reminded that he was not the most experienced person in the room, nor was he the most magically or intellectually proficient.

When he looked sufficiently cowed, Freyja straightened her coat and spun on her heels. “I will visit you in a couple of weeks to check on your progress.”

The door swung open with the barest mental push and the receptionist jumped to her feet, startled. “Madam, is everything alright?”
Freyja nodded, and then, because she was feeling spiteful, she stopped in front of the girl's desk and said, just loud enough for Fudge to hear through the still open door, “How would you feel about working in a hotel? If you’d like a more lucrative and fulfilling job with a boss who doesn’t attempt to look down your shirt every time you bend over, I’d be happy to give you an interview.”

The girl stared at her speechlessly, but took the card that Freyja offered her, clutching it tightly in both hands.

Freyja did not glance back at Fudge, but she was forced to stop three quarters of the way to the elevator when one of the doors that littered the length of the corridor and which led to various places within the Ministry burst open. The man that stepped through was tall – though not as tall as she – and very old, with long silver hair and a long silver beard that reached well past his waist.

“Freyja,” he said, his surprise evident as his bright blue eyes fell on her.

“Albus,” she greeted coolly. She had hoped she might avoid an encounter with the Hogwarts Headmaster while she was in the country.

He shook off his surprise and replaced it with a serene smile that Freyja found decidedly grating. “I was pleased to see that your granddaughter is applying to Hogwarts this year.”

“Yes,” she hummed. “I imagine given the state of current affairs you appreciate having her and Mr. Lupin within your sphere of influence.”

His smile became barely noticeably strained around the edges. “I don’t understand.”

“I highly doubt that. You cannot claim to be as intelligent as you do, Albus, and then act so dim-witted. You must choose a side.”

Freyja had often found that the greatest downfall of powerful men was that they so frequently underestimated the people around them all the while overestimating themselves, and Albus Dumbledore was a very powerful man. She left him standing there; she had better things to do than waste her time talking to a man whose entire personality was fabricated around a lie. She did not realize straight away that Albus may have been visiting the Minister for Magic for the same reason she had: to discuss the matter of Sirius Black. If that were the case, it would complicate things; Albus had a special skill for getting in the way and not doing as he was told. But this was not a fight Freyja intended to back down from.

***

The Lake House had been in the family for centuries, the eight hundred acre lot was surrounded on all sides by steep mountains, with a single, privately owned road leading in and out of the valley. Many mountainous springs ran down the hills, forming rivers and streams that all eventually led to the large lake in the centre of the property. The estate sprawled over miles of coniferous and deciduous forest, the small mountain range serving to mark the edge of the property. It was an isolated location, the perfect place for a wizarding family to build its home, far enough away from the prying eyes of Muggles to offer complete privacy, but only a ten minute drive away from a quaint Muggle town, meaning it wasn’t completely cut off from civilisation. The house itself had been torn down and rebuilt many times, but certain timeless fixtures remained to this day: such as the Mediterranean and French styling, the overall Victorian architecture with neo-Gothic accents, and the Art Nouveau features, all of which gave the building a unique look. The current home encompassed thirty thousand square feet of living space, including underground chambers dating back to before the Middle Ages where their most prized magical artefacts were kept. It was a palace, labyrinthine and arresting in its grandeur, yet haunted by painful memories: painful not because those memories
were bad; on the contrary, they were harrowing because the time Freyja’s family had spent here had been so good and so happy and it had all come to such a bitter and violent end.

Remus hated this place more than anyone, for once upon a time it was he who had been happiest here. When he’d had a home that was safe, and a family that was whole, and a love that was endless. Before it was all taken away from him. Full moons, although now made easier by the few advancements made in the field of lycanthropy in the past decade, were particularly arduous for him, because he used to have friends, a pack and a mate, to play with him and run with him while he was transformed. Now he was alone, and he no longer played nor ran. Pan kept him company, and Freyja did not sleep during those nights as an act of solidarity, and she knew that Kali did the same. But it was not as it had been, and Remus suffered with that more than the rest of the family ever could.

Freyja sat in the main living room with a glass of wine by her side, staring into the empty fireplace. Remus and Pan were in a reinforced room down the hall, a room specifically built to suit the lycanthrope’s needs. He ought to be outside, dispersing some of that pent up energy, but he stupidly insisted on being locked up, despite the health penalties that inevitably ensued. It was safe after all, the Wolfsbane potion gave him full faculty of his mind even after his body changed, but still he didn’t trust himself. He would rather slowly kill himself than run the faintest risk of hurting anyone.

She assumed that Kali was up in her room, perhaps reading her new books, but she didn’t dare check. If Freyja didn’t know for sure whether Kali stayed awake all night during full moons, she could not be expected to tell Remus about it, and she did not want to tell him about it, because it would make him feel undeservedly guilty. Guilt was an emotion he was all too familiar with. He was a stubbornly self-sufficient man who did not like being fussed over, or worried about, or helped out in the least. He did not want to inconvenience people nor bother them, as he put it, always forgetting that bothersome was a perfectly acceptable and expected thing to be within one’s family.

Freyja finished her glass with a sigh and decided a refill was in order for the long night ahead. She’d barely taken a step toward the wine cellar when something caught her attention.

An old photograph Freyja hadn’t seen in years sat on the mantel, it was from the last Yuletide before Voldemort’s defeat, the last Yule they were all together. She was surprised to see it there seeing as how after Sirius was imprisoned, Remus had gone on a crusade, tearing up every photograph with Sirius in it that he’d been able to find. But he hadn’t touched this one.

Freyja remembered the day this photo was taken. Lily had charmed the camera to float and snap pictures unaided and when she’d suggested a group photo they’d all piled in front of the fireplace, striking increasingly ridiculous poses as the bulb flashed. This photo was the last to be taken, the smiles were not as strained and forced as they had been in the first few shots, but it was also a lot calmer than the ones where James was struggling beneath Sirius’s weight on his shoulders and Peter was showing Mary and Marlene how to dance an Irish jig.

In this shot, all the ‘old people’, thoroughly tired out by the younger generation’s shenanigans, were clustered around the leather armchair Freyja had been sitting in a minute ago. Except in the photo, it was Lilith sitting in the comfy chair, with Freyja leaning against the arm of it, as Ezra and Lyall Lupin stood behind them, smiling fondly at the children. Nahele stood at the back, towering over everyone else with his huge frame, his newly acquired scar mark on his left eyebrow making him look far more intimidating than he’d used to, but the large grin that crinkled his eyes as he hugged Asherah to him held him back from looking truly frightening. Ash was leaning against Nahele’s chest, one hand looping over his shoulders and tangling in his long curls as she threw her head back laughing. Next to them stood Lily and Remus. Lily had both Remus’s and Nahele’s arms wrapped around her shoulders, and was clutching Asherah’s hand, laughing along with her, she was looking
very small standing next to so many tall people. On the far right, Peter stood with one arm wrapped around Marlene, the other around Mary, as both girls kissed his cheeks and left smears of lipstick on his skin. At the front, James and Sirius had spread out on the floor with the two babies. Little Harry had taken a liking to his father’s glasses and was trying to force them off of James’s face, while James distracted him by tickling his tummy. Sirius was lying on his back, smiling at his daughter who sat giggling hysterically on his chest.

Freyja smiled as she stroked the frame. Those had been happier times. Even though the war still raged, they’d had each other, one big, unconventional family, the likes of which Asherah had dreamed of and begged for when she was a child. It was a shame it had been so short-lived. Of the fifteen people in the photo: six were dead; one was an escaped convict; another was either dead or it was he who had committed the crime for which Sirius was imprisoned; and little Harry…

Harry had been sent to live with Muggle relatives after his parents were killed. Freyja had never met them, but Asherah had, on one occasion, and she’d had very few nice things to say about them. The morning after Voldemort’s attack, when the wreckage of the Potter’s home was discovered and news came that Harry had survived, Asherah had been frantic. She’d spent the better part of the day trying to find the boy, but no one seemed to know where he was, nor had they seemed to care, they’d been too busy rejoicing over You-Know-Who’s downfall. It had been Albus Dumbledore who’d eventually told her of the boy’s whereabouts. Freyja never found out exactly what was said between her daughter and the Hogwarts Headmaster that day, but Asherah had been in tears when she’d come home that night, and Freyja had wanted to rip the old man limb from limb and tear out every single one of his organs while he watched.

She’d managed to piece some of the story together, between the sobs: Harry was safe, but Dumbledore was forcing him to live with his loathsome Aunt and Uncle; the boy would not be permitted any contact with the wizarding world until he started at Hogwarts, for his own protection; and if Asherah or any of her family interfered with this safety measure they would face severe consequences: namely, Albus had threatened to do everything within his considerable power to take Kali away from them and have her placed in the care of her paternal grandmother.

The choice Asherah had had to make that day: her own daughter or the son of people who had become like family; had been the most difficult she’d ever faced, and it broke her, destroying a part of her that she never got back. But in the end, Freyja had made it clear to her that no matter how awful Lily’s sister and brother-in-law were, they could not compare to Walburga Black.

Freyja had not seen the boy since, none of them had, but now the game was changed: Walburga was no longer a threat to Kali’s well-being; Harry would be reunited with Kali and Remus at Hogwarts come September; and if all went well, Sirius would soon be a free man and then he could rightfully claim guardianship of his godson. They could be a family again, not as whole as they were before, but less broken than they were now.

***

They waited until after lunch the next day to head back to Diagon Alley, despite Remus’s reassurances that he felt fine. They travelled via Floo to the Leaky Cauldron which was much less crowded during the daytime. The old barkeep shot them a curious glance, remembering them from the other night. There was no hostility there, but the whispering did follow them out through the back door and into the small courtyard.

The magical street was far more crowded than the last time they’d walked it, with numerous people scuttling and bustling from one shop to the next, stopping to talk with friends, and staggering under the weight of their purchases.
Kali had a wonderful time. Diagon Alley was unlike any wizarding place she’d visited so far: it was messy and chaotic, and people wore robes and pointed hats, and there were all kinds of indistinguishable smells and sounds coming from all kinds of shops. She stared around with the wide-eyed innocence of a child, pointing things out to Freyja and Remus that they may otherwise not have noticed or completely overlooked. She didn’t run off on her own this time, no doubt hoping to save Remus any undue stress, but that didn’t mean she was any less excited. She got her first ever set of wizarding robes from Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions, resupplied her potion’s kit at the Apothecary’s up the street, and spent an inordinate amount of time at the bookshop, Flourish and Blotts. While sitting outside Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlor sharing each other’s sundaes, Kali went to see a flower vendor at one of the various stalls that lined the street and bought a small bouquet of daffodils which she gave to Remus.

They spent another couple of days in the U.K. at Kali’s insistence to take in the sights, and left for Hawaii shortly after. Freyja would come back in a couple of weeks to make sure Fudge was doing his part, and Remus and Kali would return on September 1st to catch the train to Hogwarts.
The Sorting Ceremony

Chapter Summary

The title's pretty self-explanatory: Kali Black gets Sorted (also train ride to Hogwarts and the first dementor attack from her perspective)

Chapter Notes

This is a long chapter but I'll try to even out chapter lengths after this. As always: enjoy ;)

Wednesday, September 1st, 1993,

United Kingdom, England, London, King’s Cross Station,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

The platform swarmed with hundreds of people. Rushed conversations buzzed in the air as parents gave their children last words of advices and embraces. You couldn’t walk anywhere without bumping into someone, and the smell and noise was overwhelming. But despite the chaos Kali couldn’t help but grin, it was just as she’d imagined it.

The red paint of the steam engine was pristine, with only the slightest bit of rust at the edges. The smell was a blend between the rising smoke of the train, caffeine, sweat, perfume, and animal droppings. Some of the people around her wore Muggle clothes, but most wore robes.

Kali had noticed when she’s visited wizarding London a few weeks ago that British witches and wizards much preferred robes to ordinary clothes. During her trip to Diagon Alley it had surprised her that so many still wore robes and she’d found herself comparing it to what it was like back in the States. North American witches and wizards hardly ever wore robes and she knew that that had a lot to do with the influence of history and the oppression of magic that was very present on the whole continent for several centuries. To see so many witches and wizards blatantly showing off what set them apart from the Muggles was very odd indeed, though not entirely terrible, Kali thought, it was nice to see that British wizards and witches were comfortable with – and even proud of – their magical background in a way that few witches and wizards from North America ever truly were, especially the older generations that endured the height of the repression.

Pan was perched on her shoulder as a pine marten taking in as much as possible. The other schools they’d attended hadn’t allowed pets and he wasn’t used to seeing this many animals in one place, and he wasn’t particularly keen on the change of situation.

“It isn’t too late to go back you know,” he said, his voice crystal clear in Kali’s mind.
“We’ve been over this,” Kali thought back. “We’re staying here until we find a way to help Dad.”

“But that could take ages,” whined Pan. “And that eagle owl is looking at me like I’m his next meal.”

“Then change into something bigger,” thought Kali.

Pan scoffed. “And have to leave the safety of your shoulder and get trampled underfoot? No thank you.”

“Quit complaining. You might find that you like it better here than you did at any of the other places.”

“Doubt it,” Pan grumbled. “I found Remus.”

Kali let her mind meld with Pan’s until she saw what he did. He was looking at a tall man standing at the front of the steam engine, deep in conversation with a train guard. The tall man looked tired and sickly and seemed older than he actually was due to premature lines on his face and strands of grey in his light brown hair. He had scars cutting across his pale skin and his robes were shabby and patched. Despite this dismal outward appearance, Kali smiled fondly and even Pan forgot that he didn’t want to be here.

Kali walked nimbly toward Remus, lithely dodging people and trolleys alike. Remus looked over at her as she approached and smiled. He finished his conversation with the guard and walked over to join his god-daughter.

“Did you find a compartment?” he asked her.

“Yes, but I still don’t see why I can’t just sit with you,” she said.

Remus sighed, they’d gone over this before. “Because the minute we get on that train I become your teacher.”

“You know, I could’ve sworn that you’ve been my teacher for years now, what with the homework, and the lessons, and the lectures…. Or was that another Professor Lupin?”

“You don’t need to sit with me, Kali,” he said.

“It isn’t a question of need, it’s about wanting to sit with you,” she said.

“You should sit with your new classmates,” Remus sighed. “This isn’t San Francisco, or Ilvermorny or Hawaii, sweetheart, no one knows you here, you should try making some friends on the train.”

“You think I’m going to have trouble making friends?” Kali smirked. “Please, I’m adorable and surrounded by an air of mystery from being the new student, who wouldn’t want to be my friend?”

Under normal circumstances, Remus would have laughed, but he was far too stressed out of late. “Kali, people know who your father is here, especially now,” Remus said, wearing that same pained expression he always wore when he talked about Kali’s dad. “They might hold it against you.”

“Because he’s an escaped convict?” Kali asked, raising an eyebrow. “Why would I want to be friends with people who’d judge me over something I have no control over? I have standards, you know?”

“I still think you should use your mother’s surname while you’re here, or Nahele’s, or mine, just not
his,” he said.

“T’m not going to do that,” she said.

He sighed. “Kali -”

“They’re going to find out one way or the other,” she said. “At least this way it doesn’t look like it’s something I’m ashamed of.”

The whistle blew and parents finished saying goodbye to their kids.

“I’ll see you later, okay?” Remus said, giving Kali a quick hug. “Good luck with the Sorting.”

And then he was gone, his long strides carrying him away until he disappeared in the crowd.

“On a scale of one to ten, how stressed are you?” Pan asked her gently.

“It’s just a Sorting, it’s not like I haven’t been through one before,” she thought, stepping back onto the train.

“You didn’t answer the question,” he said, nuzzling her neck affectionately.

“It feels different this time,” Kali thought. “Like there’s more hanging on it or something.”

“Do you know which House you want to be Sorted into?” Pan asked, jumping down from her shoulder as she sat down in the empty compartment at the front of the train she’d put her trunk in earlier.

“I’m not sure,” she thought. “Gryffindor would be the easy choice.”

“Why easy?” Pan asked. His reddish-gold fur rippled, skin melting away and rearranging itself until in the blink of an eye he’d changed forms and now stretched out on the seat beside her as an oncilla.

There were a lot of names for what Pan was, varying according to different cultures, Kali had learnt the term daemon first and that was the one that had stuck. Pan could turn into any animal he desired, so long as he’d met a living version of said animal beforehand. He couldn’t replicate magical animals, though. He’d tried once and it had been a painful and unsuccessful experience, to say the least. Neither could he take on human form. Instead, daemons had the ability to bind themselves to the human of their choosing, joining both their lives together forever. That’s what Pan was to Kali, a constant companion with whom she shared a telepathic link, so that he knew her every thought as well as she knew his.

“Because Gryffindor’s reputation is outwardly pristine,” she answered. “If you get Sorted into that House you can assume you’ll be respected and trusted by the rest of the wizarding community.”

“Okay, so what’s wrong with easy?” Pan asked slowly, reluctantly. He already knew the answer.

“Easy is boring,” Kali supplied anyway, her eyes twinkling at Pan’s deep mental sigh.

(Of course it is,” he all but sniggered. “And what would the challenging choice be?”

“Slytherin,” she thought without missing a beat.

“Really?” he asked, exasperated. “You want to be Sorted into the Death Eater House?”

“It isn’t the Death Eater House,” thought Kali, feeling just as exasperated as Pan sounded.
“Tell that to all the Slytherin Death Eaters,” he snorted.

“Aunt Andromeda was in Slytherin,” she thought.

“Law of probability,” said Pan. “Even the worst of places is bound to produce a few good people from time to time.”

“Slytherin House values ambition and resourcefulness,” thought Kali. “There is nothing inherently evil about that.”

“No, but seeking power by any and all means necessary can be pretty terrible,” he said derisively.

“What about proving people wrong?” she asked.

“About Slytherin House? Kali even the House’s founder was evil,” said Pan.

“The founder whom I happen to be related to,” she said.

“Doesn’t mean you’re anything like him,” Pan said defensively.

“But I do value the traits he did,” she argued.

“You value bravery too,” said Pan. “and intelligence, and kindness.”

“I can’t be Sorted into all four Houses, Pan,” she said. “A choice will have to be made somewhere along the line.”

“I don’t don’t like how the Sorting system works here,” he said grumpily, curling in on himself in a tight little ball of spotted fur. “It doesn’t make sense. People’s values change all the time and this school wants to define the next seven years of a bunch of eleven-year-olds’ lives based on them?”

“I get the feeling you’re overthinking this,” Kali said soothingly, stroking the northern tiger cat’s soft fur.

“But it’s important,” he said anxiously. “Your House becomes your family, isn’t that what Remus said? What if we don’t like them?”

“You were never worried about this back at Ilvermorny,” she said, unsettled by Pan’s reticence. He never hid his feelings from her, but this had clearly been bothering him for awhile now and she hadn’t had a clue.

“Back at Ilvermorny I knew you’d be Sorted into a House where you’d be with people you had things in common with. That isn’t a given here,” he said shakily.

Kali pulled the small feline onto her lap, holding him close to her. “What does it matter if I have things in common with them or not?”

“Remus says you need friends,” he said quietly.

“I have you,” she said.

“I think he’s hoping for someone who’s the same species as you,” he grumbled.

“Overrated,” Kali said, laughing softly.

“That’s what I thought,” said Pan, still rather moodily. “But he sounded adamant, and I know you
like having human friends. I want you to be happy.”

“You sound like Remus,” said Kali, scratching Pan behind his ear.

“If only you listened to me like you listen to him,” Pan snorted.

“I do listen to you,” she said, glad his mood had finally improved. “Whether I do as you tell me to, though, is another matter.”

“Just imagine how much less trouble you’d get into if you actually did do as I say,” he said, flopping dramatically on her lap.

“Just imagine how much less fun that would be,” she teased.

“You say that now, but if this school’s Sorting system is any indication, we’re on our way to being trapped in a castle filled with people who obsessively value a single set of traits and disregard all others,” said Pan before asking curiously, “Is there a word for people like that?”

“Monomaniacs,” she said, after a moment’s thought. “People with an overwhelming interest or zeal confined to a single thing, idea, subject, or the like.”

“And people say learning a dictionary off by heart isn’t worth it,” he sniggered.

“I didn’t learn it off by heart,” she said. “I just read it.”

“Same thing with you,” he said cocking his head to the side. “Incoming.”

Kali heard it too, approaching footsteps and a loud conversation… or maybe it was a monologue, there only seemed to be one participant in said conversation.

“… Father of course was very pleased,” an oddly familiar voice drawled. “He got me a new owl as a congratulation gift. Not that my success was all that surprising.”

“Whoa, Draco,” a simpering voice said. Not a monologue then. “That’s really impressive.”

“This is the last compartment,” Draco said right outside the compartment in which Kali and Pan sat. Draco… it explained why the voice had sounded familiar.

The door was pushed open and there stood Kali’s cousin – second cousin really, but the distinction was superfluous. He’d changed quite a bit since she’d last seen him, but as that was eight years ago it wasn’t all that surprising. His hair was still the same shade of white-blond, his eyes were still frosty grey, and his complexion was still pale and bloodless, but his features were now sharper and more pointed, having finally lost the baby fat. He possessed the haughty good looks that ran in the family and the smug countenance of someone who thought he was above everyone else. At that precise moment the smugness was lost, however, as he gaped openly at Kali.

“Hello, Draco,” said Kali. He was blocking the compartment, so she couldn’t see who he’d been talking to

“If he pulls my tail again, I’m biting him,” said Pan, eyeing the blond balefully.

“He was five, I’m sure he knows better now,” Kali thought back, but Pan tucked his tail beneath him just in case.

“Kali,” said Draco, finally pulling himself out of his stupor. “What are you doing here?”
“I transferred from San Francisco,” said Kali. “I’ll be attending Hogwarts this year.”

“You will?” It seemed as though his brain was still in the middle of processing, but he threw on a confident smile all the same as he sauntered into the compartment, and sat opposite her. His friends filtered in after him. “That’s wonderful. Of course, Hogwarts isn’t the best school in the world, but it’s all about who you meet while you’re here.”

“I see,” said Kali, before saying telepathically. “What the hell is he going on about?”

“I have no idea,” said Pan. “Do you think it would be rude if we slipped out? That big one other there smells like mould.”

Kali glanced over, there were two big guys, and one big girl. The girl was black-haired, and had a heavy, jutting jaw, and next to no chin, her chubby cheeks gave her a round face, and made her eyes look very small and squinty. Of the two boys, one was very fat, with a thick neck, a flat nose, and an unfortunate pudding bowl-style haircut; the other looked to be made mostly of muscle, his small eyes were dull, and his short, bristly hair grew low on his forehead. The smell of mould came from the latter.

“What are you wearing?” asked one of the remaining three of Draco’s entourage. She would have been pretty if it weren’t for the scowl and the way her nose wrinkled as though she’d smelled something foul as she looked over Kali’s outfit.

Kali felt certain the look of disgust wasn’t warranted. She wore a green, cotton jacket, over a simple grey shirt, black jeans, and Chuck Taylors. It wasn’t high fashion, but it was hardly hideous.

“They don’t wear robes in America,” said Draco, with a wave of his hand, and a voice that made it clear that he was flaunting his knowledge around to make himself seem smart. “Unless it’s a special occasion.”

“You’re American?” the third girl asked. This one was definitely pretty, despite the cool, calculating look she was throwing at Kali, as though sussing out whether Kali was friend or foe, follower or competition.

“I am,” said Kali. It was easier than explaining that her mother had been Israeli, her step-father Hawaiian, her godfather was Welsh, her grandmother was Norwegian, her great-grandmother was English, and that she had a bunch of family in Argentina and Australia as well. It was simpler than getting into the fact that she had grown up moving around all the time, and that by experiencing so many cultures and living in so many countries, she didn’t have a place that was hers. She didn’t belong to anywhere.

“I don’t like any of these people, we should definitely leave,” said Pan. He was trying to distract her, he understood perhaps even better than she did her need to belong, and he knew that this line of thought did not lead to happy places.

“What happened to wanting me to make friends?” she asked.

“There are some requirements on quality that none of these humans seem to fit,” he grumbled. “None of them have said how cute I am yet.”

“They’re waiting to decide if they like me before complimenting anything about me,” she said. “Including the adorable animal on my lap.”

“They’re Purebloods?” he asked.
“Not all of them.” She got the feeling the pretty girl with the golden skin wasn’t, and she wasn’t sure what to make of the good-looking, dark-skinned boy who sat at the corner opposite from her yet.

“I always wondered why my father hated America,” said the girl who’d questioned Kali’s choice of clothing, looking down her squashed, upturned nose at Kali. “It must be because of their terrible sense of fashion.”

“Oh she did not,” Pan hissed. “Want me to give her a fright?”

“She’s establishing territory,” said Kali, keeping Pan from turning into a Komodo dragon there and then, and making the girl scream. “She’s Queen Bee, and she wants me to know it. It’s a dominance play.”

“She’s playing with the wrong person,” he growled. “You show her who’s boss.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s terrible,” said Kali out loud, smiling at the snotty girl. “Not as a whole, anyway, there are always some exceptions. But overall, I’d say that the sense of style over there, trumps that of wizarding Britain.”

The girl’s eyes narrowed, and her jaw clenched.

“She was hoping you’d roll over, and submit,” cackled Pan.

“She doesn’t know me at all,” snorted Kali.

“What makes you think that?” asked the dark-skinned boy.

“I don’t like wizarding robes,” Kali explained. “They’re very bland, they lack diversity, they’re unbecoming of anyone’s figure, and any attempt at individuality with the garment is gaudy and garish.”

Kali glanced pointedly at the pig-nosed girl’s green robes and its bright pink patterns, and the girl’s face turned bright red, clashing horribly with her showy outfit.

“Well,” said the dark-skinned boy, looking arrogantly amused by the whole conversation. “Now that Pansy’s attempted to insult her, are you going to introduce us, Draco?”


“He didn’t even introduce me, how rude,” said Pan, snorting at Draco’s theatrics.

“Black?” Pansy repeated, sitting to attention, and preening. “Are you a Pureblood?”

“No,” said Kali.

“Oh,” said Pansy, rapidly deflating, and dropping her shoulders.

“Black is the name of one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight Pureblood families of Great Britain,” said Tracey.

“I know,” said Kali. “They should really change it to the Sacred Twenty-Seven, but I guess it doesn’t have as nice a ring to it.”
“Your father is Sirius Black,” said Blaise. “The Sirius Black. The mass murderer who escaped from Azkaban.”

“I didn’t know he had a daughter,” said Tracey. “But there’s definitely a resemblance, you look just like him.”

“He should get a medal for what he did, killing all those Muggles,” said Millicent, speaking up for the first time, and Kali’s jaw very nearly dropped.

“Quite right,” said Draco, smugly. “Frankly, I think what he did was penance for the fact he was a blood traitor. Finally renouncing the Gryffindor ways and showing that he really was a descendant of the Black line after all. Pity he got caught.”

“They can’t be serious,” she thought, as the two big guys and Pansy started agreeing profusely with Draco.

“They look pretty serious, Kali,” said Pan, uneasily.

“What kind of people are dumb enough and cruel enough to think that killing innocent people is something warranting praise?” she asked.

“Purebloods,” said Pan, the word dripping with disgust in his mind.

“I like Muggles,” said Kali, and the compartment went deadly quiet,

“We are outnumbered by pro-Pureblood elitists, you really want to start picking a fight about this now?” he asked, as the six teenagers around her stared at her.

“What better time to do it?” she asked.

“How about when we’re not surrounded?” he muttered.

“Come again?” said Draco, looking mildly horrified, not by his own discriminative words, but by the implication of hers.

“I like Muggles,” she said again. “I find them fascinating.”

“You’re – you’re a -” Draco stammered.

“I’m a what? Come on, Draco, spit it out,” said Kali with a smile that was more a baring of teeth than a show of good-humour.

“A blood traitor,” sneered Pansy, with a triumphant look in her eyes.

“That term still confuses me,” said Kali, and Pansy snickered, clearly seeing this as further proof that Kali’s intelligence was substandard. “Surely a blood traitor is someone who makes a decision, or who believes in ideals which affect the magical potency of their offsprings’ blood in a de-valorizing manner.”

“That’s exactly what it means,” said Blaise, still looking highly amused by this whole conversation.

“In which case surely it should apply to Pureblood inbreeders,” said Kali. “After all it’s Purebloods who have produced the largest number of squibs and stillborns in the past century, and there’s not much magical potency there.”

Pansy opened and closed her mouth repeatedly, much like an over-sized fish. Millicent came to her
rescue. “You can’t prove any of that.”

“Actually, there have been multiple research papers written on the matter,” said Kali, “and all those with valid sources have found that inbreeding increases the chances of offspring being affected by recessive or deleterious traits, leading to a decreased biological fitness, and as such affecting its ability to survive and reproduce. I can write down a few references if you’d like.”

The compartment went quiet, Gregory and Vincent’s mouths were hanging open and their eyes had a dull, confused look to them. Millicent was glaring a her, and Kali half expected her to start cracking her knuckles. Blaise had raised his eyebrows and was studying her more seriously now, but the amused twinkle remained in his gaze – maybe it was a permanent fixture. Tracy’s expression was blank, but she kept casting glances over at Pansy waiting to see how the other girl would react. Pansy was in far too much shock to lead by example, though, her eyes appeared to have doubled in size, and her mouth opened and closed, still gaping like a fish out of water. As for Draco, he looked so horrified his facial expression was almost comedic.

Kali thought she’d been rather civilized in making her point. She could, after all, have been far more graphic with some of the side effects of inbreeding which could be quite gruesome. In fact, Pan was trying to get her to tell them about Cryptorchidism in the hope that they’d get so uncomfortable they’d leave.

“How do you know all this?” asked Blaise, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

“I read,” she said, and realizing she was sounding a bit condescending, she kept talking, figuring she might as well go all out. “The notion of blood purity exists only in Great Britain, and in some of the countries it colonized, every other wizarding community views it as quite a backward way of thinking, really. It makes it easier to be properly informed when you’re not being fed propaganda infused information.”

Pansy huffed and tilted her head back further so that her nose must surely be almost completely blocking her view of Kali. “It’s just because you’re foreign, you’d understand otherwise.”

“I’d understand the systematic discrimination of the majority of magical citizens based solely on their parentage?” Kali asked, tilting her head to the side and pursing her lips in feigned bewilderment. “You must have me confused with someone more bigoted.”

It was then that Millicent chose to lunge – not for her wand, but directly at Kali – which worked in Kali’s favour for she’d yet to get into the habit of carrying her wand with her wherever she went, but years of martial arts and self-defence training meant that despite the confined space and the fact that Millicent had about 100 pounds on her, she quickly had the other girl down on her knees with her arms twisted behind her back.

Vincent and Gregory had scrambled to their feet, but kept looking uncertainly between Kali and Millicent and Draco, waiting for the latter to tell them what to do.

“First bloody day, and you’re already getting into fights. We haven’t even gotten to school yet,” Pan scolded. He’d leapt out of the way when Kali had jumped from her seat, but he’d misjudged it and landed badly on his paw. Kali felt ghost pains shoot up her own left arm from where Pan was hurting, but he hadn’t broken or sprained it.

“She attacked me, remember?” she said, keeping a firm grip as Millicent struggled.

“I told you we should have left, you didn’t listen,” he said, gingerly licking his paw.
“I will not run from a fight that I can win,” she said, then to Millicent, “Keep struggling and you’re going to dislocate a shoulder.”

“You bitch!” Millicent screeched, still fighting Kali’s hold.

Kali tightened her grip and hitched Millicent’s arms further up her back to the point where any movement on Millicent’s part was impossible.

“I don’t appreciate being attacked and insulted, Millicent. I would suggest you not to it again,” said Kali coolly, using the tone she’d mastered from her grandmother.

She released her hold on the other girl, and Millicent sprawled onto the compartment floor, her face flushed bright red, and a wet sheen in her eyes.

“I apologize for hurting you,” said Kali, feeling her gut wrench at the sight of the tears.

“Why are you apologizing?” Pan hissed. “She started it.”

“Remember what Uncle Oke said about use of excessive force?”

“She’s two times your size. There’s nothing excessive about self-defence.”

“I’m trained, she isn’t. It’s an unfair fight.”

“She’s a bully.”

“If I lower myself to her level then I’m no better.”

Pan grumbled on about how annoying he found Kali’s morality, but she ignored him. It was generally easier on everyone to just let him rant in peace.

“How did you do that?” asked Draco, shaking himself out of his stupor. “Did you use a spell?”

“No,” she answered, keeping a wary eye on Millicent, Vincent, and Gregory in case they decided to try anything. “I’ve been taking hand-to-hand combat classes since I was five.”

“Muggle fighting?” sneered Pansy.

“Yes, it’s good exercise, and, on occasion, it’s a useful skill to have,” said Kali, relaxing her stance when she realized that the two boys wouldn’t do anything without Draco’s say-so, and that Millicent seemed to have learned her lesson.

“You’re more Muggle than you are witch,” Pansy said, her face twisting in disgust.

“I’m plenty of both, actually,” said Kali. “I can show off my spellwork, if you’d like?”

Pansy recoiled at the implied threat, she even reached inside her robes for her wand, but she didn’t take it out. She was at least smart enough not to get into a fight with an unknown adversary.

“Perhaps you should leave,” suggested Draco, barely managing to look at Kali as he said it.

Kali scoffed and sat back down in her seat. “I was here first, I’m not leaving. But if I’m making you uncomfortable then by all means get out.”

Draco deigned to glance up at her, his eyes angry, but uncertain. He wasn’t used to being spoken to like this, and he didn’t like it, but despite having only spent a small amount of time with Kali when
they were much younger, he knew her well enough not to push her.

Sensing Draco’s indecision, Pansy spoke up, “Lets go find Theo. Hopefully he’s found better company to sit with.”

They trailed out one by one, until only Draco and Blaise were left in the compartment with Kali and Pan.

Draco stood, and followed his friends, but stopped short at the door, “You want to be careful who you make enemies of here, Kali,” he warned. “You might regret making the wrong ones.”

With that he flounced out, and the door slid shut behind him.

“Now that is a dire prediction,” Pan snickered. “What were you thinking making such scary people your enemies, Kali?”

“I think he may have meant it more along the lines of ‘If you continue being mean to me, I’m going to tell my father, and then you’ll be in trouble,’” she said, copying her cousin’s snotty drawl.

“Draco does like his theatrics,” mused Blaise, still sitting calmly in his corner.

“This is nothing compared to what he was like when we were younger,” she said.

“Oh, I can imagine.”

He stretched his legs out in front of him, and watched her. When the silence started to get a bit creepy, she spoke up.

“You may have noticed all your friends have left.”

“They’re more acquaintances than friends,” he said smoothly, not at all thrown off by her clear invitation for him to leave also. “You’ll find that Hogwarts doesn’t offer up an awful lot of choice in way of friends, and they’re what I am stuck with. But you seem far more interesting.”

“Flattering as that may be, if you want to stay, you’re going to have to stop staring. It’s rather off-putting.”

“Surely you’re used to it. You’re beautiful.” He didn’t say it like it was a compliment, just a statement of fact, an emotionless appraisal of physical charm.

“I know, but that doesn’t make it any less unwelcome.”

“You know?” he asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“What? You think I’ve never looked in a mirror?”

“Fair point.”

The compartment door slid open, and a girl with very fine, strawberry blonde hair and very pale and blemished skin popped her head in. She seemed to retreat in on herself when she saw that the compartment wasn’t empty.

“Can we help you with something, Daphne?” asked Blaise.

The girl, Daphne, shook her head, “We were looking for somewhere to sit,” she said almost too quietly to hear.
“There’s plenty of room in here if you don’t mind the company,” said Kali.

Daphne debated the idea. Surreptitiously glancing up and down the train, probably wondering whether there might be an empty compartment somewhere, but she eventually nodded and slipped into the seat closest to the door. Another girl came in after her, a couple of years younger than Daphne, probably a first year, she was very skinny and promised to be tall. Her hair was that peculiar shade of light brown that turned blond in the sun and got darker during the winter time, and her eyes were big and dark brown like a doe’s.

“Kali, this is Daphne Greengrass,” said Blaise with a wave of his hand toward the older girl. “A Slytherin third year like myself.”

“Hi, I’m Kali Black,” she said, extending her hand.

Daphne shook her hand shyly, giving her a small smile. “That’s my sister, Astoria.”

“Hello,” said Astoria, with a much larger smile, she shook Kali’s hand enthusiastically, and her eyes dropped to Pan who was curled up in her lap again, and her grin grew. “He’s lovely, is he yours?”

“Oh, I like her, she’s far more acceptable company,” purred Pan, unfurling himself and joining Astoria on the opposite bench.

“You’re so easily bought,” Kali teased. “He’s a daemon.”

“What’s that?” asked Blaise, paying more careful attention to Pan now as though only just noticing him.

“Well, he’s supposed to be a spirit guide, but he’s bloody useless at it.”

“Only because you never listen,” he hissed, jumping to his feet and giving her a reproachful look.

“He can understand you?” Astoria asked excitedly, watching the interaction.

“He can understand you, too, and that’s not even his most impressive trick.”


“Just think how impressed they’ll all be if they see you do it.”

Pan huffed, but it was too tempting to resist. He shimmered like hot air over asphalt, and transformed into a golden retriever.

Astoria shrieked delightedly, and Blaise dropped his mask of mild amusement. Even Daphne sat up a little straighter, and Pan basked in the attention.

“You don’t see that everyday,” said Blaise, trying to regain his composure.

“Do you think Mother and Father will get me one for Christmas if I ask nicely?” Astoria asked her sister.

“That’s not quite how it works,” said Kali. “Daemons are rare, and unless they’re bonded, they don’t live near people.”

“Then how come you have one?” asked Blaise.

“It was a fluke. I was wandering where I was not meant to wander, and he’d gotten himself caught in
a hunter’s trap. I saved his life, and he decided to stick with me after that.”

“My hero,” he grumbled. “I would have gotten out of that trap eventually.”

“Before or after the hawks, eagles, and owls got to you?”

“You’re so lucky,” said Astoria, vigorously rubbing Pan’s tummy. “What else can he turn into?”

“Any non-magical creature you can think of,” Kali answered, as Pan demonstrated by turning into a squirrel, then tortoise, then a falcon, then back into an oncilla.

Astoria was enthralled by Pan, and he never grew tired of her surprised gasps and excited cheers when he took on a new form. Kali left him to entertain the compartment’s youngest occupant, as Blaise changed his line of questioning to Kali herself.

“What year are you in?” he asked.

“Third,” she said, which put her in the same year as Blaise, Daphne, Draco, and probably the rest of his gang, too.

“Do you know what electives you want to take?”

“Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, and Study of Ancient Runes.”

“No Muggle Studies?” Blaise smirked. “I thought you were a big fan of all things Muggle.”

“Not all things,” she corrected. “The nuclear bomb, for instance, really sucks. I’m not interested in the Muggle Studies class because I prefer to learn about them by interacting with them.”

“You interact with Muggles?” asked Daphne, eyes wide with shock.

“Of course I do, they’re fun. Their ingenuity more than makes up for their lack of magic, and honestly a lot of them live better than we do.”

“But they’re Muggles,” said Daphne uncertainly.

“Have you ever met one? Actually sat down and had a conversation with one?” Daphne shook her head. “I recommend it, it’s eye-opening. What about you two, what subjects are you taking?”

“Divination is supposedly an easy class, and if you’re there perhaps Study of Ancient Runes and Arithmancy won’t be as dull as they sound,” Blaise drawled.

Kali rolled her eyes at him, which only seemed to make his smirk grow, and she turned her attention to Daphne who was tugging the sleeves of her robe over her hands. “Daphne?”

Daphne looked a little startled at being addressed directly, and her skin took on a pink tinge, making her blemishes look less pronounced.

“Study of Ancient Runes and Divination,” she said, she really did have a very small voice.

“What are the core subjects like?” Kali asked, she’d been curious about this ever since she’d found out that Transfiguration and Charms were taught separately at Hogwarts, unlike at all the other schools she’d attended which taught anything requiring spells and wand work in just one class.

Blaise filled her in on the inner workings of a Hogwarts education, with Daphne only occasionally adding a few details. Kali learned that History of Magic was taught by a ghost, which sounded
fascinating, until they informed her that said ghost was really very boring, and that most people fell asleep during his class. They told her about how the Charms’ professor was a very, very small man who had to stand on a stack of books to see over his desk, Daphne liked that class, but Blaise only spared it a non-committal shrug – Kali got the feeling that enthusiasm wasn’t really his thing. The Potions’ teacher favoured Slytherins. Herbology was becoming more and more hands on. The Transfiguration’s professor was really strict – but Kali had already gathered that from her previous encounter with Professor McGonagall.

The stream of information kept coming until around midday when a great clattering outside in the corridor had them all looking up. A smiling, dimpled lady slid back their door and said, “Anything off the cart, dears?”

The four of them scrambled into the corridor, crowding around the food trolley. Astoria picked out a couple of packs of licorice wands before going back to play with Pan. Daphne and Blaise also took very little time to decide what they wanted, but Kali had never seen most of what the lady was selling, and couldn’t decide what looked best. She finally decided on a box of Bertie Botts’s Every Flavour Beans, some Cauldron Cakes, Chocolate Frogs, and a couple of different flavours of Drooble’s Best Blowing Gum.

“So tell us about yourself,” said Blaise, tearing into his Pumpkin Pasty.

“What do you want to know?” asked Kali.

“Draco said you’re American, whereabouts are you from?”

“Hawaii mainly, but I’ve also lived in Boston, New York City, and San Francisco.”

“So tell us about yourself,” said Blaise, tearing into his Pumpkin Pasty.

“What do you want to know?” asked Kali.

“Draco said you’re American, whereabouts are you from?”

“Hawaii mainly, but I’ve also lived in Boston, New York City, and San Francisco.”

“Why do you move around so much?”

She shrugged. “My guardian is a researcher, he studies mainly dangerous creatures and he does a lot of conferences and sometimes takes on a teaching position. We go where the job takes him.”

“He’s the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher?” asked Daphne. “What’s he like?”

“Brilliant, best teacher I’ve ever had, and I have had loads. He used to go to school at Hogwarts.”

“If he’s that good, I hope he lasts longer than the others we’ve had,” said Blaise. “Quirrell was useless, and Lockhart was a joke, we haven’t been taught how to defend ourselves against a Puffskein let alone against anything capable of hurting us.”

“You’ll learn fast. He likes the more hands-on approach to teaching.”

“How hands-on?” asked Daphne a little nervously.

“When he can, he brings the creatures we study into the classroom and lets us practice defending ourselves against them,” Kali explained, but Daphne didn’t look terribly enthused by it all. “There’s no real danger.”

Daphne smiled shyly at her. “You must be really good at Defence, huh?”

Kali told stories about the creatures she’d encountered over the years to put Daphne at ease: the Horned Serpents and Snallygasters in North America, the Sphinxes in Egypt, and the Occamies in India. Carefully glossing over those scarier and more dangerous adventures she’d found herself in completely by accident: her encounter with a full grown Manticore while exploring ancient ruins in the Negev desert; that time she’d stumbled upon a Nundu and her cubs in Uganda; her run in with
two Hidebehinds when she was at Ilvermorny…

The rain thickened as the train sped yet farther north. The heavy cloud cover blocked out the sun and lanterns flickered into life all along the corridors and over the luggage racks to disperse the growing darkness. The train started to slow down.

“Finally,” said Pan, stretching on Astoria’s lap. “I’m starving.”

Kali was starting to get hungry too and the sweets just weren’t cutting it anymore, she wanted something warm and cooked.

"We can't be there yet," said Daphne, checking her watch.

Kali checked her own watch, it was only 7pm, the train would need at least another half hour to get to Hogsmeade. But they were definitely slowing down; the noise of the pistons and the rattling of the train gradually falling away, making the hammering of the rain and the roaring of the wind sound louder than ever against the windows.

The train came to a sudden stop with a violent jolt, and distant thuds and bangs sounded up and down the carriage from luggage falling out of the racks. Then, without warning, all the lamps went out and they were plunged into total darkness.

Kali tensed. She did not like dark enclosed spaces.

“What’s going on?” asked Astoria, sounding small and frightened.

Kali took in a deep steadying breath and let her eyes adapt to the obscurity. It wasn’t easy with almost zero source of light, but her connection with Pan was good for a lot more than cute parlor tricks and his constant nagging. Even so she could only make out shapes with very little detail. She flexed her left wrist, letting her magic flow down into it, and cast a spell Remus had taught her years ago. There was a soft, crackling noise, and a shivering light filled the compartment as flames danced up from her open palm.

It was easier for them to relax now that they could see.

“Perhaps we’ve broken down,” said Blaise very calmly, although Kali could still hear his rapidly beating heart.

“There's something moving out there,” Astoria said, peering outside. “I think people are coming aboard....”

Kali got to her feet, carefully holding the flames aloft, but before she could look out the window, the compartment door slid slowly open. Kali whipped around, almost dousing the flames as her concentration wavered, and Daphne and Blaise who were sat closest to the door scampered further along the bench, huddling next to the window with Astoria and Pan.

Kali stood her ground, even as every instinct she had told her to back away, run, and hide. She couldn’t back away any further without hitting a wall, the only exit was blocked, there was nowhere to hide, and she would not cower down and hope for the best.

She held out her handful of fire further in front of her and glared balefully at the thing in the doorway.

Illuminated by the shivering flames in her hand, was a cloaked figure that towered to the ceiling. Its face was completely hidden beneath its hood and its dark cloak concealed the rest of its body from
view. Her stomach contracted as she realized what it was. She knew that beneath the cloth the thing’s skin would look like it belonged to something dead that had decayed in water: glistening, greyish, slimy-looking, and scabbed. The dementor drew a long, slow, rattling breath, trying to suck all the happiness from its surroundings.

An intense cold swept over them all and Kali felt her breath catch in her chest, she couldn’t breathe, couldn’t move. Images flashed through her mind. The cold went deeper than her skin. It was inside her, eating away at her.

“He isn’t here.” She had to force the words out past the ball in her throat, and still they sounded distant and weak. The rumbling in her ears was deafening, but she set her jaw firmly as she tried again. “He isn’t here.”

The dementor didn’t move. She clenched her right fist and Pan gave a warning growl:

“What do you think you’re doing?” he asked.

“Making it leave,” she said. “It’s corporeal, that means it can feel pain.”

“Don’t you dare punch it in the face,” he admonished.

“Got a better idea?” She wasn’t keen on this plan herself, but she wasn’t seeing any other options.

He grumbled unhappily, but before she could do more than work up her nerve, he’d leapt in front her, transforming in mid-air into a Siberian tiger. He wasn’t very big, not yet fully grown, but those claws and teeth could still inflict no small amount of damage and his roar was impressive.

There was a moment of stillness, then the dementor turned around and glided away.

Kali could breathe properly again and she gulped down air greedily. She was shaking and the flames in her hand wavering, dying down then flaring back up uncertainly.

“What was that thing?” Daphne gasped. She’d been holding her breath.

“A dementor,” said Kali.

“What is it doing here?” asked Astoria. She was shivering worse than the rest of them and Pan came to rest his head on her knees.

It wasn’t difficult to deduce why an Azkaban guard would be searching the Hogwarts Express. The lights came back on and the train started moving again as though nothing had happened.

“I’ll be right back,” said Kali, stepping out of the compartment and sliding the door shut behind her. The corridor was crowded with panicked student. It looked like the dementors had visited every carriage on the train in their search for Sirius Black.

She didn’t have to wait long for Remus to find her. He strode up to her, and, not caring that they were surrounded by students, hugged her tightly. She returned it.

“I saw Mum and Nahele,” she said, trying to forget those terrible images and memories that had consumed her mind. She didn’t want to cry, not on her first day, not in front of so many people.

Remus stroked her hair, whispering reassurances, but his heart was beating madly against his chest and she could hear how strained his voice sounded.

“They shouldn’t have been allowed on the train,” she said, pulling away from him. He looked
terrible, the full moon was getting closer by the hour, and he did not need this added stress.

“I don’t think they were,” he said. “Dumbledore would never have allowed it. That’s probably why they stopped the train before we got to Hogsmeade. I’m going to see the driver now, but it shouldn’t be long before we get to the school. Remember that you’re taking the boats with the first years?”

“I remember.” She wasn’t looking forward to it in this weather.

“Good.” He kissed her forehead and handed her a bar of chocolate. “Here, it’ll help you feel better.”

He nudged her back into her compartment. Daphne, Blaise, and Astoria all sat quietly, staring vacantly off into space. Kali sat and broke off parts of the chocolate bar, sharing it between the four of them.

“Of course Remus had chocolate on him,” said Pan, curling up next to her.

“Doesn’t he always?” She took a bite and felt warmth spread suddenly to the tips of her fingers and toes.

They sat in silence for the rest of the journey until a voice echoed through the train: “We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes’ time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately.”

They barely had time to pull off their jackets or travelling cloaks and slip on their school robes over their normal clothes before the train stopped at Hogsmeade station, and there was a great scramble to get outside; owls hooted, cats meowed, and Pan turned into a small field mouse and scurried into Kali’s pocket.

It was freezing on the tiny platform, and very wet, rain was driving down in icy sheets.

“Firs' years this way!” called a booming voice. Kali turned. On the other side of the platform stood a gigantic figure, at least eleven feet tall and three times the size of a regular person. The huge man was beckoning the terrified-looking new students forward for their traditional journey across the lake.

Astoria clutched Kali’s hand and together they pushed through the mass of people around them that kept trying to shunt them in the opposite direction. They were out of breath by the time they made it to the man and the crowd of first years that surrounded him. Kali was a good four inches taller than the rest of them. The man had a mane of shaggy black hair and a beard that covered most of his face. He looked wild, but he beamed down at them.

“C'mon, follow me – any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!”

Slipping and stumbling, they followed the man down what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. The rain had turned the ground to mud and it was nearly impossible to stay upright, Kali nearly fell face first into the dirt when a little boy lost his footing and skidded into her, but she caught herself on one of the trees that lined the path, and helped the boy upright.

“Ye' all get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec,” Hagrid called over his shoulder, “jus' round this bend here.”

The narrow path turned sharply, and as one, Kali and the first years gasped. A large, glassy black lake stretched out before them, a fleet of small boats perched atop its inky surface. Each boat had a thin wooden pole at its front with a lantern, the warm, orange lights swaying slightly in the breeze. But the lake and the boats, as impressive as they were, were nothing, a mere afterthought, because there, in the distance, stood Hogwarts, perched high upon a mountain of rock, a vast castle with
many turrets and towers. Lights twinkled from the castle windows like little stars, welcoming them home.

“No more'n four to a boat!” the man called, and the students began claiming their boats, their feverish excitement thick in the night air.

Kali and Astoria slipped into a boat with two other girls, one of whom was looking rather green.

“Everyone in?” shouted the man, who had a boat to himself. “Right then – FORWARD!”

The boat jolted beneath them and everyone reflexively grabbed hold of the side of the boat as it begun to move. The fleet of boats glided smoothly across the dark surface of the lake with the big man at the lead, guided by some unseen magic. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

“Heads down!” yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbour, where they clambered out onto rocks and pebbles. Then they clambered up a passageway in the rock. Following the man silently, slipping on damp rocks and loose pebbles, and coming out at last onto smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

Hagrid led them to the immense front doors and knocked three times, each reverberating thud like a small earthquake in Kali’s chest. The doors swung open and there, standing in the sudden pool of light from within, was a tiny little wizard with a shock of white hair.

“The firs’ years, Professor Flitwick,” said the giant.

“Thank you, Hagrid,” said the Professor in a squeaky voice. The size difference between him and Hagrid was exceptional. “I’ll take them from here.”

With a flick of his wand the doors were pulled open wide. The entrance hall was large, its stone walls lit with flaming torches, and its ceiling too high to make out. A magnificent marble staircase facing them led to the upper floors.

They followed Professor Flitwick across the flagged stone floor, the drone of hundreds of voices could be heard from a doorway to the right: the Great Hall. But the little Professor showed them into a small, empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, and craning their necks to see Professor Flitwick who was perched atop a big wooden chest as he welcomed them to Hogwarts and explained the Sorting, the different Houses, and the Point system.

“Ready?” Professor Flitwick asked jovially when he finished his speech. “Follow me.”

Silence descended over them as they followed the Professor across the entrance hall and up to a pair of large double doors. Flitwick paused just outside the door. They held their breath. Muffled noise could be heard from the other side of the doors, hundreds of students talking and laughing. Flitwick’s eyes swept over them. One side of his lips tilted up. Another flick of his wand and he threw the large doors open.

Noise and warmth flooded out of the Great Hall, engulfing them. Several first years gasped. It was like stepping into another world. Four long tables stretched out before them, packed full of students and gleaming tableware. Candles floated above their heads and above that was the night sky, black and star dusted above the cloud cover. At the front of the room, on a raised platform, sat the...
professors. At their centre, in a bright golden chair, sat Headmaster Dumbledore. Professor Flitwick led them up there, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight.

Professor Flitwick silently placed a three-legged stool in front of them, on top of which he put a pointed wizard’s hat that was patched and frayed and extremely dirty.

“Would it kill them to clean that thing?” asked Pan. He was still comfortably tucked away in her pocket but he was using her eyes to see.

“Maybe they did once and it disliked it so much that it threatened to quit,” she said as the hat twitched and a rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth, and it began to sing. Kali found herself too nervous to listen properly and, before she knew it, it was over. The Sorting had begun.

“When your name is called, you will sit on the stool and put on the Sorting Hat,” Professor Flitwick squeaked into the silence that followed the Sorting Hat’s song. “But before we start on the First Years, we welcome this year at Hogwarts a transfer student from the San Francisco Institute of Magic.” Excited whispering filled the Hall. “Miss Kali Black will be joining our Third Years.” The whispering faded just as quickly as it had begun. Astoria’s hand tightened around hers in a vice grip, but Kali met the looks of disbelief and distrust head on.

Professor Flitwick levitated the hat off of the stool and Kali gently pulled away from Astoria’s hold as whispers once again broke out like little hissing fires all over the hall.

“Black, did she say?”

“Not like Sirius Black, Black?”

“That must be his daughter.”

“He has a daughter?”

Kali took a deep breath and casually walked to the stool ignoring the already fast spreading rumours. She spotted Remus sat at the teacher’s table and he smiled at her as she sat on the stool. The hat was placed on her head, it was a bit big but not so much as to fall down to her nose, she could still see the Hall full of people craning to get a good look at her. She waited.

“Hmm… now you are a tricky one,” said a small voice in her ear. “Lets see… Plenty of courage… yes, there’s a lot of that. No shortage of confidence either. A strong moral centre, and a strength of will that is unparalleled… such passion. Oh, but look at your mind, such intelligence… witty and fast-thinking and creative… so much knowledge… and an unquenchable first to learn more… inquisitive and perceptive and independent…. Overwhelmingly loyal and so kind and tolerant… patient and dedicated… honest and selfless…. Nasty temper, though. Oh a very nasty temper indeed… the things you could do… the things you have done…. More talent and skill and power than I’ve ever felt before… with the cunning and determination to always achieve your goals… resourceful, yes… a born leader, fierce and intimidating, with a touch of disarming charm… so clever when it comes to manipulation…. This has never happened before, seldom do students’ fit into more than one of the Houses so perfectly, let alone all four…. So where to put you with all of these options? Hmm… perhaps Gryffindor, you’re certainly fearless enough, thriving through endless adventures… but there’s ambition too… ambition as far as the eye can see. You have things to prove…. Slytherin or Gryffindor? The choice is yours.”

It only took her a second to decide, less really.
“Interesting, very interesting…. As you wish….” And the hat shouted for the entire Hall to hear: “SLYHERIN!”
A Gifted Child

Chapter Summary

Professor McGonagall entrusts Hermione with the Time Turner and has her first class with Kali.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wednesday, September 1st, 1993,
United Kingdom, Scotland, Hogwarts,
Professor Minerva McGonagall,

“This is a very dangerous device, you understand this, Miss Granger?” Minerva asked sternly.

Granger nodded eagerly. “Yes, Professor.”

“You must tell no one that you have it.” Minerva trusted Granger completely, she was a bright girl and very mature for her age, she could be relied upon to use the device studiously and responsibly. The problem was Potter and Weasley, who would no doubt find a way to warp its purpose.

“Of course, Professor.”

Minerva gave Granger another harsh look, the kind that most of her students buckled under, before nodding in satisfaction and handing the Time-Turner over to Miss Granger as well as the instructions and guidelines manual. Giving a Time-Turner to a student was a most unusual thing to do, but Miss Granger had been adamant about the courses she wished to follow and Minerva would not have been a very good teacher if she’d tried to curb the young girl’s enthusiasm to learn new things. Minerva and Albus had both vouched for Miss Granger’s character in front of the Head Unspeakable at the Department of Mysteries so that she could take as many classes as she desired. The girl was an overachiever and Minerva knew with absolute certainty that she would do great things someday.

Potter was waiting patiently by the door as she and Granger stepped out of her office. It never ceased to amaze her how much he looked like James: that same unruly black hair; thin face; and bright smile. He was his father's spitting image, the only noticeable differences were that Harry’s skin was a shade or so lighter than his father’s, and he had inherited Lily’s eyes: almond-shaped and bright green. Her eyes stood out all the more strikingly against Harry’s darker skin.

The three of them made their way back down the marble staircase to the Great Hall where 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.

"Oh,” said Granger softly, “we've missed the Sorting!”

So they had. Filius was carrying an ancient hat and a three-legged stool out of the hall. Minerva
remembered a time, before the war depleted their population and witches and wizards became more reticent to have children in case another Dark Lord rose to power, when the Sorting Ceremony would last at least an hour every year. Now they were lucky if they had enough students to make it last half that.

Minerva strode off toward her empty seat at the staff table as Potter and Granger scurried off to find Weasley at the Gryffindor table. She surreptitiously checked along her House table for that head of long black hair she’d been convinced would be seated there. But Miss Black was not there, instead she sat between Malfoy and Zabini at the Slytherin table.

Minerva almost stumbled from the surprise.

She couldn’t claim to know the girl well, but she considered herself a good judge of character, and from the lengthy conversation she’d had with young Miss Black a month ago the girl’s Gryffindor traits had stood out above the rest: the confidence with which she’d acknowledged her relationship to a man who was overtly hated; the bravery with which she’d stood, even as strangers uttered slurs about her and her father; the honesty and respectfulness with which she’d answered Minerva’s questions; the innocent idealism with which she’d shared her world views on that rooftop terrace; and the playful and passionate way with which she’d spoken. Gryffindor would have been a perfect fit; or perhaps Ravenclaw – the girl’s intelligence and wit were hard to miss; or Hufflepuff at a push. But not Slytherin, the possibility that she may be a Slytherin had never crossed Minerva’s mind, because Slytherin was the worst place for her. Being Sorted into Slytherin turned her into exactly what everyone feared she would be: another infamous Black set to become a dark witch, sooner rather than later. Not only that, but it placed her within Severus’s care, and he was not one to discriminate who he took his revenge out on.

Minerva chanced a glance at Severus as she took her seat, and he was indeed glaring at Black in a way that did not bode well for the girl’s first Potions class.

“Welcome!” said Albus as he stood up, 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….”

Albus 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 Minerva remembered how hard Albus had fought the Ministry’s decision to have the dementors guarding the school.

“They are stationed at every entrance to the grounds,” he 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. 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.”

Albus 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 two new teachers to our ranks this year.

”First, Professor Lupin, who has kindly consented to fill the post of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher.”
There was some scattered, rather unenthusiastic applause. Although Black and a few Gryffindors - Potter, Weasley, and Granger among them - clapped hard enough to make up for it. Severus had turned his attention away from Black, and the expression twisting his thin, sallow face as he glared at Remus was beyond anger: it was loathing.

“As to our second new appointment,” Albus continued as the lukewarm applause for Professor Lupin died away. “Well, I am sorry to tell you that Professor Kettleburn, our Care of Magical Creatures teacher, retired at the end of last year in order to enjoy more time with his remaining limbs. However, I am delighted to say that his place will be filled by none other than Rubeus Hagrid, who has agreed to take on this teaching job in addition to his gamekeeping duties.”

The clapping was louder this time and Minerva watched with mild horror as Hagrid used the tablecloth to wipe his eyes.

“Lastly, I would like to present to you Pandoran.” With a swooping gesture Albus pointed to a golden eagle which soared over the students’ heads.

The bird reached Albus, and transformed in mid-air, turning into a small spotted cat – which looked remarkably like a miniature leopard – and landed deftly in front of the podium. The students gasped.

“Pandoran is our new student Kali Black’s daemon,” Albus said. “For those of you who do not know what a daemon is, I would suggest you take the time to read up on them for they are truly fascinating creatures. But in short, a daemon is a magical, shapeshifting creature, so do not be surprised if you see a lion wandering the school halls. Daemons are mentally linked with their witch or wizard: what one hears or sees so does the other. They share their every thought with one another, they spend their entire lives together. It is a remarkable bond.”

Albus fell silent as he let the information sink in.

“Well, I think that’s everything of importance,” he said eventually. “Let the feast begin!”

The golden plates and goblets before them filled suddenly with food and drink.

It was a delicious feast and the hall echoed with talk, laughter, and the clatter of knives and forks. But Minerva was distracted from all of this by Kali Black, as were many other people in the Great Hall.

Kali’s physical resemblance to her father was less pronounced than Harry’s, but it was there nonetheless: in those black curls and angular features; in that slender build and those sparkling silver eyes; in that easy confidence and perfect smile. Minerva thought back to the Leaky Cauldron, to that cocky grin the girl had flashed at her before they’d left the main bar. That had been Sirius’s smile, no doubt about it, and Minerva marvelled at how a child who had spent so little time with her father had managed to assimilate so many of his mannerisms.

She watched as Black talked to her new housemates: the young girl’s eyes glittered with mirth under the many levitating candles as she tactfully ignored the many people starring and gaping at her; she sat straight backed, with the posture of a dancer and an aristocratic grace that could not be taught; she spoke with elegant waves of her hands to emphasize each point and little tilts of her head when she asked a question – she could not sit still, Minerva noticed. She was mesmerizing to watch and she held her audience’s attention without difficulty.

Minerva looked away and tried to think about something else, but her mind kept returning to the Blacks, to Sirius in particular, and to a time when things had seemed so much simpler.
Minerva had found out that Sirius was expecting a child during Lily and James’s wedding. She’d been surprised, of course: his relationship with Remus had been no secret to anyone by that time. She’d not been told how the pregnancy had occurred and she had not pried. She’d known the mother only by name, before meeting her that evening. Asherah Morrigan had been an international Quidditch star, winning her team the World Cup twice prior to the pregnancy, and twice after the child was born – she’d had an exceptionally long and successful career, which would surely have continued had she not died unexpectedly in 1989. Asherah had been a surprisingly well grounded woman considering her fame and she’d fit in rather nicely with Sirius and his friends. Lily and James became pregnant during the autumn months of that year, and Sirius had been overjoyed, nattering to James during Order meetings about joint play dates and how their children would be the best of friends. After Kali was born, Sirius had brought her with him to one of the meetings, she’d been so small in his arms and he’d held her with a gentleness that Minerva hadn’t known he was capable of. It had been nearly a year later the first time she’d met Harry, and the softness and pride with which that exceptional group of young people had loved those two children had made her smile despite the devastating war they were fighting.

But then the unthinkable happened: Lily and James were murdered; Harry became orphaned; and Sirius murdered twelve muggles and one of his best friend.

The war was over, but it had cost so much, and Kali Black and Harry Potter had grown up to be strangers to one another. Now they sat reunited under one roof, but the distance between their two House tables seemed insurmountable, even as Minerva recalled sitting at an Order meeting, watching those two babies play together, and despairing for anyone who would end up with the second generation of the Marauders on their hands, of the ‘Black and Potter’ duo that promised to wreck such mayhem and mischief on the world.

“Her Sorting took nine and a half minutes,” said Filius, noticing Minerva’s unwavering attention on Black.

Minerva’s gaze snapped toward the Charm Professor, flicking between him and the girl. It explained why the Hall was filled with so many whispers and furtive glances and one word repeated over and over again… *Hatsall*: a person who was so well suited for more than one House that the Sorting Hat took an inordinate amount of time to place them. Minerva had been a Hatsall, the Sorting Hat had taken five and a half minutes, debating between Ravenclaw and Gryffindor, before placing her in the latter; and the few transfer students Hogwarts had had since Minerva had started teaching here had all been Hatsalls also – this was understandable, as people’s personalities developed and expanded the older they got and could no longer so easily fit into just a single category of values. But for the Sorting Hat to take over nine minutes to place a student was unheard of. The prior record had been seven and three quarter minutes, set by a seventeen year old boy from Burundi who was Sorted into Ravenclaw and was now a high ranking official within the Ministry of Magic. Minerva got the feeling that Black would do just as exceptionally well at life as that boy was doing.

A few hours later, Minerva retired to her chambers after making certain none of her older students were planning a back to school party to start the year off with a bang – probably a literal one, knowing some of her pupils. She was willing to condone a bit of fun, but not on a school night, and definitely not when so many of her students were far too willing and ready to take advantage of that trust.

Despite the lack of any unauthorized parties, it had nonetheless been an eventful evening: what with the dementors boarding the Hogwarts Express; entrusting Hermione Granger with a Time-Turner; and the Sorting of Kali Black…. Eventful, indeed. She would have her first class with Black in the morning and she looked forward to seeing how well the girl did. If her past school record was any indication, she was a brilliant student, and Minerva always thoroughly enjoyed teaching those.
Her first class of the day was with her Gryffindor and Ravenclaw Fifth Years. She spent the hour lecturing them on the importance of O.W.L.s, having to pause and resume multiple times to call the Weasley twins to order – it never boded well when those two smiled like that.

Next she had the Third Year Slytherins and Ravenclaws. They shuffled in and took their seats, Slytherins on one side of the room, Ravenclaws on the other. Black appeared to have adopted the Greengrass girl, who’d always sat by herself until now.

“An Animagus,” said Minerva when she was sure she had her students’ attention, “is a witch or wizard who can transform at will into an animal. The first recorded person to master this art of self-transfiguration was an Ancient Greek wizard named Falco Aesalon, who was able to transform into a falcon at will.”

Her students were scribbling away on their sheets of parchment with their quills and inkwells; all except Black who wrote in a large and colourful notebook with a muggle fountain pen.

“It is an immensely complex and time-consuming thing to become an Animagus, and, if done incorrectly, it can go dramatically wrong. As a result, Animagi are very rare: fewer than one in a thousand witches and wizards.”

Minerva carried on with her lecture and received the appropriate applause when she demonstrated her transformation into her own Animagus form. But she kept getting distracted by Black. It wasn’t that the girl wasn’t paying attention, because she was – in fact the brightness and intensity of her gaze was mildly unnerving – but she was not writing nearly as much as she ought to have been, even if her focus never wavered.

“Miss Black, what can you tell us about the relation between Animagi and skinwalkers?” she asked. It was not a trick question, anyone who’d studied – however briefly – at Ilvermorny would undoubtedly know the answer, but she’d needed something to distract her from the girl’s piercing gaze.

There was a marked pause before Black answered, and Minerva worried that she’d unfairly put the girl on the spot. But she needn’t have fretted.

“Skinwalkers belong to Navajo culture,” Black said after much deliberation. “The belief in these beings holds a fundamental and powerful place in their understandings of the world. It’s much deeper than just a scary story to tell children to get them to behave. It’s important to them. However, colonizers have appropriated and rewritten indigenous traditions, simplifying them and modifying them to fit their own world views. Witches and wizards with immigrant origins never took the time to understand the cultures they were invading: they called muggle medicine men frauds and likened skinwalkers to Animagi because they could not accept that these people were not magical.”

That was not the answer Minerva had expected. She had read that the legend of the Native American ‘skinwalker’ – an evil witch or wizard that can transform into an animal at will – had its basis in fact. The myth had originated around the Native American Animagi, who were believed to have sacrificed close family members to gain their powers of transformation. This derogatory rumour was said to have been spread by muggle medicine men, who feared and disliked witches and wizards because they possessed real powers. But Black’s confident answer was making her doubt what she knew.

“What are your sources?” Minerva asked.

“Dr. Hayden Kline,” said Black. “She’s a member of the Cherokee Nation, she graduated from Ilvermorny with honours, then attended Brown University where she earned a doctorate in
Anthropology specializing in Native American studies. She wrote a paper a couple of years ago titled: *Native Appropriation in the Wizarding World*. I have it with me, if you’d like to take a look at it?”

Minerva nodded slowly. She was trying to process what Black had said. The girl had used muggle words that Minerva had never heard before and wasn’t sure of the meaning.

“If skinwalkers are not Animagi, then what are they?” asked Minerva. This was a rather glaring issue to this new theory, she thought.

Black shrugged delicately. “I don’t know. But I do know that it’s not my place to know, and neither is it yours.”

The girl’s tone was respectful, but her words made Minerva bristle. “Meaning?”

“Meaning: we must accept that there are certain things we are not entitled to know; that not all knowledge was meant to be shared. Skinwalkers fall into this category. It’s not for us to know. Simple as that.”

Damien Chamberlain, one of the Ravenclaws, snorted derisively. He was not a smart boy, but he liked to think he was. “Knowledge isn’t meant to be limited. If these ‘skinwalkers’ know some special kind of magic it’s only fair that they share it with the rest of the world.”

Black gave him a very even look that he couldn’t hold for more than a few seconds. When he looked away, she glanced over at Minerva.

“May I respond?” she asked. Minerva nodded a tad uncertainly. Black turned back to Chamberlain. “‘Fairness’ has nothing to do with it. Native cultures have suffered a huge amount of erasure and appropriation since that first contact centuries ago – not to mention the genocide of its peoples – if not discussing certain things with outsiders is how their cultures survive, so be it.”

“None of that is our fault,” Chamberlain scoffed. “I don’t see why we should be discriminated against because of it.”

The look she gave him could have frozen over the Great Lake, and when she answered him, her tone was clipped. “We cannot be held responsible for our ancestors’ actions, but we can make sure we do not perpetuate those mistakes.”

Chamberlain did not seem to realize that he ought to quit while he was behind, in fact, he didn’t seem to realize that he was behind at all. But Black had a glint in her eyes that Minerva knew all too well. It was not a look she recognized from Sirius, though, but rather from Remus. It was the same look he got before he said something so scathing and accurate that it could utterly destroy a person’s confidence. For fear of the young boy bursting into tears, Minerva cleared her throat as he opened his mouth to say more. The class’ attention turned back to her.

“That is enough for one day, I think. For next week, I would like each of you to write a twelve inch essay on the dangers of becoming an Animagus, as well as a detailed explanation of the steps to follow to become one. You are dismissed.”

She dropped into her desk chair as her students hurried out, but Black took her time packing away her things, waiting until the only other student remaining was Greengrass who lingered beside the door.

“What is it, Miss Black?” Minerva asked as the girl approached her.
Black lightly drummed her shiny blue nails against Minerva’s desk, tapping out a melody that the Professor thought she recognized. “I wanted to apologize.”

It was so unexpected to have a Black say those words that Minerva’s jaw may have momentarily dropped. “What on earth for?”

“I put you in an awkward situation by not answering your question the way you thought I would, and I may have spoken out of turn with the Ravenclaw. Your classroom is not the place to be getting into arguments, it was disruptive and inappropriate.”

Minerva could do little more than stare. She knew very few adults who could admit when they were in the wrong, let alone a child. She nodded jerkily and Black flashed her a small smile. The girl was halfway to the door, when Minerva’s senses returned to her.

“Miss Black?” The girl glanced over her shoulder. “Five points to Slytherin for your excellent manners, and another ten for having taught me something new.”

Black’s grin was blinding. “Thank you, Professor. I’ll bring you Dr. Kline’s paper next lesson.” With that she and Greengrass left for their next class, and Minerva was left sitting there in awe.

Her next class filed in and Minerva shook off her astonishment as she gave the same speech on Animagi she’d just given to the Slytherin and Ravenclaws to the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff Third Years. However, when none of the students reacted when she transformed herself in front of their eyes into a tabby cat with spectacle markings around her eyes, she knew she did not hold their full attention.

“Really, what has got into you all today?” she said, turning back into herself with a faint pop, and staring around at them all. “Not that it matters, but that’s the first time my transformation’s not got applause from a class.”

Nobody answered her, but the entire class shot furtive glances at Potter. Then Granger raised her hand.

“Please, Professor, we’ve just had our first Divination class, and we were reading the tea leaves, and...”

“Ah, of course,” said Minerva, suddenly frowning as she understood. Sybill was at it again. “There is no need to say any more, Miss Granger. Tell me, which of you will be dying this year?”

Everyone stared at her.

“Me,” said Potter, finally.

“I see,” said Minerva, fixing Potter with her beady eyes. “Then you should know, Potter, that Sibyll Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year since she arrived at this school. None of them has died yet. Seeing death omens is her favourite way of greeting a new class. If it were not for the fact that I never speak ill of my colleagues...”

Minerva broke off lest she say something unprofessional. She went on, more calmly, “Divination is one of the most imprecise branches of magic. I shall not conceal from you that I have very little patience with it. True Seers are very rare, and Professor Trelawney...”

She stopped again, and then said, in a very matter-of-fact tone, “You look in excellent health to me, Potter, so you will excuse me if I don't let you off homework today. I assure you that if you die, you need not hand it in.”
Most of the students laughed, and Potter looked relieved, but others kept on looking at him as though he were about to drop dead at any moment. She was going to have to have another stern word with Albus about that two-bit Divination teacher.

Chapter End Notes

The views expressed by Kali in this chapter regarding the skinwalker/Animagus controversy are inspired by the ones conveyed by Dr. Adrienne Keene on her blog ‘Native Appropriations’ (http://nativeappropriations.com/2016/03/magic-in-north-america-part-1-ugh.html), if you haven’t already read it, it’s worth taking a look at ;)
Moving Staircases and Hippogriffs

Chapter Summary

Kali tries to navigate Hogwarts, she has her first encounter with Snape, and her first Care of Magical Creatures lesson.

Thursday, September 2nd, 1993,

United Kingdom, Scotland, Hogwarts,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

Kali wasn’t sure what had been going through Rowena Ravenclaw’s head when she’d decided to make the school staircases move.

Hogwarts was huge – far bigger than Kali had expected – and it didn’t make any bloody sense. Nothing was ever where it ought to be and never in the same place twice: the people in the portraits kept going to visit each other; suits of armour wandered off when no one was looking; storage closets appeared out of nowhere and disappeared just as fast; stairs vanished into thin air; there were doors that weren’t really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending; and classrooms that sometimes decided to be on the third floor, sometimes on the fourth. It was a nightmare to navigate, made all the worse by the fact that none of it was random. The castle was semi-sentient, not just because of its coats of armour and its paintings and its immobility; the building itself had a mind of its own, and that mind worked in mysterious and inconvenient ways. It was impossible to understand the thought process of a centuries old building, but Remus had once told her that the castle took you to where you needed to be rather than where you wanted to be. For instance: Kali wanted to get to the Charms classroom, but Hogwarts apparently thought that she needed to be somewhere in the North wing, possibly on the Second floor.

“You’re lost,” Pan drawled. He was currently lounging contentedly in a patch of sunlight in the Arithmancy classroom, listening to Professor Vector teach her Sixth Year class.

“No kidding,” she thought back, hurrying through the unfamiliar part of the castle.

“Maybe you should turn back?” he suggested lazily.

“Can’t. The staircase moved remember?” Before coming to Hogwarts, Kali had never imagined that staircases could be such a nuisance, but the staircases here were certainly proving her wrong.

“We wouldn’t be having this problem if we’d stayed at San Francisco,” he said.

“Are you really still on that?” she asked.

“Just pointing it out.”

She turned a corner and nearly knocked into someone. It was a teacher, the one who’d been throwing Remus dirty looks during the Welcoming Feast last night. He was a thin man – his frame
mostly drowned out by his flowing black robes – with sallow skin, a large, hooked nose, and shoulder-length, greasy black hair that framed his face in curtains. Kali fought the urge to screw her nose up at such poor grooming. He was carrying a crate full of small glass vials that tinkled together whenever he moved, and he was glaring at her.

“Sorry, Professor,” she said, taking a step back from him.

His features didn’t soften. “What are you doing here, Miss Black?”

“I’m trying to get to the Charms classroom,” she said. She really wished she hadn’t told Daphne to go on ahead of her.

Professor McGonagall had let them out so early that Daphne had suggested they head down to their dormitory to drop off some of their books. They’d been halfway to Professor Flitwick’s classroom when Kali had realized she’d left her wand in the dorm, she’d told Daphne not to wait for her and had run off back down the stairs, without realizing the bloody things would have moved by the time she made it back, forcing her to find another route to the Charms corridor on the Third floor.

“The Charms classrooms are on the other side of the castle, Miss Black,” he sneered, showing off his yellow, uneven teeth. “If you’re going to lie, try to do so more convincingly.”

“I’m not lying, sir,” she said politely. Remus would have her head if she got into an argument with a teacher on her first day. “I’m not yet familiar with the layout of the castle.”

His malicious dark eyes narrowed on her. “I suggest you gain familiarity with it quickly. You are not a First Year, Miss Black, and we teachers expect punctuality from our older students.”

“He does realize it’s your first day, right?” said Pan irritatedly.

“He doesn’t seem to care.” Before she could think up a careful reply to the teacher’s comment, Remus strolled up to them from the same direction the Slytherin Head of House had come from. Her shoulders relaxed instantly when she saw him.

“Don’t you have a class starting soon?” he asked when he saw her.

“I got lost on the way to Charms.”

Remus smiled cordially down at Snape even as the shorter man scowled up at him. Snape was actually rather tall, but everyone became short when compared to Remus.

“I can take it from here, Severus,” he said.

Snape shot one last dirty look at Kali before stalking off.

“He’s unpleasant,” she said when he was out of earshot.

Remus sighed heavily but did not contradict her. “He’s your teacher.”

“One does not negate the other.”

He shook his head, but again didn’t correct her assessment. “How have your classes been so far?” he asked as he herded her toward the elusive Charms corridor.

“Good. I like Arithmancy, it’s straight-forward and logical, like maths; and Professor McGonagall’s nice. And yours?”
“Unfortunately, Hogwarts hasn’t had much luck in ways of continuity in the Defence Against the Dark Arts curriculum: too many different teachers teaching too many different things. But the students are eager to learn.”

They stopped in front of a tapestry of a woman picking flowers and Remus pushed it aside, revealing a narrow spiral staircase.

“Go up one floor, then go through the secret passageway behind the Runespoor statue, it’ll lead you straight to your Charms classroom,” he said.

“You know, I really wish you hadn’t lost that map you made while you were a student here.”

“I’m hoping that with an entire castle to explore, you won’t get bored and start causing trouble.”

She tried to hide her smirk. “When have I ever caused any trouble?”

“I have a list,” he said dryly. “It’s a good two meters long and I whip it out whenever someone comes up to me and tells me what a sweet and charming person you are.”

“But I am a sweet and charming person,” she said, throwing him her best ‘sweet and charming’ smile.

He scoffed. “When you want to be. Now get going or you’re going to be late.”

She hugged him very quickly then ran off up the stairs. She arrived at the classroom just as her classmates started filing in.

“I worried you’d gotten lost,” said Daphne as Kali took the seat beside her.

“I did,” she whispered as Professor Flitwick climbed up onto a pile of books to be seen over his desk.

“We shall start the year with some revision as a warm-up after summer break,” he squeaked. “We’ll begin with the Levitation Charm and the Mending Charm, and then we’ll see who still remembers the Disarming Charm.”

Kali quickly learned that Charms was a chaotic class: with random objects flying overhead, sometimes with far more force than necessary; inkwells being dropped to the floor, then being shoddily mended before being dropped again; and, for some reason, tap-dancing teacups. And she loved it, the anarchy was thrilling and it was a great stress relief.

She had always found school and all the work that came with it to be surprisingly easy, learning new spells took next to no effort. Give her a brief overview of the theory, teach her the wand movement and incantation, and then stand back. It rarely took more than two attempts to be successful, and by the fifth she could do it non-verbally. Then, given just a few more minutes she could most likely do it wandlessly as well, if she was in the right state of mind.

The Levitation Charm was the first she’d ever learned, she barely had to concentrate at all to make all her pens float out of her pencil case and balance one on top of the other in mid-air.

“Well done, Miss Black,” cheered the tiny Professor. “And without an incantation or wand as well. Very impressive.”

“How are you doing that without a wand?” asked Blaise, staring up at her stacked pencils.
She shrugged. “Practice. I’m more used to wandless magic than not, honestly.”

“They don’t have wands in America?” Daphne asked.

“They do. Wands are very European, but they’ve been exported to most everywhere now. However, prior to that exportation, everyone practised wandless magic and some places still prefer it that way, like Hawaii.”

Blaise frowned, it was only a slight scrunching of his eyebrows, but that was a lot for him. “Why?”

“They see wandless magic as being purer,” she explained, “less tainted by colonialism.”

“That’s ridiculous,” scoffed Theodore Nott, a tall, gangly boy in Slytherin who sat behind them. “Wands make magic safer and easier, it’s stupid not to use them because of some misplaced sense of cultural pride.”

“Wandless magic is derived from emotion, strong emotion, learn to control that, and you learn to control it.” she said as her pens moved to spell out her name above her head. “It merely requires a bit more focus, and it has the added advantage of being untraceable, which can be very useful.”

During lunch Draco sat beside her again as he had done at dinner last night and breakfast this morning. Apparently, Kali getting Sorted into Slytherin had convinced him that there was hope for her yet, although she did not feel the same about him. He was obnoxious and arrogant and weak. He had no individual thought and his opinions were all his fathers, and Lucius Malfoy was not a man to emulate under any circumstances.

She was thrilled to get out of the castle after lunch. Yesterday's rain had cleared; the sky was a clear, pale grey; and the grass was springy and damp underfoot as she set off for her first Care of Magical Creatures class of the year down the sloping lawns toward the edge of the Forbidden Forest. She was on her own for this class – neither Daphne nor Blaise was taking the subject; however every one of her housemates that she’d managed to piss off on the train yesterday was.

Draco may have been willing to give her a second chance, but this sentiment was not unanimously shared with the others. Millicent glared at her whenever their eyes met and Pansy downright hated her. It wasn’t pleasant having two of the people she shared a dorm with dislike her so much, but as they were the two she least wanted to be friends with she decided not to be bothered by it.

Draco was once again discussing the dementors’ search of the Hogwarts Express with Gregory and Vincent who were chortling mindlessly – brilliant conversationalists those two were not. Kali sped up her pace to get away from them. She’d tried telling Draco that severe negative reactions to dementors were nothing to joke about, but he’d completely ignored her, so now she was going to ignore him. It was the mature thing to do – or at least more mature than hexing the stupid ity out of him, anyway.

They had this class with the Gryffindors, the last of which arrived outside the small, wooden hut right after the Slytherins. The big man who’d led Kali and the First Years to the boats last night was waiting for them in a rather hideous moleskin overcoat and with a great big boarhound at his heels.

“C’mon, now, get a move on!” he called as the class approached. “Got a real treat for yeh today! Great lesson comin’ up! Everyone here? Right, follow me!”

Kali felt the anticipation build. For a moment, she thought that the teacher was going to lead them into the Forbidden Forest. There was nothing quite like calling something forbidden to pique Kali’s curiosity about it. However, the Professor strolled off around the edge of the trees, and five minutes
later, they found themselves outside a kind of paddock. Kali could smell the manure and the blood from the creatures’ last meal. She couldn’t see the creatures, but their scent was so thick and heady and cloying that even someone with a bad cold wouldn’t have been able to miss it.

“Everyone gather ’round the fence here!” Professor Hagrid called. “That’s it – make sure yeh can see – now, firs’ thing yeh’ll want ter do is open yer books.”

“How?” said Draco in a cold, drawling voice.

“Eh?” said the Professor.

“How do we open our books?” Draco 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 had belted their book shut; others had crammed them inside tight bags or clamped them together with binder clips.

“Hasn’ – hasn’ anyone bin able ter open their books?” said Hagrid, looking crestfallen.

The class all shook their heads.

“You have to stroke the spine,” said Kali. She held her book loosely against her chest, there was no rope or belt or binder clips keeping it shut, yet it wasn’t trying to bite her arm off. Admittedly, it had taken her a few hours to figure it out, but after the first few failed attempts it had become a challenge, one she didn’t intend to lose.

“That’s right,” said Hagrid. “Look -”

He took the copy of the Gryffindor girl with the dark skin and wildly bushy hair 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!” Draco sneered. “We should have stroked them! Why didn’t we guess!”

“I – I thought they were funny,” Hagrid said uncertainly. He looked like a kicked puppy even if he was the size of a tank.

“Oh, tremendously funny!” said Draco. “Really witty, giving us books that try and rip our hands off!”

Another Gryffindor, the one Draco had been insulting non-stop since last night glared at him. “Shut up, Malfoy,” Harry Potter said quietly.

Hagrid was looking downcast and it was making Kali’s stomach twist uncomfortably.

“I like them,” she said loudly, stroking the cover of her book.

“Yeh do?” Hagrid beamed. Kali smiled back at him, and he bounced right back into his lesson. “Righ’ then, so yeh’ve got yer books an’ now yeh need the Magical Creatures. 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 Draco loudly. “That oaf teaching classes, my father will have a fit when I tell him.”
“Shut up, Malfoy,” Harry repeated.

“Careful, Potter, there's a dementor behind you -”

“Do you enjoy being so unpleasant?” Kali snapped at him, making him freeze, his eyes widening in disbelief then narrowing viciously.

“Oooooooh!” squealed one of the Gryffindors, pointing toward the opposite side of the paddock.

Trotting toward them were a dozen beautiful hippogriffs. 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 sharp, steel-coloured 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?”

They were, with their gleaming coats, changing smoothly from feather to hair, each of them a different colour: stormy grey, 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 .”

Kali stepped forward without hesitation. A hippogriff could easily kill you, but like with most creatures, if you respected it, it would respect you back. A few of the Gryffindors approached the fence with her, though they did so cautiously. But the rest of their classmates were less than keen.

“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.”

Draco, Vincent, and Gregory weren't listening; they were talking in an undertone and Kali 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 answer.

“Don't you dare,” muttered Pan. He sent her reinforced images of what she was already seeing: the hippogriffs tossing their fierce heads and flexing their powerful wings; they didn't seem to like being tethered like this. “You're not risking your life because you think they're pretty.”

“You worry too much,” she said.

“And you don't worry enough,” he snarked.

But when Hagrid gave them all a pleading look, and said, “No one?” she stepped forward, and so,
They both looked at each other. He was kind of cute, she supposed: the brilliant colour of his eyes stood out starkly against his glowing bronze skin, and even if his dark hair was a complete and utter mess, there was a certain charm to it.

He was staring at her hesitantly so she decided to do the generous thing and waved him toward the paddock, taking a step back and forfeiting her place.

Harry walked up to the fence saying, “I'll do it.”

There was an intake of breath from behind Kali, and the girl who’d squealed when she’d seen the hippogriffs whispered something nonsensical about tea leaves.

Harry ignored it, though, as he climbed over the paddock fence.

“Good man, Harry!” roared Hagrid. “Right then – let's see how yeh get on with Buckbeak.”

He untied one of the chains, pulled the grey hippogriff away from its fellows, and slipped off its leather collar. The class held its breath and Draco’s eyes were narrowed maliciously.

“Easy now, Harry,” said Hagrid quietly. “Yeh've got eye contact, now try not ter blink.… Hippogriffs don' trust yeh if yeh blink too much.…”

Kali watched with the rest of the class as Buckbeak turned his great, sharp head and stared at Harry with one fierce orange eye, and Hagrid continued to whisper advice and instructions.

“Tha's it,” said Hagrid. “Tha's it, Harry… now, bow.”

Pan was muttering away about the foolishness of exposing the back of your neck to anything with talons as sharp as Buckbeak’s, but Harry did as he was told, giving a short bow and then looking up.

The hippogriff was still staring haughtily at him. It didn't move.

“Ah,” said Hagrid, sounding worried. “Right – back away, now, Harry, easy does it.”

But then, to Hagrid’s obvious relief, the hippogriff suddenly bent its scaly front knees and sank into what was an unmistakable bow.

“Well done, Harry!” said Hagrid, ecstatic. “Right – yeh can touch him! Pat his beak, go on!”

Harry patted the beak several times and the hippogriff closed its eyes lazily, as though enjoying it.

The class broke into applause, all except for Draco, Vincent, and Gregory, who were looking deeply disappointed.

“Righ’ then, Harry,” said Hagrid. “I reckon he might' let yeh ride him!”

Now Kali was jealous, even if Harry looked very uncertain about the idea.

“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. Buckbeak stood up.
“Go on, then’,” roared Hagrid, slapping the hippogriffs hindquarters.

Without warning, twelve-foot wings flapped open on either side of Harry, and Kali and the rest of the class backed away quickly. Harry seized the hippogriff around the neck just in time before he was soaring upward.

Buckbeak flew him once around the paddock and then headed back to the ground.

“Good work, Harry!” roared Hagrid as everyone except Draco, Vincent, and Gregory cheered. “Okay, who else wants a go?”

Emboldened by Harry’s 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. A pudgy Gryffindor boy ran repeatedly backward from his, which didn't seem to want to bend its knees. Kali practised on the black one and was thrilled by how quickly it bowed to her. Next to her, Draco, Vincent, and Gregory had taken over Buckbeak. He had bowed to Draco, who was now patting his beak, looking disdainful.

“This is very easy,” Draco drawled, loud enough for everyone to hear. “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; Draco let out a high pitched scream, and Kali jumped between him and Buckbeak, casting a shield charm, and blocking the hippogriff as he strained to get to Draco. She spoke soft, reassuring words, calming the creature who quickly settled for glaring at Draco who lay curled in the grass, blood blossoming over his robes.

“I'm dying!” Draco yelled as the class panicked. “I'm dying, look at me! It's killed me!”

“You're not dying,” Kali said, as Hagrid put Buckbeak’s collar back on. Hagrid had gone very white. Draco had a long, deep gash on his arm and blood splattered the grass, but it was far from lethal. “Get up.”

“I can't,” Draco moaned.

Kali grabbed the front of his robes and heaved him up, none too gently. “What is wrong with you?” she snapped.

“That beast attacked me,” said Draco, backing away from the anger in her voice.

“You were told not to insult a hippogriff! Your teacher warned you that it would be dangerous!”

“Some teacher he is, bringing a thing like that to our first class,” muttered Draco, unable to look her in the eye.

“You're the only one bleeding, so clearly you're the only one lacking the brains and maturity to be allowed in this class,” she seethed.

“Right, I think tha’ll be all for today,” said Hagrid, breaking up the argument before Kali could call Draco some very unflattering things. “Off yeh go now.”

Draco threw one last glare at Hagrid and marched off.

Very shaken, the Care of Magical Creatures class walked up the slope toward the castle. Kali’s housemates were all shouting about Hagrid.
“They should fire him straight away!” said Pansy, who was in tears.

“It was Malfoy’s fault!” snapped a dark-skinned Gryffindor boy. Vincent and Gregory flexed their muscles threateningly, but they backed away quickly when Kali turned to glare at them.

They all climbed the stone steps into the deserted entrance hall.

“Go see the school nurse, Draco,” said Kali when he looked like he was heading toward the Common Room.

“You can’t tell me what to do!” he snapped, wheeling on her, his face red with anger and embarrassment. He wasn’t used to anyone talking to him the way she had.

“Fine, go ahead and bleed out then,” she said coldly. She didn’t have the patience nor the inclination to indulge his ego.

They glared at each other, and Draco turned away first. He stomped off to the hospital wing.

“I’m going to see if he’s okay!” said Pansy, giving Kali a nasty look, and they all watched her run up the marble staircase after him.

The rest of the Slytherins were still muttering about Hagrid, but they were doing so under their breaths, as they headed away in the direction of their dungeon Common Room. Kali didn’t want to be around them just now, though, so she stomped off in the opposite direction.

Perhaps a bit of exploring would ease her temper.
The Benefits of Leech Juice

Chapter Notes

I love Hermione, she’s smart and she’s strong and she knows it, but in the books she doesn’t have much tolerance for girls who like things that are societally viewed as ‘girly’ (I.e. Lavender and Parvati) and that she judges based on physical appearance (i.e. Fleur), so I can’t imagine her liking someone like Kali straight off.

Monday, September 6th, 1993,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Hermione Jean Granger,

Hermione started her Monday morning off with Divination, then she started it again with Arithmancy, because her mother taught her to leave the good things until last and get the unpleasant things over and done with first, and Divination was setting itself up to be her least favourite class this year. The first lesson hadn’t gone well: Hermione hadn’t been able to make heads nor tails of her tea leaves; Professor Trelawney had predicted that Harry was going to die, and then had said that Hermione had very little ‘aura’ and ‘receptivity to the resonances of the future’, whatever that meant. However, she had been willing to give Divination a chance, that is until Professor McGonagall had expressed her complete disdain for the class and its teacher. Hermione wished she’d known Professor McGonagall’s thoughts on the subject before she’d decided to take it, because this morning’s lesson was just as awful as the last.

That was why she was so looking forward to Arithmancy, which was the polar opposite of Divination and which Hermione found much more enjoyable.

She quickly packed her bag after writing down the homework Professor Trelawney wanted done for next lesson, and ran into the nearest bathroom. A spin of the Time-Turner later and she was rushing off to Seventh Floor Arithmancy classroom. It was a very small classroom: not many people took the subject, and even if they did it was the kind of thing that was best taught in smaller groups. She arrived just as Professor Vector was closing the door, she shot the Professor an apologetic glance and darted into the room.

Fay and Eileen, the two other Gryffindors who took the class, were sat at the very back of the class. Hermione didn’t get along extremely well with them, but they were at least civil with each other – or at least Hermione and Fay were; Eileen could be a bit nasty at times. They’d saved her a seat, but when she could, Hermione much preferred sitting at the front of the class where she could really pay attention to what was being taught. However, the Gryffindors shared this class with the Slytherins, and while Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott occupied the middle row, Blaise Zabini and Kali Black sat in the first.

Hermione didn’t hesitate long before taking the seat next to Kali, although she did sit as far away from her as she could.
Professor Vector began her lesson and Hermione eagerly wrote down every word. They were half an hour in when the Professor asked them to work in groups, and Hermione instantly regretted her seating arrangement.

She’d never had a proper conversation with either Blaise or Kali; but she knew from sharing classes with him for two years that Blaise was unbelievably apathetic and lazy about most things; and Kali was so annoyingly pretty that Hermione doubted that she was any better. Kali was clearly magically gifted; she’d cast that Shield Charm when the hippogriff had attacked without an incantation or even a wand, but being talented and being skilled were two very different things. Talent was natural and took next to no effort; whereas skill was all about the work you put in it, it was about discipline and perseverance, both of which Hermione had in droves and which were highly necessary for a subject as complex as Arithmancy. But if they thought she was going to do all the work they were mistaken.

“Is there something about this being a group project that is unclear to you, Granger?” Blaise asked indifferently.

Hermione, who’d been reading through the theory overview one last time before attempting the exercise, looked up at him. He was lounging back in his chair, book unopened in front of him. Kali answered him before Hermione could.

“Says the guy who isn’t planning to lift a finger to help out,” she said, not bothering to turn her attention away from whatever she was scribbling in her muggle notebook with her muggle pens.

“That’s precisely why I’m asking,” he said, smiling at her charmingly, Hermione completely forgotten. “Can’t have you doing all the work by yourself, that wouldn’t be fair.”

“Know what else wouldn’t be fair?” Kali asked, finally looking up at him and returning his smile. “Letting the teacher know how unhelpful you’re being.”

“Are you going to tell on me, Black?” Blaise had two expressions: bored indifference and conceited amusement. He’d just switched to the second.

“It would be unkind of me to reinforce your notion that slacking off will get you through life. I’d be doing you a favour.”

Despite the clear threat, Blaise’s grin widened. “Which part shall I work on then?”

“The number chart for the second equation,” she said, “but use the Lovelace theorem rather than the Thoth one, it doesn’t rely on Astronomy so much so it’ll be more accurate.”

Blaise surprised Hermione by getting right on it.

Hermione hadn’t thought about using the Lovelace theorem, but it did make more sense than using the Thoth theorem which relied heavily on the movements of stars from over 5,200 years ago, she supposed.

“The first equation is harder,” Kali said turning to Hermione. “Shall we work on it together, or would you rather we each take half?”

Their eyes met and Hermione tried not to let her breath catch. Because while everything about Kali was beautiful – from her long black hair that curled like princess’s, to her flawless, naturally tanned skin, and with her unfairly full lips, and her sharper than glass facial features – her eyes were her most arresting feature. They were a very distinctive grey: with a dark circle around the outer edge, and dark flecks sprinkled in among the bright silver; framed by inky black eyelashes that were unfairly long and thick, and that curled upward so effortlessly.
It wasn’t easy correlating someone so beautiful with the sunken-faced man with long, matted hair that Hermione had seen in the papers and on television, but she supposed there was some resemblance in the shape of Kali’s eyes, the straightness of her nose, the angles of her face…

Hermione wanted to smack herself: she was turning into the boys. Ron and Harry hadn’t stopped gaping at Kali ever since the Welcoming Feast, much like every other male in this school and a few of the females too. At least Harry was sort of discreet about it, but Hermione was convinced that Ron could quite happily stare open-mouthed at Kali indefinitely if he wasn’t given a sharp kick to the shin or elbow jab to the stomach every five minutes to make him stop. It was pathetic. They’d even complimented and defended her after the Care of Magical Creatures incident, completely ignoring the fact that her father had brutally murdered thirteen people, had escaped from Azkaban and was now on the loose and after Harry. They weren’t the only ones to be beguiled by her, either, and Hermione’s mind flashed back their first day, when Fred and George had handed out their class schedules, and the conversation had segued into discussing Kali Black:

“So have you guys checked out the new girl yet?” George had asked.

“She hasn’t even been here a day and the school’s already abuzz with rumours and gossip about her,” Fred had said.

“What kind of rumours?” Harry and Ron had asked, both very interested in the subject.

“She’s a genius,” had said George, “top of her class at San Francisco.”

“She’s actually a mind-reader,” had said Fred, “a skilled Legilimens.”

“Before San Francisco she attended the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but she was kicked out after driving another student insane.”

“She’s a direct descendant of the founders of Ilvermorny.”

“She came to Great Britain to plead her father’s case with the Ministry.”

“No man can resist her and she can force him to do her bidding for as long as she sees fit.”

“That one definitely sounds plausible,” had muttered Ron as he stared longingly at Kali.

“She is very attractive, isn’t she?” had said George.

“Shame her father’s a serial killer,” had said Fred.

“Well no one’s perfect.”

It was ridiculous how much people were willing to forgive Kali just because she had a pretty face; if she looked like a mountain troll, everyone would find it much easier to remember that she was related to a mass murderer, and they might start wondering why she’d chosen to transfer to Hogwarts this year, right after her father had escaped from Azkaban.

For her part, Hermione didn’t trust Kali Black, not one bit. However, this could be the perfect opportunity to learn more about this new potential threat.

“We can do it together,” said Hermione, and Kali smiled at her. It was a nice smile. It was warm; and it showed off those two perfect rows of straight, white teeth; and it made the corners of her eyes crinkle; and Hermione’s hardened resolve faltered.
Kali slid her chair closer to Hermione’s, tucking the stray strand of hair that had escaped her ponytail behind her ear. “You’re Muggle-born, right?”

Hermione tensed. “Yes,” she said stiffly. Name-calling was something she was used to, be it for the colour of her skin, her physical appearance, her overly brusque manner, or her blood status, but that didn’t make it any easier to take.

Kali must have noticed Hermione’s discomfort, because she was quick to explain herself. “I’m only asking because that means you know maths, which is hugely useful for Arithmancy.”

This was true. Hermione had loved mathematics when she was little: it was so logical and straightforward and there could only be one right answer. She’d been a little disappointed when she’d found out that it wasn’t taught at Hogwarts, but it was a small price to pay in exchange of learning magic. Arithmancy was basically maths, though, except it was more complicated, more involved, and fairly often you had to cross-reference it with Astronomy. It was wonderful.

“You know maths too?” asked Hermione.

Kali nodded. “Yeah, I went to a muggle primary school for a bit.”

Hermione couldn’t hide her surprise, she’d never met anyone raised in a wizarding family who’d gone to a muggle school. “But you’re a pure-blood.”

After Hermione had first found out the importance of blood status in the wizarding world, she’d done some research, and she’d found a list of the ‘Sacred Twenty-Eight’, as they were called. The twenty-eight British wizarding families whose blood was the purest, and the Blacks had featured prominently on that list.

“Half-blood, actually,” Kali corrected insouciantly. “My mum’s side of the family is a little too diverse to fit in with the pure-blood crowds.”

“Your mum?” Hermione repeated dumbly. She’d been so focused on Kali’s father that she’d forgotten to consider that she may have other family.

Kali was smirking at her. “Yeah, most people have one.”

“Was it your mother’s idea to move to the U.K.?” Hermione asked shaking off her daze.

Kali stopped smiling. She cleared her throat and looked down intently at the equation they were supposed to be working on. “No. She died a few years ago.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “I’m so sorry,” she stuttered.

Kali shrugged, but didn’t take her eyes off the worksheet. Hermione felt uncomfortable enough to want this conversation to end, but her nosiness wouldn’t let it.

“I don’t mean to pry, but if your mother passed away, and your father is….” Kali looked up at her then, and Hermione swallowed hard, she suddenly didn’t want to finish that thought out loud.

Kali’s head tilted to the side as she considered Hermione with a piercing look. “Who do I live with?” Hermione nodded. “My godfather, Professor Lupin.”

Hermione nodded and tried to concentrate on the Arithmancy exercise. It explained why both Kali and the new teacher had arrived at Hogwarts at the same time and why Hermione had seen them talking in the corridors a couple of times. The Third Year Gryffindors had their first Defence Against
the Dark Arts lesson of the year this afternoon, so Hermione had had no interaction with Professor Lupin since the train, but if what some of the students who’d already had the class were saying was true he was a good teacher, and if the way he’d dealt with those dementors on the Hogwarts Express was anything to go by, he was a skilled wizard and knowledgeable about the subject he taught. Those three attributes alone made him the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher Hermione had ever had.

Between the two of them, they managed to solve the equation fairly quickly. Hermione was very impressed that Kali could work out all the complicated divisions and multiplications just by looking at them, but Hermione insisted on writing it all down, step by step, to double-check her answers. When they were done, they checked Blaise’s equation, to which he took mild offence, but Hermione felt he did it mostly to tease Kali. They were the first group to finish and their work got the only perfect score of the class, of which Hermione was very proud.

“Have you finished the homework for Ancient Runes yet?” Kali asked Hermione as they were packing up their bags.

“Nearly, I’m having a bit of trouble translating the third paragraph,” said Hermione as they headed toward the dungeons for Potions, Blaise trailing after Kali like a loyal dog. “I’m not sure what I’m doing wrong.”

“It’s written in a tense that doesn’t exist in the English language,” said Kali, “an exact translation is impossible.”

“What did you do to translate it, then?”

“I translated it into Spanish first. The tense used is similar to the future perfect subjunctive which modern Spanish only uses in legal documents, but it used to be popular in literature a few centuries ago. Then from Spanish into English, and to finish I transposed it into the passive voice.”

“You speak Spanish?” Hermione asked, impressed despite herself.

Kali smirked at her again. It was an infuriatingly attractive expression. “What can I say? I’m gifted.” Blaise scoffed behind them. “Do you have something to say, Blaise?”

“Oh, you’re paying attention to me again?” he said, oozing the kind of ooze that only a Slytherin could. “How nice. I assumed that because there was someone your own gender to talk to you’d forgotten about me.”

“Are you jealous?” asked Kali.

“Only curious,” he said with an arch of his brow. “Why do you prefer female company to that of men?”

“The conversation’s better as is the hygiene,” Kali said dryly.

Blaise snorted loudly and the two of them continued to bicker all the way down to the dungeons.

They arrived in front of the class right on time, and Professor Snape snappishly explained that they’d be brewing a Shrinking Solution today as he wrote down instructions on the black board.

Hermione set up her cauldron between Kali and Neville, and got to work preparing her ingredients. Potions was a challenging subject that required her utmost attention, but today the class was filled with an endless stream of distractions: first Neville almost fell face first into his cauldron when Kali smiled at him; Draco – who’d wandered off to the Hospital Wing after Arithmancy to have his arm
checked – returned halfway through the first hour of the lesson, not even earning himself a reprimand from Professor Snape for being so late; then Draco set up his cauldron right next to Harry and Ron, and Professor Snape demanded that Ron help Draco prepare his ingredients to which Ron went brick red; there was a squabble over daisy roots; Harry was made to skin Draco's shrivel fig; and Neville's potion, which was supposed to be a bright, acid green, had turned –

“Orange, Longbottom,” said Professor Snape, ladling some up and allowing it to splash back into the cauldron, so that everyone could see. “Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Didn't you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one rat 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.

Hermione quickly jumped to his aid. “Please, sir, please, I could help Neville put it right -”

“I don't remember asking you to show off, Miss Granger,” said Professor Snape coldly, and Hermione snapped her jaw shut, feeling her skin turn as pink as Neville’s. “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.”

Professor Snape moved away, leaving Neville breathless with fear.

“Help me!” he moaned to Hermione.

Hermione waited until Professor Snape was out of earshot before she started muttering instructions to Neville while simultaneously finishing up her own potion.

“You should have finished adding your ingredients by now,” said Professor Snape five minutes later, “this potion needs to stew before it can be drunk, so clear away while it simmers and then we'll test Longbottom's…”

Crabbe and Goyle laughed openly, watching Neville sweat as he stirred his potion feverishly.

Hermione kept muttering instructions to him out of the corner of her mouth, so that Professor Snape wouldn't see. The rest of the class packed away their unused ingredients and went to wash their hands and ladles in the stone basin in the corner.

The end of the lesson in sight, Snape strode over to Neville, who was cowering by his cauldron.

“Everyone gather 'round,” said Professor 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.”

Hermione watched fearfully as Professor 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.

Half of the class burst into applause. Professor 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.

“Five points from Gryffindor,” said Professor Snape, which wiped the smiles from every face. “I told you not to help him, Miss Granger.”
Hermione flinched under the teacher’s glare and stared guiltily down at the contents of her own cauldron.

“No, who can tell me the benefits of leech juice before class ends?” asked Professor Snape, addressing the class.

Hermione’s hand shot up, eager to regain the points she’d just lost. But Professor Snape ignored her, his eyes wandering around the classroom, until they landed on Kali. His expression twisted and the look he gave her was much the same as the look he gave Harry on a regular basis. Loathing. This surprised Hermione as Professor Snape had never before looked at a Slytherin like that, had never once been mean to anyone from his own House.

“Miss Black, perhaps?” sneered Professor Snape, her name sounding like an insult on his tongue.

Kali smiled and started reciting a long list of every possible benefit leech juice could have. Some of what she said Hermione had known, but a lot of it she was only just learning about now, and as Kali spoke, Professor Snape’s expression darkened.

“And why, Miss Black, did you not raise your hand if you knew the answer?” asked Professor Snape when Kali had finished.

“Someone already had their hand up and seemed eager to answer,” said Kali, “it would have been rude to take the chance away from her.”

“Miss Granger is a show off who believes that knowing her entire textbooks off by heart makes her an adequate witch,” said Professor Snape, his lips curling in a sneer. “Her eagerness is a pain.”

Hermione’s face turned scarlet and she ducked her head to hide her watering eyes.

“Surely as a teacher you should cherish a student who is eager to learn,” said Kali, coolly.

“Watch your tongue,” snapped Snape.

“Sorry Professor, only you see this is a new school for me and I feel it would be best if I know the rules and proper procedures when dealing with teachers,” said Kali. “So is it that you don’t like it when your students participate or do you simply not like it when they give the right answer, sir? And while we’re at it: is threatening to harm a student’s pet a well thought of motivational tool at this school?”

Hermione’s head snapped back up. Everyone was staring at Kali with a mixture of horror and awe.

“Detention Miss Black,” said Professor Snape maliciously.

“For participating or for being right?” she asked.

“For being insolent,” he snarled. “How very like your father you’ve turned out to be. I’d have thought his absence from your life would have had a good impact but it would seem I was mistaken. Twenty points from Gryffindor for your attitude.”

Kali tilted her head. “Why Gryffindor, sir?”

“Because you’re…”

“In Slytherin. It would seem I’m not an exact replica of my father after all, you must be thrilled,” Kali smirked. She gathered her things, and sauntered toward the door. “I’ll see you tonight then, does 8
o’clock work for you?”

The class stared after her in shock and in amazement. No one had ever dared speak to Professor Snape like that before.

“Class dismissed,” shouted Snape. He’d turned an ugly, splotchy red colour.

Everyone scurried out, and Kali’s stunt with Snape would be all anyone could talk about for the next few days.

Hermione had to use the Time-Turner to get to her Muggle Studies class and she realized, as she caught up with Ron and Harry who’d just reached the Great Hall, that she’d have to work on her timing, because Ron was becoming suspicious of her disappearing and reappearing oddly throughout the day. For now at least, she managed to brush off his concerns and they headed for lunch. She was starving. Time travel could really take it out of a person.

Professor Lupin wasn't there when they arrived at his first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson after lunch. They all sat down, took out their books, quills, and parchment, and were talking when he finally entered the room. Professor 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 Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson 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 them along the deserted corridor and around a corner, where the first thing they 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; when he wiggled his curly-toed feet and broke into song.


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 in to 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 the class 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?”

They 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, panelled 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 and Hermione flinched away from Professor Snape’s words.

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. Professor Snape's lip curled, but he left, giving Kali, who was standing toward the back of the class, a cool look and 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, but Hermione stared at it with glee, she’d read about boggarts.

“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. “It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most.”

“Couldn't have put it better myself,” said Professor Lupin, and Hermione felt her cheeks glow with pride. “So the boggart sitting in the darkness within has not yet assumed a form. It does not yet know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door. Nobody knows what a boggart looks like when it is alone, but when I let it out, it will immediately become whatever each of us most fears.

“This means,” said Professor Lupin, choosing to ignore Neville's small sputter of terror, “that we have a huge advantage over the boggart before we begin. Have you spotted it, Harry?”

Hermione knew this, and she started bobbing up and down on the balls of her feet with her hand in the air, as Harry tried to work out the answer.

“Er – because there are so many of us, it won't know what shape it should be?” Harry guessed.

“Precisely,” said Professor Lupin, and Hermione put her hand down, feeling a little disappointed. She’d known that. “It's always best to have company when you're dealing with a boggart. It becomes confused. Which should it 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 itself 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 amusing.

“We will practice the charm without wands first. After me, please… Riddikulus!”

“Riddikulus!” said the class together.

“This class is ridiculous,” Draco sneered under his breath. Crabbe and Goyle chortled.

“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, and Hermione didn’t miss the look he shared with Kali.

“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 Professor 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 its 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…”

The room went quiet. Hermione wondered what scared her most in the world, but she had no idea, and she started to panic. If she couldn’t figure out what her greatest fear was, she wouldn’t be able to think of something funny for it to turn into, she would fail in front of everyone, and Professor Lupin would be disappointed, and she’d be so embarrassed. She looked around frantically, hoping to find someone who looked just as worried as she felt. Many people had their eyes shut tight. Ron was muttering something to himself, Harry had paled and had a haunted look in his eyes, and Kali was staring out the window, stony faced.

“Everyone ready?” said Professor Lupin.

Hermione jumped in surprise and felt her stomach lurch. She wasn't ready. She couldn't think of anything even remotely funny. But she didn't want to ask for more time; everyone else was nodding and rolling up their sleeves.

“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 -”

They 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. Professor Snape was bearing down upon him, reaching inside his robes.

“R – r – riddikulus!” squeaked Neville.

There was a noise like a whip crack. Professor 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. Professor 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 the hair on Hermione's head stand on end—“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 leapt 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, Hermione thought 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 Kali's feet.

She raised her wand apprehensively, and with a crack the boggart turned into Professor Lupin; he was sprawled on the floor, spread-eagled on his back, his eyes wide open and empty, a trickle of blood running down his face. Kali made a sound like a whimper, and the boggart shimmered and took the form of another dead body, that of Sirius Black, younger than he was in the pictures Hermione had seen and far more handsome. This must have been what he'd looked like before his
years in Azkaban. The boggart shimmered again, and there lay another dead body, that of a very big man with long hair and a scar over his left eyebrow. The body faded in and out of focus before becoming pearly white, and morphing into something else, and there stood the ghost of a stunningly beautiful woman, she looked at Kali with hatred in her eyes.

“This is your fault,” the ghost/boggart hissed.

Kali’s jaw was clamped shut, and she was shaking hard.

“Riddikulus!” said Kali, her skin going very pale.

The ghost burst into silvery light, and turned into ghostly, tap-dancing goblins. There was a horrible silence as the goblins tap-danced their way toward Harry. He raised his wand, at the ready, but –

“Here!” shouted Professor Lupin suddenly, hurrying forward. Crack!

The silvery dancers had vanished. For a second, everyone looked wildly around to see where the boggart 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 Professor Lupin as the boggart landed on the floor as 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.

“Excellent!” cried Professor Lupin as the class broke into applause. “Excellent Neville. Well done, everyone…. Let me see… five points to 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,” said Harry.

“You and Hermione answered my questions correctly at the start of the class, Harry,” Professor Lupin said lightly, and Hermione couldn’t decide if she was happy or upset that she hadn’t gotten the chance to face the boggart. “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. Kali would you stay here a moment.”

Talking excitedly, the class left the staffroom. Kali stayed behind, looking shaken.

“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 Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson we've ever had, wasn't it?” said Ron excitedly as they made their way back to the classroom to get their 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 shot him a glare, but her retort was interrupted by Harry.

“What about Kali’s boggart,” he said. “What was that about?”

“Yeah whose greatest fear is a teacher dying?” said Ron. “Even if he is a cool teacher.”

“Professor Lupin isn’t just Kali’s teacher, he’s also her guardian,” said Hermione smartly. She was glad that she’d sat next to Kali in Arithmancy. A smug part of her liked knowing more than anyone else, mainly because the only times people her own age used to listen to her was when she was imparting knowledge. Their only interest in her had been her brain.

“He is?” asked Ron.

“Her father’s in prison, and her mother died when Kali was younger. That ghost we saw was her mother, I think, although her mother isn’t actually a ghost.”

“How do you know all this?” asked Harry.

“She told me. We have Arithmancy together, and she’s quite brilliant. Very talented and very smart, a genius really.”

“I though you didn’t like her,” said Ron.

“That was before I’d had the chance to talk to her. She’s actually quite nice and she’s fascinating too,” Hermione said.

“Hey guys,” said Neville as he ran up to them. “Have you seen my wand? I can’t find it anywhere?”

“You must have left it in the staffroom,” said Harry.

“You did,” said a voice behind them. Kali walked up to them, handing Neville his wand.

“Oh – uh – thank you,” said Neville, looking flustered.

“Are you alright?” Harry asked her, she turned her sharp eyes on him. “You looked a little… shaken back there.”

Kali shrugged, watching him carefully. “I have some issues I need to work through. I’ll get there eventually.” She turned to Neville. “Why don’t you tell your Head of House or the headmaster about it?”

“About what?” asked Neville, blushing furiously.

“Snape,” she said.

“Oh – that – it’s nothing,” stammered Neville.

“Boggarts turn into the thing you fear most in this world,” said Kali, “that isn't nothing.” She frowned. “This isn’t you trying to be brave is it, because there’s a difference between bravery and stupidity and this falls into the second category.”
“No – it’s not – I’m fine really,” said Neville.

“Does he always do that? Bully you? All of you?” she asked.

“Oh yeah, all the time,” said Ron quickly, eager for Kali to look at him.

“And you’re alright with that?” she asked.

Ron shrugged nonchalantly. “We’re used to it.”

“You shouldn’t be,” said Kali as a group of Slytherins called for her and she walked away with a small wave and smile for the Gryffindors she left behind.
The Boy Who Lived

Chapter Summary

Kali and Harry spend the day together while everyone else is at Hogsmeade and Sirius Black breaks into Hogwarts for murder attempt n°1.

Sunday, October 31st, 1993,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

Kali drew a certain amount of pride from the fact that no matter which school Remus was teaching at, it never took him long to become one of the students’ favourite teachers within the first couple of weeks. The students would rave about his lessons and look forward to them and they would learn things, not like they learned things for History of Magic or Astronomy or anything like that, what he taught they remembered without having to force it, because he made his every class memorable.

Only Draco and his friends had anything bad to say about Remus, none of it relating to the way Remus taught, but all to do with his dishevelled appearance. It had earned them a few discreet and well-placed hexes from Kali.

However, not everyone was Remus’s biggest fan. The story of the boggart assuming Snape's shape, and the way that Neville had dressed it in his grandmother's clothes, had travelled through the school like wildfire, and although most everyone was highly amused by it, Snape didn't seem to find it funny. His eyes flashed menacingly at the very mention of Remus, and he was bullying Neville worse than ever. The nasty looks directed at her godfather, those Kali could handle; but the mindless and vindictive bullying, that she would not tolerate.

She found that it was very easy to get under Snape’s skin and had taken to antagonizing him whenever he was cruel toward his students. It wasn’t a perfect system, she had to admit: Snape had many classes with many students to torment, and Kali could only attend a select few; plus, Snape was a teacher, therefore an authority figure, therefore he had the power to give out detentions, which he did regularly. He never took points from her because that would penalize Slytherin, but it was a rare week when she didn’t have to serve at least one detention with him. It was a small price to pay for the game she was playing, though.

She was trying out her own version of Pavlovian conditioning, wherein Snape would eventually learn to associate being an arse with getting his pride torn to shreds. He was a very proud man, but only regarding certain aspects of himself. For instance, criticizing his looks or his personality may sting and bruise his ego slightly, but that would be it, because those were not the things he valued about himself. But to destroy a man you must go after that which he holds dear. In Snape’s case that was Potions: he was an excellent Potions Master and he was very proud of that accomplishment.

Kali couldn’t take away his knowledge and skill – not without doing things and using magic that was very illegal – but she could become better than him and start showing him up at every turn when he was a git. Potions had never been Kali’s favourite subject – it required a patience she didn’t have –
but spite was an excellent motivator, and by October she’d read half of the Potions books in the
school library and had taken the time to practice every new recipe she learned until her skill was
beyond reproach. Every potion she brewed for Snape’s class was flawless and she made a point of
never doing it the way he told her to which irritated him to no end, but it was the fact that her way of
doing it was often easier and more efficient that he truly loathed. She had become a particularly nasty
thorn in his side, and there was nothing he could do about it until he stopped being a bullying arse.

In other news, the first Hogsmeade trip of the year was planned for this weekend and all the Third
Years were very excited about it. Kali, however, would not be going. If it were any other weekend
she would have been able to swing it, but not today. Not only was the full moon tonight – and she
did not like leaving Remus during the days leading up to the full – but it was also this time of year
when Remus was most likely to become depressed and distant: because this time twelve years ago
was when his life came crumbling down around him. So she would pass on Hogsmeade this time,
because Remus was more important, which was something she would tell him over and over until
she managed to hammer it into that thick skull of his.

“You should go,” he said for the tenth time that morning.

They were in his office, Remus was looking for something, riffling through his half unpacked
suitcases and trunks, while Kali graded his Sixth Years’ essays. Remus never unpacked, never
completely, in fact he only unpacked things when he needed them which made for a very
disorganized living space and some very jumbled suitcase and trunk interiors. It was a wonder he
ever found anything in the mess he created. It was a sharp contrast to how he used to be. Grandpa
Lyall had once told her that when Remus was little his room was always spotless, his clothes were
always neatly folded, and he would alphabetize his books, which was difficult to believe when you
had to witness this orderless chaos. Kali guessed that the change in organization techniques had to do
with Remus’s unwillingness to settle down and call a place home – however temporarily – because
he knew that it would be just that: temporary.

“It’ll get you out of the castle, off the school grounds for a bit. It’ll be fun, and I’ll be fine.”

“There will be other trips,” she said absently, scribbling a note in the margin of the essay in front of
her and wondering what kind of a dolt couldn’t properly describe a dementor when there were about
a hundred of them circling the school at all times.

She only ever helped Remus out with his corrections – against his wishes – around the full moon
when he was either too tired or too restless but always too stubborn to do anything about whichever.
She did the first draft of the corrections, going over each paper and making note of what was right,
what was wrong, what was clever, and what was incredibly stupid, and Remus always read through
the paper to double check and to decide on the final mark he’d give. It saved him some time and some
energy better spent elsewhere.

She finally finished with the papers, stacking them neatly on his desk, all the while Remus was still
searching through his stuff. She was about to ask what for when he popped his head out through the
open office door.

“Harry?” said Remus, and Kali glanced over her shoulder to see Harry backtracking toward the
office. “What are you doing? Where are Ron and Hermione?”

“Hogsmeade,” said Harry, in a would-be casual voice.

“Ah,” said Remus. He considered Harry for a moment. “Why don't you come in? I've just taken
delivery of a grindylow for our next lesson.”
“A what?” said Harry.

He followed Remus into his office and spotted Kali lounging in her chair. She smiled at him. “Hello, Harry.”

“Oh – hello, Kali.” Harry glanced between Kali and Remus. “I’m not interrupting, am I?”

Kali shook her head. “Nope,” she said, with a disarming grin.

Harry turned a deep crimson. “Right – Kali – hi,” he sputtered.

“Have you seen our next assignment?” She gestured at a corner of the room.

In said 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.

“It’s a water demon,” Remus explained, surveying the grindylow thoughtfully. “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?” Remus said, looking around for his kettle. “I was just thinking of making one.”

“All right,” said Harry awkwardly.

“Kali?” Remus asked, finally finding his kettle in the mess he called an office.

“Sure.”

She'd spoken to Harry only once since starting at Hogwarts, but he seemed nice in a dorky and awkward kind of way.

Remus tapped the kettle with his wand and a blast of steam issued suddenly from the spout.

Pan startled Harry by brushing against his leg as a large yellow cat. “He’s kind of scrawny, isn’t he?”

“He’s a teenage boy, that’s how most of them look,” she said as Pan jumped onto her lap.

“Sit down, Harry,” said Remus, 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?”

Kali smirked and Remus’s eyes twinkled.

“How did you know about that?” Harry asked.

“Professor McGonagall told me,” said Remus, passing Harry a chipped mug of tea. “You're not worried, are you?”

“No,” said Harry. But there was something on his mind, that much was obvious, and Remus noticed as well.

“Anything worrying you, Harry?” he asked.

“No,” said Harry a little too quickly. 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 Remus slowly.

“Yes, why didn’t you let me fight it?” said Harry abruptly.

Remus raised his eyebrows.

“I would have thought that was obvious, Harry,” he said, sounding surprised.

“Why?” he said again.

Remus frowned slightly.

“He figured that if the boggart faced you, it would assume the shape of Lord Voldemort,” Kali said, sipping at her tea.

Harry stared at her, she wasn’t sure if the shock came from the fact that he hadn’t expected that answer or that Kali had said Voldemort’s name. She knew that many people weren’t comfortable hearing his name out loud, but it was only a name and a made-up one at that.

“We clearly, I was wrong,” said Remus, still frowning at Harry. “But I didn’t think it a good idea for Lord Voldemort to materialize in the staffroom. I imagined that people would panic.”

“I didn’t think of Voldemort,” said Harry. It was Kali’s turn to be surprised by him speaking the dark wizards name. “I – I remembered those dementors.”

“I see,” said Remus 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.”

A faint blush stained Harry’s cheeks at the compliment and he drank some more tea to give himself something to do.

“So you’ve been thinking that I didn’t believe you capable of fighting the boggart?” said Remus shrewdly.

“Well… yeah,” said Harry. Suddenly looking a lot happier. “Professor Lupin, you know the dementors -”

He was interrupted by a knock on the door.

“Come in,” called Remus.

The door opened, and in came Snape. He was carrying a goblet, which was smoking faintly, and stopped at the sight of Kali and Harry, his black eyes narrowing.

“Ah, Severus,” said Lupin, smiling. “Thanks very much. Could you leave it here on the desk for me?”

Snape set down the smoking goblet of Wolfsbane Potion, his eyes wandering between Kali, Harry, and Remus.

“I was just showing Kali and Harry my grindylow,” said Remus pleasantly, pointing at the tank.

“Fascinating,” said Snape, without looking at it. “You should drink that directly, Lupin.”
“Yes, Yes, I will,” said Remus.

“I made an entire cauldronful,” Snape continued. “If you need more.”

“I should probably take some again tomorrow. Thanks very much, Severus.”

“Not at all,” said Snape, with a malignant look in his eye. He backed out of the room, unsmiling and watchful.

Harry was looking curiously at the goblet. Remus 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. Remus looked at him and answered the unfinished question.

“I've been feeling a bit off-colour,” 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.”

It wasn’t technically a lie: the full moon was tonight so Remus certainly wasn’t feeling his best; and Snape, despite being a slimy, grease covered git, was very good at brewing Potions, still Kali would have preferred to make it herself, but Remus insisted it was too time-consuming for her to worry about while at school.

“Professor Snape's very interested in the Dark Arts,” Harry blurted out.

“Really?” said Remus, looking only mildly interested as he took another gulp of potion.

“Some people reckon -” Harry hesitated, then plunged recklessly on, “some people reckon he'd do anything to get the Defence Against the Dark Arts job.”

Kali smiled at the implication, but Remus – being the mature, respectful adult that he was – hid his reaction by draining the goblet and pulling a face at the awful taste.

“Disgusting,” he said. “Well, Harry, I'd better get back to work. See you at the feast later.”

“Right,” said Harry, putting down his empty teacup and eyeing the now empty goblet that was still smoking.

He left the office and Kali finished her tea while watching Remus over the rim of her cup. “So you’re not going to tell him then?”

Remus sighed and rubbed his hands over his face. “No. It wouldn’t make any difference to him.”

“I think it would. Plenty of people knew Lily and James, but none like you did. He might like to hear those stories.”

Remus shook his head, chewing his lip with the faraway look he got when he was seeing ghosts. Remus did not like reliving the past, with everything he’d lost it was far too painful, and retelling old stories was a special kind of hell for him.

She kicked him beneath his desk and smiled, easing the mood. “Get some rest before tonight, okay?”

“I’ll finish grading these essays, then I’m off to bed, promise.”
With that reassurance in mind she left the office as well, and spotted Harry walking down the hallway.

“You could go talk to him,” said Pan, sitting at her heels and transforming into an oncilla.

“I could,” she agreed, but she didn’t move.

“It might be nice for you to get to know him.”

Harry was about to turn a corner when she decided to banish her doubts and hailed him. He stopped and she jogged to catch up.

“Do you really believe Snape is capable of poisoning someone for a job?” she asked, a smile playing on her lips.

“Uh – well – I mean – he’s not the best person around, is he?” said Harry.

“True, but to poison a fellow colleague… that would be pretty extreme.” Her smile broke out and Harry smiled with her. “So why aren’t you at Hogsmeade with your friends?”

“Oh, I had a bit of an argument with my Aunt and Uncle before leaving and they wouldn’t sign my permission slip. You?”

“It’s a Halloween thing. Remus – Professor Lupin – and I always spend the day together. But the potion Snape gives him makes him sleepy, so I need someone else to keep me amused.” She smiled at him suggestively.

Harry blushed. “Oh – uh – I’m not busy at the moment.”

“Cool.” She grinned, grabbed his hand and led him down the corridor.

They spent the rest of the day exploring the castle, Harry showed her shortcuts and secret passages he knew about, and they discovered some new ones together. They talked about school stuff mostly, classes, teachers, homework… that sort of thing, before Harry asked her about her Led Zeppelin t-shirt and they moved on to music, and from there the conversation flowed easily from one thing to another.

“Do you want to see something cool?” he asked her after lunch.

“Always,” she grinned.

Harry led her up to the first floor girls’ lavatory.

“Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom?” Kali asked. “What’s so interesting in there?”

“You know about Myrtle?”

“Yeah, I went in there and talked to her once. She doesn’t like me much, though,” she said with a shrug.

“Why not?”

Apparently I remind her of some girl who bullied her at school,” she said. “She isn’t what you wanted to show me, right?”

“No, it’s something else,” Harry assured her.
He pushed open the door and found Myrtle floating around, wailing. She stopped when she noticed she had visitors.

“Oh, Harry!” she cried. “You’re back! It’s been so long since you’ve come to visit me!”

“Hi, Myrtle,” said Harry.

“Hello, Myrtle,” Kali said, trying to sound as cheery and nice as she could. But apparently it wasn’t enough.

Myrtle glared daggers at her. “Why did you bring her here?”

“I came to show her something,” said Harry.

“Oh, so you didn’t come to visit me after all,” Myrtle said, her face dropping.

“Uh – No,” he said and Kali elbowed him discreetly. “But I could come back, maybe.”

“Oh yes that would be lovely! Just don’t bring her next time,” Myrtle dived into one of the toilets and down the drain.

“Thanks for that,” said Harry, rubbing his side where Kali had hit him.

“I’ve never seen her that happy and you were going to take that away from her?” Kali said.

“Well she doesn’t make for the most pleasant company you may have noticed,” he said.

“She’s certainly earned her name,” she said, looking around. “So where is this thing you want to show me?”

“Over here,” Harry said, leading the way. He walked to the sinks in front of the toilets, and pointed out the tiny snake scratched on the side of one of the copper taps.

“An engraving?” Kali said, running a finger over it, her ring clinking against the metal faucet. The ring was a family heirloom, it was shaped like a small silver serpent wrapped several times around her finger. It was beautiful, expertly crafted, and old, with emeralds for eyes that twinkled and seemed to follow you around the room. The story was that Salazar Slytherin had given this ring to his youngest daughter to protect her against the evils of the world, and rumour had it that the blessings he’d cast on it and yet to fade to this day, meaning that the foulest of magic could not touch whoever wore this ring. Kali wasn’t sure if that rumour was true, but she wasn’t particularly willing to have someone cast an Unforgivable on her to test it, so the mystery remained.

“It’s a secret door,” said Harry, and then he did something so completely unexpected that Kali was left gaping at him: he spoke in Parseltongue. “Open up.”

At once the tap glowed with a brilliant white light and began to spin. Next second, the sink began to move; the sink, in fact, sank, right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, a pipe wide enough for a man to slide into. Kali gasped.

“It’s the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets,” he said, watching her expression light up. “Salazar Slytherin built it before he left Hogwarts.”

“I thought this place was just a legend,” she said, peering down the dark pipe.

“It’s real, and so was Slytherin’s monster.”
“Was? Why the past tense?” Kali asked frowning.

“It’s dead.” Kali looked at him raising an eyebrow and Harry blushed. “I killed it.”

Kali smiled. “What was it?”

“A basilisk,” he said. Of course it had been something serpentine. Kali had never met anyone more obsessed with something than Salazar Slytherin was with snakes.

“You fought a basilisk and won?” she asked, successfully resisting the urge to glance down at his thin body that was drowning in overly large muggle clothes. Harry nodded. “Huh, you’re more impressive than you look, Harry Potter.” He blushed harder than ever. “Can we go down?”

“Yeah, it’s a bit dirty, though,” he said.

Kali grinned. “Half the fun of an adventure is that it’s messy.”

She lowered herself into the pipe and let go. It was like rushing down an endless, slimy, dark slide. She could see more pipes branching off in all directions, but none as large as this one, which twisted and turned, sloping steeply downward, and she knew that she was falling deeper below the school than even the dungeons.

And then, the pipe levelled out, and she shot out of the end with a wet thud, landing on the damp floor of a dark stone tunnel large enough to stand in. She rolled to her feet, brushing off some of the muck, and helping Harry to his feet when he landed at hers.

“Lumos!” Harry muttered to his wand and it lit up.

Pan changed into a canary and flew down the passageway. “This place is filthy,” he said. “Try not to touch anything, you might catch something.”

Kali shook her head and ignored him as she and Harry started after Pan, their footsteps slapping loudly on the wet floor. “I didn’t know you were a Parselmouth.”

“I was surprised when I found out too,” said Harry. “Didn’t even realise I was doing it at first.”

“Huh,” she said. That wasn’t surprising. Parseltongue was instinctive to those with the ability, like a mother tongue except it didn’t need to be learned. It came pre-installed in every Parselmouth’s brain, and differentiating it from your actual mother tongue was nearly impossible: all you could do was train yourself to watch out for the telltale hissing.

They walked further down the tunnel, until they got to a part that was littered with small animal bones. Kali could just see the outline of something huge and curved, lying right across the tunnel. The light slid over a gigantic snake skin, of a vivid, poisonous green, lying curled and empty across the tunnel floor. The creature that had shed it had been twenty feet long at least.

“Wow,” whispered Kali.

“It’s even more impressive when it has teeth,” Harry said.

Kali chuckled softly, and stepped closer to the skin. She ran a hand along it gently, almost reverently.

“I’ve never seen one this big,” she whispered in awe.

“You’ve seen a basilisk before?” asked Harry, surprised.
She nodded, her eyes still roaming over the shed skin. “Two of them, but they were only babies compared to this wonder.”

“What happened?”

“They’d been bred illegally by a Potions master. He wanted their venom and as soon as he’d filled his shelves with it, he abandoned them in the woods. I stumbled across them.”

“How did you get away?”

Kali cocked her head and looked over at him. “I didn’t.”

“But looking a basilisk directly in the eye is lethal,” Harry said, clearly not seeing how Kali could still be alive after having come face to face with not one but two basilisks.

“Only when they’re fully grown,” she explained. “When they’re younger the worst they can do is knock you unconscious for a few hours.”

“Is that what happened then?” he asked.

“No, they didn’t perceive me as a threat,” she said. “Why would they attack?”

Harry scoffed. “Because it’s what they do. This one spent all of last year roaming the castle parallelizing Muggle-borns. It’s what killed Myrtle.”

“Because that’s what it was taught to do,” she said, catching his eye. “No creature is innately evil, not even people.”

Unable to hold her gaze Harry looked away. “What happened to the two basilisks then?”

“They were placed in a magical creatures reserve in Arizona. They’re quite happy there. The last time I saw them, they’d grown nearly eight feet.”

“Oh,” he said. Kali could understand why he wasn’t terribly willing to see the good in the species, when one of them had nearly killed him. But apparently he wasn’t about to tell her that, not when she was smiling at him like that.

“You’re staring,” she said with a sly look, her tone somewhere between teasing and mocking.

He quickly looked away, his face going scarlet. “Sorry.”

Kali shrugged nonchalantly. “It’s not like I’m not used to it.”

“Right – yeah – because you’re – well that’s to say – I mean -” He bit his tongue against the nervous stammer. “There’s more.” He gestured toward the other side of the tunnel.

Kali brushed past him and stepped up to a large pile of rubble that blocked the path. They climbed over the fallen stones and kept going. And then, at last, as they crept around yet another bend, they saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds.

Harry cleared his throat, and the emerald eyes seemed to flicker. But Kali beat him to it.

“Open,” she said, in a low, faint hiss. The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves sliding smoothly out of sight.
“How did you do that?” Harry asked, astonished.

“There are still a few things you don’t know about me.” She smiled devilishly and sauntered through the opening. Harry followed her through.

They were standing at the end of a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place.

They continued down the path until they drew level with the last pair of pillars. A statue high as the Chamber itself loomed into view, standing against the back wall.

Kali craned her neck to look up into the giant face above: it was ancient and monkeyish, with a long, thin beard that fell almost to the bottom of the wizard’s sweeping stone robes, where two enormous grey feet stood on the smooth Chamber floor. Between the feet, was what remained of the basilisk Harry had killed, which was now little more than the skeleton.

“Well this place is morbidly fascinating,” she said, running her hand along the basilisk’s skull. She stepped around the skeleton and up to the statue. “Have you ever been rock climbing?” Harry shook his head. “Don’t worry, it’s easy. Come on.”

She started to climb, casting a Cushioning Charm beneath them, just in case. Harry had trouble keeping up with her at first as she shimmied her way ever higher, but she quickly slowed down for him. When they reached the statue’s shoulder, she stopped and sat down. Harry collapsed next to her, breathing heavily.

Pan flew over their heads and came to rest on Kali’s shoulder. “Are you trying to kill the boy?” he asked.

“She’s fine,” she said, stroking his head absent-mindedly. “He got up here, didn’t he?”

“He looks like he’s about to pass out, he’s hyperventilating.” He flapped his wings nervously. “Do you know how far away we are from help if we need it? We could all die down here and no one would ever find us.”

“What’s with the gloom and doom soundtrack?”

“It’s a reasonable concern!” he squawked.

“You and Pandoran,” said Harry, who’d been eyeing the daemon curiously. “How does that work?”

“Pan. He prefers Pan,” she said, sending soothing thoughts to the ruffled little daemon. “And how do you mean?”

“How does it happen? How does a daemon become linked with a witch or wizard?” he asked.

“It’s simple really,” she said. “We just liked each other. We met when we were very young and ’round about the same age and we clicked. The connection only took a couple of days to form, and it helped that the first thing I did when we met was save his ass.”

Pan cawed indignantly and pecked Kali’s ear and she laughed.

“He got separated from his family and got caught in a hunter’s trap,” she said. “I got him out, except he’d never seen a human before and he panicked. He ran straight into a tree and knocked himself right out. I stayed with him until he came to to make sure he didn’t get eaten, and he realized I wasn’t
“You’ve been together ever since,” he said.

“Yep, and we will be for the rest of our lives,” she said. “Pan will age as I do, grow as I grow. We are linked; two halves of one whole.”

“What happens if one half…” He let the sentence hang there, unsure how to finish it.

“Dies?” Harry nodded. “Theoretically it’s survivable. In practice, though… it would be like ripping your soul in half, physically you’d be fine, but you’d be damaged beyond repair. There’d be no recovering from that. My mum’s boyfriend used to say that it would be twice as painful as losing your soulmate, and given how devastated he was when my mum died I really don’t want to test his theory.”

Harry looked over at her in surprise, he hadn’t expected her to talk about her mother so casually. “I’m sorry about your mum.”

“You’ve got your sad backstory, I’ve got mine.” Kali shrugged. “We’re not the only ones.”

“How did it happen?” Harry asked, wondering if he’d earned the right to ask that question yet, but Kali answered without pause.

“A couple of Muggles were on the run from the law, they’d shot up a bank and killed some hostages. They came across my mum, Remus, and me while we were out in the forest getting ingredients for potions. They shot my mum the second they saw her, didn’t even hesitate. When they pointed the gun at Remus, I had a power surge, turned them both to stone.”

“You blame yourself for your mum’s death?” he asked, no doubt remembering her boggart.

“It should have been within my power to stop it,” she said.

“How old were you?” he asked.

“Nine,” she answered.

“You were just a kid, Kali,” he said. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“Then why have I always felt so guilty?” she asked.

Harry’s mouth opened but no words came out. He was the first person she’d met who could understand, at least partly, what she’d gone through. His own parents had died when he was very young, too young to have gotten to know them. Kali couldn’t decide which was worse, but she didn’t envy his situation.

Kali rubbed at the goosebumps that littered her uncovered arms, and for the hundredth time since September, she cursed the Scottish weather.

“You’re cold,” Harry said, pointing out the obvious.

“Yeah, if I’d known we’d be exploring this far below the castle I would have worn a jacket,” she said with a smile.

“Here take my jumper.” He slid off his hoodie and handed it to her.

“You sure?” she asked uncertainly.
“Yeah, I’ve still got this, see?” he said, plucking at his sweater.

“Clearly one of us knows what to expect of Scottish weather more than the other,” Kali said, dragging the hoodie over her head.

“So you’ve been with Professor Lupin ever since your mum died?” he asked.

“Yeah. He’s my godfather, I’ve known him my entire life. For a while he and my mum’s boyfriend raised me, but Nahele passed away last year after a Quidditch accident.”

“What kind of an accident?” Harry asked, looking horrified, and Kali realized that he must play.

“A Bludger,” she said. “He’d been playing professionally for years and it was his first injury… and last.”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“He was actually thinking of retiring in a couple of years,” she said absently. “Maybe going to teach at Ilvermorny or San Francisco with Remus.”

“Those are the American schools of witchcraft and wizardry?”

“Two of them. America is a big bloody continent, and the U.S. alone has at least one school per State – Texas has three. Ilvermorny and Castelobruxo in Brazil are the only ones to be recognized internationally, though, because they were the first ones built by European settlers.”

Harry nodded. “I didn’t know there were any other magic schools out there.”

Kali frowned. “You though wizards only existed in the U.K.?”

“No,” he said quickly. “I mean, I knew other countries had witches and wizards too, I guess I just never really thought about it.”

“Hogwarts’ courses on international wizardry are definitely lacking,” she said thoughtfully.

“Did you have those at San Francisco?” he asked.

“Yeah, there was more diversity in classes than there is here,” she said.

“It must be interesting,” he said, “getting to see how things are done in different schools.”

“It is,” she agreed. “Mum liked to move around a lot to spend time with various family members, I got to see a lot of different places and how they taught things.”

“How many schools have you been to?” he asked.

“Six magical ones,” she answered. “Three primary schools, three secondary schools.”

“Were they all in the U.S.?”

She shook her head. “I was mainly educated in Hawaii. We’d spend half the year there, and the second half somewhere else. My grandfather and his mother live in Israel, and his sister lives in Argentina, magical education in both those countries starts at age six. So when we visited them I could go to a proper school, and when we were in a country where magic was only taught institutionally to older kids, I was home schooled.”
“Whoa,” he breathed. “No wonder you’re so good at magic and it must be nice to travel so much.”

“Do you not travel much with your family?” she asked.

He shrugged. “My Aunt and Uncle take my cousin Dudley to the beach sometimes.”

Kali frowned. “You don’t go with them?”

“I’m not ever invited. So what are some big differences between how things were done at your other schools and how things are done here?” he asked eagerly; either because he was really interested in the topic or because he wanted to steer the conversation away from his life at home, she wasn’t sure.

She hesitated, but she didn’t want to push the matter if he was trying to politely brush her off. Maybe he wasn’t comfortable talking about his family to someone he barely knew, she had to accept that. So she told him about the different classes each school offered, the ups and downs of each curriculum, but it was her last comment that made Harry bristle: “Every other school I’ve attended also has a better reputation than Hogwarts.”

“Hogwarts is a great school,” he said, obviously offended on his school’s behalf.

“It’s an alright school, and it could definitely do with some improvements. In Hawaii the magical community is so small it’s like a second family; Argentina has the highest magical educational success rate in the world; San Francisco has the best curriculum imaginable; in Israel the school is completely government founded; and Ilvermorny has a reputation for being one of the most democratic, least elitist of all the great wizarding schools. Probably because it was co-founded by a Muggle.”

“It was founded by a Muggle?” he asked with a raise of his eyebrows.

“It was founded in the early seventeenth century by Isolt Sayre, an Irish immigrant, who was a witch, and her husband James Steward, who was a Muggle,” she explained. “Isolt Sayre also happened to be a descendant of Salazar Slytherin.” She paused before adding softly, “Not all things related to Slytherin are bad, you know?”

“I never said -” said Harry, eyes widening.

“I’ve seen the way you look at everyone who’s in Slytherin’s House,” she said.

“I don’t look at you like that,” he said quickly.

“No you don’t, but you do look at my housemates like that. Even those who’ve done nothing to you are met with distrust. It’s not just you either, it’s the entire Gryffindor House,” she said. “And it’s awful. No wonder it’s turned out so many dark witches and wizards: if you get treated like a monster long enough, that’s what you become.”

“I – I never thought -” he stammered.

“I know, that’s why I’m telling you. There’s a reason Slytherin House produced an absurd amount of Death Eaters; there are other factors of course, but these are very formative years for us. How other people see us and treat us has a huge impact on who we will become.”

Kali fell silent and Harry watched her thoughtfully. “What other Houses did the Sorting Hat think of putting you in?”

She shook her head. “Does it matter?”
“I think so, yes,” he said slowly.

She sighed. “I think you already know.”

“All of them.”

She smiled and nodded. “I value loyalty and fairness; intelligence and creativity; bravery and chivalry; cunning and ambition, equally. The Hat had a really hard time figuring out where to put me. It finally narrowed it down to Gryffindor and Slytherin, and then it let me choose.”

“Why choose Slytherin?”

“I have a point to prove.”

“What point’s that?”

“That not all Slytherins are bad,” she said. “That even being related to Salazar himself doesn’t make me evil.”

“You’re related to Salazar Slytherin?” he asked, his eyes widening and realization dawning. “That’s why you can speak Parseltongue.”

“I’m a direct descendant of Isolt Sayre, therefore also a direct descendant of Slytherin.”

Harry nodded slowly and her muscles tensed despite herself, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“You don’t have to ever talk to me again if you don’t want to,” she said finally when the silence became too much.

“Why wouldn’t I want to talk to you?” he asked surprised.

“I’m an heir of Salazar Slytherin’s, a man famous for hating Muggles and Muggle-borns alike; I’m distantly related to old Voldemort who’s already tried to kill you; and my father is Sirius Black who apparently wants to kill you.”

“You’re not them,” he said simply.

Kali stared at him, then smiled slowly. “Good answer, Potter.”

“You’re not what I expected,” he admitted.

She snorted. “For the daughter of a suspected mass murderer? Thanks.”

“No, really. You’re nice,” he said.

She grinned, and leaned in closer to him in a conspiratorial way. “I’m not actually that nice,” she whispered, winking at him and watching him blush. It was fun making him turn scarlet. “We should probably get back upstairs, your friends will be back from Hogsmeade soon enough.”

Despite what she’d said about Hogwarts’ mediocrity, its Halloween Feast was something to behold. The Great Hall 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, and even people who were full to bursting with Honeydukes sweets, managed second helpings of everything. The feast finished with 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 re-
enactment of his own botched beheading.

“That was the best Halloween Feast yet,” said Daphne as she, Kali, and Blaise collapsed on one of the silver lined couches in the Common Room.

The Slytherin Common Room was a large room, the largest in the castle, in fact. It was specifically designed for Slytherin use and Slytherin use only, and if a non-Slytherin walked through the hidden entrance down in the dungeons, the Common Room would cast an illusion over itself so that the unwanted visitors would get to witness none of the grandeur or the wealth that decorated the room, instead they would see a place which was damp, and cold, and bleak, and miserable. Whereas in reality, the Slytherin Common Room was none of those things. It was spacious, and luxurious, and comfortable, and perfectly suited to accommodate the needs and desires of all the little spoiled rich kids from prominent Pureblood families. The flames from the candles and the many fires flickered over the rivulets of solid silver which streaked the polished rock walls of the underground cavern, and a portion of the far wall, behind the giant snake statue, was made entirely of glass, giving a clear view into the dark depths of the lake. The room was dotted with so many aquariums, and statues, and bookshelves that it was impossible to get a clear view of the entire floor plan from anywhere in the room. It was structured like a twisting serpent with a winding path from the entrance to the main sitting area. Along that path, neatly tucked away in alcoves that ranged in size, were the Common Room’s own personal library; a couple of secondary sitting rooms that were more peaceful that the main one; the trophy room filled with centuries worth of prizes earned by Slytherins; potions counters full of bizarre ingredients and rare collections that allowed for experiments at any given time; and a study room equipped with desks and practice dummies to invite students to master every aspect of their education. The main lounge had no less than four roaring fireplaces, and enough couches and armchairs to comfortably sit every Slytherin in the school and then some. The high ceiling was domed like that of a cathedral and two beautifully carved stone balconies overlooked the circular sitting room. Those balconies belonged to two more drawing rooms, one for each of the dormitories.

Salazar Slytherin had spared no expense when he’d built this room and it showed.

“I cannot move,” said Kali, fingers trailing over the soft green blanket which had been thrown over the back of their couch. She’d eaten more than should have been physically possible, but she didn’t regret it for a moment.

“I still do not understand how you can eat the way you eat and look the way you look,” drawled Blaise, lounging on Kali’s other side.

“It’s called exercising,” said Kali. “You should try it, it’s fun.”

Blaise scoffed. “I am not agreeing to any activity that makes me get out of bed at the ridiculous hours you do.”

“I do not get out of bed at ridiculous hours.”

“I woke up at seven yesterday and you were already gone,” Daphne pointed out.

“Extenuating circumstances,” said Kali, “I had to finish the Transfiguration essay Professor McGonagall gave me.”

“You finished that essay days ago,” said Daphne.

“Which is why she gave me another one.” A lot of the teachers had started doing that: giving her extra work in class, extra homework for after class, recommending extra books to read… and Kali
was glad of it. There were only so many things you could do around here to keep yourself amused between classes, and a little extra credit never hurt anyone, especially when the teachers weren’t being strict about it. They gave her the outline of a topic and what she did with it was up to her.

Loud shouting sounded from the Common Room entrance and a few minutes later Percy Weasley, the Head Boy, elbowed his way into the main sitting room.

“You are all to make your way to the Great Hall immediately.”

“Why?” asked Gemma Farley, a Seventh Year prefect.

“Headmaster’s orders,” he said importantly. “Now get to it.”

Gemma was nice, but she did not appreciate being spoken to like that. Her eyes narrowed dangerously and everyone sat back to watch the fireworks, but they never came because a little boy in First or Second Year had run in after Percy, panting heavily, and shouted for all to hear:

“The Fat Lady’s missing! She was attacked. They’re saying it was Sirius Black!”
Chapter Summary

Snape teaches the DADA class after the full moon.

Chapter Notes

Barely explicit but still there homophobia in this chapter because Snape is a git - a well-written git - but a git nonetheless. Also this chapter and the next are heavy with Snape bashing, I’m presuming that big Snape supporters aren’t going to read a fic that has ‘Severus Snape bashing’ in the tags, but you never know so you’ve been warned.

Tuesday, November 30th, 1993,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Severus Snape,

A month had passed since Sirius Black’s break-in and still the rumours and speculations had yet to die down. He’d heard one stupid girl suggest that Black could turn into a flowering shrub. But Severus knew exactly how Black had gotten in: it ought to be obvious to anyone who knew about Black’s disgusting relationship with that half-breed Lupin. But Dumbledore had not heeded Severus’s warning, the old codger had gone and appointed that mutt as the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, and look what had happened. It was just fortunate that Azkaban had muddled Black’s brain so much that he could no longer tell what day it was; for him to pick the one evening when the entire Gryffindor tower would be empty was lucky indeed.

Two students scampered out of his way as he strode down the corridor, he snapped at them about loitering in the hallways and they scurried away rapidly.

Not only had that fool Dumbledore invited Black’s ticket into the castle to teach here, he’d also refused to let the dementors help capture that loathsome human being when he’d finally made his move. Black had been right here, somewhere in this castle, the dementors could have sniffed him out and thrown him back in his cell before the day was out, that was what they were here for, but Dumbledore wouldn’t let them in, wouldn’t let them near his precious students. The Minister had been livid when he’d found out, or as much so as Fudge was capable of becoming. It was no secret that he was under great pressure to get Black back and he never did well under pressure. But Dumbledore had been his usual infuriatingly calm self and had sent the Minister for Magic on his way with empty reassurances and half-kept promises. With that manipulative streak he would have done well in Slytherin.

Severus burst into the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, robes billowing, startling the students who were chattering away without a care in the world. There had been a full moon
yesterday and it had been a particularly exhausting one for Lupin whose guilty conscious over helping Black had no doubt leaked into the Wolf’s mind making for an unpleasant and painful night. Or perhaps it hadn’t been guilt, perhaps the half-breed was simply irritated that Black had failed. Either way he’d informed Dumbledore that he was in no state to teach today and the old man had offered the job to Severus for the day. It wasn’t permanent, Dumbledore had made that very clear, and Severus cursed him again because of it. Severus would make for a far better Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher than any of the worthless half-wits Dumbledore had hired for the job over the years, none of them were good enough to earn back the air they breathed, let alone teach. Each one was worse than the other and Lupin was no exception.

“I will be teaching this class today,” he said sharply, and his Slytherins smiled at him as the Gryffindors stared stupidly. Only Kali Black looked unsurprised by this news as she leaned back in her chair looking bored. How like her good-for-nothing father she was.

Granger raised her hand. “But sir -”

“Quiet,” he snapped, as he searched through Lupin’s orderless desk. “It would seem Professor Lupin does not have a lesson plan -”

He was interrupted by Potter yanking open the door and dashing into the classroom. Severus didn’t know why he was surprised. He was sure that Potter took full advantage of his less strict colleagues’ lack of leniency: arriving late; not doing the work; expecting to fly by on his name alone, just like his father. Severus wouldn’t stand for it. He’d built up the kind of reputation and authority over the years that meant that students were seldom late for his lessons, but when they were, they were severely punished.

“This lesson began ten minutes ago, Potter, so I think we’ll make it ten points from Gryffindor. Sit down.”

But showing his usual arrogance and lack of respect, Potter didn't move.

“Where’s Professor Lupin?” he demanded.

“He says he is feeling too ill to teach today,” said Severus with a twisted smile. “I believe I told you to sit down?”

But Potter stayed where he was. The nerve of that stupid boy.

“What's wrong with him?”

“Nothing life-threatening,” he said, although he wished it were. “Five more points from Gryffindor, and if I have to ask you to sit down again, it will be fifty.”

Potter walked intentionally slowly to his seat and sat down. Severus looked around at the class.

“As I was saying before Potter interrupted, Professor Lupin has not left any record of the topics you have covered so far -”

“Please, sir, we've done boggarts, Red Caps, kappas, and grindylows,” said Granger quickly, “and we're just about to start -”

“Be quiet,” he said coldly. He’d been hoping Lupin wouldn’t leave a clear note as to which topic he wished for Severus to cover with his class, this made Severus goal far easier to reach. “I did not ask for information. I was merely commenting on Professor Lupin’s lack of organization.”
“He's the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher we've ever had,” said the Thomas boy boldly, and there was a murmur of agreement from the rest of the class.

Of course these cretins had bought into Lupin’s act: with his cardigans and elbow patches, and his gentle manners and even-temper, who could imagine the beast hidden within?

“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 chapter at the very back.

“Werewolves,” he said, twisting his lips to hide his sneer.

Black had sat up and was glaring at him. She had a much better glare than her father, but Severus did not flinch away from it, he delighted in it. How easy it was to break her composure.

“But, sir,” said Granger, with that irritating inability to restrain herself, “we're not supposed to do werewolves yet, we're 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 Severus.

They all sat in motionless silence, too bone-idle to read a simple textbook before coming to class; all except for Granger, whose hand, as it so often did, had shot pompously straight into the air.

“Anyone?” he said, ignoring the annoying girl.

Black raised her hand slowly, glaring daggers at him, but he ignored her too. He couldn’t have her twisting the facts to suit herself and Lupin, now could he? 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 the Patil twin that was in Gryffindor. He wouldn’t have been able to say what her first name was. He didn’t care. “We haven't got as far as werewolves yet, we're still on -”

“Silence!” he snarled. “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….”

“Please, sir,” said Granger, whose hand was still in the air, “the werewolf differs from the true wolf in several small ways. The snout of the werewolf -”

“That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,” he said coolly. “Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all.”

The girl went red, put down her hand, and lowered her head in shame, and if he was not mistaken her eyes were full of tears. Good, she was finally learning her place.

“You asked us a question and she knows the answer!” Weasley said loudly. “Why ask if you don't want to be told?”
Severus drew in his anger at being spoken to like that, and advanced slowly on the boy as the room held its breath.

“Detention, Weasley,” he said silkily, his face very close to the awful boy’s. “And if I ever hear you criticize the way I teach a class again, you will be very sorry indeed.”

No one made a sound throughout the rest of the lesson. They sat and made notes on werewolves from the textbook, while Severus prowled up and down the rows of desks, examining the work they 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…."

When the bell rang at last, Severus held them back. He was not done with them yet.

“You will each write an essay, to be handed in to 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.”

Everyone left quickly, except for Weasley, who reluctantly walked up to the front desk, and Black, who sat at her own desk, arms crossed over her chest, scowling at him. She hadn’t stopped glowering since the beginning of the lesson.

“Can I help you with something, Miss Black?” he asked, taking a perverse joy in her rage.

“I would like to have a word with you, sir,” she said through clenched teeth.

“Give me a moment to deal with Weasley first,” he said, sneering at her as she nodded stiffly and a muscle jumped in her jaw.

Black had spent the past two months humiliating him in his classroom, questioning him and criticizing him. No matter how many detentions he gave her, no matter what he made her do during those hours, she never seemed to care and she never stopped, at least now she knew he was not someone to cross.

“Well,” he snapped. The boy had been ogling Black, but Severus drew his attention back to him. “You spoke out of turn today and that is unacceptable. I am your teacher and you must learn some respect.” He paused, lips twisting in a nasty smile. “As punishment, you shall report to the hospital wing every evening this week, and you shall scrub out the bedpans. Without magic.”

Weasley turned furiously red, and he opened his big mouth, no doubt about to say something uncouth that would extend his punishment.

“Unless you wish to make it two weeks, I would suggest you leave,” Severus warned.

Weasley pressed his lips together tightly and stormed out. Severus turned his focus onto Black.

“Know that I am not in the mood for your mindless defiance, Miss Black, so unless you wish to find yourself in detention with Mr. Weasley, I would suggest you think carefully about what you’re about to say.”

“Oh, I know exactly what I’m going to say,” she snapped. “What is your problem?”

“You want to be mindful of that tongue of yours, it will get you into serious trouble one day,” he said smoothly. Obviously Lupin was not only a terrible teacher, he was also a terrible parent, if Black’s
complete lack of respect for authority figures was anything to go by.

“But I’m curious. I take it you’re hoping that my classmates will think back to this lesson, take a look at Remus, and put two and two together, right? Why?”

“I merely thought that werewolves would make for an interesting topic.”

“Bullshit.”

“Language,” he said, but it lacked any bite. She was so like her father, so easy to get worked up.

“Are you that desperate for the Defence Against the Dark Arts position that you’re willing to get Remus exposed and sacked? Putting his life on the line for a job? Except you’re too cowardly to do it yourself because that would mean facing Dumbledore’s anger, so you manipulate your students into doing it for you, you cockroach.”

“That is enough!” he shouted, standing behind his desk. “I will not be spoken to like this. You owe me your respect -”

“I owe you nothing,” she snarled. “You had my respect until you started abusing your authority; that was your choice, and if you have been led to believe that choices do not have consequences then I apologize but you are mistaken.”

“If you continue to speak to me in that tone, I will -”

“You’ll what? Take away house points? We both know you won’t do that. Give me more detentions? Go ahead. Because that is all you can do, you powerless, pathetic, little man. You can’t suspend me or expel me, only the Headmaster can do that, and we both know that he won’t. So what will you do?”

Severus felt like he was about to explode: his skin felt too tight and had gone blotchy and red; he was uncomfortably warm, sweating beneath his heavy robes; and he was angry. Furious. The likes of which he had never been before. He wanted to smother that defiant flame that was making her eyes glow feverishly bright. He wanted to break her.

“It may have escaped your notice,” he said, forcing himself to sound calm, “but that half-breed you call a guardian is a monster, just like your father is a monster, and sooner or later they will both be put down like the animals they are.”

The muscle in her jaw jumped again, but beyond that she didn’t move. He’d half expected an attack, his hand was gripping his wand tightly just in case. Sirius would have attacked; in fact, the one time Severus had mentioned Lupin being put down in front of him, Sirius had attacked: the half-breed comment had always earned Severus a hex, but that statement had landed him in the hospital wing for two weeks. Kali didn’t say anything for a long time, but her eyes burned brighter than ever; her hands didn’t leave the top of her desk, but he could see her brightly coloured nails digging into the wood; she held her every muscle so tense that she was quivering from it; and for just a moment – before he managed to stomp it down – Severus felt fear.

“I don’t see how you can judge who the monsters are,” she said, her voice unnervingly calm, despite the fire behind her glare. “After all, what happens to Remus is completely beyond his control. His condition was forced on him. But you? You actively chose to become a monster.”

Her tone made him go rigid and he narrowed his eyes at her. “I don’t know what you’re referring to, Miss Black.”
She smiled, except it wasn’t a smile at all. It was a baring of the teeth: it was cold and calculated, and it sent a chill down his spine, and if ever he’d doubted that she belonged in Slytherin, his scepticism was alleviated with that one look.

“Do you not? If you were to roll up your left sleeve, there wouldn’t be anything noteworthy branded into your skin, would there?”

Severus seethed. “Lupin told you.”

“No. Unlike you, Remus is a good person. He wouldn’t go around revealing secrets he has no right revealing. But I am perfectly capable of figuring people’s secrets out on my own. I won’t tell anyone about it, because Remus wouldn’t want me to. Perhaps you could thank him for that.”

He sneered, he wouldn't be thanking that mutt for anything. Black rose to her feet and collected her bag.

“Pull a stunt like the one you pulled today again,” she said, while maintaining eye contact, “and you will discover exactly how much of a disruptive influence I can be.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“Are you only just catching on? We’ve already established that there is nothing you can do to stop me, therefore I have the upper hand. It isn’t difficult, Professor, if you want me to play nicely, you will have to do the same.”

“This isn’t a game, Black.”

She smirked: it was an expression Severus had seen not only on Sirius, but on Regulus also, and on Narcissa, and Bellatrix, and Andromeda; an expression that marked the Black family resemblance more than any physical trait ever could.

“Of course it’s a game,” she said, and she sauntered gracefully out of the classroom with a confident stride, her hair swaying down her back, and for a moment Severus hated her more than he had ever hated anyone else: more than he hated his father who’d drank away his problems; more than he hated his mother who’d married that man; more than James Potter who’d thought he was better than everyone else; more than Harry Potter who was his father’s son; more than Peter Pettigrew who’d witlessly followed his friends’ example; more than Sirius Black who’d tried to kill him; more than Remus Lupin who was nothing more than a beast.

She thought that she was better than him, but she was not. She was arrogant and reckless and impulsive, just like her father. But she was also a Slytherin, and she had inherited other of her family’s characteristics which had passed over her father, but which made her all the more dangerous. Severus would not forget to take those into account from now on.

He hated her, and he would make her regret showing him such disrespect.
Chapter Summary

Kali and Pan go up against the twins and Kali finds a way to get back at Snape.

Chapter Notes

Brief mention of rape and of a suicide attempt, and a fictional solution to rape culture which may be a tad on the violent side; and more Snape bashing.

Tuesday, November 30th, 1993,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

“He’s a despicable human being,” Kali ranted, pacing up and down Remus’s comfy little living room in his quarters.

Remus had decided to eat in tonight rather than battle the castle's many staircases. So after dinner, Kali had gone to see the house-elves in the kitchens to thank them for the meal and they’d piled as much food into her arms as she could carry, and she’d brought it all up to Remus who’d still been ravenous – unsurprisingly. It was after he’d asked her about her day and she’d skirted around the topic of Snape’s Defence the Dark Arts lesson that he’d realized something was wrong. Unfortunately he was a smart man who knew her far too well: he was quick to figure out that if she was refusing to talk about it, then it had something to do with him, and that she was trying to protect his feelings by keeping it from him. She’d forced herself to tell him then, because she knew that his imagination and fretting would blow it out of proportion if he was left in the dark. She told him and she saw the look in his eyes, despite how he tried to hide it: the hurt, and the worry, and the disgust – not directed at Snape, but at himself; and she’d felt the familiar itching in her veins of anger boiling just beneath the surface, because how dare he be angry with himself? How dare he blame himself and hate himself? But shouting at him would do no good, telling him he was worth more would do no good, it never did. So she turned her rage onto the person who most deserved it.

“He’s cruel and bigoted and he’s not fit to teach.”

Remus didn’t say anything. He sat back, and he let her pace and shout, and he let her be angry.

“Not only did that git deliberately take away your chance to teach about an issue that personally affects you, to teach it as it should be taught, to educate students that people with lycanthropy should be treated, not as monsters, but as people with an affliction; but he also took away our chance to learn about werewolves from the unique perspective of someone who is personally affected by the issue and bloody grew up with it. He took away your right to represent yourself, and for that he’s -”
She was too frustrated to find the words so she groaned and dropped onto the couch, running her hands through her hair.

“I hate him,” she said instead. “I hate him and he deserves worse than what I did to Ryan.”

Remus hadn’t been in the most jovial of moods before, but the mention of Ryan sent him into a panic.

“Kali -”

“I won’t do anything,” she said stiffly, she did not want to go through that lecture again, “because I know that it will upset you, but know that that is the only reason. If I thought I could get away with it….” She shook her head and stared off out the window. Tears were stinging in her eyes, and her voice shook as she said: “He’s a bad person.”

Remus sighed and came to sit next to her, wrapping his arm around her shoulders and resting his chin on top of her head. “I know, sweetheart, but we do not lower ourselves to that level, because if we do then we’re not better than he is.”

“So we let him get away with it?”

Another sigh, this one heavier than the last. “No. But you have to learn to choose your battles.”

“Will you be mad if I choose this one?”

“I won’t be mad. But promise me you won’t….” His sentence trailed off uncomfortably but she knew what he’d meant to say.

“There will not be another Ryan incident, I promise,” she said softly, and he kissed the top of her head and moved on to a less troublesome conversation topic, but Kali’s mind was elsewhere.

Ryan Denton had been a student at Ilvermory when Kali had been there. He’d been in his last year, while Kali was in her first, and halfway through the second semester Kali had found a girl bleeding out in one of the bathrooms. Isla Jones had slit her wrists after Ryan had forced her to do things…. The school nurse had gotten to her in time, but Isla was never the same after. She’d been too frightened and humiliated to testify, and despite all the proof against Ryan, the faculty had done nothing. Kali had never been so angry. She’d wanted to hurt him, to break him like he’d tried to break Isla; so that’s what she did. It took her a couple of months, but eventually she’d managed it: using information and techniques that she’d been taught by both Remus and Grandpa Lyall, she’d trapped a dozen boggarts in an old classroom that was never used, then she’d led Ryan into that room and locked him in.

She wasn’t proud of what she did, but neither was she remorseful; it wasn’t the best way to deal with the situation, but he’d deserved to be punished, and Isla had deserved to walk the halls of Ilvermory without having to see him there laughing with his friends without a care in the world. Ryan had been sent to a magical mental institute in New York where he remained to this day, and Isla was now working to become an Auror for the MACUSA; Pan kept trying to use this as proof that being judge, jury, and executioner all in one wasn’t necessarily a bad thing, but Kali knew that so long as Remus was around she would never pull a stunt like that again, because she never again wanted him to to look at her the way he had when he’d found out what she’d done.

She’d find another way to deal with Snape.

***
Kali was woken by a strong clap of thunder on the morning of the Quidditch match. The weather had been horrendous all week, but it had worsened steadily as the match drew nearer.

“I would not want to fly in this,” said Pan, who was currently outside rolling around in the mud as an elephant, while the rain and hail beat down on him.

“This is ridiculous,” she said, pulling on the warmest clothes she could find as quietly as possible so as to not wake up her roommates. “The players aren’t going to be able to see anything. They should cancel the match.”

“It’s Quidditch,” he said, shaking off the mud and smoothly diving beneath the turbulent surface of the lake as a narwhal, “you don’t cancel Quidditch.”

“That is a terrible rule.” She sneaked out of the dorm, only to realize there was no need: her roommates beds were empty. “What time is it?”

“How should I know?” he said unhelpfully.

She found her watch on her nightstand: half past eight. She’d slept in, which wasn’t all that surprising given what time she’d gone to bed last night. Shrugging it off she got to the Common Room in time to hear Draco and the rest of the Slytherin Quidditch team lamenting to the gathered crowd Draco’s untimely injury which made them unable to play today. Kali scoffed as she passed and she did not go unheard.

“You got something to say, Black?” grunted Marcus Flint, the team’s Captain, a tall, and broad, dark-haired boy who was repeating his Seventh Year because he’d failed his exams the first time around.

“Do not engage,” Pan warned while he played at poking random Grindylows hidden in the seaweed with his sword-like tooth then transforming into a pygmy seahorse until they calmed down, and starting all over again.

Predictably, she ignored him. “Just wondering whether Draco enjoys playing the weakling.”

“I’m not weak,” Draco spat.

“I didn’t say you were weak, I said you were pretending to be, either because you’re a drama queen or because you’re too scared to go up against Gryffindor in this weather.”

“I’m not scared.”

"Then you admit to being a drama queen?"

"No!" His cheeks were tinged red and she was almost convinced he was going to stamp his foot.

"Then why back out of the game?"

"My arm isn’t healed yet."

"You managed to play during the Slytherin versus Ravenclaw match last month."

“I guess I overexerted it.”
“Of course, I didn’t realize you were so frail.”

“I am not frail!”

“It’s one or the other: either you’re worried your teammates and yourself aren’t good enough to beat the Gryffindor team; or your body’s too weak to heal from an insignificant little scratch. Or perhaps it’s both.”

“I was attacked by a hippogriff!”

“And I saved your hide before any real damage could be done, remember that? Regardless, I was only asking because if the reason for not playing is the weather, then I was wondering if you recalled that the Gryffindor Seeker wears glasses?”

“Of course I know Potter wears glasses, his eyesight’s as awful as the rest of him.”

“Knowing that, did you stop to think that perhaps the rain might be more detrimental to his vision than it is to yours?” Silence. “I’ve seen him play during his practices: he’s good; better than you and you know it. There’s nothing wrong with that, but given the circumstances, you want to be taking every advantage you can get, and low visibility would have worked for you. So I just wanted to say that this may not have been a good strategy on your part; but good luck trying to beat Gryffindor when the weather gets better.”

She walked away, leaving them staring after her open-mouthed. Spotting Daphne over by one of the small clusters of armchairs, Kali headed for her.

“You really shouldn’t rile them up like that,” said Daphne, looking up from her book as Kali plopped down in the seat in front of hers.

“I wouldn’t do if they weren’t such gits.”

“Just so you know: if you wear red and gold to the Gryffindor versus Slytherin game, I’m going to pretend I don’t know you.”

Kali smirked. “And here I was, thinking we were friends.”

“We are friends, but I’m not as perilously impulsive as you are.”

“I’m not impulsive,” she scoffed. “All my actions are perfectly well thought out beforehand.”

“That makes it so much worse.”

The girls laughed and headed up to breakfast.

Despite the thunderstorm, the whole school turned out to watch the match, but they ran down the lawns toward the Quidditch field, heads bowed against the ferocious wind, umbrellas being whipped out of their hands as they went. Rather than risk an umbrella, Kali used a Water Repelling Charm to keep herself and her friends dry, but it did nothing to protect them from the strong gusts that had them staggering sideways as they walked to the elevated bleachers. It wasn’t much better after they found seats: the wind roared; the thunder rumbled overhead; the gale pounded against the stands around them; the trees in the Forbidden Forest swayed and creaked; and they could barely hear the crowd cheering over the fresh rolls of thunder. It was difficult to concentrate on anything but the weather.

The players walked out onto the field, blurry outlines of scarlet-red and canary-yellow, and Kali
thought that perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing Slytherin wasn't playing today, because with the team’s darkly coloured Quidditch robes they wouldn’t be visible at all. Kali didn’t hear the whistle blow, but it must of done because fourteen players rose up into the stormy sky, swerving slightly with the wind.

Even with her enhanced vision she had to squint to see anything, and still it was just blurs. She could barely make out the commentary, but from what she could gather Gryffindor was in the lead although only barely.

The sky was getting darker and darker and it was impossible to distinguish which team each player belonged; everyone was now so wet, and the rain so thick, you could hardly tell them apart....

With the first flash of lightning came the sound of Madam Hooch's whistle; the Gryffindor Captain had called a time-out and the teams splashed down into the mud.

“What’s the score?” Blaise shouted to be heard over the clap of thunder.

“Gryffindor is fifty points up,” Kali shouted back.

“They better catch the Snitch soon or we’ll be here all night.”

The game was back on, the forked lightning adding some much needed light to the pitch, but making it all the more dangerous to be out here. Someone needed to catch the Snitch right now.

Just as that thought crossed her mind another flash of lightning illuminated the Hufflepuff Seeker, Cedric Diggory, pelting up the field, a tiny speck of gold shimmering in the rain-filled air in front of him. Harry noticed it too, and he threw himself flat on to his broom handle and zoomed toward the Snitch.

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 Kali had gone suddenly deaf – what was going on?

And then a horribly familiar wave of cold swept over her, inside her, just as she became aware of something moving on the field below...

At least a hundred dementors, their hidden faces pointing up at the players, were standing beneath them. It was as though freezing water were rising in Kali’s chest, cutting at her insides...

“Kali, block them out.” Pan’s voice broke through the icy mist and she clung to it. She melded her mind with his, feeling the wind slice through his feathers, the rain weighing him down, his talons catching in the soaking wet material of scarlet Quidditch robes –

Kali snapped her eyes open and jumped to her feet. Harry had fallen from his broom; Pan was slowing his fall as best as he could but the weight difference made it a fruitless battle. A tall figure rushed out onto the field, and with a short wand wave Harry’s fall lost its momentum, like he was plummeting in slow motion, and he hit the ground with much less force than he’d been going to.

Pan turned into a tiger and stood over Harry’s limp body protectively, baring his teeth at the approaching dementors. The tall man – Dumbledore – started shouting furiously at the hooded figures, but they kept advancing until he cast a Patronus and a silvery phoenix shot out of the tip of his wand and the dementors scattered. Pan watched Dumbledore warily as the anger etched into the old man’s face faded away until it remained only in his blazing blue eyes.

“I can take it from here, Pandoran,” he said softly, but Pan didn’t uncoil his muscles.
“Let him help,” said Kali and he slowly moved off of Harry.

The rest of the players all landed in the mud with a squelch and Dumbledore magicked Harry onto a stretcher, quickly walking up to the school with Harry floating beside him, before the boy’s teammates could crowd in. Pan followed at a trot; his sharp hearing focused on Harry’s uneven breathing and thundering heartbeats, and Kali’s own heart rate unwittingly sped up to match his.

There was a commotion down on the pitch; Diggory was waving the Snitch around, trying to get Madam Hooch to agree to a Hufflepuff versus Gryffindor rematch, but he’d caught the Snitch before Harry had fallen, fair and square. People were rushing from the stands to the castle, and Daphne dragged Kali along with them.

***

Sunday, December 5th, 1993

Harry’s fall was the talk of the school that day. There was a brief worry among the students that he hadn’t survived it which was quickly dissipated when his teammates were let into the hospital wing to visit him. Professor Flitwick carried in the remains of Harry’s broom which had flown straight into the Whomping Willow after he’d fallen, and Kali hexed Draco’s vocal cords to make him sound like a monkey whenever he opened his mouth after he made some disparaging comments regarding Harry’s flying skills and the Gryffindor team’s dwindling chances at winning the Quidditch Cup.

Madam Pomfrey insisted on keeping Harry in the hospital wing for the rest of the weekend, and while Kali had joined in his steady stream of visitors, Pan had refused to leave his side ever since the fall.

It was on Sunday night, when Kali was wandering the halls – very much out of bounds – that Harry had his worst nightmare yet. He’d had a couple last night, waking Pan up with all his thrashing and shouting, but nothing compared to this. She was only a couple of corridors away from the hospital wing so that’s where she went, once there though she wasn’t sure what to do, but she needn’t have bothered thinking about it because Harry jerked awake a couple of minutes after she got there.

He looked terrified: his eyes were wide and his breathing erratic; and he reached for his glasses on the nightstand, slamming them on and searching the room skittishly, pausing as his gaze landed on Kali.

“Kali,” he said a little breathlessly. “It’s past curfew, you shouldn’t be here.”

“You keep waking me up,” she said, gesturing at Pan who was snuggled against Harry’s side purring.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to .”

She dropped into one of the chairs beside his bed. “Don’t apologize. He’s the one who refuses to leave.”

The oncilla chirped. “There’s this little something called watchful vigilance, look it up.”

Kali smiled and rolled her eyes. “Here I thought it was called being an overprotective worrywart, silly me.”

“Just because you have a complete disregard for care and safety does not mean the feeling is
“He appears to have taken a liking to you,” she said, watching as Harry’s smiled bloomed, and he looked down at the small feline fondly, scratching him under the ruff around his face. “So what’s keeping you up at night?”

Harry’s smile faded.

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to,” she said quickly. She didn’t want to overstep despite how worried she was. “But you should tell someone, Ron or Hermione, or anyone.”

Harry’s eyes searched her face for something, and whatever it was, he must have found it because he told her everything.

He told her about the Grim appearing to him twice, and how both appearances had been followed by near-fatal accidents; the first time, he had nearly been run over by the Knight Bus; the second, he’d fallen fifty feet from his broomstick. He worried that the Grim might haunt him until he did die, that he’d have to spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder for the beast. He told her about the dementors; how he felt sick and humiliated every time he thought of them. Everyone said the dementors were horrible, but no one else collapsed every time they went near one. No one else heard echoes in their head of their dying parents. But when the dementors approached him, he heard the last moments of his mother’s life, her attempts to protect him from Lord Voldemort, and Voldemort’s laughter before he murdered her. And he told her that when he fell asleep, he sank into dreams full of clammy, rotted hands and petrified pleading, and every time, he would jerk awake to dwell again on his mother’s voice.

Kali listened silently, letting the words spill out of him like a confession. By the time he was done he looked drained, and Kali let his words sink in.

“I don’t think you’re going to die,” she said after a moment’s thought. “There are accounts of the Grim existing, but there’s no solid proof that it’s ever failed before or shown up more than once with the same person – that I know of – I’ll look into it. But it happening twice is still just a coincidence, if it gets to three then it becomes a pattern. We’ll worry about it more seriously then. Just try not to die in the meantime.”

Harry chuckled. “I’ll do my best.”

“As for the dementors: they feed off of happiness by dragging up bad memories. You went through something very traumatic at a very young age, they must sense that somehow and are drawn to you because of it.”

“How do you know all this?”

“My surrogate father’s the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher this school has ever seen, remember? That and I’m really very clever.” She winked at him and he laughed with her.

“I should let you get some sleep,” she said. “Goodnight, Harry.”

“Goodnight, Kali.”

“Oh, and Harry?” she said, stopping at the door. “Talk to Remus about the dementors. He can help.”

***

_Thursday, December 9th, 1993_,
It had started with Fred and George Weasley laying a Dungbomb trap outside the Slytherin common room on Monday morning after the match. Unfortunately for them, it was Kali who set it off. She laughed it off but warned the twins that she’d get even. Sure enough she did. The next day the twins woke up with bright purple hair and eyebrows longer than Dumbledore’s beard. They took their vengeance by charming a serving dish of Banoffee pie to fly straight at her face during dinner; she ducked just in time and it hit a Ravenclaw Sixth Year who’d been passing behind her, starting a full scale food fight which only ended when Professor McGonagall received a face full of whipped cream. After that, the pranks went back and forth between Fred and George, and Kali and Pan, each pair trying to outdo the other. As the good-natured rivalry went on, the magic used got more and more impressive: Kali charmed every staircase in the castle to turn into a slide the minute one of the twins got past the fourth step, regardless of whether they were going up or down; the twins somehow transformed her hair into many long, writhing snakes sticking out of her head; she cast a spell that made them dance the Time Warp at random throughout the day; and so on. Flitwick had congratulated Kali and the twins a couple of times on their perfect spellwork. Even McGonagall, who was very much against these kinds of shenanigans, was left in awe despite herself at the mastery of magic she witnessed. Everyone knew who was responsible but the four of them were always clever enough not to leave any evidence that was too incriminating.

One day, after Snape had been particularly vile during class, Kali decided to enchant every coat of armour in the castle to sing ‘You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch’, modifying it slightly so that the song included Snape’s name instead. She’d completed the spell on all the lower levels of the castle and was halfway through the sixth floor when Peeves came to say hello.

“What trouble is little Kali getting into today?” he asked, floating above her as she cast the spell again and again.

She didn’t look up at him, too focused on getting the charm just right. “Hello, Peeves.”

“Does Kali need help with her scheme?”

“Are you offering?”

“Oh I believe I am,” he sang, “there's something quite alluring about your brand of chaos.”

She finished and smiled up at him. “Well, in that case, could you keep Filch busy for awhile while I finish up.”

He bowed lowly, his nose brushing against his curly tipped shoes. “It would be my pleasure.” And he zoomed off down the corridor.

She was about to start on another coat of armour when the hairs on the back of her neck tingled, warning her that someone was behind her. She checked the coat of armour for a reflection but saw nothing. She turned slowly and spotted a tabby cat with spectacle markings around its eyes.

“Hello, Professor,” she said, relaxing slightly.

McGonagall transformed back into herself, staring with narrow eyes at Kali and her drawn wand. “May I ask what it is you’re doing, Miss Black?”

“Nothing much, Professor.”

“I don’t believe that for one second,” said McGonagall, eyes searching up and down the corridor for anything amiss. “For someone who’s so often in trouble you’d really think you’d be a better liar.”
“I don’t need to be a better liar,” said Kali with a winning smile to distract McGonagall from looking too closely at the coats of armour. “I’m so utterly charming people let me off easy.”

The Professor scoffed, but her lips twitched as though she was holding back a smile. “Be that as it may, if anything abnormal happens down this corridor in the near future, I’ll know who’s to blame.”

“I can assure you, Professor, nothing abnormal will happen down this corridor today.” Tomorrow, however…

McGonagall nodded swiftly and began walking away when Kali was hit with an idea.

“Professor?” McGonagall stopped and turned. “I was wondering if you could help me with something.”

“What is it, Miss Black?”

“I was down in the trophy room earlier, and I noticed that Slytherin has won the House Cup an inexplicable number of times over the past ten years.”

A scowl of displeasure crossed McGonagall’s features. “Yes, I’d noticed that also.”

“It coincides with Professor Snape’s tenure here.”

“What are you implying, Miss Black?” McGonagall asked.

“I’m implying that Slytherin students don’t, overall, have a better academic performance or better behaviour than students in other Houses, not enough so to justify us winning so many times. What we do have, though, is a Head of House who blatantly favours us.”

The Professor was looking at her curiously and let out a loud sigh. “It isn’t your place to question Hogwarts professors, Miss Black.”

“It is when the Headmaster and the rest of the teachers won’t. You’re all very smart people, so I imagine you’re aware of the situation, are you not?”

“Miss Black -”

But Kali kept going before McGonagall could shut her down. “But if you know what’s going on, then you’re being harrowingly negligent toward your students by letting such an unfair situation continue.”

The Professor had her mouth open as though about to speak, but the words had gotten lost along the way.

“You’re a good person, Professor, so I can only assume that Professor Snape is teaching here against your wishes. But still, this problem must be dealt with.”

Professor McGonagall was frowning at her. “What do you suggest?”

“By my count, my actions and those of my housemates in all seven years should have led to a combined eighty-five point deduction, if Snape weren’t so biased and treated us as he treats everyone else. Minus an extra ninety points that he’s awarded to his students undeservedly. So one hundred and seventy-five points total. I require you take those points away from us.”

McGonagall stared at her, baffled. “You want me take over a hundred points from Slytherin?”
Kali shrugged. “Professor Snape won’t dock points off Slytherin, trust me, I’ve tried to make him. But if you do, and you make him know why, perhaps it will incite him to act more fairly in the future.”

“You realize this will penalize your own House.”

Kali smiled. “The game is rigged in Slytherin’s favour. Professor Snape is setting his own House up to win through absolutely no merit of our own, and winning is of no value if it isn’t earned.”

“You’re full of surprises, aren’t you?” said McGonagall thoughtfully.

“So you’ll do it?”

But the Professor shook her head. “I can’t undermine another teacher’s authority like that. I’m sorry.”

“Well, the other option is that I cause just the right amount of chaos that you and the other teachers are forced to take the points from Slytherin for my awful behaviour. But I figured you wouldn’t approve of that alternative.”

“Are you threatening to unleash hell on this school if you don’t get what you want, Miss Black?” McGonagall asked, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

“I wouldn’t call it threatening,” Kali said sweetly.

McGonagall’s smile broke through, softening her strict features. “I’ll see what I can do. So don’t go blowing up half the school just yet.”

Kali grinned as McGonagall walked away. “That went better than expected.”

“Do you think it’ll work?” asked Pan who was in the dungeons, spying on Fred and George.

“I don’t know. I get the feeling Snape isn’t here because he has a passion for teaching; he certainly doesn’t like his students. But until we can figure out what’s making him stay, I don’t think we’ll be able to make him leave.”

“We can try, though, and we can make him wish he did.”

Kali agreed wholeheartedly and carried on charming the suits of armour. Her patience could be endless when the cause was right, and she promised herself that by the time she left this school, Snape would no longer be teaching in it.
Chapter Summary

In which I have a lot of feelings about little Ginny and the trauma she went through during her first year at Hogwarts.

Friday, December 10th, 1993,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Ginny Weasley,

Hogwarts wasn’t supposed to be like this. Hogwarts was supposed to be fun and magical like her brothers had described it. It wasn’t supposed to involve Ginny hiding away in an unused classroom, crying her eyes out on the dusty floor for the third time this week. She wiped her nose on the tattered sleeve of her robes and opened a folded piece of parchment that someone had stuffed into her Transfiguration textbook.

‘Dark Witch go home!’ it read.

The note crumpled in her fist and she sobbed harder. Ever since school had started back up in September, people had been glaring at her in the halls and calling her names as they shoved past her; her roommates pretended she didn’t exist; and the rest of her housemates either did the same or simply didn’t notice her at all. They blamed her for what had happened last year with the Muggle-borns and the Basilisk and Harry. They thought she was a Death Eater in league with You-Know-Who, and they wanted nothing to do with her. She supposed she couldn’t blame them: if she had the choice, she wouldn’t want anything to do with herself either.

She felt dirty and tainted after last year’s events, and no matter how much Bill and her mother tried to reassure her that none of it was her fault, and no matter how much the rest of her family tried to pretend it hadn’t happened, it didn’t help. She’d had her mind and body stolen from her by a force so evil that it had slowly drained the life from her. You-Know-Who had been in her head for a whole year; he’d seen her thoughts and imbued them with his own; and she hadn’t been able to fight it, hadn’t even been aware it was happening. If she’d been stronger and smarter, if she hadn’t let him in, then none of it would have happened: none of those Muggle-borns would have gotten hurt; Hagrid wouldn’t have been sent to Azkaban; Harry wouldn’t have had to put himself in danger to save her; and she wouldn’t now have this gnawing feeling in her stomach that was slowly eating away at her.

She cried until she couldn’t anymore, until she felt so numb she couldn’t feel a thing. Then she lay there, alone and breathing in the dust.

Things had been so much better over the summer. Far from Hogwarts she’d been able to forget about it all. She went to visit Bill in Egypt with the rest of her family; she spent endless days at the Burrow swimming in the pond, and exploring the orchard next to the house, and watching her brothers play Quidditch. But when they’d gone to Diagon Alley to get their school supplies, the dread had settled in her mind, only to grow and grow as the 1st of September approached. When finally it was time to
board the train, she’d stuck by Ron, Hermione, and Harry, hoping their high spirits would dissipate her oncoming panic, but then Ron told her to go away, and that hope shattered. She’d found an empty compartment to sit in and every time other students had popped their heads in in search of empty seats she’d smiled at them, but each of them had taken one look at her and changed their mind. When the train had stopped and the lights had gone out, she’d made her way to where Ron and his friends were sitting, and when the dementor showed up… she’d never felt so cold in her life, and images had flashed through her mind: Hermione and all the other Muggle-borns dead on the floor; Harry bleeding out with a Basilisk fang embedded in his skin; and You-Know-Who laughing as Ginny wrote one final message on the castle walls, this time using her own blood as it trailed from her wrist…

The sounds of students in the corridors, pulled her from her memories and she struggled to her feet. She wiped away the tears, but she knew it wouldn’t help: her eyes were red and puffy from all the crying; her face was blotchy and tear-stained; her hair was lank and knotted from her running her hands through it too often; and her robes were threadbare and covered in dust. She wished she knew more magic, then she could fix her appearance with a snap of her fingers and no one would know she’d been crying. But she couldn’t, so she rubbed at her eyes, smoothed back her hair, and peered out the door to check that the coast was clear. The corridor was empty. She hurried out, keeping her head down just in case, turned a corner, and ran right into someone.

“Sorry,” the other person said quickly, hands gripping Ginny’s shoulders to keep her upright.

She glanced up very quickly and her eyes widened on Kali Black, the girl who was quickly climbing the Slytherin food chain, and who was related to the infamous Sirius Black. “I’m s-sorry, I didn’t see you there.”

“It’s okay,” Kali replied. “I wasn’t watching where I was going either.”

Ginny lowered her gaze back down to her feet, hoping that Kali would walk around her and carry on her way, but she didn’t. Ginny felt panic bubble in her chest and, as discreetly as possible, looked for an escape route, that was when her eyes caught on Pandoran and she gasped. The dog that had been trotting faithfully beside Kali was huge, the size of a bear, with long, sharp teeth clearly visible in his open mouth.

“He won’t hurt you, if that’s what you’re worried about,” Kali said. Her voice was very gently and Ginny almost thought she’d imagined it.

As though to prove this, Pandoran transformed into a tiny spotted feline which was far too cute to look threatening. Ginny gasped and the daemon changed again, this time into a rabbit, then into a fennec fox, and Ginny felt a tentative smile flit onto her face. She hadn’t smiled in months, tentative or otherwise.

“Perhaps a peacock would be more appropriate,” Kali said as Pandoran changed into a wombat. The daemon glared at her and made a harsh rasping noise, but he did turn into a peacock and flaunted his impressively beautiful tail.

From there he turned into a harp seal, and then settled for the form of a Friesian horse when Ginny’s eyes felt like they were about to pop out of her head. She raised a hand to stroke his muzzle, but quickly thought better of it and took a step back. Pandoran huffed and stepped forward, lowering his big head to her hand. She stroked him uncertainly, staring at him in awe.

“What’s your name?” Kali asked, smiling at her.

“Ginny – Ginny Weasley,” she said timidly.
“Kali Black,” she said. “And the show-off is Pan.”

“He’s beautiful,” said Ginny, and Pan whinnied and tossed his head happily.

Kali laughed, the sound startling Ginny. “You’ve just made a friend. He likes you,” said Kali, stroking her hand along Pan’s side as he moved his head to the side of Ginny’s face and nuzzled her affectionately.

Ginny almost burst into tears all over again, but then his whiskers brushed against her skin and she giggled instead. “That tickles.”

She caught Kali looking over her thoroughly, from her tattered robes and unkempt appearance, to her dull hair and reddened eyes. Ginny knew she wasn’t looking her best, she knew that she had the look of someone who wasn’t eating properly – because she wasn’t – with bones that jutted sharply against pale and clammy skin. She felt like an emaciated troll next to Kali who was tall and lithe with skin that glowed with a healthy tan, and whose hair was clean and shiny.

“Have you had dinner?” Kali asked, and Ginny swore under her breath. She hadn’t realized how late it was. Kali raised an eyebrow at the swearing, a smile tugging at her lips, but she shook it off. “I’m heading down to the Great Hall now if you’d like to join me?”

Ginny wanted to refuse, but no one had been this nice to her in months, and Pan was resting his head on her shoulder, and she felt… safe, almost. She nodded and Kali grinned and Ginny didn’t feel bad anymore.

“What happened to your robes?” Kali asked as they headed down several flights of stairs together. Pan was perched on Ginny’s shoulder as a pine marten, nibbling at her ear and pulling on her hair every few steps.

“One of my roommates has a cat, he got stuck in our dorm the other day, and I’d left my trunk open. He shredded most of my clothes.”

Kali stopped walking. “Your roommate hasn’t offered to replace your stuff?”

Ginny shrugged and didn’t answer as she fiddled with one of the holes. Of course Jennifer had done no such thing; when she’d seen what her cat had done, she’d said that Ginny only had herself to blame and that it served her right.

Kali huffed and grabbed Ginny’s hand, dragging her down another hallway and down a spiral staircase which landed them in the dungeons.

“Stay here a sec, I’ll be right back,” said Kali as she darted through a door that hadn’t been there a second before and that disappeared again as soon as Kali was out of sight.

Before Ginny could start to worry about being alone down in the dungeons in front of the Slytherin Common Room, Kali was back with three sets of robes in hand.

“Here,” she said, piling the robes into Ginny’s arms. “I’ve shot up about five inches since I bought these. They’re too small for me, but they should fit you.”

Ginny let her wide eyes flick from Kali to the robes and then back again. “I can’t accept these.”

“Why not?”

Because they were nicer than anything she had ever owned. The fabric was thick and soft and
surprisingly light, they looked like they’d been fitted specifically for Kali, and they were probably more expensive that Ginny was comfortable knowing.

“I can’t wear them anymore,” said Kali, “and I don’t know anyone else who needs robes, so if you don’t accept them, they’re just going to take up space in my trunk.”

Ginny was about to protest again, but Kali gently herded her into a bathroom, pushing her toward one of the stalls to try the robes on, and Ginny gave in. She changed quickly and stepped back out into the bathroom, enjoying how nice the new robes felt against her skin, they weren’t at all scratchy like her own robes were.

“They’re a bit long,” said Kali, drawing her wand and with a fluid motion the bottom of the robes turned in on itself, shortening by a couple of inches, as did the sleeves. “That’s better. What do you think?”

Ginny stared at Kali’s smiling face, and she felt her eyes sting. She pressed her lips together hard as the tears slipped free. Kali’s eyes widened in horror and she rushed forward.

“What’s wrong?”

Ginny couldn’t say anything through the sobs, so she waved her arms around meaninglessly instead, babbling incoherently as she gasped for breath. Kali gave up on trying to understand her and pulled her into a hug instead. Ginny sobbed harder, sinking into the first human touch she’d gotten since leaving home. She cried for a long time, and Kali let her, squeezing her tightly and whispering soothing words of comfort. Finally, she calmed down enough to pull away, and tried to ignore Kali’s worried eyes by rubbing at her face.

When she felt ready to face Kali, she opened her eyes, and saw Kali bending down to pick up a piece of parchment on the floor. It took Ginny a moment to recognize it, and she sprang forward but it was too late. Kali read through the note and Ginny snatched it out of hands.

“Ginny, who gave you that?” Kali asked, her voice was deceptively calm, but her normally clear silver eyes were starting to look an awful lot like two angry storm clouds.

Ginny shrugged, stuffing the note in her pocket, and looking anywhere but at Kali.

Kali took a step toward her, and with a finger under chin, lifted Ginny’s gaze to hers. “Ginny?”

“I don’t know,” she said quietly, her voice shaking. “I found it in one of my textbooks.”

“Have you told anyone about it?” Ginny shook her head. Kali sighed and stepped away from her, slowly pacing around the small room. “You need to tell your Head of House.”

“No,” she said, voice rising with panic. “I don’t want to cause a fuss and I’m sure Professor McGonagall has better things to worry about.”

“No, she doesn’t,” Kali replied. “This is bullying, Ginny. It’s wrong and it won’t go away if you do nothing.”

“Please,” Ginny pleaded. “I don’t – I don’t want…”

She’d caused enough trouble last year, and she didn’t need to be called a snitch as well as a dark witch. It was enough to know that someone cared enough to get angry on her behalf, even if that person was a complete stranger. Kali didn’t like it, but it’s what Ginny wanted, so she nodded stiffly and cast the robe shortening spell on the other two sets.
“Come over here,” she said, pulling Ginny in front of the mirror. She took a paper towel and ran it under the tap. “Cold water helps bring the redness down.” She handed the damp paper towel to Ginny and guided her hand up to her blotchy face letting her wash away the dust and dried tears from her face.

Kali brushed a strand of red hair behind Ginny's ear, took her wand out again and tapped the tip against the top of Ginny's head twice. Ginny's scalp tingled and some of the life returned to her hair until it was no longer dull and stringy.

“Not as efficient as a shower, but it will do,” said Kali, observing her work with a critical eye, then throwing a smile at Ginny. “Feeling better?”

Ginny nodded. She wasn't sure what else to do or what she could say to express the extent of her gratitude, but the basics seemed like a good place to start. “Thank you.”

“Any time.”

They headed up to the Great Hall, and were halfway there when Kali stopped again.

“Why did they call you a dark witch?”

Ginny wasn’t sure she wanted to tell her, but all Kali would have to do was ask one of her friends and they’d spill the entire thing, at least if Ginny was the one recounting the story it would be accurate and not as vilifying. “Do you know what happened here at the end of last year?”

Kali frowned. “Harry killed a Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets.”

Ginny wondered at the familiarity with which Kali spoke Harry’s name, it took her a moment to remember that they were friendly with each other. “Well… it was my fault.”

Ginny told the story aloud for the first time since it had happened: she talked about the diary; about bearing her soul to it and how You-Know-Who had used that as a gateway into her mind; about opening the Chamber of Secrets and waking the Basilisk; about killing all the roosters and painting messages on the castle walls with their blood; about Mrs. Norris, and Justin Finch-Fletchley, and Sir Nicholas, and Colin Creevey, and Penelope Clearwater, and Hermione; and about Harry saving her and the phoenix saving him.

She was exhausted by the time she was done. She and Kali were sat on a stone bench in an alcove, and Kali had nodded along as Ginny spoke, her beautiful grey eyes clouding as the story progressed. By the end of it, Ginny felt a huge weight lift off her shoulders.

“Whoa,” Kali breathed. “You’re… you must be really strong to have survived that.”

Ginny ducked her head and scrunched up her shoulders. “I’m not strong, if it weren’t for me none of that would have happened.”

“I don’t believe that’s true. I think it would have happened, one way or another, eventually, and if not to you then to someone else, someone who wouldn’t have made it to where you are now.”

“I haven’t done anything.”

“You’ve gotten out of bed everyday since. You’ve endured people’s hate and distrust. You haven’t given up yet. That’s something, and it’s something that makes you very strong and very brave.”

Ginny felt herself blush at the compliment as she let herself believe it, because Kali’s tone was warm
and sincere and trustworthy, and Ginny wanted to be better – needed to be better – than she thought
she was.

“Come on, I’m starving,” said Kali, holding out her hand and pulling Ginny to her feet.

They finally made it to the Great Hall, and Kali sat at the Gryffindor table as though she belonged
there. People stared, Ginny wasn’t sure if it was because of her or because of the Slytherin in their
midst, but either way Kali ignored them as she served Ginny a generous portion of lasagne. Kali
supplied most of the conversation while Ginny gorged herself on food, she hadn’t realized how
hungry she’d been the past couple of months. She’d been avoiding the Great Hall as much as
possible, skipping most meals because the thought of eating alone while the people around her glared
at her made her lose her appetite, but Kali acted like a shield between them and Ginny.

Ginny was piling a second helping of desert onto her plate when Kali smiled at someone over Ginny
shoulder and waved them over. Ginny turned and spotted Luna Lovegood, a Ravenclaw in her year,
skipping over to them. Luna was an odd person, she believed all kinds of strange creatures existed
despite what everyone else said, and she had a bizarre sense of fashion, today for instance, she was
wearing Dirigible plum earrings and a Butterbeer cork necklace. She had waist-length, straggly, dirty
blonde hair, and pale and protuberant eyes that made her look permanently surprised.

“Hello, Kali,” Luna said dreamily.

“Hey, Luna,” Kali said brightly, and looked from Luna to Ginny. “You two are in the same year,
right?”

“That’s right,” said Luna. She was swaying from side to side to music only she could hear. Ginny
found it amazing how the Ravenclaw didn’t seem to care at all what the people around them must be
thinking of her.

Kali was about to say more when Professor McGonagall appeared beside her. “Miss Black, may I
have a word?”

Kali grinned up at the teacher and slid from the end of the bench as McGonagall led her away from
prying ears.

“No,” said Ginny. “Professor McGonagall doesn’t look angry enough. Look, she’s even smiling.”

McGonagall’s lips had twitched into a soft smile and the look in her eyes was almost affectionate, if
slightly confused like she couldn’t quite figure Kali out. Ginny looked away from them and focused
on Luna who was smiling at her serenely.

“How do you know Kali?” asked Ginny.

“She’s nice to me too,” said Ginny, glancing over at Kali’s smiling face, then focusing back on
Luna. “Have you started on the Herbology homework yet?”

The conversation flowed easily from there. Luna may be weird, but she didn’t judge, and she was friendly in an airy sort of way. Kali came back to join them and Ginny knew, for the first time, that she had friends at Hogwarts, and that things could only get better from here.
The way I picture them, Blaise and Sirius’s personalities are very similar, except Blaise is more up himself and Sirius has more of a devil-may-care attitude.

Saturday, December 11th, 1993

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

Kali passed Jennifer Moore and her group of friends as she made her way to the Entrance Hall. The younger students caught sight of her and scurried away quickly. It hadn’t taken much effort to find out who’d sent that nasty note to Ginny Weasley: Pan had sniffed the parchment, memorized the scent still clinging to it, and wandered the halls looking for a match. Kali may have promised Ginny not to involve any teachers, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t sort the situation out herself; she’d had a chat with the group of Gryffindors that had been deemed responsible, she’d been perfectly civil about it until one of the boys had insulted Ginny rather rudely, then she’d started to lecture them, glaring at each of them in turn, and inadvertently making three of them cry. They got the message, and Kali noted a vast improvement in Ginny’s mood.

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.

It was the second Hogsmeade trip of the year and despite the freezing temperatures the turnout was pretty good. Blaise and Daphne had favoured wrapping themselves in their cloaks for the trips, but Kali found that even the thickest cloak let in a nasty draft, so she’d bundled herself up in her big winter coat with her hat, scarf, gloves, and anything else she could get her hands on to keep warm.

The walk down to the village was slow going because of the ten inches worth of snow they had to trudge through, but it was worth it. Hogsmeade was a charming and picturesque place with little thatched cottages and shops all covered in a layer of crisp snow, strings of enchanted candles hanging in the trees, and holly wreaths on every door; it could have been the front of a Christmas card.

They’re first stop was Honeydukes, and Kali was in awe. There were shelves upon shelves of the most succulent-looking sweets imaginable. Creamy chunks of nougat; shimmering pink squares of coconut ice; fat, honey-coloured toffees; hundreds of different kinds of chocolate in neat rows; there was a large barrel of Every Flavour Beans, and another of Fizzing Whizbees, levitating sherbet balls; along yet another wall were “Special Effects” - sweets: Droobles Best Blowing Gum (which filled a room with bluebell-coloured bubbles that refused to pop for days); strange, splintery 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-spin quills; and exploding bonbons. Kali wanted to ransack the place, but she
controlled herself, and only filled one bag’s worth of goods.

Next was Zonko’s, which was so packed with students you could hardly move. There were jokes and tricks of every variety: Dungbombs, Hiccup Sweets, Frog Spawn Soap, and Nose-Biting Teacups… It was as the three of them were leaving the joke shop that they were accosted by Fred and George.

“Hello there,” they said with matching devilish grins.

“Hello,” said Kali jovially even as Blaise scowled and Daphne took a discreet step back. “What can we do for you two?”

“The question isn’t what you can do for us, but what we can do for you, Miss Black,” said George with a ridiculous little bow.

“Perhaps we could talk to you privately for a moment?” said Fred, his eyes flicking to Blaise and Daphne.

“You know they’re just going to give you a clown nose or charm horns onto your head,” said Pan. He was off in a nearby field as a fox, jumping in and out of the snow, hunting for mice.

“I know,” she said as she told Blaise and Daphne that she’d meet up with them at the Three Broomsticks. “But if you don’t go along with the prank, you lose the right to retaliate.”

Pan scoffed, crunching down on one of the little rodents and sniffing around for more.

She led the twins down a short alleyway next to the shop, the stone walls offering a barrier against the fierce wind.

“My brother and I have been thinking -” said Fred.

“And this wasn’t an easy decision to make -” said George.

“But we believe it’s time for us to surrender,” they said in unison.

Kali couldn’t hide her surprise. “Surrender?”

“We can’t match your evil genius,” said George solemnly. “You have officially won the prank war of 1993.”

“But we have a proposition for you,” said Fred with a quick grin. “We’ve decided to look passed your House -”

“How good of you,” Kali snorted.

“Talent like yours shouldn’t go to waste on following the rules,” said George. “We could use a girl like you on our side.”

“You have a lot of potential.”

“And we’d rather have you as an ally than an enemy.”

“So we’d like to recruit you,” finished Fred with a dramatic hand flourish.

“Oh, no,” Pan groaned distantly.
“Really,” Kali asked and the twins nodded eagerly “What would this partnership entail?”

“You share your tricks with us, we share ours with you,” said Fred

“We show you every secret passageway and hiding place in the castle,” said George.

“And we raise a little hell,” said Fred, grin blazing.

“I could be down for that,” she said, even as Pan lamented her lack of common sense.

When she found Blaise and Daphne in the extremely crowded, noisy, warm, and smoky inn, they asked her what that was about.

“I may have just joined a gang,” she said nonchalantly, and she didn’t explain further as a pretty, buxom woman arrived with a platter of butterbeers.

***

**Saturday, December 18th, 1993,**

A week later they were back in Hogsmeade, boarding the Hogwarts Express at the station for the trip back to London. It felt odd to be leaving. For the past three months her world had been restricted to Hogwarts, most days it had felt as though there was nothing beyond its walls; the castle had a way of pulling you in and cocooning you away from the rest of the universe in a manner that felt safe but at the same time suffocating. When Kali stepped on the train she felt a weight lift off of her chest, one she hadn’t realized was there until it was gone.

The ride down to London was uneventful. They discussed what their plans were for the break: seeing family mostly. Blaise was least looking forward to going home, but his mother had insisted that he meet his newest step-father, so here he was. Blaise’s family life was a touchy subject. From the little he’d been willing to discuss, Kali knew this: his mother was extraordinarily beautiful and very vain; his father had been her first husband whom she’d married when she was very young; he’d died shortly after Blaise was born; his mother was now on her seventh husband and had been widowed no less than six times; Blaise hadn’t bothered to learn his step-fathers names after the third one died.

Kali and Daphne tried to keep him distracted, but still he got gloomier and gloomier the further the train travelled. By the time they arrived at King’s Cross he looked downright mutinous and he scowled at the gathered crowd on the platform, slumped in his seat, arms crossed over his chest. Astoria popped into their compartment to collect Daphne who left reluctantly, casting worried glances at Blaise. Still he didn’t move. Kali sat with him in silence for a minute before nudging his knee with her foot. “You going to be okay?”

“Of course I am,” he said softly, though his expression didn’t change.

“In four years you’ll never have to speak to her again.”

That drew his attention to her and he narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. “I will if I want my inheritance.”
“You’re not one of those people, are you?” she smirked, nudging him again. “Tell me you’re smart enough to get by without her money.”

“Oh, I am, but that would require work, and a face as pretty as mine was not meant for such things,” he said smoothly.

“Do what your mother does then: marry rich.”

“I’ll take that into consideration.” His lips pulled up into a smirk of his own. “You’re wealthy, aren’t you?”

Kali scoffed. “Not happening.”

“You’re also shaping out to be far more beautiful than my mother and she will absolutely loathe you for that.”

“You’re really selling it to me,” she said as she stood and stretched. “Come on, you can’t put it off forever.”

He sighed heavily and got to his feet. “Will you mourn for me when I die of boredom within the coming week?”

“I might even shed a tear at your funeral.” She hugged him, just like she’d hugged Daphne and Astoria before they left, but unlike them, Blaise froze. Kali thought perhaps he didn’t like being touched and quickly backed away. “Sorry.”

He was giving her a weird sort of look that was both guarded and slightly horrified. “What was that for?”

“We’re friends,” she said, shrugging lightly. “I hug my friends, but if you’re not comfortable with it, I won’t -”

“Do it again.” It was phrased like an order but the uncertain lilt at the end turned it into a question.

She frowned at him but did as requested. He was still very tense to start of with, but she slowly felt him relax against her as he slid his arms around her and squeezed tentatively.

“Has he never been hugged before?” Pan asked watching the scene curiously.

“I don’t think he has.” That thought was nothing short of horrifying and she held him a little tighter as a result.

Eventually he cleared his throat and detached himself from her. “Right. I’d better be going then.” He grabbed his case and strode purposefully from the compartment, and Kali watched him go thinking some people just weren’t fit to be parents.

Remus and Gran were waiting for her on the platform. For the past few months Gran had been working tirelessly to get Dad a fair trial, but the Minister wasn’t being cooperative, and after Dad’s break-in at Hogwarts on Halloween her job was made all the harder. But she was not one to quit when things got difficult, and in tandem to negotiating her way through lengthy bureaucratic procedure, she was also building a case for Dad for when she succeeded.

They Apparated to Oxford Airport and Kali hung in there, although she did feel slightly sick when they landed with a loud crack. Gran’s private jet was waiting for them on the runway as was Grandpa Lyall. Kali forgot all about her upset stomach and ran to meet him. He caught her in a hug,
her momentum pushing him a couple of steps back.

“You’re growing like a weed,” he said to her as Remus and Gran joined them. “You must have shot up at least twenty centimetres since the last time I saw you.”

He exchanged pleasantries with the other adults as they waited for the pilot and crew to prep the aircraft. This didn’t include refuelling or anything like that, though, as it was magic that kept the engines turning when they were in the air, making the jet very ecologically friendly and quite a bit faster that its Muggle brethren. The craft was equipped with the bare minimum in terms of electricity to avoid interference with the spellwork cast on the engines, so more magic was used to replace the missing electrical features; the end result was something that looked like a private jet but that could not be described as such beyond its appearance.

Finally the pilot – a sturdy witch named Donna who’d flown for the British Royal Force in her youth – waved them onboard. The interior was comfortable to say the least: capable of seating up to fifteen people; with a bedroom at the back; and a small bar and kitchen area next to the cockpit. Remus and Grandpa Lyall sat together at the front, talking quietly; they weren’t close but they had an easy relationship, they’d been known to stay up for hours discussing one intellectual topic or another – a lot of what Remus knew about magical creatures he’d learned from his father. They were very similar, both in personality and in appearance: 6’2”; lean; strong nosed; clever; reserved; mild-mannered; but with a fierce temper. Gran retired to the bedroom to get some work done; and Kali and Pan were left to amuse themselves with homework and games.

It took them eleven hours to get to Honolulu and they landed well after the sun had set, although the time difference meant that it was now Friday 17th all over again.

Grandpa Aukai and Uncle Oke were waiting for them in the parking lot. Both were olive skinned, ridiculously broad-shouldered, taller than Remus and Grandpa Lyall, and built like heavyweight champions. Oke was Aukai eldest, followed by Uncle Makari, and Uncle Kawika; Nahele had been the youngest with a whopping seventeen year age gap between him and Oke.

There were more comments about her newfound height, she didn’t mind, just hoped she was no longer the shortest of the cousins.

The wizarding community in Hawaii was tiny, with less than one witch or wizard born every year: needless to say it made for a very tight knit society. There were seven core magical families: the Kalakauas – the largest and oldest wizarding family on the islands; the Nakamuras – a Japanese family that immigrated to the islands at the end of the 19th century; the Johnsons – who were descendants of ex-slaves turned merchants; the Ionas – descendants of ex-Filipino pirates; the Millers – the token WASP family who immigrated to Hawaii after the First World War; the Garcias – who were stationed in Hawaii during the Second World War and chose to stay; and lastly the Jungs – a Korean family that moved to the islands in 1958. The families made up 96% of the wizarding population on the islands; and the few Muggle-borns – called Koho‘ia meaning Chosen in Hawaiian – tended to marry into one of them. Both Uncle Oke and Uncle Kawika had married Muggle-borns; although Uncle Oke’s marriage hadn’t lasted long.

The drive home took less than half an hour. The Kalakaua Estate was just outside of Kailua, halfway up the Olomana mountains with a spectacular view of the ocean to the East. It was an ancestral and communal home, with all four generations living under one roof and all past generations buried in the private graveyard further up the mountain.

Oke had barely gotten the magically expanded car in park when the rest of the family came out to greet them: Kahole and Leilani – Grandpa Aukai’s parents; Grandma Noelani – Aukai’s wife; Uncle
Kawika and his wife Kono; their four children: Lono, Kai, Vaiana, and Auli’i – ranging in age from sixteen to eleven; and Uncle Makani, followed by Uncle Oke’s two boys: Jason and Keanu – seventeen and fifteen respectively.

Kali noted with some satisfaction that she was in fact now taller than Auli’i, Vaiana, and Kai – much to the latter’s annoyance.

They were ushered inside and fed copious amounts of food, despite having already eaten on the plane, as everyone shared stories of what they’d been up to: Kahole and Leilani had just come back from a holiday in Indonesia; Grandpa Aukai was opening a new resort in Honolulu; Grandma Noelaní had started teaching an engineering course at the local university; Gran was inviting most of the British Ministry of Magic to her Yule Ball; Grandpa Lyall was thinking of renovating his cottage; Uncle Oke was in the midst of training some fighters for an upcoming MMA competition; Uncle Makani and Uncle Kawika were both in the lead for this year’s surfing championship; Aunt Kono had been promoted to captain at the Honolulu Police Department; Jason had applied to some of the islands’ universities; Keanu had a new boyfriend; Lono had finally made it onto his high school’s American football team; Kai was struggling with physics but thriving at potions; Vaiana had taken up sculpting; and Auli’i was going to start horse riding after the New Year.

Kali, who’d only had a short nap on the plane, was about ready to fall asleep on the spot when they called it a night, and she was very grateful that her room wasn’t on the other side of the house. As it was, all she had to do was climb the stairs and head down the hall to the right. She bothered with only the most basic nightly hygiene stuff before letting herself collapse into bed.

**Saturday, December 18th, 1993, (Hawaiian Time Zone),**

Despite feeling that she was entitled to a lie in, Kali rose with the sun just before 7a.m.. In Scotland she’d have to wait another hour and a half before the first rays of light peaked over the horizon, but the Aloha State was not comparable to that freezing wasteland. Scotland wasn’t so bad, really – the scenery was nice, that was for sure – but she’d grown up on a tropical island, so the cold did not agree with her, and Scotland during the winter was nothing if not cold.

Regardless of the early hour, Kali was not the first one up: Grandpa Aukai and Uncle Oke were about to head off to work; Uncle Makani, Uncle Kawika, Aunt Kono, and Vaiana were already down at the beach; and Grandma Noelaní, Keanu, and Lono were getting ready to head off for a morning hike. It was really little wonder that Kali seldom slept in, she was from a family of early risers.

“Hey, kiddo, sleep well?” asked Grandpa Aukai.

“I did,” she said, picking at the breakfast choices set up on the on the kitchen table. “Are you working all day today?”

He grabbed his briefcase and kissed her forehead on his way to the door. “I’ll be back home by four to help set up for the bonfire, promise.”

The bonfire was a family tradition: whenever one of them came home after an extended period of time spent abroad, they would have a bonfire the following day to celebrate their return. It was an excuse for everyone to be together and enjoy some down time, and Kali had been looking forward to it for months.
She’d brought her Transfiguration essay down with her to work on after breakfast, she was one paragraph away from finishing when Jason came bounding into the room. She’d known it was Jason before he’d even made it all the way down the stairs – the guy had the heaviest footfall of everyone in the house – and she’d figured she wouldn’t be completing the essay this morning.

“It’s the first day of the holidays and you’re already doing homework?” he said, grabbing an apple from the fruit bowl.

She set down her pen. It was useless trying to concentrate with him in the room. “I did some yesterday too.”

“How studious. But you know, all work and no play make Kali a dull girl.”

“Compared to all play and no work which make Jason a… what was it your teacher called you?”

“A walking argument for birth control with an intellect rivalled only by garden tools,” he supplied with a proud smirk.

“Harsh.”

He shrugged indifferently. “She doesn’t like it when people disagree with her views on the benefits of colonialism and capitalism. And I did TP her house on Halloween.”

“She knows it was you?”

“She has her suspicions. But what about you? I hear you got on a teacher’s bad side as well, which is a surprise given what a goody two-shoes you are.”

Kali scoffed. “What can I say? This guy brings out the worst in me.”

“He’s your Potions professor, right?”

“He threatened to poison a student’s toad because their potion wasn’t perfect, and that’s just his first infraction.”

“Dick. What are you doing about it?”

“Taking a page from your book. Although not the overused cliché of throwing toilet paper over his possessions.”

He took mock offense at that. “That’s a classic, I’ll have you know. But I guess you always did have a more creative streak than I do. How long until you break him?”

That was the question. Honestly, she was surprised Snape had lasted this long. He was clearly miserable: nowadays it looked like there was a permanent storm cloud hovering above his head; but still he stayed. It lent credit to her theory that there was something keeping him at the school, something she couldn’t see yet. “I don’t know.”

“He’ll break eventually, they always do.”

“Sound advice from the guy who’s prompted multiple mental breakdowns in his teachers.”

“Only the ones who are dicks.” He chucked the remains of his apple into the compost. “I’m going for a run, want to come?”

“Give me five minutes.”
She was ready in less than that and they headed down the mountain path at a steady jog. She preferred having company when she exercised, especially company that could keep up with her pace, that wasn’t so easy to find at Hogwarts, but here she had a whole selection to pick from. The Hawaiian wizarding community believed that the key to a stronger spirit was to nurture one’s mind, body, and soul. To advance the mind, all wizarding children on the islands attended Muggle schools while they were children and teenagers, they were encouraged to read and to learn as much as they could and to share that knowledge with their peers; to strengthen the body, regular exercise was promoted, kids were applauded for joining sports clubs and praised for winning competitions, every single one of them was an all-state athlete; to cultivate the soul, they were taught to understand their emotions and to use them to control their magic, introspection was highly regarded as was honesty and openness about all things. It was a tough philosophy to follow, it demanded excellence and persistence and an almost inhuman level of self-control, but it was rewarding in the long run.

Holidays in Hawaii were predictable for the younger generation in that their days were governed by a loose schedule: mornings were meant for exercise and hobbies, afternoons were reserved for schoolwork, both magical and Muggle, and evenings were for family time. After their run, Kali and Jason joined the others at the beach where they had an impromptu surfing competition, Kali came second, she would have come first if Keanu and Kai hadn’t conspired to sabotage her chances, she got back at them and they ended up tied at the bottom of the leader board. They spent the rest of their morning there and met up with the rest of the cousins in town for lunch. The theory when they all hung out together was that Jason, being the oldest, was in charge, but the fact that he was the most immature of the lot made that logic redundant, instead, the group was non-hierarchical, and the only one with whom age mattered was Auli’i who was the baby of the family and was therefore protected and coddled even by the cousins who were otherwise more likely to WWE choke-slam anyone in their near vicinity. The seven of them made for a boisterous group, but not nearly as rowdy as when the kids from the other families joined them: twenty-two ‘kids’ with ages ranging from twenty-five to two years old. Kali wouldn’t be seeing any of them until Christmas Eve though, what with work and holiday trips and the fact that none of the other families lived on the island of Oahu.

Afternoon lessons were cut short by the bonfire as the entire family, this time, trekked down to a private section of the beach. It was all building sandcastles, and surfing, and swimming, and playing games, until the BBQ got going and the important matter of filling their stomachs had to be met. They sat around the bonfire until way past curfew and bedtime, and it was past midnight by the time they packed up and headed home.

The rest of the holidays passed in a blur of mornings spent by the seaside or hiking up the mountain, and afternoons filled with books and lectures and spellwork, and evenings lounging outside as the sunset, helping Vaiana with her cheerleading routine, learning new wrestling moves off Uncle Oke, and talking for hours. Gran left for New York City the day before Christmas Eve to prepare for her Yule Ball; the other families arrived the next day and the house became comfortably crowded; Gran returned on Yule morning in time for presents and a huge meal, they spent the afternoon playing games, and had leftovers for dinner; the laid back routine started up again the next day, and the other families left a couple of days after that.

She’d made a promise to Harry to do some research on the Grim and she did, picking at Grandpa Lyall’s brain and combing through every mention of them in the house’s library, by the end of the holidays she’d gathered all the information she needed on the subject. Just in time too.

She slept on the plane ride back to the UK, but she was still exhausted and could barely keep her eyes open on the Hogwarts Express. The journey back to school was unremarkable, unlike the one on the 1st of September. Daphne and Blaise found her and the three of them shared stories about their holidays: Daphne had spent a week in France visiting an old Aunt; Blaise was unimpressed by stepfather n°6; neither was particularly upset that the holidays had ended.
Monday, January 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1994,

Classes started again 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.

Halfway through the class, Harry approached her. She guessed it was to find out what she’d learned about the Grim, but there was a spark of anger that flashed in his eyes when they met hers, and before she got the chance to say anything he told her that he needed to speak with her after classes tonight down in the Chamber of Secrets. He didn’t say anything else and didn’t so much as glance at her for the rest of the day.

That evening after classes Kali made her way down to the Chamber of Secrets. She’d spent the day wringing her hands, trying to figure out what she’d done to upset him, but her mind came up blank.

“Quit worrying,” said Pan. “It’s probably nothing.”

But it hadn’t felt like nothing when he’d glared at her then given her the silent treatment. She was trying to distract herself by examining the basilisk skull, she was crouched down in front of it when she heard Harry’s slapping footsteps make their way toward her. She rose and tried to smile at him, but his anger was almost tangible in the air between them and her smile faltered.

“How could you not tell me?” she asked.

“How could you not tell me?” he seethed.

Her brow furrowed. “Tell you what?”

“Your father’s the reason my parents are dead!” he shouted and she took a quick step back, surprised by his sudden outburst. “He was their friend and he betrayed them! He was their friend!”

She stared at him in surprise, then in guilt. “I thought you knew,” she said softly. She should have realized he didn’t, that there was no way that he could have: he obviously wasn’t close to his Aunt and Uncle, and even if he were they hadn’t been close enough to Lily to know who her friends were. He had no way of knowing how close his and her fathers had been.

“I didn’t,” he snapped.

“I’m sorry. If I’d known that, I would have told you.”

“No you wouldn’t have. You’d have lied to me like everyone else!”

“No,” she said forcefully. “I won’t ever lie to you Harry, I can promise you that.”

Harry stared at her. She could see how he struggled to hold on to all of the pent up anger and frustration he’d been targeting on her only moments ago, but it suddenly had nowhere to go. His
shoulders fell, and he looked down at the floor.

“I’m sorry I shouted at you,” he mumbled.

“It’s okay,” she said. “I’d have been pretty upset too if it was me.”

“Why did he do it? Why would he betray his friends?” he asked, looking back up at her, desperate for an answer.

She watched him thoughtfully for a minute, debating whether to tell him, wondering how he’d take it, and then she said very quietly: “I don’t think he did.”

“Huh?” he asked, confused.

“Call it a biased opinion, but I don’t think my Dad betrayed your parents.”

“But – he was their Secret-Keeper.”

“Maybe. Or maybe your parents told everyone he was their Secret-Keeper as a front, as an extra layer of protection. Tell everyone that your father’s best friend – the most obvious person for the job – is their Secret-Keeper, and then – without telling anyone else – make someone else Secret-Keeper instead.” She was playing with the sleeve of her jacket nervously, waiting for his reaction.

Harry shook his head. “Dumbledore said -”

“Dumbledore isn’t all-knowing.” Her eyes pleaded with him to believe her. “None of it adds up, Harry. And you probably think that this is just me deluding myself because I don’t want my father to be the bad guy. But…” She bit her lip and shook her head.

“Why doesn’t it add up?” he asked slowly.

She felt a burst of hope that he was actually considering this. “Your father was his best friend, they were closer than brothers. My Dad’s parents – my grandparents – were pureblood elitists. They weren’t Death Eaters but they supported Voldemort's ideals. My father didn’t fit in with them, and the minute he was sorted into Gryffindor he became the outcast of the family. When he was sixteen his mother kicked him out, and it was the Potters who took him in – your Dad and your grandparents. He loved your family. He would never have done anything to hurt them.”

“What about those thirteen people he killed?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “It could have been a mistake, or an accident… I know that after my Mum died I did some things – some pretty damaging things – none of it on purpose, but…”

“And Peter Pettigrew?” he asked. “Why would your father have killed his friend?”

“There’s no proof Pettigrew’s actually dead,” she said. “They found some bloody robes and a finger and they just assumed…”

“Pettigrew hasn’t been seen since the attack, Kali,” he said gently as though he was talking to a spooked animal.

“Voldemort hadn’t been seen for years either, that didn’t stop him from showing up again,” she said defensively. “Maybe Pettigrew went looking for my Dad to get revenge, but after everything I’ve heard about him that doesn’t sound like something he’d do. Pettigrew trailed after our Dads. He was never particularly talented, nor was he terribly brave. He wouldn't have gone after my Dad knowing
he’d lose, so maybe – maybe it was the other way around. Maybe my Dad went after Pettigrew because Pettigrew was the one who betrayed your parents.”

“That’s a lot of maybes,” he said, no doubt catching a glimpse of just how desperately Kali wanted this to be true.

“Do you know he didn’t even get a trial,” she said quietly. “Voldemort was dead, the war was at an end and they wanted a quick, clean finish. They sent him to Azkaban without even bothering to check if there was the slightest chance he might be innocent.”

Harry looked away from her, fidgeting nervously and biting his lip. “Kali -”

“You don’t have to believe me,” she said. “Just… take it into consideration.”

Harry nodded. “I will.”

She managed a slight smile. “Thank you.”

“So – uh – how come you’re not afraid of saying his name?” he asked curiously. “Voldemort’s name that is.”

Kali shrugged. “It’s just a name, right? A nickname even. What harm could possibly be done by saying it out loud?”

“Not many people see it that way,” he said. “Did you know that he got the name Voldemort by rearranging the letters of his own name so that it said ‘I am Lord Voldemort’, ” he added, clearly trying to clear the remaining tension.

Kali smirked. “Poor thing, goes to all that trouble to find himself a cool nickname and then no one uses it, he must have been devastated.”

Harry laughed and Kali joined him, glad that there weren’t any bad feelings left between them.

“Where’s Pan?” he asked, glancing around the Chamber.

“With Fred and George in the South-east tower,” said Kali.

“I take it you accepted their offer to join them as one of the school’s troublemakers, then?” Harry grinned.

“I need a little bit more excitement in my life than what I’m getting now. Otherwise I’ll get bored and then who knows what I’ll do.” Harry chuckled. “I looked into the Grim over the holidays, by the way, and I’m convinced that it’s not a death omen.”

“What is it then?” he asked, he looked like he wanted to be relieved by this news, but after all the fuss that had been made over it he needed to be sure first.

“According to the books, Grims are the protectors of graveyards and of the dead, all those who have encountered a Grim and have died from it were grave robbers or tomb raiders who were torn to shreds by giant black dogs. There are cases of people who have never considered disrespecting the dead seeing a Grim but they’re rarer and their deaths are due to clumsiness rather than a canine attack, their suspicious minds saw a possible death omen and they panicked bringing about their own end either accidentally or not. So more likely than not you just have a stray black dog following you around.”
“It followed me from Magnolia Crescent all the way to Hogwarts?” he asked dubiously.

She shrugged. “It wouldn’t be unheard of.”

She saw him relaxing and the last of the tension dissolved from the air. “Well, so long as I’m not going to die I don’t mind how many strays stalk me.”

Kali grinned at him and they headed back up to the castle and away from the stinging cold of the underground chamber.

They walked in silence for awhile and she caught him looking at her thoughtfully. “Will you really never lie to me?”

“Really,” she promised. “I’m a terrible liar, anyway.”
Chapter Summary

Dumbledore ponders the solution to his problems.

*Thursday, January 13th, 1994,*

*Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,*

*Professor Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore – Order of Merlin (First Class), Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards,*

The Sirius Black dilemma was getting out of hand. Albus hadn’t expected it to last as long as it had, he’d given the boy a week tops before he was found and returned to Azkaban, but he’d underestimated him. It should have been obvious to him that Sirius was not someone to overlook when he’d escaped from the most secure prison on the planet. Albus knew all too well that there was a first time for everything, but he and every other witch and wizard around had been convinced that that feat would be an exception to the rule. They were wrong. And whatever skill and cunning had made Sirius’s escape possible, had also allowed him to evade capture for nearly six months, eluding the Ministry, the Dementors, and Albus himself. Albus had no idea how he was doing it, which was frustrating to say the least, and to make matters worse Freyja Morrigan was becoming a persistent thorn in his side.

She was a stubborn woman, to say the least, who was far too used to getting her way. This wouldn’t be a problem if she weren’t also remarkably intelligent, not to mention ruthless and cut-throat. It was no surprise to anyone who met her that her Patronus was a shark. He’d been friends with her parents a lifetime ago, best friends even, but that time had passed, still Freyja reminded him of them, and that was enough to make him wary of her, but she was just one witch, and no matter her persistence, she would not make the Ministry bend to her will, not with Albus carefully countering her every action. He was well aware that if not for him, Cornelius Fudge would have undoubtedly caved to her demands a long time ago, he wasn’t going to let that happen. There was too much at stake.

His wandering mind was brought back to the now by a bony elbow poking into his side. He didn’t glance over at Minerva, he knew he would see only stony disapproval at his lack of attention. The entire Hogwarts staff was gathered within the teacher’s lounge for their monthly meeting and Argus had spent the past half hour ranting about various students’ misdemeanours, Fred and George Weasley had once again made their way to the forefront of the caretakers tirade. Albus thought perhaps it might be time to throw the man a retirement party, despite him being half Albus’s age. He’d taken a gamble when he’d decided to hire Argus, the man had no magic to speak of and even under the best circumstances he could not be described as kind; he was an outcast. In giving him a second chance, Albus had thought he might gain the man’s loyalty. He had been mistaken. At least he could be sure that he wasn’t a spy passing information to the Ministry or, worse, Voldemort’s scattered followers, neither would ever accept the help nor allegiance of a Squib. Perhaps if Albus found someone better suited for the job, he would give Argus notice of termination, until then he
would watch on as the caretaker waged war against the students, who not only outnumbered him but also possessed the kinds of powers that Argus could only dream of.

“That will do for today, Argus,” Minerva said before he could catch his breath and continue his spiel. “Does anyone else have a topic they wish to discuss?”

“I think we should talk about Kali Black,” said Filius, lifting his eyes from his notes. Had he been taking those earlier?

Argus jumped out of his seat. “She’s one of them. I haven’t caught her in the act yet, but she’s definitely responsible for at least a third of the infractions that take place in this school—”

“That’s enough, Argus,” Minerva snapped. She was fond of the girl. Albus had seen the two talking outside of class on many occasions. It had been a long time since he’d seen Minerva smile at a student like that, it was an expression she usually reserved for when they couldn’t see her, lest they think they could take advantage. “Filius, please continue.”

Filius cleared his throat uncomfortable and glanced nervously at Argus. For someone who was such an excellent dueller, the man truly did not like conflict. “I think we should consider putting her in the classes meant for the older students.”

Remus cut in almost before the Charms Professor had finished. “No.”

“Remus, she’s well above Third Year level,” said Filius. “I can’t speak for everyone, but I know that my class isn’t challenging enough for her anymore, if it ever was.”

There were murmurs of agreement from every teacher who had Kali in their class, except for Severus, whose sneer was growing more disgusted by the minute, and Remus.

“She needs some normality in her life,” said Remus. It was obvious he was speaking as her parent and not as her teacher, but that perspective was perhaps more important in this matter. “She has to stay with her own age group.”

“I agree with Filius,” said Septima. “If she isn’t challenged she’ll grow accustomed to under-achieving. She needs to be encouraged to push herself.”

“She’s already is,” said Remus. “We give her extra work so she doesn’t get bored, and she’s driven enough to go above and beyond every time with any extra encouragement.”

As his colleagues debated the matter, Albus considered the possibility of having Kali skip a couple of grades. The prospect had its appeal, he had to admit. Kali was an unknown game piece, not quite like her grandmother, or great-grandmother, nor like her father, or Remus. She was obviously intelligent and skilled, perhaps even more so than Albus was, which was cause for concern; charismatic enough to win over Minerva; and a Slytherin… that was the most troubling aspect of all. If she’d been sorted into Gryffindor, or even Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff, he wouldn’t have been so worried, but the allegiance of a Slytherin was not an easy thing to win, and Albus did not have the best reputation among her new peers. He had the foresight to realize that she would be a relevant player, but he could not yet figure out how. Having her skip ahead a few grades would at least have the advantage of getting her out of this castle sooner, it would perhaps destabilize her enough for him to find a way to earn her trust, but more importantly, it would separate her from Harry. He’d noticed that she had not only charmed her way into Minerva’s heart, but she’d also grown uncomfortably close to Harry Potter. Given who her father was and what House she was in, Albus had thought that this wouldn’t have been a problem because it shouldn’t have been possible, but she’d proved him wrong. There was a reason he’d tried to keep her family away from the boy all those years ago, but
Walburga and Asherah dying had ruined the only real threat he could hold over them. He’d counted his blessings that Freyja hadn’t returned sooner to claim the boy, but now he wondered if there was a reason for that, if there was a piece of the puzzle that was eluding him, and if so, perhaps Kali could clue him in. How much did she know? There were not a million ways to find out.

“Childhood is short enough as it is,” he said, interrupting the ongoing squabble, “why hurry it along any further?”

Remus sagged with relief, but Minerva turned her narrow eyes on Albus, and the Headmaster knew the argument would not be so easily won.

“We can’t keep up with her, Albus. She knows more about my own subject than I do sometimes, and anything new that I teach her only takes her a few tries to perfect.”

“That isn't possible,” he said absently. It wasn’t like her to exaggerate.

“Miss Black seems to specialize in the impossible.”

“I do not doubt that you will find a way to match the curriculum to her ability. It is up to us to adapt to gifted students. Perhaps I could join her in one of her classes to see just how advanced she is.”

“She has Charms first thing tomorrow,” Filius informed him.

“Very well, if you will accept me in your classroom, I will take the opportunity to observe Kali’s skill. Is that all for this evening?”

The professors nodded their assent and filed out of the room. Minerva, however, looked ready to continue arguing her case, Remus noticed this also and hung back to not give her the advantage of his absence. Albus was not in the mood for any more disagreements, the meeting had been lengthy enough as it was.

“I shall wait until tomorrow to make a decision, Minerva,” he said firmly. She wasn't happy at his tone and her pursed lips and narrowed eyes made sure he was aware of it, but she dropped the subject and marched out of the lounge. Albus sincerely hoped no students were wandering the castle out of bounds tonight, if Minerva spotted a single one there would be hell to pay. Remus took the time to wish the Headmaster goodnight then followed suit.

Albus waited a little while before flicking his wand and extinguishing the lights, he had some thinking to do and he needed silence to do it. As he began the long trek up to his tower, he ignored his creaking bones and sore back in favour of thoughts regarding young Miss Black. With the right disposition, she could become the key to winning this war, and Albus was not naive enough to believe that this was not war. War did not end because a stalemate had been reached, it merely paused while both sides independently struggled to find the winning solution. Voldemort would return, sooner or later, probably sooner, and Albus needed to prepare for when that happened. Kali was intelligent and talented, and her friendship with Harry, despite its more problematic aspects, was a good sign, a sign that she was on the right side of this war regardless of her House. She could become a powerful ally if Albus played his cards right. He was going to have to win her over somehow. The obvious play would be to help Freyja in her pursuit to have the charges against the girl’s father dropped. But Sirius as a free man would be far more dangerous to Albus’s cause than he was as an escaped convict. If Sirius was pardoned he would resume his role as Harry’s godfather, he might try to take Harry away from the care of the boy’s Aunt and Uncle, might plan on raising him in the kind of loving environment that would inadvertently condemn the entire wizarding community to Voldemort’s dark reign.
Albus needed another option, and he needed to find it soon. He could sense the coming storm, its destructive power was already reverberating bone-deep within him. Time was not on his side.

***

It had been a long time since he’d last sat in on a class to observe a student. It brought back fond memories of his own time as a student, then as a teacher with students of his own. He almost missed it, the simplicity of those earlier years, before everything fell apart. The burden he had been carrying since then was not one he would have wished on his worst enemy.

Surrounding himself with happy faces was an efficient way of forgetting the weight on his shoulders, and there were few places in this castle happier than Filius’s Charms classroom. It was not an easy subject, this was true, but it was taught in such a carefree way that students could only relax and enjoy themselves as they attempted to master the Freezing charm. The Headmaster’s presence created a tension and uncertainty that wasn’t usually there, but Albus sat quietly in his corner, occasionally dodging the odd blast of extremely frigid air or the various effects of a miscast, and he was soon forgotten, all the while, he kept a steady eye on Kali.

She practised the wand movement and pronunciation a couple of times, then cast the spell and executed it perfectly on her first try, that was already impressive, but when not five minutes later she was casting the charm silently, Albus saw what his colleagues had meant. Even he hadn’t been able to do that at her age. She entertained herself for the remainder of the hour by testing the spell using force, power, and speed in varying degrees. The Freezing Charm was not designed to be a combat spell, but with the way she was wielding it, it could be.

By the time class ended, most of the students had managed to at least produce a slightly cold blast of air, and Kali had covered most of the far side of the room in a few layers of hard ice. She didn’t leave with her classmates, but stayed to observe her work, as they all scurried out, desperate to get away from anything remotely resembling a classroom for their break. When the last of them had left the room and Filius had done the same, closing the door behind him, Kali flicked her wand, casting a strong Warming Charm that evaporated the ice creating a thick fog which she funnelled out of the room through the window. Albus barely had time to raise an eyebrow in surprise as she turned to face him.

“You wanted to speak with me, Professor?” she said, smiling sweetly as though she had not just out-magicked a lot of the school’s Seventh Years.

“Yes, I do,” he said artfully plastering on a serene smile. “Some of your teachers are concerned that you’re too advanced for their classes. I was wondering what your take on the matter was.”

“I don’t want to skip ahead, if that’s what you’re asking.”

The decisiveness of her tone made him hesitate. Perhaps he wouldn’t have a choice in the matter after all. “Is this because Remus doesn’t want you to?”

There was a flash of something close to disdain in her eyes, and he was forcefully reminded that he was not dealing with just anyone, this girl was a Black, whether she was raised by that family or not. It was in her blood.

“I’m perfectly capable of forming my own opinions and making my own decisions, Professor.”

“Of course you are.” He tried to ignore the prickle of unease that was travelling along his spine, but it only doubled when those impossibly grey eyes rose to meet his and he was momentarily thrown by the intelligence in them.
“The extra work the professors give me is all the academical stimulation I need, and as you may have noticed, I can keep myself entertained. I’m happy where I am.”

So she would be remaining in the picture then. He needed to find a way to make that work to his advantage.

“I will relay your decision to your teachers,” he said amiably. “I hope that you’ve been enjoying your time here, Hogwarts gets so few transfer students, it hasn’t been too difficult to get use to, has it?”

“Actually, Professor, there is something regarding the school I’d like to talk to you about.”

He didn’t miss a beat, despite the nerves that spread through him with the girl’s clouding eyes.

“Why, of course. What is it you wish to discuss?”

“I have some concerns as to Professor Snape’s aptitude to teach.”

That was not what he’d been expecting, though he should have known. The already existing tension between Severus and the other teachers had multiplied tenfold this year, he should have realised that Kali was the instigator.

“Professor Snape has been teaching here for twelve years now, Miss Black. I can assure you the results he has received from his students speak for themselves, he is an excellent teacher.”

“I disagree. Results are not the only thing that make a good teacher. Although Professor Snape’s potion making techniques are beyond reproach – mostly – in every other aspect of teaching vast improvements are required.”

It was as though with the flick of a switch she’d turned into a distinguished diplomat: her posture changed and she seemed taller all of a sudden; her voice lost its smooth melody in exchange for something colder and more forceful; her facial expression became stony and unreadable. She no longer looked like a thirteen year old girl – or fourteen, as it were, her birthday was last week – she looked powerful, and imperious, and transcendent; she looked like a Black.

“What other aspects are you referring to?”

“The long and short of it is that he’s a bully. He takes sadistic pleasure in terrorizing his students; he’s been known to threaten them; he has no regard for fair play; he blatantly favours his own House; and he childishly holds on to old grudges.”

Albus already knew all of this, he was very good at knowing what was going on in his school. He’d discussed it with Severus many times, but the man refused to change. Albus had received the rare parental complaint, but both times he’d quickly diffused the situation. It wasn’t going to be so easy this time.

He needed to buy himself some time to think. “I will bring the issue up with Professor Snape.”

“I believe you already have.” So much for that plan. “I don’t intend to underestimate you, Professor. I’m aware that you keep a close eye on the goings-on at this school, you already knew about Professor Snape’s personality issues, and I don’t think you’d be so cruel as to do nothing about it. But it’s clear that whatever you are doing isn’t working.”

She had him there, but she didn’t have all the facts. “I trust Professor Snape completely.”

“I’m not asking you if you trust him, I’m telling you he’s abusing his authority as a teacher and is hurting his students.”
“He hurts them physically?”

“Pain is not necessarily physical, Professor. What Professor Snape does is emotional harm, which some might argue is worse than anything that is suffered on the physical field, as the mind is far harder to heal.”

She wasn’t going to drop the matter, but the only things that might appease her – the truth or Severus’s immediate sacking – he could not give her. She must have read his reticence in his eyes because her next words held a particular sting to them.

“I’d have thought any respectable headmaster would put the well-being of his students above any personal matters or stakes he might hold over the issue.”

He tensed but tried to pass it off as a stretch. Perhaps the girl knew more than he was giving her credit for. “I’m afraid I don’t understand, Miss Black, what personal matters would those be?”

“I don’t know yet. But you’re not unintelligent, and you don’t strike me as the kind of person who is unnecessarily cruel or negligent. This school is your own little kingdom, I imagine you keep a watchful eye on its staff, and that you keep track of its students. Which means you know exactly what Professor Snape gets up to in his classroom, and yet you do nothing. So either I’m wrong about you, or there’s a reason you’re keeping him here that has nothing to do with his teaching ability.”

She was too close, and Albus had to resist a wince. He’d come across this particular brand of questioning and observation before, the very same grey eyes, the very same indignation, and the very same gaze which promised all sorts of hell should it be denied. He’d learned a long time ago, during endless Order meetings, that the easiest thing to do was to give in. But he could not resign himself to surrender this time, not with what was at stake.

So he did what he did best, he put on a benign smile and fabricated the truth to fit his needs. “I keep Professor Snape here because no one can match his skill as a Potioneer. He has a lot to teach, and if you were to give him a chance, you might find that you can learn a few things from him.”

She tilted her head halfway through his spiel, and scrutinized him so thoroughly he felt that she was looking into his soul and weighing its worth. If the look she gave him when he finished was anything to go by, he’d been deemed unworthy.

“So do you play poker?” she asked, catching him off guard.

“I used to.” He’d been very good at the game, bluffing was something of a speciality.

“So you know what a tell is?” He nodded slowly, he saw where this was going now. He’d had a similar conversation once before, a long time ago. “You have one. I don’t appreciate being lied to, Professor.”

She did not look back at him as she took her bag and left the room. As the door closed behind her, Albus collapsed into a chair and rubbed his wizened hands over his face. So much for winning her over. She was cleverer than he’d given her credit for, and for a moment, she’d borne an unsettling resemblance to Gellert. He’d been the first person to notice Albus’s tell, he’d never said what it was, and Albus had never managed to figure it out, but if past experience was anything to go by, he was going to have to be very careful of what he said around Kali from now on.

She was a popular girl; he’d noticed it before, spotting her in the corridors and the Great Hall; she had no problem making friends and her sphere of influence within the student body was expanding rapidly. If it weren’t for the girl’s smile, which was too genuine to fake, he’d have worried he had
another Tom Riddle situation on his hands. But Kali was going to be problematic for an entirely different reason.

He’d come across this same problem with her father, but not just him, a number of her relatives had been difficult. The trouble was born from the fact that the Blacks were, to the core of their essence, assertive and headstrong. This was problematic because it meant they were not easily swayed away from their convictions and they rarely kept those convictions quiet. They were pioneers whom people flocked to, listened to, obeyed… Power and influence went hand in hand among the Blacks, and you could not think of one without thinking of the other. Albus had thought that Kali, having not been brought up by a Black, may not have learned those traits that had made her ancestors such dangerous people. But he’d been mistaken in assuming that nurture would overcome nature where that family was concerned. He should have seen it: the same full bodied laugh, the same smirk, and challenging glint in those silver eyes, and he’d briefly wondered how a child who'd never met her father could be so much like him, but he’d failed to realise the extent of it. Until now.

He’d seen the way Severus had watched the girl, the cruel glint in his eyes as she was placed in Slytherin, and he’d known that he wouldn’t be able to protect her there, but she didn’t need protecting because she was just like her father and the rest of his family, and thus it was Severus who would need protecting from her.

There was something else of her father’s that she’d inherited: his loyalty. It was what her single-minded battle against Severus came down to, he was mistreating her friends so he had to go. Now, loyalty was not always a bad thing, in fact it could be a very good thing, but Sirius had been picky about who he bestowed his loyalty to, and Albus had not made the final cut. Sirius had trusted him, of course, but he’d never bestowed upon Albus the undying loyalty he was so known for. Kali appeared to be going one step further than her father, as she seemed to not even trust Albus. Which wouldn’t do at all.

***

The next morning, troubling news arrived via the Daily Prophet: the Ministry had given the Dementors’ permission to administer their Kiss to Sirius Black when they found him.

The news spread like Fiendfyre through the school, and Albus quickly realised that he had to get on top of this situation now, before he lost the chance. So, he summoned Remus to his office, hoping that he would have some insight that Albus could use to figure out his next move.

Remus’s expression was difficult to read as he sat down in front of the Headmaster and Albus offered him tea. Albus could relate to how he was feeling. After all, he’d gone through something very similar a few decades ago when Gellert had revealed his true colours. The set of Remus’s jaw said quite clearly that he knew why Albus had requested his presence but that he didn’t wish to discuss his feelings. Again, Albus understood, Gellert may never have been threatened with the Dementor’s Kiss, so he could only imagine what Remus was going through, but his imagination was very good.

It is unknown what is hidden beneath a Dementor’s hood, for those atrocious creatures only reveal it to use their most vile weapon: the Dementor’s Kiss. They clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the person whom they wish to destroy utterly and suck out their soul and their sanity along with it. It is entirely possible to exist without a soul so long as your body is still in working order, but to lose it, is to lose your moral compass and your sense of self. But few people who’ve suffered this punishment have lost only their sense of that which is and is not ethical. Combined with the Dementors’ ability to feed off of memories, their Kiss can wipe the human mind clear and warp it until there is little left but a shrivelled, broken carcass. To recover from something like that was impossible. Once consumed by
the Dementors, your soul is lost forever, and you become nothing but an empty shell, you will exist,
but that is all. That was the fate that awaited Sirius Black if he was found.

“Does Kali know?” Albus asked.

Remus’s face fell. “Yes, I’m afraid she does. She didn’t take it well.”

“She thinks he’s innocent.” It wasn’t a question, the girl was too much like her mother and
grandmother to believe in circumstantial evidence.

“She has done ever since she was a child. No one’s ever been able to convince her otherwise. I
myself stopped trying a long time ago. She can be very persuasive, and on a few occasions she
almost had me convinced.” Remus smiled sadly. “She’s incredibly loyal, even to him, despite the fact
that she remembers very little about him.”

Remus’s gaze took on a far away look, and his smile became a little less sad. Albus didn’t need to
use Legilimency to see how much Remus cared for the girl. In all but blood, the werewolf was more
her father than Sirius was, it was he who had raised her for most of her life, he who’d been there
when she’d had no one else. If it came down to a choice, Albus believed that she would chose
Remus over Sirius.

That thought felt like dominoes being pushed over in his brain and the solution to the Sirius Black
dilemma appeared to him, clear as day.

Even if Sirius were to be deemed innocent by the Court due to lack of evidence, it would not equate
to him being forgiven by the people. Kali may run to him with open arms, but Remus would not
because there would be nothing to prove Sirius's lack of guilt and if Remus had so much as an
inkling of doubt, he would not go back to him. Kali would of course choose to live with Remus,
perhaps only writing to and occasionally visiting her father. And if even his own daughter refused to
live with him, no one in their right mind would allow Sirius to take custody of Harry. Harry would
remain with his Aunt and Uncle, Sirius would be free but isolated, and Kali would be grateful to
Albus for his help in getting the charges against her father dropped.

Admittedly, this plan was not without its weaknesses, but the most unruly variable was Remus, and
ever since Albus had exceptionally allowed the werewolf to attend Hogwarts, he had owned his trust
and confidence. If Albus played his hand right, the way he’d done twelve years ago, Remus would
do exactly what was needed to be done without ever realizing it.

It was nothing short of a miracle that Albus had managed to convince Remus of Sirius’s guilt. He’d
come barging into Albus’s office barely an hour after Sirius had been arrested, demanding answers,
and Albus had given them to him. He’d planted the seed of doubt in Remus’s mind and it was fed by
grief and guilt, until it overrode everything else, and his conviction became so unshakable and
desperate that even Freyja and Asherah couldn’t make him see reason. Truth be told, there were a lot
of inconsistencies in the official story of what happened twelve years ago, but the relief of the war
ending had meant that very few people had examined it closely enough to see the flaws. Still, anyone
who’d known Sirius had expressed their surprise at his betrayal, but in the end they’d put it down to
his family: he was a Black, after all.

The events of that day and the choices Sirius had made could not have played into Albus’s hand
better except for if the old man had orchestrated the entire thing himself. If Sirius had not let his rage
and grief overcome him, if he’d stopped to think and consider the consequences of his actions for
even a second, things would have played out very differently. He would have cleared his head,
explained the entire situation to the authorities, and been declared innocent within a matter of hours.
He would have fought Albus’s decision to have Harry live with his Aunt and Uncle, and unlike
Asherah, Sirius would have been impossible to stop.

Albus had once thought to take Sirius under his wing, as he had done with Remus. He would have been the perfect fit: the Gryffindor Black; the disowned heir; the homosexual Pureblood. But Albus quickly realised his mistake, Sirius could not be lured to Albus’s side with promises of protection and a second chance, because he was not an outcast, he was a rebel. He knowingly chose his path and he would not let anyone make that decision for him, not ever. He refused to be used and would never serve anyone but himself and those he loved. His loyalty could not be bought. It was a shame, really, Albus could have used a man with Sirius’s talents and ability, and it was regretful, the way things had turned out, but necessary for the greater good.
The Fake Dementors

Chapter Summary

The Gryffindor vs Ravenclaw Quidditch match.

Chapter Notes

A quick update this week! (I say as I beat my homework and responsibilities away with a stick) I hope you enjoy it!

Saturday, February 5th, 1994,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

The weather couldn't have been more different from the last Quidditch match, Kali noted as she stepped out from the Forbidden Forest. It was a clear, cool day with a very light breeze; there would be no visibility problems this time, which was going to make watching the match a lot more pleasant.

She gradually slowed her pace until she reached the castle doors where she stopped to stretch. Running through the Forbidden Forest in the early hours of the morning was ill-advised; if a teacher spotted her, she'd likely wind up in detention for the rest of the year, not to mention Remus would probably kill her. But you could only jog around the castle grounds so many times before it became dreadfully boring, so she accepted the risk. The Forest wasn’t so bad so long as you were careful, the way you ought to be in every forest, and its inhabitants were only dangerous if you got in their way, but if you left them alone, they would leave you alone. Besides, it was too beautiful a place to steer clear of, with all kinds of treasures to discover and explore, and it wasn’t like she went unprepared, she always took her wand with her and Pan was always by her side.

Speaking of, something had caught his attention down by Hagrid’s hut, a scent on the breeze, gone before he could really process it. This had been happening a lot since they’d started at Hogwarts; if it wasn’t a vanishing scent, it was padded footsteps on stone floors, fallen leaves and branches cracking under the weight of something just out of sight, a flash of something just out the corner of her eye, that prickle at the back of her neck she got when she was being followed... At first she’d shrugged it off as being part of the creepy, haunted castle vibe that Hogwarts had going on, but now she wasn’t so sure. In fact, she was starting to think that she had a stalker, not of the human variety – they were easier to catch. Maybe it was just Peeves messing with her, but he had the attention span of a two year old with ADHD, she doubted he’d have managed to keep it up for this long.

“Do you want me to go check it out?” asked Pan. He was about ten times more freaked out about the situation than she was, and she knew that it went against every instinct he had to ignore a possible threat, the real and deadly kind, but whatever this was, it didn’t feel dangerous. It didn’t feel
particularly safe either, though, which was why she didn’t want Pan going after it alone, and as she had other things to do today, finding her invisible stalker could wait.

“Not if you want to eat before the game starts.”

The tempting smells of breakfast were wafting though the air, and, as always, his stomach won out. He was the first through the door, and he didn’t even complain when she took a detour to her dorm for a quick shower. The Great Hall was still practically empty by the time she got there with only the Ravenclaw Quidditch team huddled together, bleary-eyed, and a handful of others.

“What are you doing up so early?” she asked as she sat in front of Theodore Nott.

Theodore was more Draco’s friend than he was hers. The two of them had known each other growing up, each being deemed a suitable playmate for the other as they were both heirs to noble pure-blood families. Despite this, Kali wasn’t convinced they truly liked each other. They’d sit next to each other in class when their options were limited and they got along well enough, but they never sought out each others’ company.

He glanced up at her and bookmarked the page he was at in a well-worn paperback. “I wanted to get an early start on homework, and yourself?”

“I went for a run.” She passed Pan a piece of bacon before piling some onto her plate. “We don’t have that much homework for next week, do we?”

“Those of us who want to attempt to keep up with you do.” He took off his glasses and put them down on the cover of his book. He had very narrow blue eyes that looked surprisingly humorous given that this was the longest conversation they’d ever had together.

“I’m glad I can motivate you to improve your grades.”

He smiled, revealing two front teeth that were longer than the rest, giving him a rabbity appearance. “It’s been bad enough always coming in third after Granger and Malfoy, now I’m not even in the top three. My father will be disappointed.”

The notion didn’t seem terribly upsetting to him, but it was always hard to tell with pure-bloods, especially the aristocratic ones.

After arriving at Hogwarts, Kali had done some research into the wizarding community in the United Kingdom, and the deeper she dug, the darker its history became. Muggle hunting as an official sport; complete ownership of women first by their father then by their husband; old tales of cannibalism that claimed that eating the hearts of your enemies would transfer their magical ability to you; numerous accounts of filicide when the child was born deformed or without magic, some of which happened far too recently for comfort. It was the stuff of nightmares and horror movies hidden beneath the façade of gentility, and each pure-blood family had its own long list of sins.

She couldn’t claim to know much about Joseph Nott specifically, except that he was quite old, a widower, and that he was suspected of being one of Voldemort’s earliest followers; he’d bought his way out of a conviction, though, so no jail time for him. Theodore had two sisters who were fairly older than he was, both had already been married off, one to the Crabbe family, the other to the Selwyn family – good matches, Kali was told. Rumour had it that their mother had died in childbirth – one of the leading causes of death for pure-blood witches – and the child, a stillborn son, was mourned more than she was, three guesses as to why anyone?

“I’m sure you’ll manage to make it up to him,” she said lightly.
“I was thinking you could tutor me.”

Now that was odd, it wasn’t common for Slytherins to ask for help. “Unless he wants something else and this is his underhanded way of asking for it,” Pan piped up, still munching down on his breakfast.

“You have some very serious trust issues, you know that?”

“You were thinking it too.”

He wasn’t wrong, but she wasn’t about to let paranoia get the better of her. “I could do that,” she said aloud.

“Good, are you busy this evening? Say seven o’clock?”

They agreed to meet up at the library after dinner, and the Great Hall started filling up with students who brought with them the excited chatter and over-abundance of House spirit that only popped up on game days. Today’s match would decide whether Gryffindor stood a chance in the school leagues, if they lost today they’d be out of the running for the Cup which explained why so many people were decked out in Ravenclaw blue. The Slytherin team, in particular, had gone over the top in its show of support with robes charmed to match the Ravenclaws’ House colours and a large bronze eagle painted over their backs.

A commotion by the large double doors drew her attention away from the extravagant display and she spotted Harry, decked out in his Quidditch robes and surrounded by a sort of guard of honour made up of the boys in his dormitory. They stood tall, chins raised high, and bright smiles on their faces, occasionally casting glances at the broom slung over Harry’s shoulder. It took her an embarrassingly long second to figure out what the fuss was about, too distracted by the comedic aspect of the scene, but upon further inspection she realised that she recognized that broom, it was a Firebolt, a recently released state-of-the-art racing broom that was the envy of any Quidditch player, and apparently quite a few non Quidditch players too if the swell of excited muttering that overcame the Great Hall was any indication. Kali chanced a glance at the Slytherin team to see their take on this new development; if their thunderstruck expressions were anything to go by, they weren’t thrilled.

The reflected glory of the Firebolt was brighter than a sun and warm enough to bask in, and Oliver Wood, the Gryffindor team Captain, made sure that they made the most of it by laying the broom in the middle of the Gryffindor table. People from the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables were soon going over for a closer look and a few reverent caresses of the polished handle.

“Oh for the love of Circe, it’s only a broom,” Pan scoffed, snatching at another piece of bacon while no one was looking.

“Not just any broom. That is an aerodynamic masterpiece.”

“No,” he said, turning into a peregrine falcon. “This is an aerodynamic masterpiece, that thing over there is an abomination. Humans weren’t meant to fly, it’s unnatural.”

“You’re just jealous that you’re not the centre of attention today.”

She excused herself from Theodore and started toward the Gryffindor table.

“Where are you going?” Pan asked, flying onto her shoulder.

“Where do you think?”
She stepped into the gathered crowd just as Percy bustled off after his Ravenclaw girlfriend to join her in a piece of toast.

“Nice broom, Harry,” Kali said, walking up to him. Pan flew from her shoulder and landed on the table, turning into a small chipmunk and sniffing at the broom in distaste.

“Thanks,” Harry beamed. It was nice to see him this happy again. His mood had been a little rocky since the last Quidditch game, but apparently all it took to raise his spirits was a new broom. Good to know.

Fred and George drew her in for a private conversation and she wished the rest of the team good luck as the twins herded her away. She’d started being able to tell them apart without having to rely on sense of smell, it wasn’t easy as they were really very similar to one another, but there were slight differences in speech and actions that were barely noticeable most of the time but more reliable for long distance identification, except for when they had their backs turned or were deliberately mucking up their mannerisms just to mess with her.

They wedged themselves into a dark alcove outside the Great Hall where they could see all the comings and goings but where no one would be able to spot them unless they really looked.

“Did you get it?” asked George.

“Of course I got it, who do you take me for?” she said, producing several shrunken cases of butterbeer and other goodies from her jacket pocket.

The twins had been too busy last night with Quidditch practice to do their usual pre-game trip to Hogsmeade, so Kali had gone for them. They’d shown her the secret passageway behind the statue of the hump-backed witch that led to the Honeydukes’ cellar a few weeks ago which made sneaking out of the castle a lot easier. She’d gone to the Hog’s Head rather than the Three Broomsticks to get the butterbeer and unsurprisingly the bartender, who had oddly familiar blue eyes, hadn’t asked any questions. Honeydukes had been practically deserted by the time she’d gotten back and she hadn’t wanted to risk buying anything upfront so she’d sneaked back down to the cellar, filled a few crates with sweets, and left the money lying around where the owner would find it without making it look suspicious.

“Your Shrinking Charm is very good,” Fred observed as he fiddled with one of the tiny sweet crates.

“I’ve put a timer on the spell to make sure that it will have worn off by this afternoon, so don’t keep them in your pockets.”

“That could be interesting,” he said with that all too familiar mischievous glint in his eyes. “Maybe we could charm them to go back to their normal size during the game and stuff a few in the Ravenclaw team’s pockets.”

“That would be called cheating,” Kali felt the need to remind him, “and cheating is bad.”

George cooed and ruffled her hair. “The little Slytherin on our shoulder.”

“Piss off,” she said, shoving him away and rolling her eyes, although they probably missed the eye roll in the dark. “How come you’re so sure you’re going to win the match anyway?”

“We have a Firebolt on our side,” said Fred.

“We can’t lose,” finished George.
“Have you seen the Ravenclaw line-up for this game? Their Keeper may not be brilliant, but their Seeker is.”

“Not as brilliant as Harry,” said George.

“You haven’t seen him play properly yet,” said Fred. “That last game doesn’t count, but there’s a reason he was the youngest player Hogwarts had seen in a century.”

“Not everyone seems to think so. I’ve seen a few people place bets against you.” The underground betting ring at Hogwarts was something to behold, it was nearly as old as the school itself and covered everything from Quidditch to test results to Gobstone matches. It was run by Seventh Year Ravenclaws, who, every year, passed on the mantle to their successors. Every teacher in the school knew about it, but either it was too much of an ingrained tradition to put an end to, or they’d tried and failed and somewhere along the line given up.

“Not everyone knows that Harry’s been taking extra classes with Professor Lupin to learn how to keep the Dementors away,” George pointed out.

That was true. “You ought to go hide these in your dorm before the match,” she said, handing them the last of the miniaturised crates.

They both ruffled her hair as they left and she fired a couple of low grade Stinging Jinxes after them, both hit their mark, but the twins merely cackled manically as they ran up the stairs.

“What are the odds one of them ends up in prison?” Pan asked snidely. He had yet to place his seal of approval on this friendship, and he made sure to remind her of that whenever possible.

“They’re harmless.”

“I beg to differ, my tail hairs are still blackened from that ‘harmless’ explosion of theirs. Do you know how difficult it is to fly with singed tail feathers?”

She let him rant as she headed for the library, she had some books to return before the match started, and if she was quick she might even have time to peruse the shelves and borrow a few more. She took three different secret passages to get there, the last one wasn’t much of a shortcut, but she went down it anyway simply because she could. She’d done well since school began, discovering all kinds of secret passageways and hidden rooms, but as it had turned out, she’d known very little when compared to the mind of information that the twins shared. Now that she knew everything they did, she felt more at home at Hogwarts than she ever had before.

She greeted Madam Pince with a smile and the librarian nodded back rather stiffly. She was a hard one to win over, Madam Pince, but Kali would not let that deter her. She made sure she was out of sight of the librarian before taking the borrowed books out of her pocket and returning them to their normal size. She imagined Madam Pince might throw a fit if she knew that Kali was casting spells on her precious books, even if it was something as harmless as a Shrinking Charm. She delicately placed the books onto the return pile, and silently padded over to the Charms section. This week, her curiosity led her to a shelf of books on healing spells. She leafed through a few before selecting five big tomes that covered everything from boils to back pains to missing limbs.

She still had some time before the game started, so she heaved her pile of books over to her favourite spot: a window seat on the mezzanine, hidden away in a nook of the Muggle literature section. She was working her way through the introductory chapter of one of the easier spell books when a loud snapping sound and a flash of light almost had her falling off of her seat. She caught herself and looked up at the cause of her near heart attack: a very small, mousy-haired boy who held an old-
fashioned Muggle camera between both hands. He was staring at her as though transfixed and the moment she looked at him, he went bright red.

“At least now we know that you’ve finally learned to go for your wand when something dangerous and scary rounds the corner,” Pan sniggered. He was still pilfering food from the Gryffindor table, and his sudden screeching laughter startled the little girl next to him who spilled her orange juice all over herself and him.

“Serves you right,” she muttered, trying to get her heart rate back under control. She loosened her grip on her wand and pointed it away from the small child. “Who are you?”

“Colin Creevey,” he said breathlessly, taking a tentative step forward.

“I didn’t hear you coming.” Which wasn’t a surprise all things considered, he looked like he weighed less than her five new books did.

“I didn’t mean to startle you, it’s just that you looked really peaceful.”

“I was.”

“You’re Kali Black, right?” he asked very quickly and didn’t wait for her to answer. “Your dad’s been all over the news, even in the Muggle world. I’m Muggle-born, and I told my dad – he’s a milkman – that you started to go to school here and he said to stay away from you, just in case. But I think that if I send him this picture, he won’t be so worried anymore. What do you think?”

The kid was talking a mile a minute and Kali actually had a hard time keeping up. Not sure what else to do, she nodded slowly and agreed with him.

His grin split his face in two. “Thanks. Hey, are you not going to watch the match? It’s Ravenclaw versus Gryffindor today, and Harry Potter has this really great new broom so Gryffindor’s bound to win, even though my friend Jake in Hufflepuff says that they’d have to win by loads if they want a shot at winning the Cup. But I’m not worried, I know Harry can do it. Which team are you going to cheer for? I know that most of the Slytherins are supporting Ravenclaw, but you’re friends with Harry and the Weasley twins, right? I’d have thought you’d be on Gryffindor’s side today.”

“That’s right,” she said when his excited chatter died down and he looked at her expectantly for an answer.

“Oh good, I’ll see you there then.” He waved energetically as he left, leaving Kali alone again in her little corner.

She let out a long breath, and kept nervously glancing up at the path that led back to the rest of the library as she stacked her books. She hadn’t realised she was so on edge until she’d drawn her wand on a little boy who was barely half her size, but apparently this stalker issue was getting to her more than she’d led herself to believe. She checked out the books with Madam Pince and shrunk them down as soon as she was out from under the librarian’s watchful eyes. It was quarter to eleven and by the time she made it down to the stadium and up into the bleachers, the teams were walking out onto the field to tumultuous applause. She was dragged down into a seat and spotted Daphne and Blaise on either side of her.

“Where have you been?” Daphne asked still clasping her hand.

“Library,” she said, rubbing at a stitch in her side.

“Where else,” Blaise drawled.
The teams faced each other on the pitch, red on one side, blue on the other, as the crowd cheered loudly, thrumming with a collective excited energy, only to quieten when Madam Hooch joined the teams, the box of balls levitating behind her.

“Wood, Davies, shake hands,” Madam Hooch said briskly, and the team Captains shook hands in the only show of cordiality there would be before the game began. “Mount your brooms… on my whistle… three – two – one -”

All fourteen players kicked off into the air, but all eyes were drawn to the Firebolt which zoomed higher and faster than any other broom.

Lee Jordan, one of Fred and George’s friends was providing the commentary. “They're off, and the big excitement this match is the Firebolt that Harry Potter is flying for Gryffindor. According to Which Broomstick, the Firebolt is 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…”

Lee and Professor McGonagall, despite the latter’s unwitting participation, made for a brilliant comedic commentary duo, making the game entertaining even for those who weren’t a fan of the sport.

Harry streaked past the stands, gazing around for the Snitch, with Cho Chang, the Ravenclaw Seeker, tailing him closely. The twins hadn’t been exaggerating, he was an excellent flyer, even with Chang cutting across him, forcing him to change direction. He outmanoeuvred her by putting on a burst of speed as they rounded the Ravenclaw goal posts and she fell behind, just as Katie Bell succeeded in scoring the first goal of the match, and the Gryffindor end of the field went wild. Lee had barely finished announcing the score when Harry dived, Chang tearing after him. The Snitch was close to the ground, flitting near one of the barriers, and Harry was speeding up. He was ten feet away when a Bludger, hit by one of the Ravenclaw Beaters, went pelting towards him out of nowhere. He veered off course, avoiding it by an inch, and in those few, crucial seconds, the Snitch had vanished.

There was a great “Ooooooh” of disappointment from the Gryffindor supporters, but much applause for their Beater from the Ravenclaw end. George 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 Ravenclaw scored any more points, it wouldn’t matter if Harry caught the Snitch,
Gryffindor would sit squarely at the bottom of the leagues. Both teams seemed very much aware of this fact, because the Gryffindors were getting more frantic and the Ravenclaws were upping their game.

Kali caught sight of the Snitch circling the Gryffindor goal post, as did Harry. He 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 loud enough for everyone to hear as Harry swerved to avoid a collision. “KNOCK HER OFF HER BROOM IF YOU HAVE TO!”

The Snitch had vanished again and Chang looked very proud of herself. Harry turned his Firebolt upward and was soon twenty feet above the game. Chang followed him up. She’d decided to mark him rather than search for the Snitch herself, not a bad move considering that every time it had appeared Harry had been the first to spot it. He dived again, and Chang followed. Kali couldn’t see the Snitch anywhere and she realised why as Harry pulled out of the dive very sharply and Chang continued to hurtle downward. It was a feint, a beautifully executed feint. Harry rose fast as a bullet once more and accelerated toward the Ravenclaw end where the Snitch was glittering way above the field. Chang, who was now many feet below Harry, did her best to race him, but he was winning, gaining on the Snitch with every second – then -

“Oh!” screamed Chang, pointing down at the field.

Every gaze in the stadium looked down. Three tall, black, hooded dementors, were looking up at the players. Kali drew her wand but she needn’t have bothered. Harry plunged a hand down the neck of his robes, whipped out his wand and roared, “Expecto patronum!”

Something silver-white and enormous erupted from the end of his wand and shot directly at the dementors, it galloped toward them, antlers lowered, ready to attack, and the dementors fell apart. Literally. They tumbled to the ground, long, black, hooded robes falling away to reveal Draco, Vincent, Gregory, and Marcus. Draco, who had been standing on Gregory’s shoulders, fell on top of the other two boys, and the four of them lay in a crumpled, heap on the ground all struggling to remove themselves from the dark robes.

Harry hadn’t paused to watch, though, hadn’t even seen that his attackers hadn’t been dementors at all, he kept going, faster and faster. 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, and six scarlet blurs bore down on Harry; next moment, the whole team was hugging and Kali worried for a minute that they might all fall off their brooms.

The roars of the Gryffindors in the crowd were deafening and Kali joined in with them as the team managed to make its way back to the ground. She joined the gaggle of Gryffindor supporters who were sprinting onto the field and who soon engulfed the entire team. She felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to see Remus.

“He did it,” she beamed. “He cast a Patronus.”

“That he did,” said Remus, looking both shaken and pleased. “Come on, lets go congratulate him.”

There were cheers all around them as they made their way to the centre of the 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,
“Sorry,” Harry said, but he was still grinning. “Good for you, Harry!” roared Seamus Finnigan.

“Ruddy brilliant!” boomed Hagrid over the heads of the milling Gryffindors.

“That was quite some Patronus,” said Remus once they’d reached Harry.

“The dementors didn’t affect me at all!” Harry said excitedly. “I didn’t feel a thing!”

Remus glanced over at Kali then back at Harry. “That would be because they – er – weren’t
dementors. Come and see .”

He led Harry out of the crowd until they were able to see the edge of the field.

“You gave Mr. Malfoy quite a fright,” said Remus.

The four Slytherin boys still hadn’t managed to extract themselves from the long robes, and now, 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!”

Harry didn’t seem disappointed that it wasn’t dementors who had caused the scene, he found the situation hilarious, and when Ron finally fought his way to their side, he doubled up with laughter as they all watched Malfoy fighting to extricate himself from the robe, Goyle's head still stuck inside it. If anything could have set the seal on Gryffindor's victory, it was this.

“Come on, you lot !” said George, fighting his way over. “Party! Gryffindor common room, now!”

He grabbed hold of Kali’s hand as he and the rest of the Gryffindor team led the way, still in their scarlet robes, out of the stadium and back up to the castle. She glanced back at Remus, who was pretending very hard not to hear the word ‘party’ that was being repeated over and over by the retreating crowd, and waved as she was dragged away.

She’d never been in the Gryffindor Common Room before, and she thought is looked nice, in a cosy sort of way, but it was in no way big enough for this many people. Not only were all the Gryffindors crowding in, but quite a few Hufflepuffs and even Ravenclaws were too. Although, she couldn’t help but notice that she was the only Slytherin. By the way the Gryffindors were still cheering and dancing, it felt as though they had already won the Quidditch Cup; the party went on all day and despite the food run Kali had made yesterday, Fred and George had to make another, disappearing for a couple of hours and returned with armfuls of bottles of butterbeer, pumpkin fizz, and several bags full of Honeydukes sweets.

George started throwing Peppermint Toads into the crowd and Kali noticed that one person wasn’t joining in the festivities. Hermione was sitting in a corner, attempting to read an enormous book entitled *Home Life and Social Habits of British Muggles*. She was making good headway considering the racket everyone was making around her, Kali certainly wouldn’t have been able to read with all this noise. She took an extra bottle of butterbeer with her as she sauntered over to the nearly deserted corner.

“What?” Hermione looked up at her blearily and Kali nodded toward the book. “Oh, no, I’m alright,
thank you.”

Kali pulled at the crown cork with one of her rings to open the bottle, and handed it to Hermione. Hermione thanked her again and took a small sip.

“I’m heading to the library if you want to come with,” said Kali, finishing off her own bottle.

“Oh.” Hermione looked out at the crowd and started nibbling on her bottom lip; it was an endearing look on her. “No, I should stay. I don’t want it to look like I don’t care that we just won.”

Kali could have pointed out that that’s exactly what her sitting alone in a corner looked like, but she opted not to in case it came out sounding meaner than intended. “If you’re sure.”

Hermione nodded and Kali felt the other girl’s gaze follow her out the room. She headed straight for the library, hurrying along so that she wouldn’t be late. She’d skipped dinner, but she figured she could go down to the kitchens after she was done with Theodore and grab an apple or something. It had been a while since she’d last visited the House Elves.

She walked past the Trophy Room and the sounds of angry muttering stopped her in her tracks.

She glanced in and spotted Draco hard at work polishing an old trophy.

“Having fun?” she asked, startling him so bad he fumbled with the trophy and dropped it to the ground.

“What are you doing here?” he spat, bending to pick up the award and checking for dents.

She leaned against the doorway and glanced around at the many awards, trophies, cups, plates, shield, statues, and medals all kept in crystal glass displays. “Just passing by.”

“Then pass by faster.”

“Someone’s in a foul mood,” said Pan as he turned into a hummingbird and flew swiftly around the bottles of butterbeer that Fred and George were juggling between themselves.

“I wanted to thank you,” said Kali. “It was so nice of you to make a fool of yourself for everyone’s amusement.”

His pale skin took on a pink tinge and Kali almost though he might hurl the trophy in his hands at her face, he certainly looked like he wanted to, but he merely tightened his grip on it, white-knuckling the delicate handles. He pressed his thin lips together hard, draining what little colour they had, and glared at her.

She grinned at him and turned to leave, but something caught her eye before she did. Prominently displayed on the left wall, beneath a sign that read: Hogwarts Awards for Services to the School, was a collection of small gold shields, each one about the size of her splayed hand, and on one was the inscription, T. M. Riddle. She stalked closer, spotting similar shields with Harry and Ron’s names engraved on them; she’d have to ask them what they’d done to earn those, although the Basilisk carcass decaying several hundred feet beneath the castle might have something to do with it. She heard Draco move behind her, giving her a wide berth, until he could see what had caught her attention.

“You’d think that after he started killing people they’d have removed this,” she said, eyeing Tom Riddle’s well-kept award.

Draco didn’t say anything and when she glanced over her shoulder at him, she saw him staring at the
little shield with something close to awe.

Kali rolled her eyes and left the Trophy Room, giving Draco some parting advice. “There are better people to look up to.”

She was late by the time she made it to the library, but she saved some time by knowing exactly where Theodore would be. The library was huge, with tens of thousands of books, thousands of shelves, hundreds of narrow rows, and just as many places to sit, but humans are creatures of habit and every student at Hogwarts had their own favourite place to study, and while Kali preferred the private window seat up in the Muggle literature section, Theodore could always be trusted to have his things spread out on one of the long tables among the dusty old law books that were rarely read by students. She wasn’t wrong. That was definitely his bag leaning against one of the chairs, but Theodore himself was nowhere to be seen. She was about to start looking for him when she heard a distant creak behind her and glanced back to see him heading her way.

“I was starting to think you wouldn’t show,” he said when he was close enough that he didn’t have to raise his voice.

He was taller than she’d realised. She’d been going to class with the guy for the past five months and she’d failed to notice that he was a head taller than she was. She blamed it on the fact that his build was even more slender than hers, she’d just assumed that his height would match.

“Sorry, I got side-tracked,” she said when she was done staring.

“Shall we get started?” He waved her toward a seat, long limbs moving awkwardly, and shins banging against the leg of the table as he sat down beside her, suggesting that this growth spurt of his was fairly recent.

“Which subject would you like my help with?” she asked.

“Arithmancy,” he said, already pulling his book from his bag as well as sheets of parchment, his quill and several spares.

Kali couldn’t even pull out the books she’d borrowed this morning to fill up her side of the table because she’d forgotten her jacket up in the Gryffindor Common Room, she could only sit and watch as he set one item after another onto the table, all neatly organized for a structured study space. Fortunately, he either didn’t notice or didn’t care that she was woefully unprepared for this tutoring session.

“I don’t understand the second exercise of the worksheet that Professor Vector gave us to do for Monday.”

Oh, well that was easy enough.

Kali spent the next three quarters of an hour going over numerical formulas with Theodore covering the entire worksheet that was due on Monday and a few of the previous ones too. He was a fast learner and eager to do well, but he struggled with some of Professor Vector’s more succinct explanations on when and how to apply each formula. Madam Pince came to kick them out of the library right before curfew, and Theodore packed up his things as efficiently as he’d unpacked them. Every quill and inkwell had its own prearranged spot in his bag; she half expected to see little labels pointing out what went where.

“Thank you for your help, Kali,” he said as he slung his satchel over his shoulder and they headed for the door.
“It was no trouble.”

He held the door for her and she led the way to a stairwell that would get them to the lower levels.

“Would you mind if we made it a regular thing?” he asked, looking down at his shoes uncomfortably. “Once a week, or once every other week, whatever works for you?”

“I can do once a week.” Preferably during a weekday, though, then she might actually think to bring her bag. “How about Wednesdays.”

“Can’t,” he mumbled, “I’ve got chess club.”

“Thursdays then,” she said with an indifferent shrug.

He nodded his agreement and they went down the next set of steps in silence. “Do you play? Chess, that is.”

“I know how, and playing once in a while is fun, but I don’t have the patience to do it regularly.”

“Maybe we could play sometime,” he said as they reached the Entrance Hall.

“Sure.” He headed for the dungeons, but she didn’t follow, veering instead toward the Hufflepuff Common Room. “I’m going this way.”

“It’s past curfew,” he said, sparing a quick glance at the large grandfather clock which stood next to the doors to the Great Hall. “You’ll get in trouble.”

“You’re only in trouble if you get caught,” she said with a smirk that bordered on a grin as she sauntered off to the kitchens.
Sirius's second attempt at breaking into the school.

*Saturday, February 15th, 1994,*

*Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,*

*Sirius Black,*

He waited at the edge of the forest, sitting so still that someone could walk right by him and not see him, his dark fur blending in perfectly with the night. He’d never used to be able to sit still, in his youth he’d been bursting with so much nervous energy that he was constantly moving. It had driven his friends crazy on more than one occasion. One of them in particular had always found Sirius’s hyper-activeness especially distracting, and he’d found some very entertaining ways to tire Sirius out. Sirius lost himself in the pleasurable memory; it was still odd, after so many years with the dementors, to be able to remember things again, good things. He’d thought that all of his happy memories had been stolen from him a long time ago, but apparently so many had been tainted by guilt, sorrow, and regret that fragments of them had remained, and the more time he spent away from Azkaban, the more those fragments grew.

Being at Hogwarts certainly brought back some of his better memories: daring James to skinny-dip in the Great Lake during Sixth Year, and pushing him in because he was too slow, just as Lily and her friends rounded the corner; the four of them, the Marauders, sneaking Firewhisky up to their dorm for the first time at the end of Fourth Year and each of them spluttering and gasping at their first sip; those evenings during Seventh Year spent lounging in front of the fire in the Common Room while Lily braided his hair and they just talked; that old tapestry on the Sixth Floor which hid a comfy little alcove where he and Remus used to sneak off to for some alone time…

All happy memories, but all bearing the stain of that traitor’s presence: Peter had pushed Sirius in right after James, fully clothed, and Sirius had dragged Peter in after him; it was Peter who’d nicked the Firewhisky while the rest of them had distracted the old bartender at the Hog’s Head; Sirius and Lily would watch Peter beat James at chess, or Gobstones, or cards, or whatever board game they’d decided to play that evening; Peter had covered for Sirius and Remus while they were gone, once even outright lying to Professor McGonagall and winding up in detention so that she wouldn’t catch them… He had been their friend, which was what made the betrayal all the more damning.

Sirius stared up at the castle he’d once called home, at its many turrets and towers, its long corridors, secret rooms, and winding staircases; he’d known every inch of it by heart, but he imagined it had changed a bit since then. Three of the people he loved most on this Earth were hidden away within that castle’s vast walls, as well as the one he hated more than he could ever hate anyone else, more than his family, more than Voldemort, more than every single Death Eater alive and dead.

Tonight the traitor would die.
He felt the all too familiar rage building in the pit of his stomach, and he had to take a deep shuddering breath to calm down. It wasn’t time yet. He pressed his nose against the tree she’d leaned against that morning, catching the remnants of her scent in the bark. She’d almost seen him again today; he’d been careless, wanting to get closer, wanting to get a proper look at her after over a decade of only being able to imagine what she might look like now. He’d been able to drop in on Harry a couple of weeks after his escape, the boy looked so much like James had at that age. He’d wanted to get closer then too, and Harry had almost gotten hit by a bus because of it. He hadn’t been able to find Kali, not until he’d finally made his way to Hogwarts, and she’d been right there, running around the grounds before the sun had fully peaked over the horizon. He’d collapsed to the ground where he’d stood, exhausted and bloody-pawed, staring at her as she ran circuit after circuit. It was a miracle that shape-shifting pet of hers hadn’t found him there and then.

He sensed the other before he saw him, and shifted as a big, bandy-legged, ginger-coloured cat with a squashed head and a bottlebrush tail trotted down the hill. The cat held something in its mouth which bobbed limply with each of the cat’s uneven steps. For one glorious moment, Sirius’s heart swelled as he mistook the object for the body of that traitorous rat: it was finally over, James and Lily were avenged, as was Sirius. But as the cat got closer, he realized it was only a crumpled sheet of parchment and he tried to not get too disappointed. The cat sat in front of him and dropped the paper to the ground, nudging it toward him. He pawed at it until it was writing-side up and read over a list of random odd words. In human form, he might have realised what they were sooner, but as a dog his mind was altered and it took him a few minutes to make the connection, and when he did, he stared at his new little friend in wonder. It was a list of possible passwords to get past the portrait that guarded Gryffindor Tower. He couldn’t ask the cat how it had gotten its paws on it – communication wasn’t easy between them, although the cat was very good a mimes – but he was sure to express the extent of his gratitude with his madly waggling tail.

Back before Azkaban, before his world fell apart, he’d imagined a few times what his life would be like after the war was won, he’d pictured himself living in that big house in Oxfordshire with Remus, Kali, Asherah, and Nahele; they’d have James and Lily over a few times a week so that Kali and Harry could have a play date; he’d spend his days working on his motorbike and looking after the kids while the others went off to work; back then he’d imagined Peter being there too, getting a job at the Ministry, finally hitting it off with Mary Macdonald, having two kids to James and Lily’s five; Marlene and Dorcas would have been those cool aunts who pretend to turn their backs while the kids get up to mischief and then laugh at their shenanigans; they would all have been together, and they would have been happy.

But now look at him: a convicted felon on the run from the law, something he used to think sounded kind of cool, but the reality of it was anything but; living off of scraps and whatever small animal wasn’t fast enough to escape him; disguised as a dog so that he wouldn’t be carted back off to prison; his only partner in crime was a cat albeit a very intelligent one; and his life goal was to break into a school to murder some kid’s pet rat. Needless to say this was not how he’d thought his thirties would be going. But he took what he could get.

The cat started toward the castle and Sirius followed, sticking to the shadows in case someone up in the castle chose that moment to look out the window. They walked past the Quidditch pitch where he’d watched Harry’s first match of the year a few months ago, Harry had definitely seen him then too, and moments later the dementors had shown up and Harry had fallen from his broom. First the Knight Bus incident, then that, Sirius was starting to notice a pattern, which was why he’d stayed well away from this morning’s game, despite wanting to see the Firebolt in action.

He’d felt guilty when he’d seen Harry’s old broom crash into the Whomping Willow and he figured that he had twelve years worth of birthday presents and Christmas gifts to catch up on, so he’d written up an order and the cat had taken it to the Owl Office for him. He’d signed the letter with
Harry’s name to fool anyone screening the post, but told them to take the gold from Gringotts vault number seven hundred and eleven – his own. The false signature wouldn’t have been able to mislead the Goblins, they could establish the authenticity of any money order they received with the simple stroke of a finger, but as they were not subjected or held liable by Wizarding law, they were by no means compelled to share this information with any third party, including the Ministry of Magic, and since they didn’t care much what witches and wizards did, escaped prisoners or not, so long as it was within Gringotts regulations, Sirius hadn’t been worried that they would sell him out.

He would have liked to see the look on Harry’s face when he’d opened the parcel, though, or watch him fly again; the kid flew even better than James had. But from his spot at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, he’d been able to hear the commentary and the victory cries, and that had been enough.

They entered the castle through a secret door behind Greenhouse Three. It was very late so they didn’t have to worry about patrolling prefects of teachers, they’d all be tucked away in bed at this hour. However, ghosts and poltergeists don’t sleep; Peeves was easy to avoid, he always announced his presence with loud bangs and manic cackling and never did anything silently; the ghosts, though, would pop through random walls without notice and Sirius had to scramble for cover on more than one occasion. But the closer he got to Gryffindor Tower the faster his feet carried him and the less he paid attention to his surroundings. So close, he was so close. The cat had to dart in front of him before he turned a corner, stopping him in his tracks, and only then did he hear the voices. He peeked around the statue of some long dead wizard and spotted Sir Nicholas in a heated debate with the Fat Friar right in front of the Gryffindor Tower. There was no way around them, no other path but this one. He felt the growl rising in his throat, but before it could get any further than that, the cat darted out into the corridor and started hissing and swatting at both ghosts.

“I say,” Sir Nicholas gasped indignantly. “Shoo, shoo.”

But the cat would not be deterred, and after a thorough telling off and lengthy prose about good manners which fell on deaf ears, Sir Nicholas huffed once more and flounced through the wall, the Fat Friar following at his heels.

The cat looked over at Sirius expectantly, and he gave a furtive sweep of his surroundings to make sure they were well and truly alone this time, then he transformed into a man. There was a mirror hanging from the opposite wall, but he avoided looking directly at it. He’d walked past a house window shortly after his escape and his reflection had scared him more than he cared to admit.

He bent down to scratch the cat’s head as he walked by it, and it trotted alongside him until they reached the portrait. He’d been expecting to see the Fat Lady, but Filch mustn’t have finished repairing her yet. He was ashamed that he’d lost his temper with her the way that he had, but it had been the anniversary of James and Lily’s death, and the perfect opportunity to get into the Tower without anyone noticing while all of the students and teachers were at the Halloween Feast, but she hadn’t let him in. He’d threatened her with the knife he’d nicked from that little Muggle house near where he’d found Harry, the knife he now had hidden away in his dirty old robes, and when still she had refused to open, he’d slashed at the canvas like a deranged man and she’d run away, he’d tried to chase after her, but it wasn’t easy with her jumping from one painting to the next. He’d failed that night, but he would not fail again.

“Who goes there?” shouted the subject of the new portrait, a short, squat knight in a suit of armour. “Draw, you knaves, you scurvy braggart!”

Sirius took the list of passwords from the cat and read them off, each wrong one drawing a new insult from the little knight: rogue, scoundrel, cur…

“Oddsbudikins,” Sirius read, and the knight’s face fell with disappointment and the portrait
reluctantly swung forward to let them into the common room.

It took a hard shove from the cat to get him moving. He couldn’t believe it. *So close, so close.*

The common room was exactly as he remembered it, a cusy, round room full of squashy armchairs and forgotten belongings. He padded to the winding mahogany staircase that was decorated with crimson and gold, much like everything else in the Gryffindor Tower, and headed up to the boys’ dormitories. The cat led him to the right door, and he had to take a deep breath to steady his madly beating heart. He pushed the door open slowly, doing his best to quieten its ominous creak, and waited a moment to see if the noise had woken anyone. It had not. He slipped into the room where five four-poster beds were spread out in a circle, each one had its thick red hangings shut, and he tried to guess which was Harry’s.

The cat pawed at his leg and pushed him toward the bed on the other side of the room. Peter Pettigrew was here, sleeping in the same room as the son of the friends he’d sold out to Voldemort. *Soon, soon, soon.*

He tried to find the opening in the hangings, but his emaciated hands shook with his every rapid breath. His blood sang for justice and his frustration grew. He fumbled for the knife in his robes as he kept tugging, but still the hangings would not open. In a fit of desperation, he slashed at them with his knife and the fabric tore, the sound loud and harsh in the quiet room. *Got to be quick, got to be quick.*

He scanned the bed for anything rat shaped, but there was only a red-headed boy who was slowly waking up. Sirius gripped his knife tighter and ripped away the boy’s thick scarlet blanket with its gold embroidery hoping that the rat was hiding beneath it. But it was not, it was only the boy, who was now wide awake and screaming.

“AAARRGGHH! NOOO!”

The shout woke the other boys in the dorm and Sirius panicked, eyes urgently darting around the room, searching for Peter, but when one of the other boys called out: “What’s going on?” he knew it was too late, he had to get out of there. He could hear movements around him as the disoriented boys struggled to find the divide in their curtains, and he ran for the door, slamming it behind him and sprinting out of the Tower, the cat hot on his heels.

“Stand and fight, you mangy cur!” yelled the little knight from the portrait as Sirius barrelled out into the corridor.

He transformed as he turned the corner and took off at breakneck speed, he could hear the castle waking up around him, but he didn’t stop, he couldn’t stop. He kept running, out the castle, over the grounds, through the woods, he was halfway up the mountains on the other side of Hogsmeade by the time he finally collapsed. The cat had stayed within the castle and he was alone again, panting and heaving, and miserable. He’d failed, he’d failed them, James and Lily, and Harry and Kali, and Remus, he’d failed them all. The traitor lived and Sirius had run like a coward.

He rose onto his sore paws and started pacing up and down the mountainside, berating himself for all the things he’d done wrong: he should have been quieter, should have checked if the rat wasn’t somewhere else in the room first… He’d nearly gotten himself caught, but worse than that, they’d know that he’d managed to get into the castle again, they’d be doubling security all over the place, and he might not get a fourth chance to finish the job he’d started over twelve years ago.

He hadn’t been prepared when he’d gone after Peter the first time, after he’d stepped out from the ruins of James and Lily’s house, stepped away from their lifeless corpses, he’d been distraught, he
hadn’t been thinking straight, hadn’t been thinking at all, and when Peter started shouting those things in that crowded street, Sirius should have realised what he was doing, but he’d been blinded by grief and his need for vengeance had drowned out his common sense. When the Aurors had carted him off, after Peter had blown up half the street, he’d laughed. Crippled by despair and facing imminent doom, and he’d laughed. The situation hadn’t been funny in the least, but what else could he do? Two of his best friends were dead, betrayed by the third who had just artfully framed him for their murder as well as that of twelve other people, and it was all Sirius's fault because he was the one who’d suggested they make Peter Secret-Keeper in the first place. *It was all his fault.*

Twelve years later and this portly little man in a lime green bowler hat had visited him while on a tour of Azkaban, and Sirius had put on his mask of bored nonchalance because he would not allow himself to look broken in front of anyone, not even in Azkaban. He’d asked the man if he’d finished with the newspaper he was carrying under his arm, claimed he missed doing the crossword, really he just wanted to know the date, he’d lost track of it years ago and he’d been morbidly curious as to how long he’d been trapped in that hell hole for. He didn’t even bother to read the entire paper until a week later, and that’s when he saw it:

**MINISTRY OF MAGIC EMPLOYEE SCOOPS GRAND PRIZE**

_Arthur Weasley, Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office at the Ministry of Magic, has won the annual Daily Prophet Grand Prize Galleon Draw._

_A delighted Mr. Weasley told the Daily Prophet, "We will be spending the gold on a summer holiday in Egypt, where our eldest son, Bill, works as a curse breaker for Gringotts Wizarding Bank."

_The Weasley family will be spending a month in Egypt, returning for the start of the new school year at Hogwarts, which five of the Weasley children currently attend._

Beneath it had been a black-and-white picture of nine people waving furiously through the page, standing in front of a large pyramid. One plump, little woman; one tall, balding man; six boys; one girl; and right in the middle, on one of the boys’ shoulder, a rat that Sirius would have recognised anywhere.

*What were the odds?*

He’d spent the next week wringing his hands frantically, muttering to himself, and pacing ceaselessly, driving the poor bastards in the cells next to his even crazier than they already were. Seeing Peter after so many years had revived the burning rage within Sirius, something that the dementors could not feed off of, knowing that the traitor was alive and would be going to Hogwarts where Harry would be, where Kali might be too… They were in danger and no one knew except Sirius. He had to do something.

So when the dementors had come to give him food, he'd transformed into a dog and walked right past them, animal emotions were difficult for them to read and their confusion had lasted long enough for him to take advantage of his extreme weight loss and slip through the bars. He'd swam across the North Sea and only when he’d reached the shore had he realised that he was free. Free to hunt down Peter Pettigrew and make him pay, regardless of the risks, and however difficult it may be, he was going to succeed. *He had to.*
Kali deals with doubt over Sirius’s innocence and steps in to help with Buckbeak’s appeal.

Saturday, April 23rd, 1994,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

The entire castle had been woken up during the search for Sirius Black the night after the Quidditch match. Apparently he’d broken into the Gryffindor Tower, made his way up to the Third Year boys’ dormitory, and been forced to flee when Ron Weasley had spotted him. No student had slept that night. They’d known that the castle was being searched again, and every House have stayed awake in their common rooms, waiting to hear whether Black had been caught. A teacher had come by at dawn, to tell them that he had again escaped.

Over the next couple of months, everywhere she went, Kali 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; the odd little knight who’d been replacing the Fat Lady had been fired, 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 be 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.

Ron had become an instant celebrity. Everyone at school was paying him attention, and it was clear that he 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 he scampered.”

Which made no sense. If her dad really was the heartless murderer everyone thought he was, why not have silenced Ron and proceeded to kill Harry assuming that Harry was the original target? She couldn’t understand what he was doing and it made her sick to her stomach every time she thought about it. She so desperately wanted to believe that he was innocent but he was not acting like an innocent man, and she didn’t know what to think anymore.

Gran had sent her a letter the next day after hearing about what had happened to check up on her and give her an update. Reading between the lines, she was no happier with the situation than Kali was.
Neville Longbottom was in total disgrace. Everyone was saying it was his fault that her dad had gotten past the portrait and into the Gryffindor Tower, he’d written down all the passwords for the week on a piece of paper and then lost it. 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 had in store for him. Two days after Sirius Black’s break-in, she’d sent Neville the very worst thing a Hogwarts student could receive over breakfast – a Howler.

The school owls had swooped into the Great Hall carrying the mail as usual, and Neville had choked as a huge barn owl had landed in front of him, a scarlet envelope clutched in its beak.

“Run for it, Neville,” Ron had advised, loud enough to draw the attention of every student in the room.

Neville hadn’t needed telling twice. He’d seized the envelope, and holding it before him like a bomb, sprinted out of the hall, while Kali’s housemates had exploded with laughter at the sight of him. They’d 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.

Kali had felt sorry for him, it wasn’t his fault her dad had gotten in, not really, and he could hardly be blamed for not remembering some of the ridiculously complicated passwords the doors and portraits in this school sometimes came up with.

With everything that was happening, Kali decided to skip a couple of Hogsmeade trips, which was how she ended up in the library one Saturday morning after waving off Daphne and Blaise. She’d long since finished the books about healing spells, and was now exploring a new interest: magical travel. She loathed Apparation, and Portkeys and the Floo network weren’t much better, so she was looking into alternatives. She was halfway through the second book she’d borrowed on the subject, so she headed up to the Muggle literature section with it in hand, but was surprised to find someone already sitting in her spot.

Hermione was gazing out the window, frizzy hair tied back in a thick ponytail, flawless dark complexion glowing in the morning sun, and an open book lying in her lap. She was lost in thought, delicate fingers trailing absently over yellowing pages, a slight frown creasing her forehead as she worked over whatever problem was flitting through her mind. Kali took a step back to leave her to it, but the floorboard creaked beneath her and Hermione glanced over at her.

“Hi,” said Hermione, her features softening as her look of concentration slipped away.

“Hi,” Kali repeated back dumbly, feeling like a startled deer caught in the headlights.

“Smooth,” Pan scoffed from his perch on the Owlery roof.

“Piss off,” she muttered, deciding then and there that she did not like this newfound awkwardness of hers and that she wanted it gone.

Hermione shifted, swinging her legs off of the window seat, and facing Kali completely. “Why aren’t you at Hogsmeade?”

Kali shrugged, the movement made awkward by the heavy book she was clutching to her chest. “Didn’t feel up to it. You?”
Her dark eyes lost some of their sparkle as they flicked down to her lap. “Same.”

Kali wasn’t sure if they were good enough friends yet for her to ask Hermione what was bothering her. She’d noticed that things had been tense between Hermione and her friends these past few weeks, so maybe that was it, it would certainly explain why she wasn’t at Hogsmeade. Ginny had told her that the rift was because Hermione’s cat had eaten Ron’s rat, so he wasn’t speaking to her anymore. Frankly, that seemed like a silly thing to lose a friend over; Hermione, clever as she was, couldn’t control animal instinct, and having a rat as a pet in a place with this many cats and owls was asking for trouble.

“How are you reading about teleportation?” Hermione asked, eyes taking in the cover of Kali’s rather flimsy shield.

“Curiosity.” She loosened her grip on the book before Madam Pince could pop up behind her like a book abuse radar and throttle her for damaging one of her precious charges. “I have some free time on my hands, I figured I might as well expand my horizons.”

Hermione smiled wistfully, showing off two rather large front teeth. “Must be nice.”

Kali glanced down at Hermione’s book and at the picture of what was unmistakably a toaster that covered the bottom left-hand corner. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“How are you taking Muggle studies?”

“Oh.” She followed Kali’s gaze and her cheeks darkened with a blush. “I thought it would be interesting to study them from the wizarding point of view.”

“And has it been?”

Hermione’s eyes snapped up to hers, and Kali could tell that she wanted to say yes, and that she wanted it to be true, but that it would be a lie. She’d met Professor Burbage, the Muggle Studies Professor, at the beginning of term and had had a fascinating conversation with her about Muggles’ ability to adapt without magic and how their ingenuity allowed them to achieve things that no one in the magical community could have dreamed up. She was a very intelligent woman and her class was undoubtedly very engaging… to pure-bloods and half-bloods who didn’t already know all there was to know about Muggles, but for a Muggle-born there was very little point.

“You’re taking Divination too, right?” Kali asked, sitting cross-legged on the opposite side of the window seat and leaning back against the wall. Hermione twisted to mimic her position so that they were facing each other. “What’s that like?”

Hermione let out a heavy sigh. “Awful, just awful. It’s a bunch of guesswork and chance. There’s nothing rational or logical about it, and the teacher’s just…”

“Airy?” Kali supplied, smiling at Hermione’s outburst.

“That’s a nice way of putting it.”

“It’s an odd subject to put on a school curriculum, even as an elective. It isn’t something you can learn; you can either do it or you can’t.”

“Well, I can’t, at all.”
“Are you going to drop it?”

Hermione looked startled by the question as though she hadn’t even considered the possibility. “I can’t do that.”

Kali pushed a strand of hair that had escaped from her braid behind her ear as she thought about the best way to word her next thought without it sounding patronizing. “I’m impressed that you decided to take so many extra classes, don’t get me wrong, and not that I’m in any position to judge for over-achieving, but you seem to have a lot on your plate.”

“I can manage,” Hermione said firmly. She almost sounded convinced.

There was a blaze in Hermione’s eyes that Kali very much did not want to mess with so she let it go. “I should let you get back to studying.”

“You can stay if you’d like,” Hermione said before Kali was done untangling her legs to leave. “There’s enough room for both of us, and it might be nice having some company while I work.”

Dear in the headlights, take two. “Sure,” said Kali, tripping over herself in her haste to agree and narrowly avoiding crashing through the window.

“Get yourself under control, human,” Pan scolded as she righted herself. Thankfully Hermione hadn’t noticed. “I’ll never forgive you if you die.”

“I’ll be sure to take that into account,” she said, opening her book to the right page.

Her good intentions were for naught, though, because her brain refused to focus on the writing, and kept forcing her eyes to glance up at Hermione every few minutes which was far from discreet, but the other girl was far too distracting to resist. She nibbled on her lip whenever she came across a complicated paragraph, which was adorable, and her gaze would dart back up to the top of the page to go over it again; every so often she would mouth a word from the text, seemingly at random and probably without realising she was doing it; her right hand stayed on the book at all times, skimming over the pages as she read through them, and her left hand was hidden away in the sleeve of her jumper, occasionally coming out only to brush an imaginary strand of hair out of her face.

Half an hour later and Kali realised that this little crush of hers was getting out of hand. It had crept up on her out of nowhere, starting from that first conversation in Arithmancy at the beginning of term, when she’d thought to herself: hey, this person’s really quite clever. It had only gotten worse from there because Hermione wasn’t just clever, she was brilliant: wickedly intelligent and more hard-working than anyone Kali had ever met. She knew the answer to every question the teachers asked, always got perfect results on homework, and her spell-casting was beyond reproach; she was incredibly impressive, and Kali was completely infatuated.

It was a good thing Hermione’s concentration was so unwavering or she would definitely have noticed all the staring, and Kali decided to put a stop to it before she got caught in the act. A tapping sound drew her attention to the window. It was a fine and breezy day, and if Kali wasn’t being eaten up by stress she’d have spent it outside with most everyone else who wasn’t at Hogsmeade; she watched a small group of students throw around a Frisbee and considered going down to join them when the tapping started up again, more insistent this time. She spotted the haggard looking owl fluttering by her elbow and opened the window for it. It swooped in, dropped a letter in Hermione’s lap, and swooped right back out.

Hermione frowned at the slightly crumpled envelope for only a moment before her eyes went wide with trepidation and she tore into it. Her eyes scanned over the short letter and her expression fell.
“What’s wrong?” Kali asked with mild panic as Hermione’s eyes started tearing up.

Hermione handed her the damp parchment. 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_

Kali connected the dots quickly enough but the pattern that emerged didn’t make much sense. “I don’t understand.”

“After Malfoy was injured during Hagrid’s first Care of Magical Creatures class by that hippogriff, his father put in a complaint at the Ministry to have Buckbeak put down. I’ve been helping Hagrid prepare for the hearing, but we lost anyway.”

Kali was furious. Going after the hippogriff when the injury was Draco’s own bloody fault was a low blow even for the likes of the Malfoys. She wasn’t surprised, though, that family wasn’t exactly known for being morally upstanding, but what was surprising was that she hadn’t heard Draco gloating about it.

“There’s going to be an appeal, right?” Kali asked, digging through her brain for every piece of information regarding legal procedures that Gran had ever mentioned in front of her.

Hermione nodded, sniffling and wiping away the tears. “But I can’t see any hope.… Nothing will have changed. Malfoy’s dad’s frightened the Committee into agreeing to Buckbeak’s execution. They won’t change their mind.”

“Doesn’t mean we can’t try to make them,” said Kali, already thinking over a list of books that might be helpful.

“You want to help?” Hermione asked uncertainly.

“Sure… unless you don’t want me to…”

Hermione was quick to relieve Kali of her budding insecurity. “No, I do, it’s just… why do you want to help?”

“Buckbeak doesn’t deserve to die, the Malfoys don’t deserve to win, and I need a distraction,” Kali answered honestly.

“A distraction from what?” Kali only needed to give her a rather pointed look for her to get it. “Oh, right, that… I keep forgetting that he’s your father.”

“I don’t. So how about it? Will you help me take my mind off things?”
Hermione smiled despite her watery eyes and nodded. “You know, I’ve never had a girl friend before.”

Kali spluttered and almost choked on her own tongue, and cursed the English language for not coming up with a less ambiguous term than ‘girlfriend’.

“Really?” she asked once she was done turning her blunder into a coughing fit.

Hermione looked away almost shyly. “I’m not very good at making friends.”

“You don’t seem to be doing too badly.” It was the wrong thing to say. Hermione immediately burst into tears, and Kali wasn’t sure what to do.

“But I am,” she sobbed. “Ron thinks my cat killed his rat and now he isn’t speaking to me, and I got Harry’s broom confiscated by Professor McGonagall because I thought it might be cursed, and they might never have forgiven me if she hadn’t gotten it back to him before the game against Ravenclaw, and the other day I threatened to tell on them if Harry – if he -”

Her crying doubled in fervour and Kali worried Madam Pince might hear. She shifted until she was sat next to Hermione and wrapped an arm around her shoulder, casting a Soundproofing Charm around them to avoid any unwanted attention.

When Hermione’s entire body wasn’t being racked with sobs anymore, Kali tried her hand at some comforting advice. “If you want to fix things with them, an apology can go a long way.”

“But I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I know, and I think a part of them probably does too. But people can get a bit funny when it comes to their pets, or their favourite sport, or whatever. What you need to be asking yourself is whether your pride is more important than your friendship.”

“They won’t apologise to me.”

“They’re teenage boys, so no, probably not. I could beat them up for you, if it would make you feel better, rough ‘em up a bit.”

Hermione smiled. “You can’t beat them both up.”

“I’ll have you know that I’m a black belt, and they are both very scrawny,” said Kali, taking mild offence at Hermione’s doubt about her skill, “I could take them both out in under three minutes.”

“I don’t think Professor McGonagall would be very impressed with you starting fights.”

“She need never know. Getting caught is for amateurs, and I somehow doubt that the boys will admit to getting beat up by a girl, the male ego is a very predictable thing.”

Hermione laughed and rubbed the tear streaks from her cheeks. “I think I’ll try apologising before I have you resort to violence for me.”

“If you change your mind, you know where to find me.”

Hermione closed her Muggle Studies book and was finally comfortable enough to make eye-contact again. “Thank you, Kali.”

“Anytime,” said Kali, working past the lump in her throat.
“I should go tell the boys about Buckbeak, I’ll see you around.”

Kali’s took a deep breath and her heart rate finally went back to normal after bouncing all over the place the entire time Hermione was around.

“You get that by offering to help with the appeal, you also agreed to spend more time with her, right?” Pan pointed out.

“I’m aware, and I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“Oh, well, if you’re sure,” he said and his tone sounded more than a little mocking. “I just hope you don’t embarrass yourself in front of her by contributing absolutely nothing to the case because you’re too busy staring at her.”

She wanted to tell him to shut up, but he had a point. “I should do some research for the appeal beforehand, and have everything written down, just in case.”

“That would be smart.”

She took down the Soundproofing Charm, shrunk her book, and climbed down to the main level. The library was all but empty, but the legal section did have one occupant; Theodore sat in a patch of sunlight, reading his old paperback. He hadn’t spotted her yet, so she stalked around him, staying out of sight, until she could sneak up behind him.

“What are you reading?” she asked, bending down right next to his ear.

He jumped right out of his seat, cussing up a storm, and brandishing his book like a weapon. She burst out laughing, thankful that the law books were kept on the other side of the library from Madam Pince’s desk, and, although, Theodore's defensive stance melted away quickly enough, his glare did not.

“You should come with a bell,” he said.

“That wouldn’t be fun at all. Tell me, where does an upstanding, pure-blood boy like yourself, learn all those interesting words?”

“An alcoholic great-uncle who likes to swear. What are you doing here?”

“I came to read some law books.”

“Why?”

“Who are you? The law book police?” His face scrunch up in confusion and she remembered that while creative swear words could be found in a pure-blood’s vocabulary, Muggle concepts, such as ‘police’, could not. “I’m helping Hermione Granger prepare an appeal for the hippogriff that attacked Draco.”

“The one that injured his arm?”

“Has there been any other? I mean, I wouldn’t put regularly pissing off magical creatures past him, but given the big show he made of that scratched arm, I think I’d have heard about it.”

“He actually took the hippogriff to court?” he asked incredulously. It did sound a bit ridiculous when said like that.

“His father did. It’s a very Malfoy thing to do.”
Theodore chortled and pushed his glasses up his nose. “That it is. But Lucius Malfoy does have a lot of pull with the Ministry, I don’t think even you can save that hippogriff if he wants it dead.”

“But if I don’t try, then what does that make me?”

He managed to hold her gaze longer than most people could, but he did eventually look away and rub at the back of his neck self-consciously. “I’m surprised that you care about something like this.”

“Why is that?” She kept her tone light, but couldn’t stop the involuntary tensing of her muscles. If this was going to turn into a ‘pretty girls shouldn’t do this, and pretty girls shouldn’t do that’ spiel, she might have to hit him, she’d suffered through enough of those to last her a lifetime.

“Not many people at this school would voluntarily read a law book, let alone plan out an entire appeal.”

Alright, good, no hitting required. “What can I say? I like animals.”

“You must do. If you want, I could help. I’ve already read through most of these books, and it could be a good exercise.”

“So you don’t just sit in this corner of the library for the musty old book smell? You’re actually interested in this stuff?”

“Is it that surprising?”

“Sort of. I’ve read some law books and interesting is not the first word that comes to mind. Long, overly-complicated, and involved, however, are quite high on the list.”

“I can’t argue with you there, but I do find them interesting.”

“Well, in that case, yes, I absolutely want your help.”

He laughed and waved her towards the many shelves of legal texts. “Step into my office.”

They spent the rest of the day looking up old cases that could help with Buckbeak’s appeal, and Kali was glad for the help or else she would have drowned under all the jurisprudence hours ago.

They were on their way back to the common room with armfuls of notes when Theodore finally let slip the real reason he’d asked her to tutor him.

“Your grandmother’s a lawyer, right?”

“She used to be,” she said. “She still practices on occasion, but her interests revolve more around business now.”

“She still has contacts, though?”

Kali stopped walking, his subdued eagerness tipping her off, and turned to look at him. “Is this why you made an exception to your loner status for me? You need an in with the wizarding lawyers in the U.S. because there aren’t any in the U.K.?”

He had the decency to look thoroughly embarrassed, scuffing his shoes against the flagstone floor and refusing to meet her gaze. “Yes, but only that first time. I like hanging out with you, you’re… you’re alright.”

“High praise.”
“You know what I mean,” he said, daring a glance up at her. “I’m sorry if I upset you.”

She only let him stew for a couple of minutes before shrugging and moving on. “Nepotism is the way of the world. You know, you could have just asked outright, I probably would have talked to her about getting you an apprenticeship with one of her old colleagues.”

He jogged to catch up with her and his relieved sigh was barely audible. “But then I wouldn’t have known the pleasure of your company.”

She scoffed, but couldn’t quite hold back her smile at that pitiful attempt to excuse his underhandedness. “It’s going to take a lot more than that to sweet talk your way back into my good books.”

“Do you prefer chocolates or flowers?”

“Think bigger,” she said, throwing a grin at him over her shoulder.

The next morning she met up with Hermione at the library, and to Kali’s surprise, Ron joined them. Obviously apologising really did go a long way. His presence was much appreciated, because while Kali could quite happily make stupid googly eyes at Hermione all day long, she would not do so in front of witnesses; she had a reputation to uphold and googly eyes were not part of the package. It also meant that she was not the only one to gape at the workload Hermione had put into the first hearing, Kali was convinced that there were professional lawyers with clients facing murder charges who were less prepared than Hermione.

They spent the day rewriting Hagrid’s speech and inputting enough legal precedents that only the most corrupt Committee member would consider execution as a viable option.

Kali still had a niggling feeling that it wouldn’t be enough, not with Lucius Malfoy bribing and scaring his way into getting the majority vote, but she pushed it down, because pessimism and cynicism would not be of any use to Buckbeak.

The safety measures imposed on the students since Sirius Black's second break-in made it impossible for them to visit Hagrid when he returned from London on Sunday evening. Their only chance of talking to him was during Care of Magical Creatures lessons.

He seemed numb with shock at the verdict.

Kali asked him for a step-by-step of everything the Committee had said and all of Malfoy's main arguments, and he relayed them as best as he could remember. Hagrid had been one of those people who’d been a tad prejudiced against her at the start of term because of her surname, he'd never been overtly hostile like Snape was, just wary. But he was a sweet man, and if you liked animals and could appreciate the beauty of even the darkest of creatures, then he could look past most other flaws.

“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. “Don't give up yet, we're working on it!”

They were walking back up to the castle with the rest of the class. Ahead they could see Draco, who was walking with Vincent and Gregory, and kept looking back, laughing derisively.

“S'no good, Ron,” said Hagrid sadly as they 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!”

Draco, Vincent, and Gregory had been standing just inside the castle doors, listening.

“Have you ever seen anything quite as pathetic?” said Draco. “And he's supposed to be our teacher!”

Harry and Ron both made furious moves toward Draco, and Kali drew her wand, but Hermione got there first – SMACK!

She had slapped Draco across the face with all the strength she could muster. Draco staggered. Kali, Harry, Ron, Vincent, and Gregory stood flabbergasted as Hermione raised her hand again.

“Don't you dare call Hagrid pathetic, you foul – you evil -”

“Hermione!” said Ron weakly, and he tried to grab her hand as she swung it back.

“Get off, Ron!”

Hermione pulled out her wand. Draco stepped backward. Vincent and Gregory looked at him for instructions, thoroughly bewildered.

“C'mon,” Draco muttered, and in a moment, all three of them had disappeared into the passageway to the dungeons.

“Hermione!” Ron said again, sounding both stunned and impressed.

“You’re full of surprises, aren’t you?” said Kali, her tone matching Ron’s. She was done for, now, completely smitten. Who knew seeing your crush slap a bully could be such a turn-on?
Draco could pinpoint the exact moment his life had taken a turn for the worst: September 1st, 1991. It was meant to be a good day, the start of his Hogwarts career, but it had been ruined before he’d even made it to the school because of some self-important, little Muggle-lover who’d chosen the likes of a Weasley over a Malfoy.

Draco had grown up hearing stories of the Boy Who Lived, much like every other child born into a magical family at that time. Theories as to how Potter had survived what should have been a lethal attack circulated for years, and one of the most popular amongst Draco’s family and their close friends, was that Potter himself was a great Dark wizard, more powerful even than You-Know-Who. Draco’s father had believed this more than most, hoping that the boy would be another, and greater, pure-blood champion.

When Draco had boarded the Hogwarts Express for the first time ever, and had heard the rumours that the famous Harry Potter had returned to the wizarding community after a decade of absence, he had immediately gone in search of the Boy Who Lived. The rumours had been true, and in the hope of pleasing his father by getting close to the next Dark Lord, Draco had offered Potter his friendship, only for his overtures to be spurned, in favour of an allegiance to Ronald Weasley, of all people. That alone had been enough to make Draco realise that the wild hopes that Harry Potter was another, and better, Dark Lord were completely unfounded, and their mutual enmity had been assured from that point on.

The only exceptional thing about Potter was that ugly scar on his forehead, yet he was the most talked-about and admired person at school; becoming a symbol for Gryffindors, blood traitors, and Mudbloods alike, representing everything that was wrong with the world. Little had Draco known at the time that two years onward, Harry Potter would be the least of his concerns.

Meeting Kali on the train ride to school had been a nice surprise. At first. His memories from his early childhood were mostly vague, but he remembered her fondly. He had no recollection of their first meeting, they’d been only two years old after all, but he could recall events from her visits the three following years: playing hide-and-seek in the house at Grimmauld place; sneaking down to the kitchens during the middle of the night for a sugary feast; running from the wizened old house-elf when their giggling had woken him….

He’d always found Great-aunt Walburga to be a frightening woman, scornful and austere. She’d
lived alone in that big old house, widowed and childless – one son dead, the other disowned – with only the grumpy, old house-elf for company, and in the last few years of her life, had rarely ventured outside. Draco remembered how contemptuous his father had been when the old woman had expressed an interest in the daughter of Sirius Black; her only grandchild. Despite the cold-blooded murder of twelve Muggles and one wizard, Father had not forgiven Sirius Black for his blood traitor ways, and the uncertainty as to Kali’s blood purity had had him attempting to convince Walburga that the girl wasn’t worthy of the attention. Walburga hadn’t listened. Draco still wasn’t sure how Walburga had managed to convince the rest of Kali’s family to give her visitation rights – bribery or threats probably – but for four years, Kali had spent three summer weeks at Grimmauld place, and for a time, she had been Draco’s closest friend.

Then Great-aunt Walburga had died unexpectedly during one of Kali’s visits, and Draco never saw her again until that train ride. He’d been so happy to see her, but then she’d started spewing all that blood traitor nonsense, and he’d realized that her father’s penance had not affected her as it should have done. She had not renounced his old blood traitor ways. When she was sorted into Slytherin, he’d thought there might be hope for her yet, that she really was a descendant of the Black line at heart, but no such luck.

He hated her almost as much as he hated Potter, perhaps more because she didn’t belong in Slytherin, couldn’t belong in Slytherin, and yet she did, fitting in better than anyone like her had the right to. She was popular, making friends left, right, and centre, despite her political stance which ought to make her a pariah among her Housemates. But she was manipulating the more weak-minded into agreeing with her by being nice, and pretty, and clever, and flirting with everyone until they were all falling over themselves to line up behind her. It was pathetic, and there was no one in Slytherin capable of standing up to her because she’d been smart about picking her allies, like that Seventh Year prefect girl and most of the other prefects for that matter, choosing people who were powerful, intelligent, and influential, and cosying up to them from day one, and they’d let her, even though she was only a Third Year. He supposed it helped that she was tall enough that she didn’t look like a midget next to the m, not to mention smart enough and powerful enough for them not to make the mistake of treating her like a little kid.

Draco was envious, he couldn’t deny that. He’d arrived at Hogwarts, expecting to fly by on his name alone as he’d been raised to believe that he would, but he hadn’t anticipated that being in a House made up almost entirely of the children of powerful, wealthy, pure-blood families, his name wouldn’t be enough to make him stand out. Kali hadn’t fallen for that trap. Yes, she had her infamous surname, but that wasn’t all; she had power, intelligence, charm… she was the new girl, and she was something foreign and exotic with a melodious accent that made people want to listen to her.

When he’d realised back in First Year, that he’d need to do more than just be a Malfoy to earn the respect that he deserved, he’d pushed himself to be better than everyone else, but at every turn, his attempts were foiled: he excelled academically only to beaten in every subject by that Mudblood Granger, and now Kali was leaving him in the dust as well; he joined the Quidditch team, got everyone new brooms, positive that he’d be able to outdo Potter, but Slytherin hadn’t won a single match against Gryffindor since he’d joined the team.

The final match of the season was today: which team won and by how much would be the deciding factor in who was rewarded the Quidditch Cup. The game didn’t start for another five hours, and Draco lay awake, staring up at the canopy of his bed, listening to Vincent and Gregory’s loud snores, unable to sleep because of the nerves racking his body. The pressure was on, and he could not let himself lose this match. He’d won his two last games, the first against Ravenclaw, whose reserve Seeker was barely worthy of the name, and the second against Hufflepuff, that one had been a close call and if it weren’t for some dirty tactics employed by the Slytherin Beaters, he might have lost. Those victories weren’t enough to boost his confidence, though, because the only game he’d ever
played against Gryffindor had been a disaster: Potter had beaten him to the Snitch despite a rogue Bludger chasing after him and a broken arm.

He heard the rustling of bed curtains being drawn apart to his right from either Theodore’s or Blaise’s bed, probably Theodore’s since Blaise rarely rolled out of bed before nine if he could help it. Deciding that he wouldn’t be getting anymore sleep despite needing it, Draco rolled out of bed just as Theodore reached for the door. He saw Draco, and was decent enough to wait until the other boy was dressed and ready to follow him out of the dorm.

During his childhood, Draco’s parents had made sure that he associate only with the right sort: the pure-blood children of his father’s ex-Death Eater friends. Thus, he had arrived at Hogwarts with a small gang of friends already made, comprised of himself, Vincent Crabbe and Theodore Nott. Theodore liked to keep to himself, though, so Draco had quickly replaced him with the more physically imposing Gregory Goyle. He and Theodore had remained on speaking terms and still sat together in class and ate together on occasion. This would not be one of those times, however.

“What is that?” Draco asked, spotting the title of the book that Theodore was carrying under his arm: *The Legal Defence of Magical Creatures*.


“I know that,” Draco snapped, stepping in front of the other boy and blocking his path out of the empty common room. “Why are you reading *that* book?”

Just the other day, he’d caught Kali hanging around the library with Potter, Granger, and Weasley, discussing that beastly hippogriff’s appeal. He knew that Theodore had taken to studying with her on Thursday evenings, but had assumed that he was merely using her for her mind, hadn’t thought to suspect that his childhood companion might be buying into the trend that was Kali Black.

“I offered to help Kali research information for that hippogriff case,” answered Theodore candidly.

“Why?” Draco demanded.

“Because she is someone I would rather have as an ally than as an enemy.”

Draco scoffed and contorted his features into the sneer he’d learned from his father. “You mean you fancy her.” That was all well and fine, there was plenty about her to fancy so long as you could block out her various, annoying opinions, but to be taking homework assignments from her? She had him wrapped around her little finger. “You know, she’s only stringing you along. You can help her all all you like, but nothing will ever come of it. She’s using you.”

Theodore’s eyes narrowed with scorn and his mouth tilted into a derisive smile of his own. “I don’t have to fancy her to know that she isn’t someone I want to be on the bad side of, I’ve seen what she does to people she doesn’t like, as have you.”

Draco felt his skin burning. He knew exactly what incident Theodore was referring to, and he had been trying very hard to wipe it from his mind.

Two weeks ago, Draco and a group of Slytherins had been praising Sirius Black’s actions within Kali’s earshot, it was something that always got a reaction out of her, but this time things had escalated further. Draco had made the mistake of using the word ‘Mudblood’ in front of her, and he hadn’t noticed her drawn wand until it was too late. She’d hexed the entire lot of them, stating that if they were going to behave like barnyard animals, they may as well sound like them too. Draco had spent the next three days bleating like a goat, whilst Vincent oinked like a pig, Gregory brayed like a
donkey, Marcus bellowed like a cow, and Pansy clucked like a chicken, until the spell wore off, because Madam Pomfrey didn’t know the counter-jinx, and, even under the threat of many detentions by Professor Snape, Kali had refused to give it to him. It had been the most mortifying thing to have ever happen to Draco, more embarrassing even than the fake dementor incident which he was still serving detentions for.

“You’d best head up to breakfast without me,” said Draco. “I don’t associate with people who befriend filthy Mudblood lovers.”

Theodore didn’t so much as pause before stepping around him and leaving for the Great Hall, and Draco was left standing there like an idiot. He was glad that no one was around to see him stamp his foot like a child; he hated losing, loathed it, but he could never seem to win when it mattered. He’d lost Kali to her blood traitor ideologies; he and Blaise had never been close, but it had still stung when he hadn’t hesitated to become best pals with her; and Theodore may not have been his best friends, but they were close, at least he’d thought they were, and Theodore was the smartest friend he had: Vincent and Gregory were barely intelligent enough to hold a conversation with; Pansy did little more than simper whenever he spoke; Millicent was a violent troll; and Tracy was Pansy’s little lapdog. But those five were all he had now. The players on his team had to like him because he owned their brooms, but he was the youngest member on the team and the smallest and they treated him like a kid, and some of them still hadn’t gotten over how Marcus had kicked Terence Higgs off the team to make room for Draco. Those of lesser blood stayed away from him because of his family’s reputation, and all the students from other Houses kept their distance because of Slytherin’s reputation, all in all, he wasn’t being given much possibility to expand his friend group. Yet, Kali could work around all that even though she was a Black, a family whose notoriety among Mudwallowers was even worse than than of the Malfoys.

Draco stomped out of the common room. He didn’t particularly feel like eating alone, so he went outside rather than to the Great Hall. It was a clear, cloudless day with very little wind: nearly ideal Quidditch conditions. He wasn’t in the right mindset to enjoy the fresh air, though, because his brain kept flashing back to that stormy Gryffindor vs Hufflepuff match. So far that was the first and only time Potter had lost a match. Even if the Dementors hadn’t shown up when they had, Diggory had too much of a lead, Potter would never have caught up in time. Kali had all but predicted Gryffindor’s defeat, questioning the Slytherin team’s decision to back out of the match with harsh words and cruel comments. Draco had thought about that conversation a lot since then: that nonchalant mean streak of hers. She may not be a pure-blood, but she sure knew how to act like one, switching from blatant rudeness to underhanded insults with the ease and skill of a true aristocrat. She had everyone fooled, though, with her nice girl act. Almost everyone.

As though sensing his thoughts she popped into view, running out of the Forbidden Forest at breakneck speed. Only nothing was chasing her. She slowed her pace progressively, walking by the time she reached Draco, and stopping right in front of him.

“What are you doing out here?” she asked, panting heavily and wiping at her sweaty forehead.

“I’m allowed to walk the grounds when I please, Black. The forest, however, is forbidden.”

“That’s pretty much explicitly stated in the name, isn’t it? The Forbidden Forest. It’s not very creative.”

“I’d tell a teacher that you’re breaking the rules, but as you’re already in detention for the rest of the month, there’s not much point. Of course, it’s nothing less than what you deserve.”

“You’re not still bitter about the goat incident, are you?” she said with that infuriating smirk.
It didn’t matter how many detentions Professor Snape gave her, it would never be enough, because she didn’t care. It was like everything was a game to her. He could play games, too.

“Actually, I was referring to your association with that criminal element.”

“The Weasley twins really aren’t that bad, I don’t know why everyone insists on assuming that they’re lawless delinquents.”

“I meant your father,” he said, annoyed at having to explain himself. “Everyone knows that you’re the one who’s been letting him into the castle.”

“Is that what everyone knows?”

She didn’t believe him. Of course, she didn’t believe him. Sure, at the beginning of term people had thought that she’d come to Hogwarts to serve as her father’s accomplice, and some still did, but it was only a very small handful of students. Draco counted himself among them. How else would Sirius Black be getting in and out of the school undetected? Kali was a Slytherin after all, and she’d already proven how manipulative she could be: making powerful friends; convincing everybody that she was nice and fun; playing all the teachers like fiddles. Professor Snape was the only one who wasn’t fooled by her act. It would explain her friendship with the Weasley twins, who, rumour had it, knew secret passages in and out of school. And why would anyone willingly venture into the forest under the guise of a morning run unless they had someone to meet in secret outside the school?

“You’re up to something,” he said with a suspicious glare.

“Frequently. But aiding an escaped felon in breaking into a school isn’t on my bucket list.”

“Your what?” She was always doing this, using words and expressions that made no sense.

“Look it up.” For the second time that morning, he was stepped around like he was nothing more than a pathetic obstacle as Kali headed for the castle. “Good luck with the match. Lovely weather for it.”

She didn’t bother turning to see his reaction at the taunt, didn’t for a second worry that he might draw his wand on her, and he wanted to, he wanted to punish her for everything she’d done, but he could see her wand poking out of the duelling sheath strapped to her forearm, and he knew how quick she was on the draw. But he’d show her one day: you’d don’t mess with a Malfoy.

Draco spotted Marcus and the rest of the team through the front door, making their way into the Great Hall and he went to join them. Winning the Quidditch Cup would be the first step in showing everyone his worth.

His stomach was in knots by the time he made it to the locker rooms and Marcus wasn’t helping. It was his last year at Hogwarts and he wanted to win; he’d taken to making threats to his teammates if they didn’t play well, he’d even fired a curse at Graham Montague during their last practice because he’d dropped the Quaffle.

Finally, they saw the front doors of the castle open in the distance and the rest of the school spilling onto the lawn. It was almost time.

All too soon, they were walking out onto the field to a tidal wave of noise. Three quarters of the crowd was wearing scarlet rosettes, waving scarlet flags with the Gryffindor lion upon them, or brandishing banners with slogans like ‘GO GRYFFINDOR!’ and ‘LIONS FOR THE CUP’. Draco tried not to let that get to him, what did it matter if every member of every other House in this school wanted him to fail? Behind the Slytherin goal posts, 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 that awful commentator, Lee Jordan. “Potter, Bell, Johnson, Spinnet, Weasley, Weasley, and Wood. Widely acknowledged as the best team Hogwarts has seen in a good few years -”

Draco was glad when Jordan’s over-the-top praises 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 line-up and seems to be going for size rather than skill -”

More boos from the Slytherin crowd. Weren’t commentators supposed to be impartial? Yes, Draco was easily the smallest person on the Slytherin team; the rest of them were enormous, but what in-depth knowledge did Jordan have to say that they weren’t skilled players?

“Captains, shake hands!” said Madam Hooch.

Marcus 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…”

The sound of her whistle was lost in the roar from the crowd as fourteen brooms rose into the air. His doubt evaporated as he sailed through the air; now confident in the knowledge that he was going to win this, Draco tailed Potter as he sped off in search of the Snitch, copying Cho Chang’s technique from the Gryffindor vs Ravenclaw game.

“And it's Gryffindor in possession, Alicia Spinnet of Gryffindor with the Quaffle, heading straight for the Slytherin goal posts, looking good, Alicia! Argh, no – Quaffle intercepted by Warrington, Warrington of Slytherin tearing up the field – WHAM! - nice Bludger work there by George Weasley, Warrington drops the Quaffle, it's caught by – Johnson, Gryffindor back in possession, come on, Angelina – nice swerve around Montague – duck, Angelina, that's a Bludger!- SHE SCORES! TEN-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!”

Johnson punched the air as she soared around the end of the field; the sea of scarlet below was screaming its delight, but they were about to find out exactly how far Slytherin was willing to go to win.

“OUCH!”

Johnson was nearly thrown from her broom as Marcus went smashing into her.

“Sorry!” said Marcus as the crowd below booed. “Sorry, didn't see her!”

A moment later, one of the Weasley twins chucked his Beater's club at the back of Marcus's head. Marcus's nose smashed into the handle of his broom and began to bleed.

“That will do!” shrieked Madam Hooch, zooming between then. “Penalty shot to Gryffindor for an unprovoked attack on their Chaser! Penalty shot to Slytherin for deliberate damage to their Chaser!”

“Come off it, Miss!” howled Weasley, but Madam Hooch blew her whistle and Spinnet flew forward to take the penalty.
“Come on, Alicia!” yelled Jordan into the silence that had descended on the crowd. “YES! SHE'S BEATEN THE KEEPER! TWENTY-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!”

Draco turned his broom sharply to watch Marcus, still bleeding freely, fly forward to take the Slytherin penalty. Wood was hovering in front of the Gryffindor goal posts, his jaw clenched.

“‘Course, Wood's a superb Keeper!” Lee Jordan told the crowd as Marcus waited for Madam Hooch's whistle. “Superb! Very difficult to pass – very difficult indeed – YES! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! HE'S SAVED IT!”

Annoyed, Draco zoomed off after Potter, gazing around for the Snitch, while keeping one eye on Potter, and still making sure he caught every word of the commentary. Potter would try to hold him off the Snitch until Gryffindor was more than fifty points up; without those fifty points, Potter could catch the Snitch and Slytherin would still win the Cup. Draco had to find that Snitch.

“Gryffindor in possession, no, Slytherin in possession – no! Gryffindor back in possession and it's Katie Bell, Katie Bell for Gryffindor with the Quaffle, she's streaking up the field – THAT WAS DELIBERATE!”

Graham Montague, had swerved in front of Bell, and instead of seizing the Quaffle had grabbed her head. Bell cart wheeled in the air, managed to stay on her broom, but dropped the Quaffle.

Madam Hooch's whistle rang out again as she soared over to Graham and began shouting at him. A minute later, Bell had put another penalty past Miles Bletchley, the Slytherin Keeper.

“THIRTY-ZERO! TAKE THAT, YOU DIRTY, CHEATING -”

“Jordan, if you can't commentate in an unbiased way -”

“I'm telling it like it is, Professor!”

Draco was distracted by the argument and almost missed Potter’s look of sudden concentration, as he pulled his Firebolt around and sped off toward the Slytherin end. Draco couldn’t see the Snitch, but he went haring after Potter, anyway, trying to keep up, then…

WHOOSH.

One of the Bludgers went streaking past Potter's right ear, hit by the gigantic Slytherin Beater, Peregrine Derrick. Then again.

WHOOSH.

The second Bludger grazed Potter's elbow. The other Beater, Lucian Bole, was closing in.

Draco tried to spot the Snitch while Potter was distracted and had a fleeting glimpse of Lucian and Peregrine zooming toward Potter, clubs raised -

Potter turned his Firebolt upward at the last second, and Lucian and Peregrine collided with a sickening crunch.

“Ha haaa!” yelled Lee Jordan as the Slytherin Beaters lurched away from each other, clutching their heads. “Too bad, boys! You'll need to get up earlier than that to beat a Firebolt! And it's Gryffindor in possession again, as Johnson takes the Quaffle – Flint alongside her – poke him in the eye, Angelina! – it was a joke, Professor, it was a joke – oh no – Flint in possession, Flint flying toward the Gryffindor goal posts, come on now, Wood, save -!”
But Flint had scored; there was an eruption of cheers from the Slytherin end, and Lee swore so badly that Professor McGonagall tried to tug the magical megaphone away from him.

“Sorry, Professor, sorry! Won’t happen again! So, Gryffindor in the lead, thirty points to ten, and Gryffindor in possession -”

It was turning into the dirtiest game Draco had ever witnessed, let alone played in. Enraged that Gryffindor had taken such an early lead, the Slytherins were rapidly resorting to any means to take the Quaffle. Lucian hit Spinnet with his club and tried to say he’d thought she was a Bludger. One of the Weasleys elbowed Lucian in the face in retaliation. Madam Hooch awarded both teams penalties, and Wood pulled off another spectacular save, making the score forty-ten to Gryffindor.

The Snitch had disappeared again. Draco was still keeping close to Potter as he soared over the match, looking around for it, hoping Miles got his act together and stopped the Gryffindor Chasers from scoring anymore points.

But no such luck. Bell scored. Fifty-ten. Both Weasleys were swooping around her, clubs raised, in case any of the Slytherins were thinking of revenge. Lucian and Peregrine took advantage of the twins’ absence to aim both Bludgers at Wood; they caught him in the stomach, one after the other, and he rolled over in the air, clutching his broom, completely winded.

Madam Hooch was beside herself

“YOU DO NOT ATTACK THE KEEPER UNLESS THE QUAFFLE IS WITHIN THE SCORING AREA!” she shrieked at Lucian and Peregrine. “Gryffindor penalty!”

And Johnson scored. Sixty-ten. Moments later, Weasley pelted a Bludger at Cassius Warrington, knocking the Quaffle out of his hands; Spinnet seized it and put it through the Slytherin goal – seventy-ten.

The Gryffindor crowd below was screaming itself hoarse – Gryffindor was sixty points in the lead, if Potter caught the Snitch now, the Cup would be theirs. Draco could almost feel hundreds of eyes following him and the Boy Who Lived as they soared around the field, high above the rest of the game, with Draco speeding along behind Potter, desperately trying to spot the Snitch before he did.

And then he saw it. The Snitch was sparkling twenty feet above them.

Potter put on a huge burst of speed; Draco followed; the wind was roaring in his ears; he saw Potter stretch out his hand; knew that he wouldn’t catch up in time, so he threw himself forward, and grabbed hold of the Firebolt's tail, pulling it back and slowing it down. Potter’s horrified face turned to anger as he spotted Draco grimly hanging onto his broom.

“You -”

Potter tried to throw a punch, but Draco was out of reach. Draco 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.

“YOU CHEATING SCUM!” Lee Jordan was howling into the megaphone, dancing out of Professor McGonagall's reach. “YOU FILthy, CHEATING B -”

Professor McGonagall didn't even bother to tell him off, she was actually shaking her finger in
Draco’s direction, her hat had fallen off, and she too was shouting furiously.

Spinnet 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 Draco’s foul on Potter, were being spurred on to greater heights.

“Slytherin in possession, Slytherin heading for goal – Montague scores -” Jordan groaned. “Seventy-twenty to Gryffindor…”

Potter was marking Draco so closely their knees kept hitting each other. He obviously wasn’t going to let Draco anywhere near the Snitch….

“Get out of it, Potter!” Draco yelled in frustration as he tried to turn and found Potter blocking him.

“Angelina Johnson gets the Quaffle for Gryffindor, come on, Angelina, COME ON!”

Draco glanced down and spotted every single one of his teammates streaking up the pitch toward Johnson, including the Slytherin Keeper, Miles – they were all going to block her –

Potter wheeled the Firebolt around, bent so low he was lying flat along the handle, and kicked it forward. Draco almost raced after him until he realised he wasn’t going after the Snitch. Like a speedy curse, Potter shot toward the Slytherins.

“AAAAAAAAARRRGGH!”

They scattered as the Firebolt zoomed toward them; Johnson’s way was clear.

“She scores! She scores! Gryffindor leads by eighty points to twenty!”

As Potter, who had almost pelted headlong into the stands, skidded to a halt in midair, reversed, and zoomed back into the middle of the field, Draco’s face lit up with glee – there, a few feet above the grass below, was a tiny, golden glimmer. He dove for it, a look of triumph on his face as he pictured his fast approaching glory. The Firebolt may be the faster broom, but Draco was miles ahead –

But Potter was gaining on him, urging his broom on, flattening himself to the broom handle, neither swerving nor stopping as Lucian sent a Bludger at him – he was at Draco’s ankles – he was level –

Draco stretched his arm as far as it would go. His fingertips had barely brushed against a delicate, golden wing, when Potter threw himself forward, took both hands off his broom. He knocked Draco’s arm out of the way and –

“NO!” Draco howled as Potter pulled out of his dive, his hand in the air, and the stadium exploded.

Potter soared above the crowd, the tiny golden ball was held tight in his fist, beating its wings hopelessly against his fingers, and the entire Gryffindor team descended on him, chanting, “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.

Draco watched as wave upon wave of crimson supporters poured over the barriers onto the field. Hands rained down on the Gryffindor team’s backs in a confused impression of noise and bodies pressing in on each other. Then Potter and the rest of his team were hoisted onto the shoulders of the crowd. Thrust into the light and borne toward the stands, where Dumbledore stood waiting with the enormous Quidditch Cup.

Draco had never felt such cloying disappointment before, it ate at him from the inside, leaving a
ringing in his ears and a bitter taste in his mouth. His moment of glory had been stolen from him, but what was worse, was the knowledge that even if he had caught that Snitch, he would never have received the magnitude of cheering and applause that Potter had. There may have been a tidal wave of emerald green lifting Draco up into the air, but it wouldn’t have been enough to drown out the heavy silence or loud booing as three quarters of the school lamented his victory rather than celebrated it as they now celebrated Potter’s.

Draco would never know the triumph of that much solidarity, because he was a Slytherin, and Slytherins were forced to stand alone.
The End of Year Exams

Chapter Notes

Am I too emotionally attached to that hippogriff? Yes. Yes, I am

Monday, June 6th, 1994,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

Kali didn’t like exams. It didn’t matter how many times she told herself that it was just another exercise; that whether she failed or succeeded, at the end of the day it was irrelevant; even the fact that she could recite every single one of her lessons backwards wasn’t enough to appease her stressed out brain. She’d learned a long time ago not to express her angst when surrounded by her equally anxious classmates, though, as it was their belief that she had nothing to worry about because things came more easily to her. It was for this reason that she’d developed a tendency to withdraw at the approach of exams. However, she quickly discovered that this old habit wasn’t necessary at Hogwarts, because here she’d made a friend who was equally as intelligent as she was and just as prone to stress.

Hermione looked like a maniac: hunched over her Arithmancy notes, muttering complex formulas too low for anyone to hear, hair in total disarray from constantly running her hands though it and yanking hard when she encountered a knot. It was nice to be able to study with someone who lacked Blaise’s irritating indifference, Daphne’s inclination to burst into tears at random intervals, and Theodore’s inability to read silently. Plus, with the threat of exams looming right around the corner, Kali was able to sit less than three feet away from Hermione and not lose her concentration once.

There was one thing that was niggling at the back of her mind, though: Buckbeak’s appeal was set for Thursday, the day the Third Years finished their exams. That, in itself, wasn’t a bad thing; the speech that Kali, Theodore, and the trio of Gryffindors had written up for Hagrid was a work of art: elegant, and insightful, and judicially sound. The issue was that the appeal was to be held at Hogwarts, not in front of the whole Committee, and the one member who was showing up would be accompanied by an executioner. The Disposal of Dangerous Creatures Committee had already had its mind made up up for it by Lucius Malfoy, and the appeal was a mere formality, and no one was more furious about this than Ron, who’d surprised Kali by pouring his heart and soul into researching for the case.

Draco, who had been noticeably subdued since Gryffindor’s triumph in the Quidditch final, seemed to regain some of his old swagger over the next few days. From sneering comments Kali had overheard, Draco was certain Buckbeak was going to be killed, and seemed thoroughly pleased with himself for bringing it about. On these occasions, the only thing that had stopped Kali imitating Hermione and hitting Draco in the face was Daphne artfully dragging her away from possible conflict. However, that did not stop Kali from sneaking into the Third Year Slytherin boys’ dorm on Sunday evening, and sprinkling the bed Blaise had told her was Draco’s with generous handfuls of itching powder.
Exam week began and an unnatural hush fell over the castle. Kali started her Monday morning off with Arithmancy, writing down every single calculation, even the simplest one, step by step, just in case.

Next was Transfiguration, from which most of the Third Years emerged limp and ashen-faced, comparing results and bemoaning the difficulty of the tasks they had been set, which had included turning a teapot into a tortoise. Kali had overdone it a little and her tortoise had been much larger than anyone else’s, but as Professor McGonagall hadn’t specified what size she wanted everyone’s tortoise to be, Kali was happy of her work, and she was the only one. Hermione irritated the rest of their classmates by fussing about how her tortoise had looked more like a turtle, which was the least of everyone else’s worries.

“Mine still had a spout for a tail, what a nightmare…”

“Were the tortoises supposed to breathe steam?”

“It still had a willow-patterned shell, d’you think that’ll count against me?”

Then, after a hasty lunch, it was straight back upstairs for the Charms exam where Professor Flitwick tested them on Cheering Charms. Kali, who had been practising this charm on Daphne frequently in the past few weeks, performed it brilliantly. After dinner, the students hurried back to their common rooms, not to relax, but to start studying for Care of Magical Creatures, Potions, and Astronomy.

Hagrid presided over the Care of Magical Creatures exam the following morning with a very preoccupied air indeed; his heart didn’t seem to be in it at all. He had provided a large tub of fresh flobberworms for the class, and told them that to pass the test, their flobberworm had to still be alive at the end of one hour. As flobberworms flourished best if left to their own devices, it was the easiest exam any of them had ever taken, and also gave Kali, Harry, Ron, and Hermione plenty of opportunity to speak to Hagrid.

“Beaky’s gettin’ a bit depressed,” Hagrid told them, bending low on the pretence of checking that Harry’s flobberworm was still alive. “Bin cooped up too long. But still… we’ll know day after tomorrow – one way or the other .”

That thought preoccupied Kali over lunch, but she was quick to dismiss it as she descended into the dungeons for Potions that afternoon. Professor Snape wanted them each to brew a Confusing Concoction; Kali was loath to use Snape’s recipe for the potion, but she suspected that he would deduce points if she used her own. She didn’t miss his smug expression as he watched her add the dried scurvy grass, and she clenched her jaw to avoid throwing her ladle at his head.

Then came Astronomy at midnight, up on the tallest tower. This one was almost as easy for Kali as Care of Magical Creatures had been, and she was almost grateful for her time with Walburga. The old hag had been a real piece of work, but she’d made sure that Kali knew the night sky like the back of her hand.

History of Magic on Wednesday morning, and Kali may have gone a bit off topic. Professor Binns’ lectures regarding the witch hunts had been very centred on the wizarding point of vu, and he had barely glossed over the tens of thousands of Muggles who were tortured and/or killed for practising ‘witchcraft’. In the stifling classroom, Kali went into explicit detail about the superstitious fearmongering of Christian men who’d targeted women, Jews, and Muslims; and dedicated an entire paragraph to the hundreds of years of medical knowledge pioneered by midwives and ‘witches’ that was lost because of men’s desire to play at being gods.

She worked herself into such a state that when she spelled her potted valerian to grow faster, that
afternoon in Herbology, it shot up so fast that Professor Sprout fell back in shock, and Kali barely got the spell under control before the plant broke through the greenhouse’s glass ceiling. She was more careful after that, and headed off to Study of Ancient Runes thinking longingly of this time next day, when it would all be over.

Kali’s last exam was Defence Against the Dark Arts. Remus had compiled one of his usual exams; an obstacle course outside in the sun, where they had to wade across a deep paddling pool containing a grindylow, cross a series of potholes full of Red Caps, squish their 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.

Kali was finished in no time, even conquering the boggart, which had given her such trouble the first time around as a steady litany of ‘It isn’t real, it isn’t real’ played through her mind.

Flushed with her success and the knowledge that it was finally over, Kali hung around to watch Harry, Ron, and Hermione, who were the last to take the exam. Harry did brilliantly, working his way through the obstacle course even faster than she had. 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, Kali, Harry, and Ron 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 them on the top of the steps.

Cornelius Fudge, sweating slightly in his pinstriped cloak, was standing there staring out at the grounds. He started at the sight of them.

“Hello there, Harry!” he said. “Just had an exam, I expect? Nearly finished?”

“Yes,” said Harry. Harry and Ron still had their Divination exam this afternoon, as did Daphne and Blaise, but it wasn’t one that any of them were terribly worried about.

Hermione and Ron, not being on speaking terms with the Minister of Magic, hovered awkwardly in the background, as the portly man looked over at Kali.

“Miss Black, what a pleasure seeing you again,” he said with a forced kind of smile. The last time they’d seen each other, which was incidently the first time they’d met, Kali had publicly humiliated him during one of her grandmother’s Yule balls when he’d made a disparaging comment about werewolves; now Fudge was on a crusade to have her father’s soul violated in the worst possible way. Needless to say that there was no love lost between the two of them.

“Minister,” she said coolly.

“Lovely day,” he said, casting an eye over the lake and avoiding her accusatory gaze. “Pity… pity…”

He sighed deeply and looked down at Harry.

“I’m here on an unpleasant mission, Harry. 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 -” He glanced at Kali then quickly looked away. “- Black situation, I was asked to step in.”

“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 at all!” said Ron stoutly. “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 their very eyes; the other was tall and strapping, with a thin back moustache. Kali vaguely recognized the former from one of Gran’s parties, and gathered that they were representatives of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures, because the very old 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-moustached man was fingering something in his belt; Kali looked and saw that he was running one broad thumb along the blade of a shining axe. Ron opened his mouth to say something, but Hermione nudged him hard in the ribs and jerked her head toward the entrance hall. Pulling Kali along by the wrist when she’d been unable to move or take her eyes away from the axe.

“Why'd you stop me?” said Ron angrily as they entered the Great Hall for lunch. “Did you see them? They've even got the axe 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 very upset. “As long as Hagrid keeps his head this time, and argues his case properly, they can't possibly execute Buckbeak…”

But Kali could tell Hermione didn't really believe what she was saying, and she felt the anger bubbling in her stomach.

“Sure they can,” she seethed. “The governing system’s been completely corrupted by sleazy, arrogant, callous, dishonest, interfering, bone-idle, narrow-minded low-lives!”

She saw red and was fully prepared to turn heel and tell the Minister and his cronies exactly what she thought of them when Fred and George popped up out of nowhere in her path.

“Who’s upset you this time, Kali?” asked George, his tone verging dangerously close to patronising.

“And do you need help teaching them a lesson?” asked Fred.

“Lucius Malfoy,” Kali fumed. “And the entire Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures.”

The twins shared a look over her head and herded her away from the Great Hall, down the short flight of stone steps, past the paintings of food, and into the kitchens.

They were immediately greeted by a chorus of squeaky voices. “Mistress Kali! Master George! Master Fred!”

The house-elves were always happy to have company and were even happier when that company could be ploughed with food. Kali and the twins had barely gotten past the door, they were already being seated at a small table that the house-elves were rapidly covering with enough food to feed a small army.
It was difficult to stay mad at the world when you were surrounded by the innate and boundless kindness of house-elves, and Kali felt herself letting go of the tension in her shoulders as she sank further into her chair. The twins took her mind off of Buckbeak’s appeal by recounting the time they’d bewitched several snowballs to follow an old Defence Against the Dark Arts professor around and to bounce off the back of his turban, not knowing at the time that a piece of You-Know-Who’s soul had attached itself to the man. So, yes, the Weasley twins had totally, if inadvertently, hit Voldemort in the face with snowballs, repeatedly, and they were very proud.

Fred and George had their own Defence Against the Dark Arts exam after lunch so they ran off to get to that, and Kali was left to her own devices. She could go down to Hagrid’s hut to see how the appeal was going and offer her support, but given her earlier reaction upon seeing the executioner, she quickly reconsidered.

She ended up wandering the grounds with Pan trotting by her side. All around them, people were talking excitedly, either happily anticipating the end of the exams or already enjoying their clear schedules. Kali was losing herself in worry about Hagrid and Buckbeak so she pulled the book from her pocket and sat in the grass by the lake.

It was a beautiful nineteenth century first edition of Josephine Beauregard's Which Wicked Ways. Beauregard had come from a prominent French family, which had emigrated to the United States when it was still a colony. She was the Mary Shelley of the wizarding world, and her Gothic novels could rival Stephen King in terms of horror fiction. The book was a gift from Theodore and it was enough to amply earn him her forgiveness.

She didn’t notice the time pass with her nose stuck in the book, and when she finally looked away from the yellowing pages, she realised she was the only student still outside and that she was quite probably breaking the school’s strict new security measures – not that that was a first, but doing so in full view of the front doors was less than smart. She gave Pan a nudge to wake him up from his hour long nap, and he yawned, turned into a field mouse and slipped into her pocket. She shrunk her book down to a smaller size, slipped it into her other pocket, and was halfway through the front doors when she was pushed back out by an invisible force.

Pan was scrambling out of her pocket, ready to turn into something large with sharp teeth, and Kali had drawn her wand, but before either could go on the offence, Harry’s head materialised out of thin air, detached from his body. Kali was too shocked by the sight to resist as his hand came out of nowhere and dragged her beneath what felt like water woven into materiel. Her brain stopped spitting out error messages as the cloak closed around her and she saw Harry, Ron, and Hermione all huddled under the fabric.

“"I didn’t know you had an invisibility cloak,” she said. It was a very tight fit for all four of them.

“"It was my dad’s,” said Harry.

“"Cool. Could you give me a bit of warning next time before you suddenly appear like that?’”

“"Sorry, it’s just -”

“"Buckbeak lost,” said Ron weakly. “Hagrid sent us this.”

Hagrid's 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

“Let’s go,” said Kali, and they began their awkward, many-limbed shuffle down to Hagrid’s cabin. They knocked on his front door. He was a minute in answering, and when he did, he looked all around for his visitor, pale-faced and trembling.

“It’s us,” Harry hissed. “We’re wearing the Invisibility Cloak. Let us in and we can take it off.”

“Yeh shouldn’ve come!” Hagrid whispered, but he stood back, and they stepped inside. Hagrid shut the door quickly and Harry pulled off the cloak.

The hut was rather small with only one room. Hams and pheasants were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on the open fire, and in the corner stood a massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

Hagrid was not crying, nor did he throw himself upon their 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 Kali softly, standing 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.

Kali felt hopeless and tears prickled at her eyes at the unfairness of it all. Pan tried to send her comforting thoughts but they only flew around her mind like gnats, unable to grow into anything bigger. She wiped away the spilled milk with a cloth and picked up the broken pieces of the jug, barely registering it as she pricked her finger on one of the shards, and not caring at all when she did.

“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...."

Something between a muffled whimper and a sob escaped Kali before she could hold it back, and she pressed her hands to her mouth quickly stifling the sound. Hagrid swallowed. His eyes were darting all over the cabin as though looking for some shred of hope or comfort. Kali certainly couldn't see any.

"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 helping Kali make 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!"

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?"

He grabbed the struggling rat and held him up to the light. It was not a pretty rat: it was very thin with large tufts of fur missing leaving wide bald patches; and it 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 colour of parchment.

"They're comin'...."

Kali, Harry, Ron, and Hermione 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.

Kali desperately searched her brain for a solution, any last-ditch thought that might save Buckbeak, but she could think of none. It was too late.

"Yeh gotta go," said Hagrid. Every inch of him was trembling. "They mustn' find yeh here.... Go
Ron stuffed Scabbers into his pocket and Hermione picked up the cloak.

“T’ll let yeh out the back way,” said Hagrid.

They followed him to the door into his back garden. Kali felt strangely unreal, as though she was merely a spectator to this whole, awful mess, watching through a dirty window. There was a huge, uncomfortable knot in her throat as she 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. She was going to cry; she was definitely going to cry.

“It’s okay, Beaky,” said Hagrid softly. “It’s okay…”

Except it wasn’t okay at all. Death was too permanent, and Buckbeak didn’t deserve it. He deserved a long life, and the chance to fly again, and do whatever else it was that hippogriffs enjoyed to do. He didn’t deserve it to end like this so suddenly; for the swing of an axe to be his last vision of this Earth, and for pain and fear to be his last memory. And Hagrid didn’t deserve this either; not the guilt of having failed a creature that was relying on him; not the numbness of hopelessness; not the sorrow of losing someone that he loved. It wasn’t fair, and if it was the last thing she did, Kali was going to make Lucius Malfoy regret this.

Hagrid turned to Kali, Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “Go on,” he said. “Get goin’. Yeh too Pan, off with yeh now.”

But they didn’t move.

“Hagrid, we can’t -”

“We’ll tell them what really happened -”

“They can’t kill him -”

“This isn’t right -”

“Go!” said Hagrid fiercely. “It’s bad enough without you lot in trouble an’ all!”

They had no choice. As Hermione threw the cloak over Kali, Harry, and Ron, they heard voices at the front of the cabin. Hagrid looked at the place where they 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, Kali, Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off silently around Hagrid’s house. As they 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….”

They 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.

“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.

They heard a door open behind them and men's voices.

“Ooh, Ron, please let's move, they're going to do it!” Hermione breathed.

“Okay – Scabbers, stay put -”

They walked forward; Kali was trying not to listen to the rumble of voices behind them, and she felt bile rise up into her mouth, her stomach twisting and contorting so much that she thought she might actually throw up. Her face had taken on an unhealthy greenish tinge, and Pan was nuzzling against the hand that was stuffed in her jacket pocket beside him. 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 axe.

Hermione swayed on the spot.

“They did it!” she whispered. “I d – don't believe it – they did it!”

Kali’s mind had gone blank with shock. The four of them stood transfixed with horror under the Invisibility Cloak. The very last rays of the setting sun were casting a bloody light over the long-shadowed grounds. Then, behind them, they heard a wild howling.

“Hagrid,” Harry muttered. He made to turn back, but Kali, 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….”

Hermione's breathing was shallow and uneven.


“It isn’t fair,” Kali breathed, her mind screaming in white-hot agony, an answering cry to Hagrid’s broken howls.

“Come on,” said Ron, whose teeth seemed to be chattering.

They set off back toward the castle, walking slowly to keep themselves hidden under the cloak. The light was fading fast now.

By the time they reached open ground, darkness was settling like a spell around them, thick cloud cover blocking even the light of the moon and stars.

“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 plainly terrified. He was writhing with all his might, trying to break free of Ron's grip.

“What's the matter with him?”

But Kali had just seen – slinking toward them, his body low to the ground, wide yellow eyes glinting eerily in the darkness – Crookshanks. Whether he could see them or was following the sound of Scabbers's squeaks, Kali 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 between Ron's clutching fingers, hit the ground, and scampered away. In one bound, Crookshanks sprang after him, and before any of them could stop him, Ron had thrown the Invisibility Cloak off himself and pelted away into the darkness.

“Ron!” Hermione moaned.

She, Kali, and Harry looked at each other, then followed at a sprint; it was impossible to run full out under the cloak; they pulled it off and it streamed behind them like a banner as they hurtled after Ron; they 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 -”

Kali, 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 they could even catch their breath, they heard the soft pounding of gigantic paws…. Something was bounding toward them, quiet as a shadow – an enormous, pale-eyed, jet-black dog.

Kali saw the dog make an enormous leap, its trajectory going straight for Harry. She hit him hard in the chest, pushing him out of the dog’s path, and he keeled over backwards. Her momentum sent her sprawling next to him, and the dog flew through the space where Harry had been standing, close enough to where he and Kali lay that she felt its hot breath, saw inch-long teeth –

The force of its leap carried it too far; it rolled to the ground. Harry was clutching at his ribs, and for a moment Kali worried that she might have broken them; but right now they had bigger problems: the dog was growling as it skidded around for a new attack. Harry struggled to stand up, and Kali helped him get back up.

Ron was on his feet. As the dog sprang back toward them, it was Ron, this time, who pushed Harry
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 –

Kali went to help, but, then, out of nowhere, something hit her across the face hard enough that she was knocked off her feet. A grunt and a shriek of pain followed by two loud thuds told her that Harry and Hermione had fallen too.

“Lumos!” Harry whispered.

The wandlight illuminated the trunk of a thick tree; they had chased Ron’s rat into the shadow of the Whomping Willow – Hogwarts’ own, personal murder tree – and its branches were creaking as though in a high wind, whipping backward and forward to stop them going nearer.

And there, at the base of the trunk, was the 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!” Harry shouted, trying to follow, but a heavy branch whipped lethally through the air and he was forced backward again.

All they 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.

“We've got to go for help -” Hermione gasped; she was bleeding; the Willow had cut her across the shoulder. Harry was blinking blood out of his eyes from a gash on his forehead; Kali’s left cheekbone was on fire, and she could already feel the bruise forming.

“No!” said Harry. “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 them, 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.

Kali darted forward and managed to avoid two branches, but a third swooped her into the air and sent her crashing at Harry’s feet. He helped her back up, and she winced as she ran a hand over her ribs.

“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 shook.

“Crookshanks!” Hermione whispered uncertainly. “How did he know --?”

“He's friends with that dog,” said Harry grimly. “I've seen them together. Come on – and keep your wands out -”
They covered the distance to the trunk in seconds, but before they had reached the gap in the roots, Crookshanks had slid into it with a flick of his bottlebrush tail. Harry went next; he crawled forward, head-first, and slid down an earthy slope to the bottom of a very low tunnel. Seconds later, Kali slithered down beside him, Hermione close behind her. Crookshanks was a little way along, his eyes flashing in the light from Harry’s wand.

“Where's Ron?” Hermione whispered in a terrified voice.

“This way,” said Harry, setting off, bent-backed, after Crookshanks.

“I don’t like this,” said Pan.

“Neither do I.” There was something deeply unsettling about this place. An eeriness that seeped through the dirt walls, and a sense of forbidden that hung heavy in the too-damp air. There was no beauty here like there was in the forest, no adventure, no cheap thrill; only fear, cloying and stifling; she could smell it, taste it, feel it. It was everywhere.

“Where does this tunnel come out?” Kali asked, trying to keep her head from spinning. The tunnel floor was swaying beneath her feet, and she couldn’t get enough oxygen into her lungs.

“I don't know…” said Harry. “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…”

“Did he just say the Marauder's Map?” she asked, clinging to that snippet of information like a lifeline.

“I guess now we know where it ended up.”

Kali nearly face-planted onto the uneven ground, but Hermione steadied her. “Are you alright?”

“Peachy,” said Kali, trailing her fingers over the tunnel walls, trying to prove to herself that it was solid, real. She was alright, she told herself, perfectly safe… and several feet underground.

Do you know what state people are usually in when they end up where you are?

“I don’t like confined spaces.”

“Just breathe,” said Hermione. “Count down from ten and breathe.”

Ten. They moved as fast as they could, bent almost double. Nine. Ahead of them, Crookshanks's tail bobbed in and out of view. Eight. On and on went the passage. Seven. It felt at least as long as the one to Honeydukes.… Six. The blind panic going through her head quieted long enough for her to worry about Ron and what the enormous dog might be doing to him.… Five. She was drawing breath in sharp, painful gasps, running at a crouch.… Four. Her eyesight had adapted to the darkness, and now whenever Harry’s lit wand flashed into view around his form, it felt like dragging fire over her retinas. Three. Was the tunnel beginning to rise? It felt like the tunnel was beginning to rise. Two. Moments later it twisted, and Kali peaked around Harry to see a patch of dim light through a small opening. One.…

She, Harry and Hermione paused, gasping for breath, edging forward. All three raised their 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.
“No place around Hogwarts has boarded up windows,” said Pan.

That wasn’t entirely true. “There is one.”

Kali pulled herself out of the hole, staring around. The room was deserted, but a door to their right stood open, leading to a shadowy hallway. The other two followed her out of the tunnel. Hermione suddenly grabbed her arm. Her wide eyes were travelling around the boarded windows. “I think we’re in the Shrieking Shack,” she whispered.

“Ghosts didn’t do that,” said Harry slowly, staring at a wooden chair near them. Large chunks had been torn out of it; one of the legs had been ripped off entirely.

Kali traced a set of long scratches that covered the boards on the windows. Claw marks. She’d never asked Remus where he’d spent the full moons while he’d been attending Hogwarts.

At that moment, there was a creak overhead. Something had moved upstairs. All three of them looked up at the ceiling.

Quietly as they could, they 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.

They reached the dark landing.

“Nox,” they whispered together, and the lights at the end of their wands went out. Only one door was open. As they crept toward it, they heard movement from behind it; a low moan, and then a deep, loud purring. They exchanged a last look, a last nod.

A shadow at the end of the hall caught Kali’s attention, just as Harry kicked the door wide open. He and Hermione darted into the room, but Kali crept toward that shadow, wand pointed toward it. The door hit the opposite wall from the force of Harry’s kick and swung shut behind them. It wasn’t a shadow at all, it was a set of rotting robes heaped onto the floor. The kind of robes that prisoners wore in Azkaban.

She dashed back to the room, and eased the door open as discreetly as was possible. When it was open wide enough she peaked in. On a magnificent four-poster bed with dusty hangings lay Crookshanks, purring loudly. On the floor beside him, struggling to stand and clutching his leg, which stuck out at a strange angle, was Ron. Standing in front of him were Harry and Hermione; and standing in front of them was a man wearing robes that were far too short for him, and with a mass of filthy, matted hair that 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. The madman. The murderer. The traitor.

This man was not her father. He looked nothing like her father.

“Expelliarmus!” he croaked, pointing Ron’s wand at Harry and Hermione.

Their 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 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….”

Harry made to move forward, so much rage radiating from him that Kali could feel it from the other side of the room.

“No, Harry!” Hermione gasped in a petrified whisper as she held him back.

Kali snapped out of her daze and crept into the room, her wand pointed at Black. This man was not her father. “Wouldn’t want to make it too easy, though” she said, forcing her voice to be as steady as her hand. “That wouldn’t be fun at all.”

Sirius Black spun around to face her. She edged sideways so that she was between him and Harry, Ron, and Hermione; shielding them. Black let her, he was too busy staring at her.

“Kali,” he whispered hoarsely.

Her resolve nearly faltered. For years she’d wanted to meet this man; fantasized about what he might be like; imagined all kinds of scenarios in which she got him back. But none of that was real. This was real: an escaped murderer pointing a stolen wand at her friends. So what if he remembered her name?

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I’m protecting my friends,” she said steadily.

“From me?” Black asked. “Are you going to attack me, Kali?”

“Depends,” she said. “Are you going to make me?”

Ron spoke to Black before he could answer.

“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 colour, 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 to Harry to stay upright. “You'll have to kill all four of us!”

“There’ll be only one murder here tonight,” said Black, and his grin widened. He didn’t look human.

“Why’s that?” Harry spat, trying to wrench himself free of Ron and Hermione. “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 huge effort he broke free of Hermione's and Ron's restraint and lunged forward, dodging past Kali –

Harry lunged at Black, despite the fact that he was short and skinny and thirteen, whereas Black was a tall, full-grown man. Perhaps it was the shock of Harry doing something so stupid, but Black didn't raise the wands in time – 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 Black's head and they fell,
backward, into the wall –

Hermione was screaming; Ron was yelling; Kali was swearing; there was a blinding flash as the wands in Black’s hand sent a jet of sparks into the air that missed Harry's face by inches; Harry clung to the shrunken arm that was twisting madly to get free, his other hand punching every part of Black it could find. There was no skill to it, only anger and violence, and those things did not win a fight. Black’s free hand had found Harry's throat.

“No,” he hissed, “I've waited too long -”

The fingers tightened, Harry choked, his glasses askew.

Kali couldn’t get a clear shot to fire a hex, not with Harry in between her and Black, so she copied Harry’s more hands-on approach. Her foot swung up and connected with Black’s ribs, and he let go of Harry with a grunt of pain. Ron threw himself on Black’s wand hand, and Hermione joined the fray. It was a chaotic mess of limbs, each vying for the upper hand. Black may have been outnumbered, but even emaciated as he was, he was still bigger than his four opponents. Harry fought free of the tangle of bodies, but that still left Ron and Hermione who were both very much in Kali’s way. She couldn’t take a decent shot at Black – either magically or physically – without risking hurting either of them.

“Get out of the way!” shouted Harry. He’d gotten his hands back on his wand and was pointing it at Black.

Ron and Hermione 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. But Kali stood her ground. She stood next to her father, just out of arm’s reach, staring down at him.

Black was sprawled at the bottom of the wall. His thin chest rose and fell rapidly as he watched Harry walking slowly nearer, his wand pointing straight at Black's heart.

“Going to kill me, Harry?” he whispered.

Harry stopped right above him, his wand still pointing at Black's chest, looking down at him. A livid bruise was rising around Black’s left eye and his nose was bleeding.

“You killed my parents,” said Harry, his voice shaking slightly, but his wand hand quite steady.

Black stared up at him out of those sunken eyes.

“I don't deny it,” he said very quietly. “But if you knew the whole story.”

“The whole story?” Harry repeated furiously. “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 -” said Kali. She wasn’t sure what she wanted to say. Did she want to express concern at his outbreak? Talk him down from that dangerous ledge? Did she want to hear what Black had to say? 
Did she hope that his explanation would redeem him?

Before she could decide, something ginger streaked past Harry; Crookshanks leapt 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 the right, Hermione gave a dry sob.

Kali watched Harry as he stared down at Black and Crookshanks, his grip tightening on the wand. The seconds lengthened. And still Harry stood frozen there, wand poised, Black staring up at him, Crookshanks on his chest. Ron’s ragged breathing came from near the bed; Hermione was quite silent. Harry glanced over at Kali, she was still watching him warily.

And then came a new sound -

Muffled footsteps were echoing up through the floor – someone was moving downstairs.


Black made a startled movement that almost dislodged Crookshanks; the footsteps were thundering up the stairs.

The door of the room burst open in a shower of red sparks and Kali wheeled around as Remus 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 Harry, standing there with his wand covering Black, to Kali standing next to her father and then to Black himself, crumpled and bleeding at Kali’s feet.

“Expelliarmus!” shouted Remus.
He couldn’t believe it. His eyes had to be mistaking him. It wasn’t possible. Peter was dead; Sirius had killed him twelve years ago. But the Map was never wrong. Remus had helped Sirius design half the spells that powered that piece of parchment; he was intimately aware of its capabilities. But still he couldn’t wrap his head around it. If Peter was alive, what else had Dumbledore gotten wrong? The dot labelled Peter Pettigrew broke away from Kali’s, Harry’s, Ron’s, and Hermione’s dots, just as another name appeared in that section of the map: Sirius Black.

Remus bolted out of his office, not even shutting the door behind him, and ran faster than he’d ever run in his life. He reached the Willow; quickly levitated a stick toward the knot, and the tree’s deadly branches stilled. He darted into the tunnel, so intent on what lay ahead – on who lay ahead – that he did not feel the usual anxiousness that this tunnel had always made him feel; this was his own little route to Hell, but he barely noticed it. Before he knew it he was inside the Shack, and a girl screamed upstairs, not Kali, it had to be Hermione.


Remus ran up the stairs. There was sound coming from the room on the other end of the hall, he didn’t slow his pace, just pointed his wand at the door and blasted it open. He hurtled into the old bedroom, and it only took him a second to take in the scene before him.

“Expelliarmus!” he shouted, and all the wands in the room were propelled toward him. He caught all four deftly.

“Remus,” Kali protested at being disarmed.

“I’m sorry, it’s for the best,” he said, barely out of breath even after his mad race, moving into the room, staring at Sirius, barely noticing the ginger cat lying protectively across his chest.

He was almost unrecognisable. His unwashed hair fell past his shoulders in ropes and tangles, the robes he wore were dirty and too short and too wide for his body, his face was pale and wasted… and even so, the power and the beauty of the man were still apparent. He was nearly too painful to look at, but Remus couldn’t tear his eyes away.

“Where is he, Sirius?” asked Remus, in a very tense voice.

Sirius’s face was quite expressionless, it was a practised look that allowed him to hide his feelings from all but those who knew him best; Remus had used to be able to see right past it, but he must have been out of practise. For a few seconds, Sirius didn’t move at all. Then, very slowly, he raised his empty hand and pointed straight at Ron. The boy looked completely bewildered.

“But then…” Remus muttered, staring at his old friend so intently it seemed he was trying to read his mind, “… why hasn't he shown himself before now? Unless…” His eyes suddenly widened, as pieces of the puzzle he hadn’t realised were missing fell into place, “- unless he was the one… unless you
switched… without telling me?”

Very slowly, his sunken gaze never leaving Remus's face, Sirius nodded.

“Professor,” Harry interrupted loudly, “what's going on -?”

But he never finished the question, because what he saw made his voice die in his throat. Remus was lowering his wand, gazing fixedly at Sirius; his friend; his lover; the most improbable thing that had ever happened to him. An innocent man. Remus walked to Sirius's side, seized his hand, pulled him to his feet so that the cat fell to the floor, and embraced him, clinging to him with all his might. Sirius was so skinny, and Remus worried he might snap under the force of the hug, but Sirius didn't complain, holding onto Remus just as tightly.

“I DON'T BELIEVE IT!” Hermione screamed. Remus let go of Sirius and turned to her. She had raised herself off the floor and was pointing at Remus, wild-eyed. “You – you -”

“Hermione -”

“- you and him!”

“Hermione, calm down -”

“I didn't tell anyone!” Hermione shrieked. “I've been covering up for you -”

“Hermione, listen to me, please,” Remus shouted to be heard. “I can explain -”

“I trusted you,” Harry shouted at Remus, his voice wavering, out of control, his entire body shaking, not with fear, but with a fresh wave of fury, “and all this time you've been his friend!”

“You're wrong,” said Remus. “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!”

There was a ringing silence. Everyone's eyes were now on Remus. He kept his calm, but felt the colour drain from his face. Hearing that word, said in that tone, never got any easier, not even after thirty years.

“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; a nervous tic of his. “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. Remus made toward him, giving the boy’s broken leg a look of concern, but Ron gasped, “Get away from me, werewolf!”

Remus stopped dead.

“Ron,” Kali snapped, and despite everything she managed to throw him a disapproving glare.

She was shaking like a leaf; pale as a sheet; mouth set in that heartbreaking pout; confusion, exasperation, and something sad and broken flashing through her eyes. The last time he'd seen her this upset, they’d been at a funeral. He wasn’t sure a hug would be welcome right at that second, so he merely squeezed her shoulder instead, feeling relief wash over him when she didn’t pull away. She wasn’t mad at him. Thank Merlin.
It took obvious effort for him to turn away from Kali, but he had to. There were things to be done.

“How long have you known?” he asked Hermione.

“Ages,” Hermione whispered. “Since I did Professor Snape's essay…”

“He’ll be delighted,” said Remus coolly. “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.

Remus forced a laugh.

“You really are a very clever witch, 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 Remus. “At least, the staff do.”

“Dumbledore hired you when he knew you were a werewolf.” Ron gasped. “Is he mad?”

“Some of the staff thought so,” said Remus – namely one Severus Snape. “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 Sirius, who suddenly crossed to the four-poster bed and sank onto it, his face hidden in one shaking hand. The cat leapt up beside him and stepped onto his lap, purring. Ron edged away from both of them, dragging his leg.

“Enough,” Kali snapped. “No more shouting I'm getting a headache.”

“Did you know?” Harry demanded, turning on her now. “Did you know he was a werewolf?”

“Of course I knew, but it does not change who he is,” she said.

“He’s been helping Black get into Hogwarts!” Harry shouted. “Helping him try to kill me like he killed my parents.”

“I trust him.”

“Then you're wrong, too. Either that or you’re in on the whole thing.”

“If Remus or I wanted you dead, you’d be dead. We’ve had plenty of opportunities: down in the Chamber of Secrets or while he was giving you private lessons. There is more to this than either of us knows, and if you would quit shouting for five minutes, Remus might be able to explain.”

Kali wasn’t shaking anymore. There was nothing like anger to calm her nerves, and her level glare had the entire room falling quiet. When she was certain her message had been heard, she turned to Remus, giving him the floor.

“I have not been helping Sirius,” he said. “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; they all looked stunned.

He only hesitated a second before handing Kali’s back to her as well; Harry, Ron, and Hermione,
although all clever and gifted each in their own way, were still only Third Years, the damage they
could do to an experienced dueller like Remus was minute; Kali, however, was a different matter,
and that sharp, broken edge in her eyes was still plainly visible. But she trusted him, and he had
always trusted her.

“There,” said Remus, sticking his own wand back into his belt. “You’re armed, we’re not. Now will
you listen?”

The three young Gryffindors shared an uncertain look, but they heeded Kali’s words.

“If you haven’t been helping him,” said Harry, his tone much calmer, although, he couldn’t hold
back his furious glance at Sirius, “how did you know he was here?”

“The map,” said Remus. “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 Remus, waving his hand impatiently. “I helped write it. I'm
Moony – that was my friends' nickname for me at school.”

“You wrote -?”

“The important thing is, I was watching it carefully this evening, because I had an idea that you, Kali
Ron, and Hermione might try and sneak out of the castle to visit Hagrid before his hippogriff was
executed. And I was right, wasn't I?”

He had started to pace up and down, looking at them. Little patches of dust rose at his feet.

“You might have been wearing your father's old cloak, Harry -”

“How d'you know about the cloak?”

“The number of times I saw James disappearing under it…,” said Remus, waving an impatient hand
again, now was not the time to take a walk down memory lane. “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. But you
were now accompanied by somebody else.”

“What?” said Harry. “No, we weren't!”

“I couldn't believe my eyes,” said Remus, 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, labelled Sirius Black…. I saw him collide
with you; I watched as he pulled two of you into the Whomping Willow -”

“One of us!” Ron said angrily.

“No, Ron,” said Remus. “Two of you.”

He had stopped his pacing, his eyes moving over Ron.

“Do you think I could have a look at the rat?” he said evenly, despite the mad gallop of his heart.
“What?” said Ron. “What's Scabbers got to do with it?”

“Everything,” said Remus. “Could I see him, please?”

Ron hesitated, then put a hand inside his robes. The rat emerged, thrashing desperately; Ron had to seize his long bald tail to stop him escaping. The cat stood up on Sirius's leg and made a soft hissing noise.

Remus moved closer to Ron. Holding his breath as he gazed intently at the rat. It was him: thinner, older, and missing large tufts of fur, but it was unmistakably him.

“What?” Ron said again, holding the rodent close to him, looking scared. “What's my rat got to do with anything?”

“That's not a rat,” croaked Sirius suddenly.

“What d'you mean – of course he's a rat -”

“No, he's not,” said Remus quietly. “He's a wizard.”

“An Animagus,” said Sirius, “by the name of Peter Pettigrew.”

It took a few seconds for the extent of this statement to sink in. Sirius was innocent; Peter was guilty; everything Remus had tried so hard to believe was true for the past twelve years was a mere fabrication; his instincts had been right all along. Sirius had been left to rot in a cell in the worst place on Earth for over a decade, and it was Remus’s fault. He should have trusted the voice in his head that had kept telling him that Sirius wasn’t capable of what they’d accused him of; he shouldn’t have listened to Dumbledore who’d been so sympathetic, sharing with him a similar story of heartbreak, and stating that we could never truly know anyone, not even ourselves; he should have insisted there be a trial, but Dumbledore had talked him out of it, explaining that anyone who showed any kind of close association with Sirius would be arrested too, and Remus’s status as a werewolf meant that he wouldn’t have just been arrested, he’d have been put down like an animal.

Days turned into years, and still that persistent voice that declared Sirius’s innocence had not quieted. There were times, when that voice combined with Kali’s, or Asherah’s, or Freyja’s, or Nahele’ - all of whom had agreed that Sirius couldn’t possibly be guilty - when Remus would start to doubt Albus Dumbledore, and the entire British Ministry of Magic, and everyone else who had ever told him that Sirius was guilty, that he was a traitor and a murderer who’d finally gotten what was coming to him. During those times, he would fantasize about marching straight into Azkaban, past all of the dementors, his Patronus so strong that they fled at the mere sight of it; he would reach Sirius's cell and Sirius would be so happy to see him, and they would leave a note for the Ministry telling them all to kiss their arses, and they would leave, hand in hand. But it had only been a fantasy, and an unrealistic one at that, and Remus had learned a long time ago from watching his father's desperate attempts to find a cure to Remus’s condition, that false hope was a terrible and destructive thing.

But now here they were: the voice had been right; the hope had been real; Remus's deepest wish had come true. But it was nothing like the fantasy, because Remus had never imagined himself feeling this much guilt. He had abandoned his last best friend when Sirius had needed him most, and Sirius had spent twelve years in Azkaban because of him. Because he hadn’t had the strength to fight for him. Remus had betrayed the love of his life, and he would never forgive himself for that.

“You're both mental,” said Ron, breaking through Remus’s thoughts of self-loathing.

“Ridiculous!” said Hermione faintly.
“Peter Pettigrew’s dead!” said Harry slowly, glancing over at Kali. Kali looked just as shocked as the rest of them, despite having voiced this very possibility months ago. She hadn’t truly believed it, Remus realised, it had been a theory born of desperation; even she hadn’t expected it to be true. “He killed him twelve years ago.” Harry pointed at Sirius, whose face twitched convulsively.

“I meant to,” he growled, his yellow teeth bared, “but little Peter got the better of me… not this time, though!”

And the cat was thrown to the floor as Sirius lunged at Peter; Ron yelled with pain as Sirius’s weight fell on his broken leg.

“Sirius, NO!” Remus yelled, launching himself forwards and dragging Sirius away from Ron again, “WAIT! You can't do it just like that – they need to understand – we've got to explain -”

“We can explain afterwards!” snarled Sirius, trying to throw Remus off. One hand was still clawing the air as it tried to reach Peter, 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!” Remus panted, still trying to restrain Sirius. “Ron's kept him as a pet! There are parts of it even I don't understand.”

“Stop it now!” Kali shouted. Sirius stopped struggling and he stared at his daughter. She held his gaze. “I want an explanation. You owe me an explanation. You owe Harry and me the truth.”

“Why did you bring her here, Remus?” Sirius asked quietly, gaze fixed on Kali. “She was safe in Hawaii, she was safe with Ash and Nahele.”

“Mum and Nahele died years ago,” said Kali.

Sirius stared at her blankly and then his face fell. “No. They can’t have. I left you with them. They were supposed to be there for you…. I never meant to leave you alone.”

“You didn’t. You gave me the best godfather I could’ve asked for,” she said glancing over at Remus.

Sirius followed her gaze. “Thank you. Thank you for looking after her.”

“It was a pleasure. But we really do owe them the truth.”

Sirius turned and fixed his hollowed eyes on Peter, who was clamped tightly under Ron's bitten, scratched, and bleeding hands.

“All right, then,” Sirius 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 Remus raised his wand again, pointing it at Peter.

“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 force the rat back into his front pocket, but Peter was fighting too hard; Ron swayed and overbalanced, and Kali caught him and pushed him back down to the bed.
Then, ignoring Sirius, Harry turned to Remus.

“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 Sirius savagely, still watching Peter struggling in Ron's hands.

“Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter,” said Remus, 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 and Ron shared a look and it was clear that they both though that Remus and Sirius were out of their minds.

Then Hermione spoke, in a trembling, would-be calm sort of voice, as though trying to will Remus 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?” Remus 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.”

“But neither is his,” Kali said softly, staring intently at her father. Sirius gave a startled twitch every time she spoke, and each time he looked at her as though he couldn't quite believe she was real. Remus couldn’t even begin to imagine what either was feeling.

“That's because the Ministry never knew that there used to be three unregistered Animagi running around Hogwarts,” said Remus.

“If you're going to tell them the story, get a move on, Remus,” said Sirius, forcing his gaze away from Kali and back to watching Peter's every desperate move. “I've waited twelve years, I'm not going to wait much longer.”

“All right… but you'll need to help me, Sirius,” said Remus, “I only know how it began…”

Remus 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 Remus strode toward it and looked out into the landing.

“No one there…”

“This place is haunted!” said Ron.

“It's not,” said Remus, still looking at the door. “The Shrieking Shack was never haunted…. The screams and howls the villagers used to hear were made by me.”

He pushed his greying 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 bitten… and if I hadn't been so foolhardy…”
He felt tired. Ron started to interrupt, but Hermione, said, “Shh!” She was watching Remus 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....” Remus 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” – Remus looked miserably around the room, his very own torture chamber – “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.”

Everyone was listening raptly. The only sound apart from Remus’s voice was Peter's frightened squeaking.

“My transformations in those days were – were terrible. It is very painful to turn into a werewolf. 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 rumour.... 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 ever, I had friends, three great friends. Sirius Black… Peter Pettigrew… and, of course, your father, Harry – James Potter.

“Now, my three 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 of course, they, like you, Hermione, worked out the truth....

“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, sounding astounded.

“Yes, indeed,” said Remus. “It took them the best part of three years to work out how to do it. 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 James and Sirius. Finally, in our Fifth Year, they managed it. 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 Remus. “A werewolf is only a danger to people. They sneaked out of the castle every month under James's
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 Sirius, who was still watching Peter with a horrible sort of hunger on his face that Remus had never seen there before.

“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. James was Prongs.”

“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 Remus 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 three 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…”

Remus's face had hardened, and he heard the self-disgust leak into 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 in the U.K. 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 Sirius harshly, taking his eyes off Peter and looking up at Remus. “What's Snape got to do with it?”

“He teaches potions here,” said Kali. She already knew about the history her father had with the man, Remus had told her about it in an attempt to convince her that Sirius was not who she’d imagined he was.

Remus looked up at Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

“Professor Snape was at school with us. He fought very hard against my appointment to the Defence 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 -”
Sirius 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.’ Remus told Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “‘We were in the same year, you know, and we – er – didn’t like each other very much. He especially disliked James. Jealous, I think, of James’s 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 Remus.

Severus Snape was pulling off Harry's Invisibility Cloak, his wand pointing, directly at Remus.
Claws and Fangs

Thursday, June 9th, 1994,

The Shrieking Shack,

Kali Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black,

It was all becoming too much. First Buckbeak was murdered, then a big, black dog dragged Ron all the way to the Shrieking Shack; it turned out that dog was her farther, who was an unregistered Animagus; he looked and acted like a crazy person, which was not at all how she’d pictured him; Harry was out of his mind with anger, enough so that he’d attack someone with her father’s reputation, but he didn’t have it in him to strike that final blow; Remus had come barging in, and had disarmed her, which she was rather pissed about, but then he’d gone and done something so unexpected, she still hadn’t recovered from it: he’d hugged her father. After years of insisting that Sirius Black was guilty as sin, they’d had a two minute conversation, that could barely qualify as a conversation, and suddenly they were old pals again. Now Kali was finally getting an explanation, and bloody Snape fucking showed up. It was too much.

Hermione screamed. Sirius leapt to his feet. Kali saw that wand pointed at Remus and tried to step between him and it – no matter how much Snape disliked her, she was pretty sure he wouldn’t seriously harm one of his students, like 70% sure – but Remus held her back.

“I found this at the base of the Whomping Willow,” said Snape, throwing Harry's Invisibility Cloak aside, careful to keep this wand pointing directly at Remus's chest, which was causing Kali all kinds of anxiety, because she didn’t doubt for a second that he had an extensive and nasty repertoire of spells, and she wasn’t naive enough to think that he wouldn’t use it. “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 like the cliché bad guy who was about to spill his entire life story to the hero. “I've just been to your office, Lupin. You forgot to take your potion tonight, so I took a gobletful 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 -” Remus 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 Remus urgently. “You haven't heard everything – I can explain – Sirius is not here to kill Harry -”

“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 Remus 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 Remus's mouth, wrists, and ankles; he overbalanced and fell to the floor, unable to move. Kali tried to catch him, but he was much taller than she and she fell with him. With a roar of rage, Sirius started toward Snape, but Snape pointed his wand straight between Sirius's eyes.

“Give me a reason,” he whispered. “Give me a reason to do it, and I swear I will.”

Sirius stopped dead. It would have been impossible to say which face showed more hatred. Taking advantage of Snape’s diverted attention, Kali tried to charm away the cords that were tying Remus up, but they weren't reacting to any of the usual counter-jinxes.

Hermione took an uncertain step toward Snape and said, in a very breathless voice, “Professor Snape – it 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, Black, and Weasley are out-of-bounds, in the company of a convicted murderer and a werewolf. For once in your life, hold your tongue.”

“But if – 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 Sirius's face. Hermione fell silent.

“Vengeance is very sweet,” Snape breathed at Sirius. “How I hoped I would be the one to catch you. …”

“The joke's on you again, Severus,” Sirius 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 -”

What little colour there was in Sirius’s face left it.

“No.” Kali scrambled to her feet.

“Take another step Miss Black, and your father might not even make it that far,” said Snape, shifting to the left slightly so that he could keep an eye on her.


But there was a mad glint in Snape's eyes that Kali 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 -”

Kali felt murderous. “You will not, you foul -” Sparks flew from the end of Snape’s wand toward Sirius, and she fell silent.
Harry crossed the room in three strides and blocked the door.

“Get out of the way, Potter, you're in enough trouble already,” snarled Snape. “If I hadn't been here to save your skin -”

“Professor Lupin could have killed me about a hundred times this year,” Harry said. "I've been alone with him loads of times, having defence lessons against the dementors. If he was helping Black, why didn't he just finish me off then?"

“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, POTTER!”

Snape took a threatening step toward Harry, and Kali raised her wand.

“Expelliarmus!” she yelled – except that hers wasn't the only voice that shouted. 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.

Kali, Harry, Ron, and Hermione had tried to disarm Snape at exactly 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 Sirius, looking between Kali and Harry. “You should have left him to me…."

Kali felt a tremor of guilt as she stared down at Snape’s limp form. Hermione obviously shared the feeling.

“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 -”

Remus was struggling against his bonds. Kali bent down quickly and untied him, without Snape concentrating to maintain the spell it was easy enough to undo. Remus straightened up, rubbing his arms where the ropes had cut into them.

“Thank you, Kali, and you too Harry,” he said.

“I'm still not saying I believe you,” he told Remus.

“Then it's time we offered you some proof,” said Remus. “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 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?”
“You know, Sirius, that's a fair question,” said Remus, turning to Sirius and frowning slightly. “How did you find out where he was?”

Sirius 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?” Remus asked Sirius, thunderstruck.

“Fudge,” said Sirius. “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...”

“My God,” said Remus softly, staring from Scabbers to the picture in the paper and back again. “His front paw...”

“What about it?” said Ron defiantly.

“He's got a toe missing,” said Sirius.

“Of course,” Remus breathed. “So simple... so brilliant... he cut it off himself?”

“Just before he transformed,” said Sirius. “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 Remus. “The biggest bit of Peter they found was his finger.”

“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 Remus. “Didn't you ever wonder why he was living so long?”

“We - we've been taking good care of him!” said Ron.

“Not looking too good at the moment, though, is he?” said Remus. “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.

“This cat isn't mad,” said Sirius 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... But Peter got wind of what was going on and ran for it. 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.”
“And why did he fake his death?” Harry said furiously. “Because he knew you were about to kill him like you killed my parents!”

“No,” said Remus, “Harry -”

“And now you've come to finish him off!”

“Yes, I have,” said Sirius, with an evil look at Scabbers.

“Then I should've let Snape take you!” Harry shouted.

“Harry,” said Remus 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. “HE WAS THEIR SECRET-KEEPER! HE SAID SO BEFORE YOU TURNED UP. HE SAID HE KILLED THEM!”

He was pointing at Sirius, 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 Remus, and there was a steely note in his voice that Kali had learned from a very young age not to disagree with. “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 Remus tensely.

“Force him to show himself,” said Remus. “If he really is a rat, it won't hurt him.”

Ron hesitated. Then at long last, he held out Scabbers and Remus took him. Scabbers began to squeak without stopping, twisting and turning, his tiny black eyes bulging in his head. "Ready, Sirius?" said Remus.

Sirius had already retrieved Snape's wand from the bed. He approached Remus and the struggling rat, and his wet eyes suddenly seemed to be burning in his face.

“Together?” he said quietly.

“I think so,” said Remus, 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 grey 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 speeded-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, shorter than Kali and Ron, and hardly taller than Harry and Hermione. His thin, colourless 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's 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. Kali saw his eyes dart to the door and back again, and Pan jumped out of her pocket, turning into a full blown tiger as he landed. He sat in front of the door, tail flicking from side to side.

“Well, hello, Peter,” said Remus pleasantly, as though rats frequently erupted into old school friends around him. “Long time, no see.”

“S – Sirius… R – Remus…” Even Pettigrew's voice was squeaky. Again, his eyes darted toward the door, earning a soft growl from Pan. “My friends… my old friends…”

Sirius's wand arm rose, but Remus 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 Kali could see beads of sweat breaking out over his pasty face, and the rancid smell of fear flooded Pan's senses, “you don't believe him, do you…? He tried to kill me, Remus….”

“So we've heard,” said Remus, 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 Sirius, using his middle finger, because his index was missing. “He killed Lily and James and now he's going to kill me too…. You've got to help me, Remus….”

Sirius'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 Remus.

“Sorted things out?” squealed Pettigrew, looking wildly about him once more, eyes taking in the boarded windows and, again the only door and its furry guard. “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 Remus, 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!”

Sirius started to laugh, a horrible, mirthless laugh that filled the whole room.

“Voldemort, teach me tricks?” he said.

Pettigrew flinched as though Sirius had brandished a whip at him.

“What, scared to hear your old master's name?” said Sirius. “I don't blame you, Peter. His lot aren't
very happy 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 Sirius. "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 went to the Potters' on your information… and Voldemort met his downfall there. And not all Voldemort's supporters ended up in Azkaban, did they? There are still plenty out here, biding their time, pretending they've seen the error of their ways."

"Wait," said Kali, and Pettigrew’s eyes shined with hope as though he honestly believed she was going to help him. "The Death Eaters know that Pettigrew was the one who sold out Lily and James?"

Sirius nodded, and she cast a glance over at Snape’s unconscious form, at his left forearm and the Dark Mark hidden beneath his robes. She was going to kill him, or at least make him wish she’d been so kind.

"If they ever got wind that you were still alive, Peter -" said Sirius.

"Don't know… what you're talking about…," said Pettigrew again, more shrilly than ever. He wiped his face on his sleeve and looked up at Remus. "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 Remus 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!"

Sirius's face contorted.

"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," Sirius 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; Kali caught words like “far-fetched” and “lunacy”, but she couldn't help paying more attention to the ashen colour 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 Remus 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 Sirius. “Because you never did anything for anyone unless you could see what was in it for you. Voldemort's been in hiding for twelve 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 Hermione.

Sirius jumped at being addressed like this and stared at Hermione as though he had never seen anything quite like her.

“If you don't mind me asking, how – how did you get out of Azkaban, if you didn't use Dark Magic?”

“But then I saw Peter in that picture… I realized he was at Hogwarts with Harry… perfectly positioned to act, if one hint reached his ears that the Dark Side was gathering strength again….”

Pettigrew was shaking his head, mouthing noiselessly, but staring all the while at Sirius as though hypnotized.

“… ready to strike at the moment he could be sure of allies… and to deliver the last Potter to them. If he gave them Harry, who'd dare say he'd betrayed Lord Voldemort? He'd be welcomed back with honours….”

“So you see, I had to do something. I was the only one who knew Peter was still alive… 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 Sirius. “Believe me, Harry. I never betrayed James and Lily. I would have died before I betrayed them.”

Harry said all that was needed to be said with a single nod.

“No!”

Pettigrew had fallen to his knees as though Harry's nod had been his own death sentence. He shuffled forward on his knees, grovelling, his hands clasped in front of him as though praying.

“Sirius – it's me… it's Peter… your friend… you wouldn't.”

Sirius kicked out and Pettigrew recoiled.

“There's enough filth on my robes without you touching them,” said Sirius.

“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 Remus. “I assume that's why you didn't tell me, Sirius?” he said casually over Pettigrew’s head.

“Forgive me, Remus,” said Sirius.

“Not at all, Padfoot, old friend,” said Remus, who was now rolling up his sleeves. “And will you, in turn, forgive me for believing you were the spy?”

“Of course,” said Sirius, 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 Remus 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 Sirius 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 robes.

“Sweet girl… clever girl… you – you won't let them…. Help me….”
Hermione pulled her robes out of Pettigrew's clutching hands and backed away against the wall, looking horrified.

He made to stumble into Kali next, but she gave him a look that said quite clearly that he'd be getting no help from her, and pointed her wand at him. “Do not touch me,” she said.

Pettigrew sobbed and knelt, trembling uncontrollably, and turned his head slowly toward Harry.

“Harry… Harry… you look just like your father… just like him….”


“Harry,” whispered Pettigrew, shuffling toward him, hands outstretched. “Harry, James wouldn't have wanted me killed… James would have understood, Harry… he would have shown me mercy…”

Both Sirius and Remus 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 Sirius, who was shaking too. “Do you deny it?”

Pettigrew burst into tears. It was horrible to watch, like an oversized, balding baby, cowering on the floor. Kali screwed up her nose in disgust.

“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 Sirius. “You'd been passing information to him for a year before Lily and James died! You were his spy!”

“He – 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 Sirius, 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 Sirius. “Died rather than betray your friends, as we would have done for you!”

Sirius and Remus stood shoulder to shoulder, wands raised.

“You should have realized,” said Remus quietly, “if Voldemort didn't kill you, we would. Good-bye, Peter.”

Hermione covered her face with her hands and turned to the wall.

“NO!” Harry yelled. He ran forward, placing himself in front Pettigrew, facing the wands. “You can't kill him,” he said breathlessly. “You can't.”

Sirius and Remus both looked staggered.

“Harry, this piece of vermin is the reason you have no parents,” Sirius snarled. “This cringing bit of
filth would have seen you die too, without turning a hair. You heard him. His own stinking skin meant more to him than your whole family.”

“I know,” Harry panted. “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.”

“Harry!” gasped Pettigrew, and he flung his arms around Harry's knees. “You – thank you – it's more than I deserve – thank you -”

“Get off me,” Harry spat, throwing Pettigrew's hands off him in disgust. “I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it because – I don't reckon my dad 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. Sirius and Remus were looking at each other. Then, with one movement, they lowered their wands.

“You're the only person who has the right to decide, Harry,” said Sirius. “But think… think what he did…."

“He can go to Azkaban,” Harry repeated. “If anyone deserves that place, he does…."

Pettigrew was still wheezing behind him.

“Very well,” said Remus. “Stand aside, Harry.”

Harry hesitated.

“I'm going to tie him up,” said Remus. “That's all, I swear.”

Harry stepped out of the way. Thin cords shot from Remus's wand this time, and next moment, Pettigrew was wriggling on the floor, bound and gagged.

“But if you transform, Peter,” growled Sirius, his own wand pointing at Pettigrew too, “we will kill you. You agree, Harry?”

Harry looked down at the pitiful figure on the floor and nodded so that Pettigrew could see him.

“Right,” said Remus, 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. Remus 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 Kali, bending over Snape and checking his pulse.

“*Other than his personality,*” said Pan.

“You were just a little – overenthusiastic,” said Remus. “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. Remus picked up the Invisibility Cloak and tucked it safely into his pocket.

“And two of us should be chained to this,” said Sirius, nudging Pettigrew with his toe. “Just to make sure.”

“I'll do it,” said Remus.

“And me,” said Ron savagely, limping forward.

Sirius conjured heavy manacles from thin air; soon Pettigrew was upright again, left arm chained to Remus's right, right arm to Ron's left. Ron's face was set. He seemed to have taken Scabbers's true identity as a personal insult. Crookshanks leapt lightly off the bed and led the way out of the room, his bottlebrush tail held jauntily high.

Crookshanks and Pan led the procession down the stairs; Remus, 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. Kali walked next to her father, each casting discreet glances at the other. Harry and Hermione brought up the rear.

Getting back into the tunnel was difficult. Remus, Pettigrew, and Ron had to turn sideways to manage it; Remus still had Pettigrew covered with his wand. Kali watched them edging awkwardly along the tunnel in single file. Crookshanks and Pan were still in the lead. Harry and Hermione went right after the two Blacks, Sirius was still making Snape drift along ahead of them; he kept bumping his lolling head on the low ceiling. Kali had the impression Sirius was making no effort to prevent this.

“You know what this means?” Sirius said abruptly as they made their slow progress along the tunnel. “Turning Pettigrew in?”

“You're free,” said Kali.

“Yes…,” said Sirius. “I know you already have a life that doesn’t include me – and you don’t really know me… but now – if you’d let me – I’d like to be a part of it.”

“Of course you’re going to be a part of it,” she said, as though this was the only possibility she’d ever considered, and it was. It wasn’t how she’d imagined it – not even close – but reality was seldom as clean-cut as fantasy.

Sirius's gaunt face broke into the first true smile Kali 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 she’d seen in photos. Kali grinned back.

“And Harry…,” said Sirius. “I'm also – I don't know if anyone ever told you – I'm your godfather.”

“Yeah, I knew that,” said Harry.

“Well… your parents appointed me your guardian,” said Sirius stiffly. “If anything happened to them…. I'll understand, of course, if you want to stay with your aunt and uncle. But… well… think about it. Once my name's cleared… if you wanted a… a different home…”

“What – live with you?” Harry said, accidentally cracking his head on a bit of rock protruding from
“Leave the Dursleys?”

“It's not that,” said Sirius quickly. “I understand, I just thought I'd...”

“Are you insane?” said Harry, his voice easily as croaky as Sirius's. “Of course I want to leave the Dursleys! Have you got a house? When can I move in?”

Sirius turned right around to look at him; Snape's head was scraping the ceiling but Sirius didn't seem to care.

“You want to?” he said. “You mean it?”

“Yeah, I mean it!” said Harry.

Black smiled again.

They did not speak again until 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 Remus, Pettigrew, and Ron clambered upward without any sound of savaging branches.

Sirius saw Snape up through the hole, then stood back for Kali, 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.

“One wrong move, Peter,” said Remus 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 Sirius, his chin bumping on his chest. And then –

A cloud shifted. There were suddenly dim shadows on the ground. Their party was bathed in moonlight.

Snape collided with Remus, Pettigrew, and Ron, who had stopped abruptly. Sirius froze. He flung out one arm to make Kali, Harry, and Hermione stop.

Kali saw Remus go rigid, saw his limbs begin to shake, and glanced up.

“The full moon,” she whispered.

“Oh, my -” Hermione gasped. “He didn't take his potion tonight! He's not safe!”


But Ron was chained to Pettigrew and Remus. Harry leapt forward but Sirius caught him around the chest and threw him back.

“Leave it to me – RUN!”

There was a terrible snarling noise. Remus's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Bones ripping. Flesh tearing. His body contorting and changing in ways that shouldn't be physically possible, causing pain unlike any other. 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 Pettigrew. They were locked, jaw to jaw, claws ripping at each other. Pan jumped protectively between the two canines and the rest of them.

Kali stood, transfixed by the sight, too intent upon the battle to notice anything else. It was Hermione's scream that alerted her –

Pettigrew had dived for Remus'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!” Kali yelled, pointing her own wand at Pettigrew; Remus's wand flew high into the air and out of sight.

“Stay where you are!” Harry shouted, running forward.

Too late. Pettigrew had transformed. Kali 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; Kali turned to see the werewolf taking flight; it was galloping into the forest, heading toward Hogsmeade –

“Sirius, he's gone, Pettigrew transformed!” Harry yelled.

Sirius 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. Pan ran off after Remus and Kali ran off after Pan. Harry tried to stop her but Hermione grabbed his arm.

“She knows what she'd doing, Harry, she grew up with Professor Lupin. We can’t help.”

Kali was glad; she didn’t have time to argue. She saw Harry and Hermione dash over to the friend they could help – Ron – before she was engulfed by the forest. Now, if only Hermione had been right.

“Do you have a plan?” Pan asked, putting on a burst of speed to keep up with Moony, but still falling behind.

“I'm working on it,” she said as branches whipped at her face.

“Can you work on it a little faster? At this rate he’ll have reached the village within the next ten minutes.”

“Oh, Circe, I’m going to get myself killed.” She stopped in her tracks and whistled, the sound loud and shrill in the quiet forest.

“What are you doing, you idiot?” Pan asked as he nearly collided with Moony who’d backtracked and was now running straight for Kali.

“Keeping him away from the village.”

She backed up until she was under a tree with low enough branches and she waited. It didn’t take long. Moony barrels into the clearing and headed straight for her like a freight train. She waited as
long as she physically could, until she could see the amber shade of those eyes that were too human to belong to a wolf, before jumping up, grabbing hold of a sturdy branch and heaving herself up, while Moony’s momentum had him smacking head-first into the wide trunk, hard enough that the tree shook and she almost lost her balance.

He stumbled a couple of steps, dazed and disoriented, and Kali sent silent apologies to Remus for the headache he was going to have come morning. It wasn’t enough to knock him out, though, and Kali was quick to scramble further up the tree before he came back to his senses.

“Any more brilliant ideas?” asked Pan. He’d turned into a brown bear, choosing a form that was big, with sharp teeth and a hide that was practically bulletproof.

“We could take him for a walk.”

She showed him where she wanted to lead Moony to, and he grudgingly agreed that it might work. Having a nice stroll with a werewolf wasn’t in the cards, so they settled for a game of fetch: Kali was the stick, and she finally put those gymnastics trophies from when she was a kid to good use. She jumped, tumbled, and swung from one tree to the next, always carefully out of reach of Moony who had quite the bounce in him. They had to take the scenic route to avoid a nest of Acromantula that Kali had very nearly stumbled into a few months ago, and Pan kept Moony on track when Kali proved to be too frustrating a target and the werewolf caught the scent of easier prey on the breeze. Finally they made it.

A few feet ahead, the forest floor disappeared into a dark abyss. The cavern entrance looked like the open maw of a great, ancient beast, with sharp, stone protrusions that were either teeth or makeshift steps, depending on how you looked at it.

This next part would be difficult. There were no trees down there, no safe path where she’d be out of reach of the angry werewolf, so she’d need to outrun him in a fifty metre dash down a treacherous slope, and then trap him inside the cavern, preferably without her having to be in there with him. Easy.

She waited until Moony was thoroughly distracted by Pan, then she leapt from her safe perch. She hit the ground running, making it a few paces into the maw before Moony noticed her. She sped up, but she could only go so quickly, if she lost her footing down here, she wouldn’t need to worry about Moony, the fall would break her neck for him. Pan slowed him down as best as he could, but for this plan to work, Moony would have to keep up a decent pace. She reached the bottom of the slope and pelleted toward the fissure that led to the large cavern beyond. She slipped in and climbed onto the ledge that hung above the entrance. She made it up just in time as not a second later, Moony had managed to wiggle through the narrow crack. Pan had to transform into something much smaller to join them. Kali took advantage of Moony’s distracted state as he discovered his new environment to quietly climb out of the cavern and levitate a big boulder in front of the only way in or out for all creatures that couldn’t fly.

Then she collapsed in an exhausted heap, her nerves completely frizzed out.

She closed her eyes and let herself see what Pan saw. Moony was chasing him around the underground cave in a friendly game of tag, the pesky human he’d been trying to kill earlier completely forgotten.

Pan had been the one to discover this place after winter break. The inside of the cavern was about the size of a football stadium. It had a number of small skylights carved into the rocky ceiling which let in just enough sun and rain for plant life to grow within, and there was a spring on the opposite side.
from the entrance; making it to perfect place to hide away a werewolf while he waited out the full moon.

She heaved herself up and started the climb to the surface. Pan would keep Moony company until sunrise; in the meantime, Kali had a rat to find, a father to catch up with, and a Potions Professor she desperately wanted to kick in the groin.
Flesh and Blood

Chapter Notes

Homophobic slur and violence.

Thursday, June 9th, 1994,

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Sirius Black,

He’d forgotten how vicious Moony could get when he wasn’t getting his way. Werewolves are seldom sweet-tempered when transformed, but with six humans within spitting distance, the bloodlust took over and nothing short of a serious threat to its life could dissuade it from tearing them to shreds. Needless to say that threatening a werewolf, especially a full grown one, was high on the list of dumbest things you could ever possibly do, yet it was exactly what Sirius had to do.

He transformed and bounded forward, getting to Moony just as the werewolf managed to wrench himself free from the manacle binding him to Peter. Peter looked about ready to pass out from fear, sweating and shaking, eyes rolling madly, and the boy – Ron – didn’t appear to be fairing much better, standing stock-still, eyes as big as saucers, the little colour he had, draining from his face. Sirius struggled to get Moony away from them, and Moony wasn’t happy about it, tearing at Sirius with teeth and claws, more violently than he ever had before. Sirius put all the strength he had left into fending off the attack.

Moony caught his forequarters and sent him flying onto his back. The werewolf snapped at his neck; he dodged those razor sharp teeth, grabbed Moony’s foreleg between his jaws and yanked him off balance. As he fell, Sirius leapt atop him. They tumbled further from the kids, nipping and kicking and fighting for the top position. It almost reminded Sirius of the many wrestling matches he’d had with the werewolf so many years ago, those playful scuffles meant to burn off excess energy, but any hope that Moony might recognise his old playmate was lost when the werewolf came close to tearing out Sirius’s throat. Or perhaps he did recognise him and was punishing him for all those full moons he’d had to spend alone – all 156 of them spent tearing at his own flesh, bored and lonely. Sirius wiggled free just as Moony was about to pin him, and bit down hard on the werewolf’s muzzle. Moony howled in pain, and swatted at Sirius, nearly taking an eye out; Sirius pounced backward, hunkering down and preparing for the next attack, a loud warning growl rumbling through his throat. Moony eyed him warily, tongue darting out to lick at his bleeding snout. Sirius had never made him bleed before; it wasn’t an easy thing to do to a werewolf, its thick hide protected it from most everything, even spellwork. Moony finally decided that this quarry wasn’t worth the effort, turned tail and galloped off into the forest.

Sirius’s shaking legs collapsed beneath him. He could feel the sharp sting of deep cuts; the blood matting his fur; the flaring pain of his ribs, a few of which were either broken or badly bruised. This was why it wasn’t smart to piss of a werewolf.

He heard Harry yelling behind him and had to concentrate hard to understand the words, but when
he did, he scrambled to his feet and up the slope to where the red-headed boy lay unmoving. Peter was gone. Sirius couldn’t let him get away, not again. He caught Peter’s scent, already fading from the breeze, and ran after him. He couldn’t have gotten far, Sirius just had to catch up with him, then he’d haul the rat’s arse in front of the Minister for Magic himself, and it would finally be over.

He’d reached the edge of the lake when he felt it: the unnatural cold that seeped deep into his bones, and gripped at his heart like an icy fist; twisting... squeezing....

He yelped and whined as the memories that had been plaguing him constantly for over twelve years breached his mind once again: finding Peter’s hiding place empty with no signs of a struggle; his mad flight to Godric’s Hollow; James and Lily’s house, almost completely destroyed by Voldemort’s rebounding Killing Curse; he’d discovered James’s body first, blocking the path to the stairs, eyes wide and unseeing, his brother, dead; running up the stairs to the nursery, toward the sound of an infant’s cries; seeing a huge figure bending over what was left of the crib; nearly firing a curse, before recognising Hagrid; telling Hagrid to give Harry to him, he was his godfather, but Dumbledore had given orders; handing Hagrid to keys to his motorbike, it would only slow him down in his hunt for Peter; Hagrid leaving with Harry; spotting a flash of red in the rubble; Lily, almost entirely buried beneath the walls of her own home, and, beside her, Voldemort, dead also; firing curse after curse at Voldemort’s lifeless body; breaking down and crying more than he’d ever cried before; carrying Lily’s body downstairs, away from her killer, laying her to rest beside her husband, the man who’d died trying to protect her....

*His fault, all his fault.*

Sirius turned back into a man, crouching on all fours, his hands over his head, protecting himself as best as he could from the tortures of his own mind.

“Nooo,” he moaned. “Nooo… please....”

But dementors did not know mercy, they could not understand pleading or forgiveness, only misery, despair, decay.

There were hundreds of them, gliding in a black mass around the lake toward him, more were appearing out of the darkness on every side; encircling him....

Fog was obscuring his vision, dragging him under; more memories: his father beating him with fists, belt, and cane, never leaving a bruise where anyone could see; his mother using her wand to cut deep into his flesh, leaving long parallel scars up and down his legs; Regulus calling him a faggot and a blood traitor; Remus’s anger at him after the Snape incident; that night his parents had found out about his sexuality, the first time anyone had used an Unforgivable Curse against him, over and over again; his refusal to apologise for who he was or promise to change, the Cruciatux Curse that had followed him out the door with his parents’ warnings for if he ever returned....

He could see only darkness now as his unconsciousness submerged him in a land of nightmares. The dementors’ rattling breath carrying him along like an evil wind, until even that faded away, and only the screams of the dead remained.

***

He awoke to the feeling of the cold, hard ground beneath him, but it wasn’t the pebbly shore of the lake.

“Awake at last, Black?” said a sneering voice behind him. “Good, it would be a shame if you missed the show.”
Sirius pushed up and staggered to his feet, the movement sending his empty stomach rolling, and making bright spots blur his vision. He was in an office: a tall stool sat behind a desk cluttered with quills and parchment; two chairs faced it; and not an inch of wall could be seen behind the shelves stacked full of books. Snape stood like an ugly gargoyle beside the door.

“Of all the people in the world to wake up to, Snivellus, you are my least favourite.”

*Show no fear. If they see weakness, they’ll take advantage of it.*

“Hold on to that flippant humour of yours, you’ll need it for what’s to come.”

There was a malicious gleam in Snape’s eyes which bordered on deranged, and a sadistic smile like the kneazle that ate the jobberknoll. It didn’t bode well.

“Don’t understand.”

“I understand plenty. You’ve made a right mess of everything, haven’t you? It’s a good thing I was there to relay what really happened to the Minister for Magic: how you bewitched those unbearable children into believing that you’re innocent; how you and that half-breed have been conspiring all along…. It’s the Dementor’s Kiss for you; hopefully a lengthy suspension for those interfering brats; and for Lupin…. Do you know that that idiotic daughter of yours ran into the forest after him? I’m sure after everything that’s happened tonight, I can probably convince the Minster to have her deported, that is if Lupin hasn’t already killed her. And if he has….” Snape’s smile turned into a sickly grin. “Well, werewolves are dangerous beasts, better off dead than alive.”

Sirius barely suppressed his whimper. No, no, this couldn’t be happening, not when he’d been so close. He’d almost tasted his freedom. He’d had Remus back, and Kali, and Harry; they’d planned for a future together, as a family. It couldn’t slip away now.

“Peter Pettigrew…”

“Is dead and has been for twelve years. Everyone knows it. No one can save you now, and you're going to get exactly what you deserve, and I’m going to watch.”

*No, no, no….*

“I told you once that you’d get what’s coming to you in the end,” Snape said jeeringly. “It was so satisfying to hear that you’d gotten yourself thrown into Azkaban, but this? This is what true justice feels like, and I’m so glad that I’m the one who made it happen.”

The door opened and Sirius shrunk away, fearing the dementors, but it was only Albus Dumbledore, his long beard tucked into the belt of his deep purple robes, looking exactly as he had the last time Sirius had seen him over a decade ago.

“Severus, how kind of you to be keeping Sirius company.”

Snape didn’t bother wiping the sneer from his face as he turned to the Headmaster. “I volunteered to stand guard on Black while Macnair fetches the dementors.”

“Very admirable. But I need a word with Mr. Black now. Privately.”

“Professor, this man has already proven himself capable of escaping from Azkaban. He should not be underestimated.”

“I understand, Severus.”
Dumbledore held open the door and waved Snape through it, his posture leaving no room for argument. Snape threw one last glare at Sirius, and left the office in a billow of black robes.

“Sirius,” said the old Headmaster, “it’s been too long.”

“I didn’t do it,” he said desperately. “It’s not like Snape says.”

“I thought as much. That is why I’m here, I would like you to tell me your version of events.”

So Sirius did, starting with the Secret Keeper ruse and Peter’s betrayal, and finishing with the events that took place in the Shrieking Shack not hours ago. He told Dumbledore everything, all of it seeping out like a long-overdue confession: going after Peter; not being fast enough to stop him; those years in Azkaban paying for the crimes of another; the picture of Peter in the newspaper; his escape; each desperate attempt he’d made on Peter’s life. He even explained how he, James, and Peter had become Animagi in their Fifth Year, all to keep a lonely werewolf company. The time for secrets was past.

Dumbledore listened intently and didn’t say a word until Sirius had nothing left to confess.

“I believe you, Sirius.” Sirius sagged with relief, but it was short-lived. “However, you must understand that there is not a shred of proof to support your story, except for your word and that of a few children – neither of which will convince anybody. A street full of eyewitnesses swore they saw you murder Peter. I myself gave evidence to the Ministry that you had been the Potters’ Secret-Keeper.”

“What about Remus? Can’t he-”

“Remus is currently deep in the forest, unable to tell anyone anything. By the time he is human again, it will be too late. You have not acted like an innocent man and Severus’s version of events is far more convincing than yours.”

“But you believe me.”

“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, and without Peter, alive or dead, we have no chance of overturning your sentence.”

Sirius slumped into one of the chairs. His fate was sealed. The Dementor’s Kiss… soon he would be worse than dead.

“There is always hope, Sirius,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes as he left the room.

But Sirius could see none; there would be no escape from this, and he sat with his head clutched between his hands, rocking back and forth, too numb to cry, or think, or do much of anything else. There was one thought he held onto, though: at least he’d been able to see the people he loved one last time, and even with him gone, they would still have each other. They would be together; they would be safe; they would all be alright; Snape was wrong; they wouldn’t let anything happen to each other.

There was a sharp tap on the glass window, and Sirius looked up. His jaw dropped at the sight before him: Harry and the girl, Hermione, astride a hippogriff, rising up and down several feet as the creature beat its wings to remain airborne. He leapt from his chair, hurried to the window and tried to open it, but it was locked.

“Stand back!” Hermione called to him, and she took out her wand, still gripping the back of Harry's
recognized by robes with her left hand.

He pressed himself against the wall beside the window.

“Alohomora!”

The window sprang open.

“How – how -?” said Sirius weakly, staring at the hippogriff. It was too bemusing a situation, he wasn’t sure where to start asking questions.

“Get on – there’s not much time,” said Harry, gripping the hippogriff firmly on either side of its sleek neck to hold him steady. “You’ve got to get out of here – the dementors are coming – Macnair’s gone to get them.”

Sirius didn’t need telling twice. He 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 the hippogriff’s back and pull himself onto it behind Hermione.

“Okay, Buckbeak, down!” said Harry, shaking the rope. “Down onto the grounds – come on.”

It wasn’t like riding a broom, more like riding a horse, except that horse could rise ten feet into the air with one flap of its wings, and fall back down those ten feet when gravity took hold, before it flapped its wings again. He didn’t like it. He gripped the beast’s flanks with his knees, feeling the great wings rising powerfully beneath him. It was uncomfortable, even more so than riding a proper horse bareback. The hippogriff's wings beat uncomfortably on either side of him, catching him under his legs and making him feel he was about to be thrown off. It lacked the smooth action of a broom, as well as the steady cadence of an earthbound horse; he felt himself rocking backward and forward as the hindquarters of the hippogriff rose and fell with its wings.

The girl in front of him had her eyes squeezed shut; he could hear her muttering, “Oh, no – I don't like this oh, I really don't like this -”, and he was in total agreement.

The hippogriff gave one sweep of its mighty wings and they were soaring downward, and it was much worse than just bobbing in the air. Sirius leaned back as the smooth neck lowered, tightening his knees as well as his hold on Hermione, feeling he was going to slip off the back, then he felt a heavy thud as the four ill-assorted feet hit the ground. He just managed to hold on and push himself straight again. All three riders slid off.

“Sirius, you'd better go, quick,” Harry panted. “They'll reach Flitwick's office any moment, they'll find out you're gone.”

The hippogriff pawed the ground, tossing its sharp head.

“What happened to the other boy? Ron?” croaked Sirius, noticing his absence. Someone else was missing as well, and despite the way it ripped at his heart, he thought it was probably for the best. If she were here, leaving would be so much harder.

“He's going to be okay. He's still out of it, but Madam Pomfrey says she'll be able to make him better. Quick – go -”

But Sirius was still staring down at Harry, this amazing boy who’d just risked his life to save him.

“How can I ever thank -”
“Buckbeak?” said a soft voice behind them.

They all spun. Kali was standing there, out of breath, with leaves and twigs caught in her hair.

“What did you do?” she asked Harry.

“It’s – it’s a complicated story,” he said and then turned back to his godfather. “Sirius you need to go.”

“Go?” Kali asked.

“Peter got away. Macnair went to get the dementors, we broke Sirius out of Flitwick’s office, if he doesn’t leave now the dementors will get him. You need to let him go,” Hermione said pleadingly.

“And let him live the rest of his life on the run? I don’t think so,” Kali said, her eyes narrowing.

“Dumbledore said -” Harry said.

“I don’t care,” she interrupted sharply. “Dumbledore is not always right, and this time he’s wrong.” She faced Sirius, her eyes shining with the kind of defiance and determination he’d once seen daily when looking in the mirror. “Gran has been building a case to keep you out of Azkaban for nearly a year now, and you know her, she doesn’t lose.”

“Your grandmother isn’t here now,” said Hermione. “But Fudge and the dementors are -”

“Leave Fudge to me.”

He wanted it to be enough. He wanted to live in a reality where good always prevailed, where the truth really did set people free, where her passion and confidence alone could change Fudge’s mind. But that wasn’t his reality, and it was hight time he accepted that.

“You’re fourteen, sweetheart, they aren’t going to listen to you,” said Sirius sadly.

“I’m intimidating, persuasive, and ridiculously charming, they will listen to me – I will make them listen to me.” Her eyes burned. “I’m not losing you again.”

He felt his eyes tear at her words. There was no way to resist the fire burning through her, no way to refuse the set of her jaw or the firmness of her gaze. Dumbledore had said that he didn’t have the power to make men see the truth, but that expression on Kali’s face – his daughter’s face – made Sirius believe that perhaps she possessed that power. Seeing her now, no human being alive would stand between her and what she wanted – and what she wanted was her father back.

“You’re so like your mother.”

“I can help you,” she said. “I can make sure they never send you to Azkaban again. No dementor will ever come near you again. But if you run, there’s nothing I can do for you.”

Sirius watched his daughter and he felt his heart swell with love and pride so fast it was almost painful, and it would have been if he weren’t so happy. Happiness... he could remember what it felt like again....

“I trust you,” Sirius said, stepping away from the hippogriff, away from his escape, and toward Kali. “I won’t leave you again.”

Kali smiled, a dazzling grin that could light up the darkest night sky, and threw herself into his arms. He clung to her; he’d forgotten how good hugging was.
“Harry. We’ve got to go,” said Hermione, staring at her watch.

Harry nodded tearing his eyes away from Kali and Sirius. “Okay, let’s go….”

“Harry,” Sirius said, still holding onto Kali. “You are truly your father's son….”

Harry smiled. He glanced over at the hippogriff.

“What about Buckbeak?” he asked Hermione. “What are we supposed to do with him.”

“I’ll take care of him,” Kali said, extracting herself from her father’s grip, beaming. “Go.”

They left.

“What’s the plan, princess?” Sirius asked, tearing his eyes away from James’s son and looking down at his daughter. *His daughter*….

“First, we get you and Buckbeak somewhere safe, then I deal with our spineless Minister.”
Kali could hear Professor Snape screaming from the other side of the hallway. She’d made it back to
the castle in record time thanks to one of the transportation spells she’d been researching, which was
just obscure enough that the Hogwarts teachers hadn’t bothered to ward the school against it. She’s
taken her father and Buckbeak to the cave where Moony and Pan were keeping themselves amused.
Pan had held Moony down while Sirius had borrowed Kali’s wand to cast a spell that had made the
opening big enough to get Buckbeak through, he’d then transformed and had joined them inside, and
Kali had sealed them in. They were all safe, now all Kali had to do was make sure they stayed that
way.

“They helped him escape, I KNOW IT!” Snape howled from the hospital wing.

“Calm down, man!” Fudge barked. “You're talking nonsense!”

“You DON’T KNOW POTTER!” shrieked Snape. “HE DID IT, I KNOW HE DID IT -”

A softer voice answered him, and Kali stepped up to the open door just in time to see Madam
Pomfrey bristle at whatever question Dumbledore had just asked her.

“Of course not!” said the healer. “I would have heard them!”

“Well, there you have it, Severus,” said Dumbledore calmly. “Unless you are suggesting that Harry
and Hermione are able to be in two places at once, I'm afraid I don't see any point in troubling them
further.”

Snape stood there, seething, staring from Fudge, who looked thoroughly shocked at his behaviour, to
Dumbledore, whose eyes were twinkling behind his glasses. Kali leaned against the door frame,
thoughly enjoying the state this whole ordeal was putting the Potions master in. His eyes were
bulging from his skull and his face was going a funny colour, and Kali decided to step in before he spontaneously combusted and made a mess of Madam Pomfrey’s work place.

“There’s no need to throw a fit Professor Snape, my father hasn’t run away.”

Snape whirled. Kali didn’t move out of her casual stance.

“YOU!” Snape roared. “YOU HELPED HIM ESCAPE!”

“Hardly,” she said coolly.

“DON’T LIE TO ME GIRL!”

“I did not help my father escape. I swear it,” she said. “However, I do know where he is.”

“Where?” asked Fudge, rushing toward her. “Quickly, Miss Black, before he gets away.”

“In a moment. There are a few things I wish to discuss with you first, Minister,” she said calmly.

“BLACK COULD BE ESCAPING RIGHT THIS MINUTE! TELL US WHERE HE IS!” Snape yelled. His face was twisted; spit was flying from his mouth.

“That attitude will get you nowhere, Professor,” said Kali. “My father has agreed to turn himself in on a few conditions.”

“CONDITIONS! HE HAS NO RIGHT -”

“Severus perhaps it would be best to hear what Miss Black has to so,” Dumbledore said. But Kali didn’t miss the uncertainty in his eyes.

“What conditions, Miss Black?” asked Fudge.

“He wants the trial he was never permitted to have. A fair trial, with the use of Veritaserum,” said Kali.

“What?” asked Fudge.

“Veritaserum, a powerful truth serum,” she explained.

“Powerful as it may be, it can be resisted,” Snape seethed.

“My father is in no state to fight against such a potent potion, and I don’t know how to,” she said.

“You?” said Fudge, looking confused.

“I witnessed Peter Pettigrew’s return, I heard his confession,” she said. “I’ll be making a statement during the trial.”

“Veritaserum isn’t used during trials, child,” Fudge said gently, although it came out more as patronizing than anything else.

“It should be, and from now on it will be. I will set up a series of questions that you will be allowed to ask my father and myself when we will be under the influence of the serum. You will, of course, be allowed to make suggestions to add to this list. But no question that is not on it will be asked during the trial. The trial will be short and to-the-point – enough time has been wasted on this nonsense as is. No dementors will be involved – not at any point. And unless my father is deemed
guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, he will never see the inside of Azkaban again. Those are his conditions.”

“NO! I WON’T ALLOW THIS -”

“It isn’t up to you, Professor,” said Kali, never taking her eyes off of Fudge.

Fudge took a handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped up his sweaty forehead. “This is most unusual, Miss Black….”

“You cannot be considering this, Minister,” said Snape. “This girl is protecting a convicted felon. That’s a serious offense.”

“That it is,” Kali agreed, looking over at Snape. “Except Sirius Black is not a convicted felon, is he? For him to be that, he would have to have been declared guilty of a criminal offense by the verdict of a jury or the decision of a judge. Correct me if I’m wrong, but he was never given a trial, was he?”

Snape looked murderous, and Kali smiled at him. His eyes widened and he drew his wand on her.


He did so very slowly, and Kali barely held back from saying something along the lines of ‘Good boy’. If she had, she didn’t doubt that not even Dumbledore could have protected her.

“It doesn’t sound like you’re giving me much of a choice, Miss Black,” said Fudge, glancing nervously at Snape. “Well if this is the only way -”

“It is,” said Kali.

“Well then, your demands aren’t unreasonable, I suppose – yes. I agree to your terms. You’ll want it all in writing, I presume. I’ll have someone draw up the contract right away. But I need your word, Miss Black, that Sirius Black will show up for his trial.”

“You have it.”

“Dumbledore do you vouch for this girl?” Fudge asked.

The Headmaster had been watching her carefully. He hadn’t anticipated this, that much was clear, she’d thrown a wrench in his carefully orchestrated plan, and she could see him plotting and calculating, trying to think seven moves ahead. Time to pick a side, old man.

“I do,” he said eventually.

“Very well. The press will have a field day with this,” said Fudge, shaking his head.

“YOU -” Snape glared at Kali, he 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.”

“Oh, he’s not unbalanced,” said Dumbledore quietly. “He’s just suffered a severe disappointment.”

“He’s not the only one!” puffed Fudge. “The Daily Prophet truly is going to have a field day! We had Black cornered and he slipped through our fingers yet again only to return willingly in exchange
for a trial! All I need 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,” said Fudge, running his fingers distractedly through his hair. “Never dreamed they'd attempt to administer the Kiss on an innocent boy… Completely out of control… 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 Hermione.

“Come, Miss Black. We clearly have some things to discuss,” Fudge said, as he, Kali, and Dumbledore left the ward.

Gran joined them for the preliminary negotiations, and despite the sleepless night, Kali was bouncing off the walls come morning. They’d done it, Sirius was getting his trial. Gran had insisted on him being judged by a jury of his peers, which was uncommon in the U.K., but given how much the Ministry had to lose by finding Sirius innocent, she wanted to circumvent any possible temptation the members of the Wizengamot might feel to fail at their duty of impartiality.

As the sun rose, Kali led her little group to the cavern. Despite the fact that she was wearing three inch heels, Gran decided to join them, much to Fudge’s displeasure as he’d been more than willing to stay at the castle with her, thus avoiding the Forbidden Forest. But Gran had made a rather pointed comment about not fearing anything that could be found in there, and to keep face, Fudge had stated the same, and had had to prove it. So while Kali, Gran, and Dumbledore walked calmly deeper and deeper past the treeline, Fudge jumped at the slightest sound, wand gripped firmly in his shaking hand.

Gran chose not to brave the steep slope down to the cave and Fudge stayed with her, while Kali and Dumbledore made the descent. Kali kept an eye on Dumbledore in case he slipped or at any point required assistance getting down – an untimely death would not be good for morale – but he was quite sprightly for an older fellow, and managed it without a problem.

She levitated the boulder away and climbed into the cavern where a hippogriff, a dog, and a grizzly all slept, curled protectively around a naked man.

Dumbledore kicked at a loose rock as he slipped through the fissure, and the sound startled the big, black dog awake. He leapt to his feet, standing over Remus with panicked eyes, waking the others with his low growl.

His panic faded quickly enough and Sirius transformed back into a man. “Sorry about that.”

“No harm done,” said Kali, handing him a set of Remus’s robes.

Remus got dressed, and came to join them. “What happens now?”

“Sirius’s trial is set for the first week of July,” said Dumbledore. “Until then he is a free man.”

Sirius stared at Kali in awe. “How did you...?” But his question broke off with a grin. He didn’t care.

“You’ve raised a very special girl, Remus,” said Dumbledore, staring at her also. The compliment bore the hint of an undertone, and despite his kindly demeanour, Kali wasn’t convinced he was terribly happy with her. Oh, well.
They rejoined Gran and Fudge, although Pan stayed down there with Buckbeak, and an unsteady flicker of emotions crossed Gran’s face when she laid eyes on Sirius.

“My dear boy,” she whispered, and to the surprise of all, she pulled him into a tight embrace. It only lasted half a minute before she took a step back, holding him at arm’s length and giving him a thorough once-over, then continuing in a firmer tone, “This is why we think before we act.”

“Missed you too, Freyja,” said Sirius with a small smile.

“Come on, lets get you cleaned up.”

Fudge had some documents for Sirius to sign first, before Gran could take him home. Kali felt a slight pang at seeing him go, and she wasn’t the only one.

“Only a couple of weeks until the end of term,” said Remus still staring into the fireplace through which Gran and Sirius had just disappeared. “You’ll see him again soon.”

“So will you,” said Kali, sitting herself on the edge of Remus’s desk. “Are you okay with that?”

Remus looked startled by the question. “Why wouldn't I be?”

“Because it’s been twelve years, and you’re you.”

He avoided looking at her, and busied himself by stacking random sheets of parchment into orderly piles. “I’ll try not to take that the wrong way.”

“It’s a fact, not an insult. My point is, whatever we decide to do, mainly in terms of living arrangements, has to be something everyone is comfortable with.”

“What living arrangements are you hoping for?” he asked rather uncertainly.

“You know what I want. I’m just not sure what you want.”

“Sirius and I… we’ll figure it out. We might not be able to go back to the way things used to be, but we’ll find a way to coexist. I won’t make you choose between us, that wouldn’t be fair.”

She hopped off the desk and wrapped her arms around his waist. “Thank you.”

“Alright, go grab some breakfast, then try to get a few hours sleep, you must be exhausted.”

Far from it, but Remus looked about ready to keel over, so she left, bounding out of the room so that he could take his post-moon nap. Her spirits were higher than they’d ever been before. Everything had worked out: her father was innocent and free; Gran was confident they’d win the trial; Buckbeak was alive and well; Gran would be coming back tonight to pick him up under the cover of darkness. Everything was wonderful, until she heard the whispering.

Kali hesitated on the last step of the Grand Staircase, the uncertainly of what awaited her within the dinning hall casting a cloud over her good mood. Had the news of Sirius’s upcoming trial already reached the Hogwarts population? Was that what had gotten everyone so worked up? Before she could work up the nerve to face her classmates, Daphne, Blaise, and Theo exited the Great Hall and
caught sight of her. They were dragging her outside before she could even say hello.

“What’s going on?” she asked when they were far enough from the school.

“I take it you already knew that Professor Lupin is a werewolf,” said Blaise, a hint of fear marring his usual apathy.

Kali tried to blink away her shock. “I beg your pardon?”

“Don’t deny it,” Daphne said quietly. “Professor Snape told all of Slytherin about it over breakfast. Everyone knows.”

“I’m going to kill him,” she thought.

“I’ll hold him down,” said Pan.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” asked Daphne, intruding on Kali’s murderous thoughts.

“It was never my secret to tell. Besides, it ought to be irrelevant.”

“Irrelevant?” repeated Theo. “Kali, he’s a werewolf. He was loose on the grounds last night, he could have killed somebody.”

“But he didn’t. He never has. Being bitten was something that happened to him, he didn’t choose it, certainly didn’t want it. He shouldn’t be punished for that.”

“He’s dangerous,” said Blaise.

“So am I,” Kali snapped. “So are you, and everyone else on this planet. We are all capable of awful things, but that does not mean that we are inherently bad. We are defined by our actions, and Remus is good.”

“You’re just saying that because you love him,” said Daphne.

“I do love him, but do you think I would love someone who’s evil? If you don’t trust him, at least trust me.” She looked at each of them in turn, trying not to let the fear and panic in their eyes weaken the steel in her own. “You’re my friends. I don’t ever want anything bad to happen to you, and if I though that Remus might be an actual danger to you, he wouldn’t be here – he wouldn’t want to be here. He doesn’t want to hurt anyone. Not ever.”

The three of them shared a look, and Theo was the one to give the verdict. “We trust you.”

That was it, no ‘but’, no ‘you should have told us’, none of that, just trust. She threw herself at them, hugging them all at the same time, and they only untangled themselves when they nearly toppled over.

“Good,” said Kali, blinking away her overwhelmed tears. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a Potions Professor to lynch.”

She found Snape in his office down in the dungeons, and no, she did not bother knocking before she barged in.

“I warned you,” she said, and the git had the gall smile at her.

“Miss Black, please, do come in,” he said, sitting behind his desk and waving her toward the chair in front of it.
She did not take the proffered seat, choosing instead to tower over him from the other side of the desk. “I warned you that if you ever did anything untoward to get Remus into trouble again, I would make you regret it. Or did you bang your head so hard last night that you forgot?”

His facial features convulsed, and the reddened cut on his forehead caught the dim light. “Bold of you to bring that up. You attacked a teacher, Miss Black, you should be suspended.”

“Your actions would have seen me lose the only two parents I have left, excuse me for not letting that happen.”

“You ought to be grateful I’m not filing an official complaint to have you removed from the country.”

Kali spluttered. “Removed… I was born here, you arse.”

“You don’t belong here,” he sneered.

“Yes, I do, and so does Remus. Where do you get off telling everyone what he is and disrespecting his right to privacy like that?”

“Last night’s events prove that he is a danger to the students of this school. Do you understand that you could have been bitten, Miss Black? I did what is best for the school and the students.”

“That’s rich; you claiming to be protecting the students of this school. Not so long ago, you’d have seen a good chunk of them dead or subservient.”

“Do not presume to know what it was I wanted.”

“You’re a Death Eater, what you wanted is pretty clear. Remus is a better man than you will ever be.”

Snape snarled. “That half-breed -”

“That man,” she cut in forcefully, “risked his life fighting against you and your genocidal pals. He lost his best friends to that war, and you have the nerve to screw him over, and expect to experience no consequences whatsoever for doing so. Vindictiveness has made you far too stupid.”

“DO NOT SPEAK TO ME LIKE THIS!” he howled.

“Or what? We’ve already been over this, there is nothing you can do to me, and you’ve just thrown away the only leverage you had.”

“You are remembering that he pointed his wand at you last night, right?” Pan said anxiously. “He doesn’t look like he’s gotten back on his hinges yet.”

Kali ignored him. Let Snape try firing a curse at her, that should assure him a one-way ticket to Azkaban.

“I am not my father, Snape. I won't bully you because it's fun, I won't pick on you because it's easy. But what I will do, is destroy you. I will tear you down piece by piece because you deserve it. Because you're an awful human being and you have no place here. Dumbledore won't get rid of you because he seems to think that you're useful. So you're going to quit; I'll make sure of it. Is that easy enough for you to understand?”

He was shaking with rage, his jaw clenched so tight that even without Pan here she could hear his
teeth grinding together. She’d never been as nervous to turn her back on someone as she was walking out of that room, but she kept her head held high, and her pace slow and steady, and only when she was out of sight did she start to run. Snape was such a bitter, pathetic excuse for a person, whose only amusement in life came from bullying schoolchildren, that it was easy to forget that he was a killer. But standing alone in his office with him, it had been plain to see that Dumbledore had not yet managed the stomp out that side of him. Severus Snape was still capable of murder, not to mention eager and willing.

She was out of breath by the time she reached Remus’s office, and through the open door, she saw him packing. “What are you doing?”

“I take it you’ve heard the news,” he said. He didn’t look half as upset as he ought to.

“Why are you packing?”

“I’ve just been to hand Professor Dumbledore my letter of resignation. I’m leaving at noon.”

“You’re going to let Snape win?”

Remus smiled softly and pulled out a chair for her, this time she sat. “It isn’t about winning,” he said, leaning back against his desk. “There are some things that just aren’t worth fighting.”

“I’m pretty sure the ‘you can’t lose if you don’t compete’ speech isn’t meant to figure on a parent’s motivational talks list.”

“I was going to resign at the end of the year, anyway. Snape’s little slip up only sped up the process.”

“You didn’t tell me you were going to quit.” Although it did explain why he was so calm about the whole thing.

“It’s a recent decision,” he said mildly. “Made this morning, in fact.”

“Because of what happened last night? Because I….”

“Because I got distracted and forgot to drink my potion. Because I transformed in front of people. Because if it weren’t for you, I might have made it into Hogsmeade. Because you did something incredibly stupid, and you could have died, or worse.”

She’d been hoping to avoid this conversation. When he hadn’t mentioned it at the first chance he’d gotten, she’d thought she was in the clear. What a mistake that had been.

“Do we have to argue about this?” she asked sullenly.

“Do you understand what could have happened, Kali? The risk you put yourself in?” There was no accusation or self-hate in his tone, not yet, but this was one topic that could quickly turn a well-meaning reprimand into a full-blown shouting match.

“I understand that if I’d done nothing, and you’d hurt someone, I would have lost you. I understand that I stood less risk of getting hurt than anyone else, because I know you, and you’ve taught me everything you know. I get that it was a risk, but the amount of danger I was in was minimal.”

He sighed, and rubbed his hands over his face and through his short-cropped curls. “Sweetheart, you are not invincible, and I would never forgive myself if I hurt you. Promise me that you will never do anything like that ever again.”
“No more going for strolls with werewolves during the full moon, got it.”

“Kali,” he said with that warning tone where saying her name was the only warning she needed.

“I promise. I still don’t think you should resign, though.”

“Hogwarts was never going to be permanent for me. The plan was to stay a year, maybe two.”

She carefully wiped any hint of an expression from her face. “Where are we moving to this time?”

Remus was watching her very closely, but this was a look she’d had plenty of practice perfecting with Blaise. “Actually, I thought we might stay.” Her eyes snapped up to his and he grinned. “If that’s alright with you?”

“You want to stay in the U.K. permanently? No more moving? No more new schools?”

“Unless there’s somewhere else you’d rather be?”

“No, no, here’s good. Although, now I’m kind of regretting putting frogspawn in Pansy’s shampoo.”

Remus chuckled and went back to packing, while Kali considered her new reality. She’d been optimistically hoping there would be no more new schools for about five years now, but even at Hogwarts, she’d been anticipating a short-term stay. Moving from place to place had been Remus’s favoured method of keeping his condition a secret, he’d never stuck around long enough for people to get suspicious nor had he given himself the opportunity to make any friends who might have figured it out. Mum had always loved to travel, so it had never bothered her, and Nahele would have gone wherever Mum wanted. Kali had thrown a couple of tantrums over the years, the last one when she was eight. She’d been shouting about how it wasn’t fair and that she didn’t want to move anymore, and it had upset Remus. He’d walked out to clear his head, but Kali had interpreted his damp eyes and that gently closing front door as a sign that he was leaving for good. She’d been so relieved when he’d come back a couple of hours later that she’d never complained again.

“What are you going to do, though?” she asked. “If you aren’t teaching here anymore?”

“I thought I might start that book that your Gran’s been trying to convince me to write for about ten years now.”

“Which one?”

Gran was convinced that there were two books that Remus absolutely had to write: one about defence against the dark arts and magical creatures; the other about his life as a werewolf.

He gave her a pointed look and didn’t dignify her question with an answer. When Gran had suggested *Tale of Lycanthropy* to him, his only comment had been to incorporate a dumbass pun into the title, saying it ought to be called *Tail of Lycanthropy*, instead. Remus didn’t like talking about his condition – he flinched whenever he heard the ‘W’ word – he certainly wasn’t going to write an entire book about it, no matter how interesting it may be.

“I wanted to show you something,” he said, riffling through his desk drawer, and taking out a large, square, very worn piece of parchment with nothing written on it.

“Is that….”

“The Marauder’s Map,” Remus supplied as she got a closer look at the old, seemingly mundane, piece of parchment. “I confiscated it off of Harry about a month ago, I was worried Sirius might use
it to lure him out of the castle. No idea where he got it from.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Her accusing tone was lost at the wonder of finally getting the see the Marauder’s Map

“Because I’m your teacher, and I could not, in good conscious, let you get your hands on it.”

She managed to tear her eyes away from the map at that. “You think I would have stolen it from you?”

“No, I think you would have asked nicely, and I would have caved. And you do not need to be given any extra tools that would allow you to cause even more trouble around this school. Filch isn’t as young as he used to be.” He spread out the parchment on the desk. “Try the Revelio Charm on it.”

Kali took out her wand and tapped it against the blank paper. As though an invisible hand were writing upon it, words appeared on the smooth surface of the map.

“Mr. Wormtail is absolutely terrified at the thought of a little Padfoot and Moony combination wreaking havoc on the world.”

“Mr. Moony would like to register his surprise that Mr. Padfoot survived long enough to procreate given his lack of respect for safety precautions.”

“Mr. Prongs requests that Miss Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black thoroughly berate her fathers for not supplying her with the words to activate her birthright.”

“Mr. Padfoot congratulates Miss Black on winning the genetic lottery.”

She grinned down at it, trailing her fingers over the fading words, and looked back up at Remus.

“How does it know who I am?”

“The Homonculous Charm, when cast onto a map, tracks the movements of every person in the mapped area through labelled dots. Your label’s longer than most with all your surnames in it.”

She pressed her wand to the map again.

“Mr. Moony presents his apologies to Miss Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black, but birthright or not, she needs to know the words to gain access to the knowledge of this parchment.”

“Mr. Wormtail wonders if perhaps there is a reason why Miss Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black’s fathers have not informed her of the words, could she be a worse, more unruly troublemaker than her fathers?”

“Mr. Padfoot would like to know who the fuck Kalakaua and Morrigan are.”

“Mr. Prongs suggests Miss Kalakaua Lupin Morrigan Black go blackmail the magic words out of her fathers this instant.”

“The messages change every time?” she asked.

He nodded, staring fondly down at the map. “We were very thorough when we made this thing.”

“How many times have you tried opening it with the wrong words?” How many times had he sat in front of the map, goading those greetings out of Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs? How many times had he imagined that they weren’t just words and that his friends were there with him again,
talking to him?

“Too many.” He pointed his wand at the map, and said, “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.”

And at once, thin ink lines began to spread like a spider’s web from the point that Remus’s wand had touched. They joined each other, they criss-crossed, they fanned into every corner of the parchment; then words began to blossom across the top, great, curly green words, that proclaimed:

\[ \text{Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs,} \]
\[ \text{Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers,} \]
\[ \text{are proud to present} \]
\[ \text{THE MARAUDER’S MAP} \]

The map showed every detail of the Hogwarts castle and grounds, moving staircases and all, and tiny ink dots moved around it, each labelled with a name in minuscule writing.

“The changing floorplan was a nightmare to map,” he said. “We had to figure out the magic that made the castle move, figure out the patterns, and tap into those spells so that the map could mimic them.”

“How old were you?” She was having to reconsider everything she’d ever thought she’d known about the Marauders. Until now she’d thought of them as simple troublemakers; bright kids who hadn’t found the curriculum challenging enough, so they’d come up with their own challenges. They’d given themselves codenames, for Circe’s sake, and named their friend group, if that didn’t spell out ‘giant dorks’, she wasn’t sure what would. But they’d become Animagi and drawn up a moving map of the most complicated, convoluted building Kali had ever seen, while they were still at school. It was still very dorky and nerdy, but it was also very impressive, and gave her a lot to live up to.

“We started it in our Second Year and had it completely finished by the end of our Sixth. It was your dad’s idea, he’s the one who drew it, the rest of us were all crap at art, although, James could draw a very good broom.”

Kali listened raptly. Remus had never spoken so openly about his old friends before. She’d managed to pry a few stories from him over the years, through begging, bribery, and extortion. He’d never offered one without a serious prompt.

“James already knew about some of the castle’s secrets from his dad, and it became a game, in our First Year, to see who could find the most. Peter won… he always did have a way of sneaking around and getting himself stuck where he oughtn’t be.”

His expression went dark and she sidled closer to him, offering what comfort she could.

“Then in Second Year we saw all of the First Years always getting lost, just as we had, and Sirius got to drawing little maps for all of them. He…” His voice shook and he wrapped an arm around her shoulders as they both stared intently down at the map, although neither was really seeing it anymore. “It was a very sweet thing to do. Then one evening he comes barrelling into the dorm, with this big idea to map out the entire school with all its secret passages, moving stairs, disappearing rooms, trick doors… and James jumps on the plan. Merlin, you should have seen those two when
they got an idea into their heads, they built on each other, egged each other on… they were unstoppable….”

His voice caught on every sentence now, and she knew that if she looked up, she’d see him crying, so she didn’t look up. Remus did not cry often, but when he did, he did not like for it to be acknowledged.

“I was in charge of researching spells. When I found the Homonculous Charm, we decided to add that one too. We spent an hour just staring at it when we finished it. It upped our mischief-making efficiency to all new heights. Then a few months before the end of Seventh Year, Snape overheard us plotting a prank and ratted us out. Filch caught us trying to sneak into our Potions Professor’s office, we lost the map while making a run for it. Filch confiscated it, and none of us managed to steal it back because he was too well-prepared and too suspicious.”

“You have it back now,” she said, and he pressed a kiss to the top of her head and went back to packing, keeping his back turned to her for a good half hour until he got his emotions under wraps.

She sat herself in one of the chairs, and he asked her about her exams. She did most of the talking as he bumbled around. She would have offered to help, but despite how disorganised he seemed, he did have a system, one that was incomprehensible to anyone but him.

When Harry showed up at the office door, Remus was nearly done packing.

“I saw you coming,” said Remus, smiling. He pointed to the Marauder's Map which was still open on his desk.

“I just saw Hagrid,” said Harry. “And he said you'd resigned. It's not true, is it?”

“I'm afraid it is,” said Remus. 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?”

Remus crossed to the door and closed it behind Harry.

“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 slip that I am a werewolf this morning at breakfast.”

Kali couldn’t help but scoff at the very inaccurate usage of the term ‘accidentally’.

“You’re not leaving just because of that!” said Harry.

Remus smiled wryly.

“This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents…. They will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry. And after last night, I see their point. I could have bitten any of you…. That must never happen again.”

“You're the best Defence Against the Dark Arts- teacher we've ever had!” said Harry. “Don't go!”

Remus shook his head and changed the subject, all the while still emptying his drawers. “From what the headmaster told me this morning, you saved a lot of lives last night, Harry. If I'm proud of anything I've done this year, it's how much you've learned…. Tell me about your Patronus.”

“How d'you know about that?” said Harry, looking distracted.
“What else could have driven the dementors back?”

Harry told them what had happened last night, namely that Hermione had a Time-Turner, and that’s how they’d saved Buckbeak and freed Sirius. Also Harry had been the one to scare away all the dementors that had attacked Sirius, Hermione, and Harry himself – although it had been younger versions of Harry and Hermione who were being attacked, and an older version of Harry who’d saved them in a bootstrap paradox turn of events, which was likely to throw Kali into an existential crisis if she thought about it too hard. He also told them that he’d believed that the Patronus had belonged to his father, before discovering that it was his own.

When Harry had finished, Remus was smiling again.

“Yes, your father was always a stag when he transformed,” he said. “You guessed right… that’s why we called him Prongs.”

Remus 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. It was a miracle it hadn’t been shredded by the transformation along with Remus’s robes. “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 of no use to me, and I daresay you, Kali, Ron, and Hermione will find uses for it.”

Harry took the map and grinned.

“You told me Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, 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 Remus, 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 either Kali or Harry there.

“Your carriage is at the gates, Remus,” he said.

“Thank You, Headmaster.”

Remus picked up his old suitcase and the empty grindylow tank.

“Well – good-bye, Harry,” he said, smiling. “It has been a real pleasure teaching you. I feel sure we'll see each other again very soon. Kali, I’ll see you at the start of the holidays. Headmaster, there is no need to see me to the gates, I can manage….”

Remus wasn’t one for teary good-byes, but even so the terseness with which he spoke to the headmaster was unusual.

“Good-bye, then, Remus,” said Dumbledore soberly. Remus shifted the grindylow tank slightly so that he and Dumbledore could shake hands. Then, with a final nod to Harry and a swift smile for Kali, Remus left the office.

Harry slumped into the chair next to Kali’s, staring glumly at the floor. Kali felt an uncomfortable
pinch at seeing Remus leave, and realised that it was something she was going to have to get used to. From the time she was less than two years old, the longest she’d been apart from Remus was a week-long girl scouts’ camping trip when she was seven. Not having him around all the time was going to be an adjustment. She didn’t let herself dwell on it just yet, though, because Dumbledore was still there, watching Kali and Harry curiously.

“Why so miserable, Harry?” he said 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 helped uncover the truth. You saved an innocent man from a terrible fate.”

Harry’s eyes went wide and he jumped out of his chair so fast that it toppled over and startled Kali out of her own.

“Professor Dumbledore – yesterday, when I was having my Divination exam, Professor Trelawney went very – very strange.”

“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?”

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. “But – I stopped Sirius and Professor Lupin from killing Pettigrew! That makes it my fault if Voldemort comes back!”

“It does not,” 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 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.”

“I don't want a connection with Pettigrew!” said Harry. “He betrayed my 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 didn’t seem so sure.

“I knew your father very well, both at Hogwarts and later, Harry,” Dumbledore said gently. “He would have saved Pettigrew too, I am sure of it.”
“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.”

“It was stupid, thinking it was him,” Harry 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.”

Kali’s gaze snapped from Harry to Dumbledore at the mention of Prongs.

“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 looking more confused than ever.

“And the award for cryptic an unhelpful goes to….” Kali muttered. First Dumbledore was completely unbothered by the fact that a Seer – albeit a rather useless one – had predicted the return of the darkest wizard of their time, then he rabbited on about life debts and ‘magic at its deepest and most impenetrable’, before finishing off with a speech straight from the Lion King, and waltzing out the room.

Kali slid onto the desk, and Harry smiled at her. “How’s your dad?” he asked.

“He’s good,” she said, returning the smile. “He’s resting, and more importantly he’s eating.”

“When’s the trial set for?”

“Beginning of July. My Gran and Fudge still need to sort out a few things, but until then my dad’s home and happy to be there.”

Harry did an awkward little shuffle before looking back up at her. “Where’s home?”

She grinned. “It's an old family home near Oxford. You’ll like it.”

“So Sirius still wants – he still – and you’re okay with -” Harry stammered.

“The minute his name is cleared you’re coming to live with us and Remus.”

Harry beamed, and Kali jumped from the desk, grabbed his hand, and dragged him out of the stuffy office.

“There are a dozen empty bedrooms you can choose from, but the one next to mine has the best view of the lake and the mountain range…”

Kali spent the rest of the afternoon with Harry, weighing the pros and cons of each bedroom the Lake House had to offer, and describing his new home to him with as much detail as he asked for. He never stopped smiling, and neither did she. Soon they would both have a family that wasn’t as
broken as it had been before, and they couldn't wait.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!