The Heir of the House of Black

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The Heir of the House of Black

by ravenclawblues (ravenclaw_blues)

Summary

It was the year 2003 and Wizarding Britain was finally starting to heal from the wounds of the Second Wizarding War. However, a growing number of Dark wizarding activities across Europe and political impasse in the Wizengamot threatened to destroy the fragile society once and for all.

But who was the enemy? Was it just the remnant supporters of Voldemort or was it the rise of a new Dark Lord? 23-year-old Deputy Head Auror Harry Potter tried to get to the bottom of this mystery but there was simply not enough time. There was simply nothing he could do to save the world at this point...

Unless he could go back in time and stem the tides...

This is a journey of family, of friendship, of self-discovery, and, as always with Harry Potter, a healthy dose of world-saving.

(Master of Death Harry Potter/ Rebirth/ Time Travel Fix-It/ Marauders Era)

Updates once every two weeks.
Inspired by Tsume Yuki's "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" and with her expressed permission, this is the author's fiction re-imagined.

Link: [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10610076/1/Time-to-Put-Your-Galleons-Where-Your-Mouth-Is]
Hey everybody,

This is the first creative fiction piece I have ever written and I'm open to any feedback. I love comments and messages so feel free to shoot them my way - the more the merrier. It will help me flourish as a writer and I definitely love to hear your thoughts and discuss about our mutual love for Harry Potter (that's why we are all here, right?).

I hope you will join me on this wonderful journey.

Happy reading!

- ravenclawblues 2019-08-31

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A big thank you to Tsume Yuki for being my beta for this chapter.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE: TURAIS RIGEL ORION BLACK
Cold air hit his body uncomfortably as Harry cringed and let out an involuntary cry. His eyes were shut tightly as his small ears picked up the first sounds of this world - voices chatting, fabrics shifting, feet shuffling.

“-a healthy screamer, this one –”

“-beautiful, pureblood heir,” someone cooed as a finger caressed his sensitive cheek. Suddenly, he felt something soft being wrapped around his body, something snuggly (flannel? cotton?) as he was lifted upwards. He settled into a depression filled with warmth. An embrace, Harry guessed.

Slowly, Harry cracked open his bleary eyes a mere fraction of an inch. There was a handsome face filling up his entire view as his body was swayed gently. The man was looking down at him. His eyes crinkled with joy.

Harry was mesmerized with his eyes that shone so brightly as though there were glimmering films. And beneath the sheen, there were two rings of light grey with a subtle purple undertones that communicated peacefulness. They were also accented with specks of charcoal that hinted at a modest air of aristocracy and class. But most importantly, he felt warm and... at home.

Harry was finally able to peel his gaze away from the soulful eyes and turned his attention to the combed-up raven hair and the well-trimmed handlebar moustache. His appearance was reminiscent of his godfather, only… posher.

“Thank the magic, it is a boy,” a female voice said outside his view.

Harry recognized her voice, yet he could not place where he had heard the voice from. As the
man moved Harry away from him, he squirmed at the loss of the man’s touch - the sense of warmth and safety. He felt himself being placed on a soft surface. A bed.

Then, a woman came into view and blocked out the man as she loomed over him. Her face looked familiar as well – the pointed nose, high cheekbones, and piercing black eyes that would have frightened him if he did not detect the hint of softness behind them. There was little warmth to her obsidian eyes and Harry shivered. But suddenly, recognition slapped him across the face, tearing forth a scream of surprise.

‘Walburga Black.’

He felt his magic rushing through his body instinctively as it reacted defensively against the perceived threat. However, his tiny body was unable to handle the flood of magic and caused him to discharge the energy uncontrollably into the room. The window and vases on the cupboard shattered as the door slammed shut; two landscape portraits hanging on the wall crashed down to the ground in two loud thumps. A woman, the wet nurse, shrieked.

“Merlin! Was that accidental magic?” The man, who Harry assumed is his father and no doubt named Orion Arcturus Black, stared at him in awe. “B…but, isn’t he far too young for – ”

“Orion, only the best for the new heir of the House of Black!” the woman in view snapped at her husband and looked back at him with a bigger, more genuine smile. “My little prince. You will be called Turais Rigel Orion Black, the newest heir to the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black. And you will become the strongest Black of all.”

‘Welcome to the House of Black, young Master.’

Harry screamed.

Chapter End Notes

Entire chapter is inspired by:

Tsume Yuki's "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" - Prologue: I Brought You Kicking and Screaming Into This World.
April 15, 2003 (Tuesday)

*ILLEGAL CACHE OF PORTKEYS IN CALAIS*

by M. Amerinus

*Secret Route for Criminals from the Continent Discovered?*

The growing unrest between pockets of militarized Dark witches and wizards against their local Ministries has finally spilled over our borders. The first in a series of Muggle attacks that has occurred around Dover since last month has gripped the nation with fear at the prospect of yet another rise of a new Dark Lord. Lord Harry James Potter, the freshly minted Deputy Head Auror, has yet to prove his stripes in stopping the spread of violence on British soil...

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April 22, 2003 (Tuesday)

“Henry, on your left! *Protego!*”

Harry Potter quickly shot off a Shield charm at the French Auror, who was currently locked in a duel, as a green hex streamed towards him. The hex contacted his hastily formed barrier with a long bang and ricocheted upwards into the ceiling, causing metal and wood splinters to rain down. Harry quickly clambered out of the way and threw himself behind a pile of boxes as part of the roof collapsed onto the floor. Through the holes in the warehouse roof, rays of silver moonlight eerily lit the spiralling clouds of dust that covered the battlefield.

“You hit?” Harry called out, dodging yet another green hex.

“Fine. Him, not so much. Watch your left!” Henry Talbot shouted back.

“*Reducto!*” The boxes beside Harry suddenly exploded, spraying dust and sand and the force of the spell knocked him sideways. Harry quickly recovered to his feet and darted across the corridor behind a steel beam for cover as he threw two Stunners behind him. Jets of green and red screamed past his position on both sides as Harry was pinned down at his current position. Scanning his surroundings, he locked eyes with another teammate ten meters to his right and called...
“Fenwick! Do you know where the two snipers are?”

Fenwick quickly risked peeking over behind the crate at the direction of where the curses originated and immediately shrunk back as two curses sailed directly at the space where her head was just a second ago.

“Affirmative! They’re hiding between the two red shipping containers in the back-centre of the room. Boss! I was expecting only boxes of dirty socks as short-distance Portkeys, not four murder machines!”

“Trouble always finds me,” Harry grimaced as the junior Auror groaned.

Short-distance Portkey was a type of Portkey commonly used by criminals and smugglers to illegally travel between Dover and Calais. With some cleverly-placed Magic Suppression charms, they were basically undetectable by Ministerial Anti-Portkey charms.

While it was not uncommon to find the odd, illegal Portkeys in the area, the sheer amount found in the past two months was concerning. To Harry’s frustration, the French Ministry was convinced that it was once again, an isolated incident. But this coincided with a series of Muggle attacks that occurred around Dover in seemingly mundane circumstances without any magical foul-play.

However, Harry believed that someone or some organization was preparing to systematically transport exiled and potentially dangerous criminals back into Britain. Under his stubborn insistence, the French Aurors relented to a joint task force to investigate the matter. But as all things in his life, what was supposed to be a straightforward investigation turned into a bloody nightmare.

A few crates exploded to his right, throwing chunks of wood at Fenwick’s face. “Okay, I am officially fed up with this. Boss, make the call,” she said as she spat out tiny pieces of burnt wood chip.

“Do you have a clear shot at them?”

“Negative,” She shouted, her hair curling messily outside her deformed hair-bun.

“Visual on Talbot?”

“Affirmative, Confringo! Twenty steps to my right.”

Forming a plan quickly in his mind, he spoke again. “With the anti-Apparition wards up, they can only escape through the main doors behind us. Where’s Caelum and Dubois?”

“Here!” Two men said as they came into view, taking cover behind a tower of boxes immediately to the left of him. “Dispatched the other one. What’s the plan?”

“Good.” Harry wiped off the sweat on his brow with his dirt-stained sleeves. “We will have to draw them in and flank them on both sides. Caelum, stay put and provide cover for us. Dubois, you and I’ll go left. Fenwick, pick up Talbot and go right. D.I.S. unless lethal. Understood?”

D.I.S. stood for the three spells used in standard protocol for apprehending criminals - Disarming, Incarcerous, and Stunning Spells.
“Consider it done, boss,” Fenwick threw him a playful grin. “I’m getting tired of this party, let’s wrap it up.”

“Caelum, throw a Protego maxima on the count of three so I can get out of this pin. One. Two. Three!” Harry shouted as another crate exploded beside him.

At the signal, Caelum cast an enormous blue shield that soared over Harry’s head and entrenched itself a few steps in front of him, temporarily protecting him from the incoming volleys of spells as he sprang out of his hiding spot and ran hard to his left. The shield charm cracked and wavered under the intense barrage. As Harry ducked behind another set of crates, the shield shattered into thousands of blue pieces and dissipated.

Joining Dubois, he looked across the room and saw Henry and Fenwick crouched behind a metal rack, drawing heavy fire. Their gazes connected and she nodded.

“Dubois, stay tight. We are going in.” Harry eyed Fenwick then towards the crates where the jets of curses originated and nodded. Raising his left hand, he counted down with his fingers. One. Two. Three. Dubois ran one step in front of him as they circled around the room along the left side, ducking under the incoming hexes while responding with their own Incarcerous and Disarming spells with Caelum’s red Stunners sailing above their heads in their direction to clear their path.

Suddenly, Harry saw a hex screaming towards Dubois, who was two steps ahead of him and seemingly unaware. Harry yelled, ‘Dubois, on your right!” as he grabbed his robes and yanked him backwards as hard as possible. The hex screamed past in front of Dubois, missing its mark by mere millimetres.

“Merde! I’m getting too old for diz!” Dubois hissed as Harry sat him down behind another tower of crates. Kneeling beside him, Harry pulled on his robe to inspect the wound. The fabrics on his stomach were burnt off by the intensity of the spell, revealing a wide band of red swollen skin across his stomach. Welts were beginning to form, but at least he avoided the brunt of the Blood-boiling Curse.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s nothing too serious! Stay put, I will take care of the rest,” Harry stated calmly as he went back into a crouching position while peeping around the corner. Fenwick and Talbot were exchanging fire with the two remaining assailants. His side was clear.

“Non, ‘arry…” Dubois attempted to grab Harry’s sweat-soaked cloak but missed and Harry inched back into the fray.

Taking advantage of the opening on the left of the room due to Dubois’ injury, the two assailants emerged from their vantage point and charged towards the exit.

Harry ran ahead to intercept them as Fenwick and Henry appeared behind the assailants’ backs. Quickly, they issued two well-aimed Incarcerous spells.

Just as Harry thought the assailants were surely captured, one of the men drew a red and gold package and threw it towards the spells. The spells connected with the package and exploded into a gigantic fireball with a reverberating boom that shook the entire complex.

Nearest to the explosion, Harry was thrown onto the ground from the blast. His head slammed onto the ground as his Holly wand slid from his grasp and rolled harmlessly away. His world spun in disorientation as he attempted to sit back up. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw hundreds of firecrackers emerge where the package was and whizzed randomly across the room, exploding as they came into contact with any surface. With a wall of fire and smoke separating the
unarmed Harry and the two men from his teammates, the two men turned their attention to him.

One of the men, Harry recognized him as Evan Rosier, pointed his wand at Harry and spat, “Finally, Potter. Now you die! Avada Kedavra!”

The intensifying green light rushed directly towards him, filling his vision with only green. His final thoughts were on his wife and his friends. Then the world turned dark.

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Harry laid facedown, and he was met with silence. Although his eyes were closed, he could sense that he was perfectly alone. Nobody was watching. Nobody else was there.

‘Hmmm, this place feels familiar.’

After a few seconds, or maybe it was a couple of hours, Harry became conscious and slowly opened his eyes. He took in his surroundings as the great white nothingness began to rearrange itself into a familiar setting.

‘King’s Cross Station.’

Harry reached out to his senses. He was not feeling neither warm nor cold, in fact, he felt something and nothing at the same time. For the first time, he was aware that he was naked.

‘I’m naked again,’ Harry thought bemusedly and wished he was clothed. His wish had barely reached his mind when he saw a set of robes appeared a short distance away. Quickly, he pulled them on. The fabric was soft, clean, and warm … and with a sense of weightlessness, as though he was wearing nothing at all.

‘I was not expecting you to be back so soon, young Master of Death.’

He spun around. A black hooded figure stood idly, towering over the station clock it stood beside. Unsure, he eyed the figure with apprehension and observed its dark robe flap gently as though it was swayed by a non-existent breeze.

‘You have nothing to fear. You are my equal, my partner, and soon enough, my friend. I will do you no harm.’

The hooded figure extended his arm and beckoned him forward, a skeletal hand appearing as the sleeve pulled back.

“Death,” Harry realized. Although the figure did not move, Harry felt a sense of affirmation. He wondered if Death communicated telepathically.

“I was not expecting you to look exactly like how the storybooks portrayed you,” Harry commented as he slowly approached Death. As he got closer, he realized the figure was four feet taller than him, dwarfing him in comparison. Harry wondered if Death also understood his thoughts.

In his mind, he registered a short, amused chuckle.
‘Yes. I can read your thoughts. As for my appearance, if you recall what Albus Dumbledore told you when you were last here, this is your party. Just like how you imagined this place as King’s Cross station, this is how you imagined me.’

He nodded as he looked around the station once. Speaking to no one in particular, he said with a sigh, “So I guess this is it. That’s the life of the Boy-Who-Lived, the one destined to die trying to save the world from Dark wizards again and again until his eventual and inescapable fall.” Harry was surprised by the bitterness in his voice. Then, he realized the growing lump in his throat as his rising feeling of, not guilt, but regret, filled his body.

What did he regret? Harry thought he had lived a fulfilling life with the cards he had been dealt with. He had made a relatively normal life for himself, with his own family and close friends. This was all he wished for. So why did he still feel this indescribable sorrow. Harry searched within his and the growing torrent in attempt to identify the origins of this inexplicable feeling.

Ginny? Of course he wished their time had not been cut short prematurely, but they had a good run and a blissful marriage.

No, that wasn’t it.

Ron and Hermione? Their close friendships and adventures for the past two decades was enough to last him a lifetime and he had no regrets.

No, that wasn’t it either.

The Weasleys? Yes, he regretted Fred’s death, but he recognized by now that he alone would not have prevented every casualty in a war. They have provided him a family, a home that he never…

Suddenly, a dull throb reverberated from the innermost part of his soul.

Family. Not the family that he had the blessing of starting or joining. But the family he had never gotten to know. His father, his mother, his grandparents, his relatives, Remus and… Sirius.

‘Maybe I can finally meet them properly in the “Beyond”.’

Suddenly, death did not seem like such a terrible thing anymore.

“I’m dead for good this time?”

‘No.’

“I’m not dead?” asked Harry, genuinely surprised. He felt his brows arching up into his hair.

‘Yes.’

“But how? I no longer have the protection from my mother. I no longer am a vessel of a Horcrux,” Harry instinctively reached for his lightning scar. “And I lost the Resurrection Stone somewhere in the Forbidden Forest so I am no longer in possession of all the Hallows…” Harry trailed off as he thought back to Death’s greeting – it called him the Master of Death. ‘Does that mean I am still the Master of Death despite…’

‘You are correct, young Master of Death. As you will soon discover, the mastering of the Hallows does not require the physical possession of them at all times. As the last descendant of
the Peverell brothers and as the rightful owner of the Deathly Hallows, you are their Master across all times - past, present, and future.’

“So... this means I can go back, can’t I? Or I can … journey on?” Harry suddenly noticed two identical red trains were now sitting on either side of the platform as lazy clouds of steam gently rolled around them. ‘Two Hogwarts Expresses?’

“Yes. The choice lies in your hands.’

“Why are there two trains?”

‘One leads to the “Beyond” where all departed souls travel to while the other is a choice privy only to you.’

Harry then noticed there were two signs hanging off the faded ceiling. The one on his left was labelled, “Beyond”, while the one on his right was blurred out as though it was surrounded by a swirl of mist and fog. Despite Harry’s urging on his imagination, the fog did not dissipate. Defeated, Harry turned back to Death.

“What awaits in the ‘Beyond’?” Harry asked as he waved his hand towards the train on the left.

‘The final resting place of all intact souls.’

“So, does that mean I could meet my parents?” Harry asked hopefully.

‘If that is your wish, young Master. However, once you depart for that destination, you will not be able to return.’

That sounded pretty final to Harry. And now that he could return back to the mortal world, he wasn’t sure if he was ready for that choice anymore. "What about the other train?”

‘The next great adventure. And before you ask for more details, I promise you that you will know what it entails when you are prepared to journey on.’

“Does this mean that you know I have made the choice already?” Harry asked, confused. His mind registered another chuckle.

‘I am a mere reflection of your thoughts, young Master. However, I will caution you that upon your return, a great darkness would soon descend upon your world once again. But this time you will not be the salvation the world seeks. Nor will you be able to protect those you hold dearest. Not in this world and not in this body.’


‘The future is always in motion and the fate of those individuals remain unwritten. But I assure you that the world will not be one you wish to see. Hidden plans are already in motion and there simply is too little you can change at this point to alter the outcome of your world.’

With this information, Harry stood in silence for a long time, lost in his thoughts.

Finally, he spoke up again. “So, should I journey on now if I cannot do anything? But they
will need me. I can’t abandon them knowing that I have the chance to save them.”

‘No, young Master. You are not prepared to journey on yet. Perhaps, upon your next return, you will be. And it might be sooner than you might imagine. But as the Master of Death, you will always outlive everyone you know if you choose to do so.’

Harry stood in silence once more. He still could not wrap his mind around the fact that he would need to witness the death of all his loved ones, it just seems so cruel and lonely. But at least he could one day decide to join them in the “Beyond”.

‘Yes, young Master. This terrible burden is unfortunately yours to bear. But allow me to advise you on just this. Learn how to give up your attachments as it will be less painful for you. You have learnt how to love deeply, but now you need to learn how to let go.’

Harry decided to brush away his concerns and instead, focus on the present and his imminent return to the physical realm. Steeling himself, he told Death, “Okay, I am ready to return.”

‘Very well, young Master. One last piece of information before you go, you can call upon me for guidance at anytime.’

“How?” asked Harry as he faded out of consciousness.

‘Remember, this is your party.’

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Harry gasped as he opened his eyes and observed the destruction in the interior of the warehouse. The assailant who shot the Killing curse at him was looking away from him as two jets of red light from different directions hit squarely on the men’s chests. They collapsed as their wands rolled out of their slacked grasps.

Harry stared at the two stilled figures and breathed heavily, adrenalin coursing through his veins. In the background, he barely registered the continuing explosions of light and fire.

“All clear!” yelled Caelum over the loud cracks as he appeared beside him, eyes wide in panic. “Are you okay, Harry? I heard Rosier using the Killing Curse and I thought you got hit. Thank Merlin you’re okay…” Harry gave him a curt nod as Caelum handed him his Holly wand.

“I’m all right, Caelum. Take a look at Dubois for me, I’ll take care of the Whiz-bangs.”

Caelum opened his mouth again to protest. But glancing at Harry’s stern gaze, he backed down and made his way towards Dubois.

“Harry, we can’t vanish these firecrackers!” Henry shouted beyond the growing wall of fire, thick smoke, and acidic smell of burnt plastic. “They just keep multiplying every time I try!”

“Stop, Talbot! It will just make it worse.” Harry’s eyes watered as smoke spread. “I know the disassembling charm.” He quickly muttered the charm at the fireworks before he could suffocate any further.
Suddenly, the warehouse descended into a chaotic silence. The moonlight, now serene and welcoming, became the sole light source in the warehouse once again. Its silvery rays penetrated the alleviating smoke and showed Henry’s soot-covered, grateful smile. Fenwick was sprawled on the ground and breathing laboriously; she was just renervated from the blast as well.

“Boss, you gatecrash the crappiest party,” she breathed.

“At least it ended with a bang,” Harry joked, chuckling at her loud groans and at the relief of his own resurrection.

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Caelum and Harry entered the Ministry Atrium from the Portkey concourse after delivering the four assailants to the French Auror Offices. They made a stop in front of the snack stand where Caelum purchased a pack of sugar mice. The Atrium was bursting with activity as the morning rush hour started.

“As we were leaving, I overheard Head Auror Ménard complaining about how the only two Aurors that were injured were both his men,” Caelum said after swallowing a mice in one gulp while dangling another one between his fingers and offered it to Harry. Disgusted, Harry shook his head as the sugary treat squirmed and squeaked frantically in front of his face.

“Robards is not gonna like how this went,” Caelum commented warningly.

“Let the Deputy Head Auror deal with the Head Auror, Caelum,” returned Harry. Gawain Robards was the Head of the Auror Office and Harry’s direct supervisor. Despite the more obvious goal of grooming Harry to take over his post, Harry believed that Robards wanted to lock him to his desk with mountains of paperwork instead of letting him run into stray curses out in the field.

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October 31, 2002 (Thursday)

Approximately six months ago...

“I take a dose of Calming Draught everyday and two when you’re out and running about, Potter!” Robards shouted at the bed-ridden Harry who had a foul-smelling orange paste splattered across half his face with a bandage wrapped around. “You are the worst trouble-niffler I have the misfortune of knowing!”

It was due to a particularly close call with a Blasting Curse that exploded a crate of Firewhiskey right by his head. But Harry honestly thought all these plastered Spellburn ointments was an overkill; it was just a teeny burn. Okay, maybe a bit more than teeny, but it wasn’t all that horrible.

Harry knew Robards was just worried and there was no real heat behind his words. So he just merely grinned sheepishly or... maybe it was the pain potion that was making his brain woozy...
“I also wondered if I was born a niffler and glued together with trouble under a permanent Sticking Charm!” Harry’s voice came out high-pitched and too cheerily. It was definitely the pain potions.

‘Takes the best Auror to figure this out. I’m a genius!’

Harry gave a goofy grin that was clearly not taken by the Healers and the two Aurors hovering over him. Robards looked mightily displeased and disheveled from the frantic late-night travel while the young man looked as though he ran through a forest fire. The ends of his straight black hair were singed and his robes were shredded and burnt. His ash-covered face was contorted in anger that clearly remained despite his hour-long rant about Harry’s lack of self-preservation.

“If Selwyn -” Robards pointed fiercely at the equally enraged man beside him as he barked on, “- did not pull you out in time. Your head would be in smithereens. You’re promoted to Deputy Head and I will not take no for an answer for my sake! Say goodbye to field op and home sweet home to paperwork, Deputy Head Auror Potter!”

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April 22, 2003 (Tuesday)

Harry smiled at the memory.

Their task team of five escaped relatively unscathed, with Dubois sustaining the heaviest injury. But even then, it was only a first-degree spellburn across his stomach (the lowest level in the five-tier spellburn injury classification). Henry Talbot, Harry’s closest correspondence and counterpart in the French Auror Force, suffered from multiple small burns all over his body that was caused by the Whiz-bangs, a bestseller from the Weasleys’ Wizards Wheeze. Harry reminded himself mentally to have a word with Ron and George about the dangers of their products on their next get-together. As the junior partner of the six-month-old Selwyn-Fenwick pair, Fenwick offered to stay behind in France to finish up the reports and paperwork.

“Stop playing with your food, Caelum. Propriety is supposed to be your middle name,” Harry glanced at his ex-partner’s mouth where the food disappeared only to find a tail trapped between his closed lips, dangling limply. “By the way, I never understood your obsession with these mice. Isn’t it at all disturbing to you to put something so alive into your mouth?”

“What?!” Caelum sounded offended, “Number one, they are delicious. Number two, they are most certainly not alive, but I can transfigure it into one if you want,” he responded cheekily. Harry glared at him. “But the most important reason is reason number three. Before Hogwarts, when Cygnus and I were still living with them, we never had any allowance to buy candy. So we secretly made money by using magic to fix our neighbour’s broken trinkets. Whenever we had enough money, I would bike to another Wizarding family nearby and asked the kid to sell us whatever treats she didn’t want. Most of the time, we received sugar mice because she hated them. But it was our favourite.”

Catching himself reminiscing the past, Caelum cleared his throat and changed the topic back to work. “So, Death Eaters and Dark Lord sympathizers again, sir? This is the third catch in this month alone.”
“To your question, I’m really not so sure, Caelum. At this point, they might as well be classified as a new Dark Force, rather than being loyal to whatever is left of Voldemort’s supporters. But I can’t shake the feeling that something bigger is at play here,” said Harry as they stepped into the elevator. Two purple Ministry memos, folded like paper airplanes, slipped in just before the gate was pulled shut. They flapped gently by their heads as the elevator lurched backwards. “And tell Ménard to stop complaining. They were out of the infirmary to say their goodbyes, on their own two feet, by the time we got back from the holding cells. And if it wasn’t for my insistence, we would not have finally caught Rosier,” said Harry.

“Okay, I’ll tell him that you were deeply regretful and wishes Talbot and Dubois to make a speedy recovery,” Caelum pulled out his Self-Writing quill and notepad as the quill started to scribble in a neat, cursive font. Glancing at the pad, he said, “Also add that Deputy Head Auror Potter wishes that this will not affect the amiable relationship between the two Offices.” Satisfied, Caelum tore off the note and returned his items back into his pocket as Harry glared up at him. But before he could retort with a comment, the elevator made a hard lurch leftwards as Harry stumbled. Caelum instinctively grabbed his bicep and steadied him as Harry was never prepared for that particular turn despite travelling through there a dozen times per day.

‘It was times like this that I really miss being partners with Caelum. We know each other like the back of our hands.’

“By the way, I would not dare say that catching Rosier was your intention, sir,” Caelum sidestepped as Harry swiped at his head, who missed and swatted down at one of the memos instead. The memo recovered and turned menacingly towards him. If a memo could glare, this one was.

‘Gosh, I even miss this. I really need to request going back to field operations more frequently. What are my chances with Robards after tonight?’

Unfazed by the act of violence, Caelum continued, “But it is high time that we finally caught that insane cousin of mine. I wish I wasn’t related to these scumbags.”

“You say that every time we catch a Death Eater, Caelum,” Harry said as they stepped out onto their floor. “And yes I know, all Purebloods are interconnected by marriage but please stop thinking it will affect your personal reputation. You have worked here for three years already and your record speaks for yourself. Has the management team ever targeted you because of your familial relations?” Harry commented as they entered his office. Harry settled into his swivel chair while Caelum sat down on a chair opposing him.

“No… sir,” Caelum said slowly. “But it’s just because I was partnered with you -”

“But me no buts, Caelum. You are an amazing Auror, an amazing partner, and most importantly, an amazing friend. Thank you for having my back for all this time, especially for putting up with me at the very beginning when Ron just left and I was all mopey and angry. I know it wasn’t easy for a junior Auror fresh out of training to be saddled with my attitude and reputation,” Harry spoke sincerely as Caelum sat quietly, absorbing the information presented. “You have changed a lot since I first met you when you were still a whimpering second-year and I am proud of what you were able to achieve despite the immense familial and peer pressure. Be proud of yourself.

“By the way, I’m not supposed to tell you this. But since you should be receiving the letter anytime now so I might as well be the first person to congratulate you. You have been made Senior Auror. Congratulations, Senior Auror Caelum Carl Selwyn.”
Harry stood up and extended his hand. Caelum widened his eyes slightly, and looked between his face and his hand; his body trembling. Harry expected his former partner to be composed as ever but was taken by surprise when he leaped out of his chair and, in a rare display of affection, delivered a bone-crushing hug.

“Thank you. Thank you for having faith in me when everyone else looked down on me. Thank you for being an amazing mentor and partner. Thank you for changing our lives when you got my brother and I away from my aunt and uncle. And thank you for this opportunity, I will be sure to do my best, Harry,” Caelum spoke as he shook in excitement.

“Wow. You called me Harry twice at work today. I have been insisting that you call me Harry for the past three years but a near-death experience and a promotion was all it took? I should have done this ages ago then,” Harry teased, gently patted his back.

“Shut up, sir. Don’t you dare joke about this. I’m scarred for life,” Caelum huffed, punching Harry’s shoulder lightly.

“I know, don’t worry about it. As you can see, I got away scotch-free.”

“But, you’re not going to be so lucky every time. What if I am not there to watch your back?”

“I’m the Boy-Who-Lived for a reason, Caelum,” said Harry. He could feel the young man rolling his eyes as he disentangled himself from the hug and stared directly into Harry’s eyes.

“Please promise to always be careful.”

“I promise, kiddo.”
CHAPTER 3

THE SHROUD OF DARKNESS

October 30, 2003 (Thursday)

LEGISLATIVE DROUGHT TO END?

by E. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

Minister Shacklebolt, Granger-Weasley face off with Lord Nott again

The new portkey security bill - Domestic Regulation of International Portkeys or commonly known as D.R.I.P. (see page 5 for more details) - faces the usual stiff opposition from the coalition led by Lord Paschal Bratus Nott, who holds a record-breaking seven seats (six of those seats are representation-by-proxy, see page 8 for more information) in the Wizengamot and is notorious for blocking Ministry-backed bills. Assistant Department Head of DMLE Hermione Jean Granger-Weasley said last week that she was confident that the bill should pass (See how each member is likely to vote on page 12).

“This is a common-sense, non-controversial, and apolitical bill that will increase the safety of British citizens against the growing turmoil across the Channel,” Mrs Granger-Weasley told our reporter. She was also asked if this bill would potentially cost her two valuable votes from Lords Johnathan Xavier Steward and Rolf Octavius Tremblay, who are major shareholders of Port-on-Call - a Portkey Service company. To this question, she replied, “The Ministry will ensure that no businesses are unnecessarily affected by the new law.”

Lord Alexander Fawley, an independent and centrist, also weighed in on the issue. As one of the usual swing votes, he is known as the “Maverick” for often surprising both sides with his votes. He is often regarded as a weather-vane for the impending vote as he has always ended up voting with the majority. Yesterday evening, he provided a statement as he left the Wizengamot chamber: “As normal, I will closely examine the minute details of the bill. It is very comprehensive and without the excessive Ministry overreach that frequently appears in Ministry-backed bills. I look forward to the final debate.”
October 31, 2003 (Friday)

“So, I have basically wasted three hours of my time today debating against Lord Nott on the necessity of tightening the ministerial Portkey wards at Dover again and for nothing,” Harry groaned as he threw his hands up in frustration and slumped back into his crimson, velvety chair.

‘This is why I never show up! Nothing gets done here.’

He stared at the black, marble columns that circled around the exterior edge of the room and casting imposing shadows onto the emptied bleachers, then moaned exasperatedly, “You would think that as Deputy Head Auror, I would know best what is needed to secure our borders.”

The Wizengamot chamber was largely emptied except for a few strangers. It was another gruelling and fruitless session that ended with yet another defeated Ministry-backed legislation. Caelum, who was seated next to him, gave him a sympathetic grunt as he also abandoned all decorum and slouched, feeling completely spent as well.

Today was Harry’s first day back at work after his three-month leave and, of course, he had to torture himself by attending a morning session of the Wizengamot. Harry, representing the family seat of Potters, received an urgent owl from Hermione at the break of dawn claiming that she might have swayed enough votes to finally pass the D.R.I.P. bill and was adamant that Harry make an appearance. Caelum, representing the Selwyns, was also present for a similar reason. Unfortunately, after a three-hour long final debate, the bill was defeated by a razor-thin margin of one vote – 38 votes for, 39 against.

The Wizengamot acted as both the legislative and judicial branches of the Ministry. The full Wizengamot was composed of 77 seats and formed the parliament where legislations from the executive offices or individual members were passed into law. A few members of Wizengamot were selected to form two courts that addressed crimes based on their severity: the High Court for lesser crimes, and the Grand Jury Court for felony charges. However, on rare occasions, the full Wizengamot could be assembled to hear a case (as they once did for Harry in the summer before his fifth-year at Hogwarts).

The seats were allocated via three ways. First, there were family seats, such as the family seat of Potters, that were passed down the generations and represented by the Lords of their family. Second, there were openly elected seats (seats of families that died out, such as the family seat of Blacks) that were held by representatives elected during Ministerial elections. Third, there were special seats that were bound to the offices of the Minister of Magic, Under-Secretary of the Ministry, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and Head of Hogwarts.

Since the end of the Second Wizarding War, many of the pureblood families were wiped out while many others had lords and heirs that were incarcerated in subsequent trials. By Wizarding Law, convicted members with Azkaban sentences are barred from their family seats for life; therefore, many of the seats ended up being represented, by proxy, by their next of kin. All pureblood families are intermarried heavily, therefore, the seats often went to other pureblood Lords and resulted in a concentration of voting power into a handful of individuals. One of those who benefited was Lord Paschal Brutus Nott, who currently represented a whopping seven seats and have been effectively shooting down all of Hermione’s reforms. He was quickly becoming one of Hermione’s most hated person. He was also the only person Harry really recognized from this crowd besides Heir Draco Malfoy and a few long-term acquaintances like the Longbottoms, and
that was because they “debated” every time he came to a session.

After finishing up a chat with her aides, Hermione walked over to them with a pinched expression and sat down in the vacant seat beside Harry. “I honestly thought we had it! Steward and Tremblay flipped at the last moment. I thought I got them convinced. They were still on board when I checked in with them yesterday. I knew I should have worked harder for Hopkins’ vote instead. Fawley was a pleasant surprise when he voted with us and think I am close to finally be able to convince him to ally with us. And Hopkins is good on his promises unlike those double-crossing bastards. I still don’t know what changed their minds last second - the deal we offered them was more than lucrative,” Hermione muttered exasperatedly. Harry could not place the faces with the names that Hermione just spewed out in rapid succession.

“Calm down, Hermione,” Harry said dejectedly as he held up the morning edition of The Daily Prophet by his side. “Read this. I received it just an hour ago during the vote.”

Hermione snatched the paper out of his hands and glanced over the front page. Her eyes widened a fraction as grim understanding settled in. “NEW TRADE DEAL ANNOUNCED BETWEEN PORT-ON-CALL AND NOTT CORP. See page 3 for the full story.”

“So it is our beloved Lord Nott again. Why does he have to get into the way of everything we do?” Hermione threw down the paper as she scanned the chamber and found her mark. Lord Paschal Brutus Nott, feeling her gaze from across the chamber, turned towards them and sneered before disappearing through one of the chamber doors.

Over the past few years, many Ministries on the Continent saw the destruction in Wizarding Britain caused by Lord Voldemort as a warning sign against the use of Dark Magic to prevent the rise of another Dark Lord. Therefore, they enacted radical, harsh legislation that banned various magical practices, including family magic, that were deemed “Dark”. Dark families were forced to allow their ancestral homes to be searched for and stripped of Dark artefacts, including many precious family heirlooms. These legislation created an uproar amongst Dark families as they were marginalized and felt their family traditions were destroyed. Hermione surmised that these legislation were largely ineffective and would only led to further alienation of the dark families from the rest of the Wizarding population. Harry agreed.

While Minister for Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt has publicly announced that he had no intention to pursue similar legislation, the British Dark families were anxiously observing their allies on the Continent being suppressed while they themselves were at the mercy of the Ministry’s whims.

Since the war, the Ministry has made immense efforts to try and rebuild trust between the Dark families with the Ministry and the Light families. Harry and Hermione also spearheaded the campaign to slowly educate and reintegrate pureblood families into accepting more progressive ideas. While progress has been made slowly as a fragile co-existence began between the historically-opposing factions in the Wizengamot, much of this has become undone due to one person.

Lord Amos Diggory, whose ascended to the Diggory seat in the Wizengamot after the passing of his father, introduced numerous legislations for passage that targeted Dark families while also publicly expressing his hatred against them. He has been openly calling for more reparations and punishments against the Dark families since Cedric’s death, and was a constant sore spot amongst the Light families.

Most deemed the punishments for the Death Eaters adequate and were eager to put the conflict behind them, but they were unable to openly protest Diggory’s actions. And ever since
joining the Wizengamot, he brought with him the animosity that did nothing but further convince the pureblood families that the public sought to destroy their families because of their close ties with Voldemort in the war.

At the same time, recently emancipated Lords such as Paschal Nott were unafraid to rise against Diggory’s accusations, causing many sessions to be derailed as they degenerated into shouting matches. Their strong stance to defend pureblood ideals allowed them to quickly gain the allegiance of many purebloods who were disgruntled with the numerous concessions made since the end of the war. The animosity between these opposing factions became a constant flashpoint in all discussions, further disintegrating the fragile balance and co-existence between the political powers.

It has been months since the Wizengamot passed any major legislation. This vote was the closest they have gotten to breaking the legislative drought, but alas, it failed all the same.

“These are perfectly reasonable laws, I don’t understand how they keep playing the ‘Prejudiced-against-Dark-families’ card every single time,” Hermione grumbled.

“Hermione, despite your insistence that everyone is capable of rational thinking, you do realize it is a personal vendetta against the Ministry at this point, don’t you?” Harry took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Anyways, I best get back to the Auror Offices. I don’t want to be late on my first day back.

At the mention of work, Hermione immediately shot up and gave Harry a quick hug. “Of course, Harry. I’ll see you at dinner later. You too, Caelum.” Flashing them a tight smile, she hurried off. Harry sighed as he saw her tightly-wound hair-bun disappeared from view.

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Harry was waiting for the Senior Management biweekly meeting to begin as his colleagues greeted him for the first time in three months.

"How was your vacation?" one of the Senior Auror asked as she came over to give him a friendly hug.

"Potter can’t say for sure. He doesn't have any other one to compare it to," another Senior Auror answered as the room laughed.

"For the record, I enjoyed it," Harry said in good humor as he sat down. "Instead your stupid mugs, I saw Ginny's angry one every day I forgot to buy something from the store."

"Bet her face was not the only thing you saw more of," the first Auror said with a sly wink. "When are we going to get news of baby Potter?"

"You'll be the first to know, Craft," Harry responded with a grin.

"Did Potter finally learn that he's not going to suddenly die tomorrow and start to plan for a future?" Head Auror Robards barked as he strolled into the room with Caelum behind me. Caelum smiled and waved at Harry.

"I knew that all along, Robards," Harry protested.
"I wouldn't be able to tell with your affinity to serious bodily harm," Robards commented as a ripple of laughter passed through the two-dozen Senior Aurors. Even Caelum let off a tiny smile. Harry sent a mild Stinging Hex at Caelum as he sat beside him and, to Caelum's merit, he did not even flinch.

"No horse-playing in this room," Robards commented distractedly while he consulted the meeting itinerary. "Last time a wand has unsheathed in this room, Henley and Craft had a great time explaining to their spouses exactly why they were wearing each other’s undergarment. Professionalism, please."

There was another round of chuckle as the two Aurors in question groaned into their hands.

Robards rapped his knuckle from the end of the table as everyone adopted a sober tone immediately. "Let's start the meeting. Henley, you first."

The female Auror tapped her wand on the projector orb. An image formed on the wall as she started her presentation.

In response to Death’s dire end-of-the-world prediction, Harry decided that he should take the opportunity to spend more time with Ginny and Teddy. When Harry first broke the news to his family and friends over dinner one day, they were all very concerned for the well-known workaholic. Ron had immediately assumed that Harry had some kind of terminal illness and started listing off on famous private Healers and Potion Masters. Ginny had seemingly taken the news at face value and was happy that Harry decided to focus more attention on his own well-being. However, Hermione, ever the perceptive one amongst his friends, eyed him suspiciously. She pulled him aside later that evening and needled him for information. After gauging his reaction as she grilled him about his scar, his family, and his work. She eventually gathered that it had something to do with his recent incident in Calais. While Harry had his fair share of close brush with death, he was never one who willingly took a break from work because of it. Therefore, to throw Hermione off his scent, Harry led her to believe that he was deeply shaken by his near-death experience and was experiencing a minor case of post-traumatic stress disorder because of it.

Happy with the explanation, Hermione arranged for him to consult a Mind Healer at St. Mungo’s where he had a weekly appointment to talk about his trauma. In order to maintain his cover story and appease Hermione, Harry went. Upon hearing about his sessions, Ron has developed a case of survivor’s guilt as he blamed his products for having a hand in almost killing his best friend. Neither Hermione nor Harry was able to talk him out of his slump. He eventually joined Harry at his therapy sessions.

While on vacation, Harry enjoyed spending all his time with his family, especially with his godson, Teddy. Every morning, Ginny, Andromeda, and he brought him outside to play on his toy broom and Snitch. Then after lunch, they went to the local park at Godric’s Hollow to play ball. In the evenings, Harry read him bedtime stories by the fireplace or, on occasion, took him down to the kitchen to bother the house elves. For two weeks, they also traveled to Switzerland and enjoyed the local cuisine and scenery. Despite the large contrast between his exciting career and the quiet normalcy at home, Harry never felt more peaceful and content. He was finally able to spend time with his family and felt closer with Teddy than ever before. And for a while, he even managed to forget Death’s warning.

But now, three months later, and with reality staring straight at him, the levity that Harry once felt was replaced with dread and anxiety once again.

During his leave, Caelum has grown comfortably into his role as new position and has also
become more confident in his abilities. Despite the grumbling amongst the Aurors about his young age of twenty and relative inexperience, Caelum has steadily gained their respect. He has successfully led and intercepted five attacks while also capturing the last of the Death Eaters, Corban Yaxley, after a ferocious one-on-one duel. No one questioned his capabilities after that showing. Harry had no doubt that he would become a worthy candidate for the Deputy Head Auror position in a few years’ time.

While on the surface, it seems like the Auror Office was successfully keeping the threats under control, but this frequency of disturbances has not been reached since the end of the last Wizarding War.

Since Harry became Deputy Head, he has been privy to reviewing historical intel and receiving news from other Ministries. From his search, he found that reports of disappearances and muggle attacks has once again started to occur across the Continent since three years ago. At first, the incidents were infrequent, ranging from two to three cases per month. Seemingly unrelated, local officials were quick to brush them off as isolated events. But in recent months, the number of attacks increased both in frequency and in magnitude.

When Harry brought this to Hermione and Kingsley’s attention, they concluded logically that there may be an insurgence of different pockets of Dark wizards plotting revenge against their local Ministries. However, as these attacks occurred outside of Britain and the British Ministry was busy capturing the last remnants of the Death Eaters, there was little they can do except keeping a closer eye. Now, as the destruction that raged across the Continent finally spilled into Britain with the first Muggle attack occurring seven months ago. Harry could not ignore the parallelism of what is occurring now, both inside and outside the Ministry, with what has happened during the First Wizarding War.

Caelum concluded his report as Harry finished reading Yaxley’s statement. A discussion started up as they formulated new plans to suppress these attacks. Silent in thought, Harry barely followed the conversation as his mind swirled. Caelum glanced at Harry’s contemplative expression and asked quietly, “What’s bothering you?”

Staring into the opposing wall of the room, he spoke softly, “These attacks make no sense. I mean, what are they trying to achieve and what is their end goal?” Harry glanced at his friend. “Yes, it is highly similar to the terror attacks that Voldemort led during the first Wizarding War, but his intentions were known. We knew he wanted to take over Wizarding Britain. But this time, we have a similar level of attack with similar guerrilla tactics, but we know nothing about their purpose or who is leading them.” Harry pointed at the file in front of him and continued, “If you take a look at Yaxley’s statement as he described his role under Voldemort and his role in the recent attacks, it is hard to miss that he lacks a defining goal. He might have fed us the usual lines of ‘terrorizing Muggle scum’ and ‘cleansing Britain of inferior animals’, but compare that to his description of Voldemort and their goal of ‘conquering Britain and restoring the glory of Purebloods’. It is clear that he does not know what his end goal is. And we don’t know what it is either. Are they trying to overthrow the Ministry? Are they simply trying to terrorize the Wizarding population?”

Harry did not realize that the discussion ended a while ago as they all stopped to hear his thoughts. Looking at every face around the silent table, he spoke again. “First, in the last three Wizarding Wars, Grindelwald and Voldemort both attacked prominent Magical families or major institutions as they rose to power. However, up until now, they are still only targeting Muggles as opposed to Wizards or Ministry workers. They also had made no moves against major Wizarding locations or their local Ministries. Second, the Dark Lords infiltrated the local Ministries to gain control of powerful positions, such as Department Heads or their Deputies. There has been, at most,
four replacements for said high-ranking positions within our Ministry in the past five years and most of the officials have had family members killed by Death Eaters so I highly doubt that they will be jumping at the chance to join another Dark Lord. Third, the Dark Lords always worked on gaining favourable alliances with the Dark families. And as much as I hate to admit, even Paschal Nott has no intention to restart a war despite being a terrible nuisance in the Wizengamot.

“Turning back to our current situation at hand, we are not having a lot of success in preventing these attacks, nor are we having a high success rate at apprehending the attackers. The methods used for each case are highly effective and similar to each other, even when compared to the attacks on the Continent. More strangely, there are a scattering of unnatural Muggle deaths that has no hint of magical foul play yet the usage of magic is the only possible explanation. It feels to me that all these incidents are too well-organized to be the works of different, isolated groups of Dark Wizards. Right now, it feels like they are just stringing us along as we run criss-cross around the country on a Wild Goose Chase,” Harry finished.

A thoughtful silence befell the entire group. Harry was once again lost in his thoughts.

'There must be a bigger plot in motion behind the scenes that I am unaware of. But what is it?'

His thoughts then turned to what Headmistress McGonagall has told him last September during his visit to Hogwarts as a guest lecturer for the Defense Against the Dark Arts class. She commented on how when she attended Hogwarts during the 1930s, there were more than a hundred students sorted each year. Fifty years and two wars later, there were around forty students being sorted in Harry’s class. And in the latest class of first-years, there were only twenty students sorted. With the high death toll that came with each war, the European wizarding communities never had a chance to truly recover. As of now, it is unknown whether the population in Wizarding Britain will ever return to its levels just a century ago, let alone if another Wizarding War were to occur right now. If a war was to occur, the wizarding communities in Europe would surely collapse beyond the chance of recovery and the wonderful world he was introduced to as a child would cease to exist within his lifetime.

Harry then thought back to how Death spoke of “a great darkness would soon descend onto your world once again” and how he would “not be able to protect” those he loved most; he involuntarily shivered at the thought. But he could not shake away the ominous premonition that something terrible was about to happen and the world would be woefully unprepared to face it. Violence was spreading like wildfire across Europe while the Ministries were busy ignoring the crisis or locked in a gridlock to effectively stem the crisis with the necessary means. With a sense of dread, Harry thought that perhaps Death was right, maybe it was already too late.

What Harry did not realize was that the end would come sooner than he imagined. And today, his first anniversary as Deputy Head Auror, would be memorable not for its festivity, but for its infamy.

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Harry turned around when he heard three quick raps on the door. Caelum was leaning on Harry’s office door frame fully out of uniform. “Harry, I am heading home now to pick up Cygy. I will see you at your place in two hours. And say hi to Ron for me.”
“Sure, catch you later,” Harry grinned as he turned back to finish packing his bag before heading for the Floo.

Harry was quite looking forward to his celebratory dinner at Potter Manor tonight. For the past three months, Ginny was insistent on doing something special for his work anniversary. Harry initially refused to allow Ginny to make a big deal out of it, but Ginny has always been more fierce and strong-willed between the two of them, so he eventually relented. However, now that Harry knew there was a surprise, he was highly curious. But to his chagrin, Ginny was frustratingly tight-lipped about everything and vehemently rebuffed his every attempt to inquiry about tonight. Ron and Hermione, her co-conspirators, were equally unhelpful in this regard and has actively avoided him beyond their weekly Friday meet-ups.

Secretly, Harry wondered if his wife picked up on his changes ever since the warehouse incident and therefore, insisted on surprising him in an attempt to cheer him up. But if she did, she did not let it show.

He came out of the Floo in the Leaky Cauldron, waved at Tom, and made his way to Diagon Alley to meet up with Ron where he was supposed to be provided with distraction until dinner was prepared at seven. As a last-ditch effort, Harry tried to coax information out of his friend to no avail.

“Ron, you were my best friend for fifteen years! And for fifteen years I have had your back. Can you just give me a hint? I promise you Hermione will never find out,” Harry exclaimed as he stood over Ron’s messy desk. A series of purple and green fireworks exploded outside the office in the background.

“Mate, first off. It has only been twelve years…"

“Seriously, Ron, you are arguing about a three-year difference!”

“…And second of all,” Ron continued calmly. “You and I both know that Hermione with her sixth sense will be able to tell if you knew about the plans. She can read you like a book, hell, I can read you like a book at this point in our friendship. And when, not if, she does, she will kick me out of the house for a week and I’ll be forced to slump in your guest bedroom bed that gives me a crick in my neck.”

At that same moment, a dazzling silver otter flowed into the room through the bookshelf and landed gracefully on the teetering pile of paper. Facing the two occupants of the room, the Patronus’ mouth opened and the calm, authoritative voice of Hermione Granger spoke. “Ronald, I know Harry is at the Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes so I am just going to remind you once more. Do NOT spoil Ginny’s surprise. And hi Harry, I will not be able to join you before dinner. I have a meeting with Kingsley but I will be there on time. Please bring Ron home back in one piece this time if you are going to drink. I did not enjoy last week’s conversation with Millicent Bulstrode trying to explain why my husband’s right toe is in the toilet bowl in the men’s bathroom at the Flying Pig.” At the end of the message, the gleaming animal dissipated into wisps of grey mist.

“See, I told you. Women have a sixth sense. And I tried to explain to her that it was an honest mistake! I was drunk and thought we were going to the Ministry of Magic but I forgot which bathroom I was in…” Ron grumbled. “Anyhow, my lips are sealed. You’ll just have to wait out the two hours.” Ron spoke with a sense of finality, and Harry grudgingly accepted defeat.

During the lull in conversation, a stray firecracker managed to whiz wildly through the door and Ron vanished it quickly with his wand, eyeing Harry with concern. Harry shrugged nonchalantly, attempting to convey that he was not disturbed by firecrackers, and said as he eyed
the spot where the vanished firecracker was, “I thought none of your fireworks were vanish-able.”

“That’s right, they weren’t. But our very own Deputy Head of DMLE decided that with the recent crimes committed using our line of firework products, she will push for regulation against any flammable or aerial joke products that cannot be vanished with a normal banishing spell. The bill is already tabled in the Wizengamot and is due to pass sometime this week so George and I changed the charms on these firecrackers already.”

Harry grimaced, “I highly doubt that. The Wizengamot has been in gridlock for months and the last time a bill was passed was what… last month? Even with my seat, Hermione’s as Deputy Head, and Kingsley’s as Minister, we were unable to pass anything meaningful to enhance national security because the Dark families are refusing to support any Ministry-led initiatives; Diggory is also not making the situation any better.”

Ron sighed as he got out of his chair and walked towards wine cabinet. He pulled out an Odgen’s Firewhiskey and two glasses and started to pour. The Weasleys, despite being one of the oldest pureblood magical families, did not have a family seat in the Wizengamot as Ron’s great-great-grandfather sold his seat to the Hopkins in the late 1700s. Apparently, it was quite the scandal.

“But most of the Dark families hate our success enough that they will support any legislation that hurts our business. And, it actually does make sense if our products are used against civilians,” Ron frowned, then started speaking in a smaller voice. “To be honest, Harry, I am still having nightmares thinking about how close we were to losing you to Rosier and his cronies four months ago. And yes, I read Caelum’s report so I know how much trouble you could have been in. Bloody hell! Caelum saw the Killing Curse directed at you! You’re lucky that Rosier was such as lousy shot that he missed you at that distance. And to lose you because of our bloody damned joke of a firecracker that no one can manage to vanish is just…”

Ron’s voice trailed off as he opted to swallow a healthy gulp of Firewhiskey. Harry saw his shoulder shake slightly and placed a hand on his best friend’s shoulder, hoping it would comfort him. In the silence, both were lost in their unpleasant memories.

“…I’m just glad he was there to watch your back when I couldn’t. I’ll admit that I can now see what you saw in him all those years ago,” Ron finished.

“Hey Ron, we’ve been through this many times. I’m still here, kicking and breathing. Don’t think about it too much. The past is in the past, let’s look forward – like how sloshed we can get away with tonight without Ginny or Hermione screaming at us,” said Harry, trying to lighten up the conversation.

“He’s a good one, that Selwyn,” Ron admitted.

“ Took you long enough to realize that, mate,” Harry teased while wincing slightly at the bygone memories when Caelum was first assigned as his partner in Ron’s stead. “You were a menace. I still remembered how he was so terrified of you that he made our cubicle rain for hours on end whenever I said you were going to pick me up for lunch.”

Ron’s neck flushed red for a moment before he cleared his throat and turned around, handing Harry his glass. “Well, I’m looking forward to seeing what Caelum will bring from his cellar as his gift. The Odgen’s Gold Label Firewhiskey 1066 he brought to your birthday was the best thing I have ever tasted. Guess he’s good for more than one thing.”

“Well, he is good for that too,” Harry smiled as he lifted the glass to his upturned lips.
Just as the rim of the glass touched his lips, he felt a pang deep inside his chest the echoed throughout his body. He gasped in shock, dropping his glass and scrambled for his chair. However, his legs buckled instead and he collapsed onto the wooden floor beside the pool of spilled drink. He felt a tight squeeze at his chest and was unable to breath. Gasping for air, he faintly registered Ron knelt beside him with his eyes filled with fear and concern. Harry could see Ron’s lips moving, but he could not hear his words over the pounding beat of heart. Another man, tall and red-headed, entered the room and was kneeling on the other side of him, shaking his shoulder. Harry focused on identifying this unfamiliar pain. He felt though a knife was repeated stabbing and twisting into the core of his body, shredding it into pieces …

'My core …'

His mind reeled. He recognized where the pain originated… and the first time he felt its existence was almost a few years ago when he keyed into the wards of…

'No… it cannot be…'

At the sudden realization, Harry felt as though he was falling even though he was lying on the floor. He snapped his head towards Ron and whispered, his voice cracking. “Ron, something’s happening to my wards.”

Dread and panic settled heavily onto his stomach.

“The Manor is under attack.”
October 31, 2003 (Friday)

STEWARD, TREMBLAY EMBARKED; MINISTRY STRANDED!

by E. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

New Trade Deal Announced between Port-on-Call and Nott Corp.

Fawley Strikes Back with Support for Ministry

The Domestic Regulation of International Portkeys, or D.R.I.P. bill, was widely anticipated to be the first major legislation to pass the extremely divisive Wizengamot chamber. However, the surprising trade deal between Port-on-Call and Nott Corp. puts a twist to the drama. In another surprising development, Lord Alexander Fawley has submitted his vote late yesterday, ahead of the scheduled voting session, to the Wizengamot clerks using an obscure procedural rule (for more details see page 9). His move announced his support of the bill (read more about Wizengamot voting procedures on page 10) and is widely interpreted as a final rallying call to gather support for the bill under Granger-Weasley’s request.

The Ministry will have to rally 39 votes in order to pass the bill (read about Chief Warlock Flamel’s rule on page 10). Now, it is anyone’s guess how the final vote will shape up, but it will certainly be a nail-biter...

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October 31, 2003 (Friday)

“The Manor is under attack.”

Ron, George, and Harry all froze in their places. Harry immediately clambered onto his feet, making for the door. At the sudden movement, George snapped out of the trance and quickly grabbed Harry’s arm in a tight vice grip.

“Don’t go anywhere, Harry,” George ordered. He then turned to the shell-shocked Ron without letting go of Harry. “Ron, send a Patronus to alert the Aurors right now. Tell them the Potter Manor is under attack.” Then in a softer whisper. “Do not let Harry Apparate, Floo, or in
anyway, contact the Manor. The Manor might be compromised already…” George did not finish his thought. He will not allow himself to imagine what might have happened.

“No, they have not completely broken through the wards yet. I can still feel it,” Harry said to George. “I have to send a Patronus to Ginny to alert them.”

“No, let Ron do it. Ronald!” George insisted and shook Ron. Ron sprang into action and immediately drew his wand to conjure two Jack Russell Terriers and recorded messages to the Aurors and his sister.

George turned to Harry and said urgently, “Harry, I am going down to the Floo-call the Burrow to tell them to shut off the Floo to your place. The whole family is supposed to meet up there before heading over to your place. Promise me you will stay here and not go anywhere.”

George waited until Harry nodded before scrambling out of the office, spelling the office door closed and locked. Harry walked towards the door and cast a Movement Monitoring charm through it while Ron had his back turned, still recording his second message. He breathed deeply, focusing on containing the pain he felt as his wards were slowly ripped apart, piece by piece.

“Hi everyone, due to an emergency, the Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes will be closing early. As compensation, everyone will be leaving with a complimentary Skiving Snackbox from Verity. Thank you!” George’s voice boomed through the door from the usage of the Sonorous Charm.

Afterwards, his charm revealed that George has went down to the basement to contact the Burrow. Once the coast was clear, Harry immediately blasted down the door and ran down the stairs.

“Harry! Stop!” Ron shouted as he ran after him. “You can’t go to the Manor!”

Feeling the panic and anxiety building up and his tears threatening to spill from his eyes, Harry turned to briefly face Ron, who on the second stairs landing. He shouted, “I can feel the wards are still holding up. I have to get Ginny and everyone out of there now. I can’t lose them.” Another stabbing sensation pulsated through his body.

Ron’s mouth was open but he did not utter a single word. Ignoring him, Harry turned around and crossed the floor for the door. As he reached for the handle, a large hand clasped on his shoulder.

“Let’s go together,” Ron said as he stepped forward to pull the door open for him instead, giving him a quick grin. In response, Harry shot him a small smile and grateful look. “Do you want to Side-Along Apparate – ”

The storefront suddenly exploded in front of his eyes, shattering the windows and throwing merchandises into the air. The door flew off the hinges from the blast and rammed into Ron as they sailed backwards. Harry slammed onto the floor on his right side and heard two sickening cracks in his wrist and elbow while he saw Ron crashed into a column like a ragdoll and slumped motionlessly onto the floor and beneath the charred door. Shrieks and screams filled the store and the Alley as vicious curses flew in all directions, destroying displays and store fronts. Shoppers scampered away to safety chaotically as they all ran for the Apparition points.

Picking himself off the floor, Harry hugged his right arm with his left as he shuffled on his bottom to hide behind a stand selling Decoy Detonators. Looking around the corner of the shelf and through the broken window, he saw a group of masked attackers strolling down the street, making their way towards them. Members of the group were systematically entering and
destroying every store on the Alley while the rest sent Blasting Spells in random directions.

George appeared from the basement after hearing all the commotion to find half the store destroyed as shoppers fled the site. Quickly crouching behind a shelf to hide himself from view, he turned to frightened witch huddled behind the counter and whispered urgently, “Verity, go to Burrow through my Floo, now!”

Verity nodded frantically as she tumbled past him into the basement. He eyed the incoming mob of attackers in the distance and searched the room for his friends. Harry connected gaze with him and directed George to Ron’s position. Harry saw George dropped down to the floor and crawled towards the unconscious man, hoping to avoid being seen. He reached his brother and silently cast a weak Levitation charm to shift the door off Ron’s unconscious body. Then, Harry saw George check for Ron’s pulse using a Monitoring charm. With a grim but seemingly satisfied look, George shot Harry a thumbs up and motioned to take Ron down to the basement.

George levitated Ron’s body to hover a few centimeters above the floor as he crawled backwards towards the stairwell. When they were halfway towards their destination, a Patronus appeared and landed in the middle of the broken window and faced Harry as he stared in horror.

Caelum’s voice sounded from the wolf’s open mouth, “Harry, the Ministry is under attack! Kingsley and Hermione are barricaded in the Auror Offices. Fenwick and I are at the Manor, we’ll –”

A Blasting spell shot through the Patronus, dissipating it into wisps of silver, and found its mark on the far end of the store, exploding the entire shelf.

“Harry Potter is in the joke store!” shouted one of the attackers as several more spells sped through the open window. Some of the attackers broke off from the main group and ran towards the store. Boxes, bottles, and decorations were hurdling down as the building shook from each spell that connected with the structure.

Realizing that they have been found out, Harry abandoned his hiding spot and yelled at George, “Get Ron to the Burrow and seal the Floo!”

George, no longer bothering to hide, dragged Ron’s floating body towards the stairwell. “What about you, Harry?”

“I will distract them and head to the Manor! I’ll send a Patronus when it’s clear -”

Two black, metal canisters ricocheted through the window as landed noisily in the center of the room.

“What -?”

Before Harry could even process what he saw, a blinding flash and a deafening “BANG!” overwhelmed all his senses.

Harry felt he groaned as his ears went ringing with white noise. It was though there were layers of cotton filling his ear canals. He tried to open his eyes to see where George and Ron were but he couldn’t open his eyes… Harry’s fingers touched his eyes… they were opened already… wait, what?

He tried to re-orient himself as he flailed his arms around him blindly. He patted the wooden floor. Okay, he’s lying on the floor. Harry touched a sturdy object nearby. A stand? A merchandise bin? He pulled himself off the ground just as blurry images started to re-appear. He took a step...
towards where he thought the Weasleys were but stumbled back onto the floor drunkenly. His shake his head violently. Everything was doubled and overlapping. Disorienting.

He finally recognized his location and coordinates. Turning towards the broken window, he saw a group (half a dozen?) of people running towards the store away from the main group.

‘I have to get them away from Ron and George!’

With his right arm hanging limply by his side, Harry clutched his wand in his left hand and tumbled out of the store. He cast multiple Stunners towards the attackers but he could not hear his voice nor aim at them properly. Harry ran further down in an uncontrolled zig-zag fashion down the Alley as curses flashed by him. One curse shot by him so closely above his head that it singed his hair, but Harry couldn’t worry about it now.

Harry risked a glance backwards and he was satisfied when all of the attackers passed by Weasleys’ Wizards Wheeze without entering. He turned left onto a narrower alley and collected his breath as he slowed to a jog. Suddenly, he realized that the stabbing sensation was no longer present.

‘No.’

Harry searched desperately for the painful sensation that brought him to his knees just minutes ago. Nothing.

‘No. No, no, no, no, no...’

Harry started to scramble forward madly, desperate to reach the closest Apparition point.

‘Left. Right. Straight. Right. Left.’

As he arrived at his destination, he ignored the muted sounds of shouted spells and cracking bricks around him. Harry calmed himself with two deep breaths as he tried to maintain an upright position. He visualized the image of Potter Manor surrounded by a beautiful rose garden in the front, a glistening lake on its side, and a Quidditch pitch in the distance.

He turned slightly on his heels, praying he would not tip over. He heard a loud crack as his vision of the alley spun and warped out of view.

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Harry tumbled onto the grass lawn and retched up the contents in his stomach. His mouth tasted like bile and acid. Quickly wiping his mouth, he turned towards the gates of the Potter Manor just to see the destroyed and mangled gates. He breathed deeply and closed his eyes as he tried to reach out his magic, but he could not sense any of his wards that were supposed to be mere inches in front of him. Instead, there was only an anti-Apparition ward. He could not sense any individuals, friends or foes, entering the grounds of the Manor. There was only one logical conclusion.

‘The wards are destroyed.’

Harry stumbled forward, not wanting to believe what he saw or what he felt.
‘My home. Ginny.’

Harry dashed through the ruined gates and up the hill that led to the Manor, rustling his robes against the shrubs and bushes that lined the path. When he reached the top, his heart stopped beating.

In the distance, the Potter Manor was aflame, lighting up the cloudy night skies and dark surroundings like a giant bonfire.

And it was not a normal fire. Even at a kilometer away, Harry could feel the unforgiving heat. As though they were sentient, the licks of flames coiled and wrapped around the spires unnaturally while others raced around the exterior in a frenzied pace. Suddenly, he recognized the slender shapes of the flames – serpents, chimeras, dragons.

‘Fiendfyre.’

‘Ginny.’

A loud shout of pain pierced through the cackling of the burning structure as Harry tore his gaze from the fire to the commotion below. Lit by the fire, he could see two people engaged in a duel against a dozen of hooded figure.

‘Fenwick. Caelum.’

Too far from the battle, Harry had to witness helplessly as two green curses hit one of them squarely in the chest as the figure fell onto the ground, unmoving. At the same time, a red curse shattered through a shield charm and struck down the other figure as a blood-curdling scream reverberated across the dark field.

Soon after, the hooded attackers trod away in the direction of the village of Godric’s Hallow.

Harry ran towards them. Even though his mind has registered what he saw and concluded that there was little chance that his friends survived, he refused to believe it. Not unless he saw it with his own eyes.

‘This is just a nightmare. I will wake up from this. Ginny, please be safe.’

As he got closer to the house, the heat was almost unbearable. He was flaming chimeras and dragons are circling wildly around the exterior wall. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Harry reached the battlefield.

He slowed down to a walk as he approached the first body. His left hand reaching out hesitantly although there was nothing to grasp. Fenwick’s face was lit up by the flickering flames, but her eyes stared blankly towards the sky, unseeing. Harry’s legs collapsed under him as he kneeled beside her body and clutched at her robes. “Oh no… this is all wrong… this is not happening…” Harry choked out the words thickly, his head buried in her robes as he shook violently.

‘I’m so sorry!’ Harry looked up to her face as he caressed her cheek gently with his knuckles. Everything started to look hazy as tears clouded his eyes, but another body a couple meters from his place caught his attention.

‘Caelum.’

He mustered all his strength and managed to get onto his feet as he dragged them onwards.
“Caelum!” Harry cried out as he collapsed beside his body. Blood was splattered messily on his shredded robes and on the surrounding lawn. His Rowan wand lay useless on his side. Multiple large gashes streaked angrily across his torso and arms. No blood flowed out of the wounds and that worried Harry even more - there was no blood left to be spilled.

‘Sectumsempra.’

Staring at his chest, Harry noticed the weak rise and fall. This body was only sustained by his magic, but that wouldn’t last much longer. “Caelum, my boy!”

“H… Harry.” Caelum spluttered the word from his blood-filled mouth. “They’re d… dead. I… I… I’m s… sorry.” Caelum heaved weakly.

“What are you saying, Caelum? Who’s dead?” Harry wrapped Caelum in his arms, ignoring the protesting pain in his limp right arm. Harry rested Caelum’s head onto his lap, refusing to acknowledge his last words. He focused his scrambled mind on the dying man in front of him.

“Thank…k you …. for saving m…me,” Caelum whispered as his breathing grew weaker.

Harry understood his meaning. “No, Caelum. You silly boy. You never needed my saving. You are an amazing person and you will be fine. Let me just get you out of here, alright?” Harry said as he fumbled with his wand, tears now flowing freely down his face. He tried to focus on his happiest memory but all he could see was death and destruction.

‘Expecto patronum. Expecto Patronum. EXPECTO PATRONUM!’ Harry yelled desperately, yet nothing shot out of his wand. In desperation and frustration, Harry threw down his wand and cradled Caelum once more, tucking his wet hair under his chin as he rocked gently. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“Harry,” Caelum grimaced as he lifted his hand and placed it on Harry’s shaking arm. “You were… the b… best brother I… ever… had.” Then, his hand fell limply back onto his stomach as Harry wrapped around his body even more tightly. He trembled as deep sorrow and grief coursed through his body. He shook his head in denial.

‘This makes no sense. Caelum is not dead. Fenwick is not dead. My family is fine. This is just a bad dream. I will be waking up any time now.’

Harry had no idea how much time has passed as he cradled Caelum’s limp body while staring blankly and the burning building with glazed eyes.

“Now, now, now. The Boy-Who-Lived has come to witness the destruction of the world he once saved.” A soft voice shook Harry from his reverie. “You really should have just went to the Ministry Ball instead of avoiding it, then I wouldn’t have to waste time making a detour to your Manor.”

Harry looked up and saw a masked man picked up his Holly wand from the lawn and twirled it carefully in his hand. Half a dozen similarly masked figures stood a couple meters behind him, silently observing.

“So this is the wand that destroyed Voldemort… Holly and phoenix feather, the brother of his Yew and phoenix feather… how fascinating,” the man inspected the wand closely, as though he was analyzing every minuscule troughs and burrows and every wood grain patterning on his wand.

Harry took the time to identify the man in front of him. He had perfectly groomed, grey hair that illuminated in the harsh oranges and reds from the nearby fire. However, the rest of his
features were hidden behind a blank, white, plastic mask that betrayed no details of his facial features. Harry took in the pale, slender fingers that held his wand, the slim figure, and the sense of aristocratic superiority that exuded from his posture. The man reminded Harry of Draco Malfoy, but he knew it was not him.

“Who are you?” Harry tried to say the words calmly, but even he caught the grief in his voice that laid bare his emotions.

“That is unimportant, Mr Potter. What is important is that my men are ransacking the Ministry and Hogwarts as we speak.” The man drawled. “Britain will fall. And the rest of the world will soon follow.”

Harry spat furiously. “So, you are just another Dark Lord, someone will rise up against you...”

“Mr Potter, you insult me by comparing me to Grindelwald or Voldemort,” the man interrupted. “They were weak and incompetent fools because they were too arrogant. That’s why they failed. But I am smarter.”

“How?” Harry sneered. “You are just another pureblood lunatic who wants to take over the world. That won’t happen.”

“No, Mr Potter. You have insulted me yet again. I don’t wish to rule the world. I am merely facilitating the death of the old world to herald in a new one. One where half-bloods and Muggleborns will rule over both the Wizarding and Muggle world. A perfect harmony from those who have mastered life in both worlds.”

‘Wait, that doesn’t make sense. If he wanted half-bloods and Muggleborns to rule the world. Why would he attack other Muggles? Unless...’ A sudden realization hit Harry. All those Muggle attacks were indeed distractions that attracted attention away from his underlying scheme.

“So all those attacks were distractions! But how?” Harry did not voice the underlying questions. ‘How did you out-manoeuvre us so completely when I was constantly monitoring for any suspicious activities?’

“Good, Mr Potter.” The man had the audacity to sound slightly surprised, even a little impressed. “I wondered if anyone would ever catch onto me.”

He walked slowly towards Harry and crouched down until they were facing each other, inches apart. Harry felt the tip of his Holly wand poking slightly above his chest. But Harry did not care. His family was gone, all his friends would soon to follow, his life was completely destroyed.

“Let me tell you my secret,” his mellow voice rung painfully melodious into his ears. “Muggles.”

It was clear that Harry’s face scrunched in confusion as the man chuckled and continued. “Yes, Mr Potter. Muggles. Muggles outnumber us fifty thousand to one, if not more. There is no way we, as a race, can ever conquer the world by magical means alone. Grindelwald and Voldemort were both illusioned idealists, thinking they can control the world with only magical people despite being so greatly outnumbered. Alas, they were ultimately defeated and have since disappeared into the irrelevant past. In order to survive in this new World, we must adapt to the ways of the Muggles and we must bring along like-minded Muggles into our fold.

“The magical world is too proud, narrow-minded, broken to survive alongside the Muggle
world. They have overtaken us with great advancements in their technology yet the magical world remains painfully rooted in the Medieval times.

“And as you probably have noticed, it will soon collapse with or without my intervention. I just decided to speed up the process… and in my own terms. Like the thunderbird, in order for a new Magical World to arise, a brilliant maelstrom must be summoned to cleanse the old world of its sins and crimes.

“In a different world and a different time, we could have been the greatest of allies, Mr Potter; but in this world, you are a threat to me, and an obstacle that I cannot allow in my new world. Therefore, you must fall with the rest.”

Harry listened on in shock. He realized that he was too narrow-minded and therefore, was blindsided by the man in front of him the same way the Dark Lords were destroyed by the Light. He did not, for a second, consider that the enemy would be willing to use Muggle technologies, let alone partner up with Muggles to achieve world dominance. Now that the man mentioned it, everything made so much more sense. It was exponentially easier to hide Muggle weapons from the Muggles with simple, harmless magic and then use them against Wizards who have no exposure to those technologies.

They had been too careless, and this was their downfall.

Fearing his time was up, Harry gathered his wits and tried to obtain more information. He spoke softly, “Before you kill me, I have one last question.”

“Go ahead, Mr Potter. You continue to surprise me.”

“Since when?” ‘How long has your plan been in motion for?’

“Since long before the second rising of that pathetic excuse of a Slytherin,” the man sneered. Harry closed his eyes and accepted his fate.

But he did not hear the incantation. He re-opened his eyes just and saw the man leaning forward to whisper in his ear. “I’ve decided to answer your very first question. You have earned it. Remember me as Prometheus, the Titan that brought a gift and a weapon to mankind through fire.”

The man then enunciated the incantation “Avada Kedavra” softly as the Holly wand shuddered. For a moment, Harry thought his wand was able to resist the command. But a green light erupted from the wand and directly into his chest as he collapsed onto the ground with his arms still wrapped around his friend.

‘Ginny. Forgive me. I’ve failed you.’

‘Prometheus.’
Hey everyone,

I'm still new to the posting system of AO3 so I might have accidentally deleted my notes on the previous chapter. I remember they were just notifications for simple updates, but sorry for the inconvenience.

I also just discovered the "unreviewed comments" tab - I was wondering why there was no comments for a long time (facepalms self). If you have anything you want to ask me or tell me in private, feel free to comment at write "PM" and your email address (if you want me to reply) on top so I won't post it. I love to have feedback and constructive criticisms on my first (and probably only) fanfiction piece.

However, I would regretfully not respond to any plot-related inquiries or comments, especially future relationships between characters, because I am trying to treat this piece of writing as an original story - but one that closely adheres to canon as much as I can. That being said, if you have something neat, feel free to PM the idea to me and I'll see what I can do.

Also, if any of you absolutely hate the "preview" thing, please let me know. I worry that someone might think it's a terrible tease and that I should just post the chapter outright, but it's a complicated process with my beta's editing schedule and my own writing pipeline. However, I'm open to suggestions and I'm still trying to work out a system.

I'll aim to post a new chapter every two weeks (less if my inspiration goes wild and I just want to procrastinate; more if I am just swamped with everything in my life). For those of you who really care about whether the work would be completed - first, this will be a long novel-length fiction (100k+) and second, I have the backbone of the plot figured out so it's just a matter of putting pen on paper. I promise it will be completed someday and I'd love for you to join me on this journey.

Lastly, if I don't have time to respond to anything promptly, please be patient with me. I will definitely respond to your comments!

And I would love to give a big thank you to Tsume Yuki as always for being my muse, and my beta. How wonderful is it to have the author whose plot you're using to help you with your own fiction?!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-08

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**CHAPTER 5**

**INTERLUDE: BOARDING THE TRAIN**
For the second time in six months, Harry found himself laid facedown in a soothing silence. However, he sensed that he was not alone this time. Quickly wishing to be clothed, he dressed himself as he walked towards Death, who stood out amongst the muted colours of King’s Cross Station.

Just like last time, Harry found Death standing beside the station clock. Without hesitation, he strode down the platform towards the landmark. As he approached his destination, he realized that Death stood beneath the station clock.

’Hello again, young Master.’

‘Hello, Death. I see that you have grown shorter since I last saw you,’ Harry remarked.

‘I’m glad your sense of humour survived. But as I said before, this is your party. I am just an external imprint of your thoughts.’

At that comment, Harry stilled. ‘Right, although I died, I can still go back. But go back to what? No, but I need to find out what happened to Ginny. She should’ve survived. Ron’s Patronus should have warned them before the wards were destroyed. Wait, I need to stop Prometheus, but it is too late now? According to him, by the time I get back, he would have already controlled the Ministry and Hogwarts. He will be unstoppable.’

Harry’s chaotic thoughts swirled uncontrollably. What should he do? What could he do? He feared that it was too late now. What he needed was more time.

‘That’s right! What I need is more time!’

Harry turned to look at Death, about to open his mouth as he heard a familiar chuckle in his head.

‘Yes, young Master. What you need is more time.’

“But how? All the time turners were destroyed eight years ago. And even if I can get my hands on one, I need to go back at least fifteen years! There is no way I can travel back that far safely, Master of Death or not.”

‘You are correct. As you have heard from Prometheus, the seed of destruction was sown long before your birth.’

“Then what is the point of me becoming the Master of Death and defeating Voldemort if the world was going to end anyway?” Harry said frustratedly. “As you said, if the plans were set in motion before my birth, how was I supposed to prevent everything that has happened?”

‘This question is one I cannot answer completely. As Death, I have knowledge and control over almost everything in the universe, but there are still many things in existence amongst the cosmos that I am not privy to understanding. I could only speculate an answer - Fate.

‘The paths of all beings that grace this world have long been determined since the beginning of time. Occasionally, variations or branches may occur spontaneously. But in general, every living entity will travel down their predetermined paths. Perhaps, you were Fated to live your first life as you did to allow your ascension to becoming the Master of Death.’
“First life? What do you mean by first life? Will I be reincarnated? Is this what journeying on meant? To live a different life in a different world at a different time? What about this world? Will I see my family, my friends again?”

‘It seems that you have discovered your third option, young Master. Indeed, if you choose to do so, you will be reborn into a different body, and in this case, in the past to guide the world down an alternate timeline.

‘However, you will cease to be Harry Potter. You may still cross paths with individuals you have once known in this life, but they will not recognize you for they will have no knowledge of this timeline. There is no turning back.’

“Alternate timeline?” asked Harry.

‘Yes. The future is the combined result of the choices made by every individual at any given time. One change in one choice by one individual can potentially alter the future completely.

‘Imagine time as one continuous river while the world is a leaf that floats down the river. Each choice then presents a fork with diverging branches downstream. By returning the leaf upstream, your choices can guide the world down a different timeline with a different future. You will have a chance to prevent the world from descending into a similar fate as the one that befell this one.

‘Remember how I told you last time that there was simply too little you could change to alter the outcome of your world? What I meant was that no series of choices you could have made from that point onwards would have altered the future significantly enough to stop the rise of Prometheus. I also told you that the fate of specific individuals remained unwritten. That is also true, depending on your actions, there was a possibility that they could have continued to lead their lives.’

“So, does that mean my choices caused the death of Fenwick and Caelum?”

‘Yes and no. Your decisions are merely drops in an ocean of decisions made collectively by everyone else. Was there a possibility that their deaths would be postponed if you made one or more different choices? Yes. But consider the flip side, there was also an equal possibility that your choices would have accelerated their deaths.’

“Since you can see all possible futures, can you tell me if… if they survived? I refuse to believe that they are dead unless I see it for myself.” Harry swallowed thickly, unable to visualize the image of their dead bodies. They were always so vibrant, so full of life…

‘I am not permitted to do that. If you want to discover their fate, you will have to return to your world once more. However, weigh your options wisely. What will you do if you found out that they were dead? What will you do if you found out that they were alive? If you journey on, although you will no longer be recognized as Ginny’s husband or Teddy’s godfather, you might be able to safeguard their futures, just in a different capacity.’

Harry pondered on that thought. What if they were truly dead?

‘Well, the Wizarding World that I have come to learn and love will be in shambles, then
there is no point in continuing on in this World.’

What if they were alive?

‘Well, we will need to go into hiding as Prometheus continues to take over the world until he finds us one day. Prometheus has shown today that we have no place in his new world order and he will just hunt us down if he knew we survived. Or else I will have to fight in yet another war…’

That was not a life he wanted his family to live in, nor a world he wanted his children to grow up in. If he journeyed on, at least he could change the world for the better and see his godchild and children grow up safely, albeit with a different Harry Potter.

‘That leaves me only one choice.’

But Harry could not ignore the fate of his friends and family that he has learnt to love and cherish, tossed away carelessly and swept into the “Beyond” as he traveled to another dimension and another Ginny, Ron, Hermione. Another Harry Potter. He would never share the same bond with their counterparts.

‘But I have to know…’

‘Returning to your world once more might only bring more pain and suffering. Please consider my advice - Learn to let go.’

‘No, I have to see for myself… I have to go back.’

‘Very well, young Master. But please note that this is the last time you shall be able to return to your mortal body.’

‘Wait… what? I have a limit to the number of times I can resurrect? Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?!’

‘Would this knowledge have changed your behaviour prior to your third death?’

‘Well… no, but that’s not the point. The point is you withheld information!’

‘Young Master, remember that I can only reveal to you what you already know. And what you know consists of what you have experienced. I can only reveal what is necessary for you to know when it becomes relevant. This is part of living.’

Harry stayed silent, still feeling slighted by Death’s deception. Death sighed and continued.

‘You have the ability to return to life thrice each lifetime. That means you have three additional chances to remedy whatever mistakes you might have made. Coupled with your magical abilities, you are able to live an unregrettable life should you use them wisely. You are closer to death yet paradoxically closer to immortality than any single living entity. Please recognize that not many people have this luxury rather than being fixated on my supposed “deception”.’

Harry grudgingly accepted Death’s argument, if only because he had something more important to do right now.

‘Very well, young Master. I’ll -’
'But wait! How do I get into the Manor with Fiendfyre? Only the caster can extinguish the flames.'

'You're the Master of Death. You just need to command your magic to circumvent the issue.'

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October 31, 2003 (Friday)

Harry woke up to a floating sensation. He cracked an eye open to see that his body was lying sideways at waist-level and surrounded by the hooded figures that he saw minutes ago. Carefully, he caressed and pressed into his robes with his arms to feel for his Holly wand, it was not there. He focused on his other senses and smelt the overpowering scent of burning ashes and felt the quickly increasing heat and warmth. The cackling sounds of crumbling stones and bestial howls roared into his ears.

He was still at Potter Manor and he was being levitated towards the flames.

'I'm the Master of Death. I can't even die, so the least I can do is summon my wand and run like a madman into the Manor.'

Willing for his wand, he suddenly felt something long, hard, and knotted materialize in his right hand and extended into his tattered robes. He didn't recognize the wand from his touch but he assumed it was from one of the masked attackers.

'Someone's not going to be happy about losing his wand.'

Quickly, he yanked himself off the Levitation Charm as he cancelled it and ran towards the burning building that towered above him. He ignored the screams and shouts from behind him for he knew they would not dare come so close to the Fiendfyre.

Harry paused for a moment merely steps away from the front door of his Manor, closed his eyes as he willed for the strongest Shields, ones that can Shield him from an uncontrollable Fiendfyre. He felt his magic surge as the heat suddenly cooled off as though the flames were extinguished. He opened his eyes and saw a shimmering black but translucent bubble revolving him continually like a never-ending torrential wave.

At the corner of his eyes, he saw the devilish gaze of an enormous flaming serpent uncoiled and sprung forward, its mouth was stretched open wide as it sank its fangs in his position. Upon contact, the serpent screamed as it disintegrated into amber and ashes.

Mentally steeling himself, he crashed into the Manor as the flames enveloped him and his shield, but none of flames could penetrate the black vortex of pure magic.

He traced the familiar path towards the master bedroom for he knew that was the most protected room in the entire Manor. If anyone was still alive in this Fiendfyre-engulfed Manor, they would be there. It was adjoined with the adjacent room where the wards originated, the locus of magic for the entire Manor and its surrounding grounds - much like the castle keep.
As he approached the interior of the Manor, the flames became weaker as they crashed against the protective magic that emanated from within. However, Harry knew the magic was no match against Fiendfyre and they will soon puncture the last defences, which has already begun as he saw amber and wisps of flames floating when he turned into the Master bedroom corridor.

Suddenly, a silver otter appeared in front of him as Hermione’s distraught voice shouted out, “Harry! Hogwarts has fallen - Kingsley’s dead - They were Muggles and Muggleborns - machine guns - grenades - Take everyone to the Forest of Dean, I’ll meet you there! If I don’t make it… I love you… tell Ron... Argh!”

The silver otter dissipated at the interrupted speech as Harry stared at the empty spot. His mind was numb and nothing registered. He felt like he was observing as his mindless dragged his feet down the corridor.

‘That was just fake. Everything is fine. Hermione was just playing a terrible prank on you for the first time ever and she’s really bad at it.’

He walked through the wide open door and took in the destruction and chaos that laid in front of him: torn curtains, overturned cupboards, tilted bed with clothes and blankets spilt everywhere… and in front of the destroyed door that leads to the safe room...

“Ginny…”

He saw the limp body of a red-haired woman lying limply and broken before him. Harry’s world turned into static as he walked towards the body. His body went numb, he did not feel grief, nor pain, nor tears - just nothing.

He finally understood what it meant when someone once told him that the death of a spouse was like a walking death. Nothing mattered anymore. He did not dare venture any further for he already knew the worst. The sight of her hammered in the truth that he refused to believe until now; the tiny flame of hope that he held onto dearly was now extinguished. He sat calmly as he cradled her in his arms, uncharacteristically cold and light, as though her fiery personality and warm presence was now reduced to nothing more than a soulless mannequin. He took in the familiar scent and magic that hummed mutely like an afterglow. But that didn’t matter. She was safe now… in his arms for one last time… and until the end.

He sat in silence - for how long, he did not know - as he saw the glowing light of the incoming flames breach the hallway. But he made no attempt to move. He just watched as it poured into the room like lava and filled the room with bright reds and yellows. Harry merely closed his eyes and lifted his magic...

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Harry sat alone in the emptiness of King’s Cross Station for... an hour? A day? A week? A month? A year?

Harry did not know.

For the entire duration, however, Death stood faithfully by his side. Silent. Still. Somehow, he was comforted by his presence.
Eventually, Harry spoke.

“So… I guess that was it?”

Death stayed silent as he stared at the Elder Wand in his hand. The wand that he only recognized when he returned to King’s Cross Station.

“The most powerful wand in the world, huh. Not that powerful after all.”

Silence.

“I guess I should get on with it. I cannot travel to the ‘Beyond’ knowing that I could live in a world where I can see them alive again. If I cannot save what has passed on, I will make sure I can safeguard what has yet to come.”

‘Very well, young Master. When you are ready, you can, as you put it, board the train. But remember, you cannot save everyone and death comes to all eventually, without discrimination - even you. You just have the option to journey on.’

Death’s skeletal hand swept towards the idle train that was on the right of the platform. The other train was nowhere to be found.

“But do I get to choose my ‘destination’?” Harry asked.

‘No, young Master. But I assure you that you will have a fighting chance to fix what you desire and remedy your deepest regrets.’

Harry looked up to Death in surprise. Did it mean what Harry was thinking?

‘Will I get to meet my parents? Will I get to meet Sirius? The Potters?’

Death did not respond. But in the foggy distance, a faint train whistle hooted. With a duality of heaviness and, oddly enough, excitement, Harry slowly walked towards the train. As he stepped one foot onto the carriage, he paused and turned back for one last time. Death turned its head slightly towards him and waited.

“I’ll see you on the other side?”

‘Of course.’

Harry nodded and boarded the train.

‘Good luck, young Master.’
Hey everybody,

Sooo... I procrastinated. Yay for you readers and part-yay part-ney for me, I guess?

I've also decided to ditch the preview system. So, in order to realign the notifications, I decided to post a new chapter as well. Good solution?

I'll try not to get distracted anymore... but exercising my creative writing mind is always infinitely more enjoyable than studying biochemistry. It's just a fact.

Later!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-10

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⚠ Warning: Mentions of miscarriage. Please be advised.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 6

THE BIRTH OF A PRODIGY
August 1, 1958 (Friday)

BLACK HEIR FINALLY BORN

by Sclandora Gosp

Birth of Turais Rigel Orion Black after Tumultuous Pregnancy

Declared as Heir Presumptive, Replacing His Father as First in Succession

The long-awaited, newest addition to the illustrious family of the Blacks was confirmed by Lord Arcturus Sirius Black late yesterday night from the Black Manor. Turais Rigel Orion Black, male, born on 31 July 1958, will become the Heir Presumptive after what was widely believed to be a difficult pregnancy by Walburga Black. Numerous private Healers have been seen to enter and exit 12 Grimmauld Place, the Black ancestral home, for the past nine months due to rumoured complications...

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May 17, 1961 (Wednesday)

‘So how is this supposed to work again?’
Harry James Potter, now known to the world as Turais Rigel Orion Black or Heir Presumptive Black, was sitting beside his brother’s cot as he read a large tome that he found in the Black library yesterday. *The Black Magick Wards* outlined the familial wards that were invented by the Black ancestors and only the Lord, Lady, and Heirs of the Black family were able to access and read this book. However, Turais has read this book in his past life.

‘Well, I would have told you to wave a wand and say the incantation but somehow I think you would not have appreciated this answer.’

Turais scoffed indignantly.

Arcturus Black, his paternal grandfather, commented proudly on how he looked like a replicate of his father as Pollux Black, his maternal grandfather, huffed conspicuously beside him. At the age of two, Turais has already shown the traditional aristocratic good looks, fair skin, and lustrous black hair, that graced all Black males. The sole deviation was his electrifying green eyes as opposed to the sharp, grey eyes that all the other blacks sported. His eye colour initially caused some dismay amongst his family, but after Arcturus commented that green eyes are traditionally associated with wizards with powerful magic, the chatters fell silent.

Also, despite being physically a two-year-old, Turais has retained the mental capacity and magical ability of his old adult self. He even knew how to speak Parseltongue ability despite not harbouring a piece of Voldemort’s soul any longer and failing to hiss a single word since the Battle of Hogwarts. Death told him this was because he had the ability when he was in possession of the Hallows and the ability would follow him through all iterations of his life from now on. In the same conversation, Death also told Turais that the first of his enhanced magical abilities from being the Master of Death, including the ability to resurrect, would not manifest until he was eleven (which was when he obtained his first Hallow - his father’s Cloak of Invisibility). The full manifestation, however, would not occur until he was seventeen when he received the final Hallow - the Resurrection Stone during the Battle of Hogwarts. Despite these restrictions, Harry was a naturally powerful wizard in his own right, therefore, he could cast wandless magic before then.

This was great news for Turais as being a child was very boring, especially during his first year and a half when Sirius was not yet born and he was often left to his own devices. Whenever he was alone in his room, he distracted himself with practising casting new spells and charms he found in the Black library books wandlessly. He never had the time or chance to practice windless magic or browse the Black library when he was Harry Potter and this was the chance to perfect his skills.

Besides that, he filled up the rest of his schedule trading verbal barbs with a sarcastic Death telepathically.

‘You’re right. I do not appreciate your sassy self. Can you revert back to the Death I knew when we first met? The thoughtful, wise, and definitely not narky one?’

‘Well, you could always find someone else to talk to.’

Yup. Narky, definitely narky.

‘You bloody well know I can’t have a full conversation with Orion or Walburga on how to improve their wards because one of the Runes outlined in their Foundation wards I found in their 500-years-old book is actually incorrect. And when they inevitably ask why, I can’t say it is because I have first-hand experience with it when I saw how my familial wards were torn apart in my past life!’
Death sighed.

‘Do you have to be so melodramatic all the time? And realistically, you know they would’ve just Silenced you and performed an exorcism before you could finish your first 20-word sentence. So, you really don’t have to worry about them asking about your past life.’

‘Well, that’s a relief,’ Turais thought sarcastically. ‘And yes, I do think I have a right to be melodramatic. I am still not over the fact that Ginny got away and successfully went into hiding and you did not tell me before that very traumatic scene! I knew Ron’s Patronus got to them!’

When Turais was three months old, he had called Death up to the physical realm every ten minutes asking about what happened to his family for three continuous months. And for some reason, perhaps pity (if Death can even feel pity), Death finally relented. It reasoned that since Turais cannot return to his original timeline and since this information would have no impact on Turais’ timeline except for lifting his spirits enough to make him a functioning human being, he would kindly do him that favour. Secretly, Turais believed that Death was just annoyed that he could not do his job of transporting departed souls onto the “Beyond” if Turais kept calling him away from his post. And, as the Master of Death, he could get away with strong-arming Death a little. But he still felt cheated by Death. Yup, cheated.

‘You know what? I should not have told you anything. Now, you are just using that sob story as an excuse every time I say you are overreacting.’

‘Yeah, well, too bad.’ Turais mentally stuck out his tongue. He was being immature, but there were some odd, irresistible urges that required him to act childish. Turais wondered originally whether it was a phase, but with each passing day it seemed that was not the case.

Despite what he said, Turais was immensely grateful that Death told him the truth. After the revelation, it has helped Turais rid himself of the guilt of failing to save his family and allowed him to let go of his regrets. Prior to that, Turais had been moping for three consecutive months where he cried himself to sleep, and then woke up to cry some more. In hindsight, it was funny how his parents thought that amount of crying was normal until Sirius was born and they realized what a handful he was.

‘I was just... totally blindsided by the Mannequin Spell... amongst other things. I should’ve known that I could summon any of the Hallows as Master of Death, then I could’ve tried to summon her with the Resurrection Stone and realized that she was still alive. Why did I not think of that?! Well, but to be fair, I didn’t realize I was holding the Elder Wand until I went back to King’s Cross Station so I wouldn’t have figured it out anyways.’

Turais was told that the “Ginny” that Harry found in the bedroom was in fact, a magical replica of the real Ginny. Apparently, The Mannequin Spell was a Dark family magic passed on through the matriarchs in the Weasley family that allowed one to quickly generate a realistic corpse, much like an inactive Inferi, and transfer some of their magical core into the body. The draining of one’s magical core was what made the spell extremely powerful and Dark. And those outside the Weasley family would be none the wiser. Because who would have suspected that the female Weasleys would have knowledge of any magic that was remotely Dark.

‘Can you explain to me why I am reborn as a new entity? I am fairly certain there was no Turais Rigel Orion Black in my original timeline. Did you just make up a new person? How does this work?’

‘Did you know Walburga Black had a term miscarriage in your original timeline?’
‘Really? I never knew!’ Turais was shocked. He never heard his godfather mention this. ‘But I guess Sirius would not have known if his parents never told him.’

‘Yes, well news like these are generally not publicized. Especially in pureblood families such as the Blacks. They see miscarriages as a sign of magical weakness, especially given that miscarriages of magical beings are highly improbable. It also did not help that Orion and Walburga are second cousins. Even though marriages between members of close blood relations were still common at their time in pureblood families, it was falling out of favour and most people were uncomfortable with their union. So the miscarriage was the last thing they needed to confirm others’ fears, which is why they swept it under the rug. Contrary to common belief, the miscarriage was not caused by genetic defects but rather by a foolish ignorance of an easily-curable infection. Anyhow, that’s why you are not a “made-up” person, even I cannot manipulate Fate like that. You just ended up in a slightly altered past in which the miscarriage was prevented to allow for your existence.’

‘Hmm, that might explain why Sirius’ parents had such high expectations for him. The death of an unborn child and the desire to prove the world wrong will do just that. Of course it wasn’t as simple as that, but this experience would have aggravated the situation for sure.’

With this new information, Turais reconsidered his opinion on Orion and Walburga. In the past months, he has felt the genuine love and caring attention that they have peppered him with.

Walburga was much more gentle than he’d believed and doted on him with motherly affection, albeit stilted and awkward, as though she was unsure on how much affection to show. Her crueler, more vicious side also surfaced occasionally, especially when Turais disobeyed her direct commands. For example, when Turais snuck into the kitchen in search for Kreacher last year despite Walburga’s previous warnings, she lashed out and cast a strong Stinging Hex on him that resulted in a small scarring on his left thigh. However, her actions differed significantly enough from Turais’ expectations based on Sirius’ scathing recount of his mother that Turais wondered whether Walburga could be redeemed in this timeline.

Orion, however, was the one who took Turais completely by surprise. Sirius has never mentioned his father compared to his constant disparaging of his mother. However, Turais always assumed that Sirius had hated his father similarly from his utter disregard for his father’s ring when he first returned to 12 Grimmauld Place. But Turais just could not reconcile the indifferent, cold Orion he’d once imagined with the loving, affectionate Orion that he opened his eyes to every morning. It was clear to all who could see Orion’s expression that he loved his sons greatly and treated them as though they were the centre of his universe. The unbounded fondness that exuded whenever he entered their rooms and laid his eyes on them was unmistakable and impossible to fake, at least not for years. Now, Turais wondered if Sirius eagerly threw out all of Orion’s possessions because he could not bear to be reminded of his father’s betrayal for disowning him. However, that also confused Turais as he could never imagine this Orion doing something so terrible to Sirius...

Alas, there was still a lot of time for personalities to change and dislike to form until Sirius’ arrival at Hogwarts. But still, Turais wondered if his birth has already irreversibly changed the future of this timeline in some way.

Maybe, things would have been different if Sirius in his original timeline was not the heir. His carefree, rebellious nature would have never allowed him to act as the proper Black heir that his family would have wanted.
‘Well, you are living this scenario out right now. You dummy.’

Turais heard Death laughing at him. Irritated, he yelled at it, ‘Shut up!’ Turais glanced up at his drooling brother and silently swore to himself that he would do anything to protect him from the familial pressure. The original Sirius had to bear this mismatched and heavy burden and he was miserable until the end of his life. The Sirius in front of him would grow up happily in a life that he deserved, Turais silently promised once more.

This meant that Voldemort and Prometheus would have to be dealt with. But of the two, Prometheus was now the bigger threat. While Turais already knew of Voldemort’s rise and every single one of his weaknesses, Prometheus remained an unknown enigma. Was he a Dark wizard? Was he a Muggleborn? Would I recognize him when we eventually crossed paths?

‘Okay. So, about Prometheus, when do I start …’

‘Once again, young Master. There is nothing you can do right now. Wait until you enter Hogwarts and start to worry about it then.’

‘It is just so frustrating. Back in my timeline, you said no choices I make will stop Prometheus from taking over the world. Now in this new timeline, you are saying that no choices I make will affect the future. What is the point?’ Harry huffed in frustration as he spelled the book shut.

‘Regarding Prometheus, your choices will matter. Just not yet. As I explained last time, currently your lives are running in parallel and far from each other. Hence, none of your choices will impact his decisions. When your paths cross later on, that is when meaningful changes will occur. So, enjoy the calm and serenity while it lasts, I assure you that when the time comes, you will wish that your childhood was longer. I am going to leave you now. There is quite the backlog of souls waiting to be transported.’

‘I still don’t understand why I have to wait for eleven years to grow up. This whole reincarnation wait time is quite ridiculous.’ Turais groveled as he felt the Death’s presence fade.

Turais flipped open another, much more recently published book - in 1957, it said. This one was on Patronuses and its different practical applications. He mindlessly flicked his wrist, producing his silvery stag, as he followed the instructions. According to the book, one could produce and sustain multiple identical Patronuses by applying a set of complex Arithmancy equations called “Pierricoeur Laws of Energy Integration”. Turais thought back to the time when McGonagall performed that feat during the Battle of Hogwarts. Furthermore, it was possible to produce multiple different Patronuses using a combination of three sets of different equations. However, with each new Patronus, the conjuration of an addition one would become exponentially more complex and difficult.

Turais studied the equations while the stag strolled calmly around the room, occasionally sniffing the cot where Sirius lay. Baby Sirius, barely six months old, snapped his eyes wide open and stared at the stag in fascination. When Turais managed to produce a second Patronus, a dog, and then a third, a wolf, Sirius was gurgling happily. He waved his arms wildly as he tried to grab the dog’s tail.

A sharp intake of breath behind Turais notified him that he was not alone. He quickly cast an Invisibility Spell over his books, hoping the intruder did not see them. He snapped around and saw his father staring at the three floating animals, fascinated.

Walburga walked in a second later.
“Orion, you forgot Sirius’ -” She stopped suddenly as she took in the sight. The dog Patronus sniffed at her neck curiously and whined. Then, it decided it preferred the baby and circled back to settle in the cot with Sirius, laying snuggly at his feet. “What are you doing, Turais Rigel -”

“Turais, did you do this?” Orion asked Turais as he picked him up, cutting off his wife.

Turais tilted his head as he sucked on his right thumb, pretending to be deciphering his words. After a reasonable pause, Turais nodded once and said, “Siri sad. Siri ‘appy!” He threw his tiny hands above his head with a wide grin on his face.

“Turais! We told you Sirius is too young and magic is dangerous for him -”

“Turais, this is amazing! Burga, our son just conjured not one, but three corporeal Patronuses. On top of that, all of them are different. And he did it wandlessly. Do you know how amazing this is?”

Walburga stood there silently for a moment, then ran out of the room as she muttered something about a camera and having evidence. Meanwhile, Orion continued to rock Turais while he patted his back gently. “You will be a great wizard, Turais.”

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December 25, 1962 (Tuesday)

It was Christmas Day and the extended Black family has all gathered at the Black Manor to celebrate, with the notable exception of Dorea Black-Potter and her family. Turais had eagerly anticipated to finally be able to meet another living Potter besides himself in person last year. However, he was sorely disappointed when they had not shown up. Upon a not-so-subtle inquiry to his father, “Where’s great-aunt Dorea?”, and receiving a surprised look, Orion revealed that Dorea has not participated in the family Christmas Party ever since she married into the Potter family and attended theirs instead.

Similar to last year, the Black Manor ballroom was brilliantly decorated. Magnificent crystal chandeliers draped with garlands spiraled down from the arching stone ceiling, illuminating the Caen limestone walls in shimmering gold. The floor was magically charmed to appear as though they were standing above an iced-over lake. And in the middle of the frozen lake stood a towering Christmas pine that measured above 30 feet in height. It sparkled with fairy lights, colourful glowing baubles, and a dazzling star etched with the Black family crest atop the tree. The house elves really outdid themselves, as always.

Turais was sitting amongst the pile of presents beneath the tree, attempting to figure out what hid beneath the colourful wrappers, when he heard a familiar voice in distress.

“Pa’foo! Pa’foo!” Sirius whined as Bellatrix jabbed him on his cheeks with her fingers, laughing at her struggling younger cousin. Turais heard him let up a low hiccup, suggesting that he was moments away from crying. It was Sirius’ first time at a family Christmas party as magical children are highly sensitive to magic and therefore, discouraged to be in the presence of too many magical entities before the age of three. Regulus stayed behind at 12 Grimmauld Place where his was entertained by his two grandmothers, Melania and Irma Black.

‘Might as well make the minimum age thirty because I don’t want Bellatrix anywhere near
Turais flicked his wrist and a silvery dog materialized mid-air and leapt playfully around Sirius before settling on its belly in front of him. “'Pa’foo!” Sirius exclaimed happily, his grievances all but forgotten, as he concentrated on patting the dog’s head softly.

“Well, well, well. If I haven’t seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed you, my dear brother-in-law,” Cygnus Black told Orion and Arcturus, Orion’s father, as he eyed Turais with interest.

Orion chuckled as he sipped his wine. “Would you believe it if I told you he can simultaneously conjure three Patronuses right now, wandlessly?”

Cygnus raised an eyebrow, issuing Orion a challenge.

Cygnus has seen the picture Walburga took of the four males in her family with three Patronuses running around them. Instead of the traditional family portrait, that photo was featured on the cover of the Christmas cards she sent to all her friends and extended relatives, along with a not-so-subtle mention about her eldest son’s magical ability inside. Heck, even Quintus Longbottom, who was her second-cousin-twice-removed (and how Callidora Black managed to marry a Longbottom and not get struck off the family tree, Turais did not know) received her Christmas card this year.

Like everyone else, Cygnus had his fair share of doubts regarding the authenticity of the story, but the fact remained that there was indeed three Patronuses featured in the photo. While it was possible that Orion or Walburga casted the charms themselves, it was highly unlikely as they both never mastered this particular charm in their entire lives.

Orion excused himself and approached Turais, who was currently worming his way in and out of the glistening Christmas tree and the mountain heap of presents in the centre of the ballroom.

“Turais! Come out from under that tree right now!” Walburga’s voice shouted from across the room.

Turais reemerged with a grimace. When he saw his father approaching, he held out his arms in an obvious request to be held up. Orion crouched down. Sighing but with an exasperated grin, he reached out and lifted him, settling him against his shoulder. Yearning for more of the soothing warmth, Turais burrowed deeper into the embrace away from the drafty air.

Looking behind Orion’s back, Turais saw Walburga’s disapproving glance but she said nothing. Instead, she turned back to her conversation with her father. Walburga, the stricter of the two parents, often frowned upon Orion’s outward affection towards his children. She claimed that it defied propriety held by upstanding Blacks but Orion generally ignored her on this front.

“Hey, big boy,” Orion whispered into his ears. His moustache tickling his cheek as he squirmed slightly and released a joyful squeal. “Want to go with dada and show Padfoot’s friends to uncle Cygnus?”

“’Ongs and ‘Oony?” Turais leaned back and looked at his father, scrunching his face.

“Yes, ‘Ongs and ‘Oony.”

“Hmm, okay dada,” Turais turned to look at Cygnus as he twisted his wrist and wiggled his fingers. He took in the look of surprise on his uncle’s face as the two Patronuses burst into existence and dashed freely across the ballroom floor. Sirius jumped and clapped in excitement
while the rest of the adults looked on with fascination and murmured to each other quickly.

Just for added flair, he performed a variant of the *Lumos* charm and sent a dozen balls of light at Bellatrix, lighting her up like a Christmas tree before dissipating. Bellatrix scowled darkly as she glared at Turais. She then grabbed Narcissa, who was trying admirably to suppress a grin, and dragged her away to likely sulk in a corner.

“We, Blacks, have a natural constitution for offensive magic and a lesser affinity for defensive and Light magic. I wonder where he got his magic from?” Lucretia Black, Orion’s elder sister, commented as she wandered over.

“Well, our Turais is a special, powerful child,” Orion spoke proudly. “He will soon become the pride of the Black family - ”

“- As befitting the next heir of the House of Black,” Lucretia finished placatingly with a soft smile.

Turais nodded and gave his aunt a toothy grin and both adults laughed. Observing the usual stray black hair that dropped rebelliously over his son’s right brow, Orion tugged it back in place behind his soft ear.

He looked fondly over Turais’s face and Turais saw the paints of light grey that was found in the clouds that brought the lightest and most refreshing drizzle of summer rain. It was a shade the shone of levity and of timeless serenity.

Orion moved to place a kiss on his temple. Turais just sighed and let the room slip away from his consciousness as he basked in his father’s affection.

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**November 29, 1963 (Saturday)**

“These, my sons, are all the stars you can see in the skies,” Orion waved his left hand above their heads at the images of stars and constellations projected on the dark study room ceiling. The stars oscillated intermittently between bright and dim as the sole light source flickered gently inside the star lamp.

“Woah! Which one is me?” Sirius asked breathlessly, following the rotating stars in fascination. Orion’s right arm was draping over his three sons as they snuggled together cosily under a large duvet.

“Me! Me!” Regulus chimed along as he gurgled sloppily.

Orion chuckled at ruffled the hair of his youngest son. “Okay, okay. Sirius, why don’t we let Regulus go first since he is the youngest?”

“Fine, but I’m next,” Sirius said while Regulus gave a wet chuckle.

With a twinkle in his eyes, he scanned the moving lights. Suddenly, he patted on Regulus’ shoulder urgently. “Regulus, look at that! I see you.”
Orion gestured at the constellation Leo depicted by a roaring lion. The stars which composed the constellation glowed inside its body.

“Do you see the brightest star at the bottom right side of the lion?”

Regulus nodded as he stared wondrously at the scintillating light.


Regulus stared at the lion silently as it faded out of view. He turned to his father as he pointed at the tail of the disappearing lion, “Jer… Gif…”

“Gryffindor. Yes, the symbol of that house is a lion.”

“I want to go to the house of lions,” Sirius said, in awe.

“No, you’re not, Sirius. Get that thought out of your mind at once. The Blacks have been sorted into Slytherins for generations, without exception. Don’t be impressed by a large cat. Gryffindors are foolhardy and reckless, a group that is unbefitting to be associated with a proud son of the House of Black,” Orion spoke fiercely.

Regulus breathed gruffly as if he disagreed with his brother. Then, he punched his brothers kneecap with his little fist as Sirius scowled. Orion’s eyes twinkled at the exchange.

“Now, let’s find you, Sirius. Yours should be the easiest to find. Ah hah, right there!” Orion pointed at a large dog triumphantly.

“Pa’foot!” Sirius looked up, jubilant.

“I always wondered if your namesake resulted in your affinity with Turais’ patronus,” Orion commented, glancing at the quiet form of Turais. “But yes, Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky. So bright, that the ancient Greeks called it the ‘scorcher’ - the star that scorches across the night sky.”

“Wow. I have the most awesome-est name ever!” Sirius exclaimed, turning his gaze from the dog to his older brother. “Turais?”

“Turais - it is found in the constellation of Carina, wwwwaaay over there near the corner of the room, do you see it?” All three brothers squinted at where his father was pointing at.

“It is named after a part of the ship, the keel. And it is the first and most important step in building a ship,” Orion looked at Turais and spoke again. This time, his voice was softer. “Everything is built around the keel, not the other way around. Perhaps…”

Orion trailed off and Turais wondered what his father has meant to say.

But he saw his answer in the polished silver orbs that shone of steely determination. Coupled with the enigmatic dance of flickering dramatic orange and pastel-textured yellow, he recognized the gaze of protection, of responsibility, and of the bright future that he saw for his family.

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_{July 20, 1964 (Tuesday)}_
Turais felt the light breeze caressing his cheeks as it brought the faint scent of lavender into his nostrils. He breathed in deeply, enjoying the rustling of the leaves and the distant chirping of the sparrows. He was perched on a tree branch as he looked at the rows upon rows of perfectly aligned, purple bushes. The spikes danced gently as Sirius glided his hands through them whilst running past them. His laughter rang clear and crisp like a summer bell.

The lavender field in Banstead, a few miles south of London, was one of their favourite spots to visit in the summer. In fact, Sirius claimed it was his “favouritest”. Granted, it was only at Sirius’ persistent whining that they visited this spot yet again. It was their fifth time in this month alone, amongst the countless times that they have been in the past three years.

But Turais, did not complain for it was a magical place. Sometimes, he wondered how magical people failed to recognize magic in all forms of life. Especially now, when he was immersed in the midst of it, he could hear the magic sing from every plant and every creature.

He closed his eyes and bathed in the serenity as he heard Sirius laugh again, this time a bit fainter.

He wondered if Sirius, too, could hear the magic sing.

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July 31, 1965 (Saturday)

“Hey, Turais,” Orion said as he held out his hand for Turais to grab. “Are you ready to Apparate?”

Turais nodded as Grimmauld Place disappeared in the blink of an eye and was replaced by overwhelming greeneries. He felt his shoes squish against the soft ground as he landed one foot on a slippery patch of moist grass while the other sploshed and sank into the squelching wet mud.

Turais looked around him and saw the misty haze of the lifting fog. There were no man-made structures in sight, nor noticeable vegetation except for the obscure shadow of a tree a few yards ahead of them. By the tree was a shallow stream that flowed lazily across the gently-inclined field. Its banks were completely covered with long, slender blades attached to rigid stalks. Turais glanced closer to his immediate surroundings and saw the nearby ferns, coloured in various shades of woodland greens, swaying mildly in the soft breeze as they drooped tiredly from the drops of morning dew that rolled atop.

However, the peculiarity of this place was its silence. Despite the gentle breeze that he felt on his skin, Turais could not detect any rustling of branches and grasses nor trickling of water against pebbles or plants. There was also a void of the humming of insects or the larking of common avians.

It was the definition of serenity yet it was… almost lifeless.

But lifeless was not the accurate description of the surveyed land. There was a deep, resonating hum of energy that resounded steadily through the stillness and which his core responded in parity. This sensation was so dense and thick around him that Turais thought he could
barely breathe. Yet, he felt an overwhelming sense of calmness as he immersed in his surroundings.

Orion’s voice rang through the void as Turais suddenly registered the steadfast warmth that his hand provided against the cool surrounding.

“You once told me that you could feel the magic sing in nature. I stumbled upon this place when I first learnt to Apparate. As a rebellious and stupid seventeen-year-old boy, I once tried to spite your grandfather and decided to Apparate with only the joking thought of arriving at a destination where true magic originated. I half expected it to fail and to be Splinched terribly. But when I opened my eyes, here I was.”

Orion squeezed Turais’ hand once as though ensuring his son was listening before he continued, “This was my secret garden; now it is ours. Happy seventh birthday, Turais.”

Turais breathed out a breath he did not realize he held. He spoke reverently, “Thank you, father. I can feel it, the magic here is stronger than any place I’ve been to.”

Orion hummed in agreement. After a long moment, he spoke again, “Do you see the trees in front of us?”

“Trees?” The fog has thinned a bit more since their arrival but the outline of the object was still too faint to see clearly.

“Yes, there are inosculated,” Orion confirmed softly, as though he was afraid to disturb the equanimity of nature. “Three trees separated at birth but destined to intertwine their fates as one. However, none are known to inosculate. Yet, here they are right before our eyes. Peculiar, wouldn’t you say?”

“It is magic,” Turais squeezed his father’s large hands as he looked up at his relaxed demeanour. Orion turned to look down at him and smiled.

“Yes, it is.”

***

June 20, 1966 (Monday)

“Looks like Black has spotted the Snitch! The Slytherin seeker is on the move - ” Orion shouted as he walked slowly behind Turais, who was sitting on his new toy broomstick, hovering a foot above the carpet as he drifted slowly forward. Sirius and Regulus were chasing behind their father, screaming excitedly.

Turais bit down on his lower lip as he leaned forward, stretching his right arm out as he tried to reach for the winged gold-coloured ball that drifted lazily just out of reach. Frustrated with the slowness of his broom, he swiped his hand down violently upon the ball just to end up empty-handedly as the Snitch casually shifted to his left.

“- and… he missed. Better luck next time. Aaaand now, it seems like the Ravenclaw seeker is hot on his tail -” Turais suddenly felt a slight lurch backwards. He snapped around just to see his father’s naughty grin and his right hand gripping the tail of his broomstick. “- in fact he is grabbing
onto his broom. That’s a foul - ”

Turais narrowed his eyes at his father’s widening grin and the mischievous glints of playful greys.

“- or would be but the referee did not see it! Did the barmy old hat sort him into the wrong house?”

“Hey! That’s not fair! I would have caught the Snitch if you didn’t hold onto my broom,” Turais fumed at this blatant injustice and swiped at his father’s arm.

“Would not!” Orion smiled smugly, ignoring his son’s attack. He then took a big step forward without letting go of the broomstick. “Both seekers have spotted the Snitch. The Ravenclaw is slowly gaining on the Slytherin seeker -”

“No! The Ravenclaw seeker is cheating! The referee -”

“- is distracted by a flying troll in the sky -”

“Trolls can’t fly!”

Orion slowly stretched his left hand towards the Snitch as Turais continued to punch at his arm. “The elder Black makes an attempt at the Snitch and… he’s caught the Snitch! Ravenclaw wins!” Orion closes his hand around the ball as its wings retract back into its tiny body and sat idly in his palm. He turned around with a smug look on his face.

“Arrrrgh …!” Turais lunged at his father after his battle cry as they both tumbled onto the couch next to them. Sprawled on top of his father, he landed punches on Orion’s chest as his father’s laughter echoed the sitting room.

“I call for a rematch! The Ravenclaw seeker is a cheating scumbag!” Turais said after he was tired from all the punching, mumbling into his father’s neck. After all the physical exertion, the regular beating in his father’s chest and the enveloping warmth was slowly lulling him to sleep.

“Cheating scumbag!” Sirius echoed as his climbed onto the couch and piled onto his older brother and father. Regulus was content with sitting on the floor beside them and made some weird noises that sounded like “eating ‘cumbug”.

They stayed like that for a while, immersing themselves in the serenity within the cozy room as the fireplace cackled and glowed softly in the background. They listened to the sounds of car engines and the rustling of the leaves outside the house. They felt the gentle warmth of the setting sun through the emerald curtains. They felt the escalating shakes of feet thumping up the stairs…

The sitting room door flew open in a loud “bang!”

“Orion Arcturus Black! Why do I see a broomstick wrapper on the kitchen table?” A familiar voice boomed.

‘Life is good.’ Turais thought to himself as he gave a contented sigh, ignoring the impending storm for just a moment longer.

Chapter End Notes
1) Patronus scene with Sirius, Orion, and Walburga, and 2) Black family Christmas Party scene are inspired by:

Tsume Yuki's "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" - Chapter 1: Along Came a Little Brother.
February 22, 1965 (Monday)

GREYBACK DESERVES DEATH

by Lyall Lupin, Guest Columnist

The most despicable scum on Earth, one who falsely posed as a Muggle tramp to evade justice for the murder of two Muggle children, deserves nothing but the worst punishment possible. Yes, even the Dementor’s Kiss is too kind for this ‘thing’ - I will not dignify it by even addressing it as a human or a creature. What it deserves is death. I stand by my words during the fateful trial. It is, and forever will be, a “soulless, evil, deserving nothing but death” thing...

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November 3, 1966 (Thursday)

“So… which one did you like best?” Orion asked, tightness evident in his voice. As a treat, Orion brought home a basketful of treats from Honeydukes. They were making their way through the pile of sweets as Kreacher was cleaning the dishes in the background. Walburga was in the living room Floo-calling her friend, Lady Parkinson.

Without hesitation, Sirius pointed at the empty package that contained a dozen sugar mice just a minute ago. Regulus nodded frantically in agreement. Sirius then eyed the one remaining
sugar mice trapped under his father’s hand greedily. Orion chuckled and released the mice from his grasp. The sugar mice darted across the kitchen table and almost made it to the edge when Sirius grabbed its tail and stuffed it into his mouth, with a tail hanging limply down his chin. He grinned at his father who grinned back, but Turais saw that the smile did not reach Orion’s eyes.

It was Sirius’ seventh birthday, which was a major milestone in magical tradition as it marked the day when one’s magical core stopped growing, hence, determining the magical potential of the wizard. Due to the stabilization of one’s magical core, it was also less likely for children to experience accidental magic. Therefore, most magical children would have displayed their magical capability prior to their seventh birthday.

However, Sirius has yet to display a bout of magic.

For the past year, their parents have been fidgeting with unease. Turais observed them glancing at Sirius more frequently, as though expecting his magic to manifest at any moment. At the same time, he has caught his parents in frantic discussions and stopped abruptly whenever they noticed their presence before subconsciously darting their glance towards Sirius.

Orion was also acting particularly strange in the past year. Turais has caught him staying in the Black family library for long periods of time, which he has never seen his father do before. He also sometimes waited for hours on end in front of the window to snatch the letters delivered from tropical birds that Turais did not recognize. Several of the birds even have a long, flat-shaped bill in black that was more like a flying duck than a post owl.

His father would read them quickly and immediately throw them into the fire. Sometimes, he found his father sitting silently in room and stared in the darkness blankly. His mood was also erratic and was easily spooked or irritated. However, Turais wasn’t sure if it had something to do with Sirius’ situation, Voldemort, or something else entirely.

Regardless, he still remembered the day his image of his perfect parents was completely shattered.

Of course, Turais knew they were far from perfect. From his original timeline, he knew that Orion and Walburga Black were blood purists, supported Voldemort’s cause despite not being Death Eaters themselves (a moot distinction in his view), and were known to be cruel towards their children. But for the past eight years, Turais saw he and his brothers being loved and cared for just as he had always imagined his parents would. Especially Orion, who acted like the father he had always wanted. He also never caught them being outwardly vicious against others due to their blood status or preached any pureblood ideals. But granted that Turais has not been out in public often and his social circle was composed completely of purebloods, there was never a situation for those views to be expressed.

However, this all changed two months ago.

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September 11, 1966 (Sunday)

Approximately two months before Sirius’ seventh birthday...

“Sirius is almost seven but he still hasn’t shown that he has a single drop of magic inside him
besides in his blood,” he heard Walburga hissed when he was outside the kitchen door about to enter the kitchen. Immediately, he leapt back away from the doorway and the light that spilled out onto the pitch-dark hall through the slightly ajarred door. Turais was initially planning to sneak into the kitchen to find something to eat as he was hungry. But instead, he found himself engrossed in a conversation his parents were having.

“Burga, calm down. Maybe his magic is manifesting just a bit later than normal. He still has time. He’s not turning seven until November,” Orion said tiredly.

“But even Regulus has shown his magic already last Christmas and he’s not even six yet. And don’t get me started on Turais. Merlin bless his soul. He showed his magic the second he was out of my womb.”

“I think what we need to do is relax and not be stressed -” Orion spoke soothingly.

“Orion Arcturus Black! Do not dare tell me not to be stressed. Our second son might turn out to be a squib! A squib! I will not let his deformity sully the Black family name. Can you imagine the shame that will be brought upon our family? The shame Turais will face as the future Lord Black - to have a filthy squib he calls his brother,” Walburga’s voice echoed through the building.

“Look, Walburga! I don’t like this situation anymore than you. Armand Nott and Abraxas Malfoy have been asking me about Sirius and I have been burning up in shame trying to deflect them. I promise you, when the time comes, I will do what is needed to uphold our family’s prestige and honour,” Orion spat furiously.

Turais was confused.

Orion loved his children. This made absolutely no sense.

Although Orion would never step in to stop Walburga from hitting them, he would always soothe and heal them afterwards. And he would never hit them on his own volition - that was indisputable. He just could not fathom a world where he would…

‘But he disowned Sirius in your original timeline…”

Turais paused. Was he just blinded by his wants for a father’s love and ignored Orion’s inherent bigoted views? Turais felt his blood chill at the thought. Orion was capable of that, this Orion might be the same as the Orion in his previous timeline...

“Good, this is what I needed to hear from you, Orion,” Walburga spoke softly, sounding pleased. “Sometimes I just worry. You seem so attached to them that I feared many times that you might have forgotten you place as the future Lord Black. You have standards to uphold, especially when blood traitors and mudbloods are ransacking our children’s world. You will need to protect them in this terrible world, but you cannot do that if your reputation is in tatters and if your words hold no power.”

There was a pregnant pause as Turas could only hear Orion’s harsh breathing.

“You know what you need to do,” Walburga spoke again.

“You’ve made it perfectly clear, Burga,” Orion replied coldly. A pause. “His presence will only serve as a constant reminder of our shame. I will not let Turais be reminded of our shame. I will not let my family be reminded of our shame. I will not let the world be reminded of our shame. He will have to disappear completely.”
Turais stared blindly into the dark, shocked. He felt a wave of utter horror crash over him like a tsunami - a torrential wave that destroyed all trust and familial love he had ever felt and receded as it took away all the fondness and love he once felt for his parents. Now, he was left with only despair and disgust. Every colourful memory he had of Orion turned into greys of deception and dishonesty.

Hot tears welled up behind his eyes as they threatened to fall out, but Turais bit down hard on his lips to stop himself from crying. He would not cry, not for these bigoted people.

They were not worthy of his tears.

‘I will not cry…. I will NOT CRY…’

Turais chanted those four words over and over again in his mind as he folded into himself tightly on the cold, hard wooden floor. He felt trapped... lost... helpless. All the warmth in his heart seemed to have drained out and seeped into the chilly air.

For the first time in eight years, Turais felt cold.

At the thought, his vision blurred as a wave of tears flooded to the front of his eyes. Beads of tears rolled down his cheek and splashed down silently onto the floor as he trembled.

He cried for Sirius. He cried for Regulus. He cried for their futures. And finally, he cried for the unfairness of the world.

His parents were plotting to kill Sirius! Their child that they have raised for nearly seven years! They -

He suddenly heard the sound of chairs scraping across the kitchen floor. Barely stifling a gasp of horror, he scrambled up as quietly as possible and crept up the stairs to slip back into his room.

Before he closed the door, he heard Orion speak faintly.

“- the morning after his birthday, it will be quick and painless -”

His parents never noticed his presence, nor did they notice the small puddle of tears on the first step of the staircase when they headed up to bed.

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November 3, 1966 (Thursday)

“I deliberately went to Hogsmeade and bought you one of every kind of treat available, yet you still like the sugar mice that I could’ve bought at Diagon Alley an Apparition away the most?” Orion frowned.

“Yes, father,” Sirius mumbled, his left cheek bulged with the sugar mice off to one side of his mout, “My love for sugar mice, it is something even you cannot control.”

“I suppose so...” Orion spoke slowly as he stared at a spot over Sirius’s head solemnly, “There are some things you just cannot control.”
Shaking his head slightly, he looked down to see that the tail is still plastered on his son’s chin.

“Stop playing with you food, Sirius. Propriety is supposed to be your middle name as a son of Black,” Orion teased as Sirius puckered his lips and sucked in the tail, who then smiled contently.

“Love you, father.”

“Love you too, son,” Orion smiled tightly as he gave Sirius a suffocating hug. Sirius returned the affection. Orion has allowed more physical displays of affection in the recent weeks. Turais wondered if it had anything to do with what was soon to happen.

Taking in a shuddering breath, Orion asked, “Anyhow, I will never understand your and Regulus’ obsession with sugar mice. I find it very disturbing to put something so alive into my mouth.”

“What?! Number one, they are delicious. Number two, they are most certainly not alive,” Sirius said.

‘But the most important reason is reason number three. Before Hogwarts, when Cygnus and I were still living with them -’

Turais looked up and saw Caelum and Cygnus sitting across from him, talking animatedly while gesturing wildly. Empty packs of sugar mice scattered messily across the tabletop. They were back in the Potter Manor, Turais realized, and Caelum looked like he was only fourteen instead of the adult, but Turais couldn’t tell precisely between their faces shifted and wavered with the details blurred…

Turais suddenly realized that he couldn’t remember their faces clearly anymore.

‘No… I have to remember. That’s the only thing I have left of them.’

Turais clawed towards them, but they took no notice of the desperate boy.

‘Caelum… Cygnus… Caelum… I won’t fail you this time… Caelum…’

“Caelum.”

Turais was startled by his own voice. He snapped his eyes back to where Caelum and Cygnus were a second ago, but he was surprised to see Sirius and Regulus watching him curiously.

“Who’s Caelum?” Sirius asked.

“Not.. nothing at all,” Turais stuttered, his brain working overtime to come up with an excuse, “Just… just… daydreaming! Yeah, daydreaming. Suddenly, the name Caelum just came into my mind. Curious, ain’t it?” He hoped this lie satisfied their curiosity.

“Are you sure you are okay, Turais? Your mind has been wandering in the clouds for the past few weeks. Do you want to talk about it?” Orion asked, genuinely concerned.

“No, father. I’m certain. I was just… excited about Sirius’ birthday because I knew you would bring lots of candy home,” Turais tried to give his father a winning smile. It clearly worked as Orion turned back to his brother. But Orion has been fairly frazzled himself lately so that might be why Turais was off the hook.
“But you did not even touch any of the candies besides the treacle tart in front of you,” Regulus muttered from the seat across from him. Turais looked beside Regulus, relieved that neither Orion or Sirius noticed Regulus’ perceptive comment. “Here’s my Licorice Wand if you want, I’ve had loads of candy already and I am quite all right.”

“No thanks, Reggie, but thanks for the offer though,” Turais patted his youngest brother’s hair.

For the past few weeks, Turais has been dogged by nightmares. Cedric’s death, his godfather’s death, and Caelum’s death were the most prominent and common recurring memories. The conversation he overheard that night also played repeatedly in his mind.

During every waking moment, he thought about different ways that Sirius’ situation will be solved. He knew that Orion still held up hope that Sirius would present himself as magical so he would wait until Sirius’ birthday has passed before he acted on any of his plans. Therefore, Turais decided that he could do nothing but prepare himself for the day to arrive.

As a result, he was constantly distracted by his thoughts. His parents also picked up on his erratic behaviour, but they did not inquire further. Fortunately, neither of them were Legilimens so they did not pry at his thoughts either. While Turais was a skilled Occulemens and could shield almost any attacks, inherited from his past life as an Auror, he still did not wish to explain how he became skilled in Occlumency.

Turais had no idea how the next twenty-four hours will go. For the first time since being an Auror, he really didn’t have a plan. But he knew one thing was for sure. Sirius was not going to get hurt under his watch.

Turais did, of course, call upon Death for advice. But as usual, it cannot divulge any information that will reveal the fate of the future. However, he did confirm one fact.

‘Is Sirius magical? I do not think something like magical ability will be different across the timelines.’

‘Young Master, your assumption is correct. The Sirius in your world is magical, however, why he has not presented his magic yet is not information that I am allowed to give you.’

So at least Turais knew that Sirius was magical, but unless Orion and Walburga knew, it still did nothing to change the fact that Sirius was in great danger. Turais knew that he was probably powerful enough to stop his parents and save Sirius, but he did not want Sirius to live his life as a fugitive or in secret again. He has done it once before, Turais vowed he would not suffer this again. Maybe they could take refuge in the Potter family again...

Furthermore, removing his parents from their lives, in any form, would not be an option as it would change life for the worse. Turais didn’t really worry about his own comfort - but Sirius and Regulus deserved to live a comfortable life. Their custody would go to the rest of the Black family and they would not any more lenient on Sirius’ situation. Say anything you would like about his parents, but they loved their sons… well, at least the outwardly magical ones.

Therefore, Turais decided that it was best to wait and hope that Sirius will show magic before and if not, run away and hide themselves from his parents. Turais also thought, as a last resort, that he could just throw himself into the path of the Killing curse and resurrect again. And at that thought, he suddenly realized that he should probably double check before going into this headstrong.
He quickly summoned Death.

‘Death! I have an urgent question to ask. If I die tomorrow by, say, throwing myself in front of a Killing curse. Will I die?’

‘Yes, young Master. Even you will die. I think your question is more about whether you can return to this world after you die. And to that question is no. Your powers as Master of Death will manifest upon the Christmas after your eleventh birthday for it was when you first became the owner of one of the Hallows. You will be forced to journey on into your next life or to the “Beyond”.

Well, so much for that option.

“Turais!” Regulus’ voice blasted into his right ear as he leaped out of his chair in surprise.

“Reggie, you scared me! You didn’t have to yell,” Turais said, rubbing his ringing right ear. Regulus was standing right beside him with arms crossed and annoyed expression.

“I called you three thousand times already,” Regulus huffed, “We should head up to bed.”

Turais realized that Orion and Sirius were absent from the table, so was Walburga.

Panicking, Turais turned to his younger brother and asked. “Where is Siri?”

“Siri? He’s upstairs, mother and father are tucking him into bed,” Regulus replied, unconcerned.

Turais was very concerned. Orion and Walburga has not tucked any of the children to bed since they turned three. He dashed out the kitchen and ran up the stairs noisily, leaving behind a bewildered Regulus.

“Sirius!” Turais yelled as he opened the door to his room. He saw his parents hovering over the bed where Sirius was lying. His parents turned to look at him questioningly.

“Turais, what’s the matter?” Sirius’ voice drifted out from behind them.

“No, nothing. I just… uhm … wanted to show you something in my room as your… second birthday present, if that’s okay? Mother and father?” Turais voice came out high and he winced at his poor quick-thinking skills.

“Of course, Turais. Sirius, go with your older brother now. Make sure to return to your room quickly though, you have to wake up early tomorrow,’ Walburga said as she rose from her seat, not betraying a single hint of what terrible thing was to happen tomorrow. Sirius, in his pyjamas, quickly swung his legs to the side of the bed and ran past his parents towards him.

Turais said bidded his parents good night as they walked across the house to his room. After he shut the door closed and cast a non-verbal Locking and Sound-cancelling spell, he turned to Sirius and asked, “What did mother and father say to do?”

“Urm, what’s wrong? Turais? Did I do something wrong?” Sirius said, his voice small and confused.

“I’m sorry, Siri,” Turais apologized and softened his voice. “I’m just a bit nervous, please excuse me. But can you answer my question?”
“Uh, sure... Father was just asking me where I wanted to go tomorrow as part of my birthday present and I said Hogwarts, so they said I will need to wake up super early because Hogwarts is really far away,” Sirius said quickly. “I should’ve asked them to bring you and Reggie along, but I forgot. I’m really sorry, Turais. Is this why you are mad? I can talk to them right now! I’m the birthday boy, I can ask for whatever I want.”

“Uhh no, no. There’s no need for you to do that. This is your birthday present so you should go,” Turais said hastily. Orion and Walburga couldn’t grow suspicious of his plans, “Besides, you have wanted to go to Hogwarts your entire life. Don’t lose this chance. Okay? I am ‘Sirius’-ly fine, get it? ‘Sirius’-ly,” Turais mumbled on awkwardly.

“Sorry if I offend you, big brother, but that was awkward,” Sirius tisked as he made for the door. Turais hastily cancelled all the Spells before Sirius turned the doorknob. “Anyways, good night.”

Suddenly, they heard a series of hard pounding on the door. When Sirius opened the door, he found a red-faced Regulus with his hands clenched tightly into fists.

“What is wrong with you, Turais?” Regulus yelled. “I was pounding and yelling at the door for ages, why didn’t you open the door?”

“Um, sorry Reggie, but we didn’t hear anything,” Sirius explained.

“Huh? That’s not possible, I think I was about to break down the door with my fists when you opened the door. Weird,” Regulus said.

“I wonder if it was a ghost? I heard from father that there is a ghost in Hogwarts that plays pranks on people. Do you think there is a ghost in our house too? This place is ancient, it must be older than even Hogwarts!” Sirius added to the growing conspiracy.

“Hmm, maybe,” Turais lied. Gosh, he was a mess today.

“Anyways, I am wiped. I better head to bed. See you tomorrow!” He pushed his two brothers along and out of his room. Before he was able to close the door, a foot snuck in and kept the door ajar. Sirius poked his head back into the room.

“Wait a minute, you said you have a present for me, Turais. What is it?” Sirius’ eyes narrowed.

“What present? Ooo… can I see too?” Regulus piped out from beside him and out of view.

“Oh… right. Uhmm, yeah, I forgot all about it.”


“So… I was planning on telling you a very special story,” Turais said mysteriously. “It is a secret story, so you cannot tell mother or father, okay? You have to swear on your honour.”

Sirius and Regulus eagerly nodded, “Cross our hearts.”

“Well then, in you come, pups.”

As they settled in, Turais waved his hand to distinguish the lights. He brought out a candlestand from his cupboard and placed it on the floor between them. He lit the candle
soundlessly and watched the warm, yellow glow on his brothers’ eager faces.

“So, this is a story about three brothers,” Turais narrated.

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“One upon a time, there were three brothers who were walking along a lonely, winding road at twilight.”

With a wave of his hand, three silhouettes appeared on the wall as they walked on top of a row of books on the bookshelf.

“Then, they came upon a treacherous river, too dangerous to cross.”

He gestured at the gap between two books at which the figures stopped and looked down upon.

“However, since they were wizards, they simply waved their wands and a bridge made up of reeds grew from both sides of the bank. But before they could cross, a hooded figure crossed their path,” Turais waved as a fourth, much larger silhouette, appeared and swooped down upon the others.

“Death.”

Sirius and Regulus both gasped and grabbed each other’s hands tightly. Turais felt Death’s presence in his mind at the mention of its name. He continued, “Death was cunning. It congratulated the three brothers upon their impressive display of magic, and promised to gift the trio for successfully evading it.

“The eldest brother asked for the power to defeat Death. So, Death created a wand from the nearby Elder Tree and gifted it to him.”

Turais waved his hand between the wall and the flame and the silhouette of the Elder Wand appeared.

“The second brother, wished to show he’d bested Death even more so than his elder brother. So he asked for the power to recall those who departed from this world. Death plucked a stone out of the depths of the river and handed it to him.”

A small silhouette of a stone appeared. The Resurrection Stone.

“The youngest brother did not trust Death and asked for the power to leave the meeting and to never be followed by Death again. Unwillingly and reluctantly, Death handed over his own Invisibility Cloak.”

A silhouette of a cloak appeared. The Cloak of Invisibility.

“The Deathly Hallows,” Turais breathed out in a reverent whisper.

“After the meeting, the eldest brother went on to kill a man he had a quarrel with and upon his death, bragged of the wand’s incredulous power. He was slain that night and his wand stolen. And so Death claimed the life of the first brother,” Turais said as the shadow of the oldest brother
Regulus gave out a small whine and huddled even closer to Sirius. Sirius wrapped his arms around his brother tightly, clearly engrossed and slightly unnerved by Death.

“The second brother returned home and summoned up the girl he’d once wished to marry before her untimely demise. She appeared, yet she grew sad, for she no longer belonged to his world. He decided that if she were not able to stay in his world, he would journey to hers. And so Death claimed the life of the second brother.”

The shadow of the second brother faded as well, leaving out a sole figure beneath the looming presence of Death.

“Death searched and searched for the last brother, but he was hidden under his gift. It wasn’t until he willingly shed the cloak, passing it on to his son, that the third brother allowed Death to take him, greeting him as an old friend.”

Turais ended his tale as he vanished all the silhouettes except the Hallows. An uneasy silence befell the group as they allowed the story to sink in.

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“So which Hallow would you have?” Turais whispered.

Sirius contemplated for a moment, then pointed at the Cloak of Invisibility.

“I would like the cloak so I can hide myself and everyone I love from everyone else.” A deep sadness flashed across his somber, grey eyes.

It was a look that Turais has seen many times in the adult version of the boy in front of him. A look that Turais swore would never grace the boy in front of him. But there it was, and Turais did not have a solution to remedy it.

“Are you sure we can all fit underneath that, Siri? Turais, you, me, mother, and father?” Regulus exclaimed.

“Maybe not mother and father, but definitely the three of us,” Sirius said forlornly. “Maybe mother and father doesn’t even need to hide under a cloak to be invisible.”

“Wow, really?” said Regulus. “But I would like the stone so I can say goodbye to everyone who died.”

“Why do you need to do that?” Sirius asked, scrunching his nose.

“Because that means I was not powerful enough to save them. When I grow up, I will be so powerful that no one I know will ever die,” Regulus puffed up his chest at the notion.

Turais knew Regulus was thinking about great-aunt Lycrois, the sister of Arcturus, who died last December. Regulus has always been her favourite amongst the three of them. Turais once overheard her saying that Regulus was the “the quintessential Black”, which he agreed with. As opposed to Turais’ unconventional behaviour and Sirius’ rebellious nature, Regulus’ temperament
has always been most similar to Orion, Arcturus, and the rest of the Blacks.

“Then you should have gone for the wand instead, Reggie,” Turais said.

“Hmm,” Regulus considered for a while before deciding it was too difficult to understand. “Which one will you pick, Turais?”

“Well, only the wand is left. So I will take that,” Turais said simply.

Sirius and Regulus groaned. “That is such a lame answer.”

Looking at the clock, Turais stood up. “Okay pups, it is way past bedtime. Go to bed now.”

“No, I want to have a sleep-over. We haven’t had one in forever,” Regulus complained.

“But Siri snores too loudly,” Turais offered weakly, pretending to not want them to stay. He didn’t want them to leave anymore than they did, apparently, especially on such an important night as tonight when he could keep an eye on Sirius.

“Hey!” Sirius scowled.

“I’ll sleep through it anyways,” Regulus said proudly.

“But you steal all my blanket, Reggie,” Turais scolded.

“Hey!” Regulus sniped indignantly, “You don’t want them anyways!”

Of course Turais wanted the blankets, but he would rather Regulus have them.

“Fine, fine,” Turais said as his brothers high-fived each other, “I just need to use the loo. You two claim your spots.”

He left the room as his brothers fought over their spots on Turais’ bed. Instead of walking into the bathroom, he walked up the stairs to cast a visual-audio Monitoring spell on his parent’s bedroom instead.

As Turais walked back down the stairs, Death asked him.

‘So which gift would you have chosen, young Master?’

Turais eyed his room from the distance where his brothers were engaged in a hand-to-hand wrestling as though the perfect spot on his bed was their biggest concern in the world.

Turais wanted to keep it that way forever.

He spoke into the darkness, “I meant it when I said I would have chosen the one that was left. I would let Sirius and Regulus have what they wanted… just like how I let Caelum and Cygnus do the same…” Turais spoke into the dark, empty space.

Eight long years have passed since Caelum has died in his arms. But the scars and pain felt as fresh as though it occurred yesterday.

If only he wasn’t Harry Potter…

Death was silent for a long time before it released a sigh and spoke again.
‘That is not your real answer. If you could choose, you would have simply walked away.’

Turais did not sleep.

After Sirius and Regulus fell asleep, he pulled up the image of his parent’s room. He also cast a Tracking Spell on Sirius for extra precaution. They were both Auror-grade spell used for surveillance and tracking potential suspects, but now, he was using it to keep an eye on his unsuspecting parents and brother. He glanced at his images from his Monitoring Spells every couple of minutes throughout the restless night, ensuring Sirius’ safety. So far, his parents have not woken up yet.

An hour before daybreak, Turais felt a light shuffle to his right where Sirius slept. Turais quickly silenced all his Monitoring Spells as his second brother fidgeted a bit more. Turais stayed as still as possible as he kept his eyes closed, pretending to sleep.

The boy sat up silently and stayed in that position for a few minutes. Turais wondered what Sirius was observing. Then after, he heard the bedroom door open as the floorboards down the hallway creaked under the faint, muffled footsteps until they stopped in front of the bathroom. Turais waited until his heard the bathroom door closed when he emerged from his room and walked towards the bathroom unnoticeably with the aid of a Cushioning charm.

He stopped in front of the bathroom door and listened in. A faint sob travelled through the door. Turais creaked open the bathroom door and saw Sirius sitting on top of the toilet cover in the darkness. His hands were wrapped around his knees with his forehead touching his kneecaps and his chin was quivering where drops of tears hung precariously. Turais approached his brother slowly, afraid to startle him.

“Siri, why are you crying? What’s wrong?” Turais asked gently, placing one hand on Sirius’s shoulder as he crouched down. Sirius tried to cover it up by wiping his face quickly but to no avail.

“Turais, do you love me?” Sirius looked up with tears welled up in his eyes and streaks of tears marking his pale skin.

“Of course, Siri. Forever and ever,” Turais reached him arm over to embrace his brother. Sirius wrapped his arms around his shoulder blades and squeezed as he buried his face into Turais’s chest. Turais felt his nightshirt dampening from the tears.

“Turais,” Sirius’ voice trembled and was thick with emotion. “Do you still love me if I cannot do magic? Even if I’m a **squib**?” Sirius said the last word as though it was a taboo, a curse. And it broke Turais’ heart. He never thought his little brother has been able to pick up on the changes in the family dynamics. He has always seemed like his carefree self. Was it all just a well-maintained front that managed to fool all of them?

“Siri, no matter what you are. A fae, a werewolf, a giant, even a troll, I will love you because you are my silly brother. My one and only Sirius.”

Sirius chuckled wetly at the mention of a troll.

“But mother and father won’t. I am a freak. I can’t do magic, Turais. I can’t. They are going
to be mad at me and send me far away. I will never see you or Reggie ever again,” Sirius said as he shuddered. A new wave of hot tears rolled down his cheeks and onto Turais’ soaked shirt. “I’m scared, Turais.”

Turais patted his back gently. “Don’t worry, Sirius. You will not be going anywhere. I promised that I will protect you forever and I will do just that. I swear on my magic.”

Sirius gave a pained chuckle.

“Sirius, listen to me carefully. You are not going anywhere without me. In fact, let’s leave before mother and father wakes up.”

“What? Why are we leaving?”

“Because we are not staying here so you could be taken away to an orphanage. Remember, wherever you go, I go. You’re stuck with me for life, pup. If mother and father are going to disown you, they will just have to disown me too. I will choose you and Reggie over them anytime,” Turais turned to drag Sirius out of the bathroom when he realized that Regulus was standing at the door. His bloodshot eyes suggested that like his brothers, he did not sleep a wink.

Staring up at Turais, Regulus looked betrayed. “Where do you two think you are going? And worse, without me.” He hissed accusingly.

“Go back to bed, Reggie,” Sirius said calmly, creating a jarring contrast with his catatonic emotions.

“No. You two are not going to leave me behind. I’m almost six and I am a big boy now. Besides, I will tell mother and father that you are leaving right now if you don’t bring me,” Reggie said.

“Reggie—”

“Reggie. I was just heading to my bedroom right now. Turais -” Sirius shot him a look. “- was going back to his bedroom.”

Sirius’ voice was surprisingly calm and authoritative in front of Regulus, Turais noted.

“Siri, listen to me, we have to leave -” Turais interrupted.

“No, Turais, you listen to me. Mother and father always loved you the most. But mother never liked me -”

“Sirius, for Merlin’s sake. They are going to kill you. You’re going to die, do you understand?”

Sirius and Regulus stood there in shock.

“Die? You mean like great-aunt Lycrois?” Sirius asked, confused with the concept of death.

“Yes, pup. When great-aunt Lycrois died, were you sad?” Sirius nodded his head.

“Do you want Regulus and I to be sad?” Sirius shook his head.

“Do you want us to never see each other again?” Sirius shook his head again.

“So, let’s go away and hide together then, just like hide-and-seek. Then none of us will be
sad,” Turais said encouragingly.

Sirius thought for a moment, looked at him and then at Regulus. Finally, he nodded.

“Great, pup. Now we get need to go downstairs and -”

Turais stopped as his Monitoring charm warned him that his parents were leaving the room. He was able to pull Regulus inside the bathroom and close the door before two sets of footsteps were heard on the stairs landing.

Turais’ heart pounded against his ribs as put his finger on his lips, motioning his brothers to stay silent. Quick change of plans.

“When I say run, run downstairs and out of the house to the park across the street, okay?” he hissed. “No turning back, no looking back, keep running. Just like tag, remember?” Turais has placed an emergency kit transfigured as a bird-feeder in a tree hole somewhere in the park when they last visited.

Turais slipped out of the bathroom to intercept his parents, standing at a location where he had his parents’ backs turned against the bathroom door. Turais saw the shadows of Regulus and Sirius’ feet through the space beneath the door. “Hey mother, hey father. Good morning! Can you come to my room for a second? I need to tell you something.”

“Turais, this can wait until later,” Walburga snapped. “We need to find Sirius first.”

“Why are you looking for Sirius this early in the morning? Is it for his trip to Hogwarts?”

“Yes, Turais. Why don’t you go back to bed first, Sirius and I will have a quick trip to see the castle and we will be back before you know it,” Orion said with an uncharacteristic edge as he sidestepped Turais and walked towards Sirius’s room. Walburga followed.

Turais walked in the opposite direction and waited until his parents entered Sirius’s room before whispering towards the bathroom door.

“Run!”

The bathroom door flew open as Sirius and Regulus darted out and clambered down the stairs. Turais sent two powerful Locking and Shield Charms towards Sirius’ bedroom as the door slammed shut and sealed itself, trapping the two adults in the room. Then, he took the rear as he ran down the stairs behind them… or they were until it suddenly turned into a wooden slide. Turais tumbled down and fell into a tangled pile with Sirius and Regulus.

Quickly, Turais helped his brothers up. But a dozen ropes slithered out of nowhere as they made their way towards the brothers. Turais cast a strong Vanishing Spell as the ropes disintegrated but a second wave has started to come towards them again. Plates, dishes, and silverware also flew out of the kitchen towards them and aimed at their joints as though they were trying to stop them from leaving the house. Turais slashed, cut, and blasted against all the incoming projectiles. But he was slowly overwhelmed as the relentless waves of attack rolled onwards.

They managed to get half-way down the hallway on the ground floor when Regulus tripped and fell, courtesy of a well-placed Tripping Jinx and Immobilizing Spell from Orion, above.

‘How did Orion get out of the room?!’

Ropes and kitchenware continued to appear out of seemingly nowhere as Turais deflected
their increasingly insurmountable attacks. Turais helped Regulus up while performing a Shield charm around them. He slashed at and severed the incoming ropes while deflecting various forks and spoons. But in the distraction, a renewed attack of ropes managed to sneak past his defenses and wrapped around his ankles and his right wrist unyieldingly, imprisoning him to the walls of the house.

It was as though the house was stopping them from leaving…

Turais' eyes widened in recognition. It was the Black family house defense, an ancient type of magic commonly found in ancestral houses which can only be activated by its owner - in this case, Orion. Orion had escaped from the room and turned the house magic against them according to his will. Fearing he would not be able to leave with Sirius, Turais simply shouted at Sirius.

“Run!”

Sirius turned frantically and fumbled with the locks on the front door, which magically scrambled themselves at his futile attempts. Turais was about to unlock it for him when he felt a spell crack through his shield and slammed into his back as his limbs snapped by his sides and his jaw clamped up.

‘Petrificus totalus.’

He fell like a slab of cement onto the floor and saw Orion leap over his spellbound body towards Sirius at whom he cast an Incarcerous. Orion then proceeded to open the front door and physically dragged Sirius out. He watched helplessly as he saw the look of horror on Sirius’ face before he disappeared in a loud crack.

Walburga stepped into his view and tisked as she trained her wand on Regulus. Regulus froze in horror at the wand that was pointed at his forehead as he trembled and shook violently.

“Well, it was a good try, Turais, but no one can fight against the Black house defense - especially against its masters. It will be best to forget your former brother ever existed, but such an enormous memory charm will not be feasible. Therefore, I will have to settle with deleting your memories from today instead,” Walburga said calmly, “Forget, my child. Obliviate.”

Turais saw his brother fall limp at the spell. Calling upon his magic, he willed the counterspell for the Full Body-Bind Curse and immediately felt his limbs unbind. Knowing the immense danger of a misplaced Memory Charm, Turais waited until the faint blue glow around Regulus disappeared as his mother lifted the charm before he struck. He directed his flow of magic towards her mother, blasting her off her feet and into the wall. She fell limply on the floor, rendered unconscious. Turais added a Sleeping Hex on her for extra precaution before dashing out the open door onto the front steps of the house. Checking the Tracking charm he placed on Sirius, he recognized the location and quickly visualized it as he Disapparated.

‘Hang on, Sirius.’

A second crack sounded throughout the neighbourhood.
The storytelling scene is inspired by:

Tsume Yuki's "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" - Chapter 2: A Tale of Three Brothers.

**

Feel free to send me your thoughts and speculations! This is my longest chapter yet - 6.8k+ words! I hope it was not too exhausting for you all.

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-14
Sacrifice

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone,

Hope you had a great week. Mine was crazy and hectic... I will be busy over the weekend so I decided to post the chapter one day earlier than usual. Happy reading and commenting!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-20

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 8

SACRIFICE

November 23, 1966 (Monday)

Driver arrested after mother and son die in Essex car crash

* Twin brother in car miraculously survives unscathed

A 35-year-old woman and her 7-year-old son have died after a truck driver crashed into a family car in Essex. The 22-year-old truck driver was arrested at the scene of the crash in Loughton in the early hours of Sunday on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving, causing serious injury by dangerous driving and perverting the course of justice.

The man, from Loughton, was taken to hospital, where he is being treated for what are believed to be minor injuries.

Essex police appealed for people to come forward who may have witnessed the incident...

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November 4, 1966 (Friday)

Turais spun into the ground with a heavy thud, lifting up icy chunks of dirt and dew-wetted moss. Hidden in the treeline, he saw the once-vibrant interchanging rows of purple and green from
his memories were now a stretch of lifeless, monotonous brown with pale grey frost streaking intermittently across. The cloudy skies were slowly brightening as dawn was about to break.

In the foreground, he saw his father and his brother staring at each other a few meters from his position. Orion’s wand was pointed at Sirius in his clenched fist, which hung by his side. Sirius, on the other hand, was sitting on the ground, his pyjamas disheveled and stained with mud, but no longer bound.

“Father, I have one final question for you,” Sirius said calmly, resigned to his fate. It was a complete contrast from the horrified look he had when Turais last saw him.

“Speak,” Orion spoke tensely, struggling to contain his emotions.

“Do you still love me?”

“Always.”

They stood there in silence once more. Crows cawed in the distance.

“Father,” Sirius continued without waiting for a response. “Please tell Turais and Reggie I love them. Always.”

Turais saw his father’s fist shake violently as he opened his mouth.

‘No! I’ll save you this time, Sirius!’

In a daze, Turais emerged from the shadows and ran towards Sirius. His blank mind only focused on the sight of Sirius’ shocked face as he threw himself in between the two males. A second later, he felt a spell connected with his body as a large wave of magic swept through him.

Turais’ world turned dark.

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Turais felt his entire body trembling. Cold. Wet.

‘Is this what dying actually feels like?’

Then, he registered a pair of arms enveloping him around his arm. He felt a series of pulsating warm breaths on his right ear as he heard someone sniffling.

“Why are you so stupid, Turais? You’re dead because of me!” he heard a voice - Sirius - shaking with intense emotions.

“What do I do? You’re the one who takes care of Reggie and I. Wake up and tell me what to do! Tell me to stop crying like a baby! Wake up and make fun of me! Wake up… please… I beg you…”

Turais tried to motion that he can hear him, but his limbs felt like lead, his brain was fuzzy, and his mouth was numb. He wanted to tell Sirius that he was okay and that he really should stop crying like a baby. But he couldn’t. It felt like the time he was hit with four Stunning spell at the same time.
Turais did not know how long they stayed in that position for as he slipped in and out of consciousness, but he was lurched back into consciousness he heard a scream.

“Sirius! Turais! What happened?”

He heard Orion’s panicked shout. He felt a set of heavy footsteps running towards him.

“You killed him, father! You killed him! I trusted you. You were going to kill me!” Sirius shouted in return.

“No, that cannot be. The spell doesn’t do that! It doesn’t even work on him.” Turais felt two large hands patting around his body roughly. A finger settled below his nostrils as another two fingers pressed on his jugular. “He’s not dead, Sirius. Turais is alive.” He heard a faint Diagnostic charm cast on him.

“What? Then why is he not moving?” Sirius asked in disbelief.

“He is lucid, but in shock. Definitely not dead. We need to bring him to a Healer right now!”

After a moment, he heard Orion telling Sirius to grab his arm tightly as he felt a large hand squeezing his right hand. Then, a hook near his navel pulled at him into a disorienting spin as he once again lost consciousness.

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The golden rays of sunlight light streamed into the bedroom, warmly lighting up the bed and the waking occupant. The boy stirred slightly. He sensed the comfortable linen fabric surrounding him and the sound of his brother’s familiar, soft snoring.

Slowly, he cracked open his eyes and saw a ceiling painted in yellow with a modest lamp in the center of it. He shifted his eyes to his right and saw an open window where the sunlight entered the room. On the ledge, a funny-looking bird perched. It has a long, flat bill and white feathers. It looked similar to the ones he saw delivering post to Orion a few months ago. Turais looked to his left and saw a couch sitting opposite the window where a boy with messy, raven hair laid. A blanket pooled on the floor below.

Just as he was wondering where he was, the door creaked open as he saw a young man enter with a tray balancing on one hand. The man looked up and saw him. A smile formed as he turned back towards the hall and yelled, “Mr Black! Father! He’s awake!”

Seconds later, Orion and another man, the young man’s father, appeared beside him as they looked in. Orion looked relieved, his tired eyes regaining a bit of lustre. Turais took in his father’s wind-tossed hair, disheveled clothes, and exhausted demeanour. He has never seen his father in such a state. Even at home, he always looked immaculate without a stray hair out of place. Clearly, the incident has taken a toll on him.

The young man walked up to his bed and set down the tray on the dresser beside him. “Hi, I am Healer Carl Selwyn. You can call me Carl. This is my father, Lord Archibald Selwyn. And you are at Selwyn Cottage.”
Carl Selwyn? Is this the Carl Selwyn, Caelum’s father? Turais scanned his face, noting the strikingly similar shining jet black hair, warm brown eyes, and fair complexion. He looked similar to Caelum he knew - this must be his father...

“You were unconscious for about three hours, mainly due to magical exhaustion. Nothing to be concerned about. A good day’s rest and a cup of hot chocolate will get you up in no time,” Carl continued in his soothing voice. “Would you like to rest? Or would you like to talk to your father? He is quite worried.”

Turais glanced at Orion, who looked away and avoided his gaze.

“I am feeling much better. Thank you, Carl. I think I would like to talk to my father,” Turais flashed the Healer a tired, grateful smile.

With a slight nod, he walked over and muttered into his father’s ear before leaving the room with his father and closing the door behind them.

A pregnant silence filled the room with many unspoken words.

“Why?”

“I’m sorry -”

Both males started and eyed each other warily. Then once again, Orion hung his head in shame, his eyes refusing to meet Turais’s. Turais waited silently for his father to speak again. “I’m sorry, Turais, for what happened in the house and for what happened in Banstead. I have no right to ask for forgiveness, but please believe me when I say that I did not intend to hurt any of you.”

“Why?” Turais asked again, simply.

Walking towards the open window and staring out into the garden, Orion heaved a heavy sigh. “I had a few hours to think about what happened this morning. And from your actions, I believe you have gained knowledge of my plan. You were always such a bright boy -”

“Why did you try to kill Sirius?” Turais interrupted, uninterested with his father’s opinion of him. He has heard this speech many times over the years.


“Then what did you mean when you told mother that you wanted Sirius to disappear so that a squib will not shame us and sully our family name?” Turais asked angrily. He felt his frustration bubbling to the surface.

“What?” Orion frowned, then recognition appeared on his face. “Oh, so you overheard our conversation,” Orion spoke quickly as he saw his son opening his mouth to interrupt again, “Before you get angry, which you have every right to, please give me a chance to explain myself.”

“Quickly,” said Turais impatiently.

“Okay. So you probably have realized that your mother and I have quite different philosophies on raising children. We never really managed to see eye-to-eye on how to raise you.” Turais thought back to all the times that Orion indulged them with their disobedience or playfulness while Walburga frowned upon them, as though having fun was inappropriate for Black children. He gave a curt nod in agreement.
“And in Sirius’ case, your mother and I were very worried that Sirius will turn out to be a squib -”

“Wait, were? Why not anymore?” Turais interrupted again, genuinely interested in the answer.

“When you shielded Sirius from the spell, his magic reacted in defense and panic. He actually knocked me out cold for a few moments,” Orion had a hint of pride in his voice as his glance travelled to the slumbering boy in the side of the room. “But more on that later. Back to my story. We were worried that he will turn out to be non-magical. Your mother, growing up under grandfather Pollux, was adamant about the idea of family honour to the point of fanaticism. I disagreed, but I never voiced my disagreement for I knew there was no point.” His father’s voice was marred with resignation.

“So you are not a blood purist?” Turais asked, genuinely surprised.

“How do you know that term, Turais?” Orion frowned. “I made sure that nothing about blood purity was discussed under our roof.”

“Why is that?” asked Turais.

“For two reasons. First, your mother and I will never agree on this issue. So we both agreed that we will not discuss this topic in the house for it will end up in a shouting match every time. Second, I did not want your mother’s brand of ideology imposed on you,” Orion stated.

“But don’t you and mother agree that purebloods are superior to other humans and creatures?” Turais pressed on.

Another sigh.

“Turais, I will tell you what I believe. I believe that magical people are superior to Muggles and to other creatures, magical or not. I believe that purebloods are more magically powerful than half-bloods or mudbloods.” Before Turais can protest, Orion raised a hand to silence him. “But I do not agree with the sentiment that they should be cast out of our world. Believe it or not, Turais, our race is slowly dying out. There are fewer and fewer witches and wizards each year and not enough magical children born to replace them. If only purebloods remained, there just won’t be enough of us to sustain our society. Your grandfather, Arcturus, supports the same views.

“That being said, I do not believe in your grandfather Pollux’s view. His ideas are radical, extreme, wrong. Did you know that in fact, he was the one who pushed for the betrothal between your mother and I, even though we are very close in blood relation and that there were other eligible purebloods? Many have said that he did it to ensure his daughter will one day become Lady Black amongst other things, but I knew he did it because he lived under the belief that if two Blacks were to intermarry, the offspring would be the purest of blood and the most powerful. And I was in no position to refuse...” Orion gave Turais an appraising look, “I guess he was right on that score.”

His father turned to face the window again. “But nonetheless, I worried. Every waking moment during your mother’s pregnancies and after, I worried. I worried that you will turn out chronically ill, or magically stunted. Because I knew that if there was the slightest abnormality, your mother’s side of the family will force me to dispose of you without batting an eyelash. You cannot imagine the joy and happiness I felt when I saw the three of you grow up strong and healthy.”
A faint smile curled up on his lips at those memories.

“Alas, my worst nightmare was becoming true. Sirius was to be a squib. My fears were finally realized; it was just late by seven years. Ever since last year, your mother had pushed me into forcing the magic out of Sirius, but I refused. I will not deliberately place Sirius in harm’s way just to see if he is magical or not. I couldn't care less if all of you were non-magical. You are all my precious sons. My only wish is to see you all stay healthy, grow old, and have families of your own. That is all I ever wanted and all I will ever want - your safety and happiness.

“But I knew your mother’s side would never accept Sirius, not if he is non-magical. So I pretended to agree with your mother’s decision to kill Sirius. But secretly, I concocted a plan to ferry Sirius to safety. I searched through the family library, looked into the most potent blood magic… and finally, I found the solution.”

“What did you find?” asked Turais.

“Blood adoption,” Orion smiled at Turias sadly. “He would forget his life as a Black. He would no longer be a Black by blood, by magic, by name, nor by appearance. But at least my son will live, and with a little bit of luck, happily. This knowledge was hidden in the depths of the Black family library, which grandfather Pollux and your mother has no access to, for he will never be Lord Black and she is not yet Lady Black. So, now that I had a plan, I needed to find a family who was willing to take on another child, albeit non-magical. A family that was both close in acquaintance so I could visit without drawing attention but far enough so that Sirius’ new parentage would not be questioned.”

“The Selwyns,” Turais breathed and nodded appreciatively at the well thought-out plan. Currently, only he, Arcturus, and Orion had access to the library as the Lord and Heirs of the family. Even if the other Blacks were to suspect the appearance of a new Selwyn boy was somehow linked to Sirius’ supposed death, they would not be able to piece out the truth. In addition, Arcturus and Pollux’s dislike of each other was legendary amongst the Blacks, so it was certain that even if Arcturus realized what was happening, he would not reveal the scheme to Pollux’s side. It was almost a fool-proof plan.

“Yes, Turais. Although there is a scion of the Selwyns residing in Britain, the main Selwyn line has been living in Hong Kong for the past sixty years. The current Lord Selwyn, himself, was born in Hong Kong and has few contacts with the British Wizarding families. Therefore, I corresponded with him seeking an immense favour. By the blessing of Hecate, Lord Selwyn has recently retired from his post as Minister in Hong Kong and his sole heir, Carl, wished to pursue a career at St. Mungo’s. Therefore, they were already planning to return to Britain. Furthermore, Lady Selwyn has died a few summers ago, dashing his hopes to sire another child. But he did not wish to remarry. Hence, this presents the perfect solution to both conundrums.

“Lord Selwyn and I have been in correspondence all year long. And even though the letter was spelled for my eyes only in addition to being encrypted, I was not leaving anything to chance. Not when my son’s life is in question.”

‘That explains the mail that he has been receiving,’ Turais thought. He also realized that those tropical-looking birds were potentially the equivalent of owl post offered in Hong Kong.

“So, the spell you used…”

“It was the first step in the ritual. ‘A son cruelly abandoned, at the site he once most loved. There a father’s spell doth cast, in severance of bond that everlast.’ Those were the first lines of instruction.”
So that was the reason why Orion Disapparated them to Banstead. And there he was thinking that Orion did it for the theatrics - how terribly poetic it was to kill a son in the place filled with his fondest memories.

Another realization hit Turais. ‘That's also why the spell didn’t work, because it was specific to the individuals.’ Banstead was indeed a wonderful spot, but Turais could think of many places he loved more than that. Hogwarts, for example.

His father walked towards him and sat on the bed as he slowly extended his hand towards Turais, giving him plenty of time to shrink away from his touch. But Turais didn’t resist as he felt his anger melted away as Orion clasped Turais’ hand. A moment later, he asked softly, “These rituals are highly dangerous, so I am glad all of us escaped unharmed. So, do you forgive me, Turais?”

“There is nothing to forgive, father. You did your best to protect us. I should apologize for lashing out at you. I’m sorry, father,” Turais apologized sincerely.

“I will not accept your apology if you won’t accept mine, son.”

“Fine, apology accepted,” Turais rolled his eyes, but grinned weakly at his father.

“Apology accepted as well,” Orion smiled softly back. “But that was very brave of you, Turais, what you did back there. You thought I was going to kill Sirius but you still jumped in front of him.”

“Father, just like you, I will protect Siri and Reggie with my dying breath,” Turais said fiercely.

Orion nodded.

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“Should we place a False Memory Charm on mother to convince her that Sirius has shown his magic?” Turais asked his father as he kicked a small pebble into the pond where a few tropical birds floated lazily. Lord Selwyn told Turais that they were Black-faced spoonbills and are native in Southeast Asia.

“No, your mother has mastered Occlumency, which protects her thoughts and memories from any attack even when she is unconscious or asleep. We won’t be able to alter her memories. I would have done it a long time ago if it was possible,” Orion said.

They were walking along a trail that circled the small pond behind Selwyn Cottage. Orion revealed that he had returned to 12 Grimmauld Place while Turais was unconscious to check on Regulus and his wife. He found Walburga asleep under the Sleeping Hex Turais cast. Regulus was also asleep, likely recuperating from being under a False Memory Charm. Orion placed him under a Healing Trance to ensure that he is rested and not to awaken until they return. Now, they were discussing about how to take their next steps.

“Does Occlumency protect her from the removal of memory?”

“I don’t believe so,” Orion frowned and thought about it for a moment. “If organized
properly, thoughts and memories are just compartments in the mind while Occlumency provides the metal shields that surround each compartment. The removal of memories will just be removing the compartment along with the metal encasing. But the issue becomes this. How do I identify which compartment to remove without observing its content?"

"Find the least connected and least compact compartment."

The more recent the memories were formed, the less time it has to connect with other memories and to condense; hence, they tend to be more loosely unravelled. Especially given that mother was unconscious ever since, her mind would not have had a chance to process her memories yet.

"And why would you know that, Turais?"

"I read it from the library," Turais lied smoothly. "There was a book on Memory Charms and the functions of the mind."

Turais remembered when he worked alongside the Obliviators and learnt how they determined which memories to delete and which ones to alter. They showed him how long-term memories were tightly coiled and hidden deep within the mind to preserve mental capacity, only surfacing and unraveling when summoned. Short-term and recent memories floated freely at the surface and were loosely bundled together and more dynamic as information was rapidly gained and lost; hence, easier to be manipulated and altered.

"So that solves the first problem, which leads to our second problem. What will our cover story be? Should I tell her when she wakes that Sirius’ magic manifested in self-defense and knocked us both out cold for a few hours due to the magic backlash?"

"That will work. But she will need to witness Sirius’ magic before she will be satisfied," Turais commented. Orion sighed.

"That was what I struggled to solve for the past months. I was unwilling to force Sirius to perform magic. This plan will hinge on Sirius being able to perform some magic in front of her. But I worry he won’t be able to, especially not after today’s traumatic events. Then again, since he has felt the magic within him, I think it would be easier for him to draw from it. But I will have to confirm with Sirius when we head back," Orion said as they fell into a comfortable silence. Then Orion spoke again, "I also wonder if I should Obliviate Sirius to spare him the emotional upheaval from today. But then, I worry that he will not be able to perform magic without his memory of being able to do it the first time."

"I don’t think you should wipe his memory. He should know about his mother’s cruelty, especially when he is the innocent victim of all our action...” Turais pointed out. This happened because of Walburga’s unworldly cruelty, Orion’s cowardice, and Turais’ misguided inaction - they were all responsible. “As for Regulus... is it safe to perform a Reverse Memory Charm on him...”

"I’ll ask Sirius if he wants his memory removed, but I can’t perform the Reverse Memory Charm on Regulus,” Orion interrupted fiercely. “He’s too young and his brain is not fully developed yet. It is unwise to place him under a Memory Charm to begin with, let alone another one to reverse it hours later. I can’t risk any more damage to him that what she has already done.”

Turais acknowledged the challenge silently. It was then followed by a lull in the conversation as they silent watched the spoonbills waddle across the still waters.
“Did you know he was really convinced that he was a squib?” Turais spoke up after a while. “That’s why we were up in the bathroom. Sirius was crying because he thought he was getting disowned and abandoned.”

“I know,” Orion said solemnly, “I questioned Sirius when he seemed so calm about the entire situation. I guess I have severely underestimated how perceptive children are.”

Turais couldn’t agree more.

"For the record, I understand your intentions now. But I still don't agree with how you decided to pull the rug over every one's eyes instead of standing up to mother," Turais said delicately.

Despite Turais' tight control over his tone to not sound scolding, Orion still flinched at the words.

"I'm sorry I'm not strong enough to stand up against your mother's side of the family," said Orion weakly, avoiding his gaze. "I guess I'm sorry for many things -" 

"Father," Turais interrupted before Orion became maudlin and sorrowful, "Everything is fine now. Let's look forward and prevent this from occurring ever again."

Orion nodded and Turais started to turn and walk back when Orion reached out to grab his arm.

“Turais, just before we head back. I would like to ask how to came to obtain all your knowledge. I have always found your maturity and wisdom to be way beyond your years. Did you know that?”

“I do not know, father. Perhaps this is magic’s way of keeping me in control of my powers,” Turais offered, silently scolding himself for not sounding like an eight-year-old.

“Perhaps. I’ve also come to learn that the world works in mysterious ways.” Orion’s expression turned somber and said quietly, “You make me a proud father, Turais, but I hope I make you proud too.”

Turais remained quiet for a long moment, pondering on the question. Despite everything that has happened and his disapproval of Orion's subterfuge, he found that he already had his answer.

“Father,” Turais said softly, “You do.”

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“Hey Siri, how are you feeling?” Turais asked Sirius, who has just woken up from his well-deserved rest.

“M’kay,” Sirius muttered groggily as he rubbed his puffy eyes. “Are you okay? You died .”

“No, I did not die. Didn’t father explain to you what has happened? I was just very tired, so tired that I could not move at all,” Turais said calmly. “Anyways, you can do magic! How amazing is that? You can go to Hogwarts like you always wanted.”
Instead of cheering up, Sirius continued to look dejected. “Turais, I’m getting disowned by father, I -”

“Hey, Siri. You’re not getting disowned -”

“But father doesn’t want me -”

“No, Siri. Father loves you very much. He did it to protect you. Because living without being able to do magic is dangerous. Do you remember Uncle Alphard and his pranks with fire? If you cannot do magic, you cannot protect yourself.” Turais lied a little to simplify the events and make it more understandable for a seven-year-old.

“So, does that mean I will be going home with you then? Will I get to see Reggie again?” Sirius looked decidedly more excited at the thought of returning home.

“Yes you will,” Turais tried to calm Sirius, who was jumping up and down on the couch and shouting happily. “But. But, you will need to show mother that you can do magic when you see her. Can you do that?”

Sirius paled at the mention of his mother. Turais doesn’t blame him for he too was a bit traumatized to learn how cruel she was, first-hand.

“I think so?”

“Siri, this is very important. Mother must see you perform some magic, any magic. Or else, we will be in big trouble and we don’t want that.”

Sirius nodded.

“So… do you remember how you felt when you wanted to protect me?”

“Yes.”

“What did you feel?”

“Something warm in here.” Sirius pointed at his sternum.

“Great, Siri! What you felt was your magical core. The place where your magic comes from.” Turais proceeded to pull out a feather quill that Lord Selwyn kindly provided. “Siri, can you direct that warmth in your body and lift this quill up without touching it?”

“I’ll try,” Sirius spoke softly, eyeing the feather quill apprehensively as though it would pounce on him at any time.

“Relax and take your time. I know you can do it. Just think very hard that you want to lift the quill,” Turais said encouragingly as he placed the quill on the armrest of the couch.

Sirius stared intently at the quill and scrunched his face up in concentration. His entire body tensed as his hands grabbed the hem of his shirt and twisted. After a few moments, he realized that the quill was not moving at all. His face slowly morphed into a look of disappointment until he heard Turais’s laughter and turned to look down at his delighted smile.

Hearing the commotion, Orion entered the room to the sight of Sirius sitting on a couch that was hovering halfway up the wall above Turais’s head.

“Father, I am floating! I can do magic!”
Orion felt a strong tug in his heart. “I see you, son. I see you.”

***

After thanking the Selwyns profusely for their help and hospitality, they returned to their home. Frankly, Turais felt a bit strange to roam the eerily silent halls that they were trying so desperately to escape from mere hours ago. It was also peculiar to see the step where he spent one night eavesdropping in shock and depression with his father beside him. Orion, sensing his eldest son’s distress, wrapped his right arm around him and gave him a gentle rub.

Turais leaned into his side, gaining comfort that his love in his father was not misplaced. While his father confessed to believing in pureblood supremacy, he was relatively moderate in his views. Most important of all, however, was that he was a loving and self-sacrificing father. Although the fact that he was willing to push away Sirius instead of confronting Walburga was a huge red flag for Turais, he could just forgive him for his good intentions. Although he swore he would keep an eye on his father from now on and take on the responsibility of protecting Sirius more fully.

Turais thought back on all the fond memories he shared with his father and was glad that all of them were genuine and real. Based on this fact alone, Turais could forgive his father’s views, as it was just an unquestioned part in his father’s upbringing. He could work on changing that in the future.

However, he certainly felt no love lost for his mother. The relationship between her and her sons was tenuous at best. And in light of recent events, her only redeeming quality as a providing mother has all but disappeared.

“I will never forgive her, you know that right?” Turais spoke quietly.

“I don’t expect you to. Turais, I will be frank with you. We had a loveless marriage since the beginning, but I cared for her as a bedmate and a fellow cousin who also suffered from an arranged marriage. However, the first time she thought of casting Sirius away was when any affection I had for her withered away. But for Sirius and Regulus’ sake, I will endure. And I hope you will as well.”

“Don’t worry, father. I will. But if anything -”

“If anything happens, both you and I will protect them. You have my word, Turais,” Orion said solemnly as Orion squeezed his shoulder tightly.

***

Everything went according to plan. Orion successfully removed the memories of this morning from Walburga’s mind and when he revived her, he told her the pre-established story. As anticipated, she immediately demanded Sirius to demonstrate his magic, who leapt at the opportunity to explode all the mounted house elf heads that lined the stairs. Walburga narrowed her eyes but said nothing, silently acknowledging that Sirius could remain. Kreacher, however, wailed
at the sight of destruction when summoned and glared viciously behind Sirius’ back ever since.

Regulus woke up with no recollection of that morning’s events as his memories were removed by his mother. Orion decided to provide a watered-down version of what happened and removing the “killing Sirius” bit of the story because Regulus wouldn’t understand what that meant at his age.

“So mother tried to make Sirius leave because he can’t do magic... and he is staying now because he can do magic?” Regulus repeated.

“Yes, that’s right!” Orion said as he ruffled the hair of his youngest.

“Well, that’s unkind... although Siri always steals all my sugar mice and makes me sad, I don’t want him to leave...”

Turais was torn between telling Regulus the entire truth or keeping his mouth shut. He ultimately chose to compromise and made a promise to himself that he would tell him the full story when he was older.

Sirius, however, was adamant that he wanted to keep his memories intact, for it was “the most exciting day of his life”. Orion eyed him worriedly and Turais could only snicker internally. He wondered if some things will always remain constant across all timelines despite everything else changing.

On the same note, Turais feared that his presence has already fundamentally altered some things beyond his control. While his presence as a shield for Sirius and Regulus against Walburga’s influence was ultimately a positive thing, this event showed that Sirius’ accidental magic presentation might have been suppressed due to all the magic he had done near him - he might have been the culprit who inadvertently placed Sirius in a serious situation. He was only lucky enough to discover the plot and salvage it.

As unwilling to admit the truth as he was, he knew that he has overestimated his abilities to protect his brothers. He couldn’t even keep them away from the house’s defence, which he was blindsided by... it was so stupid of him to leave the escape plan so late in hindsight. But maybe a part of him was secretly in denial all along... Turais was just glad his trust was not misplaced in this case.

But still, Turais felt so uncertain of the future once again.

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December 25, 1966 (Sunday)

‘Avis. Oppugno paulo.’

Three yellow birds appeared and fluttered gently as it chased a delightedly screaming Regulus around the Christmas tree. It was Regulus’ first time at the Black family Christmas gathering despite being five years old. Regulus was magically-sensitive, as the family has discovered last Christmas when he suffered from a magical backlash and fainted when Pollux Black’s family, including the three Black sisters, arrived. After progressively introducing him to all the Black family members through planned family visits, he was allowed to stay for the party this
Bellatrix continued the holiday tradition to single out and torment Sirius, who could now protect himself somewhat by sending electrical shocks at her whenever she touched him. Orion, realizing that Turais was uncomfortable being demanded to showcase his magic after mentioning it to him once, refused any requests fielded from the family members. But in return, he occasionally performed magic to entertain his brothers and to quell any rumours that might distress Orion.

After the entire ordeal, the father and son duo, and Sirius to an extent, were more transparent and trusting of each other than ever before. Sirius, who was never really comfortable in his own skin due to his internalized fear of being disowned, grew in confidence and became visibly more comfortable around his family, especially around Orion and Turais. But that also caused Sirius to want to be around them every waking moment, much to their exasperation.

Wondering where Orion went and wanting to get away from Sirius for a moment, Turais distracted his brother with the help of his dog Patronus, Padfoot, and escaped to search the Black Manor. He was walking down a darkened hallway when he heard Arcturus and his father in a discussion. Turais peeked through the door and saw them lounging near the fireplace in the study. On the opposite corner of the room was a door that connects to the main ballroom where the party was.

“Son, you cannot continue to keep Turais away from Ministry balls and other party invitations, lest someone starts to spread unfavourable rumours. As the old saying goes, there are only so many times one can be taken ill with Spattergroit before others diagnose it as Obscurus,” Arcturus scolded his son, “In fact, I have already accepted the invitation for the upcoming Malfoy Ball on his behalf.”

Every year, the Ministry Ball on Halloween, the Malfoy Ball during Easter break, and the Black Ball on Winter Solstice were the three most prestigious and important balls in the Wizarding community. All the most important figures and politicians were in attendance. Turais has been actively avoided them because he hated socializing, but it seemed as though his period of hiding was over.

“What?” Orion spluttered. “Father, Turais -”

“- is the pride of the family and he has nothing to hide. Abraxas Malfoy has been making moves in the Ministry recently and I will not allow his power grab to continue anymore. I need the others to see the future Lord Black as a powerful, worthy leader, especially in such troubling times when leadership is weak and even rebel groups are jostling for power,” Arcturus said sternly, not allowing any concessions. “It wouldn’t be so if you were more competent.”

An icy silence befell the duo that the cackling hearth nearby could not thaw.

At his son’s silence, he continued unperturbedly, “I have been receiving news that a group who called themselves the Knights of Walpurgis has been amassing followers. While I have no love for the current Ministry, if my sources are correct, this cult, friend or foe, is becoming too powerful for my liking. They will soon threaten our standing and we must present a worthy fourth option in the Blacks, apart from the Malfoy-backed coalition, muggle-loving Dumbledore, and this band of hooligans.”

So Voldemort has still been recruiting people in the name of Knights of Walpurgis at this point in time. The Death Eaters were still an unknown group of Voldemort’s elites hidden from the public.
“I understand, father -”

“I don’t need your understanding,” Arcturus said dismissively. “What I need is your cooperation. Without Turais, our influence will be slowly snuffled out until we are forced to align with one of those three options. We have lost enough time because of you. We must seize this last opportunity and we cannot allow our power to slip any further.”

“Hear, hear. Lord Black has finally decided to do the sensible thing and uphold the family prestige,” Pollux remarked snidely as he entered the room from the other door, “Arcturus.”

Pollux didn’t acknowledge Orion’s presence as he settled into his chair.

“Pollux,” Arcturus said with a subtle hint of disgust, “Congratulations on the courtship between your eldest granddaughter and the Lestrange boy. I look forward to the wedding invitations once she graduates. But, as I was just telling my son, Turais will be attending the Malfoy Ball come March and that I would gladly relay the interesting tales from the event to you afterwards.”

Arcturus smirked as Pollux tightened his grip on his glass. Pollux cleared his throat before continuing. “That won’t be necessary. And also, you mean our grandson, Arcturus. I keep having to remind you, but I cannot fault you for your old age.”

Arcturus scowled as Pollux continued. “I’ve gathered news that Lord Selwyn and his heir has returned to Britain and will be making their first official social appearance at the Ball.”

“Indeed, I heard from Yaxley that Heir Selwyn is applying for a position at St. Mungo’s,” Arcturus added, “A noble profession.”

“A job unbefitting for an heir from such an old family. What a disappointment for the supposed proud return of the Selwyns,” Pollux sneered, his voice filled with contempt, “I wonder if his heir is even pure-blooded.”

“Don’t get too excited now, Pollux. Lord Selwyn married the youngest sister of the late Lord Greengrass, Carina Greengrass. She travelled to Hong Kong for her holiday and never returned. It was quite the scandal if you recall, unless you are succumbing to your old age,” Arcturus returned, “But my biggest concern is whether Lord Selwyn will align with us or with Dumbledore. The vote for Chief Warlock is this summer and his presence will only serve to muddy the water.”

“He is already Chief Mugwump and the Head of Hogwarts. His election as Chief Warlock will give him too much power. This will mark the end of the Wizarding World and I feel like as the Head of our family, you’re not doing enough to stop this madness,” Pollux accused.

“What are you suggesting, Pollux? I am already funneling gold towards MacMillan’s campaign.”

“We both know MacMillan doesn’t stand a chance against Dumbledore, not in this political climate. What we need is meaningful change outside the Ministry.” Pollux spoke in a low hiss. “Rosier recently told me that his eldest boy, Emery, has joined a group called the Knights of Walpurgis. Their leader, Lord Voldemort, as he calls himself, wants to re-establish pureblood dominance. A noble goal worthy of our support.” Pollux interpreted Arcturus’s raised eyebrows as a look of surprise and smiled gleefully.

“And you have met with this, Lord Voldemort?” Arcturus inquired, intrigued.

“Indeed,” Pollux spoke, enthused. “He was a handsome, charming, and humble young man
in his late thirties, from what I can tell. He commented on his worries about the future of the world being ransacked by mudbloods and Muggles and spoke to me of his lofty goals to reform the wizarding world and to honour the pureblood and Magical traditions. In addition, he made it plenty clear that he was strongly opposed to Dumbledore’s meddling.”

“If he is in his late thirties, he should have still been in Hogwarts when you were studying there, son. Have you heard of this person?” Arcturus turned to his son.

“No, I do not believe I have heard that name before, father. Father Pollux, did this Lord Voldemort disclose who else was in his cause?” Orion asked.

“I remember he mentioned he was closest friends with the Averys, Lestranges, Mulcibers, and the Notts with whom he went to school with. But he most wished to seek the alliance of Blacks.” Pollux stated proudly.

“Of course he’d say that, we Blacks are the most influential Wizarding family in Britain. I was surprised that he did not seek out our support sooner,” Arcturus sniffed. “If he approaches you again, please send him my regards and sympathy towards his cause. However, I would like to see how this election will play out before advancing.”

“If you wish, I can put you in contact with him directly,” Pollux suggested.

“It will not be necessary at this point, Pollux. All in due time.”

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January 27, 1967 (Friday)

“What do you think of the Knights of Walpurgis?” Turais asked his father.

Orion hesitated for a moment before speaking. “I would not even ask how you know about them, Turais. But I have been in contact with a couple of acquaintances who are associated with the group and from what I’ve gathered, they are supportive of initiating the necessary chances to return the Wizarding World back to its proper roots. I fear that the Ministry has strayed too far from its root and turned its back on tradition and culture that are quintessential to our existence.”

“What if they resorted to violence and murder to achieve their goal? Will that change your mind?” asked Turais.

Orion fell silent as he pondered the difficult question posed by his son. In the end, he simply said, “I believe in necessary sacrifices for the greater good.”

Turais thought that statement on its own was perfectly acceptable. But where did one draw the line and at what cost? Turais didn’t think there was an easy answer to that question. He also silently reminded himself that currently, Voldemort and the Death Eaters were not instigating violence and crimes yet. So at this point, there was no plausible reason for Orion to not believe in them as his views perfectly aligned with theirs.

“What does grandfather Arcturus think?” he asked.

“Your grandfather is a shrewd man, Turais, as he should be in order to stay in the top circles
of society. He has allegiance to no one but to his family. I believe he agrees, in principle, with the goals of this group. However, the obscurity of their leader displeases him. And he will not, like everything he is affiliated with, commit to a single cause unless he is out of options. That’s why you are going to the Malfoy Ball in March. All of the influential officials and Lords will be in attendance and your grandfather would like to showcase you and your powers to the world. If successful, he can hold off from placing his bets because he has you. I’m sorry I cannot shield you from this commitment.”

“I know you’ve tried, father. I also understand that grandfather would rather others to rally around a Black than the Blacks rallying around anyone else, especially not Malfoy or Dumbledore or some unknown variable,” Turais sighed.

“Again, I don’t know where you have heard all this, Turais. But you are correct,” said Orion.

“Father, will you join them, the Knights?” asked Turais.

“Your grandfather will not allow me even if I wanted to, Turais. But no, I have no intention to join them as of now. These are turbulent times and I will not allow myself to make the wrong choice by aligning myself with the losing side and endangering my family.”

“Thank you, father. I just worry,” Turais said, appeased for now.

“Me too, son. But please believe me when I say you three are the most important in my life.”

Chapter End Notes

What did you think of the resolution?! I hope it was to your satisfaction (I was satisfied :). And also, next chapter - Chapter 9: Battlelines Drawn, will be an exciting one and posted in one week's time. What will happen at the March Malfoy Ball? Shh... to those of you who knows the correct answer ;)

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-20
Hey everybody,

Enjoy the chapter!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-23

⚠️ Warning: Mentions of child abuse. Please be advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER 9

BATTELINES DRAWN

August 29, 1966 (Monday)

AUSTRALIA WINS 415TH QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

by A. Carnierus, Quidditch Correspondent

Royston Idlewind Ends Chaser Career with Top Trophy

After an exhilarating final against the evenly-matched Syrian National Quidditch Team yesterday, captain and star Chaser Royston Idlewind was able to lead the Australian team to victory. In addition to his superb goal scoring that amounted to more than half the total goals scored in that match, he was able to force the other team to commit technical fouls against him...

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February 21, 1967 (Tuesday)
The Malfoy Ball was in two weeks and Turais was at a loss for what to do.

Ever since Christmas, Walburga has been jumping at every opportunity to preach about pureblood supremacy and Voldemort’s noble goals to them whenever Orion was out conducting business and the tutors left. Turais suspected it was Pollux’s idea. And everytime Walburga finished her lectures, Turais immediately dragged his brothers up into his room and try to undo the damage, calling for his brothers to be open-minded and not accepting everything at face value. While Sirius was clearly not taken by her words (he has been cold towards her ever since the incident on his seventh birthday last year) and was firmly entrenched in Turais’ side, Turais could see that Regulus was torn between believing his eldest brother or his mother.

Turais has mentioned Walburga’s actions to Orion and he has since heard several arguments that culminated into actual fights with Orion storming away from the house. However, with his father spending an increasing amount of time outside the house, Walburga had plenty more opportunities to continue to corner them while ignoring her husband’s wrath.

Therefore, the ball was the perfect opportunity to display his hidden Parseltongue skill. By broadcasting his ability so publicly, it would strengthen his hand against his mother when he bargained with her. He could threaten to leave the family, which would lead the family to fall in disgrace if anyone knew that they parted with a Parselmouth heir, in exchange for her compliance on many issues. At the same time, he could discourage those who were undecided on whether to join Voldemort or not by presenting himself as a worthy leader in a tradition, pureblood heir as opposed to an enigma. Arcturus would also have a strengthened hand with a Parselmouth Heir and decreased incentive for him to join Voldemort’s cause, indirectly protecting Sirius and Regulus from his influence.

However, he also feared that the news of his ability would reach Voldemort’s ears and instantly make him a target. Turais did not want that to happen for he wished to stay under the radar and focus on finding out who Prometheus was while waiting for the right time to strike against Voldemort once the Horcruxes were at their rightful places.

Death, once again, was silent on the matter. So an important decision laid in his hands, and he would have to deal with the consequences.

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March 19, 1967 (Sunday)

The day of the Malfoy Ball has arrived. For the first time since he could remember, Turais was going to a public social event without his brothers since they were born. At the crack of dawn, Kreacher woke him up by banging a soup ladle on a metal pot right beside his ear. Turais thought the house elf was rather fond of him considering he would’ve poured a bucket of icy water on him if he was Sirius.

Sleepily, Turais did not remember much about what happened in the next couple of hours. He felt hands, items, and spells touching almost every part of his body constantly and when it finally stopped, he suddenly found himself in front of mirror dressed in a set of smartly cut wizarding robes with impeccable hair. Green lines traced the hems of his otherwise pure black
robes, which accented his eyes very well. Then, the next second, he was quickly shuffled out of his room and into the living room where a coat-hanger stood. A label flashing the words “Port-on-call, departing in one minute from 12 Grimmauld Place to Malfoy Manor” was stuck sideways along the length of the stand. His parents directed him to grab onto the coat-hanger and after a few seconds standing awkwardly in dead silence, the family was Portkey-ed away.

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Turais spun and flailed his arms trying to remain standing. Orion grabbed his robe to steady him, amused, while Walburga scowled at his undignified manners. He looked up sheepishly. Fortunately, he was saved from a dressing down by his mother as Lucius Malfoy approached.

Turais never imagined what Lucius would look like as a child and yet here he was, a thirteen-year-old boy, walking towards him. He had beautiful straight, long blonde hair that grew past his shoulders and a perfect yet impersonal smile - a picture-perfect example of a properly groomed pureblood heir.

“Heirs Black and mistress Black. Welcome to Malfoy Manor. Please excuse my father, as he is currently attending to the arrival of Lord Black,” he spoke as they left the arrival chamber and stepped into the entrance hallway. Turais noted that there was a significant gathering of guests milling in the ballroom beyond the hallway.

“Thank you, Heir Malfoy. How is Hogwarts treating you?” Turais heard Orion initiate a polite conversation with Lucius.

Uninterested with the dialogue, he let his eyes wander around the magnificent halls accented exquisitely with various items. Artworks, a combination of marble sculptures and paintings of Greek gods, lined the grey-carpeted hallway. Gathered knots of flowers, all of which are pale white - lilies, magnolia, and pincushions - appeared on every marble column while wisteria streamed elegantly from the arches above.

As he was marvelling at the tasteful decorations that lined sumptuously over most surfaces, he passed by a group and caught glimpses of a conversation that perked his interest, more specifically, one of the boys. Turais edged closer to his target, pretending to be casually wandering.

“Why is that mudblood Minister here?” He turned towards the voice and saw a group of teenagers huddled together. A girl was glaring viciously at the Minister’s direction.

‘Perfect.’

Eyeing his parents who were now engrossed in a conversation with some other Lords, Turais quietly slipped away from his parents and approached the group.

“Because he’s the bloody Minister for Magic, Violet,” the boy beside her hissed.

“I know that, Brutus, but he shouldn’t be. My father has been saying for years that Dumbledore will ruin the Wizarding world and now look, a mudblood that he supports has finally come to defile our party. I don’t understand why Lord Malfoy invited him.”

“So he can poison his food and kill him?” a third, shorter boy said hopefully.
“No!Obviously Lord Malfoy is trying to cosy up with the Minister! All the high-ranking ministry officials are here, just look around you,” the girl called Violet scanned the room and caught Turais looking back at her. “Who are you, child, and why are you eavesdropping?”

“Hello, I am Turais Black, Heir Presumptive of the House of Black. And you are?” Turais said calmly, extending his hand.

She took his hand.

“Oh, so you are the mysterious Heir Black that everyone is talking about. My name is Violet Travers and these are my friends, Brutus Nott, Cepheus Yaxley, and Pertinax Avery.”

“Pleasure to meet you all,” Turais said, “So, are you all studying at Hogwarts?”

“Yes, Nott is a third-year while the rest of us are sixth-years. But my father is considering to transfer me to Durmstrang instead of studying under Muggle-loving Dumbledore but I don’t want to because it will ruin my NEWT studies,” Yaxley said.

“I see. So you are all studying magic then?” Turais asked.

“Of course!” Nott exclaimed, affronted.

“Show me,” demanded Turais.

“No, not right now. We’re not supposed to, the trace -” Nott said.

“The trace on your wands won’t work with so many wizards and witches around.” Turais gestured at the crowd, then goaded him. “Or is it just because you can’t? Because I can. Avis.” His wiggled his finger and a flock of yellow birds appeared above his head and flew out the window. He looked back down at Nott and smirked.

“Really now, Black. That spell is simple. We learnt that in second year. Watch this!” Nott pulled out his wand from his robe.

"Brutus, stop!" Yaxley hissed, "There's -"

Nott ignored him and wordlessly conjured up a dog. It yipped as it appeared mid-air and landed on the floor. Nott looked at him smugly.

"Idiot!" Yaxley exclaimed as he watched the calamity unfold before his eyes, but fortunately Nott was too engrossed in showing-off to notice his warning. Turais was pleased that the rumours of Nott being as bright as a packet of Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder was accurate.

“Watch this,” Turais smirked as he transfigured the dog when it was in the air, mid-jump, into a silver dagger. And then, before the dagger fell to the ground, he transformed it into a badger. Frightened by the people and noise, it proceeded to curl up into a furry ball. Turais proceeded to vanish it. Both spells were fourth year Transfiguration Spells.

“Really? A badger?” Nott asked, unimpressed. Turais saw the adults around them looking at their group, amused at the magic display.

“Yes, to represent you and your house, Nott. From what I saw, you’re clearly a Hufflepuff - all work, no achievement,” Turais spited him and stoked his anger. He sent a silent apology to all the Hufflepuffs he knew.
‘Please conjure a snake. Please conjure a snake.’

“You little bastard, I’ll show you what true Slytherin house pride looks like. Serpentoria!” A large green garden snake fell to the ground.

‘Thanks, Nott. Just what I needed.’

“Brutus! What are you doing? Why are you conjuring up a snake -?” An old man bellowed as he made his way through the group towards them.

‘Too many people. Needs... to hide,’ Turais heard the snake hiss as it searched for an exit.

“Hey, don’t leave yet!” Turais hissed at the snake as it turned away from the group. The snake snapped its head around and looked up at Turais. Turais heard the sudden silence that filled the space, but he ignored it. Satisfied with how the scenario played out, he knelt down and continued. “Hi, my name is Turais... What is... your name?”

“You s...peak?” The group gasped as they saw the snake slither right up to Turais’s face but did not attack.

“Yes, I s...peak. S...orry for bringing you here right into the middle of a huge crowd.”

“No worries..., human. I am honoured to meet a human s...peaker. But can I hide in your robes...? The floor is... too cold.”

“S...ure.”

With his verbal permission, Turais felt the snake crawl around his feet and wound his way up under his robe and finally draped around his shoulders.

“What is happening here?”

Suddenly, a middle-aged man with pure white hair and icy blue eyes appeared with Turais’s parents and his grandfather behind him. Turais and the snake turned and looked towards him.

“He… he talked to the snake, Lord Malfoy,” Nott spoke blisteringly.

“I’m sorry, my Lord. I was just asking them to show me some magic and he conjured up a snake. I heard it said it was too cold so I offered him my body heat,” Turais pointed his finger at Nott while managing the most innocent, puppy-eyes look that he could muster (learnt from Sirius) while stroking the snake softly. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to cause any trouble.”

Abraxas stared at him for a long moment, his lips thinning, before he snapped his attention towards Lord Nott and hissed. “Armand, can you please explain why your son would think it was a good idea to perform underaged magic in a room full of Ministry officials?”

Both Notts paled at the realization. “I do apologize for my son’s behaviour, Abraxas. Brutus, apologize at once!”

Nott glared at Turais, his face turning red as his hair in shame and humiliation. At his father’s stern gaze, he gave a deep bow and muttered through his gritted teeth, “I’m sorry, Lord Malfoy. Please excuse my unacceptable behaviour. I will reflect on my misdeeds.”

“See that you do, Heir Nott, or the next time you will not get off so easily,” Abraxas glared at the tipped head once more before disappearing back into the crowd.
“Are you in trouble, human?” The snake hissed in his ear.

“I don’t know.” He hissed back as he observed his family, rooted in their spots. Although they maintained a calm and controlled appearance, Turais knew from the look in their eyes that they were shocked in awe and, for his mother, in a rage.

“Maybe.” However, Turais was not concerned about his mother, but how his decision has affected the future, and most importantly, Voldemort’s plans.

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“How dare you not inform us of such a talent, you wicked child!” Walburga slammed the kitchen door at his brothers’ faces behind her.

Turais’ Parselmouth ability spread like wildfire during the Ball and was the sole topic of conversation for the night. Lord Malfoý was not pleased by how he got upstaged by an eight-year-old, especially the Black heir, at his own ball. After they returned home, his mother physically dragged him into the kitchen, ignoring Sirius and Regulus completely as they walked by.

“Because I just discovered it?” Turais feigned innocence, though knowing it was probably a fruitless endeavour.

“Cut the act, Turais. I know what you were trying to do,” Arcturus spoke fierly. But despite the irritation, Turais also noticed the underlying mirth and approval in his eyes.

“Yes, Turais, can you explain your actions? I know you must have goaded Nott into conjuring a snake, but why?” Orion sounded exhausted and Turais felt a bit guilty. But he pushed on for it was necessary. He will apologize to his father afterwards.

Turais looked at his mother’s enraged expression and turned his innocent smile into a devilish smirk. “Because now I have leverage,” Turais purred, “So you cannot dismiss my abilities.”

“Leverage for what?” Arcturus asked sharply, although Turais could see no true anger in his eyes. Turais continued to direct his words at his mother.

“If you don’t yield to my demands. I’ll leave the House of Black. Can you just imagine the faces of your fellow Lords when they hear you’ve run off a Parselmouth heir? I won’t have to worry as there is no doubt any family will accept me if I wed their daughter simply because of my gift -”

“You insolent brat! Crucio!” Walburga pulled out her wand and before he could react, the Unforgivable slammed into him as he felt thousands of knives stabbing on every inch of his skin and burying into his body.

His throat tore out a blood-curdling scream.

But before he knew it, it was over. He panted heavily as he found him lying on the floor.

His father was hovering over his body as Turais registered his father’s distress and immense concern. Behind him, he saw Arcturus with his wand pointed at his mother while she was tied up
on a chair, her face contorting with anger although no sound was made.

Wincing at his aching body and ignoring his father’s concerns for the moment, he stumbled back onto his feet and placed both hands onto the table, steadying himself. He stared directly into his mother’s eyes and spoke calmly, “I did it because now I can demand you to stop forcing your pureblood fanatic views on Sirius and Regulus; I can demand you to stop forcing them to join the Knights; and I can demand you to never harm a single hair on them.”

“What else do you want from this stunt you’ve pulled tonight?” Arcturus turned and looked at him.

“Grandfather, I am Heir Black, and I refuse to bow down to a man who operates under a pseudonym for he won’t wear his family name with pride. I refuse to believe in a cause that lurks in the shadows, unwilling to be judged by the whole of society based on its true merits. And I disagree with their goals to eliminate all those without pure blood. Who will man the shops? Who will run the trains? Without them, do you expect purebloods to stoop to such a level? Also, I don’t need to tell others I am superior for I know that I am, both in blood and in magic. And I surely won’t waste my time interacting with them more than necessary,” Turais said vehemently. He didn’t truly believe in everything he just said, but he needed to appeal to Arcturus without being too overtly progressive.

There was a dead silence.

“Head back to your room with your father right now”, Arcturus commanded. "Your mother and I have something we need to discuss, privately. Make sure to bring your brothers up with you."

Arcturus flicked his wand at the door. As it opened, Turais saw Sirius and Regulus fall onto the ground in one heap of tangled limbs, blinking at them blankly.

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“I’m really sorry, father,” Turais spoke when they returned to his bedroom with Sirius and Regulus in tow, staring at his father’s clenched fist. The three brothers were sitting on Turais’s bed while Orion sat on a chair by the opposite wall, leaning over and staring down between his knees. Sirius and Regulus were each on one of his sides, wrapping their arms fiercely around his shoulders and tucking their hair in the crooks of his neck. If he could ignore the tension, Turais would have probably laughed at his two brothers-turned-koalas.

“I’m really sorry for not telling you before I did what I did. I will apologize for that. But I will not apologize for doing what is necessary to keep Sirius and Regulus out of harm’s -”

“When you screamed after Walburga cast the curse, it felt as though I was placed under it as well. I felt my heart ripped into shreds, slice by slice,” Orion looked up at him, distraught. Sirius and Regulus shuddered in his arms as well.

“I’m sorry, fa -”

“Don’t apologize, son. You have shown far more courage and moral fibre than most adults I’ve ever known. I understand why you’ve done it. It’s just… this responsibility you speak of should be mine to bear, as your father. I can’t help but feel I have failed -” Orion’s shoulder lifted
and fell again.

“Stop, father. You have been a wonderful father, everything that I wanted and needed in a father,” Turais said with conviction.

“You’re the best father in the whole world,” Sirius turned around to look at Orion.

Regulus nodded and said, “Best father… and best brother. Love you both.”

“Yeah, best brother,” Sirius added hastily after sticking his tongue out at his younger brother, annoyed that Regulus has beaten him to praising his older brother. Orion gave them a small, shy smile and Turais couldn’t help but laugh as the tension rolled off his shoulders.

When his father met his gaze, Turais once again saw his favourite shade of grey. It was the ones he saw when he first laid his eyes on the wonderful man in front of him, the perfect balance between peacefulness and familial duty.

Turais calmed as he realized that all was well again. He released a chuckle and shook his head. Everything seemed so much brighter all of the sudden. Orion also chuckled and the younger brothers soon followed after. Laughter filled the room for a long time and they were so engrossed in it that they did not even notice a set of footsteps that paused outside the door before it retreated.

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March 20, 1967 (Monday)

Walburga and Orion were suspiciously absent when Turais went down to the kitchen in the morning. Kreacher was cooking up his favourites, egg benedict with a side of fresh salad and buttered toast with a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. As usual, Turais gave Kreacher gave a dazzling smile and his thanks as Kreacher walked away muttering something about “perfect, pureblood Heir”, “lucky to serve as his house elf”, and “unlike the horrible brother who blew up his ancestors’ heads” under its breath.

Just when he was about to get up and search for his parents, he heard the front door open. He peeked through the kitchen door and saw his grandfather strolling down the hall. He stood up to greet his grandfather.

“Good morning, grandfather,” Turais said as he entered the kitchen and sat down on the chair directly opposite of him.

“Good morning, Turais. You must be wondering why I’m here,” Arcturus asked as he poured the tea that Kreacher just served him into a teacup. Turais settled down into his seat once more.

“I have an inkling, grandfather. But please elaborate, nonetheless.”

Arcturus eyed him for a moment in silence before returning to his task of pouring milk and stirring the tea. “What you said yesterday, did you mean them?”

“Every single word,” Turais said simply.

“Explain.”
“I fail to see why a champion of blood purity would willingly refuse to use his family name. If he is serious about his cause and if he truly believed he is firmly on the side of justice, why does he have to hide? That, to me, suggests that he has something to hide. In comparison, his followers wear their names proudly. I will not follow a cause in which the leader does not subject himself to the same rules that he imposes on his followers. Furthermore, I have heard that he brands his most loyal followers with a mark on their forearm in return for their loyalty and service. It is laughable that one would be mad enough to willingly mark themselves permanently for another man, for it sounds like the branding of a slave to his master. I will not let myself, or my brothers, be branded as slaves to a leader that I do not believe in.”

Arcturus did not motion for him to stop, so Turais continued. He needed to convince Arcturus so he had to amend a bit of his speech to make it progressive but not too otherworldly for Arcturus to swallow. “I believe that purebloods are magically more superior than those of less blood purity. However, I do not believe in the segregation, or removal of them from our society. On the contrary, we should do more to integrate them into our society. These people, who came from an entirely different world, never had the opportunity to learn about our world, our culture, and our traditions that we grew up with for every single moment of our lives since we were born. If we never provided the opportunity for them to learn about us, how can we now blame them for not knowing anything about us? That is just hypocrisy. Furthermore, without Muggleborns, we would have resorted to more in-breeding, and we don’t need to look far to see the problems it causes. Just take a look at the Gaunt family, which descended into madness and poverty.”

“Muggleborns also bring a lot of benefits to our world. For example, a Muggleborn invented the Banishing Charm. If we consider them, and by extension their inventions, worthless, why do we continue to use this Charm? We have to accept these Muggleborns as part of our lives and part of our society. If we, the Wizarding society, just cast our eyes further than the small community that we live in, we will see that the Muggles, despite not having magic, have made many advancements while we remained stagnant. In fact, did you know that Muggles have sent the first objects onto the Moon a few years ago? Can you tell me a spell or a wizard powerful enough to send anything to the Moon? I will not underestimate the resourcefulness of Muggles and their technologies for that will be our downfall, grandfather,” Turais finished darkly.

He saw Arcturus deep in thought, his tea laying on the table, cool and abandoned. They sat in repressed silence, listening to the soft clanking of utensils in the background. Finally, Arcturus spoke, “Turais, you have given me a lot to think about.”

Turais nodded as his grandfather stood up. He walked his grandfather to the front door. Before his grandfather stepped out onto the front steps, he turned to him and said, “What your mother did to you yesterday was unacceptable, not to a promising heir of the family. She will never lay a finger on you, nor your brothers, ever again.”

“Thank you, grandfather,” Turais said sincerely.

After a loud crack, he was left staring into the streets in deep thought as two adults strolled by, glazing their eyes unseeingly over his position.
1) The reveal of Turais' Parseltongue ability, 2) The Crucio scene, and 3) The talk between Arcturus and Turais are inspired by:

Tsume Yuki's "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" - Chapter 3: The Disgruntled Lady and Chapter 4: The Annoyance Known As Bellatrix.

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As always, I love to hear from all of you - good or bad and everything in between. Any thoughts or comments - send it my way! It's the only way I know if I'm doing a good job. Next chapter is Chapter 10: The Lords and the Heirs, and there will be a time skip to 1969, you know what that means? 😊

Also, take a guess which lords and which heirs might meet each other?

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-22
Hey everybody,

We are officially in the double-digit count in chapter numbers!

As we tumble towards the 70's and the start of the First Wizarding War, a lot will be happening from now on. How will Turais handle all the moving pieces? What will be happening behind the scenes without his knowledge? What has changed from the original timeline? How will he achieve his goals? What will he choose to do when every decision will have an unknown impact on the future?

Let me know your thoughts!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-28

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**CHAPTER 10**

**THE LORDS AND THE HEIRS**

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January 29, 1967 (Sunday)

**NIMBUS JOINS THE RACE**

by A. Carnierus, Quidditch Correspondent

*How will Cleansweep, Comet, and Universal Compete?*

The revolutionary Nimbus 1000, which features the ability to turn 360 degrees in mid-air, is bound to shake up the Quidditch Pitch. Despite today being the official release date for the broom, it has already received record-breaking pre-sale orders for the past month after the European Racing Broomstick Convention in Munich, Germany last December. The official spokesperson has already issued a statement last week stating that there was a backlog of orders and that no broomsticks will be available for purchase in-store until March. However, those interested can still pre-order through owl post...
Four days ago marked the second anniversary since Turais last saw his mother.

After the Malfoy Ball two years ago, Walburga has permanently moved back to live with her parents at their residency in France under Arcturus’ insistence. She had also been keyed out of all access to 12 Grimmauld Place. While not technically divorced, as purebloods never divorced, Orion told Turais that they were separated in all ways but in name.

This living arrangement was a closely-kept secret as Arcturus used the family magic vested in him as Head of Black to forbid any of his family members from revealing this information to any non-Blacks and to forbid Walburga from ever appearing in the same location as her children. This meant that she has not been present in any of the family gatherings ever since. But it was only a matter of time when people realized that none of them were seen with Walburga in any events. Regardless, Turais was happy that her poisonous influence over Sirius and Regulus was removed.

Orion and his brothers transitioned into their new lives without the matriarch surprisingly easily, which further pointed out the lack of bonding between her and her children. Kreacher, who was unaware of the true reason of his Mistress’ departure, blamed Sirius for “breaking his Mistress’ heart” and was vicious to him in all ways short of physically harming him. Sirius took it in stride, especially when it was really not that much different from how Kreacher normally treated him since he destroyed all the mounted elf heads the day after his seventh birthday.

Since the Malfoy Ball, Turais has went on to attend a handful of other Ministry balls and they all ended less dramatically than his first, to much of his relief. However, he remained at the center of attention and many lords and heirs, with the notable exception of Heir Nott, clamoured to capture his attention and to cultivate personal relations with the Parselmouth and future Lord Black.

Today, Orion and Turais was once again dressed up to attend the Malfoy Ball. Orion and Turais were not invited to the ball last year, which was unsurprising considering how the host was utterly upstaged by Turais the year before that. Therefore, Turais was surprised when he saw the invite three months ago, but Orion merely shrugged and said that Turais was now an important figure and that the Malfoys could not afford to publicly break relations with him anymore. Sirius was allowed to attend but he opted to stay with Regulus and Lucretia and Ignatius Prewett, who was baby-sitting them, as he cited it was too “stuffy and posh for his taste”. Orion once again frowned at his behaviour, and he has been doing that quite frequently these days, but he relented.

At the ball, Turais found himself in the familiar routine of being introduced and re-introduced to various officials while making polite small-talks with other purebloods. The only person he felt genuine interest in conversing with was Carl Selwyn, who was soon entering his third year of residency at St. Mungo’s in the Janus Thickey Ward, which specialized in Spell Damage.

Initially, Turais thought his immediate affinity with Carl was merely because Carl reminded him of Caelum, but he soon realized that he liked Carl as a separate entity as well.

“I’ve always been curious why you chose to specialize in Spell Damage, Heir Sewlyn,” Turais asked Carl as they walked out onto the balcony and enjoyed the fresh, evening breeze. The crescent moon shone serenely upon the dark Malfoy grounds with white peacocks dotted across the vast expanses.

“Well, Heir Black, I have always been interested in the subject, but if you were wondering if
it had anything to do with *the incident*, you would be correct. That did nudge me into that direction,” Carl smiled, reminded by the circumstances surrounding their first meeting. “I don’t know if I’ve told you. Although I would have loved to have a younger brother, I am glad it worked out for your family in the end.”

“You can still have him if you want, he’s a slobbering mess. Just say the word,” Turais said jokingly, then sighed, “I love them so much, I will miss them when I leave for Hogwarts this coming September.”

“Oh right, you are finally starting school. Sometimes I forget that you’re not even eleven yet because of your mannerisms.”

“So you’re just calling me an old soul now,” Turais jested.

“Shut up, you know what I mean,” Carl nudged him in the shoulder, laughing.

“Have you met anyone yet?” Turais asked Carl, prodding for information. From what he remembered in his past life, Caelum told him that his parents were both Healers. Turais knew his mother was a Rosier, same as their aunt and uncle who gained custody of them, but he knew nothing else.

He saw Carl’s cheeks blush faintly. ‘Ah hah, gotcha!’

“Who is it?” Carl flushed darker. “A Muggleborn? Because I really don’t care -”

“Shut up! It’s a girl, and um, she’s nice… and caring… and pretty.” Carl stuttered, glancing behind him and whispered in a hushed voice. “I’ve not even told father yet, you’re the only one who knows.”

Turais motioned his fingers across like a zipper and threw the imaginary key away.

“So, what’s her name?”

“Eva. Evangeline Rosier. She is an intern at the hospital right now. We first met a couple months ago during her rotation in my ward.”

“Cool! I’m sure she is lovely. You’re going to get married one day, I have a good feeling about her.”

“Hey, aren’t you too young to talk about love and marriage, Turais?” Carl scuffed his forehead. Turais swatted at his head and missed as the older boy ducked. “I still can’t believe I am blushing about my romantic feelings to a ten-year-old.”

“Don’t feel embarrassed, Carl. I’m talking from experience. You have no idea how many marriage contracts my father and I turned down, especially since everyone heard I was a Parselmouth,” Turais mused as Carl laughed at his plight. He punched him in the waist, *hard*. “You arse, this is a terrible situation! Have some sympathy.”

“Says the person who just got me to confess my deepest and darkest secrets,” Carl smiled as Turais rolled his eyes to the back of his head. “At least your grandfather is not in a hurry to pair you up with someone, unlike my father. He’s been trying to get me to marry and start a family since forever. And all those girls who have been circling around me…” He looked back at the ballroom and shuddered.

“Well, you are the most eligible bachelor -” Turais said and smirked, “- after me that is.”
They nudged each other and laughed some more before settling into a comfortable silence.

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After a few more minutes, Carl decided to return to the ball while Turais decided to stay out on the balcony for a bit longer as he was not eager to join the crowd just yet. But in hindsight, it might have been a mistake, or was it...?

“S...o you s...peak.”

At the hissing sound, he turned around and found a man with red eyes staring at him, he quickly tore his gaze as he felt tendrils of magic probing at the surface of his mind. Turais strengthened his mental shields quickly as he looked around him. There were a few couples around him, each pair was engrossed in their own conversations a couple meters away from him and too far to hear their conversation, but they were close enough to observe them. However, if this stranger wanted to attack him, Turais doubted that their presence would be the deterrent.

His sharp facial features glowed under the moonlight, looking almost ethereal. The immaculately styled obsidian hair, trimmed brows, and perfectly fitted robes. All the while, Turais avoided his gaze. Suddenly, he caught a slight simmer directly beneath his chin.

‘A glamour.’

He had an idea who was in front of him, and his blood turned cold.

‘Voldemort.’

Turais decided to pretend to ignore him and turned back towards the open grounds, but he kept him within sight at the corner of his eye. The Voldemort in front of him looked different from the Tom Riddle he has seen in Slughorn and Dumbledore’s memories and he wasn’t sure if there were other Parselmouths.

He was still nine months away from acquiring his powers as Master of Death, and before that he was vulnerable to death just like everyone else with the exception that he will be forced to travel to yet another timeline instead of going to the ‘Beyond’. If this was Voldemort, he had to tread carefully.

“Interes...ting. Very interes...ting. an Heir of the Blacks... speaks...”

Realizing that there was no point in pretending, Turais dropped his facade and spoke, “So you know who I am. It is but fair to ask who you are?”

“Nobody of interest, I assure you.”

“A nobody would not have been able to score an invitation to the Malfoy Ball. Who are you?” Turais asked again, this time with more force behind his voice.

“Most know me by the name Lord Voldemort -”

“I find myself most curious about your real name, Voldemort,” Turais interjected.

“That name no longer matters,” he spat as his handsome face turned into a fiendish reptilian
snarl. “I -”

“Names are powerful and sacred in magic. Owls can find the addressed with only a name, a Tracking charm works though the utterance of the name of one’s target, blood magic and wards are tied intricately to the family name. I am surprised that you would be so careless to think, even for a moment, that your birth name does not matter, unless… you are a Muggleborn,” Turais egged Voldemort on.

For a moment, he feared that he has made the wrong move as he felt Voldemort’s magic flared at the accusation. But fortunately, it disappeared as quickly as it appeared. A pregnant pause descended in the air between them.

“I sense that you will not be an ally to my cause,” Voldemort’s smooth, tenor voice called out once again. “No wonder Lord Black has refused to extend his hand to me for a worthy alliance. It is because he has you. It was you that dissuaded him of the alliance.”

“I am neither your friend nor foe, Voldemort. My loyalty is to my family and my family alone. And I seek no quarrel with you. As long as you do not move against us or harm our members, I will not interfere with your machinations.” Turais hoped that Voldemort will back down with the assurance that he is not a threat to him and also that Voldemort would not risk a feud with the House of Black.

Turais was genuine with his stance regarding Voldemort. While he knew which items were imbued with pieces of his fragmented soul, he did not know where at least two of those Horcruxes currently were. Bellatrix has not joined the Death Eaters nor was she married to Rudolphus Lestrange yet as she was entering her final year in Hogwarts this September, so the Hufflepuff cup was likely not in the Lestrange vault. Likewise, Lucius did not join the Death Eaters nor did he possess Tom Riddle’s diary yet. While Turais would destroy the Diadem, the Ring, and the Locket in due time, he would not be able to completely destroy Voldemort without the two missing pieces. So he would have to be patient and wait for the right time to destroy him completely. And most importantly, he needed time to uncover and defuse the threat that was Prometheus, and he couldn’t focus on that with Voldemort acting against him constantly.

He could see Voldemort’s mind spinning in calculation. After a long moment of consideration, he said, “I have not met someone like you in a long time, Turais Black, someone worthy of my attention. I accept your offer but I will keep a close watch on you.”

‘I would not expect any less from you,’ Turais thought bitterly, although he mentally releasing as shuddering breath of relief for averting a crisis. But he will have to be careful when he is in Hogwarts. Any of them could be a potential spy for Voldemort to track his movements.

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“My Lords, would you excuse us for just a moment?” Turais asked when he approached his grandfather, who was currently in a conversation with Lords Greengrass and Montague.

His grandfather turned to him and raised an eyebrow, but acquiesced at the request for Arcturus knew there must be a valid reason for this interruption. He pardoned himself from the conversation and followed Turais to an empty side chamber and closed the door behind him. As he was about to pull out his wand, Arcturus has already started to cast the standard anti-eavesdropping
spells as well as a *Muffliato* charm around the duo.

“What is it, Turais?” His grandfather spoke once he put his wand away.

“I just spoke to Voldemort.”

“He is at the party?” Arcturus looked surprised, “I did not see anyone unusual.”

“He was under a glamour, grandfather. Perhaps under Lord Malfoy’s personal invitation, or perhaps posing as an aide to an official.”

"Voldemort is still holding out hope for an alliance with the Blacks, but he will soon turn his attention to the Malfoys if he wishes to gain influence in Ministry politics," Arcturus commented, "I'll not be surprised if Abraxas extended an invitation to him."

Turais nodded and continued, "But my point is, he spoke to me in Parseltongue and was most interested in my ability."

“Voldemort is a Parselmouth?” Arcturus let out a genuinely surprised gasp. “He must have been a descendant of Slytherin then, but their lines have gone extinct. The last Gaunt was reported dead decades ago. Unless, he has gained the power spontaneously like you.”

“That would be highly unlikely. However, I believe he could have been a bastard child harboured by the Gaunts,” Turais was planting the seeds of suspicion regarding Voldemort’s origin in his grandfather’s mind. “Maybe not a son of Morfin Gaunt for there is currently no one who claims the Gaunt name. But perhaps his sister, Merope Gaunt.”

“I will have to look into this more deeply. But if what you are saying is true, then this changes things for us. This Lord Voldemort will have a genuine claim to be the heir of Slytherin and can sway many more minds in his favour. However, he has not revealed his parentage despite the obvious rewards. At least not publicly. So why?” Arcturus frowned in brows, deep in thought. “Unless...”

“Unless he has something to hide. Yes, grandfather. I suspect that he is not of pure blood. If his followers were to know that he was a half-blood, he will quickly lose the favour of many but his most loyal supporters. I think it would be prudent to seek out the information discreetly so we may one day find it useful,” Turais suggested as Acturus considered. "How long would it take for you to uncover the information, grandfather?"

Turais knew the only way Arcturus would ever truly believe a story if he found out on his own.

"Information of this nature is often well-hidden and obscured from view," Arcturus responded, "Especially when it concerns bloodlines. It might take years of careful and costly investigation to confirm their identities. That's why the wizarding community is still so fixated on rumours about potential heirs and newly-introduced family members. We just have no way of confirming their legitimacy unless they reach emancipation of their Lordship and receive their inheritance and Wizengamot seats."

Turais nodded, although he was a bit disappointed that Voldemort’s true nature would not be reveal any time soon.

"There are no inheritance test available at Gringotts to test for a person's lineage?"

"Unfortunately not. Forward lineage tracing, such as the verification of a new member into a
family when born and our family tapestry, is already a disappearing art. However, reverse lineage tracing, or the determination of one's ancestors, is a branch of magic that was long-lost even before Merlin's time.

"That is precisely why we are so meticulous with recording our genealogy, Turais. It does not merely serve as a validation of our bloodline and lineage, but it is most importantly a physical reminder of our family's collective history and connection with magic. Without it, we are nothing but individuals that would be lost in the whirlpool of time. But with it, we will live on in our descendants and their knowledge of us," Arcturus said reverently. "We are fortunate to be born into a family with such a rich, illustrious history that few can rival, except the Potters, Shafiqs, and a handful others. You will truly understand the magnificence when you gain access to the family vault upon your seventeenth birthday."

Turais gained a deeper appreciation regarding the deep attachment of pureblood families to their ancestry. Blood purity was only a warped, misconstrued obsession of an, otherwise, beautiful sense of familial pride. Turais could also relate to the yearn to connect with his family history. Only the gods know how many hours he spent in the Potter family vaults and in front of his ancestors' portraits in his past lifetime.

"I understand, grandfather. And I do appreciate our family history. But back to our matter at hand, I must stress the importance of obtaining this information," Turais said. "This might be the only way to undermine Voldemort's support completely."

"I am aware of the risks and benefits of this venture, Turais. Please rest assured," said Arcturus.

"Thank you, grandfather. But when you find out eventually, I would caution you to move against him at this time."

"Why?"

"I believe he came to seek me out not only as a fellow Parselmouth, but also for an alliance with the House of Black. He told me that you have refused an alliance between us and the Knights of Walpurgis, for which I am grateful for, and I have offered a counterproposal for which he has agreed to," Turais admitted.

Arcturus frowned at the mention that his grandson has struck up an agreement with another person as representative of his family.

"I told him that we are going to be neutral towards his aspirations, in exchange, he will not seek an alliance with us nor act against us. I am sorry if I overstepped my boundaries, grandfather, but I was shaken by his subterfuge and just reacted instinctually."

Arcturus pondered on what his grandson said. The agreement was, in all honesty, quite favourable for them. While the family shared a lot of commonality with their cause, the mystery that surrounded their leader unnerved his grandfather a great deal. In Arcturus’ view, per the agreement, Voldemort would continue as usual to move against Dumbledore and the Ministry while the Blacks would sit on the sidelines. If Voldemort ultimately succeeded, the Blacks would still reap the benefits of his cause. If Voldemort fell, then the Blacks would have a strong claim to neutrality and be in the perfect position to lead the Dark families as their opponents fall with him.

Just as Turais had hoped, Arcturus has discovered the merits of the agreement and gave Turais a rare, genuine smile. "You have served your family well, Turais. And that is not because you have placed your family away from the battle, but because you have placed yourself away
“Thank you, grandfather. Like you, I seek to protect what is most important to me, which is my family. But I don’t understand the distinction between our family and me, grandfather.”

Arcturus looked at his grandson with a fierce determination and Turais wanted to shrink under his gaze.

“Turais, contrary to what you might believe, my health is in decline, and soon enough, my influence will as well. You are the one that our allies are rallying around now - the idea of a powerful future Lord Black - one that is more influential than even me,” Arcturus said solemnly without a hint of irony or ridicule, “Our allies are investing in your future, which is what deters them from switching sides.

"The Malfoys draw their power from their astronomical wealth; Dumbledore draws his from his reputation and powerful positions within the Ministry and at Hogwarts; Voldemort draws his from his attractive manifesto of radical change and a promised revolution for purebloods. But for us, the future Lord Black and a powerful House of Black is where our power originates. You, Turais, are the most important asset on our side and you must be impeccable while keeping yourself firmly away from harm. I have meant this conversation for a later time, but you would soon be leaving the safety of your family to a place where Heir Malfoy rules the Slytherin dungeons and Dumbledore rules the rest. You must be vigilant and trust no one. This four-way war has barely begun and our family must persevere until the bitter end, whenever that may be.”

***

Turais found himself wandering in the grand expanses of the open fields of the Malfoy Manor grounds as he pondered on the gravity of the situation at hand. A gentle breeze caressed his cheek as it brought the faint scent of roses and lilies while he basked in the moonlight under the cloudless skies. He trod on the wood chip path that crunched crisply upon each step as he discovered the perfect curated gardens with Death’s presence by his side.

“Am I making the right choices? To make the Blacks a neutral party in the upcoming conflict? To not destroy Voldemort right there and then?” Turais spoke his questions into the air as wisps of smoke formed as his breath contacted the night air. It was an abnormally chilly March evening.

‘I cannot answer that for you, young Master. But remember to measure it against what you aim to achieve.’

“Well, I’m here to stop the world from destroying itself. A very modest goal,” Turais said with a self-deprecating laugh followed by a heavy, shuddering sigh. Another puff of vapour rose upwards as Turais tried to follow it, trying to find where it would end up. Of course he couldn't, but it seemed more manageable that what he was meant to do for the next few years.

“It’s just… to prevent the Wizarding world from collapsing on itself again, fundamental changes on the bigoted blood purity ideology must occur. If not, there will always be another Grindelwald, Voldemort, or Prometheus. For that, I know I have to instigate the change at the root of the issue, and starting from my peers and my family.
“But at the same time, I have to stay put until all the Horcruxes end up in their respective places. And that would require me to stay out of the conflict and allow Voldemort to rise to power, lest he decides to hide the Horcruxes somewhere else. But that will mean that I would have to watch so many deaths that could be prevented if I intervened.

“However, I could not think of another way to circumvent this issue. If I cannot find all the Horcruxes and destroy them once and for all. He will rise again and only cause more destruction, just like in my last timeline.”

Harry felt the enormity of his responsibility in full-force and it was crippling. That was why he rarely allowed himself to think too deeply about his future. Death was right, as his return to Hogwarts approached, he really wished that his childhood could last forever…

“Also, I will need to find this Prometheus person and it would be wise to alter the least number of significant events as possible to prevent the timeline from becoming any more unrecognizable than it already is. Because he, not Voldemort, is the ultimate threat to the Wizarding World.

“But isn’t it ironic that I am convincing myself to try and keep everything as similar as possible when my goal is to alter the fate of this timeline. Also, isn’t it a fruitless attempt as so many events have already been altered? Instead of a power struggle between the Malfoys, Dumbledore, and Voldemort, now the Blacks are part of it and it is all because of my existence. The future might already be unrecognizable at this point in time. I am just so unsure and I feel so…powerless. I’m supposed to be the Master of Death and I have all this knowledge at my disposal. Yet, I am not allowed to change things that matter most…”

Turais trailed off and turned towards where Death was, as though he was asking for his input. Although he knew he would be met with empty space, it felt like the natural thing to do - to address him as a companion - as he walked down this deserted garden path.

Death stayed silent for a long while, and Turais was about to give up as he turned to continue on his stroll when it finally spoke up.

‘Remember what your end goal is, young Master. You will never be able to save everyone. That is not your role nor do you have the capability. Also, you are responsible for your actions and your actions alone. Focus on what is most important to you, then choose what to do and how you do it.’

Turais considered in a companionable silence for a long while.

“Then I choose to safeguard the Blacks and the Potters and defeat Prometheus,” Turais said with certainty. However, he faltered once more as he whispered, “But it doesn’t make it any easier to accept the fact that many will perish along the way.”

‘You are but one individual, albeit a very important one, but you have your limits. Many great men have fallen due to the misconception of being infallible. Take care to remember that.’

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 11: Worlds Collide will be published very soon. Who will Turais meet at Diagon Alley? How will his encounters change history? I can't wait for you to find out!

Please feel free to comment who you think will make an appearance?!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-28
Hey everyone,

Thank you for supporting my story, folks! This is a massive chapter with 8k+ words. I just didn’t know where to end the chapter so that’s good news for you!

We are finally back in familiar territory with some friendly (and some unfriendly) faces.

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-30

P.S. The Teen and Up rating was totally meant for the newspaper article ;P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 11
WORLDS COLLIDE

June 30, 1968 (Sunday)

WARBECK FEVER INCENDIOS CHART
by Sclandora Gosp

Her Cauldron is Full of More Than just Hot, Strong Love

Celestina Warbeck’s lead single, “A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love”, from her mega-hit album “Wands n’ Cauldrons” stays atop the WWN Top 10 Enchanting Songs chart for the 77th straight week, casting Bombardos on all previous records since its inception. Yesterday, the superstar songstress announced her bewitching world-tour “STIR MY CAULDRON HARD” with performances on all six continents and the tickets were all sold-out within 24 hours. One must wonder if the tour name had any relation with the recent scandal where she was caught exiting a dodgy establishment near the famed red-light district of Amsterdam...

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July 1, 1969 (Tuesday)
“Father, my letter from Hogwarts has arrived!” Turais waved the opened envelope in his hand excitedly at his father. His brothers stayed up all night with him as they were too excited to fall asleep. At the crack of dawn, they ran down and waited by the window for the mail to arrive, taking the sleeping house-elf by surprise. Turais had been waiting for this day to arrive since he was born. Despite having been and studied at Hogwarts in his past life, he still remembered vividly the day he found out he was a wizard and the excitement. Now, instead of a half-giant, he had a loving family to share the news with.

“And so I’ve heard,” Orion grinned widely, nursing a morning cup of coffee. The fact that even the strongest builder’s tea was not enough for his proper functionality spoke volumes. The three brothers had been tearing apart the kitchen with their magic in excitement, much to the house elf’s dismay and Orio, himself, was awaken by the boys jumping on his bed and his slumbering body. “And I gather that you would like to go to Diagon Alley today then?”

“Yes!” The three boys shouted in unison.

“Okay, we will go there after you finish your breakfast -” The three boys cheered. Orion quickly amended when the children were about to speak up again, “- at least two eggs, one piece of toast, and a glass of juice.”

He chuckled at the boys’ groans and he opened up the *Daily Prophet*. Turais glanced at the heading "DARK CREATURES ACTIVE ACROSS EUROPE" and his heart dropped down to his stomach.

The tenuous peace was coming to an end.

***

“So you are one hundred percent sure that there was nothing I could do to stop the war from happening in the first place?” Turais asked Death when he was changing his clothes in his room before heading to Diagon Alley.

“One can never be absolutely certain, not even Death, young Master. But indeed, there was almost no chance for any alternate outcomes. And depending on the choices you have made, you might have delayed or expedited the onset of the war, but you would not have prevented it.’

‘So did I expedite it then?’

‘You know the rules, young Master. You will have to see for yourself.’

‘I know I asked this many times before, but are you sure that I could not have done anything about the Prometheus situation until now?’

‘With the lack of information you possessed, and still lack, you would not have made any meaningful changes. In addition, isn’t it too late for you to ask this question now?’

‘I am just stressed about saving the world, I suppose. Anyways, thank you for the confirmation, I needed to hear that.’
‘While we are on the topic, I might as well remind you that your Sorting will have a very significant impact on which course the future will take. But I am sure you already know this.’

‘I do. I appreciate the reminder though and I have thought this through very carefully already. Too many times to count - in fact.’

“Turais, we’re going to leave without you if you don’t get down here right now!” He heard Sirius barked out from downstairs.

“Coming!”

***

Instead of visiting Madam Malkin’s, Turais found himself in Twilfitt and Tatting’s, a bespoke tailor shop on Optim Alley. Compared to the dodgy haunts of Knockturn Alley and vibrant activities of Diagon Alley, Optim Alley was an impressive and lavish high-end shopping street lined with elegantly old-fashioned stores that offered fine dining, jewellery, bespoke clothing, and any expensive accessories one could imagine: antique heirlooms, goblin-wrought armours, crystals and china, custom-made canes, bejewelled birdcages (who needed that?)...

Oh, and practically all stores required an invitation before one could visit them. It was that *supercilious*.

Therefore, despite having the means and connections, Turais rarely browsed this area for it was too high-handed for his taste as Harry Potter.

However, ever since he was Heir Black, he had to be accustomed to all these quite pompous services despite his dislike. Well, if he could stomach a Malfoy Ball, shopping here was an easy task in comparison…

“Welcome, Heir Black,” a short, plump man bowed as he opened the door for the family to enter. “I have just received the notice of your arrival.”

"Hello Dardanus, my eldest son was quite eager to start his shopping for school robes. I hope I’ve not come at an inconvenient time,” Orion spoke coolly as he eyed the two figures currently occupying the single studio ahead.

Dardanus hesitated slightly, “Heir Black, Trebonius is currently attending another customer. But - in fact, I think he’s done - let me check with him right now.” Dardanus hurried down the room to a wizard who was busily exacting measurements as scissors and measuring tape swirled around the boy who stood atop a stool.

The two men exchanged a series of quick whispers and they both eyed the Black family and the little boy. Turais was able to get snippets of the heated conversation between the tailors and the boy.

“ - refuse to - ”

“ - Heir Black’s eldest -”

“Father, we can just come back later,” Turais said.
“It’s fine, Turais. They wouldn’t want to upset the Black family,” Orion said simply as he observed the exchange with little interest.

“- was here first, I don’t care -”

“- boy, you can go somewhere else -”

Finally, the little boy stomped off the stool as Dardanus scurried back with a bright smile plastered on his face.

“Heir Black, please come with me,” the man bowed deeply to his waist as Orion nodded at him. “Heir Black, please feel free to stay in the waiting lounge or return in a half-hour.”

“Turais, we’ll be waiting at Fawkswind's Boutique next door,” Orion said as they departed.

Turais walked into the room and stepped onto the stool as the tailor directed. Immediately, the tools started to fly around his body in flashes of gold and silver as the large cloth on the work table carved out pieces of fabric simultaneously.

The two tailors worked in a fast but orderly fashion. It was fascinating to see how they interchanged places and items in perfect synchronicity as the basic outlines of his robes began to form before his eyes.

While he was standing idly, he let his attention wander to the boy who sat on a plush couch at the corner of the room. Turais could see his furious glares as he sulked moodily. Turais felt apologetic that the boy was unceremoniously removed from his measuring just because the tailors wanted to service the Blacks first.

Half an hour later, he was fitted into his robes as they made notes and pinned the fabrics where further adjustments had to be made for the perfect fit. Then, he was sent off to Orion with a scheduled final fitting a week later.

As he exited the room, he sent an apologetic look at the brown-haired boy in the corner with a quiet “Sorry”, but he only received a glare of intense loathing and disgust.

“Save your crocodile tears, Black.”

Turais shifted uncomfortably under the gaze from those hateful eyes.

***

Turais was browsing the Quidditch section in Flourish and Blotts while his father was waiting in line to purchase his school textbooks when he saw a boy with messy, black hair and glasses levitating a stack of diaries and balanced it on top of the slightly ajarred door. Turais gasped out loudly in surprise at the unexpected sight, desperately trying to keep his emotions at bay and avoid an emotional breakdown. Although Turais had been preparing for this day to arrive ever since he discovered he would be attending Hogwarts with his once-father, Turais did not expect to see him for at least another two years.

“Hey, Turais -” The unsuspecting Sirius opened the door as he walked through and fell victim to a collapsing pile of books that descended upon his head.
“James Fleamont Potter!” A woman, Turais recognized her as Euphemia Potter from her portrait, rushed towards the two boys as she yelled, “Apologize to the young man right now!”

“It’s okay, ma’am. That was quite funny, actually,” Sirius grinned at the boy and extended his hand. “My name is Sirius Black, nice to make your acquaintance.”

James visibly blanched at the name, but composed himself quickly to take his hand. “As you probably have heard my mum, my name is James Potter. Nice to meet you too. You seem alright for a Dark wizard -”

“James!” His mother snapped and smacked her son’s head. “Don’t be so rude! Where are your manners?” Despite the scolding, Turais saw her eyes narrowed at Sirius by just a fraction.

“Urm, thank you?” Sirius said to the other boy as he rubbed the back of his neck.

After ensuring his emotions were properly suppressed, Turais composed himself and headed over. Looking at his father and grandmother from his previous life, he asked his brother, “Hey Siri, who’s your new friend?”

“Hey Turais, this is James Potter. He just dropped a pile of books on me, which was cool. This is his mother, Mrs Potter. James, Mrs Potter, this is my older brother and heir, Turais Black.”

“Heir, you said? So your grandfather is the Lord Black?”

Turais grinned. “Yup, that’s our grandfather Arcturus.”

“Woah, what does he look like? People say he’s evil -”

“James, I’m warning you,” Mrs Potter glared at her son again disapprovingly but she eyed the Black brothers warily. Sirius frowned at the words but shrugged it off fairly quickly.

“So, what are you doing here?”

“Turais is starting at Hogwarts this year, he just got the letter this morning!” Sirius said excitedly.

“No way! I want to go to Hogwarts too, but mum says I need to wait for two more years,” James responded disappointingly.

“So you’re nine too? We’re the same age!” Sirius jumped at the thought that his new friend would be attending Hogwarts at the same time he is.

“Wicked! We can be the same house and prank everyone -”

“How many times do I have to tell you to stay out of trouble, James!” Mrs Potter said exasperatedly. Looking behind her and seeing that Orion was almost finished his transaction at the counter, she told James, “However, James and I best head out. Say goodbye to your new friends now, James.”

“Aw, mum! I just met Sirius -”

"Now, James!"

James gulped at his mother’s tone and did as instructed. "Bye, Sirius. Bye, Turais. I reckon I will see you later."
He waved at them as Mrs Potter hastily dragged the reluctant boy away from the store and disappeared through the doorway.

Moments later, Orion and Regulus approached the boys.

“So, we have shopped for everything except your wand and owl. Turais, why don’t you take Sirius with you for your wand-shopping while Regulus and I buy the owl?”

"Sounds like a plan," Turais said and they started to walk towards Ollivander’s. As they approached the wand shop, Turais turned to ask his father, “Can I get a pure white snowy owl?”

“Of course, Turais,” Orion smiled, "I will see you in a bit."

Orion and Regulus walked off towards Eeylops Owl Emporium as Turais and Sirius turned to walk the remaining distance to the wand shop.

***

The doorbell chimed as the brothers entered the shop. Once they approached the counter, an old man suddenly appeared from beside it. Sirius gasped and gripped Turais tightly as he jumped backwards.

“Just received your Hogwarts letter, I presume?” The man had round-rimmed spectacles over his wrinkly face and greying hair on both sides of his head but none on top. They both nodded.

“You two children are sure eager. You’re my first customers for first-year wands this summer,” the man said.

“Actually, only my brother is getting his wand. I’m going to Hogwarts in two years,” Sirius said quietly, tugging on Turais' sleeve.

“Hmm… alright. Judging from your appearance and your unusual green eyes, you must be Heir Black.” Mr Ollivander’s wispy silver eyes scanned over his features and ended in his eyes.

Without breaking eye contact, Turais spoke for the first time since he set foot in the store. “You are correct, Mr Ollivander.”

“Your father, Heir Black, was chosen for an English Oak wand. Fourteen inches. Unicorn hair. Supple. Restraint in power but exceptionally strong for non-verbal and defensive magic. Rare combination for a Black yet a perfect match.”

Turais nodded at the words.

“Your mother, Mistress Black, held a very different wand. Nine and three quarters inches long, stiff, made of Walnut wood with a core of dragon heartstring,” Ollivander did not elaborate any further.

“And now before me stands… the son of two wand-owners with highly conflicting wands, and an alleged Parselmouth if the rumours are to be believed. I wonder which wand you will favour… of course, when I say favour - it really is the wand that chooses the owner…

“Which is your wand arm?” Mr Ollivander snapped out of his thoughts suddenly and asked.
“Right,” Turais lifted his arm as a measuring tape appeared from thin air and started to measure every possible body metric. Shoulder to fingertip. Armpit to knee. Nose to navel.

“That will do,” the measuring tape contracted and returned to the countertop and fell idle. “Here, Mr Black. Try this one. Yew and dragon heartstring. Ten inches. Rigid. Give it a wave.”

Turais took the wand and waved it around, feeling nothing, and handed it back to Mr Ollivander.

“Walnut and unicorn hair. Twelve and a half inches. Quite springy. Try -”

Before Turais can give it a proper wave, Mr Ollivander snatched it out of his hand.

“No, that is not right - here, ebony and unicorn hair. Nine inches. Bendy. Try it out.”

Turais tried again but Mr Ollivander shook his head and took it away, muttering excitedly. As the pile of tried wands mounted higher and higher, Turais grimaced internally. He thought that without his fate being tied to Voldemort, he would have a simpler time for his wand choosing. But alas, nothing was ever simple for him.

“I wonder -” Turais snapped out of his reverie when Mr Ollivander spoke after a long silence. “- yes, why not - try this, Mr Black. Holly and phoenix feather. Eleven inches. Nice and supple.”

‘My old wand.’

Turais took the wand gingerly, in anticipation. Mr Ollivander was also staring at him intently.

He gave it a flick.

But, unlike last time, the wand remained cold and lifeless in his hand. Disappointed, he placed it back on the counter.

Perhaps seeing his crestfallen face, Mr Ollivander looked at him softly and said, “No worries, Mr Black. Everyone who walked through this door left with a wand. You are a tricky customer, but the perfect match is in here somewhere -”

Suddenly, his eyes glazed over in thought. “- Hmm, oh yes - why did I not think of this sooner - yes, I wonder - how unusual.” Mr Ollivander disappeared into the back of his store and for several minutes, Turais heard the faint noises of falling boxes. During his absence, he heard the bell chime again as he saw his father and youngest brother entering the shop with a large owl cage in tow. On the perch, a pure white snowy owl sat and hooted sleepily.

“Turais, are you still not finished yet?” Orion then eyed the mountain of tried wands and raised his eyebrows. “Ollivander must be very excited.”

Turais grimaced.

“Yup! He was practically leaping up and down,” Sirius spoke on his behalf.

“Ah, Heir Black, how is your wand working for you?” Mr Ollivander spoke when he re-emerged.

“Very well, thank you. I hope my son here is not giving you too much trouble?”

“No, no - I love a tricky customer,” he muttered mindlessly, fixing his pale gaze at Turais.
The father shared a knowing glance with his eldest son at the comment. “This wand here, was one of the first wands I have ever created since my Mastery and the only time I used this particular wand core. Try this, Mr Black.”

Turais held the wand and immediately sensed an inferno of warmth swirling through his right arm towards his core as they hummed in syncopation. As he raised the wand above his head, a stream of pure white light shot from the end like a waterfall and filled the room in a blinding haze. As the light dimmed, Mr Ollivander cried, “Oh, bravo! Yes, indeed, very curious.”

“What is very curious, Mr Ollivander?” Turais asked while feeling a bit of déjà vu.

“Mr Black, this wand is highly unusual. While I remember every single wand that I have ever fashioned, this wand’s creation fascinated me the most. It was during my first journey in search for wand woods after my Mastery when I came across a single tree that grew amongst the reed banks of a treacherous river. A single strand of Thestral tail hair was tangled around its lowest branch, yet there was no other vegetation or creatures within miles. The tree called out to me and offered me that particular branch, to which I was bound by oath to collect. I have only found that place once more for yet another presentation, but it was barely recognizable then and I have never found the place since.

"A few months later as I was returning home, I encountered a peculiar incident. Across my path, the body of a horned serpent laid. Judging by its state, it could not have been dead for more than an hour. This creature is not native to Britain, yet here one was in front of me. After meditating on the matter, I decided to collect its horn.

“And thus, the wand in your hand was born. Elder and horned serpent horn. Eleven and a half inches. Flexible yet rigid.”

“Did you say Elder wood, Mr Ollivander?” Orion took in a sharp breath.

“Yes, Mr Black. Elder - the rarest wand wood of all. Extremely difficult to pair and even more difficult to keep ownership of. Though its wand core will aid in that task for the horned serpent horn is highly attuned to a Parselmouth. I have only offered this wand once before, to whom it rejected. He went on to be chosen by another equally powerful wand. It seems that your son is destined for greatness.”

Turais shivered at his words. Sensing his discomfort, his father quickly paid six gold Galleons and Mr Ollivander bowed them out of his shop.

“That man is brilliant, but he always manages to make me feel unwelcomed,” Orion said once they were a fair distance away. Turais nodded in agreement.

***

“Father, why do people call us a Dark family?” Sirius asked Orion when they returned home.

“Those people are usually from Light families. They think that just because we amassed more knowledge about so-called ‘Dark magic’ and are better at performing them, therefore, we are considered ‘Dark’,” Orion explained as he set Turais’s school supplies on the kitchen table. Kreacher immediately charmed them and started to put them away.
“And why do people call grandfather Arcturus evil?” Sirius continued asking.

“Who told you that, Sirius?” Orion breathed harshly.

“J... just a new... friend I met in the bookstore today. His name is James Potter.”

“Ah, that explains it. The Potter family is traditionally a Light family, that’s why he thinks our family is evil.”

“But that’s not fair! He just met me, and I’m pretty sure he doesn’t even know my grandfather. Why can he call us evil when he doesn’t know a thing about us?” Sirius fumed angrily.

“Sirius, don’t be upset. They are just prejudiced people against Dark families. Their opinions don’t matter. What matters is your opinion. Do you think you grandfather is evil?” Orion asked.

“Well... no, father,” Sirius said. “He is stern and darn stickler for etiquette and rules, but he is definitely not evil . Mother and Bellatrix are evil.”

Orion grimaced at the words but did not comment on it. “As long as you know that, it does not matter what others think of our family, do you understand? Families like the Potters will never understand our ways. They have strayed too far from their roots.”

“Yes, father. But I don’t think I like him anymore, he’s mean,” said Sirius with a frown.

"Then simply dissociate yourself from him, Sirius," Orion caressed Sirius' hair gently.

"I guess... so."

Turais observed the conversation with deep concern and wondered if he had irreversibly impacted James and Sirius’ friendship in this timeline.

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July 31, 1969 (Thursday)

For Turais’s eleventh birthday, which was an important milestone as it marked the start of his adolescence as a wizard, the family travelled to the Black Manor for the celebration. The entire extended family sans Walburga was present, although it seemed as though Pollux wished to be anywhere but there.

His wand choice, as expected, garnered the most attention. Arcturus was very pleased that he was chosen for an Elder wand, the first in the family, and with a horned serpent horn core, another first. To most, the wand core merely confirmed his Parseltongue ability. Everyone was convinced with the correlation and excited for Turais' future prospects.

After they returned to 12 Grimmauld Place, Orion tucked his younger sons to bed and headed to Turais’ bedroom.

“Turais, this ring -” Orion held out a large, golden band with the Black crest engraved on top that Turais had seen on his father’s index finger at all times. It was the same ring that Sirius threw out unceremoniously in the original timeline. “- was given to me by your grandfather when I was
eleven, and now, I am giving it to you.”

Orion held Turais’ hand and slipped the over-sized ring over his right index finger. The ring slowly shrank down until it rested snugly past the second knuckle.

“Thank you, father,” Turais said, shocked, as he felt the strong magic emanating from the object. Turais examined the intricate engravings on the ring and the protective runes that emanated and coiled around the object. “But I’m afraid I might lose something so valuable.”

Orion laughed at his son’s genuine concern. “That was the first thing that I asked when I first received it, too. Don’t worry, it had strong family magic that protects it from being stolen or taken off forcefully. Only you will be able to take it off once it’s on, and hopefully, that is when you give this to your Heir.”

Turais twisted the ring around his finger, suddenly feeling a heavy weight of responsibility from this little object.

Orion patted his shoulder and sighed. “I can’t believe you are eleven already. It seems like yesterday when you were just a tiny, little baby I could rock in my arms. But in one month, you will be starting at Hogwarts.” He leaned forward to embrace his son, who returned the affectionate gesture. “Son, I will miss you dearly.”

“I as well, father,” said Turais sincerely.

Orion released him and held his shoulders.

“I want to talk to you about Hogwarts and what to expect.”

Orion’s eyes suddenly hardened and Turais blinked incomprehensibly at the sudden change.

“Turais, you have been sheltered from the outside world for most of your life. And I hope you feel loved by your family as well. Even when you went to those balls and parties, we were by your side and the attendees are either close family friends or like-minded acquaintances. However, once you arrive at Hogwarts, you will meet many people who will dislike you for your family and what it stands for. Remember to stay close with your friends and fellow Slytherins.

“That being said, also be careful of your housemates. Trust no one except your cousins, but even then, be on constant alert. In Slytherin, there is a hierarchy in which everyone in the House must obey. As an heir of a prominent pureblood family, you are more fortunate than most as they will respect you for your station and status. But you might be forced to follow the lead of older students, such as Lucius Malfoy. Although I doubt he, or anyone for that matter, would dare instigate a feud against the Blacks, for your safety and my peace of mind, please avoid any confrontation.”

“I will be careful, father. Don’t worry about me,” Turais said, surprised by his father’s assessment of his own House.

“How can I not, Turais? You are my precious son... But you do worry me less as opposed to your brothers, especially Sirius. I don’t even know how he will survive Slytherin when the time comes for him to go to Hogwarts,” Orion sighed again.

“Did you climb to the top of that hierarchy, father?” asked Turais.

“No, I was never in the top circles, although I was well-protected thanks to my family name and as Heir. I was able to live through my years in relative peace.”
“What happens if you become the leader of Slytherin?”

“You will get to dictate the rules in which all Slytherins must abide to within their domain,” Orion said. “But you will also be constantly fending off challenges to your position. One’s life in Slytherin House is not easy, but it will also be a great opportunity to associate yourself with prominent families, which will prove to be very useful after school as I did myself.”

Turais nodded at the information. Already, a plan began to formulate in his mind. Unlike his father, he would have to climb to the apex of the Slytherin hierarchy in order to force the House to bridge the chasm between it and the other Houses. He would succeed because he must succeed.

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August 31, 1969 (Sunday)

Turais was preparing his bed that was stuffed with five pillows, four blankets, and in a few minutes... three Black brothers, two loud snorers, and one content big brother, when he heard a knock on the bedroom door.

He turned around and quirked a brow. Neither Sirius or Regulus ever bothered to knock on his door.

"Turais," Sirius said shyly as he walked into the room with his hands behind his back. Regulus was stuck beside his brother closely, leaving no gap between them as they waddled awkwardly up to him.

"What's up, Siri?" Turais asked, amused at his brother's meek display. It's rare to see Sirius less than flamboyant.

"Um... Reggie and I... we..." Sirius looked desperately at his younger brother for assistance.

But he only received a vigorous shake of his head and a nudge in response. Sirius glared at his partner-in-crime but decided to take the plunge. "... we... uh... wrote you a letter" - he exposed his hidden arms and held out a letter - "read it when you get to Hogwarts - only when you get to Hogwarts."

The tip of Sirius' ears turned pink as he ducked his head. Regulus was also looking everywhere but Turais while he shifted uncomfortably.

"Thank you so much, Siri, Reggie," Turais said happily as he took the letter carefully from Sirius' outstretched hands. "Come over here, you two."

His two brothers risked a glance at Turais and saw his brilliant smile and welcoming arms before finally deciding that they were not going to die from Turais' teasing. After sharing a look, they leaped into Turais' arms and sent them all crashing onto the mattress behind.

"Oof - do you two know how heavy you are?" Turais said as he wiped Sirius' long locks out of his face.
"Funny that you're the one talking..." Sirius mumbled into his neck. Regulus voiced his agreement in a grunt.

"Well, you're not going to hear my voice again until December so..."

"I'll miss you," Sirius suddenly blurted out as he lifted his head and looked down on his face. "Well... maybe not your bossiness... or your stinky breath... or..."

"Sirius, belt up," Regulus interjected. "Just... stop talking. You're ruining it."

Sirius smacked Regulus on the head and he yelped. "I'm your older brother, don't be disrespectful to your elders."

"Yeah? Make me," Regulus blew a raspberry as he leaped off the bed and out of the room while Sirius immediately gave chase.

"Wait until I catch you saucy little mink," Sirius' voice drifted from the open door. Their footsteps echoed thunderously up and down the hallways and stairs between the occasional shouts and horseplay.

A door opened upstairs and Orion's voice shouted loudly. "SIRIUS! STOP STRANGLING REGULUS!"

The scuffling stopped abruptly and a few moments later, a disgruntled Orion in his night-shirt and pajamas dragged the two brothers by the collar of their shirts and deposited them at Turais' door.

"Turais, please put up with these two for one more night. Sirius, Regulus, behave and go to bed."

The three brothers did as instructed as Orion tucked them into bed. Just as Orion was about to leave, Regulus asked shyly, "Father, will you tell Turais one last bedtime story? He really likes them."

Orion glanced at Turais, amused, and he returned a grin and a nod.

"Of course, Regulus. What a splendid idea." They both knew it was Regulus who wanted to hear the stories but they would never point it out.

Sirius shuffled over to make space as Orion settled on the edge of the bed beside the pillows.

"Siri, your cold feet!" Turais hissed as his brother wormed his leg around his waist. Sirius grinned mischievously and just coiled around him tighter.

"Not you too, Reggie!"

Regulus, seemingly trying to outshine Sirius, decided that he wanted to physically burrow himself into Turais and placed himself squarely on his chest as Turais' arm wrapped around his back. He was going to wake up sore again.

"Are you ready for the story?" Orion asked when the now-conjoined brothers finally settled down.

"Yes!" Regulus shouted excitedly. Orion chuckled as leaned back on the bedpost and started narrating.
"Once upon a time, there was an enchanted and enclosed garden..."

Turais focused on the warmth from Orion's voice and the familiar weight and heat of Sirius and Regulus' bodies snugged up against him closely. He felt as though he was encased in a cocoon of happiness and contentment. And he didn't want it to end.

He realized that this was one of life's perfect moments. With a smile on his face, Turais slowly drifted to sleep - at least for a few minutes until Sirius accidentally kicked him in the privates.

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*September 1, 1969 (Monday)*

As 12 Grimmauld Place was closest to King’s Cross station, therefore, Arcturus and Melania decided to meet them at home for breakfast before Apparating to the station.

The three Black brothers emerged from Turais' room bleary-eyed from the lack of sleep yesterday night. Despite Orion's narration of the entire collection of The Tales of Beedle the Bard, they were still too excited at the prospect of the start of school term to sleep properly.

Frankly, Turais still couldn’t believe he was finally going back to Hogwarts. Although this time, instead of pure ecstasy as he had felt as Harry Potter, he felt a pang of guilt and sadness for leaving his brothers behind. He knew they would be well cared for and protected by Orion, but he would miss them sorely.

His owl, named Edwige, hooted as she rattled the locked cage door. Realizing that she would like to go for a flight instead of being stuck on the train for many hours. He decided to release her after telling her to find him at Hogwarts after she was finished her hunt.

After a flurry of activities, he suddenly found himself on a busy train platform staring at a scarlet steam train. A sign above it said Hogwarts Express. Blinking at the sign, he felt the realization settling into his mind.

‘I am really heading back to Hogwarts!’

In the distance, he saw Pollux and Irma Black accompanying Cygnus Black and his three daughters. Pollux met his gaze and he turned away, ignoring his presence.

Shrugging it off, he turned back to his own immediate family. Turais received a firm handshake from Arcturus.

“Turais, remember what I told you at the Malfoy Ball. Keep yourself and your family safe,” Arcturus said sternly.

Turais nodded as he turned to receive a quick hug from Melania. Orion crouched down and long, tight squeeze with a quick peck on his cheek. He then turned to his brothers, who were both looking at their toes and unusually quiet. He knelt down to try and catch their wandering gaze.

“Hey, hey, Siri and Reggie. Promise to write me everyday. I have asked father and he has given permission for you to use our family owls, so I better receive something, *anything*, every
day when the owl post arrives. Or else I will be very crossed,” Turais said.


“Love you too, Turais,” Regulus said.

The three brothers shared a long hug. They stayed there until the train whistled, announcing the imminent departure of the train.

“Oh, you better get going, Turais, or else you will not be able to find a compartment,” Orion warned as he lifted his school trunk onto the train for him. But Orion was as reluctant as his younger sons, if not more, at the thought of letting his eldest son go to Hogwarts. Turais gave Orion a quick smile.

“I’ll write to you often, father,” Turais said softly. Orion nodded and flashed him a grin.

"Remember, after you get to Hogwarts!" Sirius reminded.

After a wave at his family, he stepped onto the Hogwarts Express. And unlike the last time eleven years ago, he knew where this train led to.

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The train gave a protracted, noisy lurch as Turais settled in his compartment that faced the crowded platform. Outside, the conductor’s voice called for the doors to be shut. Suddenly overwhelmed by a deep stab of homesickness, Turais looked out of the window and searched through the crowd hoping to get a last glimpse of his family before his return during the Christmas holidays. A sense of desperation was settling in rapidly when he found them in the throng. They were just where Turais had left them.

Turais frantically knocked on the glass as Sirius turned towards his direction. Sirius' eyes widened as he tugged Regulus' robe and said something. He turned, looked, and found Turais. Sirius waved excitedly with both hands and jumped up and down. Regulus clung onto Orion's arm with his face half-buried in the sleeves as he gave a shy wave after rubbing his eyes. Turais beamed at his brothers as the train slowly pulled out of the station. Sirius decided to give chase as he slipped from Orion's outstretched grip and ran down the length of crimson locomotive in front of the waving parents. He reached Turais' window and jogged alongside as he mouthed his goodbyes.

"Stay out of trouble!" Turais shouted.

Clearly, Sirius understood the meaning as he gave an eyeroll and stuck out his tongue. But he mouthed back as he started to run, "Fine, but you avoid trouble too!"

"Take care of Reggie and father for me!"

Turais didn't see what Sirius said as his brother lagged behind and disappeared from view. But he felt at ease that he knew they were in safe hands.

Turais continued to stare out the window as the milling bodies vanished behind a wall at the
end of the station and replaced by the scrolling view of the bustling, industrial heart of London. A gentle knock sounded on glass of the compartment door brought Turais' attention away from the view. The door slid open a fraction and then, the head of a round-faced girl with brown hair appeared through the opening.

“Excuse me, there are three of us and do you mind if we join you? All the other compartments are full,” she asked shyly. Turais glimpsed two other students through the glass pane. The grey-haired boy waved his hand as he saw his familiar face.

“Of course,” Turais said. Smiling gratefully, she slid open the door entirely and entered with her luggage as her companions followed. The second girl, with black hair bunched up in a ponytail, struggled to lift her trunk as she attempted to place it on the overhead compartment. Turais pulled out his wand and levitated the trunk upwards. The three children looked at Turais in awe.

“Turais! You can do magic already? Awesome!” The grey-haired boy exclaimed as he gave Turais a big hug.

“Hi Gerald, nice to see you again!” Turais greeted his second cousin warmly. He had met Gerald and his older brother, Geoffrey, occasionally over the years as Arcturus’ wife, Melania, was a MacMillan.

“I’m Alice.” He lifted the brown-haired hand to his lips and kissed the back of it.

“And I’m Jane, thank you for helping me with the luggage.”

“No worries, Jane, it was my pleasure,” Turais winked as he lifted her extended hand and kissed it. She blushed furiously at the pureblood traditional handshake… and maybe the not-so-traditional wink.

“And please call me Turais, pleasure to meet all of you. Are you all first-year students?” Turais asked, looking at their pure black robes and ties. Once students were sorted, their ties and robes will automatically incorporate their house colours.

“Yes, I’m guessing you are too?”

“That’s correct. Which house do you think you will get sorted into?” Turais asked casually.

“I don’t know. Alice and Gerald were just telling me about the different houses. My parents are Muggles so I don’t know anything about the Wizarding world. I’m afraid that I won’t get sorted into any house,” Jane said nervously.

“Don’t worry, everyone gets sorted. I’m sure you will feel at home wherever you go,” Turais gave her a comforting smile and she smiled back shyly. “This is why we go to Hogwarts right? To learn magic.”

“That’s right, Jane. Don’t worry! I’m from a pureblood family and I don’t even know how to cast spells yet, same with Gerald. Turais here is an exception,” Alice said encouragingly.

“Well, my entire family has been in Hufflepuff for generations, so I know where I’ll end up,” Gerald said dully. “It’s such a boring house - loyal, honest, and hard-working - that’s basically anyone.”

“I think Hufflepuff is pretty cool. I want friends who are steadfast and loyal to me so they can be honest with me and I will trust them to keep my secrets,” Turais said. “And definitely not everyone is loyal or honest.”
“You really think so?” Gerald asked, perking up at Turais’s affirmative nod. Gerald beamed.

“How about you, Alice?” asked Turais.

“Well, my mother was a Hufflepuff while my father was a Gryffindor, but my brother was in Ravenclaw. So I can’t tell from my family history. But as long as I’m not in Slytherin, I think I’m good with anything,” Alice said.

“Why not Slytherin?” Jane asked. “That’s the one with the snakes, right?”

“Did you not listen, Jane? Because they are evil and they hate people that are like you, who has parents who are Muggles,” Alice said darkly. “Don’t go near them, they will hurt you.”

Jane gulped and nodded. “How about you, Turais? Where do you think you’ll be sorted into?”

Turais swallowed while Gerald shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Glancing at Alice, he braced himself from her reaction to his response. “Well… I mean, like Gerald, my entire family has been in… well, Slytherin.”

An uncomfortable silence settled in the compartment as Turais looked down, pretending that he was embarrassed. Alice was staring at him with suspicion and disgust.

“Um.. you let us come into your compartment and helped me with my luggage, so you seem nice. Right, Alice?” Jane broke the silence as Turais looked up at Alice. Alice stared at Jane incredulously. “Alice, snap out of it! He’s not evil!”

“I can leave if you want,” Turais said, sounding dejected, and started to stand up.

“No, you will stay! Alice, you are being very rude to Turais and he has been nothing but nice to us. You need to apologize to him right now,” Jane said fiercely.

“Well, Alice. I’ve known Turais for a long time and I don’t think he’s evil either,” Gerald spoke quietly into his robes.

Alice met his gaze. After a few moments, she said hesitantly with a lack of sincerity, “Um. I’m sorry, Turais, I didn’t mean to be rude.”

“It’s okay. But just so you know, I don’t hate you because you have muggle parents, Jane. Your family background does not matter to me. You seem really nice too,” Turais said weakly.

“Okay then, let’s be friends,” Jane smiled brilliantly, ignoring Alice’s elbow.

The snack trolley came along a few minutes later and they each purchased a handful of sweets and shared it with each other. As they were sampling at the box of Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans, the compartment door slammed open sideways.

Turais turned to find three Slytherins standing imposingly at the doorway and snarling at him.

“I heard that Heir Black was here on this very train and I had to see for myself.” Turais remembered him from the Malfoy ball. He was Brutus Armand Nott, now a sixth-year. “I hope you did not forget what you did to me, because I will be reminding you a lot for this year, Black.”

“Who are you? Why are you threatening him?” Jane asked sharply.
“Who are you? Are you one of those filthy mud—“

Turais stood up and jabbed his wand at Nott’s neck, the tip of his wand touching Nott’s skin. “Do not use that word, you red-head brute. Wiggle back to your wormhole, you are not welcomed here,” Turais spoke in a deadly voice.

Nott’s Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed at Turais’s menacing tone. He managed to warp his face into a sneer, “I’ll watch your back if I were you, Black. You have no idea what I can do to you in Hogwarts.” Nott and his shadows disappeared and Turais shut the compartment door, sighing.

“So you’re a Black, and the Heir?” Alice asked, wide-eyed. “And you defended a muggleborn?”

“Well, Nott is a big bully and I don’t agree with using that word, it’s rude. I also don’t care about blood purity,” said Turais, shrugging, while putting his wand away.

“My brother said he’s one of the biggest bullies at school! Woah, Turais!” Gerald exclaimed excitedly.

“I thought you were lying when you said you didn’t care about Jane’s parents being muggles. I was wrong. I’m sorry, Turais, and I mean it this time,” Alice said apologetically, but this time, he could sense the sincerity in her words.

“It’s alright, Alice. I forgive you. I don’t believe purebloods are superior to Muggleborns and please trust me when I say that.”

“I believe you,” Alice said firmly, flashing him a smile.

“Thanks for standing up for Jane, Turais,” Gerald said. “And you called him a red-head brute, ha! That was brilliant. I have to write to my ma about this!”

“I overheard some of the older students saying that you are a Parselmouth, is that true?” Alice asked quietly.

“Yes, I can speak to snakes,” Turais said. The girls gasped.

“You can speak to snakes? It is a rare gift and only Dark wizards are supposed to be able to do that!” Alice frowned once more.

“No, Alice. Being a Parselmouth just means I might be related to Salazar Slytherin, who was a famed Parselmouth, in some way. The ability doesn’t make anyone ‘dark’,” Turais explained.

“I’m sorry, I’ve just been told that by my parents,” Alice looked sheepish. “But isn’t Salazar Slytherin supposed to be a Dark wizard?”

“I don’t know, Alice. Maybe he was, but he was also one of the greatest wizards of all times. Just because I speak a different language doesn’t mean I’m evil. That’s analogous to saying that because I speak French means I’m evil,” Turais reasoned. “Does it make sense?”

“I suppose so…” Alice said, frowning. But then her face relaxed into a small smile. “But anyone who stands up against bullies is good in my books.”

“Sorry, I’m not following. What did Nott do to me? What is a Parselmouth?” Jane asked, confused with the entire conversation. Alice, Gerald, and Turais shared an amused look.
Before anyone could speak again, the compartment door slid open again and a breathless fourth-year Slytherin boy stepped inside. Turais felt a sense of déjà vu as he eyed the scroll of parchment in his hand as the boy confirmed his suspicion, “I’m supposed to deliver this to Heir Turais Black.”

Turais unrolled the scroll and scanned the content as the boy exited the compartment. Although Turais really couldn’t care less for the writer’s attention, he is undoubtedly an extremely useful contact to have on one’s side and Turais wouldn’t dare to disobey a direct invitation. Sighing, he stood up and announced to his new friends, “I’m sorry but it seems that I have an invitation to attend lunch with Professor Slughorn.”

Chapter End Notes

The train compartment scene is inspired by:

Tsume Yuki's "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" - Chapter 4: The Annoyance Known As Bellatrix.

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What do think about the wand selection? Happy? Unhappy?

Also, yikes with James' blabbermouth...

The next chapter, Chapter 12: A Different Hogwarts, will be published next Saturday. We will finally get to see Hogwarts! Are you not entertained?!

Any thoughts or comments? Throw them my way!

- ravenclawblues 2019-09-30
Hey everyone,

The highly anticipated Hogwarts arc has finally begun. We're through the less interesting portions (aka set-up) of the story, if I can say so myself. Again, this is a veeeery long story so every year will have several chapters' worth of material in addition to the summers. On that note, as a teaser, refer to the news headline of Chapter 9: Battlelines Drawn and guess what will be happening the summer after first-year if you can do the math!

(Hint: add 4 to the year 1966)

Finally, from this point onward, there will be a slew of characters introduced and multiple plot lines and character interactions, which will be stretching my amateur writing skills to its limits. SO... if you see anything poorly done or any plot lines that I am neglecting, please let me know (I confuse myself half the time ¯\_(ツ)_/¯).

Send me any of your thoughts and comments!

- ravenclawblues 2019-10-05

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**CHAPTER 12**

**A DIFFERENT HOGWARTS**

August 16, 1968 (Friday)

*LEACH IS OUT, JENKINS STEPS UP!*

by Andy Smudgley

*Afflicted with a Mysterious Illness for Months, Muggleborn Minister Resigns*

After taking on the mantle of Minister for Magic for the past six years, the first Muggleborn Minister has officially announced his resignation, citing his declining health has barred him from further carrying out the role of his office. He will be succeeded by Eugenia Jenkins as the interim Minister for the remaining balance of his term until the next Ministerial election in two years' time.

6 Ever since last year, Minister Leach's health has been under intense scrutiny. The last public
event that he was seen to be in full health was the March Malfoy Ball of 1967...

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September 1, 1969 (Monday)

“Nice to meet your acquaintance, Professor Slughorn,” Turais said cordially as he greeted the large-bellied man who stood up at the sight of him. He saw two boys already seated around the table of four with a table at the corner of the compartment that held several cloche plates with metal domed covers.

“Good to see you, Heir Black,” Professor Slughorn said cheerily as he guided him to the remaining seat to his right.

“Please do call me Turais, Professor,” Turais said with a bashful smile.

The only way to suffer least with the professor was to just not resist, cozy up, and pretend to be innocent and pliable to his every whim.

Professor Slughorn's smile grew impossibly wider.

“Of course, Turais, m’boy! Now, this little lunch is just for the first-years as I do not wish to overwhelm any of you and I would like the cream of the crop to get to know each other before being separated into different houses. Speaking of which, let me introduce you to two of your future classmates.”

Professor Slughorn pointed to the brown-haired boy with slitted, obsidian eyes who sat across from Turais. His brows were furrowed tightly as his eyes glared at him unwelcomingly.

Turais’ eyes flashed with recognition. It was the boy he met at Twilfitt and Tattings.

As though unaware of the tension, the professor continued merrily, “This is Leon Pierricoeur, the eldest son of Emmaneul Pierricoeur, a famous Arithmancer and the first non-pureblood and Muggleborn to be inducted into the Société Arithmancie de l’Europe. But don’t be fooled by the last name as his father was born in Britain and attended Hogwarts as well.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Mr Pierricoeur,” Turais nodded as the boy maintained the unfriendly glare.

Professor Slughorn didn’t seem to notice the oddity and continued, “This is Alexander Fawley -”

Turais turned to look at the thin, shy, grey-haired boy who was clearly determined to look anywhere but at his eyes.

“- and I did not have a chance to talk to him yet. So you came at just the perfect time, Turais,” Professor Slughorn said cosily.

‘A Fawley boy?’

Turais was taught all the intricate relations between between pureblood families, especially for the Sacred Twenty-Eight, which the Fawley family was part of. But the main scion of the
Fawleys currently consisted of only two men. The first one was former Minister for Magic and current Lord Hector Fawley while the second was the famed social recluse, Howard Fawley. Neither men married nor sired a children, at least until now that was.

The boy in front of him was most likely the son of Howard Fawley since Lord Fawley was a high-profile individual and highly active in the Wizengamot. If he had an Heir, someone would have known by now.

So this same question would probably be on every pureblood’s mind during the Sorting: “When did Howard Fawley have a son and where did he come from?”

But to be honest, Turais didn’t really care. His personal experience of being gawked at as Harry Potter meant that he understood how someone’s familial matter was really no one else’s business unless they voluntarily provided the information. All families have their own issues and this statement was particularly true for pureblood families especially.

While Turais was temporarily lost in his thoughts, Professor Slughorn charmed one of the dishes over to the center of the table. He opened the lid and it was pheasant. Turais thought to himself.

’Some things never change.’

“Now I was just telling Alex that I went to Hogwarts with former Minister Hector Fawley. He was the most energetic and flamboyant fellow you could ever meet. A prankster too. Could never sit still and drove all of us half-mad. Guess how much a surprise it was when he was made Minister for Magic, and to be re-elected! Oh –” Professor Slughorn’s eyes glazed over for a moment while he reminisced about his schoolyard days. Then he remembered himself and gestured Pierricoeur to take a serving. “How is he faring these days, Alex?”

“I’m not too sure,” Fawley said uncomfortably.

“Well, I daresay he is a busy man especially with all the happenings in the Wizengamot. Too busy to even get married and have an Heir!” Professor Slughorn pressed on questioningly, “But you are his nephew… is it, nephew?”

“Cousins… he’s my grandfather’s younger brother actually so… my father is his nephew… but I don’t see much of him,” he said hesitantly.

“Is that so? How unfortunate,” Professor Slughorn smiled coldly as he gestured Turais to help himself with the pheasant as well, blatantly skipping over Fawley. “So how about you, Turais? I’ll admit I’ve fallen prey to the many rumours surrounding you and it has piqued my curiosity.”

“Of course, Professor,” Turais said amiably. “My father over-indulges my wish to maintain a low profile. It has frustrated my own grandfather so please don’t worry.”

Professor Slughorn chuckled jovially as he hugged his bulging belly, which hit the table slightly. “I can’t imagine one could over-indulge a delightful young gentleman such as yourself.”

Pierricoeur scoffed at the statement but Slughorn did not seem to take notice. “Did you know I’ve had the pleasure to meet your grandfather in school and to teach your father? I have a lot of great stories to tell you if you’d like to visit my office some day.”

“I’d love to hear them, Professor,” Turais said.

He then leaned in and whispered conspiratorially. It was for show as his words rang clearly
around the compartment. “Turais, I’m most interested in a particular incident. Is it true that you’re a Parselmouth?”

Turais quirked his eyebrow and smirked mischievously as he opened his mouth. However, it was only to eat a bite of pheasant, much to the man’s amusement and mild frustration.

“Fine, fine. Turais, you may keep your secrets. For now,” the professor scolded playfully, “Although I’ll find out soon enough.”

“Of course, Professor. You’ll be the first to know,” Turais said pleasantly.

“Oh, you can’t tease an old man like that, m’boy,” the man scolded mildly with a knowing glance but he looked humoured all the same.

The rest of lunch droned on as Professor Slughorn continued to exchange pleasantries with Turais and Pierricoeur while ignoring Fawley completely. As the sky was transformed into a rosy hue, the man finally released the three boys.

“Oh dear, we must be near Hogwarts. I wouldn’t dare to keep you any longer. Turais, Leon, please make sure to drop by my office at some point,” he said as he held the door open for them.

“Goodbye, Professor,” Turais said as he filed out of the compartment.

Once the compartment door slid shut again, Pierricoeur turned to him and hissed, “Well, I hope I don’t see you around, Black. What an arse-licker.”

With that, he rammed his shoulder into Turais as he passed by the two boys and stomped away. Turais turned to face Fawley, who was looking down at his feet, and they stood in an awkward silence.

“So… I’ll see you at Hogwarts then, Fawley. Goodbye,” Turais said as he eyed the boy in confusion. After realizing that he was not going to get a response, he trotted off in the opposite direction where Pierricoeur headed.

After a few steps, Turais swore he heard the boy mutter a “goodbye”, but he couldn’t be sure.

When the train arrived at Hogsmeade Station, Alice and Jane have completely warmed up to him and they have already made plans to meet up later in the week. They also gave Jane a crash-course on the prejudice against Muggleborns, such as her, and the bullying she might receive for it. But they assured her that only a few people thought that and the majority of the students will not have an issue with her parentage.

As they were alighting the Hogwarts Express, Turais heard a voice call out to him.

“Cousin Turais!”

The four first-years turned towards the voice and he saw Bellatrix shoving students out of her path as she headed down the train hallway towards him.

“It’s my cousin,” Turais muttered to his friends as he handed Jane’s luggage back to her. “Go ahead first, I’ll join you in a moment.” The trio eyed him worriedly but walked away at his stern gaze.

Walking back into the train hallway, Turais narrowed his eyes at his cousin and shouted, “What do you want, cousin Bella?”
“I heard from Nott that you spent your entire train ride with a filthy mudblood. You're Heir Black, how dare you associate with those rubbish?!”

“Who I associate with is none of your concern, cousin Bella. Mind your own business,” Turais retorted and walked away.

"Don't you dare ignore me, Turais,” Bellatrix shouted as she stormed thunderously after him. “Your father has clearly been too lax with his teachings.”

"Do not speak of my father, Bellatrix, and I will do as I please,” Turais said, not turning around to face her. "Save your breath."

"You will have a word with me, Turais. Stay!"

Turais refused to acknowledge her words. A second later, he heard Bellatrix whip out her wand.

“Incarcerous!” Bellatrix shrieked as he turned around to cast a quick Shield charm. The spell deflected back at Bellatrix and she was instantly tied up in ropes, seething on the corridor floor. Her sisters, along with Lucius Malfoy, came into view and gathered around her and considered him.

“Oh, cousin Bella, what happened to you? Accidentally tying yourself up? And I thought your incompetence could not be greater,” Turais sneered. “Maybe pick on someone your size for a change, a first-year beating a seventh-year does not make a good rhetoric for your cultivated image.”

After throwing her a final warning glare, Turais turned once again to leave the train.

He got off the train to a nearly empty platform and quickly placed his luggage and owl cage onto the luggage carriage before heading towards the docks to rejoin the first-years at the docks.

“There yeh are, Mr Black!” A large, towering figure bellowed at him as he came into view of the Black Lake. Hagrid, Turais recognized, walked towards him with an ugly, pink umbrella in his hand and grabbed his shoulders as he was forcefully walked towards the two dozen little boats floating gently over the inky waters. Once he was on the wooden dock, he saw his friends waving at him and pointing at an empty space in their boat. He walked over and climbed onto the boat, giving them a grateful smile.

“Everyone hol’ on tight, we don’ wan’a be late fer the Sortin’!” He heard Hagrid yell as he tapped his umbrella against his boat. Suddenly, the boats lured forward as they slowly sailed across the dark surface with only the tiny lamps to light up their surroundings.

As they sailed out of the cove that harboured the Hogwarts docks and into the centre of the Black Lake, the illuminated Hogwarts castle loomed in the distance in its full glory and without the crumbling towers and walls that marred the historic site after the Battle of Hogwarts.

At the sight, Turais’ distasteful encounter on the train was momentarily forgotten. All the students, including Turais, gasped in awe. Despite having spent six years in Hogwarts in his past life, it has been more than eleven years since he was last here. Turais felt the rush of emotion and love he felt for this place and a similar sense of awe that he felt when he laid eyes on this castle for the very first time.

“I still can’t believe this is real,” Jane whispered softly. “Please tell me this is not a dream.”
Turais chuckled, agreeing with the sentiment completely. “I feel the same, this is magic.”

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Professor McGonagall stood waiting atop the staircase as the students climbed up. Once the last of them stopped and stood still, she announced. “Welcome to Hogwarts. The start of term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The four houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. I hope you will be a credit to whichever house you join.

“The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few moments when I return to retrieve you, but before then, I will suggest you to smarten up yourselves.”

She departed as the students started to mutter amongst themselves, wondering how the Sorting will occur.

“I think we will need to fight against a magical creature to show our worth!” one of the boys spoke excitedly in front of Turais and his friends. He felt Jane stricken at the sentence.

“Don’t worry. You don’t need to fight off a creature. They won’t do that to a first-year who can’t do any proper magic,” Turais told Jane to calm her down.

“So you know how we are sorted, Black?” Pierricoeur’s voice sounded from somewhere ahead as he came into view.

“As a matter of fact I do -”

“Hiss something, Black,” he interrupted rudely.

Turais ignored the interruption. “To your question about how we are sorted, we will just have a hat placed on our heads and it will decide which house we belong to.”

“So, can you actually speak to snakes or not?” Pierricoeur narrowed his eyes at how Turais was selectively answering his question. Those who were pureblood and half-blood gasped at the mentioning of this information.

“Yes, I can, Pierricoeur. Do you have a problem with that?” Turais said. Another round of gasps sounded.

“I don’t believe you. You’re just another lying pureblood snake baby,” Pierricoeur returned with unmasked hostility.

“How dare you, you sodding mudbl -” a large boy further down the stairs shouted just as Gerald stepped in to defend Turais.

"Cheer up, mate," Gerald responded loudly.

"No one was asking for your girly swot opinions," Pierricoeur said. Gerald fumed as Turais placed a hand on his cousin’s shoulder.

“Now you’re plain rude, Pierricoeur. I -” Turais said.
“Prove it, Black. Say something. I bet you can’t because you’re a liar and -”

Before Pierricoeur could finish his sentence, someone cleared their throat behind Pierricoeur. He turned around to see Professor McGonagall peering down at him through her glasses sternly.

“Thank you. There will be plenty of opportunity to chat after the Sorting,” she then addressed all the first-years. “Follow me to the Great Hall please.”

Turais had an instinctive feeling that he would not get along with the boy. Fortunately, chances are that Pierricoeur would not be sorted into Slytherin given his hatred for the house. At the same time, Pierricoeur better not get sorted into Slytherin for his own sake as Turais knew he would have a terrible time in Slytherin being a non-pureblood and with that hostile display seemingly against purebloods.

“He’s gone mad, that wanker,” one of the other first-years whispered to him as they walked towards the Great Hall. The other first-years around him nodded in agreement.

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Professor McGonagall led them through the large oak doors and down the middle of the Great Hall, which is filled with students sitting at their benches with their respective Houses. As he walked, he noticed the stares he received from the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables, likely due to the rumours of his Parselmouth abilities.

They stopped at the bottom of the steps that led to the staff table ahead. Atop the stairs stood a stool with the Sorting Hat perched on it. After it finished waxing poetry about house unity, Professor McGonagall climbed halfway up the stairs and unscrolled her parchment.

“Black, Turais.”

Murmurs filled the Great Hall as students strained to catch a glimpse of the future Lord Black. Turais drew himself to his full height of an eleven-year-old boy and walked calmly up the stairs and sat on the stool.

The battered, old hat was placed over on top of his head and fell over his eyes.

‘Hmmm. Mr Black. I can sense the mind of an adult and that you have been Sorted once before. Yet I have no recollection of meeting you prior to today. How is that possible?’

‘Will this conversation remain private between the two of us?’

‘Yes, Mr Black. I am bound by the magic of the Founders to secrecy.’

‘Very well. I travelled back in time from a future where the Sorting Hat there Sorted me into Gryffindor.’

‘Hmmm... I do see plenty of courage. Not a bad mind. Brilliant, in fact. And also loyalty, yes - unwavering loyal to your family, your brothers. And a great ambition - yet curiously not a strong thirst to prove yourself. Very difficult to place indeed. I can see your potential as a Gryffindor, but that pales in comparison with your potential as a Slytherin. One's personality
does not change that drastically so I do wonder why my future self went with Gryffindor when Slytherin is clearly the superior choice.’

‘It did, but I refused to be placed in Slytherin and requested Gryffindor instead.’

‘Interesting… but I sense that you do not wish to fight my decision this time.’

‘No, indeed. I have great plans in store where being a Slytherin will be the superior choice. And this time around, I am prepared to face the challenges of this house.’

‘In that case, then - ’

“SLYtherIN!” The Sorting Hat shouted into the Great Hall. Amidst the polite applause of his fellow housemates, Turais jumped off the stool and headed towards the Slytherin table as his robes incorporated the Slytherin crest, greens, and silvers into his clothes. He saw his friends gave him an encouraging smile.

“What took you so long, Black?” Nott yelled over the fading applause. “Did you want to go to Hufflepuff?”

Turais ignored the taunt and sat down when he heard Bellatrix pipe up, “He’s a Parselmouth, Nott, where did -”

Turais waved his hand and cast a silent Silencio at the direction of the voice without looking. As he turned back towards the stool, he felt the intense gazes and uncomfortable mutters from both the students and the staff at the revelation and blatant display of magic by a first-year. A moment later, he heard Professor McGonagall cleared her throat once before continuing the Sorting ceremony.

He scanned the staff table and saw some familiar faces, albeit, much younger. Besides Hagrid and Minerva McGonagall, there was Horace Slughorn who was waving at him, Albus Dumbledore, Filius Flitwick and Pomona Sprout, who looked like she was barely thirty. When his eyes made contact with Dumbledore’s sharp gaze through his spectacles, he detected the tendrils of Legilimency probing against his Occlumency walls. Turais tore his gaze away from the piercing blue eyes as he focused at the crease between his eyebrows and the Legilimency attacks dissipated.

Sighing, he knew that this was just the beginning of a tenuous relationship with Dumbledore. Despite his good intentions, Turais has mixed feelings about his legacy in his past life. After taking time to reflect on his childhood and his Hogwarts years, Turais recognized the manipulative nature of Dumbledore’s action in his past life. While his actions did bring peace back to the Wizarding world, it still did not make his actions any easier to forgive. Dumbledore placed Harry Potter in the hands of the Dursleys without ever inquiring for his well-being. He lived in the willful ignorance that the Dursley would treat him well, and that careless attitude caused him so much distress and ruined his entire childhood - all for what? - for his belief that Voldemort would rise again and he needed a boy that was "humble" and "kind" so he could ultimately be on the "good side" to eliminate Voldemort.

Turais would like to believe that he would have saved the world regardless of Dumbledore’s persuasion or upbringing, but Dumbledore's methods would forever leave a bad taste in his mouth. The means did not justify the ends was his opinion on Dumbledore’s legacy, especially for what he did to Harry Potter. He has long since forgiven Dumbledore for anything he might have done wrong and continued to honour his undisputable role in defeating Voldemort, but he ultimately proved to the world that he was far from being infallible and Turais would never forget his easily
Furthermore, he knew that Dumbledore did not trust Sirius in the original timeline despite his decade-long friendship with James Potter. His suspicion of Sirius as a Death Eater was largely in part due to his inherent prejudice against the Dark families. If Sirius was not from a Dark family, Turais was sure that Dumbledore would have fought harder for a fair trial instead of falling back to pre-existing bigotry. His prejudice and subsequent inaction were two of the main reasons why Sirius spent thirteen years in Azkaban for a crime he never committed. Purely from this fact alone, Turais knew that Dumbledore would never fully trust Turais regardless of what he did and how much he proved himself. He would forever be the first to be questioned when any unfavourable situation arose. They would never truly be allies, not with him as Heir Black.

Therefore, Turais has no intention to involve Dumbledore in any of his plans nor would he contact Dumbledore and reveal his true nature. Dumbledore would only be suspicious of him or wield him like a weapon against Voldemort. This time, Turais would like to do things his way… and without Dumbledore.

“Fawley, Alexander.”

There was a moderate amount of murmur upon hearing the name.

“SLYTHERIN!”

And Fawley becomes the second Slytherin of the night. The shy boy he met on the train strolled over and sat beside him. Turais gave him a quick nod before focusing back on the Sorting. He was keeping an eye on every student that was Sorted. Death has told him that his path with Prometheus will only cross when he reached Hogwarts, but the information left much for speculation. Furthermore, excluding the fact that he did not know what he looked like underneath the mask, his only feature that was exposed was his grey hair; but even that could be misleading as he could have been under a glamour or used a simple hair colour-changing potion or just simply due to old age. In addition, Prometheus could be a fellow first-year student, or he might be a lower-year who has yet to start studying at Hogwarts, or even an upper-year Hogwarts student. It was frustrating but he basically has to filter through the entire school population to hunt him down.

“Macmillan, Gerald.”

“HUFFLEPUFF!”

Turais saw the grey-haired boy look in his direction and gave him a smile.

One of the main contributors to Voldemort’s success stemmed from was the radicalization of the already-contentious blood purity views amongst the Wizarding population. This divide never healed in his original timeline, which led to the eventual animosity between the Dark and the Light. And this division resulted in two destructive wars and a resulting inability for the Ministry to govern properly, which was capitalized by Prometheus. If he could minimize the animosity now, he might not even need to seek out Prometheus as he would not have the opportunity to rise.

“Pierricoeur, Leon.”

“RAVENCLAW!”

The boy strolled towards the Ravenclaw table beside his and shot him a dangerous glare. Turais shrugged it off and ignored him. If he is not in his House, his time spent with the new Ravenclaw would be minimal.
Turais has already decided that the search for Prometheus would have to take a lesser priority. For one, he had absolutely no clue who he was; for two, he could do much more good focusing on mending the growing divide between Slytherin and the rest of the school.

He would need to act quickly, however. Despite not knowing many things about the First Wizarding War, Turais knew the important timepoints of the war. In his original timeline, the first Muggle attacks started in the summer of 1970. But Turais did not know if the war has been accelerated or postponed in this timeline due to his existence. Regardless, he would need to accomplish a lot this year to have any hopes of changing the future before the inter-house animosity reached an irreversible state when the war in Britain began inevitably. And in order to do that effectively, he would need to seize control of the Slytherin House.

“Smith, Alice.”

“GRYFFINDOR!”

Turais has already mentally prepared himself for the cut-throat viciousness of the political games in Slytherin. He would play the game and he must win for that could be the key to turn the tides of the impending war. Currently, Lucius Malfoy was the leader of the Slytherin House. Turais would have to challenge his position, but he feared that without his powers as Master of Death, he would be vulnerable to possible lethal attacks from budding Death Eaters trying to impress Voldemort. He thought back to his sixth-year in Hogwarts as Harry Potter where Draco Malfoy managed to severely harm Ron and Katie Bell whilst trying to kill Dumbledore. While Voldemort has promised not to harm the Black family, Turais was not naive enough to think that he would actively discourage current Hogwarts students (who were technically not Death Eaters yet) to eliminate a possible threat.

“Stahl, Jane.”

“GRYFFINDOR!”

Jane gave Turais a quick smile and wave before running towards the Gryffindor table.

But he did not have the luxury to wait when the war was just beyond the horizon. He turned to briefly look at the unsuspecting sixth-year who was chatting animatedly with his pals. He would have to generate his chance to take over Slytherin, and that boy would be his ticket to the top.

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As the Slytherins filed out of the Great Hall and head down the staircases, Turais turned around at the sound of commotion. He saw the boy he sat next to struggling against the crowd as he fought his way towards the Slytherin group that marched slowly out of sight. Then, he crashed into two older Gryffindors.

“Excuse me,” Fawley mumbled as he tried to move past them between the two towering figures. But one of them pulled on the back of his robe collar and held him in place.

“Trying to slither to your snake pit? You pathetic slimeball,” Fawley tugged on his robe but he couldn’t get away. People around laughed openly at the struggling boy. Turais looked around, no staff was in sight.
“Hey, pick on someone your own size, you git!” Turais shouted at them as he strolled up to Fawley, abandoning the rest of the Slytherin group which continued to disappear through the doorway to the Slytherin common room.

“Another little hissy hatchling. I see you’re the newest Black, the worst of all snakes -”

“Watch your mouth, you poor excuse of a furry cat, and don’t speak ill of my family. Let go of him!” Turais said. Seeing that the Gryffindor had no intention of releasing the Slytherin. He said, “Relashio!”

As though Fawley had stung him, the Gryffindor hissed and released the smaller boy as he massaged his hand, scowling.

“Let’s go,” Turais grabbed Fawley’s hand and dragged him away from the dwindling crowd. He shot a final glance at the offending students. “Do not cross us again.”

“Ooo, this snake bites back, how cute…” he heard someone crow as they turned into a hallway in the dungeons.

Turais led them down a dimly lit corridor lined with fire torches and turned right at the intersection. Then, they made a left and down a flight of stairs, after that, another right. Here.

They stood in the middle of an empty hallway and faced a blank stretch of the wall. Neither of them knew the password, they were stuck.

Suddenly, an idea came to his mind and he hissed in Parseltongue, “Open the door.”

Turais felt a vibration in his robe as a single archway appeared followed by a door. Once fully formed, it swung backwards to reveal a narrow passage. ‘Eureka. Now that I know this, I won’t have to remember the passwords.’

“Did you just speak in Parseltongue?” Fawley asked timidly.

“Yes, I just said ‘Open the door’. I didn’t even know it would work,” Turais said and started down the hallway. After a short walk, he spotted the first-years at the end of the tunnel and they quietly joined the back of the group.

“Welcome to the Slytherin House,” Lucius Malfoy said as he looked at the two dozen newly-minted first-years in the underwater Slytherin common room. “I am your fifth-year Prefect, Lucius Malfoy. Professor Slughorn, the Potions Professor, is our Head of House. If you have any concerns, you may speak to him. The password for the common room this week is ‘Serpentine’ and will be changed every fortnight. The password will be posted on the wall and you will not share it with anyone outside of our House. First-year dormitories are located on the ground floor, two for boys and two for girls. Each room houses six students. Once you have chosen your bed, your belongings will appear. Choose wisely.

“As Slytherins, we pride ourselves with our ambition, cunningness, resourcefulness, and shrewdness. These values are not shared by the other three Houses, who will view you as the deceitful enemy. Therefore, Slytherins always protect their own beyond these walls. However, within these walls, you will be left to fend for yourself. A hierarchy exists in which you will become a part of; climb to the top and you will dictate those below you or stay in the bottom and fall prey to others.

“Breakfast starts serving at seven every morning and classes start at nine. But tomorrow, you must be present at the Great Hall by eight-thirty to receive your timetables. That is all, good night.”
Malfoy dismissed them and headed for the throne-like chair by the fireplace as the first-years began to walk towards their rooms. However, six older Slytherins detached from the rest of the observing students and stepped up to where Malfoy was and blocked their path. Their faces were twisted into various malicious sneers and grins before Bellatrix opened her mouth.

“Hello, you ickle little first-years, I am Bellatrix Black,” Bellatrix cooed frighteningly as she flashed her teeth at them. Turais felt threatened and he knew the rest of the group shared his sentiment. “There are a lot of unwritten rules in the Noble House of Slytherin… and the most important one is that there is a group called known as the Group of Seven. We have the final say in every House matter.”

Bellatrix suddenly hollered, causing the entire room to jump. “You must always obey them without exception, or you shall face your just punishment!” Then instantly, her voice dripped like sickeningly sweet honey, “But of course, you wouldn’t do that right?”

The entire group was stilled with shock and Bellatrix looked satisfied as she continued, “Good, then we will have such a fun time together!”

Bellatrix cackled.

If Turais had a mental fortitude of a first-year, he might have been absolutely petrified. However, he has survived a Wizarding War and worked as an Auror once, so he has basically seen it all and was not impressed with her theatrics by the slightest.

“We are six of the members in this prestigious Club that has the power to determine your fate,” Nott spoke after Bellatrix fell silent. “Lucius Malfoy, the Prefect who welcomed you into this House, is the Leader and his words are final.”

Nott then locked eyes with Turais. He spoke in a deadly whisper, “If you cross us, you will suffer the consequences.”

Turais refused to back down from his gaze. Eventually, Nott broke the prolonged eye contact with an enraged expression.

“Who here is not a pureblood?” A tall, thin man with blonde hair and calculating, blue eyes asked suddenly. Turais guessed from his appearance that he was none other than the teenage version of a menace, Corban Yaxley. From the corner of his eyes, he realized that none of the first-years raised their hands. Turais did not know if they were telling the truth, or if they were just frozen in fear, or if they were actually scared of revealing the truth of their parentage.

“You!” Yaxley pointed at the boy closest to the front and shouted, “Family names of both parents.”

The boy’s voice trembled and he said, “Pic… Picquery… an… and Sk… Skyes.”

Yaxley seemed satisfied as he moved onto the next target. This time, it was the girl behind him, “You!”

“Per… Perrot an… and Riviéres,” she stuttered.

“ French purebloods ,” Yaxley said with a hint of disgust, “But still better than half-bloods - You!” He pointed at the girl next to her.

“Sme… Smethwyck and… and…” the girl looked as though she was on the verge of tears. “... and…”
“And what, girl?” the boy leaned inches away from her quivering lips.

“Lefévre…” she whispered. Yaxley leaned back suddenly and the girl raised her arm across her face as though she was anticipating a strike on the face. The six members of the Group laughed mockingly.

“You thought I was going to hit you, girl?” Yaxley spoke. “Don’t worry, Lefévre is perfectly respectable. They’re just French. But as long as you’re a pureblood, you are welcomed in this house. Now, you!”

As the boy went through the two dozen first-years, Turais realized that all of them were purebloods. And that he has not heard of most of these family names: Rivers, Bellechance, Killick, Leroy, Hess, Runcorn, Tripe, Montgomery, Stout, Moonstone… He has met many people in many public and private events, Light and Dark, as Harry Potter after the turn of the century, but he has never heard or seen these names in the invites or attendee’s lists. This only meant… that no family members were alive to meet him thirty years later. How many families had Voldemort annihilated in his conquest for world domination? Turais despaired as he felt the truth hit him harder than ever before.

Suddenly, Turais realized that Yaxley was went through anyone and reached the third-last student.

“Gamp and Alderton,” the boy said.

“Ah, I recognize the Gamp’s waxy blonde locks. And Alderton- you’re the son of Daphne Alderton, I suppose. Good blood. You!” Yaxley jabbed his finger at the boy beside him.

“Fawley,” Fawley said as he visibly gulped.

“And what, Fawley? I’m sure we all have the same burning question. Who is this new Fawley boy joining our midst? I did not know Mr Fawley married nor sired a son, but he’s quite the recluse… unless he had a secret and shameful dalliance with a muggle… ” the blonde boy smiled sinisterly at the potential half-blood. Fawley became deathly pale. “If you’re not telling me… that means you have something to hide -”

“Excuse me,” Turais interrupted as everyone turned their attention towards him. This terrorization has got to stop before it turned ugly. He drew himself to his full height and aimed to exude an exorbitant air of regality and confidence as he addressed the boy once more.

“Judging by your hair and eye colours, I would guess that you are Corban Thuban Yaxley. I’ve met your brother, Cepheus a few years ago.”

“Yes, he has mentioned that dramatic event. I suppose all of us should keep our eyes open to what you’ll be up to, Heir Turais Rigel Orion Black. Our newest and finest addition to the Slytherin House,” Yaxley turned menacingly on him and sneered at the word “finest”. “So tell me, Black. Why did you interrupt -”

“Black and Black,” Turais spoke simply. The rest of the first-years and the common room widened their eyes at his second interruption.

“What do you mean?” Yaxley asked harshly.

“Black and Black. They are my family names…” Turais stared fiercely into Yaxley’s gaze before he turned and looked around the room predatorily. “… and likely Slytherin as well given my… unique ability.”
The entire room stilled at the mention of the Hogwarts founder’s name.

“Yaxley, now that you have finished playing your little game and terrorizing all of us, I would like to head to bed,” Turais said as he faked a yawn. “I am exhausted from my travels and I’d hate to say a bad word about my first day at Hogwarts to my grandfather.”

Turais grabbed Fawley’s stiff shoulders and steered him past the Group to their dormitories without a second glance.

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They entered one of the two male-designated bedrooms and found six poster beds arranged in a semi-circle fashion. Above his head, he saw a transparent dome that showed the dark murky waters of the Black Lake above. He quickly claimed the rightmost bed that was beside the wall and saw Fawley claimed the bed next to his. Immediately, his initials were magically inscribed onto the front board of his bed. “T. R. O. B.”, it spelt. His school trunk and empty owl cage also appeared beside the chest a second later.

“So, um, you can speak to snakes?” Fawley asked as he stood in front of his bed and watched his luggage appear in front of him.

“Yes. I can speak to snakes,” Turais said nonchalantly.

“That’s cool. And, um, thanks for saving me back there… from the Gryffindors and…. um… thanks for saving me from the Slytherins too.”

“You’re welcome,” Turais responded coolly.

An awkward silence permeated the room as Fawley fidgeted while Turais eyed him warily. Deciding that Fawley wasn’t about to speak, he sat on his bed and pulled out the letter that Sirius and Regulus wrote him in their messy scrawl.

Dearest big best-est brother Turais,

This was all Reggie’s idea.

Hey, Siri is lieing.

Don’t listen to Reggie.

Siri is the yucky rowmantic one.

But we will miss you. A lot. And lots. And lots and lots. And lots and lots and lots. Lots X10.
Lots times 1000!!!
And don't forget about us! That's right, don't.

Sincerely Lots and lots and lots of love times infinity,

Your Siri and Reggie

Turais smiled at the letter and placed it back into his breast-pocket for safe-keeping. He had a thank you letter to write soon. Glancing at the framed family portrait of him with Orion, Sirius, and Regulus on his bedside, Turais already missed their smiling face; and of course, Sirius had to sneak in a funny face as he made a cross-eyed look for one second before reverting back to an easy smile.

“So… you’re Heir Black.”

Turais turned his head to see Fawley eyeing his picture in curiosity.

“Yes.”

Another awkward pause.

“Um… I could be a half-blood but why did you help me -”

Turais turned his body fully and look at Fawley square in the eyes. “Look Fawley, I don’t care about your blood status and I could care less what your mother’s blood status is. You can be a pureblood, half-blood, muggleborn, half-creature, non-magical, lycanthropic, but no one should be subjected to that kind of bullying.

“Also, I am not going to pry in your familial matters. It’s no one’s business to needle you for private information.”

Fawley looked equal parts relieved and gobsmacked as his eyes widened comedically. Then, he grinded his teeth and pursed his lips as he breathed heavily. Finally, he worked up his courage and blurted out.

“Can we be…” Fawley shouted out the first three words but faltered on the last and most important word, “...friends?”

Turais observed the boy’s furrowed forehead, compressed lips, and crossing hands while he engaged in an internal battle. Why didn’t he agree to it at once? He wasn’t sure. It's just... everyone is a suspect, right? No point in being best mates with the future Dark Lord?

'Yeah, you really think that now don't you, Turais. At this rate, you’re just going to lead a long, lonely life.'

Turais was not too convinced with his own argument, to be honest. But it seemed like he hesitated for a moment too long as Fawley hung his head and sagged his shoulders.
A peculiar awkwardness settled between them as Turais haltingly turned back to his task. He started to cast all the protection spells he knew on the chest, including adaptations of Auror-grade spells that were used for protecting evidence. Satisfied, he then proceeded to unpack his items and placed them inside the chest before spelling it closed. He turned his attention to his bed and cast multiple privacy and protection spells, including permanent Imperturbable and Shield charms. Turais would not let his guard down for a single moment in his House. Although he has experienced this cautious lifestyle as an Auror before, he could already feel the stress building up within him once again thinking about the seven years to come.

‘This is what you get for trying to save the world.’

Scratching his neck, he eyed Fawley, whose back was decidedly turned against him, and returned to the common room. The group of first-years were still huddled around the corner and eyeing him with a mix of awe and admiration while Yaxley and Malfoy has disappeared. However, the ambiance of the common room was now more lively and filled with conversation compared to the tense, repressive silence minutes ago. People were still gathered around talking about what just transpired or reconnecting with others after the break. Once he spotted his cousins, the three Black sisters, he started to walk over.

However, Nott intercepted him in the middle of the room.

“Black!” he barked as the common room fell silent and eyed them with trepidation. “Hogwarts is not like your home where you can act like the crown prince and pretend to Lord over everyone, hissing voice or not. There is a pecking order in this House and while I’m at the top of it, you -” Nott rammed his index finger into Turais’s chest and causing him to stumble back one step, “- are at the very bottom. If you know what’s best for you, stay out of my way, or you will regret you were ever born.”

Turais drew him up to full height and stared up at him with a deadly glint. Nott stared back but after a few long seconds, his eyes visibly quivered and he broke the eye contact. Managing a final condescending sneer, he strutted away. Turais sighed internally but ensured that his face was expressionless as he straightened his robes, pretending as though that confrontation never occurred.

Ignoring the glances and whispers at his direction, he approached his cousins, who were all huddled together in a corner far removed from the other students and deep in conversation. Bellatrix was clearly agitated and pointed her finger at Andromeda accusingly.

" - I forbid you to come in contact with that mudblood -" Bellatrix hissed.

"There is nothing happening between us -" said Andromeda.

"There better not be, Andromeda, or -"

“Cousins, may I have a word?” Turais demanded in an authoritative tone, glancing up at the female Blacks as they turned their attention towards him.

“You may, and if I can have my way, that would be Crucio -” Bellatrix spat viciously.

“Bellatrix ,” Turais spoke in a menacing tone while Silencing his cousin a second time this evening. His voice echoed throughout the quiet common room in front of a full audience who were currently watching the Black family drama unfold before them eagerly. “Might I remind you what happened two years ago when someone uttered Crucio at me? I will not hesitate to return that favour, curse for curse.”
Bellatrix turned deathly pale, realizing that she just insinuated that she would harm Turais in the same way that Walburga once did. Walburga was publicly shamed by Arcturus within the family and removed from her children. Clearly favouring his Heir Presumptive, Bellatrix understood the implications if word was to reach Arcturus of her grave mistake.

“Cousin Turais, please lead the way,” Narcissa said quickly as she shot Bellatrix a withering gaze. Bellatrix seemed to be a bit chastised by her youngest sister.

“Shall we then?” He smirked at Bellatrix and gestured with his arm towards the bedchambers. Narcissa and Andromeda nodded stiffly.

“After you, cousin Bella,” Turais said with fake, saccharine sweetness and they headed towards their room. Turais followed after them and took the opportunity to glance around the room at his fellow Slytherins. They all eyed him with a mixture of weariness and admiration. A first-year just managed to interrupt Corban Yaxley, stare down Brutus Nott, and scare Bellatrix Black into submission.

‘Not so low on the pecking order, am I?’

After entering an empty bedchamber, Turais spelled the door shut and cast an Imperturbable Charm on it as well as a Muffling Charm around the room. After he was finished, he turned towards his cousins.

“I would like to address your attack on the Heir Presumptive of the House of Black on the train, cousin Bella? And even worse, when my back was turned,” demanded Turais.

“Why you -” Bellatrix spoke before Narcissa interrupted her.

“We do apologize for her actions, cousin Turais,” Narcissa interrupted.

“Cissy, Stop -”

“This will not happen again. You have my word.”

“I hope your word is good, cousin Narcissa. I do not wish for others to see in-fighting amongst our family. Yes, cousin Bella, family. I should not have to worry about family attacking me. This is not a request,” Turais said. “The incident on the train and in the common room will be conveniently forgotten and absent from my letters to grandfather. And my cousin Bella here will remain as Queen of Slytherin, if she so desires. But if any incident were to arise, my memory might just return.”

“How dare -”

“Of course, cousin Turais. I agree completely,” Narcissa spoke smoothly before Bellatrix could get another word out of her mouth. “Blood is what matters most.”

“Please see to it, cousins.” Turais looked at Andromeda. She nodded. Finally, he turned to a fuming Bellatrix. She looked at him with eyes filled with hatred, but she clenched her jaw and nodded.

“Thank you, cousins. However, I would like a private word with Bellatrix, would you mind leaving us for just a moment? I promise to return her unscathed.”

“You!”
Narcissa nodded and headed for the door with Andromeda following behind. Once they left, Turais turned back to Bellatrix.

“Bellatrix, there is one more condition,” Turais said. He felt that this plan was a bit reckless but he'll try his luck. It was not everyday that he would have some leverage over his wicked cousin, and he would have to capitalize on her gaffe. He looked at Bellatrix as she was about to argue. “You didn’t really think Narcissa’s promise was sufficient to placate me, did you? Your actions requires more punishment. I need something more... a promise. A promise to do one bidding of whatever I request. But don’t worry, it will not be illegal, against school rules nor self-inflicting commands. And the deal will expire the moment you graduate from Hogwarts.”

Turais saw Bellatrix hesitate. Of course, a blank cheque to do whatever he commanded her was a great risk and uncertainty for anyone to promise. Turais would have to push her a little.

“Bella, you have one year left in Hogwarts before you can leave and go on your merry way to greatness, marry Lestrange, and do whatever you please. But before then, you’re still a Black and I’d hate to see you lose your family name. Can you even imagine the disgrace? Will a Lestrange still be willing to marry a disowned girl?”

"Are you threatening me, Turais?" Bellatrix glowered.

"No, Bella. You misunderstand me. I'm giving you a choice," Turais said.

"Well, I choose to not accept this ridiculous insinuation."

"Do you really now, Bellatrix? Then I might just have to alter some important details regarding your unprovoked attack... a change of the spell used? Crucio perhaps... guess whose words grandfather Arcturus would favour when it’s yours against mine."

Bellatrix stared hatefully at Turais. She couldn't do anything against the Heir of her family without facing serious consequences from Arcturus and was practically backed into a corner by Turais.

“Fine!” Bellatrix spat, “I accept the deal! But you'll regret this. Mark my words.”

“Thank you, I wish you a pleasant evening.” Turais cancelled all the spells and left the room.

***

September 2, 1969 (Tuesday)

“Good morning, Turais... Black,” Fawley said when Turais drew his curtains open. Fawley was already dressed neatly in his school robes with his school bag hung across his body. The other four boys - Flint, Rivers, Steward, and Urquhart - were still sleeping soundly as evident by the occasional soft snores.

Casting a Tempus, he saw that it was six-thirty in the morning. He eyed the boy suspiciously, but returned the greeting. Then, he went to wash up and change in the bathroom. But when he returned to the room, he saw Fawley was still standing awkwardly in the center of the room.

“Um, do you want to head up to breakfast with me?” Fawley said shyly.
“Sure… I need to head to the Owlery first though,” Turais said slowly, confused. “Give me one moment to grab my bag.”

“Great, I will wait for you by the fireplace,” Fawley said happily and went out of the room. Turais stared at the door, wondering what just happened.

They exited the common room and walked up to the Owlery, where Turais sent his family a letter via Edwige, and finally to the Great Hall. All the while, Fawley filled the silence with his excited chatter about his favourite Quidditch team (Puddlemere United, duh), his favourite creature (a bowtruckle), and his future career (a Wandmaker or Magic Theorist specializing in wandlore). He just started to describe his favourite food item when they reached the empty Great Hall. It was a minute after seven and clearly no one has woken up so early for the first day of classes.

As they settled into their seats, Turais was grateful for the temporary silence from Fawley, who turned out to be surprisingly talkative. But it was short-lived as Fawley quickly shoveled some scrambled eggs down his throat and began to talk again.

Unable to contain his frustration, Turais interrupted Fawley’s monologue and snapped at him. “Fawley! Can you be quiet for just a minute? You have been talking non-stop for the past half-hour and it’s very annoying.”

With a clank, Turais saw Fawley drop his fork onto his plate. He looked up and was surprised to see his lips quivering and his eyes wide in shock.

“I’m sorry…” Turais started to apologize when Fawley suddenly got up and ran out towards the entrance, crashing through a couple of Ravenclaws on his way out.

‘Should I run after him or should I just leave it? Of course you need to chase after him, he is just a shy but over-excited child who is trying to make his first friend at school, dummy!’

Turais reprimanded himself mentally and grabbed their bags as he hurried after him. He saw Fawley run out to the front courtyard and onto the school grounds as he called out.

“Hey, Fawley! Stop running! I’m sorry!” Fawley suddenly tripped over a rock and fell forward onto the ground. Turais ran out to him, slightly out of breath and crouched beside the shaking body. He can hear the muffled sniffling.

Panting, Turais said gently. “Hey, Faw - Alexander. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. Alexander, will you forgive me?”

Turais shook his shoulder softly. “Alexander? Alex? Hello, anyone here?”

Fawley righted himself as he got into a sitting position as he looked up at Turais. “I’m sorry, Tur - Black. Can I call you Turais?”

“Yes, sure. Should I call you Alexander or Alex?”

“Call me Alex. Turais, I didn’t mean to run away, I didn’t mean to annoy you. It’s just … I never had anyone to talk to, unless you count the house elves -” There was a slight intake of breath, before he muttered, “I’m sorry.”

Turais realized that he has fallen for exactly the same prejudice that he vowed to stop. Fawley was just a lonely eleven-year-old who started school and was simply eager to make friends with him. But Turais was too consumed by the fact that he was a pureblood Slytherin and, therefore, a would-be Death Eater that would stab him in the back at any moment to even give think that he
would genuinely want to be friends with him.

“I should be the one apologizing, Alex. I’m sorry I overreacted. I could have said something to warn you before getting mad at you. I don’t have a lot of friends either, so this is new to me too. So um, do you want to start all over again? Hi, my name is Turais Black, nice to meet you.” Turais held out his hand.

“Hi Turais, my name is Alexander Fawley but you can call me Alex. Nice to meet you too.” He took his hand and gave him a bashful smile.

“So, let’s head back to breakfast? I didn’t even grab a bite of food yet.” Turais lifted the boy up from the ground and cast a Cleaning Spell on his muddied robes.

“Sounds like a wonderful plan. Did I tell you my favourite breakfast item is -”

“Alex -”

“Right, sorry. I’ll shut up.”

Chapter End Notes

Bellatrix shouting out that Turais is a Parselmouth scene is inspired by:

Tsume Yuki’s "Time to Put Your Galleons Where Your Mouth Is" - Chapter 4: The Annoyance Known As Bellatrix.

***

I took some artistic license with the creation of the Group of Seven. But the Slytherins seemed like the kind of place where you would have something akin to a secret and exclusive college dining club. And also because, plot.

Next chapter is Chapter 13: The First Ascent, and will be published next Saturday. Until then!

Thoughts and comments are always welcomed. :) 

- ravenclawblues 2019-10-05
Hey everybody,

First order of business. Who is well-versed in the Northumbrian dialect and would be willing to help me translate a couple lines of dialogue? There will be no spoilers from the phrases that I will send you, rest assured. Please write PM and your contact email in the first line of your comment so I can send them over and know to not post your comment. I will credit you on the chapter(s) which your work appear(s) on.

Second of all, for those of you who have posted your speculations, you might have noticed that I conveniently ignored parts of your comments - particularly about Prometheus' true identity. I will have to continue to do so because I can't really let the cat out of the bag so soon, can I now? 😊

But please keep posting your speculations and reasoning. The hints are layered heavily in my story (if I do things correctly) so hopefully it isn't out of the left field during the ultimate reveal.

Also, this is a massive 10k chapter compared to the average 4-5k chapters at the beginning. I can't believe I wrote that much, really... my chapters are getting longer...

Finally, you might notice that I have included an illustration for this chapter! I *might* do that for selected chapters - We'll see 😊 I have also added one for chapter 1 and chapter 6 if you would like to check it out.

As always, please comment! I would love to hear from you.

- ravenclawblues 2019-10-12

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER 13

THE FIRST ASCENT
June 30, 1969 (Sunday)

**PUREBLOODS VS. SQUIBS**

by Andy Smudgley

*Squib Sit-in Interrupted by Pureblood Parade Turned Chaotic*

*The Squib Rights march, which was held in the only all-wizarding British village of Hogsmeade, was interrupted by a counter-protest by a group of purebloods. What initially started as a peaceful sit-in quickly spiraled out of control as the opposite camps clashed violently. The Ministry Hit Wizards arrived on site and was quickly able to separate and subdue both sides. However, the leaders of both movements were arrested on charges of instigating public unrest...***

September 6, 1969 (Saturday)

It was the first weekend of the school term and Turais finally had the time to seek out the first item that would destroy Voldemort once and for all. It was prudent that Turais destroy all the Horcruxes as he came across them to avoid losing access to them. Hence, Turais found himself standing silently in front of the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy teaching trolls how to ballet.
‘I need a place to hide things. I need a place to hide things. I need a place to hide things.’

Turais focused on his request and on his third pass in front of the blank wall, the long- awaited door finally materialized.

Turais opened the door to mountains upon mountains of hidden and forgotten items in the Room of Hidden Things. Wracking his mind for the memory of where he once hid Severus Snape’s Potion book, Turais made his way through the maze. Finally, he reached the chipped bust of an ugly old warlock. He searched in the pile of items nearby and suddenly, a discoloured, old tiara caught his eye.

The Lost Diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw.

As steadily as he could over his body which was trembling in anticipation and excitement, he pointed his wand at the Diadem as he focused all his magic on the spell and muttered ‘Geminio’.

The Diadem shook as a replica slowly budded out and separated into two exact copies, one with the Horcrux while the other one without it. Turais examined his handiwork closely. Satisfied that the appearance was flawless, he replaced the real Diadem with his fake copy and hid the box once again.

Taking a leaf out of the Regulus Black’s deception in the original timeline with the Slytherin locket, Turais decided that there was no reason that Voldemort should suspect anyone would know about his Horcruxes, let alone where he hid them. So Turais was confident that the fake diadem would not be touched as Voldemort would never dare return, especially not when Dumbledore was Headmaster. This was one of the only Horcruxes that Turais could safely disable without raising suspicion for now.

Carefully, Turais lifted the Diadem with his wand physically with the Diadem balanced on it and brought it to a relatively uncluttered space in the room. Placing it on the floor, he willed the strongest shield charm that could withstand Fiendfyre and saw a shimmering blue sphere curling itself into a cocoon of protective energy around the object.

Confident that the shield was complete, Turais then concentrated on summon the Fiendfyre and directed his spell to form within the perpetually swirling, translucent barrier. A scalding heat ran from his magical core through his arm as a warm glow appeared inside the encasement, burning warm as beads of sweat gathered on his brows from exertion. Turais felt as though he was sprinting a marathon.

The fire grew and grew as its flames twisted and turned in an unpredictable manner. Miniature serpents and chimeras were also visible. Every time the flames challenged the shield, Turais felt as though someone landed a mean punch in his gut. He held onto his magic for dear life - he could not let the shield break...

The tips of the flames touched the barrier and then shredded back into tiny flicks of amber before disintegrating. They crashed and slammed against the stone floor as it began to fissure under the pressure and heat.

Fortunately, the barrier held.

Turais watched the ball of energy that glowed in orange and black for a minute when he suddenly heard a loud, unearthly scream emitted within the swirling torrent of flame. However, the scream was short-lived as the roars of the Fiendfyre soon overtook it once more. Desperately tired, Turais gathered the last of his sanity and rapidly depleting magic to maintain the spells for another
minute before he finally cancelled the *Fiendfyre*. Through the shield, he can see a large crack down the middle of the diadem as black liquid oozed out onto the blackened surface of the diadem, and finally onto the cracked and charred floor.

Turais collapsed onto the cold, stone floor as his entire body protested an ached. Panting out labourious breathes, Turais felt light-headed from how the curse drained his magical energy. Anyone with the required intent and magic could cast *Fiendfyre*, such as Crabbe once did, but to control it was a completely different matter. Casting powerful Dark Spells with the immense control and precision he just demonstrated were magically and physically draining, especially when he was still physically an eleven-year-old. Further aggravating his case, his magical core was inherently incompatible with Darker magics. He could easily maintain multiple Patronus Charms for hours, but a few minutes of *Fiendfyre* would put him in bed for the rest of day and tomorrow. There were limits to what his body and core could sustain, but fortunately, it should be easier next time when his powers as Master of Death manifested.

For a brief moment, he wished he could seek out the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets and extract its fang. But unfortunately, he did not know how Voldemort controlled the beast nor did he want to accidentally unleash the monster upon the castle. So *Fiendfyre* was his only option. However, the deed was successfully completed and he would allow himself a short moment of victory.

One down. Four more to go.

***

Turais was dragging his tired body to the Slytherin common room as the clock tower in the distance struck ten consecutive times. The image of a warm, comfort bed filled his mind as he turned into the dimly-lit common room corridor. Suddenly, his thoughts were rudely chased away by the sudden opening of the secret doorway as light flooded the halls. Turais immediately ducked into the shadows of a nearby alcove as a girl exited the doorway. She wore a dark, long shawl and had her hood over her head, concealing her features.

Suddenly, the common room entrance appeared once more as a pair of footsteps clambered out to the chilly corridor.

“**Andromeda, where are you going?**”

The girl stopped walking.

“That is none of your concern, Cissy,” she said hauntily.

“You’re going to meet up with Tonks, aren’t you?” Narcissa hissed. “But you promised us that you will break relations with him.”

“So what if I lied, Cissy?” Andromeda challenged.

“I… I…” Narcissa stammered, “I will tell Lucius and Bellatrix, they will stop.”

“Cissy, if I am afraid of them, I would not be out here arguing with you at this moment.”

“He’s a mud-”
"I told you not to call him that, Cissy," Andromeda said. "He is as magical as you or I -"

"You will be disowned!" the younger girl shouted in exasperation.

"I will face the consequences when that day arrives."

"But he's not worth it, sister!"

Tears began to well up in Narcissa's eyes.

"He is..." Andromeda said sincerely, "... to me. Cissy, I love -"

"NO!" Narcissa shouted as her covered her ears with her hands and shook her head in denial. "No..."

"Cissy, please listen to me -" Andromeda grabbed her sister's arm just for her to twist her arm away from the contact and push her away.

"NO! You lied to us. You lied to me! I won't listen."

Angry tears now began to flow out of Narcissa's glistening eyes. Andromeda looked as though she was on the verge of doing the same.

"Cissy, I beg you!" Andromeda shouted desperately as Narcissa suddenly snapped her head at her sister in shock. She stumbled backwards and away from her older sister as though she didn't recognize the person in front of her.

"Cissy, please -" Tears were streaming down her face now.

"Look at what you have become," Narcissa said coldly and void of emotion. Only the traces of tear on her face showed evidence of her recent emotional outburst. "We, Blacks, never beg. We. Never. Beg. I'm telling Lucius. He will give you detention every night -"

"Cissy -"

" - then you will not have the chance to see that home-wrecker," Narcissa's eyes shone with fierce determination as she walked back through the doorway. "I will not let anyone destroy my family."

The door slammed shut as Andromeda collapsed onto the floor, sobbing. But the breakdown only lasted for a few moments as she picked herself up. Still sniffing, she continued on her original path, which was directly towards Turais' position. As she turned the corner at the intersection, Turais decided that he would confront his cousin and offer her his help. As he stepped out of the shadows, Andromeda's eyes widened as she gasped in surprise.

"C...cousin Turais."

"Listen, Andromeda," Turais said quickly as Narcissa would soon return. "Where are you and Tonks meeting up?"

"Why?" Andromeda's eyes narrowed as she asked harshly.

"I'm going to misdirect them," Turais said. "You need to tell me now."

Andromeda stared at Turais for a hard moment before making her decision. "Hufflepuff Quidditch changing room."
Turais nodded and said, "Steer clear of the Astronomy tower."

Andromeda gave a quick nod and Turais walked past her towards the common room entrance. By the time he stepped into the doorway and looked back, Andromeda has already disappeared. Behind him, two figures walked briskly towards him from the other end of the tunnel.

"Black! Why were you outside the common room after curfew?" Malfoy's voice boomed.

Turais calmly turned his head towards the fifth-year Prefect and Narcissa. "Am I now? All I can see in that my two feet are firmly in the tunnel, which is within bounds."

"Black, do you take me as a fool -" Malfoy started to shout when Narcissa interrupted.

"Lucius! Her!"

Malfoy narrowed his eyes at Turais, who remained as impassive as ever. "Your lucky star is shining tonight, Black. You won't get away with this next time." Malfoy and Narcissa walked past Turais in a huff.

"As a gratitude for your magnanimity..." Turais said airily as the two older Slytherins paused. "The person you seek was heading towards the Astronomy Tower... of course, it was my imagination."

A long moment later, the common room door slammed shut and Turais wished Andromeda that her lucky star was shining brightly as well.

***

"Where were you, Black?" one of Turais' roommates, Flint, asked as Turais stepped into the boy's dormitory. "It's more than an hour after curfew."

"What is it to you, Flint?" responded Turais tiredly. 'Why is everyone so nosy?' He could see Alex eyeing him with concern.

He was barely able to keep himself upright, let alone engage in a conversation right now.

'At least tomorrow is Sunday so I can recuperate.'

"You're nothing but trouble, Black! Thank Merlin that my father doesn't work with your Lord Black so I don't need to pretend to like your ugly mug," Flint snapped.

"If you're calling him ugly, you clearly don't understand the word," another one of Turais' roommate asked as he looked up from his textbook. "Maybe try the mirror, that'll show you what true ugly is."

"Steward! You're lucky that -"

" - that my father doesn't work with Lord Malfoy so I don't need to be pals with you," Steward said. "Sleeping beside you is vile enough."

"Yeah, Flint. Do yourself a favour. Shut up and hide behind your curtains," Rivers added.
"Everyone -" Turais said weakly.

Urquhart, the boy who occupied the leftmost poster bed, drew back his curtains and shouted, “All of you shut your big fat mouths, I’m trying to go to sleep.”

“Then knock yourself out, Urquhart,” Flint snapped.

“Yeah, your poor family doesn’t even have a seat in the Wizengamot so you’re not entitled to an opinion,” Rivers concurred.

Urquhart scowled. “I don't want to have anything to do with any of you either," Urquhart fumed as he drew his curtains shut again.

“And we don’t want to see your face,” Rivers retorted.

“Everyone, stop arguing at once!” Turais shouted as all the boys turned their attention to him. “You will not make personal attacks against anyone else in this room.”

Flint snorted. “Steward and Rivers might be under your command, but you have no control over what I do, Black.”

“Watch your words, Flint,” Rivers said menacingly. "I am not one of Black's minions. I am from a Grey family and -”

“That just means your family is spineless,” Flint sneered.

“At least they’re not a complete tosser like you, Flint,” said Steward.

“You speak as though your family is any better, Steward. If we and the Malfoys lose, you wankers are losing as well. Put that in your pipe and smoke it,” Flint said before drawing his curtains up.

"The revolting face has finally disappeared," Steward said loudly. "Glad we don't have anything to do with each other."

***

September 9, 1969 (Tuesday)

“Transfiguration is a very scientific, disciplined branch of magic. Unlike Charms or Potions where the practitioner may display some personal flair in their works, this will not be possible in my class,” Professor McGonagall lectured her Slytherin-Ravenclaw first-year class. “Transfiguration will likely be your most challenging class in Hogwarts. But as long as you finish your readings and complete all your homework, I will personally see to it that you succeed in my class.

“After learning the basic theory of Transfiguration last week, today you will apply it and learn how to Transfigure an animal into a matchbox. The incantation is Flintifors and the wand movement is as such.”

Professor McGonagall demonstrated in front of the classroom. “One, two, Flintifors.”
On the stand where the mouse previously was now stood an empty, wooden match box. The room made silent gasps in wonder and students were waiting impatiently to try out proper magic. “Now go ahead and practice.”

At once, the room was filled with the sounds of the spell-casting. Turais pulled out his wand and pointed at the mouse lying on his table. He was about to cast the spell when Alex hissed beside him, “Woah, is that an Elder wand? But isn’t it a bit too short for that type of wand wood?”

It was the first time that their classes required a wand for practice as they only had theory lessons in the first week. Turais looked at Alex curiously, his mouse all but forgotten. “What do you mean it’s too short?” Turais hissed back.

“Well, Elder woods are very rare and normally associated with great power and character. And generally speaking, the longer the wand, the greater one’s character. So naturally, the branches that the Elder trees offer are relatively longer than typical wand woods, such as fourteen inches or above. But yours is twelve inches at most. That’s strange,” Alex whispered.

Turais looked around and saw Professor McGonagall at the opposite corner of the classroom. He turned back to Alex. “It’s eleven and a half inches by the way. Mr Ollivander told me when he found this branch, there was a Thestral tail hair caught around.”

“Wait, what? A Thestral tail hair? And he still crafted a wand from the wood?” Alex exclaimed, but then he realized he was in class and immediately looked around them in concern. When he saw the coast was clear, he spoke again, this time softer. “Elder wood are notorious for having their magical properties being easily altered as they tend to take on the characteristics from its environment. This is one of the reasons why they are so rare. If the branch was in contact with the Thestral tail hair, the wood would have been imbued with the characteristics of a Thestral tail hair. That’s highly dangerous for the wand-owner! What was he thinking?”

“What do you mean -”

“Mr Black, would you care to demonstrate the spell?” Turais looked up at the voice and found Professor McGonagall stood toweringly in front of his desk, unimpressed with the chatter. From the corner of his eye, he saw Pierricoeur smirk from the opposite side of the room.

Flustered, Turais hastily took his wand and cast the spell. He stared intently as the mouse morphed perfectly into the exact same wooden matchbox that Professor McGonagall transfigured. Relieved, he looked up at the teacher, only to find her mouth gape open while staring at him.

“Did I do something wrong, Professor?” Turais asked, genuinely confused at the teacher’s reaction.

“Nothing, Mr Black. Everyone, please look at Mr Black’s matchbox.” She raised his transfigured matchbox for the class to see. “This is what you should aim for with your spell. Clean, smooth surface with sharp, straight edges and no patternings or etchings on the side. Five points to Slytherin.”

Turais took in Pierricoeur’s furious expression as she placed the matchbox down and walked away. Turais immediately turned to Alex and asked, “What did I say? Why did she look at me like that?”

“That’s exactly what’s wrong, Turais. You didn’t say anything. You just transfigured the mice into a matchbox non-verbally. That’s supposed to be really advanced. How did you do that?”
Turais gaped at his words, not realizing his actions. "Um, I don’t know. I just thought really hard and said the spell in my head loudly. I didn’t realize that I didn’t say the spell out loud."

Alex muttered something under his breath as he focused back on his classwork. After two tries, Alex managed to turn his mouse into a matchbox, although the edges were more curvy than Turais’ and the sides were etched with an intricate whisker pattern. But seeing that no one was even close to having anything remotely rectangular-shaped on their table, Alex could easily claim a close second. Looking pleased with his spellwork, Alex continued the conversation.

"Back to your wand," Alex said. "That Elder wood definitely has some properties of Thestral tail hair... but what is the wand core? Also Thestral tail hair? Mine is Rowan and unicorn hair just so you know."

It was considered a taboo to ask others about their wand cores as it was highly personal and highly offensive to person asked. Turais was surprised that Alex would be so bold as to ask him that question. Furthermore, to reveal one’s wand core was also a symbol of trust - that just meant Alex had a lot of trust in him. Turais considered for only a split-second before he made the decision.

"No, it’s actually horned serpent horn. Shhhhh!" Turais slapped Alex as his friend gasped out loud. Professor McGonagall shot a look at their tables but said nothing once she saw their transfigured matchboxes.

"That’s amazing. Elder wood imprinted with Thestral tail hair and a horned serpent horn core. What a combination! Merlin knows it’s a wonder anyone could ever be matched with a wand like that," he hissed. "Can I ask Mr Ollivander for more information?"

"Cool, as long as you tell me what you find out. You said you wanted to become a wandmaker, might as well start now."

"Of course I will! And you actually paid attention to what I said?!" Alex beamed. "But yes, I’m planning on apprenticing at Ollivanders after I graduate, but only if he takes me in though..."

"Why wouldn’t he want to?"

"Well, it's a family business and I'm not an Ollivander so -"  

"Mr Black! Mr Fawley!"

Professor McGonagall yelled at them for chattering and they fell silent for the remainder of the class, not daring to face her wrath. After class, as he was packing up his bag, he saw Professor McGonagall walking up to him. "Mr Black, would you mind staying behind for one moment?"

Nodding, he waved at Alex to go on before walking towards her desk. "Yes, Professor. How may I help you?"

"Mr Black, did you realize that you have just cast a perfect Transfiguration spell non-verbally?" McGonagall asked.

"Yes, Alex told me about it after you left our desk."

"And do you know that it is difficult for an adult to be able to achieve this level of magic, let alone a first-year?"

"No, I’m not aware of that, Professor," said Turais truthfully.
Professor McGonagall sighed. “Very well, please do not hesitate to ask me if you find the material too trivial. I am glad you and Mr Fawley developed a fast friendship, but please refrain from disturbing others with excessive chattering during class.”

“I promise and I’m sorry, Professor.”

“Very well, off you go then.”

McGonagall dismissed him.

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September 12, 1969 (Friday)

“How is yours the perfect shade of purple, Turais?” Gerald shouted in frustration as he stirred his pink potion ferociously to no avail. His housemate, Sigmund Notley, was also struggling with his neon pink potion.

Gerald and Sigmund shared a table with Turais and Alex during their first double-potions class. Their table was the only one that saw a table shared between two houses, which attracted the occasional glances from everyone else. However, Turais wasn’t sure if it was because they were looking at the latest Parselmouth-on-display in Hogwarts or if was because they thought that a fight would occur at any time.

They were currently on the last step in making a second-year potion - the Sleeping Draught - as a test of their capabilities to follow instructions. As per the instructions, the potion should be dark purple in colour. Turais glanced at Alex’s potion and it was at a darker shade of lilac. He would easily get an Outstanding for his potion. He glanced at the Hufflepuffs’ cauldrons again and summoned Death.

Turais was complaining about his terrible Potions skills one day to Death last summer when he accidentally discovered that Death actually knew a lot about Potions. Death claimed it was because Healing Potions actually drew magical energy from it to reverse damage and extend longevity (basically Healing Potions are ‘cheating Death’ in a superficial way), especially blood magic and Dark potions. Therefore, Death was always present for his first two Potions lab class. However, Death told him it cannot reveal to him anything that he did not know already, as usual. Regardless, Turais still made Death promise to be available whenever he had Potions class.

‘Young Master, their potions must have been overheated from the excessive clockwise stirring and inactivated the lavender.’

“Hey, Gerald, Sigmund. Add a sprinkle of lavender right now and stir anti-clockwise.”

‘Great solution to salvage their potions, young Master.’

“Are you sure?” Sigmund eyed him suspiciously as Gerald added the lavender and started to stir already.

“Yes, trust me. Your potion is over-stirred so -” Turais started to explain when Gerald interrupted him with a shout.
“Thank you, Turais! You’re a lifesaver.” Gerald smiled as his potion now looked purple but still significantly lighter than Alex’s potion. He would get an Acceptable for that colour. At the sight of his friend’s potion, Sigmund’s inhibition faded away and he did as instructed. After awhile, his potion also turned into a very pale purple colour.

“Thanks, Turais. I’ll defer to your potions expertises from now on,” Sigmund grinned gratefully just as Professor Slughorn strolled towards their table. Turais silently thanked Death. Professor Slughorn glanced at both Hufflepuffs’ potions quickly without comment and nodded approvingly at Alex’s cauldron. When he reached Turais’ cauldron, his eyes widened in surprise.

“An absolutely splendid job, Mr Black!” Professor Slughorn exclaimed when he saw the contents in his cauldron. His Sleeping Draught was currently a shimmering deep purple colour with anti-parallel spirals of steam rising above the potion’s surface.

“Everyone gather around to look at Mr Black’s cauldron. His potion is at the perfect shade of purple. And also observe the opposite spirals of steam coming off the potion surface. Only the most potent Sleeping Draughts will display this characteristic. If anyone drinks a gulpful of this potion, they would be knocked out cold for the rest of the week. Five points to Slytherin.”

As everyone returned to their desks, Slughorn turned to Turais once again. “My boy, tell me, how did you do this? I know the instructions in the first-year Potions textbook does not lead to this result.” He peered down at his cutting board. “I see you have added seven Valerian sprigs instead of the stated four.”

“Yes, but I also added a dash of essence of Nettle to the lavender and soaked it for five minutes before adding the lavender in the final step,” Turais said.

“Ah, ingenious! Nettle oil would have neutralized the brain-stimulating property of the lavender. But even in small amounts, it would have interacted with the asphodel petals unfavourably and made the potion poisonous... except that you added three additional Valerian sprigs, which counterbalanced the effects,” Slughorn smiled approvingly. “As an improvement for next time, you could replace the Valerian sprigs with the Infusion of Wormwood instead to buffer the effects between the essence of Nettle and asphodel petals.”

“Professor, but if I made that change, the potion would have turned black. And if I added in the Sopophorous beans on top of that, it will basically be a variation of the Draught of Living Death,” Turais commented amusedly.

“Ah, I guess you are correct, Mr Black. Take another five points for almost making a NEWT-level potion in his second Potions class,” Slughorn winked at him.

“Ahem, teacher’s pet,” Gerald muttered teasingly. Turais kicked him in the shin under the table and he yelped in pain.

***

“Turais saved my life in Potions today!” Gerald told Jane and Alice as they strolled on the school grounds.

“Stop mentioning it, Gerald. It was nothing,” Turais blushed in embarrassment, it was his fourth time hearing his cousin recite his Potion mishap and Turais’ subsequent “heroic rescue”.

***
“Awe, you’re making him blush, Gerald,” Jane teased but then frowned. “But I wished we shared a Potions class together so you can save me too. My potion ended up lumpy and I don’t think Slughorn was too impressed.”

“At least it’s better than Kingston’s, his cauldron exploded!” Alice explained how their fellow Gryffindor Tobias Kingston added asphodel stems instead of petals, resulting in his unfortunate overnight stay in the infirmary.

“Enough about classes, how do you like your dormitories?” Turais asked. “I heard you can see the Quidditch Pitch and the Black Lake from the Gryffindor Tower!”

“Yes, you can. It’s really beautiful, warm, and cosy. The entire dormitory is covered in red and gold though. I wouldn’t mind if we could tone down the gold colour a little though,” Jane mused.

“Don’t let the other Gryffindors hear you, they would flip out if they heard you say that,” Turais teased as Jane shrugged. “Anyways, the Slytherin dormitories are located in the dungeons and extend to the bottom of the Black Lake, so it is always cold and damp. But the view is amazing though. We can see the Black Lake through the transparent ceiling in our room!”

“That sounds great, but I’d prefer warmth over the view of a lake,” Alice grimaced. “How about you, Gerald, what’s the Hufflepuff dormitory look like?”

“As you know, it’s in the basement near the kitchens so it is always nice and warm. And we have a lot of dancing plants that Professor Sprout placed everywhere. That’s basically it,” Gerald said, shrugging his shoulders.

“That sounds awesome, Gerald. I find the Slytherin common room a bit creepy if no one’s there. I rather have some place that will keep me warm and toasty instead,” Turais nudge Gerald’s shoulder.

“What kind of Slytherin are you, Turais?” Alex scoffed silently by Turais’ side. “The common room is awesome. We need to have a serious conversation about your poor taste.”

Turais grinned goofily.

***

“Black! Fawley!” Nott shouted as they entered the Slytherin common room. Turais groaned out mentally, ‘Not again...’

“What is it, Nott?” Turais asked tersely. He glanced around the common room and saw Lucius Malfoy sitting casually at a plushy, crimson chair by the fireplace. A handful of older students and close allies of Malfoy, including Narcissa and Bellatrix Black, sat on the couches around him.

“How dare you and your half-blood sit with two Hufflepuffs during Potions class?” Nott stood up and strode towards the two first-years. “And even worse, I saw you entering the Great Hall with two Gryffindors, and one of them is the mud -”

Nott choked as his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth when Turais whipped his wand
out and cast silent jinx. ‘Langlock!’

“Nott, let me repeat myself one last time. Who I associate myself with is none of your concern. And I will not have you address Fawley like that ever again. Also, I would rather associate myself with her than with you, you red-head brute! Keep your nose out of my business if you want to keep it on your face,” Turais grabbed the shell-shocked Alex by the hand and dragged him past the struggling Nott and Malfoy’s circle as they went to their room. He glared at Malfoy, who looked back with his trademark impassive expression, as they passed him.

“Did that just happen?” Alex asked after a minute of utter silence in their dormitory.

“Yes, Alex,” Turais sighed, sitting down on his bed. So much for laying low.

“We are so done for now! Urghh!” Alex threw himself on his bed and whined. “That was Nott! He’s basically the second-in-command under Malfoy and you just threatened him, and in front of Malfoy of all people. He’s going to end us now, and it’s only our second week here.”

“He was going to cause trouble anyways, Alex.” Alex threw a pillow at him but it bounced off the Shield charm and landed harmlessly on the floor.

“And did you call him red-head brute?” Alex asked, sitting up again and staring at Turais.

“Well, I thought it was quite witty, you know? Brutus… brute… and he’s a ginger? Hey!”

Alex looked at Turais incredulously, his facial muscles between a smirk and a frown, but ultimately settled with a frown and threw himself on his bed again.

“Why? Why did I want to be friends with you? I take back what I said, this is terrifying,” said Alex bitterly.

“Too bad, no take-backs. And Nott has his eyes on you now too.” Turais laughed as Alex let off a muffled wail into his pillow.

Turais was banking on Nott to act hot-headed and foolishly, and to act soon.

***

"Cousin Turais."

Turais finished scribbling the last word for his letter to home and turned around to see Andromeda standing by the door.

"May I have a word?" she asked.

"Of course, cousin Andromeda."

Andromeda entered and closed the door behind her. She summoned Alex's chair towards her and sat down. Turais patiently waited until his cousin spoke up.

"Thank you," she said simply and Turais understood her meaning.

"Glad to be of service, Andromeda," said Turais.
"As a friendly reminder, please be discreet with your choice of friendship, Turais. Our House does not take kindly to your behaviour," Andromeda said.

Arcturus and Pollux’s dislike of each other resulted in an animosity that was passed down the generations. Besides family gatherings, the two sides of the family rarely see each other, so Turais was quite touched by Andromeda’s concern for his well-being.

"Thank you for your concern, Andromeda. But don't fret. I am Heir Black, and my station shall provide me protection -"

"Turais, I'm not sure if you truly appreciate the severity of the situation. I am not alluding to simple name-calling and bullying, but something worse... way more terrible..."

"Do not worry too much, Andromeda. And I promise to stay vigilant."

Andromeda frowned at Turais’ calm demeanour, but she ultimately yielded to his words. She stood up and returned the chair back to its original position.

"This place is more dangerous than one might expect. Now, more so than ever before. From our limited interactions, I believe you have a kind soul that is different from the rest of the family and I do not wish to see you harmed. Please be very careful."

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September 17, 1969 (Wednesday)

“Black.”

Pierricoeur called his name as he approached the group of first-year Slytherin and Ravenclaw students that gathered outside the greenhouses. The previous class has yet to be dismissed.

“Pierricoeur.”

“I was talking to a sixth-year in my House and he showed me a curious little spell,” Pierricoeur said slyly.

“Good for you, Pierricoeur. I don’t know why you’re telling me this but I don’t care -” Turais said when he saw Pierricoeur reach for his wand. Turais immediately drew his own.

“Expelliarmus!”

“Serpentsortia!”

Pierricoeur yelled out the incantation but his wand was pointed at Alex. Instantly, a dark, thick-bodied snake shot out from his wand and draped over Alex’s head as Pierricoeur’s wand shot out of his hand and Turais confiscated it. The boy paled and froze on the spot while the other first-years who witnessed the exchange screamed.

“Where am I? S...oft flesh… Hungry. Pulse...”

Turais recognized the characteristic flat and vertical head. Of course the closest snake to Pierricoeur had to conjure up was the only venomous species of snake native to Scotland - the
adder. Its bite was not lethal but still terribly painful and Turais would rather stop the snake from biting Alex in the first place.

“Hey... I am Turais... I s...peak. I can bring you food, but please... don’t bite my friend.”

“A human s...peaker? Of course... if you promise... me food. I haven’t eaten in a long time.”

“Can you get off my friend’s... head please...? He is... very afraid of s... nakes...”

“Humans... are s...o fragile but as... you wish, human s...peaker.”

Turais reached his hands towards the snake and it slithered onto his arm while unwrapping itself from Alex’s head. He released a breath he didn’t realize he held.

“Alex, are you okay?” Looking back up to Alex’s face that was white with fear. Suddenly, he realized the unusually silent hallway, void of any chatter or footsteps. Looking away from Alex’s stricken face, he realized the greenhouse doors were opened and the grounds were full of students who stood them staring at him. The previous fourth-year Herbology class must’ve just been dismissed.

“Woah, did he just speak to the snake?” A messy, black-haired Gryffindor boy exclaimed.

“He’s a Parselmouth, Kaiden. Haven’t you heard?” The brown-haired Gryffindor girl next to him scolded him.

Ignoring them, Turais glared at Pierricoeur. He was as pale as Alex and equally as distressed, but his expression was one of pure hatred and loathing.

“Pierricoeur! How dare you conjure up a venomous snake and attack my friend! I’m going to report you,” Turais barked. The adder coiled itself and reached its head towards his ears and it hissed.

“Do you want me to bite him, young human?”

“No, that’s... not nec...essary. But thank you for the offer though.”

“Pierricoeur, I don’t care if you dislike me. But I will not condone violence or attacks against anyone , Slytherin or not.” Turais’s voice rang in the silent hallway. He turned to the shakened Alex, “Alex, let’s go. We’re going to tell Professor Sprout about this.”

***

September 19, 1969 (Friday)

Hogwarts’ rumour mills worked its magic. Two days after the adder incident outside the greenhouses, it seemed as though the entire school knew of what has happened. Perhaps it spread particularly quickly due to the fourth-years that were present were Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors. Along with the first-years, this meant students from all four houses saw the incident.

Turais, with his newly befriended adder, complained to Professor Sprout about the incident. Sprout was downright furious that a student committed such an unprovoked attack on a fellow classmate. At the same time, she was very impressed with his perfect Disarming Spell that she
awarded him points instead of deducting them for duelling in the hallway. From what Turais has
gathered, Pierricoeur has received detention every night for the next month.

Another positive outcome from the confrontation was that while people were still casting
curious glances at Turais when he walked past, they were no longer suspicious or weary. Instead,
they were almost friendly and respectful. Without Voldemort being outwardly evil yet, it was clear
to Turais that the stigma on being a Parselmouth was not as bad as he was in his previous timeline.
Nonetheless, Turais took it as a win.

Of course, Turais went to the kitchen and fed the adder before he released it back into the
Forest.

***

"I don't know what Black sees in you, halfie," Nott jeered as Alex and Turais returned to the
common room after the day's classes were over. "Saving your pathetic hide over and over again."

"Clearly what I don't see in you, Nott," Turais returned airily. "Kindness, compassion, basic
human decency."

"What are you talking about, you couple of pansies?" Nott shouted as his friends catcalled
and whistled. "But please do us all a favour so the world doesn't need your offsprings."

"Shut up," Alex shouted. Turais was surprised by the outburst and Nott was clearly taken
aback as well. Funnily enough, Alex looked shocked himself as he faltered, "He is ten times the
man you'll ever be. You're the pathetic one."

Alex quickly ran to their room, leaving a stunned room behind as a surprised Turais, who
immediately ran after him.

"Alex, what just happened?" Turais asked as he closed the door, concerning about his friend’s
uncharacteristic behaviour.

"I... he... you're my only friend, Turais. And he... suggested that you... that you are a poof," Alex
said angrily as he kicked his bed. "I wouldn't let him get away with that."

"Hey," Turais placed his hands on Alex's shoulder but the boy refused to look up at him.
"Hey. Look at me, Alex. Nott can say whatever he wants about me and I don't care. Especially if it
is false. Don't let it bother you."

"But you always stand up for me," Alex said softly. "I want to do the same for you. You don't
deserve any of this."

"Come on, Alex. You don't deserve any of his name-calling either. That's what friends are
for," Turais said.

"F...friends?" Alex said haltingly. "You still want to be friends with me?"

"Of course! It's either you or Nott. Please don't make me choose Nott," Turais said as he gave
Alex the watery puppy-eye looks. Alex looked at his face for one moment before his defense
collapsed.
"All right, no red-head brute for you today," Alex smiled.

"Woo-hoo!" Turais jumped in glee as Alex grinned.

***

October 15, 1969 (Wednesday)

It has been more than one month since the second Nott incident. Under Nott’s command, the Slytherin House was supposed to ignore Alex and Turais. He also clearly took the adder incident personally and became more aggressive towards anyone he disapproved of: Muggleborns, half-bloods, and Gryffindors. But Alex and Turais were still his favourite punching bags. Although if one was to continue that analogy, Nott’s punches always missed the bag. Nott and his cronies continued to harass them in the hallways by calling them names and taunting them. Turais just ignored everything. But Nott never tried to jinx or curse them, perhaps because of his weariness against Turais’ magical ability.

Turais was also pleasantly surprised by the lack of repercussions they faced from associating with Muggleborns, being friends with a half-blood himself, and... just everything in general, really. They have received the occasional sneers and name-callings from their fellow Slytherins but nothing worse for wear. His surprise was also shared by the other Slytherins, it seemed, when he overheard their conversations multiple times.

“I don’t understand why Malfoy is letting them off so easily,” one of the sixth-years whispered.

“Do you not read the papers?” the other girl whispered back. “Lord Malfoy and Lord Black are working together in the Wizengamot. Can you imagine what would happen if Malfoy waged war against Black just because he looked too cozy with a Gryffindor? We will have a civil war amongst the Slytherins. No one in their right mind would rock the boat unless either of them makes a move against the other.”

"Nott would," the first boy said.

The girl snorted, "Well, he's not the brightest person in the room, is he now?"

"But that half-blood sidekick should be put in his place!" A third student hissed.

“He’s best mates with Black, don’t even think about it,” the first boy said.

“But that's outrageous! We can’t let them strut around disregarding all rules and decorum! He's a half-blood for Merlin's sake!” Another girl breathed out loudly.

"Black would raise hell if anything happened to his pet. And Malfoy's not going to start anything. Just get that idea out of your mind," said the first girl, annoyed.

"I, for one, am glad that they are not at each other's throat," the first boy said. "Desdemona and I are romancing and I don't want a star-crossed lover situation because of some stupid Black-Malfoy feud."

“I could care less about your love life, Alderton, but if anything happens, I'm following
Malfoy’s lead no matter what,” the third student said. “If he decides to do nothing, that’s what I’m going to do.”

“So if he throws himself off the Astronomy tower, you’re going to do the same?!” Alderton exclaimed incredulously.

“Yes, I will,” he said, his voice resolute. “The Malfoys have the strongest survival instincts of all and can slither their way out of any trouble. If he jumps off that tower, there must be a damn good reason to do so and you will see me jumping right after him.”

Regardless, Turais was grateful that he did not have to deal with all the potential troubles with his housemates.

Turais has continued to excel in all his classes by merit of having learnt them once before. He has earned his House many points from demonstrating his works and providing answers to their questions. Alex was also a bright student in his own right, came in a close second. The news of their brilliance spread quickly amongst the first years as they started to approach them and ask for help.

Somehow, they also caught wind that they studied with Alice, Jane, and Gerald after dinner in an empty Potions classroom every night and they started to invite themselves. Initially, there were only a few eager Ravenclaws that attended, hoping they can one day reclaim the spot of top student from Turais. However, as the weeks went on, more and more first-years came to their study session. And last week, he saw a couple first-year Slytherins whose families were aligned with the Malfoys lurking around the corridor by their study spot. When he approached them and asked whether they wanted to join, they made Turais swear that he will not tell the other older students about it before they were eventually entered.

On the home front, Turais has been sending and receiving daily letters from his father and brothers. His brothers told him that they missed him dearly and that the house was much “sadder” without his presence. In return, he told them stories about the pranks Peeves pulled on the first-years and the mishaps in Potions class.

Little by little, Turais felt he was leading the change on how Slytherins are being perceived by the rest of the school starting from the first-years.

However, it seemed like Alex was dealing with the bullying less effectively than he thought. And Turais felt guilty that he has overlooked the discomfort of his closest friend and forgot that he was just an eleven-year-old dealing with some serious bullying.

"Look, our favourite circus act has arrived," Nott jeered as his shadows, Mulciber and Tremblay laughed. "One and a half man."

Turais did not even bat an eyelash at the taunt, although he had to admit it was one of Nott’s better creations among a plethora of dismal name-callings that made absolutely no sense.

"Such kind words, Nott," Turais said. "Considering that being one half of a man is better than what you can ever attain."

"What do you mean?!" Nott said furiously as he furrowed his brows in confusion.

'Bless your soul.'

"Oh, nothing. It's a compliment," Turais lied and smiled at the gobsmacked boy as he walked away with Alex.
"It was supposed to be an insult!" Turais heard Nott whispered to Mulciber.

"Well, you must've said it wrong," Mulciber hissed back.

'Bless your souls.'

***

"Why are you still friends with... someone like me?" Alex asked softly once they were behind the closed doors of their dormitory.

"What do you mean?" Turais asked.

"You're Heir Black," Alex said exasperatedly. "You get to choose to be with anyone you wish. I'm... I'm... just Alex. A half-blood. And nothing but trouble for you. You heard everyone! They are calling you a blood traitor, a poof, and whatever else that comes to their minds. I'm ruining your reputation by just breathing the same air as you do and -"

"Stop this nonsense at once, Alex," Turais said firmly. "I am with someone I want to be with, and that person is you."

Alex didn't respond, clearly unconvinced with his words.

"Blood doesn't mean anything. Just take a look at Nott, being a pureblood did nothing but make him an obnoxious and insufferable bastard. I'd rather be with someone who is kind and caring and clever and studious and polite and -"

"Okay, I understand," Alex's cheeks heated up as he said hastily. "You can stop now."

"Are you sure?" Turais asked teasingly. "I have an entire list that -"

"Yes, I'm quite sure," Alex interrupted, clearly embarrassed.

"Fine. And don't even think for one second that you're not worthy of my friendship. These stupid thoughts should not exist in your clever mind."

"But you're the prodigal child!" Alex exclaimed. "No one can hold a candle to you. Let alone me. You barely even know me. I'm a nobody -"

"So what if I'm the prodigy, the genius, the Boy-Who-Lived?" said Turais urgently, trying to make the boy understand. "I'm still just made of bone and flesh like you. I have my faults, vices, and insecurities just like everyone else. I will grow up, live, grow old, and die. Maybe magic comes slightly easier to me than most, but so what? Magic is not boundless - it can't make you a kind person, it can't give you a moral compass, it can't help you differentiate the rights from the wrongs. Those qualities are the most important to me. And I can already tell that you have precisely those qualities which Nott lacks completely."

Alex stayed silent for a long while, mulling over his words. Then, he glanced up at Turias with a determined gaze and walked over to give Turais an enveloping hug.

"Thank you, Turais. I don't know what I would do without you," Alex said over his shoulder.
"You're going to be fine, of course! Silly child," Turais spoke gently as he patted Alex's back.

"Yes, father."

Turais pinched Alex's waist for his cheek before Alex retaliated by pouncing on him. After a playful scuffle, they were both lying on their backs, panting slightly.

"The Boy-Who-Lived," Alex said as he savoured the words on his lips. "It has a nice ring to it. How did you come up with it?"

Turais grimaced at his slip. "Just thought of it on the spot. It's quite pretentious."

"That just means it's perfect for the Black heir," Alex said with a smirk. Quickly after, his expression became thoughtful.

"Turais Black... The Boy-Who-Lived... which means despite any obstacles and danger, you will always survive to spread the kindness to the world... I think I'm quite partial to the meaning."

Turais never really thought about it that way. He always associated the name with what Voldemort has done to his family and how it thrust him into an extraordinary life that he never asked for. But now, without Voldemort, without the prophecy, and without the burden as being the Saviour of the Wizarding world, the negative connotations of the name no longer mattered to him. It was now... just a random nickname. Suddenly, a knot in his chest that he never knew existed loosened as a weight lifted from his shoulders.


"Told you so," Alex gave Turais a brilliant smile.

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October 29, 1969 (Wednesday)

October 31st was fast approach and Turais was starting to feel a bit glum. Too many things have occurred on this fateful date, both good and bad: His original parents, James and Lily Potter were brutally murdered... the troll incident that brought the beginning of his friendship with Ron and Hermione... the re-opening of the Chamber of Secrets... his godfather's attack on the Fat Lady... being selected for the Tri-wizard Tournament... becoming Deputy Head Auror... Prometheus' rise to power and his reincarnation...

Even Alex picked up on his mood change. They were sitting at their joint desks in between their poster beds and finishing up a Transfiguration essay when Alsx set down his quill and turned towards Turais.

"Are you okay, Turais?" Alex asked hesitantly as though he thought he was prying. "You look a bit... urm... peaky?"

"I'm fine," Turais looked up from his homework and gave his friend tired grin. "Thank you for your concern though, Alex. I appreciate it."
Alex looked unsure on what else to say and decided to patted him gently on the shoulder as a gesture of support. His movement was a bit stiff and unnatural, but Turais thought it was endearing all the same.

His thoughts suddenly turned to another child that was very important in his life - Teddy.

'Teddy would have be... what... sixteen years old? Would he have consoled him like Alex did when he was feeling down?'

Turais halted his thoughts before he could become any more melancholic. There was nowhere to look but forward... and Turais knew that.

***

October 31, 1969 (Friday)

Turais and Alex were heading to their daily study session with the other first years after the Halloween Feast. As they turned onto the corridor where the room was located, he saw Nott and two pureblood sixth-years he recognized as Mulciber and Tremblay cornering two first-years, Jane Stahl and Connor Blake. They were both Muggleborns, so it was quickly apparent that they were bullying them for their blood status.

“IT is not safe for two Gryffindors to roam the dungeon hallways alone, especially two mudbloods ,” Nott smiled sadistically as the two first-years cowered, pressing their backs against the castle wall. He twirled his wand menacingly in his right arm.

“Turais, don’t -” Alex hissed as he reached for Turais’ arm but it was too late as Turais came around the corner into their sight.

“What do you think you are doing, Nott?” Turais shouted as Alex followed behind him very reluctantly.

"Acting as the stray collector again, Black? First, a half-blood - " Nott jerked his head at the nervous boy by his side, " - then Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs, and now mudbloods? What's next, werewolves?"

Mulciber and Tremblay laughed mockingly.

"Stop what you are doing right now, or I'm going to report this to Professor Slughorn," said Turais furiously.

“Black, I was just trying to show your first-year friends what will happen if they attempt to turn upstanding purebloods into blood traitors .” Nott gestured the Potions classroom where the study session was held and turned back to the two trembling first-years. Just as Nott was about to utter a spell, Turais pulled his wand out and shouted.

“Expelliarmus!”

Turais sent a Disarming Spell towards Nott, who collapsed with his wand clattering onto the floor. The two Gryffindors screamed as the other sixth-years cast their own curses. Turais and Alex ducked into a nearby alcove and away from the hexes.
“We’re gonna die!” Alex cowered in the corner.

From their hiding spot, Turais aimed an *Incarcerous* at Mulciber, which contacted under his right arm. He was instantly tied-up. He sent another Stunning Spell at Tremblay immediately after ducking his green hex. Tremblay crumpled to the ground with a single grunt.

Seeing that the quick duel was over, a dozen first-years emerged from the Potions classroom to see three sixth-years lying on the floor at different states of disarray while Turais stood there, silently panting.

“What on Earth happened here?!” Professor McGonagall strolled into view. “Mr Black, please explain yourself.”

“Excuse me, Professor McGonagall. If I may?” Jane squeaked, her voice was trembling, “Turais was defending Connor and I from the three older Slytherins. They called us *mudbloods* and called Turais a *blood traitor*. He -” Jane pointed at Nott’s unconscious body. “- pointed his wand at me and was about to curse us when Turais shot a spell at them. The other two had a duel with him and they were also beaten.”

“Is that true, Mr Blake?” Professor McGonagall asked the other Gryffindor sharply. He gulped and nodded, his body still shaking.

“Mr Black, which spells did you use?”

“A Disarming Spell on Nott. Then during the duel, a Stunner at Tremblay and an Incarcerous on Mulciber, professor,” Turais said, looking at Nott and Tremblay’s unconscious bodies while Mulciber lay on the stone floor flushed with anger and, possibly, shame.

“Mr Black, you did the honourable thing to defend your fellow classmates. However, duelling is not permitted in the hallways without exception. I’m afraid I will have to send all of you to your Head of House,” Professor McGonagall said sternly before turning her attention to the loitering first-years.

Needless to say, the study session was cancelled for the night. Professor McGonagall escorted the Slytherins to Professor Slughorn’s office after renervating them. Professor Slughorn was torn between being outwardly impressed and impassive towards the fact that his favourite first-year student being able to out-duel three sixth-years; he ultimately settled with a stilted grin. Nott, Mulciber, and Tremblay all received nightly detentions for the entirety of November while Black got off the hook with only a verbal reprimand.

Nott was silently seething all the way back to the common room, where Turais saw everyone was gathered. All the Slytherins have heard about the incident by now and they were all curious of the outcome. After Professor Slughorn left, Nott turned on Turais.

“Black,” he spat. “You will pay for this -”

“Save your breath, Nott. If you could make me pay, you would’ve done it already,” Turais said and shoved past Nott’s shoulder.

“You dirty little *blood traitor* -” Nott screamed as he sent a hex at Turais, who sidestepped smoothly after having anticipated Nott's reaction to his taunt. Turais whipped around and bored into Nott’s eyes.

“*Nott*, back off *right now*, this is my final warning,” Turais issued his ultimatum. He knew that Nott would fight back, especially when he was in the full audience of the Slytherin House. He
had no choice. There was no backing down now for both sides as that would mean the other has bested themselves.

“Flipendo!” Nott screamed. Turais calmly ducked as the blue jinx flew past him wildly off target and contacted the stone wall. The Slytherins scattered away from the two boys and pressed against the walls of the common room.

“Relashio!” Once again, Turais sidestepped gracefully as the purple light streamed past him harmlessly. It wasn't even close to him.

“Incendio!” The green drapes caught on fire.

As Nott grew frustrated, his spells grew Darker and more dangerous. Yet Turais did not return any spells of his own. He did not even draw his wand.

“Expulso!” The book cabinet exploded as the glass and wood debris flew.

“Bombardo!” A large chunk of the staircase marble was reduced to pieces.

“Confringo!” The wall behind Turais exploded as he felt the shockwaves from the site of impact travel throughout the room. Sensing it was time to end the embarrassing display and before Nott started casting actual Dark curses, Turais casually cast a wandless, non-verbal jinx at Nott.

‘Levicorpus maxima!’

Nott was suddenly swept off his feet as he dropped his wand and shot up feet-first onto the ceiling as he dangled upside-down, helplessly.

Smirking at his struggling form seven meters above, he spoke quietly, though his voice travelled throughout the silent common room. “Nott, this is a little spell that I invented and no one knows the counter-spell except for me. So it will be up to my discretion if and when I would release you.”

Turais then looked at the rest of the Slytherins, past Alex’s shocked expression, and finally stopped his gaze at Lucius Malfoy, who was seated in the velvet chair. Staring at him, Turais continued. “I will not repeat myself again. My acquaintances are none of your concerns, and any attempt to interfere with my decision will end up like Nott here, or worse.” Turais saw Lucius’s grip on his cane tighten as his knuckles turned white. He was sending Malfoy a warning, it was now Malfoy’s decision to accept or refuse his demands.

Malfoy stood up and spoke, “Well said, Turais.” The crowd shifted as they realized that Lucius Malfoy, the leader of Slytherins, has referred to Turais by his first name. The implications were not lost on Turais either.

“It is entirely up to your discretion to choose who you are associated with. Nott has clearly overstepped his boundaries and I will ensure that he will never do it again. However, I would suggest that you let him down at some point later this evening for it will be most unfortunate if Professor Slughorn were to notice such an unseemly sight.”

“Of course, Lucius. I will yield to your superior experience,” Turais said respectfully. Turais did not want to challenge Malfoy’s status yet, and his submissive comment will reflect his intent to maintain the status quo. “In fact, as a token of friendship, I shall release him at once, in your honour.”

This was the final act.
Turais cast a wandless, non-verbal Cushioning Charm that laid on the floor, invisible to all eyes, beneath Nott. Without looking up, he flicked his wrist casually and thought, ‘Libracorpus!’ Nott screamed as he plummeted head-first towards the floor. Screams erupted from the room at the sight as Malfoy reacted and cast a quick Levitation Charm at Nott to soften his descent.

After ensuring that Nott was safely on the floor, Malfoy looked at Turais with wide eyes, alarmed by the ruthlessness the younger boy displayed. Nott was whimpering with tears flowing freely. Satisfied, Turais cancelled the Cushioning Charm, and strolled back to his room without a backward glance.

As he entered his dormitory, he heard a quick set of footsteps following behind me and the door slammed shut loudly.

“You could’ve broken his neck!” Alex clutched the front of Turais’ robe and shouted at his face. “You could’ve killed him! I hate Nott but I don’t want him dead, Turais!”

Turais thought darkly of all the atrocities and deaths that the Death Eaters, in which Nott will join immediately after graduation, would soon commit.

“No, Alex. That's what I wanted people to think I did,” Turais beckoned Alex closer and whispered into his ear. “I had a Cushioning Charm beneath him, he would’ve been fine. Malfoy just happened to have reacted quicker than I thought but it actually worked in my favour.”

Alex backed off and stared at Turais as though he grew an extra head. “Woah, Turais. Woah.”

He slumped onto his bed and laid spreadeagled on his bed, processing what he just saw and heard. "Woah..."

After a few moments, Alex spoke up again.

"Are you going to tell your father about this?"

“No. He will be furious. And I’m sure that none of the Slytherins will tell what exactly happened so he will never know,” Turais said.

“Woah... I take back all the times I said you were not Slytherin enough,” Alex breathed as he stared at the murky depths of the Black Lake above.

In one night, he went from being an outcast to becoming amongst the top circles of Slytherin with the help of an easily manipulated Nott. Meanwhile, he also showed the rest of the houses that he was willing to rescue two Gyrffindors, Muggleborns no less, against three sixth-years and came out on top.

‘Yes, he was Slytherin enough.’

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone,

Once again, if you are interested in helping me out. Please send me a comment with
PM and contact email in the first line. I will not post your email, please rest assured.

How did you feel about the Turais vs Nott scene? Dark? Awesome? Terrifying?

Also, check out the illustration I made for chapter 1 and chapter 6 if you’d like.

And oh no, Dumbledore has his eyes on Turais, what will happen? Does he know what transpired in the Slytherin common room?

You will find out in the next chapter - Chapter 14: The Phoenix, the Serpent, and the Slug Club. Until next Saturday!

- ravenclawblues 2019-10-12
October 12, 1969 (Sunday)

BLACK-MALFOY ALLIANCE IN TALKS

by R. A. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

The Rise of the Two-Party System?

According to an anonymous source within the Malfoy office, Lord Abraxas Malfoy has been negotiating a partnership with Lord Arcturus Black to unite their two alliances in the Wizengamot. The Malfoy alliance with the Dark families, including Lords Avery, Nott, and Travers, amount to 14 seats while the Black alliance with the Grey families, including Lords Greengrass, Macmillan, Montague, and Steward, have a combined 23 seats. If they joined forces, they will pose a unified threat against the Dumbledore-led coalition of Ministry offices and Light families.

"It is unfortunate that the greatest deliberative body in the Wizarding world has degenerated into petty partisanship," Lord Patrick Arkenstone commented as our reporter spotted him shopping at Diagon Alley with his family. "What happened to evaluating every bill based on its merits? What happened to being open to work with and amend bills with any peers within the chamber? They are destroying all these well-established precedents without care and it is frankly disheartening to see."

Soon after, Lord Reginald Nott responded when our reporter recited Lord Arkenstone's submission: "It is laughable that [Lord Arkenstone] claims we are the ones who break tradition when our Chief Warlock acts as the commander-in-chief who enacts the Ministry's agenda. The Chief Warlock is supposed to be a neutral, non-partisan, and unbiased position. But he has proven over and over again in the last few years that he has none of those qualities. I fear for our
“community and our children to have such an unsavoury character in such powerful positions.”

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November 3, 1969 (Monday)

“- he’s mad!” Turais heard Urquhart hissed when he returned to his dormitory after he
double-backed to retrieve his forgotten essay for Charms.

“I’m telling you it’s the Black madness! Just look at his cousins!” Flint whispered in return.

Turais cleared his throat as he entered the dormitory and they froze in panic. “I hope I’m not
interrupting anything.”

They gulped nervously and darted their eyes.

“Of...f course... not, B...black... we were just -”

“I don’t care about what you say or do behind closed doors as long as you are respectful and
polite to each other and everyone in the school,” Turais said sternly. “Am I understood?”

“Clear as crystal,” Flint said at once as the other boy nodded in agreement.

As expected, his frightening display made certain that nobody would dare to cross him
openly in Slytherin. In addition, if they had anything derogatory to utter to half-bloods or
Muggleborns, they made sure that they did not voice it in Turais’ presence. Nott flushed and left
from the nearest exit whenever Turais entered the same room, much to Turais’s enjoyment as he no
longer had to deal with the nuisance. Alex, who the entire House knew was his closest friend, also
benefited from an improved status as his protégé and no longer suffered from taunts or bullying.

Beyond the Slytherin common room, his heroic act has spread rapidly throughout the school
thanks to the school’s rumour mills fueled by the first-years that were present. The fact that Heir
Black stepped in to stop three Slytherin bullies from attacking two Gryffindor Muggleborns raised
many eyebrows. And the Monday after the incident, instead of the cold, indifferent glances he has
always received from the other Houses, he was now greeted with appraising nods from older
students and small waves from the younger ones.

It seemed as though everyone’s perception of him changed for the better besides Pierricoeur... and one other notable exception.

***

“Oh, excellent precision and control, Mr Black!” Professor Flitwick squeaked excitedly on
his precariously tilting stack of books as he called upon Turais for the class demonstration as usual.
The students were mumbling in awe and excitement while Pierricoeur’s expression turned stony.
“Everyone please observe his exact wrist movement and enunciation. A well-deserved five points
to Slytherin. Everyone, start practicing please!”
Turais gently waved the feather back down onto his table as the professor scurried over.

“That was fantastic, Mr Black,” Flitwick said. “I was wondering if you would like to come in for the other first-year Charms class? No one has managed this Charm quite yet and I think they would benefit from a demonstration by their peer. I’ve checked with Professor Slughorn that you have a free period.”

“Of course, Professor,” Turais said. “I’m glad to help in any way possible.”

“Excellent, Mr Black. I knew I can count on you. Considering you are running your very own homework club...” Flitwick said approvingly. Over the Professor’s head, Turais could see that Perricoeur has also mastered the Charm as his feather floated elegantly above his bench. But Flitwick was still talking animatedly to Turais and took no notice. Pierricoeur’s eyes flashed with irritation and indignation.

“...and well done to you as well, Mr Fawley! Second to finish once again. I have my pair of best students right here, don’t I? Take five more points for Slytherin.”

Pierricoeur gripped his wand so tightly as his magic flared up. Smelling the scent of ashes, Flitwick’s nose twitched as he turned around to find Pierricoeur’s gaze boring into Turais’ location, unaware that his feather was burning up mid-air.

“Mr Pierricoeur!” Flitwick shouted as Pierricoeur snapped his eyes towards the tiny Professor. “Pay attention to your spell-casting! Two points -”

“But Professor, I -” Pierricoeur protested.

“Two points from Ravenclaw. You must learn to control your magic, Mr Pierricoeur. You’re not a buffoon brandishing a stick,” Flitwick said severely as Pierricoeur scowled. Steward could barely hide his amusement at the miffed boy.

"Oi, that was bloody amazing as usual, Black!" Steward gushed as they exited the classroom. "Did you see that twat's scowl when you beat him to it? And then again when Flitwick yelled at him? Pure gold!"

The person he referred to appeared beside them.

“Bell-end Black and airy-fairy Fawley hog all the attention once again!” Pierricoeur shouted as he stormed off ahead.

"Of course a Muggleborn cannot outshine the Black heir, Pierri no mates!” Steward shouted after the departing figure.

"Steward!” Turais scolded. "Don't say that. It's rude!"

"Blimey," Steward said, confused, as Pierricoeur turned the corner and disappeared from view. "That boy is the rudest person I've had the displeasure of meeting. It's a wonder how no one has smashed in that putrid mouth of his -"

"His lack of manners is not a valid excuse for your own discourtesy, Steward," said Turais, and Steward was sufficiently abashed. “And he was the second to perform the Charm. Flitwick would have noticed if he was not talking to us.”

“Stop defending that boy, Black! He doesn’t deserve it even if it was just because of his nasty personality,” Steward said. “Plus, seeing him stew in his own cauldron of depression brightens my
Turais couldn’t bring himself to disagree with the statement. Pierricoeur’s antagonism was a bit exhausting to deal with on a regular basis, especially considering that none of the incidents were his fault.

***

Turais was giving Jane a private one-on-one crash-course tutoring session on Potions after class when a fourth-year Slytherin boy braved the darkest recesses of the school library and strolled into view.

“There you are, Black,” the boy, Evelyn Napier, said quietly as he looked at the bookshelves around the desk at Turais and Jane hid in.

“The Goblins’ Rebellion section? You two really want your privacy - took me ages to find you,” Napier smirked as he held out a roll of parchment that was tied with a purple ribbon. “No one would ever willingly come here.”

“Are you my personal owl, Napier?” Turais quipped jokingly as he unscrolled the parchment. “First for Slughorn on the train, now -”

It was from Dumbledore and he wanted to speak with him. Turais groaned. He anticipated that Dumbledore would take the incident as an opportunity to speak to him, but he did not expect it to be so soon.

Napier seemed to pick up on his mood change and said, “Black, none of the Slytherins like to deal with the Headmaster, might as well just get it over with.”

“It’s from Professor Dumbledore?” Jane hissed at the two boys. “Are you in trouble, Turais?”

“I don’t think so… I mean I haven’t done anything…” Turais trailed off as he blanched at what just happened two nights ago. Dumbledore might have caught wind of what he did to Nott.

Jane must have seen the change in his expression but misinterpreted the cause. She whispered urgently, “Was it because of your duel with Nott? It’s not your fault! I can explain to him for you!”

Turais totally forgot that duel happened. The confrontation with Nott in the common room dominated his memory.

‘Right, Dumbledore must be asking because of that instead.’

“Well, I’m going to come with you, Turais,” Jane breathed fiercely as she started to pack up her stuff, “And we’ll get Connor as well!”

“Look, Ms Stahl, the Headmaster only asked for -” Napier started to protest.

“Turais is just going to have to take a detour,” Jane shot the older boy a sharp glance, “Won’t he?”

The older boy froze in shock as Jane grabbed Turais’ book bag and pushed a reluctant Turais
out of their hiding spot and the library. After making a stop in the corridor near the Fat Lady’s portrait (Jane tried to keep the location of the Gryffindor common room a secret and walked the rest of the distance) and picking up a nervous-looking Connor Blake, they headed for their actual destination.

“Good luck,” Napier said stiffly as he beckoned the trio forward, still bristling slightly from Jane’s attitude. Turais walked towards the gargoyle and it leaped aside as he approached. Surprisingly, the two Gryffindors were allowed access as well. They climbed up the stairs and raised his Occlumency shields before entering the office with a knock. It opened silently and the trio found themselves looking into an empty room.

“Headmaster?” Jane ventured a shout into the room as she walked first into the large, circular room. The echoes of her voice were soon drowned by the gentle whirring from a number of delicate, silver instruments that lined the room.

However, the golden perch that loomed magnificently over the writing desk in the centre of the room captured his attention. On it, a decrepit-looking bird in torpid, black feathers gagged apathetically. A few blackened tail feathers fell and drifted onto the tray below.

‘Fawkes. Today is its burning day.’

“Oh no! The bird looks terribly ill!” Jane exclaimed as she ran up the stairs. “We have to do - aaaaugh!”

Jane’s scream and Connor’s yell echoed around the room as the bird burst into a fireball.

“We need water! Um, do you know the Water-conjuring spell?!?” Jane shouted at Turais, “Aqua - Agua -”

The aflamed phoenix interrupted with a loud shriek as it disintegrated into a smouldering pile of ash.

“Oh no… the Headmaster’s pet bird died… We are going to be expelled,” Connor squeaked in mortification.

The office door opened as Professor Dumbledore walked in as the trio were petrified in their spots.

“Hello, Mr Black. Ah, I didn’t expect to see Ms Stahl and Mr Blake as well,” he said.

“Headmaster, your pet bird… it caught on fire… we couldn’t find water…” Jane gasped as the Headmaster strolled over to the perch.

“Don’t worry, Ms Stahl. Fawkes, here, is a phoenix,” Dumbledore said softly as he peered curiously at the tiny mountain of ash. “Phoenixes burst into flame in order to be reborn from the ashes - ah, look at this.”

Jane and Connor looked at where Dumbledore was pointing to. There, a tiny, wrinkled head of a newborn bird emerged from the cooling ash. Dumbledore chuckled at the looks of fascination on the two Gryffindors’ faces as he seated himself behind his desk.

“So, how may I help you, Ms Stahl and Mr Blake?”

Jane snapped her attention back to the man with a confused expression. Quickly remembering her mission, she immediately stood upright and shouted quickly in Turais’ defense.
“Sir, it is not Turais’ fault! I forced him to bring Connor and I to your office. About last
Friday, he was trying to protect us! It’s not his -”

“Ms Stahl -”

“He shouldn’t be in trouble for what he did-”

“Ms Stahl!” said Dumbledore loudly. “Thank you for telling me what happened. Don’t
worry, Mr Black here is not in any trouble because of that. I merely wish to speak to him in
private,” Dumbledore spoke.

“Oh…” Jane stuttered as she flushed in embarrassment for yelling at the Headmaster,
“Well… I’m sorry, sir. I’m going to leave now.” She patted Connor’s shoulder, but Connor was
still rooted on the spot rigidly.

“Connor,” she hissed as the boy snapped out of his stasis.

Dumbledore nodded at the fidgeting girl. Jane gave Turais a tiny nod as they passed him.
After they closed the door, Turais turned back to face the Headmaster.

“Now, Mr Black. As I just said to Ms Stahl, you are not in any trouble. In fact, I would like to
commend you for your righteousness.”

“Thank you, Headmaster,” Turais said stiffly, anticipating what is to come.

“However, I’m curious as to what happened after the duel,” Dumbledore said neutrally.

Turais’ mind swirled in panic as his shields strengthen. ‘Does he know? That’s impossible…’

“I’m not sure what you mean, sir,” Turais responded calmly, not betraying any of his inner
turmoil in his curt words, “Nothing out of the ordinary occurred.”

"I've detected a fair amount of destruction on one wall in the Slytherin common room, of
course, it has been repaired quickly. But would you, Mr Black, be able to offer any insight as to
what transpired?"

"Perhaps a student decided to abuse school property to release his frustration? I'm afraid I
cannot offer a better reason," Turais spoke the half-truth simply.

Dumbledore stared at him for a short while. Then, he smiled and the tension deflated from
the room.

“Very well, Mr Black. Thank you for your time,” Dumbledore said warmly as he gestured
Turais to leave. Turais bowed as he turned to leave the room, allowing himself a sigh of
relief. Turais was just thinking about how he managed to slip out of the hot seat so easily when
suddenly -

“There's actually one more thing, Mr Black -”

Turais tensed as his mental shields slammed back into place at once. Bracing himself, he
turned to find Dumbledore looking at him solemnly. His once-cheerful disposition has all but
disappeared once again.

“ - What do you know about the Chamber of Secrets?”

Turais blinked in surprise as Dumbledore looked on. Recovering quickly, he said, “It’s a
legend, sir, and nothing more than that.”

Dumbledore placed his long fingers together as he considered the boy in front of him. Turais met his gaze unflinchingly and reinforced his Occlumency shields. But unlike during the Sorting Ceremony, the Legilimency attack that he was expecting never came.

“I must ask you, Mr Black, whether there is anything you’d like to tell me,” Dumbledore said gently. “Anything at all.”

Under his scrutinizing gaze, Turais felt as though he was transported back to his second-year at Hogwarts as Harry Potter when an older version of Dumbledore asked him the exact same question.

“No,” said Turais firmly. “There isn’t anything, sir.”

Turais never planned on re-opening the Chamber, especially not when Dumbledore was on the lookout due to his Parseltongue abilities. But now, he knew he would not be able to even if he wanted to.

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November 4, 1969 (Tuesday)

Turais was heading down along the Slytherin house table with Alex and Steward to their usual spot for breakfast when Malfoy called out his name.

"Turais," Malfoy said as Turais approached the middle of the long table, "Why don't you join us for breakfast today?"

There was a glaringly empty space beside Malfoy in the otherwise crowded middle section of the table. It was a common phenomenon that whenever Malfoy arrived in the Great Hall for a meal, he always sat in the center of the table surrounded by his closest allies. The other Slytherins, including children from both Malfoy’s and Black’s allied families, who were eager to rise up the hierarchy also gravitated towards the leaders. Turais never really cared for the rigidity of seating plans and merely chose the area furthest away from the crowds.

Turais needed to show that he was not below Malfoy's authority, but rather, his equal. Just like in social events, Turais needed to present himself as the alternative option, another choice of leadership, compared to Malfoy's rule. Therefore, as a show of authority, he cannot possibly just follow Malfoy's command. However, it would not be wise for him to outright refuse his offer and stir up any potential rumours of discord initiated by him...

"Thank you for the kind offer, Lucius," Turais said diplomatically. "However, I have some urgent matters to attend to so I was just planning to take a batch of sandwiches and head off. I'm sure you will excuse me."

Turais reached for a few sandwiches and smiled.

Malfoy's lips pressed together at Turais' subtle rejection as the Slytherins eyed the pair nervously. The Black sisters were also silent as they observed as the events unfolded.
After a short pause, Malfoy said smoothly, "Of course, Turais. Perhaps, next time then."

"Good day to you all," Turais said as he walked out of the Great Hall with Alex and Steward following behind.

After they were a safe distance away and on the school grounds, Alex ventured a question while Steward munched on his sandwich hungrily.

"Why did you refuse Malfoy's invitation, Turais? That could be... problematic."

"Well, I can't show the others that I will follow Malfoy's every word," Turais said breezily. "I need to show them that the Black heir is his equal, if not his superior."

"He might take revenge for the snub though," Alex said softly as he continued to look down at his sandwich and turning it in his hands.

"He wouldn't. He is too self-preserving to retaliate against me just because I refused to dine with him," Turais said. "And he has his father's political standing to worry about. I doubt his father would be too pleased if he catches whispers of any discord between the two Heirs."

"Hey Fawley, can I have your sandwich if you're not going to eat it? I'm starving!" Steward piped up as Alex handed him his sandwich without a word.

"And you don't worry about your own grandfather?" Alex asked as Steward munched on. "Associating with me... and with Jane..."

"First of all, stop referring to yourself as though you are any different from anyone else," Turais berated Alex mildly. "I don't care about your blood status and you are as magical as the rest of us, if not more considering your magical prowess."

Alex's cheek turned rosy. But it was the truth. If Turais was not born, Alex would easily be the top student of their year. The mere fact that Alex was able to keep up with Turais' pace in classes when Turais had an additional twenty years of magical training showed how great a wizard he was. Turais could not stand that Alex continued to undermine his own hard work and maintain his sense of self-deprecation.

"Also, I have full support from my grandfather and his allies. They are the mostly Grey families and not the staunchest blood-purist families that allied with the Malfoys, so as long as I am in good standing with everyone in society and do not stir up any controversies, they could care less," Turais explained. "As for Malfoy and their allies, they can silently fume behind closed doors all they want, but they can't openly disparage me. Not in this current political climate."

"I suppose..." Alex said. But Turais saw his worried frown deepen.

"It's going to be fine, Alex," Turais said and Alex nodded in reluctant acknowledgement.

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November 8, 1969 (Saturday)

"GRYFFINDOR: FOUR HUNDRED AND TEN; SLYTHERIN: ONE HUNDRED AND
FORTY! The seventh consecutive loss by the Slytherins under the hands of the mighty Gryffindors!

Turais groaned with his fellow Slytherins as the final score was called. It was a bit disconcerting to be watching Quidditch from the Slytherin stands. But what was more disconcerting was the fact that Turais was not playing with his house team. In general, Turais thought the Slytherin team played terribly and that half the players should not ever qualify for the team in any capacity, let alone be in the starting line-up. If it weren't for one of the Gryffindor Chasers being forced out of action due to an ill-timed bubotuber pus squirt in the eye last week, Turais had no doubt that the Slytherins would have fared even worse. The only bright spot was the sole female player on the team, Natalia Arkenstone, who single-handedly scored ten of the fourteen goals. It was impressive in her own right, but contrasted by the abysmal act from the rest of the team, she really stood out... which was why Turais was surprised to find some Slytherins bashing her for her performance later that day.

"Arkenstone is such an attention-seeker," Pucey, a sixth-year, sneered as she walked past his group in the common room. Arkenstone ignored his words and continued on her way to her dormitory.

The Slytherin team captain and seventh-year, Steve Laughalot, strolled in with a dark scowl from the loss as Pucey walked over to intercept him. "Laughalot, your Chasers are clearly not up to scratch. Why don't you put me on the team instead of the useless Arkenstone?"

"Look, Pucey. We just finished the match. Can we talk about this later?" Laughalot said.

"My father said he would sponsor the team if I get on the team -"

"We will definitely have a talk later," Laughalot said with a slight edge in his tone. "We need to change and debrief right now."

The Slytherin captain walked away with an even deeper frown while Pucey grinned with a predatory glint.

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November 15, 1969 (Saturday)

“Another perfect Potion, Turais,” Professor Slughorn beamed at Turais. “My, I wonder where your talent comes from. Must be Merlin himself!”

Turais smiled amusedly. Now, he didn’t even need Death’s help in Potions, as he discovered that Potions was actually very interesting and started to willingly read up on various Potion literature at his leisure. What wonders it makes when one’s Potions teacher was not Severus Snape. Snape might ultimately be a good man, but he was definitely a terrible teacher who should not have made a career as a professor.

Due to Turais’ impressive streak of performances in Potions class, Professor Slughorn has decided to personally oversee his progress and tailor-made a curriculum for him. Today, he met up with Professor Slughorn for his extra Potions class and made a third-year Potion called the Wide-Eye Potion, which was commonly used to reverse the effects of Sleeping Draughts, including the Draught of Living Death.
However, Turais was slightly confused when he read the instructions last week in preparation. The instructions called for the entire sprig of aconite when he remembered it differently. He swore that only the aconite roots were needed. And the sole reason he was confident was because he used the recipe frequently as an overworked Auror who never had enough sleep to stay awake at work. Therefore, he went to do some research but all the literature stated otherwise. As the stubborn mule that he was, he conducted a simple experiment and found the confirmation he needed.

“What did you modify in the instructions this time, Turais?”

“Well professor, I was reading up on the Potion ingredients last week and I wondered about the properties of aconite. According to all the literature I have come across, they stated that the aconite leaves must be present to counteract the aconite roots’ toxicity and vice versa,” Turais explained.

“Yes, it is a widely known fact that either halves are too toxic when used separately and only tolerable when used together,” Professor Slughorn said. “In fact, all herbaceous plants have to be used in their entirety.”

“But you see, I conducted a simple experiment which provided a contradictory result to the existing dogma.” Turais gestured at the four smaller cauldrons behind him. “I added the boomslang skin and aconite leaves in the first one; boomslang skin and aconite roots in the second; Billywig stings and aconite leaves in the third one; Billywig stings and aconite roots in the fourth one.”

Turais held out a vial of bezoar juice for the professor. Bezoar juice, a less potent form of antidote compared to the bezoar, was a common indicator used to determine the toxicity of potions as it titrates against any poisonous substance. Once the potion was neutralized by the bezoar juice, it would turn the potion clear as a result.

Professor Slughorn peered at each of the cauldrons and placed carefully measured drops of bezoar juice into them. As he progressed through the cauldrons, his eyes widened.

“Oh Merlin, this is a wonderful discovery! The boomslang skin neutralized the roots slightly but not the leaves while the Billywig stings partially neutralized both parts of the plant. I wonder why no one ever bothered to do a simple experiment like this! Turais, did you only use aconite roots for your Wide-Eye Potion?”

“Yes, professor. By doing that, I believe I reduced the toxicity of the potion while leaving the potency unchanged.”

“Turais, you must publish this result! This is completely novel and potentially world-changing! I know someone who will want to know about this. You must come to a party of mine that is happening before Christmas Break. Speaking of which...” Slughorn ruffled his robes, “... I keep forgetting to give you your invitation, this old brain of mine.” He procured a black envelope with golden letters on the front that spelled “The Slug Club Christmas Party”.

“Oh, thank you, Professor. I’ll be sure to attend,” Turais smiled gratefully at Professor Slughorn while grimacing infernally.

“Of course, yes, of course...” Professor Slughorn nodded although it is apparent his thoughts were miles away. “I better go invite Damocles...”

Turais packed up his notes and left the classroom after a quiet goodbye when it was clear that
November 21, 1969 (Friday)

Nott was unceremoniously thrown out of the Group of Seven after his embarrassing display that night, but he remained in the Erichthonios Club. Turais knew that was in part because the Notts were aligned with the Malfoys while Malfoy wanted to distance himself from Nott's idiotic actions against the Blacks in case word ever broke out.

However, he was surprised that Nott's place in the Group of Seven was quickly replaced by him under the recommendation of Malfoy (the fact that Malfoy of all people nominated him was completely unexpected). Bellatrix, Dolohov and Synde voted for while Yaxley and Rosier voted against, but the vote was ultimately three to two in favour of Turais’ induction. He was officially invited to the group in last week’s meeting, which was held in an exclusive and luxurious side chamber connected to the common room, and introduced to the other members. Turais remembered vividly the awed and envious looks that the older Slytherins sent him as he headed through the door into the chamber and internally winced at the idea of anyone wanting to spend any amount of time with any of the room’s occupants.

The Erichthonios Club consisted of all the top-circle members of the Slytherin House, which included the Prefects, the Quidditch Captain, distinguished Slytherins (read: children from rich, influential pureblood families), and most importantly, the core group of seven members known as the Group of Seven. The Group was composed of the seven top-ranking Slytherins, headed by Lucius Malfoy. The other members, which Turais had to address on a first-name basis with (“as per the Charter,” said Malfoy - urgh… rules ), were Antonin Dolohov (sixth-year), Evan Rosier (sixth-year), Corban Yaxley (sixth-year), Claudius Synde (seventh-year), and Bellatrix Black. They were all very impressed and appreciative of his “sadistic” performance with Nott; and to imagine being in a room where Lucius Malfoy was the least bigoted person besides himself. Turais shuddered at those thoughts.

Basically, the Slytherin House was an aristocracy where the power centralized in the Group that could dictate the lives of any Slytherin, even when it contradicted with school rules, within the boundaries of the Slytherin dormitories. No one dared to utter a word of their mistreatment for they would be shunned by their House for the remainder of their Hogwarts life and suffer from intense bullying and physical harm from their peers. It was so terrifying that those who suffered this fate would end up transferring schools. Turais vowed to himself to change this system.

Within the Group, the most powerful person was the Chair, and the current Chair was Lucius Malfoy. The Chair was elected by a majority vote amongst the regular members of the Group. Once elected, a unanimous vote was required to remove them from their post. The Chair also held the sole authority to introduce binding resolutions amongst the Slytherins, which the majority of the regular members must vote to approve. Effectively in a full Group, any resolution required the support of the Chair and four additional votes to pass. However, Malfoy has been steadfast in refusing to introduce more radical ideas for fear of tarnishing his pristine, spotless record and reputation. In addition, he understood the implications of moving against Turais in fear of disrupting the delicate alliance between the two Houses. While this was a small mercy, Turais suspected that his mind might soon change with the rise of Voldemort.
Hence, Turais was now forced to endure hours sitting around with soon-to-be confirmed Death Eaters last week and listen to their views on how muggleborns defile the Wizarding World and deserve a painful death while preaching their own brands of pureblood supremacy over expensive snacks and drinks (today's menu was an exquisite charcuterie and cheese board served with carbonated grape juice). Turais was occasionally forced to join in the conservation to pretend to support their views. It was like reliving Walburga’s lecture but ten times worse. However, no talks about Death Eaters or Voldemort were ever raised, curiously. Bellatrix was also surprisingly cordial towards him during the meeting last week, though Turais wondered if it had something to do with her portraying a sense of outward family unity in front of Malfoy because their mutual loathing for each other was unmistakable during family gatherings.

Today, during Turais’ second meeting with the group, Yaxley suddenly fielded the long-anticipated question at him.

“Now, Turais. I would like to ask about your unsavoury interactions with selected persons of interest,” Yaxley stated.

“What would you like to know, Corban?” Turais asked cordially. He knew where this conversation was heading.

“Well, why would you, a dignified Heir of an ancient, well-respected pureblood family, willingly associate with the lowliest form of critters that roam this school? I find this most appalling and distasteful,” Yaxley snidely.

“Corban, my friend, the answer to that question is as clear as day,” Turais replied. “I merely wanted to avoid the scrutiny of the Muggle-loving Headmaster. He might have a disgusting love for Muggleborns and a vengeance against us Dark families, but one thing I do respect about him is this - power. He can obstruct my future easily with his hold on the Ministry and I do not intend to give him an excuse to do so. If a little lip service will pacify him, I will do just that,” Turais gave his prepared speech.

“So you will act as a lapdog to that old fool?” Rosier spat.

“Evan, Dumbledore is many distasteful things, but he is not a fool. And nor am I. As far as I can see, Dumbledore will remain in control of the Ministry, Hogwarts, and half the Wizarding world for the foreseeable future. Until we are able to reverse this, I don’t see another viable option but to stay in his good graces for I will not subject myself to the close inspection most of you in this room currently suffer from,” Turais drawled. Unfortunately, Turais knew he had already drawn the attention of his Headmaster.

Yaxley and Rosier were about to explode as Lucius raised his hand to take control of the conversation once more.

“Corban, Evan, this is not an interrogation. You have asked a question and Turais has answered it to his satisfaction.”

“But Lucius, we cannot allow him to break ranks with the rest of the Slytherins and pretend to be a little perfect, pretty model student -” Rosier sneered.

“Evan, choose your words wisely,” Malfoy interrupted sternly.

“I didn’t mean to suggest…” Rosier hesitated briefly before hissing, “He’s… frolicking with mudbloods and Gryffindors, it reflects poorly on our group and our entire House!”
“I have decided to not intervene on this matter, Evan. Unless you would like to force your persuasion on either of us?” Malfoy said.

Rosier snarled. “Lucius, reconsider your decision -”

“Are you threatening me, Evan?” Malfoy responded sharply. “Let me remind you that it would be most unfortunate if my father lifted the stay on the Guilford case. I wonder how your beloved father will react to Emery’s demise.”

Rosier blanched as his expression crumbled for a moment before he schooled it back into a facade of disinterest. “Of course not, Lucius, I was merely suggesting -”

“Suggestion heard and dismissed, Evan,” Lucius said coldly. “Take up your grievances elsewhere.”

As the conversation was steered, once again, to safer topics. Turais couldn’t help but feel uncomfortable under Malfoy’s searching gaze.

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November 29, 1969 (Saturday)

"So, I've heard that Pierricoeur managed to get an invitation to the Slug Club Christmas Party as well," Jonathan Steward, or Jonty, said as he walked with Turais and Alex from their study session. "It's not a surprise, really, but he's a Muggleborn! I'm sure that's a first for Slughorn."

"But both his parents are magical, Jonty," Turais said.

Jonty scrunched up his face in confusion. "Well... that's true... Emmanuel and Claudette Pierricoeur are both Muggleborns, so he's technically a half-blood? - no, that's not right - Muggleborn? - uh... quarter-blood? Gah - I don't know!" He threw up his arms in exasperation. "I've never really considered two Muggleborns marrying and having children."

"Or maybe it doesn't matter? Muggleborn or not, he's a clever student -" Jonty made a strangling noise. "- He is, Jonty. Give credit where credit's due. But he's also an arse. They are not mutually exclusive."

Jonty looked at Turais incredulously. "Mate, we can't have a Mug - quarter - whatever he is - beating all the purebloods. Especially not that grouch. That would be shameful!"

"Well, Alex is a half-blood and he is also one of the best students in our year," Turais pointed out. He felt Alex tense up at the sudden mention of his name. The boy was unusually subdued today and for the past few days as though something weighed heavily on his mind. Turais wondered if he was being rude by bringing attention to his friend.

Jonty hesitated as he considered the silent boy.

"Well... he's... he's... Alex!" Jonty exclaimed as though that explained everything, "You know, he's Alex. Of course, he's clever. Everyone knows that."

"But he's still a half-blood," Turais challenged.
Jonty looked mightily uncomfortable. "Well... I guess... the Fawley blood runs strong."

"Right..." Turais said nonchalantly. "I'm sure Alex, himself, has nothing to do with his merits. It's all because of his blood, not because of his hard work and spending hours revising his studies."

Jonty fell silent for the remainder of the walk and Turais did not press any further. He understood that such a drastic change in opinion would take time, even from impressionable first-years.

After Jonty walked through the doorway to the Slytherin common room, Turais felt a hand on his arm as Alex stopped him from following. Turais let the door swing shut before talking to his friend.

"I'm sorry -"

"Thank you -"

Both boys said at the same time. Eyeing each other, Turais started again, "I'm sorry for putting you on the spot, Alex. But I want Jonty to understand you are not just your blood. You are so much more than that."

Alex sucked in a deep breath before releasing it with a long shudder. "It's all right. I know you're trying to help. Today's just... I'm just a bit under the weather. But thank you, Turais, for standing up for me. You're amazing and I'm lucky to be able to call you my friend and -"

"Best friend," Turais amended as Alex's jaw dropped. "You're my best friend."

"I... you... we..." Alex looked flustered as he said incoherently.

"Are we listing pronouns?" Turais teased. "There's also he, she, they -"

"Turais, I... can't be your b...best friend," Alex stammered out as Turais snorted. He flushed in embarrassment. "I'm serious -"

"You're not Sirius, my brother's Sirius."

"Turais! Stop making that joke," Alex said in exasperation. "It's funny the first few times you say it. But this is only the ten thousandth time you've said it."

"There you go," Turais grinned as he swung his arm around his best friend. "You know me so well, best friend material right there."

"Turais..." Alex protested weakly. "Honestly, I'm not worth -"

"Lalalalala -" Turais placed his index fingers in both ears and sung loudly.

"Turais!" Alex said exasperatedly, but Turais could hear a hint of amusement in his voice.

"I can't hear you, best friend!"

***
"Is it part of my b...best friend duties to ask if you have a new set of dress robe for the party?" Alex asked later that day.

"..."

Turais totally forgot about preparing for the Slug Club Christmas party.

"Honestly, Turais. Do you really not care about this at all?" Alex sighed as he set down his quill and turned towards him. "Loads of people salivate at the thought of even being able to attend. Yet here you are - completely disregarding the honour and prestige. Where's your Slytherin ambition?"

Turais didn't really have an answer to that question because he had no ambition for personal advancements per se (of course, he had the ambition to bring lasting peace and harmony to the world) and shrugged. Alex sighed again as he shook his head exasperatedly.

"Fine, let's do the bare minimum. Why don't you write your father to send you your dress robe? I'll send it off when I head up to the Owlery."

Turais compiled as he hastily pulled out a piece of parchment to write up his letter under Alex's watchful gaze.

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December 14, 1969 (Sunday)

After Alex's timely reminder, Turais sent an urgent owl to his father in request for a proper set of dress robe for the event. Edwige was not amused with the extra mail run and nipped his finger furiously when she saw him pull out the letter from his robes. Considering she was making three to four trips back and forth between Hogwarts and London every week to deliver mail for his family, Carl, and him, Turais didn’t blame her at all.

His brothers were already counting down the days of his return to his home and was promised a lot of hugs and treacle tarts. And sugar mice. Although they knew his disinterest in that particular treat, their gesture warmed Turais greatly as they were willingly sacrificing their favourite treats. In return, Turais also promised a lot of bedtime stories. Also in this year’s annual rendition of the Tale of Three Brothers, he will be able to tell the story with the actual items after his powers as Master of Death manifested.

Carl also updated him on his work. He said that there was now a constant overflow of patients in St. Mungo’s due to the exodus across Europe from Dark creature activities and that they were considering to open up a new ward. He and Eva were also on smooth sailing. He also promised to visit 12 Grimmauld Place during the Christmas break.

Finally, as Turais was enjoying a late breakfast with Alex and Jonty in the Great Hall, a brown, barn owl flew up and dropped a large package onto Turais’ lap. Identifying the familiar symbol of Twilfitt and Tatting on the parcel, he quickly retired to the dormitories with his friends to try on the fast-ordered dress robes.

"Woah! The green really brings out your eyes. And you look absolutely like the Heir Black that you’re supposed to be," Alex quipped when Turais tried on the dress robe he received from
Orion this morning with proper grooming. The dress robe was a dazzling mix of green and black with intricate patterns of the family and Slytherin crests lining the hems, and it fit Turais perfectly.

“What’s that supposed to mean, Alex?” Turais asked sharply, annoyed.

“Well, let’s just say your school robes are always crumpled and stained with pumpkin juice or potion burns while your tie is crooked,” Alex said in a sing-song voice. “And your hair is always messy. If I didn’t know better, I would’ve thought you went through a storm on a broom every morning.”

“It’s not that bad!” Turais scoffed as he eyed his hair in the mirror. There were a few stray strands here and there but it was largely combed neatly in shape. Of course, it wasn’t as perfect as Alex and Jonty’s flawlessly styled hair that was strenuously put together every morning, but Turais thought it was passable. He then looked over his robes and found small burnt holes along one sleeve and two patches of what was clearly spilt pumpkin juice on the other. He burnt in shame.

Jonty snickered at the comment and Turais shot him an annoyed look.

Despite not having the legendary Potter hair that was messy and unkempt anymore, Turais never got into the routine to properly maintain his hair as Turais Black. His father has given up trying to convince him when he was six, so he has gotten away with his relatively messy hair except when he went to balls. At least until today, when Alex forced pomade and whatever disgusting hair products he had into his raven hair for his “dress rehearsal” for the Slug Club Christmas Party this Friday.

“Well, my father never took issue with my hair -”

“Your father is a very kind man who over-indulges his son too much, besides his wish for a ‘low profile’,,” Alex retorted, “You need to look your part as the Heir Black and not a vagabond that was lifted right from Knockturn Alley.”

Jonty snorted out loud and broke into a full-on laugh session. Turais was not amused and he sent a Tickling Hex at him to show his disapproval.

“Stop… haha… Turais… haha… stop… please!”

Turais cancelled the spell and sniffed, feeling a bit miffed by both his friends.

“So, are you really not inviting anyone to the ball?” Jonty asked after he has regained his breath from the laughing.

“Uhm, I don’t think so. I don’t even want to go so I won’t put anyone else through it, not even my worst enemy,” Turais grimaced at the thought of spending a night being waltzed around and introduced to various “important” people.

“Not even Nott?” Alex asked.

Turais wrinkled his nose in thought. “On second thought, I will amend it to third worst enemy.” He mentally counted Bellatrix as his second worst enemy.

“But aren’t you close to Smith and… Stahl?” Jonty asked hesitantly. He was still having a hard time understanding Turais’ friendship with a Muggleborn, but he has not said anything derogatory in his presence yet.

“We are close, but I don’t think either of them will be comfortable there. From what I’ve
gathered from Malfoy, it is almost entirely composed of Slytherins and the odd Ravenclaws. But you can join me as my guest if you want, the invite says I can bring one additional person.”

“Nah, not interested. I’d rather write Alex’s letter to home than go with you,” Jonty returned to his Potions essay.

“Lump it, Jonty,” Alex gritted up, suddenly all tense as he flashed a scared look at Turais. Alex never mentioned his family and Turais never pried, but it was obvious that Alex had a complicated relationship with his father like Turais once did with the Dursleys.

“It’s the truth though. You and Turais write the longest letters ever. They’re so detailed and papers long. I don’t know why you two bother with those essays,” Jonty continued airily as Alex stared venomously at the boy. “Poor you though, Turais. You can’t even refuse or you will snub Slughorn and get, Merlin-forbid, E’s for your potions from now on.”

A pillow sailed and hit the inkwell, spilling black ink all over Jonty’s essay. Afterwards, a roar of fury was heard throughout the Slytherin dormitories.

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December 19, 1969 (Friday)

At five minutes until nine, Turais stood in front of the room in anticipation. Breathing in deeply, Turais raised his hand to knock. At that moment, the door opened and light filled the corridor.

“Turais, m’boy! I was just wondering where you were.” Professor Slughorn ushered Turais into the room and immediately started to introduce him to various persons in the room.

“This is Yvette Aynha, daughter of the owner of Mina Meadery of Aynha. Yvette, this is Turais Black, Heir Presumptive of Lord Black.”

“Pleasure to meet you again, Turais,” she said warmly. Slughorn looked a bit surprised at the familiarity.

“You as well, Yvette,” Turais stepped up to shake her hand.

“I have yet to receive an order from your father for the Bungbarrel Spiced Mead. I did not succeed in converting him with it, did I?”

Turais grinned, “Unfortunately not. But my father said if he ever were to acquire a taste for mead, the Bungbarrel would be his first choice.”

Yvette laughed softly. “I’ll await for the day I receive his owl order then.”

Eager to show off his relevance, Slughorn steered the conversation to another man.

"And here, m'boy, is Connor Hamilton - famous American astrologist."

"We meet again, Turais," the man shook his hand jovially. Slughorn looked a bit crestfallen at this point. "Considering a career in Astrology yet?"
"Not remotely," Turais said.

Perhaps unbeknownst to Slughorn, Turais has met many of them previously at various Ministry functions, so Slughorn was destined to be disappointed in his prized match-making ability. At one point, he saw Pierricoeur glaring at him murderously. Maybe he felt jilted from Turais capturing all of Professor Slughorn’s attention... He was mindlessly going through the motions of handshakes, small talks, and polite excuses until he was turned to a scrawny man dressed in disheveled robes that smelled faintly like a Potions lab - namely one particular plant,aconite. Turais also saw a series of burnt holes in one of his sleeves that he recognized as accidental splashes from potions.

“I didn’t even see you arrive, Damocles! I’m so glad you have made it to the party,” Professor Slughorn shook the man’s hand fervently. “This was the boy that I was telling you about - Turais Black, eldest grandson of Lord Arcturus Black. He’s a prodigy in Potions, though he is excellent in every subject from what I’ve heard from the other staff. But too modest for his own good. He almost accidentally made the Draught of Living Death in his second Potions class!” Slughorn placed his two hands on each of Turais’ shoulders as he steered Turais closer towards the man eagerly.

“Professor, you are too kind. I merely made a slight adjustment to one step of the instructions,” Turais protested.

“Nonsense, m’boy. See Damocles, too modest. Let me tell you, he used Essence of Nettle to pre-treat the lavender and neutralized the interaction between the Nettle and asphodel with extra Valerian sprigs. I tested the potion and it is at least ten times as potent than any currently on the market! I still can’t believe I did not coming up with that!”

“Hmm, I’ve never heard anyone do this before either. If that’s the case, this recipe will help a lot of insomniac patients because the asphodel is toxic at high doses, which is what prevents Healers from prescribing the potion. Turais, you should consider patenting that innovation,” Damocles mused, his tired eyes gained a small sparkle. “I can help you with that.”

“Brilliant! Turais, I should leave you in the safe hands of my other Potions prodigy, Damocles Belby. I’m still a bit miffed that he was in Ravenclaw but alas... Make sure to tell him about your improvement on the Wide-Eye Potion too. That was another stroke of genius!” Professor Slughorn said before leaving the duo.

‘Belby. Why is this name so familiar?’

“Well, Turais. It’s always nice to meet a fledging Potioneer,” Belby extended his hand and Turais shook it.

“I as well. Mr Belby. What are you working on currently?” asked Turais.

“Please call me Damocles, Turais. Well, I generally work on improving potion recipes by increasing the potency of potions or decreasing the poisonous ingredients used. However, I am also researching into a cure for werewolves for the past decade now but I have been having a lot of discouraging results on that front lately. I wonder if it is indeed a futile endeavour sometimes...” Damocles explained. “But I won’t bore you with the details. If you would consider my suggestion and -

‘Belby. Damocles Belby. The inventor of the Wolfsbane Potion, of course!’

“Oh no, I am most interested in the cure. Please do tell what your main struggle is,” Turais
exclaimed. He just met the man who has yet to invent the Wolfsbane Potion. He turned his thoughts to Remus Lupin, his other mentor figure from his past life. While it was impossible to cure his “furry little problem”, at least Turais would be able to expedite the process and hopefully allow him grow up in Hogwarts with the aid of the Wolfsbane Potion, which was invented after his graduation in the original timeline. He knew how painful the transformations were and a year gained in the Potion's discovery was one less year of suffering for the werewolf.

Damocles’ eyes widened at the immense interest shown from the first-year and started, “Well... I didn’t expect... first off, the base of my potion is wolfsbane, or aconite. It is so highly toxic that I am unable to make a working solution that is remotely suitable for consumption at a non-lethal dose. I have recently exhausted all the known combinations of ingredients that will neutralize aconite. However, while the potion becomes drinkable, its effects are lost.”

Turais didn’t remember the exact potions recipe for the Wolfsbane Potion as he never had to brew it, but he recalled some specific ingredients and when they were added relative to each other from Slughorn’s Potions class in his previous timeline.

“May I ask which part of the aconite plant do you use?” Turais jogged his memory desperately.

“The entire sprig, of course, as it has been known for centuries that the aconite roots must be counterbalanced by its leaves and vice versa,” Damocles said matter-of-factly.

‘Wait, the entire sprig? That’s not right... the Wolfsbane Potion only calls for the usage of the roots... unless he has not had that breakthrough yet. Right! Slughorn mentioned that using separate parts of an aconite individually was novel. Damocles Belby must have rewritten all the Potions textbook with this discovery during his development of the Wolfsbane Potion!’

“Damocles, have you tried using only the roots of aconite?” Turais asked.

“That would be impossible. Both the leaves and the roots are highly toxic without the other to neutralize it to a workable level.”

“Damocles, allow me to explain. I was experimenting on the Wide-Eye potion last month, as Professor Slughorn mentioned, and I discovered that the Billywig stings was reacting with both the aconite leaves and roots while the Boomslang skin was reacting only with the roots. Therefore, I doubled the amount of aconite used while only taking its roots and the toxicity of the potion reduced by half while the potency remained unchanged. It is true that the aconite plant neutralizes itself, but I proved that they can also be targeted separately.”

“Are you sure?” Damocles exclaimed, although he still sounded doubtful.

“I have my notes if you would like to see them.”

“Yes, that would be splendid. Turais, do you know what a breakthrough this will be if that is true? Instead of neutralizing two reactions I will only need to neutralize one. Can I see your notes right now?” he gasped excitedly.

“Of course, I’ll just have to notify Professor Slughorn of my absence,” Turais said.

“Of course, of course, I’ll wait for you by the exit.” Damocles was quite literally bubbling with excitement, although it might’ve been a highly reactive batch of Gillyweed water that he has consumed in excess. But Turais was pretty sure it was the former.

It was a miracle that Turais found Professor Slughorn amongst the crowd. When he took his
leave, Professor Slughorn just beamed and hurried him towards the exit.

He met up with Damocles and walked briskly to the Potions classroom. Turais dug out his notebook from his personal cupboard and handed it over to Damocles for his perusal.

Once he finished examining his notes on his aconite experiment. He looked back up at Turais and said, “This is amazing, do you mind if I take your notes with me to study them?”

“Of course! Especially for such a noble cause as finding a cure for werewolves,” Turais readily agreed.

“Thank you, Turais. Originally I was wondering if I should come to this party but now that I’ve met you, I’m glad I did. I will update you on my progress and I’ll make sure you are acknowledged once the potion is successful,” Damocles smiled brightly.

“Oh that is not necessary, it’s all your hard work,” Turais waved his hand in protest.

“No, Turais. I insist. I would have never thought to change the dogma on the usage of aconite. Not for another few years, at least. And to think that I never questioned the base ingredient of my potion is laughable now in hindsight. Your discovery is important in its own right, so I will have to forcefully insist that you share the honours of discovery when we succeed. I have to head back to my lab now to start studying this further. Please send Horace my apologies,” Damocles said as they reached the classroom door.

“I’ll thank you in advance then. Good luck,” Turais smiled as he disappeared through the door.

‘I cannot believe that just happened.’

Chapter End Notes

In canon, Steve Laughalot was the Slytherin Team Captain from 1968 to 1972. But because of plot (and also because I really can't take his last name seriously), he is portrayed as a seventh-year student graduating in 1970.

Seriously, there is a Slytherin team captain called Jo King... I'm not JOKING.

I'll see myself out...

Turais met with Damocles Belby?! How would that change the course of history?!

How did you like the Slug Club scene?

As usual, let me know your thoughts and comments!

The next chapter is Chapter 15: In the Twelve Days Before Christmas and Turais finally returns to 12 Grimmauld Place. I'm sure he missed his brothers as much as you and I did.

- ravenclawblues 2019-10-19
In the Twelve Days Before Christmas

December 13, 1969 (Saturday)

**BLOOD WARDS DECLARED AS DARK MAGIC**

by R. A. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

*Dozens of Ancestral Homes Affected by Bill*

In the last session of the Wizengamot before the Christmas recess, the deeply divided Wizengamot had voted to pass a legislation that declared all wards, passive and active, that relied on identification based on blood magic were deemed illegal (see page 3 for full list of banned wards). This deeply unpopular bill was passed by a margin of 40-37 and is expected to affect dozens of ancestral homes, including members from both traditionally Light and Dark families.

"I believe blood wards are dangerous and completely unnecessary," Lord Hector Fawley, the co-sponsor of this private bill with Lords Patrick Arkenstone and Adrian McKinnon, said after the final vote. "There are alternative ways to properly protect one's home without resorting to using blood magic, especially when such potent magic could be turned against unsuspecting house guests visiting those homes. We could substitute them with the Tuebor or 'Stamus contra malum'
wards."

One of the blood wards that Lord Fawley argued against in his bill is the "Volenti non fit injuria" ward (hereafter as Volenti ward). Translated, this ward means "to he who consents, no harm is done". In practical terms, guests who enter a house with this ward would have implicitly "consented" that if the house magic inflicted harm against them, they would not be able to sue the house owner for the bodily harm incurred.

It must be noted that all wards are defensive magic by nature. The Volenti ward in particular, would only be triggered if the guests held malicious intent or actively committed a crime, such as theft or assault, against the owners or their blood kins. Also, the house magic damage inflicted is proportional to the severity of the crime committed.

However, ward specialists throughout the ages have debated fiercely on the question of what is considered as mens rea (intent) and actus reus (action) by the ward. There is still no universal consensus on this matter.

Lord Arcturus Black responded furiously to the passage of the bill: "This is preposterous. For the past several debates, I have continued to tell my colleagues that the Volenti ward protects the owners' family from any nefarious intents harboured by anyone who enters their homes. If the blood wards reacted, we should be seeking out what ill will the person had against the family instead of turning to blame the victims for the self-defense invoked by the house! Their preposterous victim-blaming makes me wonder if they have forgotten what magic is."

***

December 19, 1969 (Friday)

Today was the last day of school before Christmas holiday and Turais can’t wait to be back home and see his family. After his last class of the day, he hurriedly back to his room to pack away the last of his books into his school trunk before heading back up to the school courtyard. He placed his trunk amongst the luggage that would be transported to Hogsmeade station separately.

He chatted with his fellow classmates while waiting for Alex, who Turais hasn’t seen since he left in a flurry an hour ago while muttering something about heading to the Owlery.

When it was twenty minutes until the last carriages were due to start trekking across the frozen Black Lake, Alex still hasn’t appeared yet.

The rest of the students had already departed for the station. Deciding that the Owlery was too far away for him to go and return without being late himself, Turais hedged a bet and went to the dormitories to see if Alex was there. When he opened the dormitory door, he saw the curtains on Alex’s bed drawn shut with his belongings neatly placed at the foot of the bed.

“Hey Alex, we’re going to miss the carriages if we don’t head up now.” Turais said urgently as he approached the poster bed.

“Alex?” Turais placed a hand on the curtain, after a moment of hesitation, he opened it up and looked. Alex was lying in bed, hugging his pillow with his face buried within it. “Alex? What’s wrong?”
“Turais, you’re going to miss the carriages...” Alex mumbled.

“How about you? You’re going to miss it too,” Turais said again as he placed a hand gently on the boy’s shoulder.

“I’m staying here for Christmas, Turais,” Alex spoke into his pillow, still refusing to look at him.

“But no one in Slytherin signed up to stay...” Turais said, confused. But suddenly, he recalled what happened a week ago.

***

December 12, 1969 (Friday)

One week ago...

Professor Slughorn dropped by the Slytherin common room at the beginning of December to post the sign-up sheet for students who would be staying at Hogwarts for the Christmas holiday.

Turais was grateful that he did not need to spare a thought on signing up this time because he had a home to return to. And tonight was the last day for sign-ups before the sheet disappeared from the message board and onto Slughorn’s desk at midnight, likely unfilled.

However, Turais was woken up from his slumber by a muffled moan of pain.

Listening intently to any movements beyond his curtains, he noticed the faint shuffling of a pair of feet towards the door. The door creaked open slightly as the boy left the room.

Turais carefully pulled back his curtains by a sliver to find his neighbouring bed unoccupied.

Just as Turais was about to check on his friend, Alex slipped back into the room with a Self-inking quill in his palm.

Unaware of Turais’ watchful gaze, Alex gently closed the door behind him and climbed back into bed.

***

December 19, 1969 (Friday)

“Oh, Alex...” Turais said gently as he recalled what happened. “You could have told me. Did you pretend to pack up all your belongings because I would make fun of you?”

“No!” Alex shouted. “No... No... it’s not like that... I knew you wouldn’t make fun of me,” Alex gulped. “I have signed permission from my father to return to the Manor, but I’ve decided than I rather stay here that go back.”
Turais knew that his friend had poor relations with his father from the lack of mentions, but Turais didn’t know the extent of it. Clearly it was worse than he had anticipated. Turais thought quickly. His father should be fine with him inviting Alex over for Christmas. There are plenty of unused bedrooms at home. But Alex will need to get permission from his father and Professor Slughorn...

“Hey Alex, follow me right now! And take your trunk!”

Turais used his “Heir Black” voice (Alex coined the term for the way he spoke during the third Nott incident. “Cold, menacing, and unforgiving”, he described it as) and Alex snapped up at his tone. Turais quickly shrunk his belongings and they dashed to Professor Slughorn’s office and knocked on his door urgently. Professor Slughorn opened the door, bewildered.

“Turais, my boy, why are you still here? The carriages are leaving in… ten minutes!”

“Professor, I was wondering if we can get permission for Alex to come with me to my residence?” Turais spoke quickly as Alex stared at him incredulously.

“Well,” Professor Slughorn looked taken aback. “I suppose… that should be fine since his father has already signed the permission form for Mr Fawley to leave Hogwarts during Christmas holiday, Hogwarts cannot deny him leave unless that permission was formally revoked.”

“So that means technically you cannot stop him from coming to my place,” Turais said slowly as he turned towards Alex with a sly grin on his face. “Well, Alex. What are you waiting for? We have a carriage to catch unless you want to stay here!”

They ran at top speed to the school courtyard with Professor Slughorn yelling “Merry Christmas” behind them.

***

As the snowy white scenery of trees and villages were slowly replaced by concrete buildings and pavements, Alex and Turais bounced excitedly in their seats. Alice, Jane, Jonty, and Gerald, who had the misfortune of sharing their compartment, glared annoyingly at their figures.

“Turais! Alex! Can you stop bouncing for one minute?” Jane snapped for the fifth time. “I’m getting carsick from watching you two move!”

“What’s carsick?” Multiple voices asked.

“Oh, you purebloods,” Jane shut her book and started to explain what a car is but Turais tuned her out and looked at the passing buildings. He was going to see Sirius, Regulus, and Orion for the first time in three months. Although he communicated with them through mail as frequently as Edwige can carry them, it’s different from seeing them in person. How can he not be excited?

He felt something hard smacked against his skull. “Turais! You are evicted from this compartment!” Jane shrieked as she grabbed for his robes.

“Unhand me, you crazy Gryffindor!” Turais shouted as the rest of the compartment laughed.

Once Jane released him, he straightened his robes as he scoffed snobbishly. “Propriety, young
lady. Especially in the presence of the dignified Heir Presumptive of the House of -”

“Yeah, you lost me when I laid eyes on the bird-nest on your head you call hair, Heir Black.” Jane gave him her unimpressed look. Turais scowled in a clearly undignified manner. His hair was fine, thank you very much. The rest of the compartment laughed again.

“So, what are you doing in the French Alps?” Turais asked. “Skiing?”

“Yeah, my brother and I probably -”

“Wait, you have a brother?” Jonty asked.

“Yes, Jonty. Jane has a younger brother, Dave. He’s just a year younger than her,” Alice supplied.

“Yup, my brother and I snowboard. My parents will probably cross-country ski for a bit,” Jane said. Turais saw the befuddled looks on his friends’ faces. “Oh right. I reckon I need to explain what skis and snowboards are as well. So when we ski, we are basically standing on two long pieces of wood down a snowy slope…”

By the time Jane got to the intricacies of how one executed a stop with two feet strapped onto one wooden board, the train signaled its arrival at the station. They all exchanged farewells and promises to write over holiday break.

Through the window, Turais took in the view of joyous families huddling together, reunited for the holiday festivities to come. There were also several house elves standing on the platform, awaiting for their young masters to appear.

“Hey Turais,” Alex shook Turais out of his thoughts. “What are you looking at?”

“Nothing in particular,” Turais said as his pulled down his trunk from the overhead compartment. “Let’s head off.”

Turais and Alex alighted and were walking along the platform in the clouds of steam when -

"Turais!"

Turais' eyes snatched wide open as he zeroed in on two figures jumping ecstatically afar.

“Siri! Reggie!” Turais ran towards two familiar figures in the rolling clouds of steam. He slammed into the two smaller bodies and hugged them tightly as they reciprocated.

“Turais!” His two brother screamed into his eyes on both sides.

“I missed you two so much you won’t believe it,” Turais inhaled the familiar scents of shampoo, Sirius-ness, and Regulus-ness.

“Us too,” Regulus said.

“Too quiet without you,” Sirius seconded, his voice muffled in his robes.

“Turais.” Turais looked up and saw his father smiling at him. “Sirius, Regulus. Your father needs a turn too.”

Sirius and Regulus sluggishly released Turais from their grasps as Orion communicated his intense longing for his son's return through a wordless, bone-crushing hug.
Suddenly remembering Alex’s presence and his abandoned luggage, Turais released his father and turned around.

“Father, this is Alexander Fawley, my best friend in Slytherin. Alex, this is my family, Heir Black, Sirius, and Regulus.”

“Nice to meet you, Heir Black. Please call me Alex if you don’t mind,” Alex spoke quietly, eyeing Turais nervously.

“No, I mean...” Alex started to say, but Orion interrupted him.

“Nice to meet you too, Alex. Please call me, Mr Black,” Orion said kindly. “So, where is Mr Fawley?”

“Um -”

“Um, father. Mr Fawley canceled his plans to return to the Manor last minute and Alex doesn’t want to return to the empty Manor, so I uh… invited him to stay at our place for the holidays if that is okay?” Turais used the cover story and braced for the answer.

“Alex -”

“It was all my idea, father, I -” Turais added.

“Alex,” Orion spoke again, motioning Turais to stop talking. “You are welcome to stay with us for the holidays. But I will need to make sure that your father or Lord Fawley knows your whereabouts. You will write to either of them immediately when we return home. Understood?”

“Uh… yes, sir. Can I really stay?” Alex asked, surprised. Turais was sure that he thought Orion would not allow non-purebloods into his house.

“There’s no trouble. Especially when you are a good friend of Turais. I’ll also ask Lord Black to see if you can receive an invitation for the Black Ball and the family Christmas party. Merlin knows that I could use some help to keep an eye out for these two delinquents. They are giving me too much trouble without Turais there to keep them in line. Especially Sirius.” Orion glared at the silently play-fighting boys, who stopped when they felt their father’s stare.

***

December 20, 1969 (Saturday)

When they returned to 12 Grimmauld Place, Orion immediately ordered Kreacher to empty out a bedroom on the floor above the Black brothers and beside the master bedroom. As promised, Alex wrote to his father and received a message this morning that simply stated, “Fine. - Mr Fawley”. Alex looked undisturbed by the lack of anything in that message but Turais was furious on his behalf.

“That is so uncalled for, Alex! Your father could have written more than three words, with two of them being his name,” Turais argued.

Alex just shrugged. “At least he sent something. Most of the time my mail is never returned.”

Turais scowled. "That's not fine -"
"Turais," Alex said as he looked down at the mostly blank piece of parchment. "I know you mean well. But p...please just give it a rest."

“But everyone deserves to celebrate Christmas in happiness!” Turais said angrily.

“I will be,” Alex said softly. Turais gulped as he met his friend’s sincere gaze as though his actions meant his entire world.

“It’s...s nothing, really,” Turais said as he scratched his neck. “But I don’t know why your bother writing essays to him every week when he doesn’t even bother to write back -”

He looked at the boy’s stricken expression and amended quickly, “I never read your letters, Alex. You don’t even write them in the dormitory anymore. I can just tell from the thickness of the envelopes.”

Alex flushed red and Turais knew to drop the subject. He shook his head mentally. All magical pureblood families had debilitating family issues, it seemed.

Turais did mention about this peculiarity to Orion later that day but Orion didn’t look the slightest bit surprised.

“Alex and I have chatted about his private family matters yesterday and from what he has told me, I’m not surprised by the least with Mr Fawley’s reaction. Turais, do you remember how your mother was when she was here? Indifferent. Cold. Un-involved. That is normal in all pureblood households, at least the ones I know. Did you know that your grandparents treated me that way too, albeit less distant than Mr Fawley?” Orion said.

“No, I didn’t know," Turais said as his shoulders slumped. Images of a lonely boy left to his own device in a large, empty mansion flitted through his eyes. A boy that was trapped in all ways identical to his cupboard under the stair except for being much larger. But it was still a cage nonetheless. Turais' heart throbbed slightly.

"And don't repeat to Alex what I am about to say as it is purely a case of Chinese whispers and hearsay. But Howard Fawley was infamous in my generation for being a social outcast," Orion explained. "He was quite the contrast from his flamboyant and well-liked first cousin, Lord Fawley, who was once the Minister for Magic and is currently still active in the Wizengamot. According to rumours, as we did not study at Hogwarts in the same years, he was always quiet and forgettable. Some even said he was mad. But the summer after he graduated, he was caught in an attack by Grindewald that left him seriously injured and... if rumours are to be believed... permanently maimed in some manner. Ever since, he maintained a self-imposed exile. I suspect it could be in part due to growing up in his cousin's shadow, his own nature, and his subsequent injury.”

"Could that be why Alex looks so lonely? He must’ve been scared of all the doubts and hurtful comments concerning about his parentage and curiosity about his father when he came to Hogwarts,” Turais said. "I know he doesn't say it, but I doubt his father made good company either.”

"Perhaps, but I'm frankly still surprised that there's a Fawley boy under our roof," Orion chuckled gently as he shook his head. "We all thought the Fawley name would be the next family name to go extinct after the Gaunts. Some even suspected that the Fawleys suffer from a family curse that causes their eldest sons to descend into madness... but that is unproven and likely false."

Turais fell silent for a moment.
“Father, would you mind sharing the sense of family with Alex, too? I know he is lonely and I want him to feel loved too,” Turais suggested.

“Of course, my dear son,” Orion said.

“Brilliant, let’s start with planning his birthday party then.”

***

December 21, 1969 (Sunday)

"What kind of drapes are these?" Pucey said as he swiped carelessly at navy blue material.


Today was Winter Solstice and, more importantly, the Black Ball. Turais found himself forced to socialize with the milling guests at one of the three most prestigious events in the Wizarding World alongside the March Malfoy Ball and the Ministry Halloween Ball. As usual, he was making an appearance and engaging in small talks for the bare minimum amount that was considered socially acceptable. This also meant that Turais had to spend his time in the company of his more unsavoury guests.

"Too Muggle-looking for my taste," said Bragge as he slurped his butterbeer messily.

Turais bit down on his lower lip to stop himself from hexing the lot of them.

"Don't be rude, Bragge. Just because it is not palatable to you doesn't mean someone else might not find these decoration... louche," Rosier said as he stared at Turais darkly. From the corner of his eyes, Turais saw Yaxley wipe his index finger across the table top and examined his finger carefully. Turais was quite fed up with the passive-aggressiveness from these boys, but as a member of the hosting family for this ball, Turais had to swallow a few snide remarks.

"I will need to attend the other guests. Allow me to take my leave," said Turais before he turned around and left the obnoxious gaggle of Slytherins behind. Scanning the crowd, he found his brothers standing with Orion. Then, he quickly spotted Alex standing alone by the drinks table.

"Hey Alex," Turais said as he reached his friend. "I think we've stayed long enough. Why don't we -" 

"Hey, Turais! Alex!" Gerald reappeared from the crowd for the second time in an hour. However this time, Gerald was dragging his older brother, Geoffrey, with him. "I finally found Geoffrey! Alex, you haven't met him yet, have you?"

"Hi Alex, and you as well, Turais," said Geoffrey.

"Nice to meet you, Geoffrey," Alex said as he shook hands with the older boy.

"Did you see how he trounced the Ravenclaws in the last match?" Gerald declared proudly.

"Rea and Polkiss assisted with all those -" said Geoffrey.
"Ten goals! He scored ten of the fifteen goals for Hufflepuff!" shouted Gerald. "His best goal was the one where he faked a throw and twirled around the Keeper. Which one was your favourite, Alex?"

"I... uh... I was actually not at the match," Alex said sheepishly. Turais accompanied Alex as they stayed in the castle on that dreadful rainy day. It would not be an understatement to suggest that the weather acted as a pathetic fallacy to Alex's glum expression for the entire day. It was the pinnacle of a two-week period of sobriety spanning the end of November to early December and it deviated so much from his normal behaviour that he thought his friend was succumbing to an illness. But he got better soon after so that was fortunate.

Gerald gasped. "What! How could you miss a match -"

"That's alright, Alex," Geoffrey said. "It was a dreadful day with the heavy downpour so you might've made the right call to stay warm and dry. You couldn't see much in the weather anyways."

"Yeah..." Alex said lamely.

"Yeah...," Geoffrey said carefully, sensing that both Slytherins were not up for more conversation. "Actually, I should probably drag my brother -"

"Geoffrey!"

"- back to our parents. It was nice meeting you, Alex. I will see you two around at Hogwarts then," Geoffrey said as he dragged his unwilling brother away.

"I think I have shown enough of my face tonight," Turais mumbled through his fixed lips into Alex's ear. They both still had polite smiles on their faces as they nodded to various guests that shot a glance their way.

"My thoughts exactly," Alex agreed readily. "Your room?"

Turais nodded as they started to move towards the edge of the ballroom and slipped out into the dark hallways.

They made their way to Turais' room, however, as they approached his room, Turais could detect some suspicious ruffling.

"Alex," Turais whispered as he reached for his robes to stop him from walking further, "I think -"

Turais heard the characteristic soft "ping" of a tripped Intruder Charm as the air stilled into a suspended silence. Whoever was in the room knew they were nearby.

Exposed, Turais shouted out, "Who's there?" as he palmed his wand and pulled Alex behind him for safety.

"Turais, what's happening -"

There was a quick shuffle in the room as Turais held his wand steadily at the door in anticipation. Suddenly, the door opened completely as Narcissa walked directly into Turais' aim. Behind her... was Lucius Malfoy.

"Cousin Turais," Narcissa said with a tone of measured surprise as she arched her brow at his defensive stance. "I didn't expect you to be so far from the ballroom."
"I could say the same to you, Narcissa and Lucius," Turais said as he relaxed his arm but kept his wand out. "However, I have a better reason to be here than you because this is my room. And this begs the question: 'Why did you come out of my room and what were you doing in my room?'. I hope you can provide a satisfactory response."

Narcissa fidgeted very slightly. It was barely detectable but Turais knew Narcissa well enough to spot the tell-tale sign that she was hiding something. Lucius, on the other hand, remained as impassive and calm as ever.

"Lucius and I were... having a clandestine rendezvous," Narcissa said as her face flushed slightly, while Lucius shifted uncomfortably behind her. It was a very convincing act but Turais saw through it all the same.

"I find it very interesting that you have decided upon my room of all places to meet," Turais said.

"Well... if father sought to interrupt us, he would naturally search my room first, and then my sisters’. So your room was a logical choice," Narcissa explained calmly.

"Is that so, Lucius?" Turais challenged. "And here I was thinking that you were ferreting around."

Malfoy's jaw muscles tensed as he gritted out, "You are clearly mistaken, Turais. I am courting Narcissa and I merely wished to keep matters private. I'm sure you understand."

Lucius Malfoy was never one to apologize, was he? Not even when the evidence were stacked completely against him.

"Of course you were, Lucius," Turais' eyes narrowed. "For a person of your standing, you would never work in the shadows against the future Lord of your beloved, would you?"

Malfoy flashed him an annoyed look at the mention of his rank.

"Rest assured, Turais," Malfoy said curtly, though his nostrils flared at the accusation. "I am well aware of your future prominence."

"Very well. This time, I will excuse you both for your poor lapse of judgement," Turais said warningly. "However, pray that I don't find anything suspicious left behind in my room. Or else, both Lords Black and Malfoy would be notified of this breach of conduct, which would have far graver consequences than paying lip service to me."

"Of course, Turais," Lucius nodded tensely. "My reputation surely precedes me."

'If you meant his infamous reputation of committing devious ploys without ever being caught, then yes,' Turais thought darkly.

“Well then,” Turais said. “If there is nothing else, I would like to speak with Narcissa privately for a quick moment...”

He rose his eyebrows expectantly and nodded his head down the hallway that led to the ballroom. Lucius glanced between Narcissa and Turais before realizing that he really had no excuse to remain. He made one last eye contact with Narcissa before strolling off.

“Alex, please excuse me for a moment. I’ll be quick,” Turais said to Alex as he guided Narcissa into his room. Closing the door, Turais immediately cast anti-Monitoring Spells or Dark-
spell Detection Charms around the room as Narcissa observed silently beside the door.

“That was completely unnecessary, cousin Turais,” Narcissa spoke up once Turais finished all his spells. The room was clear of any malicious or latent magic. There was nothing for Malfoy to steal either since this was his room in the Black Manor and Turais uses it only for a few times each year. Turais put away his wand and look at her expectantly.

Narcissa stared back stonily for a moment until she finally opened her mouth once again. “Lucius and I were genuine in our intention.”

“Perhaps you might have been, Narcissa. But not Malfoy,” Turais said simply. “Pray tell, who was the one who suggested to meet at my room and who arrived here first?”

His cousin frowned at both questions but did not respond.

"P...possibly you are overly suspicious of his character, Turais. It's not surprising given the competition between our Houses..." Narcissa trailed off.

"Do you really think that? Or are you trying to convince yourself of that?" Turais shot back as Narcissa felt silent. "It is not my place nor my intention to question your romantic pursuits. However, I hope you have a firm grasp on the character of whom you are getting involved with and whether you wish to spend the rest of your life with him."

"Are you suggesting that I will not be happy with Lucius?" Narcissa shot back as she crossed her arms in front of her chest defensively. "He's a pureblood. His family is wealthy. He is upstanding and proper gentleman. Our Houses will be bonded and benefit through our union -"

"I'm not talking about what our family wants," Turais interjected. "I am talking about what you want - whether you will remain happy with the man you wish to spend the rest of your life with - whom you will form a family with and have a child with -"

"Of course everything is for my family - and for you, Turais," Narcissa snarled and walked towards the window away from Turais. "You mentioned it yourself. You are the future Lord Black. Don't you see how beneficial our union would be to secure your place in society? - the joining of two powerful families - Why are you, of all people, discouraging our courtship?!"

"Because I care more about your happiness than whatever benefits your marriage might bring for me," said Turais. Narcissa spun around, eyes widened. Turais looked up to meet her gaze. "Because we are family and I only wish the best for you."

They held their gaze for a long while. Narcissa was scrutinizing the boy in careful consideration as Turais' thoughts wandered.

Ever since their meeting in the Forest and the end of the Death Eater trials, Harry Potter and Narcissa Malfoy shared an unusual bond. It was amiable, albeit with a dose of uneasiness, but nonetheless, it was one of the stronger bond he had with someone from the opposing side of the war. Therefore, he always had always been more partial towards her, even more so than Andromeda in some instances.

Turais didn't want Narcissa to marry Lucius out of obligation. If she truly loved Lucius and would marry him despite all his flaws, Turais would have to acquiesce. But if not, Turais would try to make her understand that this was not the path to take.

Narcissa reached for the doorknob. "I think I almost believed your ornate speech."
"Perhaps you should," Turais suggested simply.

Narcissa paused for a moment without turning around. Then, without acknowledging his words, she swung open the door and disappeared through the doorway.

***

December 22, 1969 (Monday)

"And so we were at the boy's toilet on the first floor when a head suddenly popped up from the toilet seat!" Alex said animatedly. Sirius gasped in awe while Regulus shook his head in disgust.

The three Black brothers were huddled together by the fireplace as Alex narrated their time at Hogwarts. Sirius and Regulus hung onto his every word as those they were the spoken gospels by the goddess of magic, Hecate, herself.

"Who was it? It was Peeves, wasn't it?" Sirius exclaimed.

"How did you know, Sirius?" Alex said in mock surprise.

"I knew it! I knew it!" Sirius shouted victoriously.

"Yay," Regulus said halfheartedly, "It's not as if Peeves was not behind every single prank they’ve told us."

"Lighten up a little," Sirius said as he scruffed his brother's neck playfully. "Plus, once I get to Hogwarts, Peeves will finally meet his match."

As Regulus squirmed under his brother's restricting arms, Sirius looked up to address Alex with a smirk, "You'd think my playfulness would've rubbed off on him without Turais’ stifling presence.” Alex snickered while Turais shot them both a withering look.

"He is a bit of a tetchy grandfather," Alex teased.

"Hey! I'm not tetchy!" Turais punched Alex in the arm. "It's called maturity, that's what it is."

"He pulls the wise older brother act on you quite often, doesn't he?" Sirius and Alex shared a knowing grin as Turais spluttered.

"Where did you learn this impertinence? You brat," Turais scolded as Sirius stuck out his tongue.

"Not from me," Orion said as he entered with a hovering tray of mugs and he set it on the table. "Dark chocolate that Gareth purchased on his trip to Belgium."

Sirius leaped up and was about to snatch one of the five mugs of steaming, hot chocolate when Orion cleared his throat.

"Where are you manners, Sirius?" Orion said sternly as Sirius' hand shrunk back at once. "Let Alex take his first."
"It's fine, Mr Black," Alex said. "Sirius can take his first."

"No, it's not fine," Orion shot his second son a warning glare. "Sirius has been acting too carelessly these days. Do not excuse his appalling manners."

"Sorry, father," Sirius mumbled sulkily. Turais stepped in quickly to diffuse the tension.

"Here you go, Alex... no marshmallows because you don't like sweets," Turais said cheerfully as he handed Alex a mug, "... and here you go, Sir. I know you like yours with lots of marshmallows so I'm going to put five marshmallows."

Sirius perked up a little as Turais plopped in the large, fluffy marshmallows into his cup as they crowded the surface of the mug.

"Thank you... Turais," Sirius smiled gratefully as he held the mug with both hands and sipped on it carefully.

"And here you go, Reggie, your normal three -"

"Two," Regulus amended, "These are ginormous marshmallows. I only need two."

"Of course you can," Turais smiled as he did as requested.

"Thank you, Turais. You're the best!" Regulus said happily.

"And father, the one with milk is yours."

"Thank you, Turais," Orion said. "You should try yours now - while it is still hot."

"Of course, but did Kreacher have some hot chocolate?"

Sirius chortled at the mention of the elf. “WHAT?! Turais! That thing doesn’t deserve hot chocolate. Does he even know what hot chocolate is?"

Turais frowned at his brother as he stood up. “Sirius, who do you think prepared these then?” Turais lifted his mug with both hands, careful not to spill any. “I’ll just heading to the kitchen for a moment.”

“Turais,” Orion said exasperatedly. “Kreacher can prepare his own if he wanted to.”

Turais rolled his eyes mentally and continued on his way. Kreacher would never dare to take anything from the family store for his own consumption, let alone from Orion’s private store and on top of that, a gift from another Lord, even with permission. His respect and reverence for the family was borderline fearful and unhealthy.

When Turais reached the kitchen, he saw the hard-working elf preparing for their dinner already. Spotting his master, Kreacher quickly left his ingredients as the knives and ladle continued to cut and stir.

“What does Master Turais need?” Kreacher croaked out with a deep bow.

“I just need a mug, Kreacher,” Turais said as he set his hot chocolate on the counter.

“Master Turais could have just summoned Kreacher. Master need not have come to Kreacher,” Kreacher muttered as he quickly levitated a clean mug towards them. “Master is too kind.”
Turais caught the second mug by the handle and lifted his filled mug to pour out a third of the content.

“Here is a bit of hot chocolate that you have prepared for us,” Turais said as Kreacher’s tennis ball-sized eyes widened horrifically as he realized what was happening. “And this is for you.”

“Master Turais... Kreacher cannot... Kreacher will not drink the precious gift from Lord Greengrass to Master Orion,” Kreacher shook his head so hard that it looked as though he would suffer from a subsequent head trauma.

“Oh hush. If my father did not permit this, I wouldn’t be here right now,” Turais grinned. “Or else I will just have to order you to drink it.”

“Order Kreacher? Master Turais always ask politely, but never order,” Kreacher trembled as he held onto the mug dearly.

“Then let’s keep it that way, shall we?” Turais asked softly.

“Anything Master Turais wishes, Kreacher is glad to provide. Even if he wants Kreacher to treat the half-blood with respect, Kreacher will gladly do so,” Kreacher looked up with a smile - a smile that took Harry Potter years before he finally witnessed it but one he saw regularly as Turais Black.

“Well, thank you, Kreacher. And merry Christmas,” Turais smiled as he left the kitchen while Kreacher continued to be mesmerized by the mug’s content.

Later that day, Turais would find an empty mug on the counter and an elf humming happily with a small blot of dried chocolate at the tip of his pointed nose.

***

December 23, 1969 (Wednesday)

There was a quick rapt on his door. Turais set down his quill and turned around to find Orion standing at the door,

“Yes, father?” Turais said as his father entered his room. Celestina Warbeck's voice rang loudly from the wireless below.

“~ drink from my cauldron full of hot, strong love ~ ”

Turais had spent most of the first five days stuck, quite literally, with his two brothers. They asked him everything ranging from the layout of the Slytherin common room to the degree of sweetness in the Hogwarts treacle tarts. Alex happily supplied the missing information in Turais’ stories when necessary and Turais was glad that he was feeling comfortable being around his brothers. It was the first time Orion spoke to Turais privately since four days ago.

“~ Oh, come and stir her cauldron ~ ”

"i thought you were finished all your holiday homework already?" Orion closed the door on the blare of music behind him.
"I did. I am working on my transcript on the novel properties of aconite that Professor Slughorn told me to publish."

Orion smiled proudly as he sat down on his bed. "I remembered that I never started my holiday homework until the beginning of the new year, let alone completing them before then. You're finished all that and there are still two days before Christmas Day."

“Well, someone needs to be the role model in the family,” Turais said cheekily as Orion feigned annoyance.

“I suppose I can’t hold a candle to the eleven-year-old who will soon get an Order of Merlin for helping invent the cure for werewolves. So I have gathered from your letters that things have been going well at school?”

“Yes, father. I have made friends with almost everyone in my year except for a few Slytherins and that Pierricoeur fellow in Ravenclaw. Those few Slytherins are blood purity fanatics or close allies with Malfoy, so it was expected. But I have no idea why Pierricoeur refuses to make peace with me. We have not even spoken properly once and I don’t think I have offended him in any way to warrant this behaviour. Unless he was still holding a grudge from Twilfitt and Tattings,” Turais shrugged.

“As long as he is not actively making your life difficult, then I would just suggest you stay out of his way. His father is very well-known on the Continent and the Pierricoeurs are a Muggle family that comes from old money - the wine business, I believe. Make sure you watch out for him. We don’t want him to use his blood status as an excuse to drag your name through the mud with slander - not when suspicion is running high in the Ministry and out with the unrest in Europe. People will be quick to accuse and point fingers at each other on the slightest matters, especially with issues on blood purity,” Orion sighed.

“Father, are you suggesting that I avoid contact with all non-purebloods?” Turais gasped.

“Turais, I’m suggesting that you do what it takes to keep yourself out of trouble. Dumbledore will not hesistant to act against you if he receives any complaints from those Muggleborns. We are disadvantaged. The more contact with them, the greater the risk. Just remember that,” Orion said grimly as Turais felt silent. This was so unfortunate as the perception of both sides against each other were so unfavourable.

“How are the Knights and Ministry reacting?” Turais asked.

“Well, the Knights have been suspiciously silent since you left. I only know that they are still actively recruiting new members but that is about it. As for the Ministry, it is more divided than ever on how to deal with the influx of refugees and restrictions on Dark magic. Dumbledore championed for more restrictions on 'Dark' magic, and as usual, the Ministry voted for its passage under his leadership. But now, the families with family seats in the Wizengamot are now firmly entrenched in either the pro-Dumbledore or the anti-Dumbledore camp. As for immigration, it is starting to become chaotic as more and more foreign nationals are also moving into Britain. But I really don’t blame them for wanting to flee. The last time the Dark creatures were this active, a Dark Lord named Grindelwald was trying to conquer Europe. I fear we are heading down that path as we speak...”

“So is the anti-Dumbledore side losing on every vote?” Turais asked.

“Yes, albeit very narrowly. The Malfoys and the Blacks each control half the anti-Dumbledore camp but we have unified against Dumbledore. But in the Wizengamot, there are only
thirty-seven of us against forty… well thirty-nine because Dumbledore couldn’t vote, so it has been very frustrating.”

The Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot was a very powerful position as it controlled the legislative agenda and bills that would get a vote or not. This was one of the reasons why Dumbledore had such a strong hold over Ministry politics. However, this position was also technically neutral and the person cannot introduce personal bills or vote on bills unless it resulted in a tie.

In an attempt to curry the favour of the Flamels, the Wizengamot granted them a seat in the Wizengamot despite their French origins back in the 14th century. Not one for politics, Nicolas Flamel allowed his son, Nathanael Flamel, to take his seat in his place. Nathanael stayed there for nearly 150 years, for which he was Chief Warlock for more than a century and established many of the Wizengamot traditions and conventions, including the one which dictated that the Chief Warlock must vote with the majority side.

“Currently, the political climate is completely against us and the Ministry is getting bolder with their legislation targeting our allies. They are actually passing bills that are preposterous,” Orion explained. “Did you know that we had to tear down one of the familial wards here last month because it was deemed ‘Dark’ by the Ministry?”

“What? But that’s not fair! Wards are inherently protective magic, even blood wards! If someone got cursed from trying to infiltrate the blood wards, they should’ve been punished for trespassing in the first place!” Turais argued hotly.

“That was the argument grandfather Arcturus made, but no one was swayed. Because to them, blood wards were just… ‘Dark’,,” Orion said.

Turais began to understand even more about how the Light side alienated the Dark families. The ends do not justify the means - this was basically the summary of Albus Dumbledore’s legacy in his original timeline, in his opinion.

“Enough about depressing subjects and more about school. I heard that you were a hat-stall during your Sorting. What did the Sorting Hat try to do?”

“Well, I didn’t realize that it went on for so long. But he was mostly talking about my attributes and asked if I wanted to fight his decision to go to Slytherin,” Turais omitted most of the conversation but the rest was true enough.

“Where else would you go! That old Hat gets barmier every year. But the point I was trying to make was that I have also heard from multiple sources that you have made it to the top circle?” Orion asked.

“I don’t even know how you know this, father,” Turais said. Orion chuckled.

“Turais, just because I am not a typical pureblood father at home and is loving towards his sons doesn’t mean I am not a typical pureblood father in public who socializes and brags about their child with other pureblood parents. We do talk, you know, and I gleaned information from Malfoy, Flint, Steward, and many others that you have found your way to the top.”

“So how much do you know about how I got there?” Turais asked weakly. He did not expect the pureblood social circles to be as efficient as the Hogwarts rumour mills. He was gravely mistaken.
“Enough. I knew what you did to Nott. But I would like to hear it from you personally,” Orion said calmly, not betraying any signs of how much he knew.

Turais sighed. If Orion knew about Nott and didn’t yell at him yet then he was in the clear since that was the worst it got. He decided he needed to come clean with everything.

He explained everything starting from the incident on the Hogwarts Express and ended with the final showdown in the Slytherin common room. Orion was silent throughout his entire monologue and remained emotionless so Turais did not know if his father was angry at him or not.

“- and I promise you that I did cast a Cushioning Charm. It just seemed as though -” Turais was trying to hammer in the fact that he didn’t aim to kill Nott for the third time when Orion motioned him to stop rambling. Turais fell silent.

Letting go of a deep breath, Orion spoke while pinching his nose bridge. “That was so much worse than I imagined. Turais, what were you thinking?”

Turais stared at his toes. Orion sounded tired. Exhausted but not angry.

“Well, they started it?” Turais offered weakly.

“Turais, you could have been seriously injured or harmed. I can’t believe you threatened Bellatrix, duelled Nott, and challenged Malfoy! Have you seen that girl? She looks barely sane as it is! And Nott, you two go way back since you publicly humiliated him at the Malfoy ball. I’m willing to bet his family knows as much Dark magic as we do. It’s a surprise you are not cursed yet! And also, Malfoy? Do you know how influential his father is in the Ministry right now? He is more powerful than your grandfather and second to Dumbledore. I don’t even know how you are alive to be sitting here in front of me!” Orion offloaded all his grievances in a tirade and rubbed his eyes. Turais could see his lips trembling.

“I’m sorry -”

Orion moved his fingers and opened his eyes, seemingly exhausted, “Why did you do it, son? Why? I know you planned for Nott to challenge you. You backed him into a corner and forced him to fight you. You could’ve been seriously injured! Why do you want the entire House to know you are ruthless? You are going to be in so much danger if someone tries to harm you -”

“Father. I’m sorry. I could have done things differently but I don’t have time -” Turais shouted his apology.

Orion snapped his head towards him and grabbed his shoulders. His eyes wandered around his entire body frantically.

“What do you mean you don’t have time? Are you ill? Are you cursed? Who did it -”

“No, father. I am not ill nor am I cursed,” Turais said quickly as he held his father’s forearms still. “A war is coming and we both know it. You told me yourself that the Ministry is more divided than ever. It is already happening in Hogwarts and only a matter of time when it is irreversible, I must bridge the divide and start to heal the wounds before the war tears everything apart. That is what I mean when I said there is no time.

“And in order to do that, I must have the power to lead the Slytherin House. This was the best way. I could have done it faster by directly challenging Malfoy on the first day, but I need to inspire my fellow Slytherins and not by fear. I know that might sound hypocritical with the stunt I pulled on Nott, but in their eyes, Nott was the instigator and I was merely defending myself. When
it is my time to rule, I will need to have an image of impartiality and pacifism but with a dose of ruthlessness if I were to be defied. That's what I did to cultivate that image.”

Orion was silent. After a long while, he spoke again.

“But why? Why do you need to bridge the gap between the houses, between the Light and the Dark? It is such a futile exercise.”

“No, father. It must be done and it will be done. What worries me most is not the war, but what comes after the war. Wars always come to an end, but what if there is nothing left to fight for. Father, you once told me many years ago that the Wizarding community is dying out. A war will only expedite this decline. I may not be able to prevent this war, but I will do everything I can to prevent us from falling into another,” Turais said.

“Turais, you sound like a forty-year-old man who has seen the world burn before his eyes and is now trying to save this world,” Orion chuckled exasperatedly.

“Maybe I am,” Turais responded truthfully but he only received another weak chuckle.

“I can’t believe my son is part of the Group of Seven before his first Christmas holiday.”

“Me neither.”

“But have you ever wondered why you were nominated by Lucius Malfoy in the first place?” Orion asked. “He has the sole power to nominate and yet he chose his greatest political enemy.”

Turais had to admit he did not consider deeply why Malfoy inducted him to the group. Now that Orion pointed it out, it didn’t make sense. They literally do nothing in the meetings besides forcing Turais to endure their company once every week and...

Turais’ eyes widened in understanding. “He’s keeping an eye on me by forcing me to interact with him. Especially when he knows I cannot usurp his power with all his allies present.”

Orion nodded grimly. “That is what I fear. Keep your friends close but keep your enemies closer. Malfoy might be assessing how much threat you pose to his family. Or he could be gathering information for his allies and searching for a weakness. Even worse yet, he might take it as an opportunity to isolate you from the rest and cause you harm. I won’t put it past him to be involved in some underhanded ploy to get rid of you as they are known for their treachery. You do remember the rumours on how Abraxas Malfoy poisoned Minister Leach to usurp his position...”

Orion turned towards him and looked at him with immense sincerity. "Turais, do you really have to be in the Group? I would feel much more at ease if you are not involved in all this political turmoil. It's not a harmless game."

"I'm certain, father," Turais said. "I must."

Orion sighed. "I have anticipated this answer. I really don't like how to are placing yourself in such a dangerous position. You have to be even more careful from now on. Please also promise to tell me everything. Turais, I know you well enough to know that you will not change your mind on your course of action. But while I might not be there in time to stop you or protect you, at least I want to know,” Orion said.

“I promise. I’m sorry for keeping this from you because I know you’ll worry. But I promise I will be safe.” Turais said this with confidence. He would have the ability to resurrect and unlimited magical power (except for preventing death and resurrecting the dead) in a week so he was able to
make this promise.

They sat in silence for a long time. Neither of them moved from their position, deep in thought. But something didn’t make sense to Turais. If his father knew about Nott, why did he react so violently?

A loud crash sounded from the kitchen, in which Orion grimaced. He stood up with a sigh and opened the door as Turais asked, “So how much did you know about what happened?”

"~ Here comes the sun ~"

Orion paused and turned to give Turais an indecipherable smile before heading out.

“SIRIUS! HOW MANY TIMES DID I TELL YOU NOT TO FIDDLE WITH THE WIRELESS?! IF I GET MY HANDS ON YOU -"

Turais looked at where Orion just stood for a long time, blinking.

"~ It's all right ~"

"~ It's all right ~"

***

December 24, 1969 (Wednesday)

"Why did the barmy elf still not charm that impure creature out of the house?"

"I heard from Elladora downstairs, who heard from Ursula, who heard Turais say that the boy is his best friend ~"

"What did you say, Lysandra?! Our sweet, innocent boy must have been confounded by that ~"

Turais cleared his throat as he stepped out of his bedroom. The portraits lining the hallway fell silent as they all eyed each other nervously.

"Great great grand-uncle Sirius, I hope you weren't gossiping about me and my best friend," Turais said calmly. "You as well, great grand-aunt Belvina and Lysandra."

"Well..." Sirius Black adjusted his dress robes uncomfortably. "We were just worried how he will drag down your reputation, especially when you have such a promising future."

"I appreciate the concern, sir," Turais said. "But times have changed and we must learn to look beyond these divisions that threatens to tear apart our society."

"I doubt it changed enough to make your alliance an acceptable one," Sirius huffed.

"It didn't, that's why I'm here to make it happen," Turais said firmly. "And take care to never utter your thoughts in the presence of Alex, whatever they are. I will not allow anything less than perfect hospitality towards my guest and best friend."
“As you wish, Turais,” Sirius said as Lysander and Belvina nodded in agreement. "Although I -"

A door swung open violently upstairs and smashed violently against the wall as a pair of feet ran through the hallway rapidly.

“SIRIUS! WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT HIDING SUGAR MICE IN YOUR UNDERPANTS DRAWER?!” Orion bellowed.

***

December 25, 1969 (Thursday)

Turais woke up to a tingling sensation, as though magic was coursing through his body and firing up his neurons and receptors randomly. He felt his magical core swell in size and press against his rib cage, and he thought it would burst through his chest at any time. It was not painful and felt more like the after effects of drinking excessive amounts of magic suppressing potion and feeling his magic once again.

He sat up in his bed and closed his eyes. Concentrating hard, he willed for the Elder Wand to appear and reached his hand out. A strong but welcoming current of warmth streamed from his core down his right arm. Suddenly, he felt a wooden stick nudging the centre of his palm and he wrapped his hand around it. He opened his eyes. There it was, the Elder Wand, in his hand.

Without closing his eyes, he willed the rest of the Hallows to appear and the Resurrection Stone and the Cloak of Invisibility appeared from thin air and hovered in front of him.

He was now truly the Master of Death once again.

Yet, he didn’t really feel that much more special than he originally did... except maybe a bit warmer? Sure, he could sense that his magical core had expanded exponentially. But stronger magic would not be able to solve his problems directly. The Wizarding world must adopt change and learn willingly and that was a problem that no magic could solve.

Turais still had a lot of work to do.

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The moment Turais reached the Black Manor, he immediately made a beeline towards the drinks table. Tugging at his collar, which felt unusually restrictive, Turais felt lethargic and uncomfortably warm.

"Turais, are you feeling alright?” Regulus hissed as Turais reached for the jug of pumpkin juice again. "That was your fourth glass in the past ten minutes.”

Turais ignored the comment and drained the entire glass of iced pumpkin juice but his tongue was still parched, his throat was sore, and his skin was clammy.
"Yeah, Turais, do you want to lie down for a moment?" asked Sirius. "Or tell father that you should go home and rest."

Turais shook his head - bad idea. His head spun and swirled. Grabbing for Alex's shoulder to steady himself, he ended up partially falling onto him. Fortunately, Alex was able to right him as he wobbled back into standing position.

"Woah, that was bad," Turais mumbled as his head pounded.

"Turais, you're burning up!" Alex hissed under his breath as he grabbed his wrists. "You need medicine right now, do we have -"

“Why can he invite a friend while I was never allowed to? I can’t even invite my fiancé for Merlin’s sake, father!” Bellatrix shrieked as she appeared from the Apparition chamber.

“Bellatrix,” Cygnus said warningly. “Where are your manners? Especially in front of guests?”

Bellatrix eyes flashed dangerously at Turais and Alex.

Ignoring his discomfort, Turais drew himself up to full height and returned the gaze confidently. However, he could feel Alex and his brothers cower.

Alex received an official invitation for the family Christmas party, much to Orion’s surprise. He confided in Turais when he inputted the request that he was not optimistic Alex would be allowed to attend. It had been a long-standing tradition that no one that was not a Black by blood or by marriage was allowed to attend, not even those who are betrothed. Turais thought to himself that his grandfather’s blatant favouritism for him was at play and he would have to thank him personally.

“Cousin Bella, how nice it is to hear your voice so soon,” Turais said with fake pleasantness as she approached Alex and the Black brothers. He hope he did not look too sick, although he was feeling downright awful. This was first in the past twelve years.

'Disarm them with a smile, someone once said.'

“Cousin Turais, did you and your boy get married last week? Why is he here?” Bellatrix snarled and Alex shuffled beside him uncomfortably. Half his body was hidden behind Turais at this point. Sirius and Regulus also shuffled closer to their older brother.

‘Well, whoever said that clearly never met Bellatrix.’

“Well, some might say many a marriage have been based on less than what Alex and I share with each other, for example, yours?” Turais sneered. It was an open secret in pureblood society that Bellatrix and Rodolphus Lestrange have no love, romantic or platonic, for each other despite being betrothed for the past few years. Lestrange was also older than her by at least a decade and they have never been seen in the same room at the same time.

“If you weren’t Heir, I would’ve -”

“Unfortunately for you, I will always be Heir, so you better put your thought on something else more productive, cousin Bella, such as your upcoming NEWTs,” Turais retorted. But he might have used too much force behind his words as he felt himself blacking out for a moment.

“I have far grander plans than to follow the mundane path of studying and working, cousin
Turais. Unlike you, I will soon be changing the world and I am conflicted on whether you should be allowed to join the noble cause,” said Bellatrix.

“You’re not impressing me with your speech, cousin Bella. Anyhow, it will be another six months before you graduate and another however-long-it-will-take for you to get married before you can go join your little cult. So until then, save your breath,” Turais said mildly.

“Well, since you know about it, I might as well ask you to join. You have the brains and the brawn, and most importantly, the *ruthlessness*, to become a worthy member of the cause,” Bellatrix crooned. “If you want, I can put in a good word.”

“That won’t be necessary, cousin Bella. I am seven years too early to think about this, isn’t it?” Turais said placatingly, gesturing the crowd. “Why don’t we rejoin the party?”

Without waiting for a response, Turais turned around and wrapped his arms defensively around his friend and brothers as they walked away from their cousin. Once they were out of earshot, Turais whispered to them. “Never be alone without father or me present with you, okay? And most importantly of all, stay away from mother’s side of the family.”

They nodded at his words, but Turais didn’t know if they understood the magnitude and importance of his words. He would have to corroborate with Orion for their safety.

Chapter End Notes

Turais tends to forget the fact that despite being a caring fatherly figure, Orion is still a Slytherin through and through.

Also, I just had to sneak in a Beatles reference. Come on, it's a no brainer if you're going to write about a fiction set in UK in the 1960's.

How did you feel about the family reunion? I love to hear your thoughts and comments.

Chapter 16: In Health and In Sickness, is currently on schedule to be released next week. Until then.

- ravenclawblues 2019-10-26
Hey everybody,

Hope you all had a wonderful Halloween.

With that aside, dive in!

-ravenclawblues 2019-11-02

December 15, 1969 (Monday)

**GUILFORD CASE REMAINS IN LIMBO**

by C. Broomwright, Legal Observer

*Malfoy Maintains Stay on Wizengamot v Rosier*

Today marks the 300th day since the burglary and assault case, Wizengamot v Rosier (or more commonly known as the Guilford Case) that occurred on February 4, 1969. On that fateful day, Emery Rosier, the eldest son of Lord Escariot Rosier and the defendant of this case, was arrested for breaking into the safe of a jewelry shop on Guilford Street and seriously injuring the owner, Hesperia Shacklebolt. After a thorough investigation by the Aurors Office, it was concluded that Rosier was attempting to steal a rumoured heirloom of Slytherin housed in the safe when the owner returned to her store coincidentally. Shacklebolt immediately attempted to summon the Ministry Hit Wizards to the site while Rosier tried to prevent her actions, resulting in a duel that led to Shacklebolt sustaining a multitude of curse damage.

According to an official statement from St. Mungo's last month, Hesperia Shacklebolt remains in a critical condition as their highly-skilled team of Healers were attempting every method to stabilize her health from deteriorating further. However, they were not optimistic that she would ever recover completely.

As this case involved a burglary and assault charge, the initial decision to allow Rosier to be tried by the High Court, instead of the Grand Jury Court, created an immense uproar in theWizarding community. Most viewed the crimes committed in this case were grievous enough to warrant a
harsher sentencing that can only be delivered in the higher court. Further infuriating some, Lord Abraaxas Malfoy, who is the Chief of the Court, issued a stay on the case (see page 3 for more information on court proceedings) by citing the complexity and technicalities of the case. His action effectively placed this high-profile case on hold indefinitely...

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December 26, 1969 (Friday)

"Turais, are you feeling better?" Orion asked as Turais' eyes fluttered open. His father had a much calmer disposition than the one he showcased when they returned to 12 Grimmauld Place last night. Turais knew Orion would have exploded in fury if he wasn't more worried about Turais' sickly appearance. Magical children generally had less illnesses compared to their Muggle counterparts, but even then, Turais was exceptionally healthy. While his brothers fell ill to a handful bouts of cold throughout the years, Turais has not succumbed to it once.

"I... I... think so..." Turais said slowly. His throat felt dry and raw. "Water, please?"

"Right here," Orion held a mug near the corner of his mouth with a towel below and slowly poured the liquid on the corner of his mouth. Turais swallowed, but as the liquid flowed down his throat, it burned. It was not just his throat. His head was pounding, his face warm but his entire body was paradoxically chilly, and every single bone ached.

"Does your throat still hurt?" Orion asked softly.

"Just a bit..." Turais said weakly. "My entire body is aching slightly too."

Orion held his palm and felt Turais' cheeks. Compared to his feverish skin, Orion's gentle hand felt cool and comfortable.

"You are still too warm, but it's much better than yesterday. Let's serve you a third round of the Pepper-Up and AnCoP," Orion said as he reached for the Potion bottles and measured a ladle's worth of each. "If this persists, I'm calling in the private Healers."

"Thank you, father," Turais said as he drank both Potions. White steam immediately shot out of his ears as he felt his body warm up.

Orion sighed as he took the cup from his eldest son. "You really should have told me that you felt unwell at once, Turais. We could have headed home right away."

"Well, I didn't want to spoil the festivity for everyone," Turais protested.

In actuality, he didn't want to show weakness in front of Bellatrix and the rest of the family. He knew how important appearances were, especially in front of potential enemies.

Orion shot him a piercing glance but did not comment. Turais knew he would get an earful of reprimand... but not quite yet.

"Are you warm enough?" Orion asked as he tucked Turais back into bed and burying him in a cocoon of quilts and blankets.
"Yes..." Turais slurred sleepily as his eyes drooped slightly.

"Well, you better get well soon. I can only keep your presents safe from Sirius for so long..."

But Turais didn't hear him as he has already drifted back to his potion-induced sleep. Orion gently closed the door behind him.

***

*December 27, 1969 (Saturday)*

"It would have been nice if I had some warning that this would happen," Turais snapped at the empty room. He summoned Death after his third nap and when he felt less malaise. Originally, he thought Malfoy managed to poison him somehow. But that accusation turned out to be false.

"*This was not information that I was -*"

" - Allowed to disclose because I have to experience it first-hand. Yes, understood," Turais finished Death's sentence in a huff. "But how long will this... fever... last?"

"*Your had a huge expansion of your magical core. Your eleven-year-old body just needed time to adapt to the sudden change. It is less of an illness and more of a physiological symptom of the change. You should feel better soon enough. -*

"Wait, so does that mean I can't use too much magic because my body can't handle the stress?"

"*You, like everyone else, has a limit to the amount of magic you could perform. Beyond that, you would experience magical exhaustion. Just be mindful that you are still physically a child. -*

"This is dumb..." Turais grumbled.

"*Just don't over-exert yourself, young Master. This is merely your first manifestation of your powers. You can still perform plenty of magic even with the restraint that are imposed upon you until your full manifestation at the age of seventeen. -*

Turais merely sighed. There was no point in arguing with Death. It was not like it would change his situation.

"Fine. But let the record show I protest this -"

There were three successive knocks on the door as Turais quickly shut up. He definitely forgot to place the Muffling Charm... but it was too late for that.

The door slowly opened as Alex peered through the crack. "Turais," Alex whispered, "Are you awake?"

"Yes, Alex," Turais said. "Come on in."
Alex opened the door wider and scanned the door as though he was searching for something.

"I thought I heard you talking to someone..." he scratched his head in confusion, "... but no matter. How are you feeling? I just wanted to check on you."

"Much better. I think I might have just caught the dreaded lurgy," Turais said as Alex pulled up his work chair and sat back beside him. "The potions have done their tasks properly. Don't fret."

"I'm glad we have medicine that can deal with these mundane diseases easily," Alex said while eyeing the various potion bottles intently. "You know, these bugs still kill people quite easily. And I mean, it has only been a few centuries since the Black Death that purged one-third of the world's population - Muggle population, that is."

"Definitely, to think that AnCoP would've - Antidote for Common Poisons - the white one over there, Alex - yup, that one - and how a ladeful of it would have easily cured a person of the plague is disturbing," Turais commented. "Actually, what could be more disturbing is how Nicholas Malfoy allegedly poisoned his Muggle tenants and covered up their deaths as plague victims back in the 14th century."

"No way!" Alex exclaimed, horrified. "That's terrible!"

"You've never heard of that story?" Turais asked. "It's a pretty well-known story around our family."

"Maybe your family just wanted to disparage the Malfoys," Alex said wryly, "Your two families are constantly butting heads."

"You say it as though your family is not involved in any of this," Turais said jokingly. "If anything, we are inviting the son of an enemy into our household considering how Lord Fawley has been making waves in the Wizengamot with his bills."

Alex flushed red. "W...what do you mean?"

"Haven't you read the papers? Lord Fawley just sponsored a bill two weeks ago to ban blood wards. It's not going over too well with the Dark families -" Alex blanched at the information as Turais eyed the boy curiously. "- you really didn't know, huh?"

"N...no, I didn't..." Alex stammered out. "B...but your f...father - he still let m...me stay -"

"Hey, it's okay," Turais sat up and reached out for his friend. "We can separate you from your cousin."

"But... your family must hate mine," Alex rubbed his hands together nervously.

"Yeah, we totally do," Turais said dryly. "I invited you to stay here just so I can put poison in your hot chocolate -" Alex's eyes widened in fear, " - I'm just joking - sorry, that was distasteful."

The two boys felt into an awkward silence.

"Hey," Turais edged out, "I really didn't mean to freak you out. It was a terrible joke -"

"Yeah, I knew that. Your jokes are always terrible," Alex sighed and Turais was barely able to suppress his annoyance. "I'm sorry that I over-acted... as usual. I wasn't not thinking clearly... as usual. Poisoning is more of a Malfoy specialty, isn't it?"
Turais eyed the boy carefully, unsure how to react. But Alex's lips twitched and Turais eased as they chuckled.

"Your father didn't tell you that one, did he?" Alex said after he stopped laughing.

"No, he didn't. But I really should've known," Turais smiled. "What is our family's specialty then? And don't say madness. It's too mundane of an answer."

"Hmm..." Alex thought for a moment, "Would killing someone with kindness be a proper answer?"

"I like that answer," said Turais, feeling his heart filled up with joy. "I like that answer a lot."

***

December 28, 1969 (Sunday)

Under grey clouds and stingingly cold air, Turais prowled the domesticated wilderness of the neighbourhood park in search of his preys amongst the large flakes of drifting snow. He packed the snow cupped in his gloved hands casually, stalking patiently for his next victim in a highly successful hunt. Suddenly, he saw a glimpse of the bobbing head of groomed, black hair just above the snow-clad hedges up ahead.

Bingo.

Turais carefully circled around the position of his unsuspecting brother, pausing occasionally to listen for any suspicious snap of twigs or crunches in the snow. He could now see the specks of white clinging onto Regulus' hair clearly as he drew back his arm...

THWACK!

"Aaaugh!" Regulus yelped as the snowball burst against his bare head. "Darn it! That was you, Turais, wasn't it?!

Regulus turned his head to where Turais once stood but the perpetrator has long receded back into the safety behind the hedges.

Turais, buoyed by his most recent success, scooped a handful of snow. Suddenly, he heard a series of footsteps rapidly approaching from his left. Turais snapped his head towards the sound, but he could not see anyone.

Slightly unnerved, Turais quickly retreated to his right and into the treeline. As he surveyed the area from his hiding spot, he suddenly spotted a mop of long, curly hair with specks of white directly beside him. He was completely burrowed in the trough of the tree roots and surrounded by bushes. There was also a small heap of snowballs lying by his feet. If Turais did not jump into the woods, he would never have discovered the boy.

"Hey, Siri!" Turais shouted out as he threw the snowball at his mark. Sirius turned towards his eldest brother upon hearing his name and Turais' aim was true -

THWACK!
Sirius twisted madly as his face was covered in powdered snow. Some of the snow has also
gone under his collar as Sirius scrubbed at his robes frantically.

"Merlin's hairy balls, Turais! The snow is trickling down my undershirt!" Sirius shouted as
Turais laughed, his face completely red from the cold air and physical exertion.

"It's on, big brother!"

Sirius bent down and scooped up his stockpile of projectiles. Then, he screamed his battle cry
and chased after the hastily retreating Turais.

Turais ran away as snowballs glanced off his shoulders. Just as Turais thought he had
outpaced his brother -

*SPLAT!*

A large snowball exploded directly in his face. Turais spluttered as two more snowballs
caught him in the chest and the stomach from seemingly nowhere.

Suddenly, he found himself targeted from all sides without cover as he was continually pelted
with compact snow.

"Do you surrender unconditionally?!!" Regulus' voice shouted from somewhere to his right.

"I will never!" Turais shouted back as another snowball slapped him in the face in return.

"Now, do you surrender?" Alex's amused voice echoed.

"Fine! Fine! I surrender," Turais waved his empty hands as the three boys cheered loudly
around him. "You are all ganging up on me."

"Did not!" Sirius' head popped into view from behind a tree at the words. "You just suck,
Turais."

Alex also appeared beside him and helped him stand up. The skies have changed several
shades darker now. The wind has also picked up as the snowflakes whipped around more
ferociously than minutes ago.

"Let's head back," Turais said. "I don't want to freeze off my buttocks."

"Happened before, Turais?" Alex teased as they trekked back onto the main path. Other
muggle children were engaged in their last minutes of building snow forts and snowmen.

"Well, I almost did one year. There was a pretty terrible winter..." Turais said thoughtfully.
"... seven years ago? Blizzards and all that." Turais shivered slightly at the memories of the bitter
cold and foot-high layers of snow. He eyed Sirius warily as he trailed behind suspiciously with his
hands hidden from view.

"How do you even remember that?!" Alex exclaimed as Turais ducked at Sirius' sudden
movement.

"We were barely five - *Arrgh!*" Alex spat out his mouthful of snow, "Sirius, you brat!"
"I like you, Alex," Regulus announced as he patted down his robes once they returned to the warm comfort of their house. "You're cool."

Alex's hands stilled as he blinked owlishly.

"Yeah," Sirius agreed as shook his head like a wet dog and chunks of ice flung out of his long, curly hair.

"Eww... Siri," Regulus said in disgust, "I don't want your frozen dandruff on me."

Sirius ignored him and continued, "We want you on our team for snowball fights from now on -"

"Ah hah! I knew you were teaming up against me," Turais exclaimed as he shed his outer layers. Now, he felt completely vindicated from suffering his first loss in their snowball fights since... well, since forever really.

Sirius shrugged, "Whatever, Turais. We never win against you so can you blame us? But now -" He turned to Alex with a conspiratory glint, " - since Alex is here... Reggie and I would like to offer you membership to our anti-Turais Snowball Society."

Sirius extended his hand with a sense of aloofness. Alex eyed Turais cautiously, but then he grinned mischievously and took Sirius' hand.

"Deal."

Turais groaned as his younger brothers cheered.

"You're all cheaters," muttered Turais with a pout.

"And you're just a sore loser, Turais. Alex has brilliant tactics and aim," Sirius crowed.

Turais looked at Alex sharply. "You're just lucky that your hair colour makes you hard to spot. You’re not that good," Turais huffed in mild annoyance.

“Bitter loser,” Alex coughed as Turais glared.

“TURAIM, DID YOU HAVE A SNOWBALL FIGHT TWO DAYS AFTER YOU RECOVERED?!" Orion's voice roared.

***

December 29, 1969 (Monday)

"St Mungo's has been flooded with patients recently," Carl said as he sliced into the casserole. "I believe there has been a recent wave of expats returning to the country given the situation on the Continent."

Carl Selwyn, his father and his girlfriend made an appearance for dinner today, making good on his promise to visit Turais during the Christmas break.
"And so I've heard," Orion said after taking a sip of wine, "What kind of injuries are you seeing?"

"Mostly collateral or indirect injuries from Dark creatures such as trolls and giants -"

"I thought giants were extinct?! - Eeek!" Sirius said as his hands shot up excitedly before clamping down on his robe quickly. Turais frowned at his brother and swore he saw a bulge moving suspicious beneath his hands. Orion shot Sirius a warning glare for his rude interruption but Sirius didn't seem to take notice.

"Well, there are still pockets of tribes scattered across the remote areas in Europe, including Britain. There are, maybe, five to six hundred of them left in this part of the World," Evangeline Rosier said.

Suddenly, there was a soft squeaking noise that originated from -

"Woah, I would like to go hunt giants!" Sirius said loudly.

"Sirius," Orion said warningly.

"Well, I'd warn you against that particular activity," Carl said seriously. "A lot of Wizarding villages are displaced because they are wreaking havoc and attacking everywhere. But we don't know what is happening."

"But there has not been any reports from my acquaintances in France and Italy about any notable disturbances," said Orion.

"My guess is that the graphorn populations there are keeping the trolls and them from wandering into the south and west," Carl said. "All thanks to Newt Scamander for re-introducing them into Europe, it seems."

"You are quite knowledgeable in magical creatures," said Orion.

"Carl just loves to read the articles on them in the papers and share it with anyone who would listen," Evangeline said as she placed one hand on Carl's and laced them together. "That's his little obsession."

"But he sometimes seems to neglect to share his knowledge to his family..." Lord Selwyn spoke for the first time during dinner as he eyed their intertwined fingers with scorn. "...no matter the importance of the subject of interest."

Carl flushed as Turais shifted uncomfortably.

***

One hour earlier...

"Hey, Carl. I didn't expect you to bring Eva along today?!" Turais said as they stared down at the chess board. Turais was losing terribly after his vastly superior opponent. "In your last letter, you told me you still have revealed this information to him."

"Well, I didn't... not exactly," Carl said as he examined the board. "Pawn to d4 -" the white
pawn marched up two squares and halted, ",- and check."

"What - where?" Turais was confused. Carl pointed to his quaking black king on the square h6, which was in the direct line of attack from a malicious-looking bishop who was holding its staff menacingly. "Pawn to g5 then. How did your father find out then?"

"He uh... made a surprise visit to St Mungo's last week and saw me uh... kissing her," Carl blushed. "Couldn't really explain that away... Queen to f7."

"Darn," Turais heaved a sigh. And that sentiment applied to both Carl's story and his own dismal gameplay. "I guess I lost, huh... I'm pinned down pretty badly."

After a minute's quiet contemplation, Turais announced, "Queen to e7."

"Nice try at making me trade queens, Turais," Carl mused. "But pawn takes g5 -" The white pawn unsheathed its sword and swung it violently at the black pawn, which splintered into pieces, before moving into the square.

" - and check."

"Well, I think I completely butchered the game," Turais conceded. "Queen to g5."

The queen dutifully smashed the pawn into bits of fragmented marble. "But I'm glad that your father knows about it now. I'd hate to tip-toe around the topic and pretend I don't know what's happening."

"Rook to h5. Checkmate. -" The rook smashed its shield against the pawn and pulverized it before moving up towards Turais' king, which took its crown and threw it onto the chess board. "Good game, Turais. Just please remember not to mention that I have told you about us during the Malfoy Ball. He was already extremely displeased that I didn't tell him outright and he'd flip if -"

"Carl! Did I just catch you saying that Turais knew about you and Evangeline before I did?!" Lord Selywn's voice boomed behind Turais as Carl's flushed face suddenly turned deathly pale.

Turais winced.

***

Orion cleared his throat noisily. "Archibald, I’m sure Carl understands the distinction now, if not already.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure, Orion,” Lord Selywn said icily. “It’s prudent to not underestimate the webs of deception woven by your own children.”

The palpable tension blanketed the dining table once more.

CLANG! - CRASH!

Water glasses tumbled and dishes shifted as Sirius looked as though he was trying to climb onto the filled table. His arms were extended and cupping something on Lord Selywn's table setting, who was wide-eyed with surprise as his robes were smeared with meat sauce and spilt wine.
"SIRIUS! WHAT IN SLYTHERIN'S NAME -"

"Squeak! " A small, white object appeared from Sirius' clutches and scuttled in the cervices between plates across the table as the table was shocked into a stand-still. Carl and Evangeline shared a bewildered moment as their gaze connected. Turais just wanted to bury himself alive on the spot from the second-hand embarrassment. Why did Sirius have to obsess over sugar mice...?

"Squeak! Squeak! " Two more sugar mice climbed out of the sleeve of Sirius' robes as they sniffed the surrounding environment. Orion looked downright murderous while Lord Selwyn's moustache twitched slightly.

Sirius looked around himself, just realizing how much trouble he was in before braving the oppressive silence with a sheepish grin, "Urm ... anyone want some tea?"

Lord Selwyn's face turned a dangerous shade of red as though he was a bomb that was about to explode as the rest of the table was paralyzed in shock and trepidation.

"Ha...hahahahah ..."

A hearty laughter erupted as Lord Selwyn reached for the napkin to wipe at his glistening eyes. "Oh, that was brilliant. I have not been surprised like that in ages. What comedic timing..."

"Ha. Ha. Hahahaha..." Carl eyed his father and laughed along. He gave his girlfriend a sharp nudge as she started fake laughing as well.

Turais slapped his palm over his face in resignation as Sirius grinned sheepishly, completely confused with the outcome but happy that he was not in immediate trouble. In fact, he would never truly understand how he had gotten away scotch-free for that terrible blunder.

***

January 1, 1970 (Thursday)

"Surprise!" Turais shouted at a bleary-eyed boy in his casual wear who was ushered into the kitchen by the two younger Black brother bodyguards.

"What is happening?" Alex asked as he stared intently at the large Quaffle cake in Puddlemere United colours that was in the center of the table. The number twelve was printed in large font on the surface.

"Well... it's your birthday... right?" Turais asked nervously as the excitement deflated in the room. He was fairly certain that he had the date correct... but maybe not?

Alex just stood there stoically for a few seconds. Turais wasn't sure if he was shell-shocked or unimpressed.

"It's my birthday," Alex said quietly.

Turais was confused with the lack of excitement, but he maintained his large smile and wide grin. Hopefully, he will infect Alex with a more festive mood.

"Well, what are you waiting for, birthday boy? Make a wish and blow out the candles!"
Turais dragged the boy towards the table in front of the cake with twelve candles that was blazing like a forest fire.

Alex did as he was told. He closed his eyes and clasped his hands together. Sirius and Regulus surrounded the cake eagerly, salivating at the treat.

"Are you done yet, Alex?" Sirius whined.

Turais shot Sirius a silencing glance while Alex continued undisturbed. After a few more silent seconds, he reopened his eyes and blew hard at the flames. Suddenly, Sirius yelped as he jumped back. Several ends of his long locks of hair were singed from the sudden burst of flames that flew towards him.

Everyone laughed as Sirius patted his hair with a scowl.

"Thank you, Turais," Alex mumbled softly into Turais' ear and Turais gave him a winning smile. "I... I didn't expect anyone to celebrate my birthday."

"I would be a terrible best friend if I forgot your birthday, Alex," Turais knocked his shoulder into Alex's.

Alex's eyes were glistening slightly, although Turais didn't know if it was from the smoke or something else.

"Thank you," Alex repeated once again.

***

A few hours after the small birthday lunch that they had, Alex and Turais were lounging in the sitting room for a rare moment of peace away from Sirius and Regulus, who were at Diagon Alley with Orion shopping for sweets. They were both enjoying each other's silent company until Alex spoke up.

"So... do you know why I write all those letters to my father?" Alex said. Turais sat up at his words and looked at the other boy who was lying on the other couch and flipping through the book in front of him mindlessly.

Turais shook his head silently. But then he realized Alex could not see him. so he spoke softly, "No, I don't."

Alex closed his book and sat up as well. He placed the book down beside him and fiddled with the seams of his robes. Turais could see him swallowing heavily before he said, "So... before I went to Hogwarts, he told me to write a diary recording everything I experienced because he wanted to relive his time in Hogwarts."

"But why?" asked Turais. It was a weird request, but a harmlessly one.

"B...because he's my father. Despite everything, he's the only person related to me by blood in this world. I can't deny him this simple request," Alex said, kicking his legs around nervously.

"Oh Alex..." Turais said exasperatedly, suddenly feeling relieved and tired all of a sudden.
"And I was worried that you had some unspeakable family issues -"

"No!" Alex protested loudly. "No. Why would you think that, Turais?"

"Well, you are always so secretive about your family..." Turais explained, "...and I didn't want to force you to tell me anything to don't wish to reveal. But I do worry if you are abused or mistreated..."

Alex flushed.

"It...It's n...nothing of that sort," Alex said. "N...not at all. I'm sorry for making you worry... it's just... I'm not quite used to talking about matters like these..." Turais could also hear the unspoken "I never had anyone to talk about this" part in Alex's response.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," Turais smiled. "But you do know that I am always here to lend you an ear. Consider it a standing offer."

"I know. Thanks, Turais. I'm sorry for being a nuisance -"

"Nonsense, Alex," Turais interrupted. "You're not a nuisance. I just tend to hover and mother-hen everyone around me."

Alex cracked a tiny grin. "You are a mother-hen... but you're also the best mate in this whole entire world."

***

January 5, 1970 (Monday)

In the blink of an eye, Christmas holiday came to an end and Turais found himself on the Hogwarts Express once again as he journeyed back to Hogwarts.

" - Turais! Turais!"

Turais whipped his head away from the window and the snowy hills, alarmed. "What? What happened?"

"You were gathering enough wool to make ten sweaters, mate," Gerald said.

"We're not good enough for you to maintain a conversation?" Jonty snided.

"Well," Turais spluttered, "No! Sorry, my mind just wanders..."

"I'm just messing around, Turais," Jonty grinned. "But you do look like a wounded crup."

"I'm sorry..." Turais scratched his head sheepishly. "So what were we talking about? Uh... right, Jane, how was your ski trip?" He looked around the compartment at suddenly realized that Jane was not present.

Jonty rolled his eyes. "Honestly, Turais. She told us that she didn't go because her brother fell ill. And if you haven't noticed, Jane is not here currently either. She went to the lavatory."
"Oh... uhm... okay, so what were we talking about then?"

"Never mind," Jonty sighed. "Disappear back into your head."

"Hey! I am fully engaged in this conversation again. I promise!" Turais said.

"Whatever, so Alice -"

"Jonty!"

***

"Alex, go ahead first. I'll go find Jane with Alice," Turais said after the train screeched to a halt at Hogsmeade Station. Jane has been missing for almost the entire trip to Hogwarts, which was a bit worrying.

Alex nodded as he caught up with the rest of the group waiting a few metres away from the train. Turais and Alice walked down the emptying train corridor and checked each lavatory they came across. Finding the one that was occupied, Alice knocked on the door.

"Jane. Are you inside? We have reached Hogwarts," Alice said. After a few additional knocks, she spoke again, this time more worriedly, "Jane. Jane?"

The door unlocked as the Gryffindor walked out. Her face was dripping wet as though she hastily splashed herself with water. Her eyes were red and swollen.

"Jane. What's wrong?" asked Alice gently as she wrapped her arms around her friend.

"Nothing," Jane gave a weak chuckle. "I just miss my family... I guess."

"I'm sure Dave will be up in no time," Alice said.

Jane sniffed, "I hope so. I'm just being silly." She gave a brave smile, but Turais knew she was still worried.

***

"What did Jane say about Dave?" Turais asked Jonty and Alex when he was unpacking in the dormitory after dinner. "I think I missed out on a large part of her conversation."

"She didn't say much. Just that he apparently had a persistent cough and chest pain since November but her parents did not mention it in their letters from home," Jonty said nonchalantly. "I'm sure it's nothing serious. A dose of Pepper-Up and he'll be up in no time."

"You don't think it's something more serious, do you?" Alex asked, reading Turais' frown.

"I don't know, to be quite frank," Turais said as he sighed. "We'll just have to wait until Jane tells us more..."
"Hey Black, do you mind if we join you for dinner tonight?" Tenebrus Bryce, a second year, asked as Turais was scooping up a healthy portion of Shepherd's pie.

Jeremy Kent, his fellow yearmate nodded. He stepped up and procured a familiar green and gold tin can. "I know you love treacle, so I asked my mother to send me the best treacle she could find."

Turais eyed the can with interest. "This is muggle-made, Kent."

The blood drained from the boy's face at the revelation.

"I... this... I d... didn't think - I swear - I apologize, Black, I -"

"And you are so thoughtful, Kent," Turais took the item out of the boy's slacked grip and placed it on the table. "But you really didn't have to do that. You can join us for dinner if you'd like. With or without bearing a gift."

The two second-years looked at each other, flabbergasted. After a moment, they decided that they would sit down with the trio. However, they were still eyeing the three boys with an air of nervousness and uneasiness.

"Tenebrus, Jeremy, why are you not eating?" Turais asked, confused.

"I... wasn't sure if... we were allowed to do so," Bryce stammered out. Suddenly, realizing that he did not address Turais, he added hastily, "Black."

Turais set down his silverware and the two boys flinched.

'Am I really that intimidating?'

"Okay, ground rules," Turais said, "Rule number one, you don't need my permission to do anything. Eat when you want to eat. Join us when you want to join us. Leave when you want to leave. Rule number two, please call me Turais. Rule number three, you don't need to bring or buy me anything to curry any favour. Agreed?"

They looked surprised. and puzzled "But Mal... the others all have strict rules to -"

"Listen," Jonty said, "Turais is different from the others. I don't agree with everything he says or does but he doesn't force me to agree with him. Nor does he force me to become friends with him just because our parents are allies. I'm here because I like spending time with him. So you should only be here if you genuinely want to be friends with him. No can of syrup or filled Gringotts vault can help you buy your way into becoming friends with him."

"Oh..." They said as their postures relaxed. "In that case, I'll dig in. I'm starving."

They chatted animatedly for the next hour. But for the entire time, Turais constantly felt multiple gazes on their little group, some curious and others weary. Regardless, everyone in the Slytherin house knew that more change was in the air.
January 9, 1970 (Friday)

It was the first Slytherin leadership meeting of the new year, and the group was discussing about their Christmas endeavours when Lucius turned his attention to Turais.

“So how was your Christmas break, Turais?” Lucius asked casually.

"Interesting to say the least," Turais replied. "You were there for one of the more eventful encounters."

Lucius smiled coldly at the mention.

“I also heard something interesting conversation from Bellatrix regarding your knowledge of a special group?"

The room fell silent as the rest of the members narrowed their eyes at him.

Turais paused and thought back to his conversation with Bellatrix… was the knowledge of the Knights of Walpurgis a secret?

“You mean the Knights of Walpurgis?” Turais asked calmly, determined to keep his emotions from surfacing.

“Not exactly, Turais. You mentioned that she has to graduate and be married before she could join, which means you know more than you are letting on. Now, speak,” Lucius said calmly.

Turais pondered on his words for a moment, allowing the silence to carry on. Then, he realized his genuine mistake. Turais was merely suggesting that Arcturus would not have allowed Bellatrix to join the Knights while she was in school and was a Black. But he has unwittingly mentioned two of the requirements on becoming a Death Eater, besides the branding of their forearm. The Knights of Walpurgis do not have those requirements. Everyone in the room are aspiring Death Eaters so they would’ve been approached by Voldemort and understood the requirements. This was also why Bellatrix was willing to marry a man she did not know, let alone love. It was only until the Second Wizarding War when Voldemort was desperate enough to kill Dumbledore and to punish Lucius for his failures that Draco Malfoy was branded.

Lucius might merely be suspicious of Turais at this point and was trying to coax him into revealing the truth as his father did to him over Christmas. He couldn’t have found out Turais knew of the existence of the Death Eaters for he never revealed that information to a single soul. So he could feign innocence and deny the claim…

Or, if he revealed he knew of the group’s existence, perhaps he could further consolidate his power and curry the favours of the rest of the members and dethrone Lucius by claiming he has directly communicated with Voldemort. This was potentially a fast track route to power, but it would be perilous and far-fetched one for he could not foresee the reactions of the other members or if they would grow suspicious of him. At the same time, he doesn’t know if his hand was strong enough. It might be easier to wait until some of them graduated, but he could not imagine their replacements being much easier to work with…
“I’m not certain what you mean, Lucius. I meant that Lord Black would not have allowed Bellatrix to join the Knights until she graduates and was no longer a Black by name. As you may know, the Blacks are officially unaffiliated with the Knights and my grandfather treats that announcement very seriously. I’m sure you of all people would understand, considering...” Turais said held his gaze steady. The Malfoys were the direct beneficiary of the failed alliance between the Knights and the Blacks.

Lucius eyed Bellatrix and then the other members in which they communicated back silently. After another tense silence, Lucius smiled.

“Of course, Turais. I think that there was a simple miscommunication about certain facts,” Lucius said casually. The palpable tension left the room at the end of the sentence and the discussion once again returned to their Christmas endeavours. Turais internally breathed a sigh of relief.

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January 10, 1970 (Saturday)

It was a Saturday and Turais was heading to the library to study as usual (he has learnt to appreciate studying over the years and looked back at his previous Hogwarts years with a shaking head). He was taking a shortcut through a less frequented part of the castle where he saw Nott pacing on his own at an adjacent hallway. While Nott has been keeping his distance from Turais, he has caught him acting weirdly ever since the incident. Turais could not shake the feeling that Nott was up to something, so he hid around the corner within hearing distance to listen in on the conversation. Call it Head Auror intuition.

After a few moments, Synde appeared from the other end of the hallway and turned into the hidden alcove when Nott now stood, out of view.

“We met up with you-know-who over break and he mentioned considering to rescind his offer to you. Clearly, someone told him about what happened in school and you are now on the outs,” Snyder said.

“What are you insinuating, Cladius?” Nott snapped to the other boy.

“Exactly what I just said. You better pick up your slack and show your worth, Brutus,” Snyder warned.

“Fine! I have received the message, Cladius. If that’s all, you can go on your merry way,” Nott fumed.

“I couldn’t care less if you don’t make the cut, Brutus. But I do not want to be associated with failure .”

Snyder shot Nott a brief look before heading towards the direction of the Slytherin common room. Fuming, Nott blasted the opposite wall with a spell, charring its surface. Turais silently slipped away.

‘So Synde and, presumably, some of other seventh-years have met with Voldemort over break. Voldemort must’ve been recruiting them to join the Death Eaters right out of school. And
they might’ve told Voldemort about him and Nott. Now, Nott will be forced to prove himself, just like Draco Malfoy before… but who will be his target? Me? Dumbledore? I will have to watch out...’

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Jonty darted from the entrance of the common room towards Turais’ desk and whispered, "Turais, gossip report!"

But Jonty might as well have yelled his words out loud as everyone has already gathered around Turais when they spotted the resident gossip-monger strolled into the common room.

"Steward, speak!" Alderton, a third-year, demanded.

Jonty cleared his throat importantly before crouching down once more and waved his arms dramatically. "There has been a huge change in the Slytherin house team line-up!"

"Who got shafted?" Summerbee, a fellow first-year, asked excited as she soaked up the news.

"Wilkins, who was the main Beater the last two years but bumped down to back-up last game, is back in the starting line-up."

"Great! Bragge is incompetent at best -" Delaney exclaimed.

But before Jonty could reveal more information, the common room entrance opened once more as two boys Turais recognized as the Beaters of the Slytherin team, Bragge and Hattilus, stormed through the common room with identical scowls wordlessly. Just as everyone in the common room was wondering what else had happened in the Quidditch practice today. A voice echoed out from the entrance antechamber.

" - you can’t do this!" a female voice shouted. The students in the common room continued to maintain their facade of nonchalance, but they were all sneaking glances at the pair that just entered the dormitory.

"Look, Arkenstone. I have replaced my Beaters as well," Laughalot said. "This is not personal."

“How is this not personal, Laughalot? Say it to my face that Pucey is a better Chaser,” Natalia Arkenstone, the sixth-year Chaser on the Slytherin team, shouted as she grabbed the captain’s arm.

Laughalot looked pained as he spun around and wrung his arm violently out of her grasp. “NO! You’re not a worse Chaser than Pucey."

“Then why are you booting me off the team?!” The Slytherin common room gasped. “I know you don’t want."

“Just accept it, Arkenstone. Pucey is now Chaser. Just like how Wilkins and Stacey are the main Beaters. End of story,” Laughalot gritted out before storming away, leaving a shocked former Chaser rooted at her spot in his wake.
The common room entrance opened again as a smug-looking Pucey in his full Quidditch outfit strolled in with the rest of the team.

“Don’t be too upset now, dearest. It’s cute that you thought that you even had a chance,” Pucey crowed. “Given your father’s behaviour in the Wizengamot. Someone really ought to put your family in place. Laughalot was honestly too kind to even entertain your pathetic bid for so long, blood traitor.”

Arkenstone glared wordlessly before turning around to leave.

“One more thing,” Pucey shouted as she stopped in her tracks. “Please clear out your locker soon -”

“I’ll do it tomorrow, Pucey,” said Arkenstone growled out.

“Make it early morning, I’m planning on practicing some moves before lunch and I don’t want to ruin my appetite by seeing any blood-stained knickers -”

*SMACK!*

Arkenstone dropped her broom and slapped Pucey across the face with every ounce of her strength and fury. “Shut your gob, you gormless sexist git!”

Pucey looked flabbergasted as a red imprint of a palm started to form on his left cheek. But then, his face contorted with rage. He was about to reach for his wand when a Beater quickly constrained his arms behind his back.

“Wilkins! Take your hands off -”

“Don’t herniate yourself, numpty,” said Arkenstone as she gathered her broom from the ground. “I’ll make sure to get front row seats to watch you flounder.”

“You slag!” the boy screamed as he struggled against Wilkin’s firm grip.

“I am a slapper,” Arkenstone said as she strolled away. Turais couldn’t help but laugh at the retort and she shot him a grin as she walked past.

“What’s funny, Black?!” Pucey roared as he flushed in embarrassment.

“Do you see anyone else in the room that’s more laughable?” Turais quipped as he gathered his materials.

“You!”

“Pucey!” the second Beater, Stacey, hissed into the ear of the enraged boy. “He’s Black, not Arkenstone. Pick your battles!”

Turais walked past a muted but enraged Pucey with Jonty clambering after him.

***

January 11, 1970 (Sunday)
"- stupid Laughalot - you spineless git -"

The needles shook noisily as the entire tree tremoured. Clumps of snow fell onto the snowy grounds.

"Natalia, that's enough -"

"- but it's really your fault - damn you, Pucey -"

"Natalia, you're going to hurt yourself -"

The tree shook again... and again... as the girl kicked the trunk in frustration. Another person, a boy, stood silently behind her as he watched on.

"What wrong did the poor tree commit against you?" Turais asked as he traced the trail of foot-sized depressions embedded in the crisp blanket of snow. The girl halted in her aggression and breathed heavily as Turais stopped a few meters away. White puffs of moisture formed in the chilly air as they drifted upwards.

"Black."

"Arkenstone. Wilkins." Turais gave each of them a quick nod. "So, what did the tree do to deserve this grievous bodily harm?" Turais asked again. Wilkins eyed Turais darkly as Arkenstone kicked the tree once more before relenting.

"It just happened to be named Pucey," she glared at the tree fiercely.

"And who bestowed such an undesirable name for it?"

Arkenstone quirked a grin before it disappeared into the persistent scowl once more. "I don't know, maybe Pucey Senior."

Turais hummed at the response. Eyeing the girl's lessened antagonism, Turais took a few steps closer to inspect the fallen needles on the surrounding ground.

"Normal trees should not lose needles from just a few punches."

"Maybe it was more than a few punches?" Arkenstone said.

"Or maybe you throw a mean punch... as well as I saw you slap," Turais commented as he continued to inspect the strands of greens that littered the white canvas. "Or maybe the tree is vastly inferior, considering it is so rattled in your presence." Turais met her gaze for a second time and held it.

She smiled at the comment. "Not a big fan of the tree, I gather?"

"Well, it does have a stupid name and a stupid look," Turais grinned as Arkenstone chuckled.

"I'll have to agree with you on this one, it is truly hideous," Arkenstone said as she patted the bark. "Want to try and pack a good punch?"

"I'll pass," Turais said. "It's not worth expending the time or effort. We both have much better things to do."

"But it will continue to show its ugly branches," she commented. Turais could sense that she was merely arguing for the sake of arguing at this point.
"A true landscaper would recognize that this tree is a dud the second he lays his eyes on it," Turais said as he met Wilkins' gaze briefly. "Just give it some time. People will notice even if they don't express it."

"I suppose..." Arkenstone said as she rubbed her gloved hands on her arms. "It's getting cold. We best head back."

"Let the tree freeze its arse out here while we enjoy a steamy, hot mug of hot chocolate indoors," Turais said as Arkenstone laughed again.

Arkenstone and the wordless Wilkins made their way towards him as the fresh snow crunched beneath their feet. They walked in a companionable silence as they made their way back to the Entrance Hall. After patting off the excess snow hanging on their clothes, Natalia turned towards Turais.

"Natalia," she said as she took off her gloves and extended her hand.

"Turais." He took the hand and shook it.

***

**January 19, 1970 (Monday)**

Tenebrus and Jeremy, along with a dozen more Slytherins, became a permanent fixture in Turais’ life during meals. They consisted of the handful half-bloods in the older years as well as the children of families that allied with the Blacks. As opposed to the beginning of the month where most of the Slytherins conglomarated near the middle of the table, there were now seemingly two loci of attraction. This was merely the visible symptom of a growing unrest amongst the Slytherin population as they were fraught with nervousness at the growing tension between the two Heirs despite their outward appearance of unity.

Apparently, this change in dynamic attracted notice from the other Houses as well as Turais discovered one day.

"Turais," Jonty said as he yanked Turais away from the prying crowds and into a discreet corner.

"I heard from Gerald that you have a new nickname," he snickered.

Turais rolled his eyes in exasperation. "I hope it's something tasteful at least. Nott's were all terrible."

"They are calling you the half-blood prince," Jonty announced as he gauged Turais’ reaction, anticipating the his words elicited a strong reaction from the boy. But Turais stood there with raised eyebrows.

"Really? How so?"

"Hear me out, Turais," Jonty said hurriedly. "They say - mostly the girls, really - that you are princely - which I personally disagree with given your unkempt appearance but that's not my point - Ouch! - " Jonty rubbed gingerly at the spot on his skull where Turais placed a well-deserved hit, " -
“Okay, I've heard you. Is that all?” Turais announced as he resumed his journey towards the Great Hall.

“Wait. Aren't you excited? Or happy?” Jonty shouted as he ran after him.

“I'm not going to feed anything into your gossip circle, Jonty.”

“Come on, Turais. Give me something. Anything!” Jonty whined but Turais remained unmoved. Suddenly, he caught sight of a brown-haired girl further down the hallway and he immediately ran after her.

“Where are you going, Turais?” Jonty shouted after him as Turais reached the group of Gryffindors.

“Hey Alice,” said Turais as the other Gryffindors eyed him with interest. "May I borrow Alice for a quick word?"

"Of course. Alice, we'll head back first,” one of the three Gryffindor girls said as they walked off. But not without giving Alice a meaningful look and a wink. Alice flushed as she shooed them away in a hurry. They giggled all the way until Turais could no longer hear them.

"How's Jane doing?” asked Turais.

"She's... she's fine..." Alice said hesitantly.

"But?"

Alice let out a frustrated sigh. "She's fine physically but she's not been herself. We tried to talk to her but she just avoids us like we're trolls. I don't know what to do."

"Does she not talk to any of you?” asked Turais.

"Well... she did when we first got back," Alice said. "But she just always got frustrated and stormed out halfway into the conversation. Now, she doesn't even try."

Turais frowned.

"I don't know what to do, Turais. I'm worried but she's not letting us help her," Alice said worriedly.

"Help me keep an eye on her,” Turais said calmly. "I'm sure it's nothing devastating. She might just be going through a hard time being home-sick."

Alice nodded fiercely in agreement, as though trying to convince herself of that as well. "I'm sure that's it. I mean... you miss your brothers dearly as well so it's not that different..."

Turais knew deep down that those two scenarios weren't the same, but he should not worry Alice more than necessary.
"So... I've heard that there is a prince among our midst," Yaxley said during the meeting. His eyes stared intently at Turais as though probing him to respond.

"Is that so, Corban?" Turais said as he sipped his glass of warm, frothy butterbeer. "My time is too precious to invest any of it in rumours."

"Half-blood prince. That's what they call him - the Slytherin champion that protects the half-bloods in our house," Yaxley continued. "There is only one person that fits the description."

"Oh, do tell," Dolohov chimed in. "I'm quite interested."

"Oh, I dare not tell without his permission. He is a prince after all," Yaxley said. "No offense intended, Lucius. But we've never had a Wizarding nobility before. I'm not quite certain how to compose myself. There are no rules or etiquette to be followed..."

Malfoy's lips were pressed dangerously thin.

"Oh, you jest, Corban," said Turais. "Don't talk such drivel -"

"I'm not, Turais," Yaxley's voice dropped to a dangerously low tone. "Besides the clear condescension that the title carries, I am quite displeased with the underlying connotation. It matters not whether you were the perpetrator behind this, it is your duty to contain the situation."

"I don't take issue with the name, quite frankly," Turais said. "Especially when it is not false -"

"And that is precisely the issue," Yaxley spat. "We, as a Group, shall not condone this behaviour. Half-bloods are inferior to purebloods. There is no championing of anything but pureblood supremacy -"

"You will not command me of anything, Corban -"

"Lucius, I motion to bar Turais Black from interacting with those of impure blood, effective immediately -"

"Corban, you -"

"Where are your manners, Black? Did your father never teach you not to interrupt your superiors?"

"You are not my superior, Yaxley."

"Your good-for-nothing father clearly failed to keep you from walking astray," Yaxley shouted. "Just like the failure that he was and still is."


"Can't face the truth, Black? Your coward of a father must be absent from your life like he has been from Slytherin. Is he sniffling alone."

Fury blinded Turais for a moment as he felt his magic rush out towards Yaxley uncontrollably, but suddenly he found himself spinning out of his chair and landing flat on the
ground. He heaved himself up to see Yaxley with his wand pointed at him.

"You might think you have achieved mastery of your magic, but your apprenticeship still has some distance to travel," Yaxley sneered. "Learn to control your magic before thinking of attacking me." With that, he left the meeting, leaving Turais red-faced with humiliation.

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"I can't believe I lashed out at him like that," Turais said after recounting his encounter with Yaxley to Alex. Jonty was decidedly out of the conversation because of his loose lips.

Turais was slightly frustrated with himself and his lack of control over his magic. His conflicting intentions of his sudden urge to attack Yaxley and his rational mind to keep control at the same time resulted in his collapsing onto the ground. He has practiced magic for three decades and he should not be committing this amateurish error.

"You just let emotion get the better of you, Turais," Alex said gently. "It has nothing to do with your abilities."

"I know..." Turais said miserably. "But it's still dangerous. I can't have my magic lashing out because I can't control my emotions."

Alex looked at Turais and suddenly wore an amused expression. Turais could see his shoulders shaking as he valiantly suppressed his emotions. But his efforts were all for naught as he ultimately burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" Turais shoved at Alex playfully and he just laughed harder. Some friend, he was. "It's not funny. This is a serious issue!"

Alex wiped off a drop of tear as he caught his breath.

"It's just funny to see you so distressed -" Alex said, then frowning at his words, " - it sounded better in my head - I meant that it's nice to see you act human."

"What do you mean - human?" Turais asked, momentarily forgetting that he was supposed to feel mad at Alex's disregard of his plight.

"Well, you always act as though you have everything under control. You're never fazed. You're always the adult in the room," Alex listed as his voice grew smaller and smaller under Turais' intense gaze. In reality, Turais was just shocked at the confession and was unable to react promptly.

When he finally gathered enough of his wit, Turais minced his words slowly, "Oh... I didn't know that what how you felt around me..."

"No... no... don't apologize, that's not why I told you, Turais," Alex said urgently. "I mean... it's just nice to know that you're are like us too..."

Turais didn't respond.

"Hey," Alex nudged him slightly. "It's nice to have you here to look after us. You make us
feel safe."

"Really?" Turais perked up a little.

Alex nodded as he gnawed on his lower lip. "Sorry for making you feel bad and sounding like I don't care. I'm a terrible friend..."

"No, you're not. I promise..." Alex gave him an unimpressed look, "... fine, you were a tad mean in this case."

Alex nodded in acknowledgement before quickly clearing his throat and donning an earnest expression.

"Okay... so, please continue on... What can I do to help you?" Alex asked.

“Nothing. Just listen to me whine and mop around for a bit,” said Turais.

“Mop away,” Alex said agreeably. “I’m all ears.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter - Chapter 17: A Venomous Strike is currently on schedule for release next week. Until then.

Feel free to comment. I love to hear from you.

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-02
Hey everybody,

Thank you so much for giving so much support my original characters. It is really heartening to know that my very own creations for the story are well-received, and I found that quite motivating.

As usual, send me your thoughts! I would love to hear from you.

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-09

CHAPTER 17

A VENOMOUS STRIKE

January 16, 1970 (Friday)

TRELAWNEY’S SHOCKING TELL-ALL PREDICTIONS

TRUE SEER OR REAL SCAMMER?

by Sclandora Gosp

Predicted 8-Time League’s Best Seeker Westermont To Be Recruited

Castiella Trelawney, Professor of Divination at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and also Divination Correspondence, revealed that she has predicted the final eight teams in this year’s Quidditch World Cup Finals (see pamphlet for more information), months before the qualification stages are complete. Currently, only two teams have qualified for the finals...

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January 24, 1970 (Saturday)

Turais was on his way back from the Owlery after he sent his response to Damocles’ newest
update on the Wolfsbane Potion when he saw Jane heaving a large parcel up the stairs.

"Hey Jane, I didn’t see you at the study sessions this entire week, is everything all right?" Turias eyed her quick pace and added. "Let me lend you a hand." Turais performed a Levitation Charm on the box and it floated weightlessly off her arms. Jane wrung her sore arms and shot Turais a tired but grateful smile.

"Thank you, Turais. Sorry about missing them, I was busy.... I’m heading to the Owlery to send some potions to my brother,” Jane waved the letter in her hand said miserably.

"What do you have in there?" Turais gestured the parcel.

"Oh, just a bit of this and that," said Jane. "I hope they help..."

They reached the circular atrium of the Owlery where Turais set the box beside the two school barn-owls right beside the entrance. Upon laying their eyes upon the enormous parcel, their yellow eyes enlarged in shock before settling into a haughty look. Turais sighed apprehensively as he saw them clicking their beaks reproachfully.

"...Anyhow, I’m sure you're busy. Thank you for the help, Turais. I’ll see you around,” Jane hurried past him with a tired smile.

"I hope he feels better soon,” Turais said with an encouraging smile. "Please let me know if I can help -"

"I'm fine, Turais," Jane snapped as she turned to glare at Turais. Then suddenly, she seemed appalled by her outburst, "I'm so sorry, Turais. I didn't mean to sound harsh -"

Before Turais could respond, a voice interrupted them from behind.

"You dimwit! Don't block the entry -"

Turais turned around just in time to see Nott shifting his scowl to a neutral expression.

"Nott," Turais greeted as he stepped aside.

Nott was rooted at his spot stiffly as his eyes traveled between Jane and him. Jane shifted uncomfortably as she turned her attention to her parcel, trying to ignore the awkward encounter.

"Brutus," Yaxley called out as he rounded the stairs into view. "Why are you standing still like an idiotic lump of charcoal - ah... Black."

"Yaxley."

Yaxley's eyes narrowed his eyes at the crouched figure who was tying the parcel to feet of the two barn owls. He cleared his throat and ignored Jane completely. "Brutus, don't you have a letter to send?"

"Ah... yes, I... I do," Nott spluttered and fled from the scene as he walked up the stairs to find his personal owl. Turais turned his attention back to Jane, who was clearly fumbling with the knots as her eyes kept darting back to Yaxley.

"Here," Turais muttered as he knelt down on the thatch-covered floor, "Let me do it." He quickly tied the knots and sent the owls on their way. Once he was done, he turned around to see a seething Yaxley staring furiously at him.
"Hey, Turais, do you want to head off?" Jane asked nervously.

"Of course, Jane," Turais said as he placed a hand protectively on Jane's shoulder and stared back at Yaxley. They descended the stairs and back to the main castle as Turais walked Jane towards the Gryffindor Tower.

"Don't worry too much about your brother -" a shadow flitted by her face from the mention, " - see you later."

"Thank you, Turais. See you around," Jane said hastily as she departed in a rush.

***

January 25, 1970 (Sunday)

Turais was outside the seventh-year Potions classroom after finding Professor Slughorn’s office and the other classrooms locked. When he opened the door, which was surprisingly unlocked, he saw a half dozen seventh-year NEWTs students clambering around the classroom busily.

“Turais, m’boy. What brings you here on a Saturday evening?”

“Professor Slughorn, Damocles just wrote to me saying that he has determined the correct amount of aconite roots to use and neutralize the potion.”

“Wonderful news! The Arithmancy required to determine that ratio is one of the most difficult hurdles during Potions creation. If he was able to finish that, his potion will almost be ready. Now, he only needs to find the correct potion ingredient amounts and the sequence in which it is used,” Professor Slughorn explained. “But he already knows which combination he needs from researching all these years.”

“That’s exciting! He also reminded me to ask for your input on my rough draft for the transcript on aconite,” Turais said, handing over his piece of writing.

“Ah, why of course, Turais! You only had to ask. I will let you know after I’m done reviewing it. I have a backlog of Potions essays to mark as well as monitoring these Potions,” Professor waved at the roomful of bubbling cauldrons. The students were still milling around them, with looks of panic and distraught, as they cut, diced, and weighed the ingredients while attempting to stir three cauldrons at the same time.

“Are they making… the Polyjuice Potion, the Draught of Peace, and the Draught of Living Death?” Turais peered down at the nearby cauldrons and at the ingredients laid on the table in front of the classroom.

“Yes, m’boy. It is the first of three project which the seventh-year NEWT students have to perform. In this one, they will need to be able to brew all three potions simultaneously and successfully within six weeks,” Professor Slughorn said, reading through the first page of his draft with interest.

“Well, that’s a bit tricky. All three Potions have drastically different maturation times and reaction rates…” Turais considered for a moment, "You could let the potion simmer indefinitely at
certain stages... but you will need to calculate the reaction rate of the new ingredients added to the mixture carefully..." Slughorn nodded his head at Turais' words expectantly, "... but if you control the fire temperature and amount of ingredients used perfectly... you can time it so that you can add ingredients for all three potions whenever you come to the lab to maintain the Polyjuice Potion, which is at most once a day!" Turais exclaimed as he turned to Professor Slughorn, who turned and smiled widely at him.

“My word, Turais. You figured out the intricacy of the project in under minutes while my seventh-years have yet to realize that. And they are more than halfway through the project!” Slughorn smiled as he gestured the frazzled students milling around, "They have been complaining about coming in to add ingredients at all sorts of different odd hours. This is to teach them a lesson that fire temperature and ingredient calculations are often overlooked but very important steps in potioneering."

Professor Slughorn was very proud of his project design and Turais had to admit it was quite clever for its intended purpose. But he still felt bad for the oblivious seventh-years as several Alarm spells blared around the classroom. The students groaned and went into another wave of frenzied activities.

***

February 9, 1970 (Monday)

“Thank you, Jonty,” Sigmund said happily as Jonty grunted. He went back to his desk and shared his answer with the other Hufflepuffs.

“That was a great explanation of the various antidotes, Jonty,” Turais nudged the boy and said encouragingly.

“Thanks,” Jonty muttered tensely as he face tinted pink. Turais noted that he was still a bit awkward around students from other Houses. But he was getting better as the study sessions went.

“Okay, I think this is a good place to stop for tonight, thank you everyone for coming. See you same time next Monday,” Turais announced to the rest of the roomful of first-years. As they packed up, many of the first-years took a detour to thank them personally.

The first-years were starting their end-of-term project where they each had an unknown poison they need to identify through its interactions with other potion ingredients, and then determine the potion ingredients required for the antidote to their specific poisons. Although Professor Slughorn has provided the list of possible unknown poisons, there were still ten poisons which have ten vastly different interaction profiles with ten completely different antidotes.

As the first part of the project was next week, Turais, Alex, and Jonty have been working overtime for the past week trying to help individual students with their own assignments. And also as a result of this particular assignment, basically all the first-years have gathered in Turais’ study sessions to discuss their assignments and ask for help; even some of the most resistant Slytherins came this week.

“We almost had a full-house again today,” Turais said as he waved at the departing Hufflepuffs.
“Except Blumenthal, Flint, Van Burm, and Pierricoeur,” Alex said, closing all the books he has borrowed from the library. “And also Jane, speaking of which, I’ve not seen her at all these last two weeks. Is she still feeling unwell?”

Alex looked at Jonty expectantly but Jonty just shrugged. "I've only heard from Shafiq, the fourth-year Ravenclaw, that she has been spending a lot of time pouring over tomes in the library."

Turais frowned. 'Why is Jane avoiding us all?'

Turais spotted Alice leaving the room with the Gryffindors and he patted Alex on the shoulder, “Actually, let me ask Alice... I'll be back in a jiffy."

“Hey, Alice!” Turais shouted as he caught up to Alice right outside the classroom door. “Can we speak for a moment in private?”

The girls beside her giggled and blushed while Alice shushed them furiously.

"Of course you can," one of the girls said as they shoved Alice towards Turais and eyed them both eagerly. "Alice, take as long as you need."

"Beatrice, Carrie, we're not like that," Alice's cheeks turned rosy as Turais opted to look away and tried valiantly to ignore their conversation.

They muttered furiously for a few moments before Alice walked back in a huff while her friends walked away as they threw backward glances at them.

"Please ignore them, Turais," Alice said with embarrassment. "They are swept along by the recent rumours...."

"The half-blood prince," Turais said, to which Alice looked surprised. "Jonty told me a few weeks back."

"Oh, I see," Alice nodded. "He knows all the happenings in school, it seems."

“Except for what I am about to ask you," Turais grimaced. "Is Jane okay? I haven't seen her outside of classes since two weeks ago and I just wanted to check that’s she’s still okay.”

"She is still avoiding everyone, skipping meals to pour over books in the library. We told her to stop and go to the Hospital Wing but she refused to do so. I’ve caught her crying in the girl’s bathroom yesterday," Alice said, exhausted. "I think she’s upset, but I don’t know why. I just… don’t know what to do...”

“How about Dave? Any news on that front?” Turais wondered.

“Not really. The last time I asked her about it was two weeks ago and she said her brother has ‘crabs’ and that he needed 'medicine'. But then she burst into tears so I didn't dare raise that question again,” said Alice, frowning. "I'm not sure what medicine is. Is it a name of a potion?"

““Crabs”? Isn't that just louse? And medicine is just the muggle equivalent of potions, Alice,” Turais frowned as Alice gave a confused shrug. "Okay, maybe I can try to ask her if she’s okay when I see her next time. But in the meantime, please continue to keep an eye out for her,” Turais said.

“Of course, Turais. I'll keep in touch, see you around,” Alice smiled and headed towards the Gryffindor Tower.
Troubled, Turais headed back to the classroom. He would have to find out what happened.

“- I was surprised Urquhart came,” he heard Alex say as he re-entered the classroom. “He was sitting right beside him... and considering that he called Connor a mudblood to his face.”

Turais knew that their roommate publicly called those who associate with “mudbloods” were “blood traitors” who deserved to die. Although he wouldn’t dare call Turais a blood traitor to his face or say derogatory terms to other in front of him, but Turais knew what he thought of him and the Muggleborns. So it was a huge surprise when he willingly entered a room full of “mudbloods” and half-bloods.

“Hey Turais, what did Alice say?” Alex asked as he approached the duo.

“She’s not sure, but I will definitely talk to Jane next time I see her,” Turais said. “What were you saying about Urquhart? He came for the first time today, which was exciting. I hope he got some help, he was awfully quiet.”

“He must’ve been distracted the entire time by the ‘mud-splattering’,” Jonty smirked. While Jonty was awkward in the presence of other Houses, he was always highly energized around Alex and Turais. He was also getting used to being around non-purebloods that he would not flinch when they touched him. Now, he has progressed to making fun of other purebloods of their uneasiness around Muggleborns. Turais was immensely proud of him.

“Well, it’s the first step that counts. Everything takes time, his father always told him how Muggleborns are worse than scum and to see someone like Jane outperform him in every subject is a rude awakening,” Turais mused.

“Well… my father told me those things too…” Jonty mumbled. “But I don’t think he’s completely right, not anymore.”

“Oh, Jonty,” Turais turned to place a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “I didn’t say that to make you uncomfortable. You have become a lot more open-minded. I can see it, Alex can see it too. Also, it’s not about right or wrong, it’s about opening your eyes and looking around you. Learn everything you can before making up your mind, this is all it is.”

“Well… I have made up my mind to think that my father is wrong about Muggleborns. I doubt he has ever been near one, let alone talk to one. Jane is a clever witch and she is definitely not rubbish.” Jonty said hotly.

“Jonty, we believe you. Your actions speak volumes,” Alex also came over to pat his shoulder. The trio stood there for a while.

“Thank you, to both of you,” Jonty said and sighed as he turned to look at a Turais. “Turais, I sometimes still don’t understand why you do all this... extra work. You don’t get anything out of helping others, besides less sleep.”

“Jonty, it's a nice thing to do... helping those in need. Besides, I get loads out of doing this - like befriending you,” Turais said sappily as he knew it would embarrass Jonty. He wasn’t disappointed when Jonty blushed faintly.

“Umm... let's... head back... before curfew,” Jonty stuttered as he scratched the back of his head, embarrassed but smiling slightly. He turned to walk towards the door and Turais took the opportunity to reach for his bag.

“Jonty, wait! Look this way,” Alex said.
Jonty turned his head and Turais pulled out a large Quaffle cake in Slytherin colours from his magically enlarged bag and held it out.

“Happy twelfth birthday, Jonty! Alex and I got you a birthday cake. We didn’t know what your favourite Quidditch team is so we just used Sly - umphhh,” Turais stopped as Jonty ran back and hugged Alex and him tightly.

“Hey, watch out for the cake, I don’t want to drop it -”

“This is the first time someone celebrated my birthday since I can remember, thank you, you’re the best mates ever,” Jonty said.

“You’re welcome, Jonty, but I really ought to put down the cake -”

“Every year my father just offered me a handshake while my mom gave me a quick squeeze. My house elves were the nicest and they secretly got me a cupcake with a candle. I never thought I’d have an actual cake!” Jonty continued. Turais could tell Jonty was definitely sobbing by now.

“Jonty, if you want an actual cake, you might not get one if I drop it. So please, let go of me,” Turais laughed at the speed Jonty let go at his words. Jonty was wiping at his eyes with his robe sleeves quickly. Once Turais placed the cake on the desk, he looked up at Jonty expectantly.

When he saw Jonty eyeing the cake hesitantly, he said, “Well… go ahead and make a wish!” Turais said.

Jonty flushed red in embarrassment while he stood awkwardly in front of the blazing candles. Turais was confused with his behaviour, but then Alex stepped in and said, "You close your eyes and make a wish, then you open your eyes and blow out the candles."

Jonty nodded as he swallowed nervously. He clasped his hands together and closed his eyes.

“I wish for many more birthday celebrations with you two!” Jonty said. Then, he opened his eyes and he blew out the candles. Turais and Alex clapped excitedly as Jonty beamed.

After their stomachs were filled with cake, Turais turned to Jonty and said, “Well, you weren’t supposed to say your wish out loud. But I guess you will have more practices.”

“You better make good on your promise, Turais,” Jonty sniffed. "Also, I didn’t cry today."

“Of course you didn’t,” said Alex simply. Jonty punched him in the shoulder and received a gasp of pain.

***

February 12, 1970 (Thursday)

“Hey Jane, I haven’t seen you around much lately,” Turais said when he next saw Jane, which was on his way back from the Owlery after the weekend. He has just sent a letter home and his edited draft to Damocles for perusal. Eyeing the letter in her hands, he asked, "Are you sending a letter home?"

When he got closer, he saw Jane’s blood-shot eyes. “Hey, what’s wrong? We are all worried
about you… did something happen at home?”

“Hey Turais,” Jane said as she gave him a tight, forced smile. “The potions I sent Dave didn't work. He has been bed-ridden with fevers for almost two months now and he’s not getting any better. I'm really worried.”

“Has he seen a doctor yet?” Turais asked.

“Yes, but…” Jane said hesitantly.

“What is it? Is it something very serious?” Turais asked softly as he guided her to sit down on a bench nearby.

Jane sniffed softly as she clutched the letter in her hands tighter.

“Yes,” Jane spoke quietly as another sob sounded.

“What disease?”

“You won’t know it, it’s a muggle disease.”

“Jane, tell me,” Turais said. When she didn’t answer, he hedged a guess. “Is it… cancer?”

Jane looked at Turais in shock. “Yes… lung cancer… they found a mass in his chest and... I can't do anything to help him…”

They sat there in silence for a long while as Jane wepted silently while Turais could only offer him his company while allowing reality to settle in. Although survival rates for cancers in the 1970s were much better than it was just a decade ago, it was still almost a death sentence. There were at least effective now, but often debilitating, treatments available… however, the chance of relapse was very high. Turais could not imagine losing Sirius or Regulus to an illness... he would not think about it. It was too painful to even consider.

Finally, the sobbing faded away.

“I’ve been trying to find potions or spells that can cure his disease but there was nothing,” Jane said miserably. "I asked Madame Roland and Madame Winchester and they both said it was likely that our magic prevents cancer from happening in the first place, so there are no potions to cure it..."

Jane looked up through her slightly puffy eyes. "Dave will have the surgery next week and I really, really hope it works…” she trailed off.

Turais remained silent. All he could do was lend her a shoulder to lean on and wish for the best.

“Can… can I find you and… talk about this, Turais?” Jane asked him pleadingly.

“Of course you can, Jane,” Turais smiled encouragingly.

“Thank you, Turais. It’s just… Alice and Tobias and… they all mean well… but they just don’t understand how my brother is sick with… with…”

“Abnormal cells, mutated DNA, chemotherapy, and surgeries?” Turais supplied. Jane's eyes widened even more.
“Yes… they just don’t understand. I don’t know how you know… all this, pureblood and all… I mean, you’re a Black! I’ve been in Hogwarts long enough now to understand what that stands for. Pureblood. Power. Wealth. Prestige… I just…” Jane rambled on.

“Jane, it’s okay. You don’t need to explain anything to me. All you need to know is that I will be here when you need me, alright?”

“Thank you, Turais. You’re awesome, you know that right?” Jane said shyly.

“I’ve heard,” Turais teased. Jane crackled a smile at that and smacked him on the arm.

***

February 17, 1970 (Tuesday)

Turais has been receiving and unusual amount of side-glances and not-so-subtle finger-pointing in the hallways recently, although he could not figure what caused this until today when Jonty ambushed Turais and Alex on their way back to the common room.

"Turais, spill!" Jonty said as he head-locked Turais from behind.

"Spill what?" asked Turais as he easily tackled Jonty onto the floor.

"I'm wounded, Turais, in body and in soul. You..." Jonty said as he jabbed his finger at Turais with his back on the floor. "... and Jane. How come you have neglected to mention this juicy piece of gossip during our chinwags?"

"What are you talking about?" Turais stared down at the boy with confusion. "There's nothing going on between us."

Jonty heaved himself upright and moved up in Turais' face as he examined his expression closely. Their noses were almost touching.

"Are you being truthful?" Jonty demanded. Turais stared righteously back at the other boy.

"Yes."

Jonty scrunched his nose and finally backed off. "Fine, I reckon you're not lying, Turais," Jonty announced as he turned around and darted away, clearly in a rush to spread his new-found information. "Remember... I call bagsy on all your gossips."

“What was he harping on about?” Turais asked Alex.

“I don’t know,” Alex shrugged, “But you are spending a lot more time with Jane recently. Maybe that’s what he was talking about?”

Turais spluttered. “Honesty, do people have nothing to do but spread false rumours about me?”

“Well, you are sort of a big deal if you haven’t noticed, Turais,” Alex said. “Everyone is whispering about how you are defying all expectations of what a Black heir should be -” Turais gave Alex an imploring look, " - in a good way, of course."
Turais hummed at the words. "That's good to know. I'm glad they think differently of me now."

"The rest of the school might. Especially if they can even fathom the possibility that a Black heir would be romantically involved with a Muggle-born Gryffindor. But I doubt Malfoy and his lot fancy this change," Alex cautioned. "Most of the Club, for that matter, doesn't seem to like how you are disrupting the status quo."

"That's old news, Alex. They've been mad at me ever since I arrived at Hogwarts. Any powerful heir that is a force to be reckoned with is a threat to them. If I am a friend, they will seek to control me. If I am a foe, they will seek to hinder me," Turais said. "The only way for me to steer clear of the conflict with a family name such as mine is to hide away in the shadows. Do you envision me choosing such a path?"

"No," Alex admitted. "No, I don't. You shine more brightly than the rest of us combined, Turais. I doubt any shadow dare attempt to conceal your brilliance."

"You wax poetic, my friend," Turais laughed. Alex cocked his head and took his words as a challenge. After a short moment, he started to recite with a hint of aloofness.

"Shall I place thee in the starlit even,
Where twine lights gild'st the ink-complexion'd skies?
The birds shall sing and think it were not night,
The envious moon shall hide, for thou art more bright," Alex finished a flourishing bow as Turais gave him a heartfelt ovation.

"Is it from anyone I would know?" Turais laughed. It was very... Shakespearean.

"No, I don't believe so," Alex grinned. "This is my very own creation... with some heavy influence from a certain individual."

"Still, very impressive."

"I do have hidden depths," said Alex with a smirk.

"Well, don't waste that talent on me," Turais smiled. "Go woo someone else with your silver tongue."

Alex made a blenched face with a dramatic shudder. "Eww... why would I do that? Girls have the lurgy."

"No, they don't," Turais snickered. Oh... innocent child.

"Yes, they do, Turais," Alex said hotly.

"Hey, I actually caught the lurgy this winter," Turais said as he deliberately distanced himself from the boy. "So why are you still around me?"

"Turais!" Alex shouted as he closed the gap just for Turais to move away once again. Frustrated, Alex exclaimed, "Can you stop pointing out the fallacies in my faulty arguments?! Ignorance is bliss, my friend."
"So you admit that girls don't have your fictitious 'urgy,'" Turais said.

"Yes, they do. End of discussion," Alex said in a huff.

***

February 19, 1970 (Thursday)

"Cousin Turais," Andromeda called out as Turais was making his way to the library for his weekly study session.

"Cousin Andromeda. How may I help you?" Turais asked as Andromeda strolled up towards him.

"I have caught whispers that you are in relationship with a Gryffindor Muggleborn of the name Jane Stahl," she asked, "Is that true?"

Turais sighed as he rubbed his temples. "That's completely unfounded. I'm just good friends with her, nothing more and nothing less."

Andromeda arched her bow, looking unconvinced.

"Look, Andromeda. I can't worry about every rumour that I am involved in. I would not see the end of day otherwise. And I would not deign them with a response either, especially when it is more a nuisance rather than a substantial threat. It will run its course and fade away."

"Turais, the mere fact that I of all people heard about this suggests that the entire school thinks otherwise," Andromeda explained. "And this scandal is not going to do you any favours in the Group."

"Andromeda, please believe that I can handle myself accordingly -"

"Not according Stretton and Volant," Andromeda said sharply. "You know they are very close with Malfoy, and they have been letting it slip that you have trouble controlling your own magic."

Turais groaned internally. Of course Malfoy would work to undermine him.

"I see that you are not denying it."

"Nor am I confirming the news either, Andromeda -" Turais continued before Andromeda could protest. " - and it is not because I distrust you. But because it is best to allow it to remain a baseless rumour for now."

"That was not what I was about to say, Turais," Andromeda said. "But... I'm glad to know I have your trust. I meant to say that Yaxley is a strong duelist according to Bella in his Defense Against the Dark Arts classes. I would not underestimate his skills."

"Noted," Turais said. "And thank you for your concern."

"And most importantly, remember they won't be playing fair," Andromeda said, "Tell your friend to be careful."
They shared a brief exchange of smiles before heading off their separate ways.

***

February 20, 1970 (Friday)

"Explain yourself, Turais," Yaxley demanded. "Explain this shameful piece of news that has been circulating around the school."

"It's none of your concern, Corban," replied Turais.

"You do you deny it then?" Yaxley asked.

"I will not confirm nor de-"

"I will not engage in your quirky word plays. Yes or no?"

"What if I am?" Turais shot back. Yaxley was stunned momentarily.

"Lucius," Yaxley addressed Malfoy with barely-contained restraint. "Look at what you have brought into this sacred chamber -"

Turais turned towards Malfoy and found Malfoy boring his gaze deeply into Turais' eyes as the rest of the room fell away. Turais focused on his defenses as the strands of Legilimency caressed the surface of his mind. Turais held his gaze and allowed Malfoy to continue sensing out his mind as Malfoy strengthened his attack. However, it was a fruitless exercise as Turais' shields were too strong to penetrate. After a few moments, Turais forcefully expelled Malfoy from his mind.

Malfoy's body jerked backwards violently and toppled over, sprawling onto the carpeted floor. Everyone around the table stood up in surprise.

"Lucius, what happened to you?" Turais cried in false earnestness as he walked over and offered to pull him up.

Malfoy, completely flustered in his less-than-perfect appearance, slapped Turais' hand away as he heaved himself up and tugged on his robes with a huff.

"C...Corban," Lucius announced once he settled back into his chair. He glanced at Turais very briefly before clearing his throat once more. Turais recognized the look as one of worry and concern. "I have made a promise to not interfere with Turais' private matters. Do you wish for me to break my promise?"

Yaxley glared at Turais with burning hatred and growled in frustration, "Fine, Lucius! I will not place you in that terrible predicament. But something has to be done -"

"And it will have be without my support or involvement," Malfoy clarified as Yaxley clenched his fists ever tighter.

***
February 23, 1970 (Wednesday)

The animated Slytherin table fell into a hushed silence as a lone Gryffindor made her way down the aisle. Jane paused with Turais was sitting, surrounded by two dozen students, as they eyed her with uninhibited interest.

“Turais,” Jane said with a quivering voice. Her eyes were brimming with tears that threaten to fall. "I... I -"

"Oh right. Jane, I forgot to return your textbook," Turais lied smoothly as he saw the girl was seconds away from a breakdown. "Do you mind walking me to the Potions classroom?"

Jane gave a quick nod as Turais placed down his fork and walked with her out of the Great Hall. He could feel hundreds of pairs of eyes staring at their departing figures. This would only serve to fuel the rumours but Jane's well-being was more important.

Once they were out of sight and into the hallway lined with snake portraits.

'Hmmm... I've never been here before. Why would anyone want to put up so many snake paintings?'

Before he could question any further, Jane stepped close to Turais hugged him tightly. Then, he could feel Jane shaking as she sobbed openly.

"What happened, Jane? Did... did something -"

"N...no," Jane hiccuped and said wetly, "It's just... my parents have not been returning my mail. It has been two days since Dave's surgery but they haven't said anything... I'm so worried. I have nightmares of him... of him..."

Jane pulled back slightly and looked at Turais. "He's not d... de... dead, is he? My parents are not hiding this from me like they did in November, right? They can't. But what if they can't reach me, they're Muggles -"

"Jane. Jane..." Turais stilled Jane's body as he spoke in the most soothing voice he could muster. "Jane, Professor McGonagall would have already notified you if something this big has happened. Your brother is not dead."

"But... but why aren't they replying my mail?!!" Jane shouted.

"Maybe... maybe..." Turais racked his mind for everything reassuring to say. "It is not an easy surgery, there could be many types of complications. I'm sure they just wanted to be certain that his condition is stabilized before telling you he has completely recovered. Also, it will take the owls at least a day or two to deliver the mail. I know it is difficult, but you will just have to sit tight and wait a little longer."

"Are you sure?" Jane asked as she wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

"I'm sure you will get the mail soon enough," Turais said softly.

"I'm...m sorry to have whisked you away from your friends and your dinner," said Jane. "You can head back, I'm fine now."
"I'm alright. I think I have gained a little weight anyway," Turais said as the corner of Jane's mouth quirked up.

Jane smiled. "Thank you, Turais. I don't know what else to say - but thank you."

***

February 26, 1970 (Thursday)

“Turais!” The owls have just finished delivering their posts during breakfast when Turais heard Jane scream across the Great Hall. All eyes turned to Jane as she flushed in embarrassment but with a large grin on her face, and then she motioned Turais to leave the Great Hall with her.

“What’s up with her?” Alex asked as Turais stood. “She was all mopey the last few weeks up until yesterday and now she is all happy.”

“Girls,” Jonty said simply as he shook his head.

“Hey, don’t be mean,” Turais hissed at them before quickly leaving the hall. When he caught up with her in the second-floor Snake Portraits Gallery, Jane leaped into him and delivering a bone-crushing hug.

“Is it good news? Is it about Dave?” Turais asked.

“Yes! My mother wrote that Dave’s surgery went really well and that they managed to clear all of the tumour tissue. He has been eating a lot and was very eager to get out of bed. I’m so excited!” Jane shouted with happiness.

“I’m so happy for you!” Turais laughed as his heart soared at the good news.

“Thank you for listening to me rant for all these time,” Jane said, her body vibrating with joy and happiness.

Turais was very glad that he was there for Jane, and even more so for the good news. But he secretly worried that the good times would not last. Relapses and secondary cancer, such as leukemia, were common for current therapies; and in the 1970s, once this happened, it was basically a death sentence. However, he allowed himself to be happy for every victory counts.

“The Heir of Black continues to defile his family’s illustrious legacy and has now sunk even lower.”

Jane’s body froze as Turais released the hug and turned around to find a familiar face. Yaxley stood a couple meters away from them, arms crossed and his wand in his hand, with a dark, thunderous scowl in the otherwise, empty hallway.

“Yaxley, what are you doing out here?” Turais asked sharply.

“To see your fall from grace apparently, Turais. A Black heir that responds to a mudblood’s beck and call like a slobbering crup -”

“Watch your mouth -” Jane shouted furiously.
“Mudblood, you have no right to address me with your filthy, mud-splattering, disgusting—”

“Yaxley. Let’s retire to a more—”

“No, I rather quite like it here, actually. The downfall of an ancient House deserves a pathetic, whimpering end…” Yaxley glanced around at the paintings where the snakes all uncoiled and looked at the trio with interest. “... and in front of his House’s symbol that he has turned his back on. But first, it needs to disappear.” Yaxley glanced around the intersecting hallways. Content that no one was approaching, he pointed his wand at Jane.

“Yaxley, do not point your wand at her.” Turais pulled out his own wand defensively and stepped in front of Jane, shielding her from a potential attack.

“Black, step aside.”

“No, Yaxley. This is my final warning, do not attack.”

“You will defend a mudblood and fight against another pureblood?” Yaxley spat scathingly, he gripped his wand so tightly that thrummed with pent-up tension and fury. The snakes made a chorus of hisses that filled the oppressive silence.

“A S... lytherin defending a Gryffindor?”

“How interes...ting…”

A flurry of footsteps echoed and Yaxley instinctively hid his wand away while Turais kept his out. A few moments later, a trio of Hufflepuffs ran past their hallway, chatting animatedly. Once their voices disappeared in the distance, Yaxley turned back towards the two first-years.

Turais quickly trained his wand at Yaxley, who eyed the wand carefully as his wand was now hidden. After a brief moment of consideration, Yaxley spoke.

“You won’t be so lucky next time, Black.”

Yaxley turned around and walked away, leaving Jane and Turais standing alone in the hallway. Turais turned to his companion, who looked shaken by the experience.

“Jane, do not wander in the hallways alone. Stay with Alice or someone at all times. Do you understand?” Turias said urgently.

Jane remained silent as she continued to stare at the spot where Yaxley was, but she nodded.

***

February 27, 1970 (Friday)

Turais did not see Yaxley again until he stepped into the side chamber by the Slytherin common room the next day. Although he arrived one minute before the scheduled meeting time (because who would want to spend more time than necessary in these meetings), Yaxley was the only person in the room. Usually, most of the members would have been present by this time.

“Yaxley,” Turais said as he reached for his usual seat nearest the door and beside Yaxley’s.
Suddenly, a low musical tune sounded from the pocket of his robe. Turais paused and patted at where the muffled sound originated and felt his wand.

Straightening his back once more, he asked casually. “I wonder where the rest of the group are? Should I go check?”

The door swung closed and sealed magically as Yaxley stood up from his seat with his wand clutched in his hand, a mere meter separating them. Turais cast a non-verbal, wand-less Unlocking Charm at the door and the door remained tightly shut. Clearly, the Charm would only be cancelled if either Yaxley willingly lifted it or if Yaxley was knocked unconscious and was unable to maintain the Charm.

‘Guess there is only one way out - through Yaxley.’

Yaxley’s blue eyes narrowed maliciously as his smirk grew crueler. “Black, I have submitted a request to the other members an hour ago to allow us privacy to discuss... matters.”

Maintaining an unperturbed expression, Turais took a few steps backwards and around the table as he steadied his breath. Then, he spoke in a surprisingly steady voice. “What matters do you refer to, Yaxley?”

“Don’t play dumb, Black. I am sure you did not forget what I said yesterday,” Yaxley said.

“Ah that, of course. Quite the proclamation. I suppose I am under an unlucky star today, per the daily horoscope predictions in the Daily Prophet,” Turais drawled as his heart was pounding violently inside his rib-cage. A seventeen-year-old Yaxley was a highly dangerous opponent, officially a Death Eater or not. “What do you want?”

“I would like to teach you a lesson that your useless father clearly neglected to teach at home,” Yaxley leered. “Crucio!”

Chapter End Notes

Oh no! What is about to happen? Will Turais be okay?! 

Also, as I have alluded before. It’s the year of the Quidditch World Cup! You can help write the story by determining the winner of the 1970 Quidditch World Cup Final (because there is no canonical winner for this edition of the World Cup)! Muggle Link to Trelawney’s Pamphlet for those who were placed under a Confundus and glanced over the news article:

https://forms.gle/H8zPdWhrSEcFv33j6

Predictions will close upon the posting of Chapter 19.

Next chapter is Chapter 18: Discovered Check. Until then, happy crystal-ball gazing!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-09
Hey everybody,

Without much ado, here we go!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-16

CHAPTER 18
DISCOVERED CHECK

February 12, 1970 (Thursday)

ASSAULT CASE TURNS MURDEROUS
by C. Broomwright, Legal Observer

Death of Hesperia Shacklebolt Marks Dramatic Turn of Event

Guildford Case Likely to be Referred to Grand Jury Court

Days before the expiry of the "Year and a day" rule, Hesperia Shacklebolt, the victim of the highly-publicized burglary and assault case (or more commonly known as the Guilford Case) died from health complications. Her death marks a dramatic turning point to the continuing legal power struggle between the plaintiff and the defendant, Emery Rosier.

The "Year and a day" rule dictates that one could not be legally attributed to acts or omissions that occurred more than a year and a day before the death, which means that if the late Miss Shacklebolt died just a few days later, Rosier cannot be charged with her murder (see Common Law procedures on page 7). However, since her death occurred prior to that limit, it is highly likely that the Aurors Office will amend its charges due to the recent development.

Lord Abraxas Malfoy, the Chief of the High Court where this case is being decided, has granted a stay on the case for an unprecedented period of nearly one year. However, the case is anticipated to be now referred to the higher court - The Grand Jury Court - under the helm of Lord Arcturus Black where an Azkaban sentence is assured...

Trelawney's Quidditch World Cup Top Picks:
England is currently favoured over the defending champions, Australia, by a razor-thin margin of 52-48.

Canada, the host nation with a relatively short history of playing at the international level, maintains a healthy lead over their South American rival, Brazil, by a 60-40 margin.

Liechtenstein, the smallest nation in population to ever qualify for the Finals, is favoured to advance to the semi-finals over Malawi, the sole African team that qualified in this edition of the World Cup, by a margin of 58-42.

Flanders, one of the world's oldest national Quidditch team, seems to be destined for a loss against the dark horse of the tournament, the new rising-star team of Syria. The Syrians are favoured by 56% of the population.

(See pamphlet for more information)

*All predictions expressed by the columnist is based solely on her current opinion and do not reflect the opinions of the Daily Prophet or their affiliates. Reader's discretion is advised. For gambling Help-Firecall, please address...***

February 27, 1970 (Friday)

Turais immediately dove for the ground as the curse streaked at where he just stood. Remaining crouched, Turais hid behind the mahogany table and chairs out of Yaxley’s view as his heart pounded as though it was about to jump out of his ribcage. Taking in a ragged breath, he shouted out with his initial bravo. “Yaxley, that was unwise of you to attack me.”

Yaxley’s cold laughter echoed in the chamber as Turais silently crawled further around the table and maneuvered into position for a surprise attack. “Nott is a bumbling fool who cannot distinguish one end of the wand from the other. Same as Mulciber and Tremblay. Like attracts like, I suppose. He only got in because of his father’s money. But I am sure I can hold my own against a first-year.”

“You’re going to be in great trouble if someone finds a Cruciatus used from your wand,” Turais gritted out as he manoeuvered into position.

“Now don’t you worry, Black. A few rounds of practice on my Transfiguration spells will cover my tracks nicely.”

“Dumbledore will notice the use of Dark magic,” Turais lied.

Yaxley chuckled. “How naïve. There’s more ‘Dark’ magic laced within these walls than all of Britain combined, magic that were considered normal until the pathetic Ministry made up their arbitrary rules. Dumbledore will never be able to tell. Honestly, harming you here is so easy.”

“Well, I’m afraid I will have to upset you,” Turais heaved as he pounced out of his hiding spot. He was about to cast a spell at Yaxley when he realized that he was nowhere to be found.

‘Disillusionment Charm.’
His mind barely reached that conclusion before his body reacted and threw himself onto the floor as another Crucius gazed past him and burned through his robes, just missing his shoulder by a fraction of an inch. Turais quickly scrambled away from the where the curse originated. He should have seen that trick coming. That was Yaxley's signature move back when he tried to capture adult Yaxley during the Auror campaign to round up all the remaining Death Eaters a lifetime ago.

"Avis multum! Oppugno!" Turais screamed as he pointed randomly behind him and a large flock of birds zoomed around the room.

"Repello!" Yaxley's voice shouted from his left. Turais immediately dove in the opposite direction as all the birds flew over his position and smashed into the wall, disappearing into a cloud of yellow feathers.

"Crucio!" Another Crucius flew by harmlessly as Turais was safely out of range. They circled back to their original position once again.

Yaxley remained silent and Turais was unable to pinpoint his location. Quickly, he peeked around the room from his hiding spot to look for anything useful. He needed to even the playing field.


Vase. "Bombardo!" Shards of pottery scattered everywhere.

‘Wine glasses!’

Turais immediately laid flat on his stomach and pointed his wand at the wine glass holder where dozens of glasses hung under a wooden, overhead cabinet at the far left corner of the room.

"Colovaria rufus! Finestra! Circumdo!"

In Turais’s rapid-fire spells, the crystal clear wine glasses turned an opaque, blood red colour and then vaporized silently into a dense cloud of fine, red particles. As it floated down gently, he directed the wave of particles with a large swirling wand motion as it enveloped the room in an artificial swirling, red dust storm. Over the sound of swirling wind and scattering sand, he heard Yaxley groan out.

"Repello! Evanesco!"

However, there were too many particles in the room to repel or vanish effectively. Eyeing the opportunity, Turais cast a Shield Charm around him and yelled.

"Protego! Homenum Aggrappa!"

The wind suddenly died as the red dust condensed and agglomerated towards the closest human. While the dust that rushed towards Turais disintegrated upon contact with the blue shield, it clung perfectly onto Yaxley. A red human-shaped figure, which stood out brilliantly from its brown and green surroundings, appeared just steps to his right and Turais jabbed his wand towards it as the figure’s hands were still scrubbing on his face and across his eyes frantically.

"Stupefy!"

The red spell rushed towards his opponent and hit him squarely on his chest. Yaxley crumpled onto the ground under the powerful Spell. As his knees touched the floor, Turais heard
the door behind him unlock. Turais released a shuddering breath.

The terrible ordeal was over.

Quickly confiscating Yaxley’s wand, Turais cast an Incarcerous and Sleeping Hex on the unconscious body. Finally, as a bit of ultimate irony, he cast a Disillusionment Spell over his body to hide the body before opening the door.

The common room was occupied by a dozen students scattered around the room like a normal Friday evening. As usual, their gaze were drawn towards the meeting room door whenever their meetings ended, trying to glean some information about what just happened in the secretive room.

Turais walked out of the room looking battle-worn and wind-swept, and most importantly, furious. Keeping his voice steady from the highs of the battle and the bubbling fury. He announced calmly to the room.

“Where is Lucius?”

None of the Slytherins spoke until his yearmate, Ingrid Summerbee, spoke up with a shaky voice. “In his room, Turais,” she squealed out.

Nodding at her, he climbed the stairs towards Malfoy’s room. When he reached his room, he cast a Blasting Charm on the silver door handle, which exploded and left a splintered hole where the handle once was. Turais kicked the door open and walked in on Malfoy and Narcissa, who were sitting side-by-side on the couch.

“Narcissa, I have something to discuss with Lucius, please leave us,” Turais spoke.

“What is the meaning of -” Malfoy started, confusion clear in his eyes. Narcissa was just staring at Turais, wide-eyed in alarm.

Turais walked forward and trained his wand at Malfoy before speaking to Narcissa again. “Now.”

Narcissa gaped and looked at Malfoy, who gave an almost imperceptible nod. Narcissa grimaced and turned to glare at Turais warningly before leaving the room and closing the broken door behind her.

Turais quickly cast the normal Silencing charms on the door before turning to Malfoy once again and revealing Yaxley’s wand.

“The matters have been thoroughly discussed… and they were settled in my favour. Let’s now talk about the repercussions,” Turais raged beneath his calm facade and gestured the couch where Malfoy stood. “Shall we?”

Taking his cue, Malfoy sat down in his seat once more, clearly tense about the aggressive demeanour of the younger boy.

“Multiple Cruciatuses were issued from this wand here tonight.” Turais referred to Yaxley’s wand. Malfoy’s eyes widened even more at those words.

“What… Corban… cast the Cruciatus Curse on you?” Malfoy stuttered uncharacteristically.

‘Hmm… interesting. Malfoy seems to really have no idea what happened.’
“Lucius, I will report tonight’s incident. However, I could be persuaded to omit certain facts regarding certain absent members of this little group,” Turais said as he stepped forward and loomed over Malfoy menacingly.

“I had nothing to do with Corban’s behaviour -” Malfoy spoke angrily before Turais interrupted.

“Do you think I would be standing here if I would believe what you said?” Turais pushed.

“I don’t care if you believe it or not, Turais. It’s the truth! Corban asked for a private session to speak with you in the meeting room and I granted the permission,” Malfoy snapped vehemently.

Turais observed Malfoy’s demeanour. His eyes flickered with anxiety and his usually well-constructed mask was crumbling. Malfoy was genuinely nervous about the fallout of the incident and how it would implicate himself. Sensing his vulnerability, Turais needled him further.

“Lucius, we both have the same goals. You wish to be the perfect, model student and so do I. I don’t believe for a second that what Yaxley did tonight was what you wanted. Why don’t we strike a deal?”

“What do I get in return?” Malfoy asked sharply as his expression loosening, although Turais could see his mind already considering his words.

Turais smirked at the famed Slytherin shrewdness. “Your name will not be mentioned in tonight’s events, leaving your involvement off the unblemished record you proudly hold. In return, I wish for you to recommend a person of my choice to the Group in the vacancy that Yaxley will soon provide.”

“A recommendation?” Lucius asked. “You do understand that you will still need a majority, or two more people, to induct said person to the Group.”

“Let me worry about that, Lucius. Do I have your word?”

“Very well,” Malfoy said curtly. Turais knew Malfoy would grant him that simple request to keep his name from being dragged through the mud by Turais’ slip of the tongue.

“Good. This is quite a good deal for you, Lucius. We both know that you do not enjoy their recent pushes for more extreme measures. I’m sure you understand the implications my selection will have with your rule,” Turais said.

Despite being a bigoted and prejudiced pureblood, Malfoy valued his self-preservation above all, as his family is famed for. Therefore, he would always actively avoid unnecessary confrontations, which was not a sentiment shared by the current Group. His neutral stance on the Nott-Black feud and also Turais’ “unsavoury” behaviour have been constantly challenged by the other members. Malfoy could not have been happy with the calls for bloodlust and violence amongst his court. With the replacement of Yaxley with a friend of Turais, a known moderate, Lucius would have more support in the Group to remain passive and further secure his position.

"I'm aware, unfortunately," Malfoy said as if that admission left a bad taste in his mouth.

“I will head off to Professor Slughorn now and I suggest you recover from your shock and have the common room under control when I return, Lucius,” Turais cancelled the spells as he exited the room.

When Turais emerged from the bottom of the stairs, the intense whispering in the common
room ceased abruptly. He saw Narcissa sitting tensely on the couch, staring into the flickering flames in the fireplace. She snapped her head towards Turais at the sudden silence and stood up, sending him a questioning glare. He glanced back impassively as he walked past her and out of the common room. Before the door closed behind him completely, he heard the discussion flared up once more until he was met with utter silence in the empty hallway.

He made his way to Professor Slughorn’s office and took a moment to school his expression into one of distraught and fear. Then, he frantically banged on the door. Professor Slughorn opened the door to a tearful and trembling first-year.

"Professor Slughorn! He … attacked me, I was in the side chamber, and he cast a Cruciatius at me and -" Turais gasped, hoping he was putting up enough of a convincing act.

“What! A Cruciatius?” Professor Slughorn asked sharply. He took in the first-year’s torn and tattered robes.

“Yes, Professor! He said ‘Crucio’ … and multiple times… I know what I heard… I’m so scared… I don’t know what to do…”

His panicked expression clearly convinced as Professor Slughorn immediately softened. “Of course, Turais, you did the right thing to come to me. Now, come in and I will need to contact the Headmaster and the Aurors at once.”

Turais entered the room as Professor Slughorn quickly jogged towards the fireplace to make a firecall to Professor Dumbledore.

A minute later, Professor Dumbledore appeared from the fireplace and was quickly followed by Professor McGonagall. Dumbledore quickly trod towards Turais and asked softly, “Mr Black, I will need you to tell me everything that happened tonight. Every single detail.”

“Headmaster, but he’s still in the common room… he can wake up anytime now… he will attack me again… I thought he was my friend,” Turais said frantically.

“Who is the he you refer to, Mr Black?” Dumbledore asked with a lazy wave of his hand.

“Corban… Corban Yaxley -” McGonagall gasped at the reveal while Dumbledore stayed impassive as ever. “- He… was waiting for me in the side chamber. When I went into the room, he spelled the door shut and my Unlocking Spell did not work. He then shot a Cruciatius at me, and I had to duck and hide. I wanted to fight back but he had a Disillusionment Charm on himself. I couldn’t see him, I was so scared. The curses kept flying at me but I didn’t know where he was. I kept scrambling away, trying to throw anything in the room at him. I managed to distract him with some dust and Stunned him. Then I didn’t know what to do and I ran to Lucius’ room and asked him what to do, he told me to go to Professor Slughorn…”

"Albus," McGonagall gasped with an incredulous expression, "We must apprehend Mr Yaxley at once -"

Dumbledore rose his hand and motioned to interrupt her. He stared at Turais and asked sternly, “Mr Black. This is a grave accusation. Are you certain -”

“Headmaster, I know what I heard! I’m not lying , I don’t know if you don’t believe because I’m a Slytherin or because I’m a Black, but I swear on my magic. I have his wand here too! Perform a ‘Priori Incantatem’ if you must,” Turais screamed out in sincere frustration and showed him Yaxley’s wand.
Dumbledore’s eyes flashed with a glint of annoyance before considering Yaxley’s wand. After considering Turais’ words for a moment, he performed the Reverse Spell on Yaxley’s wand as Slughorn and McGonagall watched with intense interest. Wisps of smoke - the echoes of past spells - floated above the wand. First came the pale blue glow of the Vanishing Spell. Then, another wisp of blue appeared, representing the Repelling Charm. Suddenly, a cloud burst out, paling the previous two spells, and lit up everyone’s shocked expressions in electrifying green - the Cruciatus Curse. Then, another barely registerable blue appeared followed by two green clouds intertwined with a grey streak of the Disillusionment Spell.

“Minerva, send for the Aurors now! Horace, we must go to the Slytherin common room,” Dumbledore said hastily. They ran back to the Slytherin common room and as they emerged from the tunnel, Turais saw Malfoy standing authoritatively in the middle of the room without a hint of nerves. All the students in the common room was silent, but their faces were lit with anticipation. Turais caught the worried looks from his friends amongst the crowd.

“Professor Slughorn, Mr Yaxley remains incapacitated and contained in the side chamber. There are no other escape routes,” Malfoy announced as the trio approached.

“Thank you, Mr Malfoy,” Dumbledore said to Malfoy before addressing the entire common room. “All students shall return to their dormitories immediately and stay there until further notice. Prefects, please direct the students and return to your dormitories afterwards as well.”

As the last of the students retreated to their rooms, McGonagall arrived with a team of five Aurors at the scene. Turais gasped as he saw a very young, barely twenty, Alastor Moody in the back. Both his eyes were still intact and he did not have a limp.

“Senior Auror Sayre at your service, Headmaster. We have been briefed by McGonagall along the way. Where is the assailant and the victim?” A middle-aged Auror who stood in front of the others spoke.

“Thank you, Auror Sayre. This is Mr Black, a first-year student who got attacked. The assailant is Mr Yaxley, a sixth-year. He is currently locked and presumably incapacitated in the side chamber there,” Professor Dumbledore gestured the side chamber by the fireplace.

Sayre nodded as he turned to Turais. “The victim is uninjured?”

“Yes, but he has yet to have a medical examination.”

“Very well, we will now apprehend the assailant. As he is of legal age, we will transport him to the Ministry holding cells. His parents will be notified and a court trial will be scheduled.”

“Of course.”

“Please stand back, Auror Moody will guide you away.” Sayre nodded at his team as they moved cautiously towards the door. Auror Moody guided Turais and the professors out of the common room. Before he disappeared into the tunnel, he saw the Aurors cast protective spells around the immediate radius of the door to contain any potential fight away from the rest of the dormitory.

After five minutes, a completely red but incapacitated Yaxley appeared from the common room into the hallway with the company of Professor Dumbledore and the four Aurors.

“We have arrested Mr Yaxley on the charge of aggravated assault on a minor and multiple illegal uses of the Cruciatus Curse. His wand has been confiscated as evidence. Priori Incantatem
has confirmed the usage of the Crucius with the wand. Aurors Findley and Peters will remain in the Slytherin common room to collect evidence from the chamber. Auror Moody will obtain an official statement from Mr Black and perform a Priori Incantatem on his wand for record. This will occur after he has completed his medical examination," Sayre declared before turning to address Turais with an approving tip of his head. "Mr Black has been through quite the ordeal tonight, and relatively unscathed. I look forward to your development."

With a final exchange of information with the Headmaster, they headed off as Turais was led by Professor Slughorn to the Hospital Wing. The school nurse, Madame Roland, quickly received him. After being told what has happened, her eyes widened in shock but immediately returned to a state of professionalism to perform one diagnostic charm after another on the student until she was satisfied.

Right when the examination was completed, the Hospital Wing door banged open as Turais saw his father argue with Auror Moody.

“ - my son is hurt, I -”

“ - in medical examination -”

“Father!” Orion’s eyes zoomed onto Turais and shoved the Auror sideways. He relented and stepped aside.

“Turais!” Orion shouted as he ran towards him. Large hands patted around his body as he took in the battered and torn robes covered blotches of red dust.

"I'm perfectly fine, father," Turais said with a small smile as he placed a reassuring hand on his father's wrist. He took in Orion's wind-swept hair and the nightshirt that was peeking out from beneath his fur cloak. It was the first time Orion's appearance has been anything less than impeccable in public and he was relishing in the more humane version of him outside the safety bubble that was 12 Grimmauld Place.

“Mr Black," The two Blacks were startled by Madame Roland's voice as they temporarily forgot they were with company. "I have just finished conducting a full medical examination of your son and he is completely healthy and uninjured.”

Orion's iron grip dug into Turais' shoulder as he winced. Eyeing his son's discomfort, Orion exclaimed frantically, “Are you hurt?” He turned to the school nurse and spoke harshly and with an accusatory tone, "You said he was completely fine! I'm calling in Healers Quill and Proudmore -”

“Father,” Turais pulled on his father's wrist to catch his attention. "You're just gripping my shoulders too firmly.”

Orion let go as though he was scalded by fire.

“I'm sorry, Turais. Are you feeling alright though? Anything feeling unnatural? Magical backlash? Phantom pain? Why are you laughing, Turais? Madame, does he have mental damage?! What are your qualifications? -”

Turais couldn’t help but laugh at his father’s protective rambles. Or maybe he was finally reacting to the highly stressful situation after his high on adrenalin.

“Stop talking, father. You heard Madame Roland. I’m fine. You are worrying too much!”

“Turais, you were just shot at with a Crucius Curse not only once, but three times! I get to
worry!” Orion seethed.

Turais immediately sobered up immediately and spoke softly, “I’m sorry, it’s just... what just happened was so... absurd and... unbelievable...”

Orion softened once more. “Of course, Turais, I was just so worried about you that I forgot you were the one who just went through all that personally. I’m sorry I snapped -”

Turais reached forward and hugged his father tightly, leaning into his large warm body and the rhythmic beating in his chest.

“Turais!” The son looked at the door and his brothers were running forward from Professor Slughorn’s side towards him at full speed.

“Siri! Reggie!” He shouted as they tackled him onto the hospital bed.

“Don’t do that ever again!” Sirius shouted. “You scared father and us to death!”

“I’m okay, Siri. I promise. Look, the nurse just told me I am in tip-top condition. Okay?”

“Fine,” Sirius mumbled as Regulus nodded in agreement.

“I’m glad you’re okay, Turais,” Regulus spoke quietly. Turais ruffled his hair and said, “Thank you, Reggie.”

“Excuse my interruption, Mr Black,” Moody addressed his father and said gruffly. “But I need to record his statement. You can stay but his brothers should leave the room.”

At his words, Turais looked at his brothers who laid on top of him. “Hey, Siri, Reggie. Do you want to go with Professor Slughorn over there and see a bit of Hogwarts while father and I talk to the Auror?” Turais asked. After eyeing their hesitation, he spoke again. “Do you know the Great Hall has an enchanted ceiling that shows the night sky and also thousands of floating candles? You should go check it out instead of staying here bored. I’ll see you back here in a very short while.”

Sirius and Regulus perked up at those words and disentangle themselves from Turais.

“See you soon then,” Sirius said. Regulus waved goodbye too. They followed Professor Slughorn, who was waiting by the doors, and he closed the doors shut. Turais turned back to the Auror and realized that Madame Roland has disappeared into her office already, leaving the trio in a suspended silence.

“Okay, I’m ready,” Turais said to Moody, who nodded and sat down in a nearby chair.

Turais recounted the events once again as the Auror’s Self-Writing Quill wrote on his notepad beside him. His wand was also recording an audio version of his speech. Orion’s grip on Turais’ hand tightened more and more as he progressed through the duel. Moody, on the other hand, grew more and more impressed, which apked when Turais mentioned his storm made of wine glass dust to overcome the Disillusionment Charm.

“I’ll just need a record of your wand history, Mr Black,” he said when Turais finished his story. Turais pulled out his wand and he performed a ‘Priori Incantatem’ and shuffled through the spells cast that night while duplicating it onto his own wand.

“A pretty darn good fight out of a tight spot, young Mr Black. Most people just blank and freeze on the spot. Not a bad mind either. You should consider becoming an Auror when you
graduate,” the Auror grunted out when he handed Turais’ wand back as Turais gaped his mouth in shock, unable to respond. Turais was taken aback by the lack of malice he displayed against him as a Black.

‘But… did Alastor Moody just give me a compliment?’

Meanwhile, Orion’s face paled at the mention of his son becoming an Auror and thrust in the face of constant danger.

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February 28, 1970 (Saturday)

The Black family was allowed to stay at Hogwarts for the night and Professor Dumbledore has provided them with a guest suite near the kitchens. After a tumultuous night, Turais was glad he was able to stay close with his family and decided that he would stay with them for the night.

At some point, Turais must have fallen asleep because the next thing knew he opened his eyes to an Orion that was already dressed while he was lying on a large bed in between two boys that has wrapped and contorted their limbs around and over him.

“Mornin’, father,” Turais yawned. “What time are you leaving home at?”

“The Headmaster said we are welcomed to stay for lunch. But he wishes to speak with you. He originally asked to do so yesterday but I insisted that you needed rest.”

Turais was apprehensive about meeting with Dumbledore as he has meticulously managed to stay out of his way for the entire school term.

“Can you stay with me, father? I don’t feel comfortable being with him alone,” Turais requested.

“Of course, Turais. If you feel uncomfortable, I can decline him as well,” Orion frowned.

“No, father. Dumbledore will just corner me when you are gone. I best resolve this while you are still around,” Turais insisted, remembering his conversation with Dumbledore a few months ago.

“Very well, he told me you can meet him when you wake up. Sirius and Regulus will be taken care of by the house elves.”

“I can go now, but you will have to rescue me from the Devil’s Snares I call brothers,” Turais gestured his physical restraints.

Orion chuckled.

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“Come in.”

Turais and Orion walked into the Headmaster’s office. Dumbledore was spilling over stacks of documents as he looked up through his half-moon spectacles.

“Ah, Mr Black,” Dumbledore said cheerily while Orion tensed at the address. The Headmaster stood up and walked around his table to greet them. "I have not been expecting you.”

"Neither did I," Orion said coolly as he shook Dumbledore’s hand. "Yet here we are."

Dumbledore smiled and did not comment. He then guided them up to the two chairs in front of his desk and sat down across from them. Dumbledore turned to look at Turais for a moment. Turais met his eyes and felt such a strong intensity that Turais thought he was using Legilimency before realizing that he would not risk that in front of his father. Turais shifted uncomfortably in his chair under the gaze until Orion spoke up and he turned his gaze back onto his father.

“Headmaster Dumbledore, I am curious as to why you summoned us. My son has already provided a statement to the Aurors and the case seems quite straight-forward, in my opinion,” said Orion.

“Yes, Mr Black -”

"Heir Black or School Governor would suffice, Headmaster," Orion said with a flash of annoyance.

"Apologies, School Governor," Dumbledore acquiesced with a good-natured chuckle. "This old brain of mine tends to forget such... traditions."

"Clearly," muttered Orion.

"- Back to our situation,” Dumbledore continued, making no mention that he heard what Orion just said. “I was merely curious as to why your son was targeted.”

“Headmaster, are you suggesting that there was any wrong-doing on my son’s part to warrant three Cruciatus Curses directed at him?” Orion asked calmly, though Turais knew that Orion was seething at the implication.

“Of course not. You misunderstand me, Mr Black,” Professor Dumbledore said placatingly. “We are certain that Mr Yaxley has deliberately planned and waited for your son to enter the room before striking. But why did he single out your son?”

“For this, you should go to the Aurors and not to my son, Mr Dumbledore. If that is all, please excuse us. My son is still recuperating from an extremely unpleasant affair.” Orion stood up and Turais followed.

“Of course, my mistake. Please forgive my impatience when it comes to my students’ safety. I wish that young Mr Black will make a speedy recovery,” Dumbledore spoke cheerily, although Turais didn’t know if it was genuine or faked.

Orion nodded tensely and placed his arm around Turais’ shoulders as they walked out of the office. Once they reached the bottom of the gargoyle staircase and left the hallway, Orion spoke again.

“That prejudiced old fool was trying to pry at your private business. I would bet if this happened to one of his beloved Gryffindors, he would have been more livid than suspicious,” he
said bitterly. “Please be mindful of him.”

“I know, father.”

“I did not anticipate Yaxley to perform an Unforgivable right under Dumbledore’s nose in Hogwarts. He acted so recklessly,” Orion mused.

“I think he was overconfident with his ability to subdue a first-year. Nott is indeed as he described and is ‘a bumbling fool who could not tell one end of his wand from the other’. He, on the other hand, is a very clever and capable duelist.” Turais was still replaying the duel. His statement to the Aurors cannot fully encompass the sense of helplessness and fear he felt.

“Yet, he underestimated your abilities.”

“And that was what saved me,” Turais said simply as they walked in silence.

"Yaxley will pay for what he has done. Your grandfather and I will make sure of that," Orion said softly, but Turais was slightly unnerved by his deadly tone. He turned to look at his father and saw his darkened expression.

"Father," Turais said carefully. "He cannot harm me anymore. The mounting evidence is stacked against him. He won't be able to get away with this."

"No. No, he will not," Orion responded. "But Turais, you must not make any more enemies. First, Nott. Now, Yaxley. Do you understand that one of the most important attributes of the Slytherin House is subtlety, correct?"

'I thought I was being subtle,' Turais' mind grumbled. 'It's not like I was expecting them to be wand-ready and trigger-happy.'

"You are doing that look, son," Orion shook him out of his light daze. "You were grumbling, weren't you?"

"I have no idea what you are referring to, father," Turais lied.

"If you can keep that charade up at all times, I would have less to worry about," Orion sighed as he shook his head. "I was not kidding when I said once you enter the political game, you will be constantly defending your position. It is ruthless… but I just did not fathom the extent. This just made me question what actually happened behind that closed door for all those years during my time in school."

Turais knew that Orion was only a few years below Voldemort so they were likely in Hogwarts at the same time, although no one knew Tom Riddle was Voldemort except Dumbledore and Tom Riddle’s closest allies-turned-Death Eaters. He didn’t want to imagine what plans Voldemort concocted in that room, let alone what would have happened if Orion was in his way.

"Can you just act a bit more… orthodox, for my sake?" Orion asked again. Turais knew he never truly acted completely like a normal child.

"I do try, father. With quite a bit of effort, in fact," Turais said. "Most of the school likes me -"

"I meant among the Slytherins, Turais," Orion said. "They are the ones that are closest in proximity to you and can cause you harm. Especially Lucius Malfoy. Never trust a Malfoy. The Slytherins are the ones you should be weary about. Not some Gryffindor who's all bark and no
"Well, it's quite a balancing act. I've been trying hard to avoid crossing Dumbledore's path and be friendly to everyone but that angered Yaxley instead and resulted in this mess. At this point, I don't even know what I should do. I now understand how Odysseus felt when he faced Scylla and Charybdis," Turais sighed and started to walk again. When Orion laughed, Turais shot him an annoyed expression. But he was glad that Orion's stormy emotions were gone.

“I didn’t know you were this melodramatic, son,” Orion said between smiles.

“I thought you knew the moment I cried for three months straight when I was born,” Turais deadpanned.

“Yes,” Orion sighed, reliving the horrors of those sleepless evenings. “I should’ve known then. But you know our stance on blood purity is not a popular one to take amongst the pureblood families.”

Turais knew that his father wants him to conform with the Slytherin's ideology, even if it was just to stop voicing his opposition to pureblood supremacy through his actions.

“I know what you are trying to say, father. But I'm certain you already know my answer to it. I have to.”

Turais then turned his thoughts to the upcoming induction of a new member into the Group of Seven. Arcturus and Orion were great sources of power to influence the other members’ votes if he were to secure safe passage of his nominee.

As they approached the guest suite, Turais asked Orion. “Father, what positions does grandfather Arcturus have in the Ministry and which families does he have a hold on?”

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Shortly after saying goodbye to his family, Turais headed back to the Slytherin common room. He ignored the gazes from his housemates as he made his way to his room. There, he found Alex sitting on his bed and chatting with Jonty.

“Turais, where were you? You missed the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff match!” Jonty shouted as he stood up. "Also, what happened in the side chamber yesterday? Yaxley was missing today, was he -”

“Stop! I promise to answer all your questions in a moment. But Alex, I have something important to ask you,” Turais interrupted in his “Heir Black” voice. “This is an extremely important decision and I need you to tell me the absolute truth.”

Jonty and Alex gulped and nodded silently. Turais breathed a deep breath before continuing.

“Okay, Yaxley has been arrested by Aurors and - ” Turais raised his voice as Jonty was about to interrupt, “ - there is now a vacancy in the Group of Seven. I have struck a deal with Malfoy to allow me to name the replacement. Would you be willing? And before you say anything, Alex, you need to think very carefully. It is very dangerous. You saw what Nott did to me, now you saw what Yaxley did. Once you join the group, you will instantly become a target. I will need you to stay by
my side at all times so I can protect you every single moment from then on, even to the bathroom, the showers. Everywhere. Do you understand -”

“Yes,” Alex said simply.

“Wait, Alex, I don’t think you realize the magnitude of this decision -” Turais was taken aback.

“Yes, Turais. Yes, yes, yes, yes.” Alex said fiercely.

“But… why?” Turais asked.

“Did you want me to say no?” Alex asked, confused.

“Well… no, but… I don’t know, Alex… if you said no, I would have thought of something else… I would never force you… but now that you have said yes, I’m scared for your safety,” Turais rambled nervously. Then he sighed, “I don’t know if I am making the right decision.”

“Turais, look. Who else would you ask, besides Jonty, to join you in the Group of Seven?” Alex asked sharply.

Turais has considered the older Slytherins. Andromeda Black? Turais knew that Andromeda would likely not support anything extreme given her character. But Turais would be bringing a lot of unwanted attention on her and Turais would not be able to protect her at all times. Natalia Arkenstone? Turais was on friendly terms with her, but he really didn't know her well enough to nominate her. Narcissa Black? She would just be a vote on Malfoy' side. There was no one else Turais trusted enough to nominated.

Barring any unforeseen circumstance, Alex and Jonty were the closest relationships Turais could consider as allies in this house. And as they were roommates as well as classmates, it was much easier for Turais to oversee their safety around the clock.

Studying Turais' blank expression, Alex continued. “See my point? There is no one in Slytherin you trust. Jonty and I know that you are trying very hard to change Slytherin to become more accepting and less prejudiced. Your study sessions, your kindness to all students, and you trying to climb to the top. You are already making good progress with the first-years. But to initiate change within the entire House, you need to become the Leader of Slytherin. This is the only way. We want to help you and you need our help.”

“Why do you sound so mature, Alex? That doesn’t suit you,” Turais teased weakly.

“Rich coming from you, Turais,” Alex retorted jokingly.

Turais turned somber again and said, “But you and Jonty need to be very careful from now on. We have to stick together at all times, no running off alone for any reason -”

“Turais, we do that already -” Jonty said.

“Swear it on your magic. Both of you,” Turais said sternly.

“We swear on our magic,” the two boys said in unison, but not without a sigh of irritation at their friend’s stubbornness.

“Thank you.”
After explaining everything that occurred last night in the room to his two best friends, Jonty was bathed in surprise and horror while Alex was despondent. Turais was surprised by the lack of surprise on his face. Maybe he was just shocked into numbness.

“You can still back out, Alex, you know?” Turais said, looking at Alex’s blank expression. “Alex? You know what, this is a terrible plan. I’ll just -”

“There is no other way, Turais, and you know it,” Alex said pointedly as his eyes shone with determination. Turais saw the glint of determination in his friend's eyes.

“Thank you, Alex. You too, Jonty. Merlin knows what trouble I’m dragging you both into,” Turais shuddered.

Turais took Alex up to Malfoy’s room and knocked on his newly-repaired door. Malfoy opened the door a few seconds later and assessed them both before stepping aside to let them in.

“You will recommend Alexander Fawley to the Group of Seven,” Turais said calmly.

“Turais, do you think the Group is a joke to you? I can’t recommend another first-year to it, especially a half-blood,” Malfoy did not bother to hide the contempt in his voice.

“Lucius, we had a deal,” Turais glared.

“Fine,” Malfoy spat. “I doubt you can find two additional members to support this bid anyways. It will fail and our deal will still be completed.”

“Malfoy, let me worry about the rest. When this is done, you just might be the one begging for a deal with us.”

March 2, 1970  (Monday)

The entire Great Hall was buzzing with excitement as the morning papers delivered the news that Yaxley has been arrested and charged for attempted use of Cruciatux Curse on a minor. However, the identity of the minor was unknown. The other Houses have been eyeing the Slytherin table with cautious curiosity to figure out which students were missing. The Slytherins, who knew the identity of the parties involved, were glum with tension and apprehension of the impending changes in House dynamics.

Turais blended into the crowd as he adopted the tensed appearance. However, he could see Jane’s horrified expressions and frantic looks sent his way. Turais gave her a small smile but she did not seem pacified with the gesture.

After breakfast, Jane caught up with the trio as they headed towards their first class together.
“Turais! Was that you?” Jane whispered, checking her surroundings for any potential eavesdropper.

“So you know he is a niffler for trouble too?” Jonty whispered back teasingly and Turais hexed him with a mild Stinging Hex.

Jane blushed with embarrassment. “Well… it was my fault, really…”

“What?” Alex gasped, then looked around alarmingly. The coast was clear. “How? Turais was in serious trouble. He could’ve been dangerously hurt! What were you thinking, Jane?!”

“Calm down, Alex. Remember last week when Jane shouted my name across the hall?” Alex and Jonty nodded. “Well, Yaxley caught Jane and I talking and threatened Jane. Yaxley was unable to curse us because someone walked by, but he said I would not be so lucky next time, and the next time was what happened last Friday. It’s really not Jane’s fault.”

“But you almost got hurt because of me, Turais!” Jane whispered intently. “If you didn’t defend me -”

“You would’ve gotten hurt, Jane. And I will not allow any of my friends to get hurt within my power,” Turais responded. “And Yaxley has always been unhappy with my behaviour. He would have acted no matter what, it was just a matter of when.”

“But -”

“No buts, Jane. It’s not your fault. End of story.”

Jane wanted to argue more but they have arrived at their Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom.

***

March 6, 1970 (Friday)

The Group of Seven gathered in the refurbished side chamber with one member short. Malfoy started the meeting as the clock struck nine.

“As all of you are aware, one of our members has been arrested for a serious offense and is unlikely to return amongst our midst. Therefore, I motion to permanently remove Corban Thuban Yaxley from his seat. As per the Charter, this motion requires the unanimous consent of all present members. Those in favour?”

Everyone rose their hands in favour. Suddenly, Turais felt the magic shift inside the room as Yaxley’s chair beside him cracked and splintered loudly before it disintegrated into fine dust, and then into thin air.

“As one of our members was removed, as outlined in the Charter, it is the Chair’s power to name the replacement candidate for induction. The candidate must be confirmed with a majority amongst the regular members, meaning that three members aside from me must vote for said candidate.” Malfoy paused as the rest of the room nodded at his words. Malfoy then looked straight at Turais and smirked.
“The Chair recommends Narcissa Black for nomination to the Group of Seven.”

Turais’ smile stilled and his eyes narrowed. Of course, Malfoy would stab him in the back.

“Lucius, you are making a mistake.”

“Turais, as per the Charter, all recommendations must be put to a vote,” Malfoy’s vile smirk widened. “Those in favour?”

Synde and Dolohov raised their hands immediately. Turais casually looked around the table and waited.

“Those in favour?” Malfoy’s smirk faltered slightly as still, only two hands were raised in favour for the induction.

“Lucius, perhaps you should move things along, I do wish to leave before midnight.” Turais smiled at Malfoy’s perplexed expression.

***

March 1, 1970 (Monday)

Five days prior to the Group of Seven meeting...

“Evan, may I have a word?” Turais walked up to Rosier in the Slytherin common room and asked. He was sitting with the other sixth-year Slytherins, who eyed Turais with interest.

“What do you want, Turais?” Evan narrowed his eyes and asked.

“Actually, I have found something to give you that would be of greatest interest to you.”

Rosier paused and considered the information. Then, he decided that he was interested. “Fine.”

Turais led him to an abandoned classroom in a nearby hallway outside the common room and Turais cast the usual anti-eavesdropping charms around the room.

“Evan, I have heard the most intriguing news regarding your brother’s case.” Evan’s face paled and then flushed angrily.

“I would like to amend what Lucius said in the meeting last December. He claimed that Lord Malfoy has the power to lift the stay on your brother’s case. However, from what I’ve heard, the DMLE has decided to alter the charges from grand theft and assault to grand theft and murder last week due to the jewellery shop owner’s recent death from those injuries. Do you know what this means?”

Rosier fumed but remained silent.

“This, Evan, means that the case is now officially moved under the jurisdiction of the Grand Jury Court and is no longer under the High Court that Lord Malfoy presides as Chief. And guess who presides as Grand Chief in that Court?”
“Lord Black,” Rosier spat.

“Yes, Evan. My grandfather. While your brother now has no hopes of avoiding time in Azkaban, one wonders if your brother would deserve the Dementor’s Kiss. As Grand Chief, my grandfather holds the balance of power in the Court. I doubt the Light families would push for anything less than a Dementor’s Kiss considering a Shacklebolt died but … there is still hope for your brother…”

“What do you want, Turais?” Rosier gritted out.

“Your cooperation, Evan, on two items. First, you are a sixth-year so we have another year ahead of us where we share our existence in the same hallways. I merely wish to co-exist with you cordially and without malice against my friends and I.”

“Deal,” Rosier looked surprised at the simple request.

“Second, you will vote with me in the Group from now on,” Turais said.

Rosier hesitated, but after a while. He says, “Deal.”

“Thank you, Evan. And just as an extra incentive, I will ensure that the court trial lasts until the end of the next school term before it’s decided.”

***

March 5, 1970 (Thursday)

One day prior to the Group of Seven meeting…

“Cousin Bella, I have determined the bidding you shall perform for me.”

Turais and Bellatrix were standing in the same abandoned classroom where he talked to Rosier a few nights ago.

“What is your bidding, cousin Turais?” Bellatrix spat.

“In tomorrow’s meeting, Lucius will recommend a replacement for Yaxley’s seat. I will need you to vote with me until a replacement is inducted. That is all.”

Bellatrix narrowed at the request. Turais assumed that Bellatrix thought the request was too trivial but she decided he was genuine.

“Deal. We are even after this, cousin Turais.”

“Of course, as long as you continue to protect our family unity, you have nothing to worry, Bella,” Turais smiled.

***

March 6, 1970 (Friday)
The magic in the room nudged Malfoy and he was prompted to speak.

“Two votes for, three votes against. The Group of Seven has rejected Narcissa Black’s nomination,” Malfoy gritted out reluctantly.

“Lucius, I suggest you follow through with your promise and make things easier,” Turais said airily. The muscles around Malfoy’s jaw twitched.

“The Chair recommends… Alexander Fawley for induction to the Group of Seven.”

A stilled silence befell the table. Every member besides Turais looked surprised by the choice, but Turais saw the looks of realization from Rosier and Bellatrix before they returned to a resentful glare.

“Lucius, are you mad? You are recommending that dirty little spawn?” Dolohov snarled.

“Yes, Lucius. This is madness!” Synde seconded. “Retract your recommendation!”

“The recommendation has been tabled. As per the Charter, all recommendations must be put to a vote,” Turais said pleasantly while staring straight at Malfoy. “Isn’t that correct, Lucius?”

The magic in the room hummed in agreement with Turais’ statement.

“Those in favour?” Malfoy spat.

Turais eyed the rest of the table before raising his hand. After two more seconds, Rosier raised his hand as well. Bellatrix raised her hand as well, though without sending daggers from her eyes.

The rest of the Group was shocked by the turn of events. Turais was particularly amused by the slightly parted lips on Malfoy’s face that was usually pressed firmly shut. Synde and Dolohov fumed at everyone else, feeling utter betrayal. The magic in the room nudged the procession to continue as Malfoy was prompted to speak.

“Three votes for, two votes against. Alexander Fawley is officially inducted into the Group of Seven.”

The magic swirled around the room and a new chair appeared in the emptied spot beside Turais; with the name “A. Fawley” etched into the wood on the back.

***

“The deed is done,” Turais announced the news of Alex’s induction after the meeting ended. Turais was eager to escape the hostility that was trapped within that room.

Alex gave a tense nod while Jonty’s jaw just dropped open. “Woah, I can’t believe that my two best friends are both in the Group of Seven. This is crazy! And we are only first-years… woah…”

Alex and Turais grimaced at each other.
Hey everybody,

As always, I'd love to hear your thoughts!

Link to Quidditch World Cup predictions: https://forms.gle/ta1yASQGJeS6H2mCA

The next chapter, Chapter 19: Intertwined Destinies, is scheduled for next week. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-16
Hey everyone,

New update. Enjoy!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-23

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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CHAPTER 19

INTERTWINED DESTINIES

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March 14, 1970 (Monday)

ENGLAND CLINCHES QUALIFICATION BERTH

by A. Carnierus, Quidditch Correspondent

Host Nation Canada Qualifies for First Time in History

After being absent from the world’s most popular tournament for the past two decades, the English team has proved that we still have what it takes to compete on the top international stage for Quidditch. The last time England qualified as one of the sixteen teams playing in the finals was in 1950. For its last World Cup win, we have to go even further back to more than a century ago in 1866...

Trelawney's Quidditch World Cup Top Picks:

It has been confirmed both England and Canada have qualified for the Finals this summer. Let these results be known to those who dare disrespect the noble art of Divination to never commit such an atrocity ever again.

With the aid of my beloved readers, we have determined the final four teams. Once again, our collective minds shall be able to travel to the farthest reaches of the known boundaries of Sight to determine the results.

The two semi-final match-ups shall be: England v Canada; Liechtenstein v Syria.

(See pamphlet for more information)
March 10, 1970 (Tuesday)

Despite Turais’ worries of the recent developments, neither Nott nor the other Slytherins conducted any remotely suspicious activities. However, Turais has found that Nott has been noticeably withdrawn from all school and Slytherin activities, much to Turais’ concern. But still, nothing has happened. Synde and Dolohov did not act against him either yet, but Turais did not know if they were actively plotting something or if they were deterred from challenging Turais due to his proven abilities against Nott and Yaxley. However, Turais knew he had to keep his guard up lest they attack him when he least suspected them to.

Turais also decided to put his power as Master of Death into good use when he summoned the Cloak of Invisibility. He revealed ownership of the Cloak one night to Jonty and Alex, who were really impressed, although they thought it was only an Invisibility Cloak made from the hairs of a Demiguise and not the actual Cloak of Invisibility from The Tale of Three Brothers. Turais thought it was for the better and did not correct them. However, the three of them used the Cloak whenever they were alone in the hallways to prevent themselves from potential attacks.

After two chaotic weeks, it was nice to finally return to a semblance of normalcy when Turais received another update from Damocles. In this update, he mentioned the possibility that the potion’s mechanism of action might not completely cure a werewolf bite but instead, allow werewolves to transform without pain. Turais anticipated this news and was not too crest-fallen.

Dave continued to fare well under his current treatment and was released from the hospital last week, much to the surprise and happiness of Jane. Although her parents warned that the disease was not “cured” and was merely “controlled”, Jane was beyond ecstatic at the thought of returning to a brother who was outwardly active and alive instead of the bed-ridden, lifeless boy she left after Christmas break.

In Tuesday's Transfiguration class, Turais and Alex were once again chatting animatedly again after they successfully completed their match-to-needle transformation within the first five minutes of class. Bored, they began a battle to see who can transform the most matches at a time. Turais was currently attempting thirteen matches.

“By the way, Mr Ollivander responded to my inquiry regarding your wand?” Alex said casually.

Turais waved his wand. A moment later, the wooden matches transformed in perfect, sharp, metal needles. Satisfied, he placed down his wand and faced his friend. “I thought you wrote to him last… September?” It seemed as though it was a lifetime away given all that has happened recently...

“Yes, I did. But he was on a wand wood scouting trip in Siberia right after school term started and was there for the past five months,” Alex said as he examined the pointy tips of the thirteen freshly-transformed needles. “He was searching for spruces by the Western Siberian Plain - the
place of the infamous Quidditch World Cup?"

“Woah, there? And in Siberia in the dead of winter with minimal magic?” Turais gasped. Mr Ollivander was crazier than he thought.

“There’s a reason why wands cost so much, Turais,” Alex explained. “The amount of skills required to construct a good wand and on top of that he needs to spend a lot of time and effort to obtain the materials. Siberian spruce wood collected around the Winter Solstice are of highest magical properties.”

Turais only nodded. Wand magic was so much more complex than he had imagined.

“Anyhow, he also told me in his letter that those chosen by a Rowan wand tend to share a strong bond with those chosen by an Elder wand…” Alex looked at Turais expectantly. But Turais just snorted.

“Well, did he also tell you that there’s the poem that states ‘Rowan gossips, chestnut drones, ash is stubborn, hazel moans’? It comes to me as a surprise that your wand is not made up of all four wand woods,” Turais said cheekily as he counted out fourteen matches on Alex’s desk.

“Hey!” Alex felt snubbed and his grin morphed into an indignant scowl. He turned back to his challenge and eyed the fourteen matches. Biting his lower lip in concentration, he waved his wand and said the incantation. Moments later, fourteen gleaming needles formed as he hummed happily and pushed them off to the growing pile in the middle of their joined desks. “He said he couldn't reveal much about your wand to me because of privacy reasons. But he also mentioned he basically told you all there is to know about your wand during your visit. He did send you his regards and inquired about your wand. How is it suiting you as far?”

“As far as I can tell, it works perfectly well,” Turais responded. He checked the match boxes in front of him but they were empty. He reached Alex’s to look at his but they were empty as well. Alex looked up to the professor’s desk in front of them and summoned the last two boxes over to their table.

“That’s good.” Alex stopped questioning how Turais knew all the advanced spells and instead began to ask him to teach them. Accio or the Summoning Spell was one of them. “Want to try the whole box instead?”

“Sure. But I don’t think it’s doing anything especially great, despite his whole tall tale about how the tree presented the branch to me and all that -”

“Wait, what? You neglected to tell me that the Elder tree presented the branch and that’s why he took it?!” Alex dropped his match box and turned at Turais, sounding completely surprised.

Turais stopped pouring out the matches and looked at Alex questioningly. “What do you mean by ‘presented’, is it special? Doesn’t he just pluck branches out of trees?”

“No, Turais,” Alex said offendedly. “The reason why wandmakers go on such long journeys into the wilderness instead of just ‘plucking branches out of trees’ in their backyards is because they need to meditate and communicate with the wand wood trees. That and also wild trees are of better wood quality.”

“Wait, what? You mean like walking up to a tree and start talking?”

“No, you uncultured troll.” Alex sounded exasperated at Turais’ ignorance. “Wand wood and wand core searches are highly magical and spiritual events. The wandmaker needs to first cleanse
his magic core by abstaining from performing any magic, not even travelling the Floo; hence, the long travels. During wand wood searches, the wandmaker must venture into the deepest and wildest parts of the forest. Then, as he approaches the candidate trees, he will have to meditate and listen to the trees through his magical core. These sounds are so well-blended with natural magic that the slightest charmworks performed will overshadow them like a hurricane to a gentle breeze.

“Usually, he would sense no objections from the trees and would proceed to collect their fallen branches that are suitable for wand-making. But for more capricious or distrustful trees, such as Elder or Yew, he will sometimes sense a warning and must refrain from collecting. For even if he collected them, the wood would not cooperate and the wands fashioned would be rendered useless.

“But very rarely, he would hear a tree call towards him to present him with a living branch. In this case, the wandmaker must communicate extensively with that particular tree and excise the branch at the precise length it dictated. It is commonly believed amongst wandmakers that these events are almost prophetic as the wands made from these branches would always end up choosing those of great significance.”

Alex gave Turais a long, meaningful look and he gulped. Hearing approaching footsteps, they hastily turned back to their matches and cast the spell. Turais managed to transform an entire box of matches into needles perfectly. And much to Alex’s disappointment, two of his needles were wood instead of metal.

“Mr Black! Mr Fawley! Please stop chatting in my… did you transfigure all my matches?” Professor McGonagall sounded half livid and half amused. They looked up guiltily from the heap of silver needles and empty matchboxes to their professor, whose right eye was twitching slightly.

“Well, clean up and... five points apiece to Slytherin as usual, I suppose, for… excessive outstanding work.”

As they walked to their next class. Alex continued, “But honestly, I won’t put too much faith in the whole ‘owner of a presented wand shows great significance’ business. It might be true for you, but… I don’t think it’s necessarily true for others as well…”

“But it’s still cool to have an interesting backstory to the wand!” Turais exclaimed, he thought back to the Holly wand he once possessed and the story of the intertwined destiny with Voldemort’s brother wand. “It’s a rare occurrence, I take it?”

“Well, he told me that throughout his entire career, he has only experienced a ‘presentation’ thrice,” Alex said.

“Woah. There are thousands of wands being sold each year and only three were ‘presented’ to him?” Turais asked in shock.

“Well. It’s true that thousands of wands are being sold each year, but that is more of a global figure. In Britain, only about three hundred wands are sold annually, and most of them are made by him. But still, it is very infrequent.”

“So, I wonder who owns the other two wands?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Alex hesitated as he looked uncertain at the answer for once. “Wand information is very personal and sacred, much like a prophecy. Mr Ollivander said that wandmakers are under magical oath to not reveal any information except to the parties involved.”
“Hmm, they must be really significant individuals then,” Turais mused.

‘Mr Ollivander was not a wandmaker when Dumbledore and Grindelwald purchased their first wands, so I bet that means Voldemort was chosen for the second wand while Prometheus, the third wand. I’ll have to keep an ear out for this.’

“I would have to guess so... but again, I really don’t think you should hold your breath on it,” Alex said, not sounding convinced.

“Don’t you want me to be significant?” Turias teased.

“Turais,” Alex looked at him blandly as they turned into the Charms classroom, “I know you will be significant with or without a presented wand. Stop fishing for compliments.”

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March 12, 1970 (Thursday)

"I think I'm going to stay at Hogwarts this Easter..." Alex mumbled softly as they were lounging on the couch in the empty Slytherin common room while Turais was reading the latest letter Regulus and Sirius wrote him. Turais turned his attention to the boy.

"Huh, I told my father that you are coming back with me," Turais said. "Sorry, I just assumed... that you would like to come with us."

"I am?" Alex asked with a tone of surprise. Turais turned towards his best friend and recognized the hopeful look on his face.

"Of course you're welcome to join us!" said Turais.

Alex ducked his head and scratched it bashfully. "I... I didn't want to presume... or impose -"

"Nonsense," Turais threw his arm around the boy. "It will be more of an imposition if you didn't show up on our doorstep. I think Sirius will have a few choice words with me in private," Turais gestured at the letter in his hand, "He has already threatened me with that. And I asked father already and he agreed to host you again. You were... what were the exact words - ah - 'a delightful young man with impeccable manners'."

Turais tilted the letter for Alex to see. Alex's cheeks tinted rosy at the revelation.

"I d...didn't act that properly," Alex said shyly as he gently pushed Turais' arm off him. Turais snorted.

"Anyone put beside my brother would have perfect manner, that's for sure," said Turais.

Alex deadpanned, "Yes... may we never forget the three dine mice." Turais choked up in laughter as two arms swung around the duo.

"What's so funny?" Jonty asked as he poked his head in between them. "Tell me."

Alex gave Jonty a shrug as Turais continued to laugh uncontrollably. "I think Turais has went berserk."
"That was brilliant, Alex," Turais wheezed out as his finally caught his breath. He could feel the tears pooling at the corner of his eye and his stomach ached.

"Can someone explain to me what is happening?" Jonty snapped.

"Sirius accidentally let loose a pack of sugar mice that he smuggled during dinner over holiday and -"

"Hold on a moment, why does he need to smuggle sugar mice to dinner?" Jonty asked.

"Merlin knows what goes through that crazy brain of his," Turais said. "Back to the story, he made a mess of the dinner and completely ruined Lord Selwyn's robes while the mice ran and squeaked frantically on the dinner table in the background."

"I can see that being quite entertaining," Jonty said while imagining the scenario. "But what were you laughing at?"

"Oh, Alex, you explain," Turais said. He was about to laugh again just picturing the lyrics. It was so accurate.

Alex scratched his neck and said, "You know... the nursery rhyme - the three blind mice?"

Jonty frowned and shook his head.

"Wait, you don't?" Turais asked. "It's a pretty well-known nursery rhyme."

"I've never heard of this ever in my life," Jonty said vehemently.

"Well, I guess our Jonty is not a know-at-all after all," Turais teased.

Jonty bristled indignantly as he retracted himself from the two boys. He said hotly, "I know everything that is *important*. Nursery rhymes are not important."

Alex and Turais grinned.

"Fine, exclude me from your little inside jokes. I'll see how you like it when you don't get all the first-hand information from your esteemed but neglected friend," Jonty announced as he stormed back to their bedroom.

Turais laughed. Jonty couldn't stay mad at anyone for long. He turned back to Alex and said, "I meant what I said about Easter holiday. Write to your father and ask for permission to come with me if you don't want to go back."

"I'll do it tomorrow morning," Alex said. "I heard Napier said that all the school owls are in use."

"Why don't you use Edwige?" Turais offered as he suddenly saw the letter in his hand, "Wait, I just sent her off back to London. Never mind."

"I wouldn't use Edwige even if she was here. You are overworking her," Alex shook his head with a chuckle. "I don't want her to bite off my finger when she sees my letter."

"Fair point. Tomorrow it is." Turais has been overworking that poor owl.

"There is just enough time that you will get a response before the sign-up deadline," Alex said. "If I don't receive mail, I'll just sign-up to stay."
"You won't have to," Turais said firmly. "I'll make sure of that."

Alex nodded.

***

March 13, 1970 (Friday)

A letter fell onto Turais' lap just as he reached for his pumpkin juice. He was not expecting mail today as Edwige should still be well on her way to London. He looked up to see Damocles’ owl circling back towards him.

Turais broke the seal and read the letter. It was an invitation to visit Damocles’ lab to observe the potions development process. He handed the letter over to Alex as he rummaged for a quill and a piece of parchment from his bag.

“That’s amazing, Turais,” Alex gasped. “You should say yes at once!”

“Of course,” Turais grinned as he scribbled down his affirmation hastily. “... aaaaand... done.”

He rolled up the parchment, tied it up with a piece of string, and bound it to Damocles’ owl. After a flurry of feathers and talons, the table was void of owls once more.

“So, have you written up your letter to your father yet?” Turais asked. “We can head up to the Owlery after breakfast.”

“Turais,” Alex said weakly. “I can just stay here for holiday. It’s fine -”

Just as Turais was about to argue, another owl soared down and dropped a letter on Alex’s plate. Alex just stared at it with his mouth gasped open.

Turais has never seen Alex receive any mail, so Turais was shocked by it too. But the jet black envelope had the Fawley crest on it also with the silver-ink words that spelt Master Alexander Fawley was unmistakable.

Alex took the envelope and cracked the seal. He pulled out the parchment and took a steadying breath before unfolding it.

As he read, Turais noted the boy’s expression carefully. Alex went from nervousness to elation and slight incredulity.

Alex handed the letter to Turais.

Dear Master Alexander,

Snivy has been ordered by Master Fawley to write Master Alexander that Master shall stay with the Blacks or at Hogwarts for Easter holiday.
Your most loyal servant,

Snivy

"Well, that was unusual," Turais said as he handed the letter back to Alex, who took it and stared at the words intensely. "I didn't even know house-elves could write..."

Now that he think about it, he has never seen Kreacher read or write anything... Turais would make sure to ask next time he saw him.

But that wasn't even the main point. It was frankly quite demeaning of his father not even bother writing to Alex and instead, ask a house-elf to do that task. Furthermore, what father would rather not see his son. There was just so many different kinds of wrong in this letter that Turais' head hurts just thinking about it.

Eyeing the boy in front of him, Turais knew better than to voice his anger. He patted Alex softly, who flinched but stayed silent. "Well, I guess everything worked out. You have permission to come home with me this holiday."

"Yeah..." Alex said mindlessly as the parchment crinkled in his tightening grip.

***

The common room was filled with excitement and anticipation for the start of the Group of Seven meeting. The change in the Slytherin hierarchy that they were anticipating for the past week has occurred. However, no one has quite anticipated this result as the Slytherin common room simultaneously inhaled a gasp of air in shock when Turais and Alex walked into the side chamber.

Sitting beside him, Turais could tell that Alex was thrumming with tension, especially since his mood turned sour ever since he received the mail this morning. But Alex was able to hide it with a brilliantly maintained mask, so well that Turais doubted he would have seen through it if he wasn’t so familiar with him.

Once the door closed as the clock struck nine, everyone sat rigidly in their respective seats in silence. The tension in the room was so palpable that anyone with a weaker mental fortitude would have cracked and broken down by the malicious glares and suppressive silence.

“So, we shall cordially invite Alexander Fawley into the Group.” Malfoy’s voice cut through the silence. “May the Group grow more Prosperous with our newest addition -”

“This is ridiculous!” Dolohov decried. “How will the Group prosper when another mudblood kisser joins our ranks. He is not worthy -”

“He has been inducted the same way you once did, Antonin, unless you question your own induction and your worthiness, I suggest you keep your peace,” Turais scolded coldly. To Alex’s merit, he does not seem shakened yet.

“How dare you, Turais!” Dolohov execrated. “I should have listened to Claudius and Corban and voted against you last time. You were trouble from the start. Now you bring this
shameful spawn of a Squib into this sacred chamber. I don’t understand why Lucius even -”

“Antonin,” Malfoy said warningly.

“How unfortunate for you; however, the past is set in stone, Antonin. Wallow in your sorrow elsewhere,” an unfamiliar, frigid voice sounded for the first time within these walls.

Turais was surprised that voice was not his own, but from the person beside him. He glanced at Alex and was taken aback when he saw the hostility burning in his gaze.

“How dare you address me, you dying breed of filth that sullies the name of an Ancient House -” Dolohov screamed. Turais suddenly felt an abnormal wave of rage and wrath radiating from the boy beside him.

“This is enough, Antonin, Alexander,” Malfoy stepped in and motioned the cease of hostility. “Antonin, this is not the proper way to welcome our new member. I expected a better showing on your part. Alexander, I will excuse your behaviour as a lack of understanding for our rules. Consider this your final warning.”

Both boys stopped talking but their gaze remained locked in battle for the remainder of the meeting.

Alex and Turais exited the side chamber before the clock chimed ten, which was usually short for the meeting. Turais surmised that it was partially due to the hostility between Alex and Dolohov and also due to the departure from school tomorrow morning.

“What was that all about, Alex?” Turais asked once they reached the privacy of their room and Turais cast a privacy spell around their beds.

“Nothing. Dolohov just got on my nerves, that’s all,” Alex averted his gaze from Turais’ stare. “I mean, what is there to like about him?”

“But it is so unlike you to rise to his bait, I know you are better than that,” Turais pushed.

“Look, Turais. Just… drop it, okay? I just hate how he demeaned my family. You lost control of your magic when they insulted your father as well so you should understand how I feel!” Alex bored into Turais’ eyes with an unprecedented level of intensity. Turais decided to not press the matter tonight. Alex is hiding something and he is clearly unwilling to share it at this point, so Turais relented.

“I’m sorry if I overstepped my boundaries, Alex. But I just worry about your safety, and you making out more of an enemy in Dolohov is not going to make you any safer,” Turais said soothingly.

“I understand, Turais. I did act rashly,” Alex admitted tiredly. “But he… he just called me a… I never wanted to cross paths with him ever again.”

“You shouldn’t have said yes to me if you were uncomfortable around Dolohov -” Turais said, frustrated with the lack of information his friend is providing. But he also knew an attack on someone’s parentage was a great insult and Alex’s blood status has always been a sore point for the boy. It’s understandable, however, given that he was one of a handful non-purebloods in Slytherin and was, therefore, “inferior” in every way in the eyes of bigoted purebloods.

“Turais, I promise to control my temper from now on. I’ll be alright,” Alex insisted. “I’m tapped out so I’ll head off. Good night!”
Alex swung his legs onto his bed still in his school robes and closed the curtains on Turais in a clear sign of dismissal. Turais stared at the closed curtains for a moment longer before sighing and started his night-time routine.

***

March 22, 1970 (Sunday)

"Thank you for the invitation, Mr Belby," Orion said with a tight smile as he shook the man's hand with his free hand. From the corner of Turais' eyes, he saw Orion's eyes were travelling down Damocles' robes as they widened slightly before immediately glanced around the room in alarm.

"Please do call me Damocles, Heir Black," Damocles said cheerily. He clearly caught Orion's concerned gaze at his stained, burnt robes as he waved his hand at the large room behind him. "I assure you that Turais is in absolutely no danger -"

A loud bang sounded somewhere behind a precariously stacked pile of cauldrons and stools as the trio jumped. A few moments later, a large, purple cloud was visible as two lab assistants hurried over to the location with vials of bright neon-coloured liquids.

" - ah... that might've been my experimental Forgetfulness Potion," Damocles said nonchalantly but Orion's fingers curled tighter around Turais' shoulder. "Did you know that the fumes from the Forgetfulness Potion could actually cause memory-lapses? Maybe one of my assistants forwent their masks. I've been trying to replace the Lethe River Water with another base catalyst. The rivers have been increasing contaminated by muggles with the new factories upstream. But I have been struggling with the new mixture's reaction with the amalgam conduit. Instead of being positive heteroazeotropic, it turned into a zeotropic solution after adding the mistletoe berries..."

Turais tuned out Damocles' long-winded explanation. Quite frankly, he lost interest after hearing 'amalgam conduit' as a compound noun and to follow it up with the words positive heteroaze-something in rapid succession made him throw in the towel.

While nodding politely at Damocles, he discreetly observed the room lined with jars of pickled animals and shining vials made out of jewel-encrusted silvers and golds. There were several bathtub-sized pewter cauldrons standing at the height of an adult simmering in the centre of the room about their clay fireplaces. Beyond the thick snog of purple steam that carried whiffs of odourous animal organs and musky herbs, intricate silver and brass instruments formed a muted chorus of rhythmic whirs and gentle ticks.

"... Right!" Turais was jolted back from his brief stupor as Damocles exclaimed. "It's supposed to be a tertiary-reaction according to Raoult's Law, how could I have forgotten this?!

Damocles smacked himself on the forehead as he abandoned the two Blacks and rushed towards the back of the room where the mini explosion occurred mere minutes ago.

"I cannot comment on the 'genius' part of your description but I can be convinced of the 'eccentric' part," Orion said breathed in deeply to loosen his nerves.

Turais nodded with a grin. "It is a fine line."
"Well, I hope this place is up to scratch with its safety regulation," Orion said as his distrustful eyes scanned the laboratory.

"I'll be perfectly fine, father," Turais said with a hint of exasperation.

Orion frowned as he stared down at Turais. "I'd hate to have a repeat of -"

"Father," Turais sighed. "Damocles is not a dodgy character."

"Don't be short with me, son," Orion scolded him. "I get to worry with the trouble you seem to find yourself in."

"Yes, father," Turais said dutifully. He couldn't argue against that.

"You and Sirius..." Orion shook his head, "Trouble seeks you out while Sirius seeks out trouble. Sometimes I wonder why you two are so unlike your youngest brother."

"Then the three of us balance each other out perfectly," Turais said.

Orion gently pushed the side of Turais' head in slight admonishment for his cheek.

"Well, aren't I a lucky father?" Orion said dryly. "You three are the cause of my premature greying. I'll have you know."

After a few more minutes, they were still standing at the threshold of the laboratory.

"I'm afraid our host might have had too close an encounter with the fumes of his potions," Orion said with a hint of amusement. One of the assistants finally noticed their presence and quickly darted back to where Damocles disappeared.

Damocles appeared into view as he shouted, "Apologies, I tend to get carried away with my work - never mind that now - follow me please."

He waved the father-son duo over as they walked down the central corridor to the end of the room where there was a double-door that led to a second identical-looking space. Turais felt as though he walked through a veil of cold water as he passed through the doors. After taking a few more steps, Turais suddenly realized that his father was not beside him. He turned around to see Orion standing idly at the open doorway as he rolled his eyes. He poked at seemingly empty space, but particles immediately conglomerated around his finger and formed an opaque red tile.

"Uh, Damocles," Turais called out. "My father might not be keyed in to your Restriction ward."

"Oh," Damocles fumbled as he walked back towards Orion, his expression slightly dazed. "Apologies again, Mr Black. Usually Matilda, my lab manager, handles these things. Let me see if I can figure this out."

"So what do I do..." Damocles murmured. After poking his wand at the doorway and muttering some spells. Damocles threw up his arms in defeat and shouted, "Edward!"

A young man with crazed hair and thick goggles trotted up from behind Orion. "Yes, sir?"

"Do you know how to change the ward access?" Damocles said as he continued to poke his wand at the doorway to no effect.

"Oh. Only Matilda has control over the wards -"
"Wait, why don't I permission to change it? I'm the owner of this lab," Damocles asked in deep confusion.

"Well, you handed over control of the lab's wards two years ago since you accidentally locked everyone out of the lab, yourself included," Edward said matter-of-factly. "You said and I quote: 'I cannot be trusted with ward control. Matilda, you are to be the sole person in charge of the wards.' Unquote."

"Ah... AH!" Damocles said as he seemingly recalled the incident. "I do recall now. But where's Matilda?"

"She has been on holiday for the past week," Edward said with a frown. "She is returning next month."

"Then how did Turais get in?"

"I don't know. Maybe you asked Matilda to key him in before she left?" Edward offered an explanation.

Damocles scrunched his noses and thought hard. "Did I? Maybe I did..."

Orion cleared his throat to get Damocles attention. "It's alright, Damocles -" Damocles blinked at Orion's figure owlishly. "- I will just wait in the pantry. You do have one, don't you?"

"Of... of course!" Damocles said. "Edward, please bring Mr Black to the pantry and serve him some tea and biscuits -"

"But sir, I'm busy," Edward said with a huff. "My Mastery thesis defense is tomorrow."

"Just do it," Damocles said. "It's a formality anyways. For all I care, you've passed it already and -"

"Okay!" Edward shouted in excitement. "Mr Black, please follow me this way."

Orion gave Turais a nod as he walked away.

"Now, Turais. Sorry for all the trouble. Let me give you a tour."

***

Damocles led Turais around the second chamber, which was dedicated to his project on the Wolfsbane Potion. He disclosed that there were only three people who had access to this room: Damocles himself, Matilda, and now, Turais.

He was led to the private garden where Damocles grew his ownaconite plants. But before he reached that particular section of the garden, there was a few unpleasant surprises along the way.

Turais eyed as one of the branches of Venomous Tentacula reached out towards his shoulder. He inched away to the other side of Damocles just to come face-to-face with a dangerous-looking shrub of Snargaluff. Turais bounced backwards and stuck close behind Damocles. These were all NEWT-level plants that Turais would not have been in close proximity without proper protection. But here he was, with only his thin layer of casual robes separating him from certain painful
deaths. Turais silently hoped that Damocles had some much-needed antidote at hand.

After seemingly forever (and passing by a towering and blazing Fire Seed Bush and some carnivorous, vampiric saplings), they reached a small clearing filled with purple hood-like flowers. However, what was more striking was the ring of space around the perimeter of the flower patch where it was just toiled soil and without live vegetation.

"This is my private stock ofaconite. I have experimented with the effects ofaconite at different times of collection and growing conditions. And I discovered that for the best effect, they must be collected during full moon and immediately placed in Lethe River water for storage," Damocles said proudly.

Careful to not come into contact with the plant, Turais knelt in front of the patch and gazed out. Beneath the purple canopy, there were small clusters of five-petaled flowers that grew.

"What are these flowers?" Turais asked as he pointed at the yellow flowers.

Damocles knelt beside him and looked. "Hm... I think they are Gelsemium, also known as heartbreak grass. Highly poisonous as well."

'Heartbreak grass... huh...' Turais' mind piqued up with interest and stored the information in his mind.

"I'm sensing a theme here," Turais said warily as they walked back towards the laboratory building. Damocles just chuckled.

"Yes, there are a lot of poisonous plants here. But that's what makes them exciting! As long as you stay on the path and not touch anything. You will be fine," Damocles said airly as Turais looked down in search of the trail...or lack there of. Turais gulped.

***

March 25, 1970 (Wednesday)

"So, any thoughts on the recipe?" Damocles asked upon Turais' fourth day in the lab. "Our goal for the two weeks is to create a stable solution that will titrate within adding twenty drops of bezoar juice."

Turais took out his annotated copy and handed it to Damocles.

"I tried my best," Turais said hesitantly. He rearranged the addition order of some ingredients based on his memory. But he wasn't sure how much help it would do.

Damocles scanned the list and hummed. "Hmmm, interesting choice to put the belladonna in with the knotgrass considering they have completely different cardinal properties - And also substituting in roots of heartbreak grass instead of Aliphosty in the final reduction process - very unconventional - why did you add that?"

"I think it might off-set the poisonous effect of theaconite seeing that it was the only other plant that thrived around it," Turais said. "There are no recorded adverse interactions with the rest of the ingredients, but it is really a stab in the dark. I'm not sure if it will work..."
"Well, there is only one way to find out!" Damocles placed the sheet of paper on the chalkboard under this week's "in progress" tab and labelled it WP-032570-5939, which had nine other recipes that Damocles was testing concurrently. "We should have the results by next week."

"What?" Turais asked in surprise. "I thought the potion requires a whole month to prepare and must be freshly made?"

Damocles grinned at Turais as he opened an overhead cupboard filled with identical, large flasks of the same blue-coloured solution under a Stasis Charm. "That's where you are wrong, my dear friend. I have concocted the base buffered solution, which can be kept indefinitely and used at any time. It will cut down the brewing time down to one week. This is a special secret of mine. I doubt anyone will ever figure this out."

"Why don't you reveal this technique to the world?" Turais couldn't help but blurt out.

Damocles frowned. "I can't, Turais. The eventual recipe of this potion will be complex enough to follow. This shortcut that I am taking requires the person to understand every single underlying mechanism and interaction between the potion ingredients and I doubt anyone will ever understand it well enough except for me, and potentially you. It is irresponsible to be reckless and introduce something so potentially dangerous for the average Potion Master."

Turais' shoulders sagged a little upon hearing Damocles' justifications. He was just a bit... disappointed.

Damocles placed a hand on Turais' shoulder. Turais looked up and saw Damocles in a rare display of utter sobriety. "Turais, I know you want to help everyone in every way you can with this potion, but there are times when the right thing to do is to not do anything. Some secrets are secrets for a reason. Trust me that this was not a mindless decision."

Turais swallowed and nodded. "I understand."

Damocles ruffled Turais' hair and took out two of the flasks. He uncorked the flasks and deposited the contents into a small cauldron as he started to follow Turais' modified instructions.

***

A knock sounded on Turais' bedroom door as he looked up to find Alex standing by the door.

"Hey Alex," Turais gave a tired smile as he turned around to face his friend, who was settling on his bed. "What's going on?"

"How was work today?" Alex asked.

"It was good. Damocles and I started testing my modified recipe today."

"Wow!" Alex exclaimed excitedly. "That's great! And you were worried about it for the past three days."

"I guess..." Turais grinned. "But he has other tests running as well so it's not that special. He could just be entertaining me for all I know."
"I'm sure it's not that. You're brilliant, Turais. Your work must be none too shabby."

Turais smiled at his friend's encouragement as the conversation reached a lull. After a while, Alex tapped on his shoulder and asked, "Hey, how was work today, really?"

"I thought you just asked me that," Turais said.

Alex rolled his eyes. "Yes I did, Turais. But what I meant was what happened in the lab that got you down. If it's not the potion recipe, it must be something else then."

"There's nothing," Turais lied.

"Turais, did anyone ever tell you that you are a terrible liar?"

Turais raised an eyebrow. "As a matter of fact, no."

"Well, I'm telling you right now that you are a terrible liar," Alex said.

Turais met the boy's scrutinizing gaze for a hard moment before relenting. "Fine. It was something Damocles said today that just made me rethink everything."

"Oh no!" Alex moaned dramatically as he dragged his hand down his cheeks. "Turais has overthought again. What a terrible past-time."

"Hey! I don't overthink anything!" Turais said as Alex gave him a stink eye. "Fine. I get lost in my head sometimes -"

"A lot -"

" - Occasionally," Turais declared as he raised his hand to silence Alex. "That's as far as I am willing to admit -" Alex looked argumentative, "- and don't you want to know what happened? -" Alex immediately clamped his mouth shut. "- That's what I thought. So, Damocles apparently had a secret technique that can reduce the potion-making time by more than half but he is not willing to share it because it is too advanced and dangerous for others to follow his method."

"And you don't feel great because you are unable to let the world know about this despite the obvious benefits," Alex completed his thought.

Turais sighed. "Yes, exactly that. I completely understand Damocles’ concern but at the same time, it's such a boon for all lycanthropic patients that this decision bothers me. I am just trying to convince myself this is the right course of action."

Alex fell silence for a while before suggesting, "So... his justification for keeping this a secret is because no one would be able to replicate his methodology without being at risk of injuring themselves." Turais nodded. "So... why can't we train people specialized in making Wolfsbane Potion and provide the potion to everyone in need? Your family clearly have the means to hire someone talented to do exactly that. And if you don't want that person to reveal the secret, you can just get them to sign a non-disclosure agreement -"

"- like the magical vow used by the Unspeakables. We can set up a philanthropic organization that provides free Wolfsbane Potion and hire people to work on the potion. That's a great idea!" Turais shouted as he hugged Alex tightly.

A pair of footsteps walked up to the door as he heard Sirius’ voice drawled. "Who has a great idea?"
Turais released Alex and turned to his brother. "Alex, he just gave me a wonderful idea!"

"Of course, it's Alex," Sirius said with a shrug. "He's the more level-headed one between the two of us."

"Hey! You brat! Can you refrain from snubbing your poor brother?" Turais said as Sirius started to walk out the door.

"Well, you better pick yourself up from the sorry state you were in this entire night then," Sirius retorted. "Your brooding has put a damper on all of us... maybe except Kreacher. According to him, you can do no wrong."

Once Sirius left, Turais turned to Alex, "Was I really that bad? -" Alex was about to answer him when Turais cut him off. "- Actually, don't answer it. I might have a clue."

***

April 1, 1970 (Wednesday)

"How is the poison coming along?" Turais asked eagerly as he tripped over the mantelpiece of the fireplace. At least he didn't fall this time.

"Toxic as ever. But it hasn't exploded or curdled yet - my cauldron hasn't melted either - so your modifications seemed to have balanced all the reactions reasonably well - not that we didn't expect that, of course -" Damocles said without taking his eyes off the cauldron. Sweat was collecting on his forehead and sliding down his cheeks. He was stirring the cauldron with extreme care and exact hand movements. Thirteen times clockwise. Five times anti-clockwise. Repeat. "- we just have to add the fresh heartbreak grass roots after this..."

Turais walked closer to the man and stopping just beyond the blue line etched around the cauldron. It was a Shield Line erected by the potioneer to contain the potion in case of an explosion and to prevent external contaminants from nearing the potion, especially during the most volatile stages of the potion.

After a few more minutes, Damocles gently lifted the gold ladle from the potion that sloshed dangerously in the cauldron, alternating between a ghastly neon-green and a sinister blood-red. This was the highly reactive triphasic state where the solution was in a dynamic equilibrium and alternating between three meta-stable solutions, one was the wanted solution and the two others were not... or so Damocles has explained. Damocles stepped away from the cauldron and straightened his back with a groan of pain.

"Oh dear, I can definitely use some pain potion for my stiff back after hunching over for the entire night," Damocles moaned as he threw the gold ladle into his bucket and massaged his lower back. "Okay, let's add the roots now. I'll go pinch by pinch, but I'm expecting to see the potion turn completely brown after two additions."

Damocles took up the bowl of freshly ground heartbreak grass roots and hunched over the potion once more. He sprinkled a smidgen of particles into the mixture.

The potion turned into a murky brown for a moment before returning to its dual state of colours.
A second smidgen.

The potion turned brown again. This time, the muddy colour remained for a longer time. But it reverted back once more.

"I think we're almost there," Damocles gritted out as he reached for an extra pinch.

A third smidgen.

The neon-green colour was replaced by the brown and Turais held his breath. One minute. Two minutes. Five minutes.

The potion remained in an unattractive state of brown. Damocles immediately scooped out a ladle-ful of the experimental mixture into a separate cauldron and reached for the vial of bezoar juice. He started to add beads of its content into the mixture. With every drop, the mixture flashed clear before it stubbornly reverted back to its original state.

Once Turais counted twenty, the mixture remained brown and Turais' heart sank. The mixture was still too poisonous for consumption.

"So..." Turais asked quietly, "It didn't work?"

Damocles continued to add the bezoar juice until it turned clear. He placed the bezoar juice vial down on the bench and stood there in silence.

"Damocles?"

The man remained motionless with his back against him. Turais could hear some muttering from the man but he couldn't discern the words that were spoken.

"Damocles? Damocles?!

The man's shoulders squared as though he was shocked. He turned around and looked at Turais and whispered, "Twenty-four."

"What?" Turais asked dumbly.

"Twenty-four, Turais," Damocles said louder this time as though that explained everything. "Twenty-four. Twenty-four!"

"Yes, I know," Turais said with an obvious note of disappointment. "It's too poisonous to drink -"

"No, Turais," Damocles said softly. "You don't understand. You got twenty-four." He walked over to his blackboard and spelled the blackboard to reveal his erased contents from the past. Turais looked on as the chalk rearranged itself into columns upon columns of experimental names with a corresponding number.

WP-070865-0101: *Fail to complete. (BJDC = NA)*

...

...

WP-091269-4981: *Stable mixture. Too Poisonous. (BJDC = 200+)*
Turais understood the significance as he saw Damocles' hands Shakily violently as he tapped his wand in the empty spot in the table. Although the potion was not completed yet, they just had a major breakthrough in lowering the toxicity to near consumable levels.

WP-032570-5939: \textbf{BJDC = 24}

Damocles turned towards Turais as his eyes glistened brightly.

"Do you see it now?" Damocles' voiced was choked with emotions.

"Twenty-four," Turais breathed out in reverence.
Hey everybody,

This is the first part and the interlude of this week's update. Enjoy!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-28

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CHAPTER 20

INTERLUDE - FIRST YEAR IN REVIEW

April 6, 1970 (Monday)

The two weeks of Easter break went as fast as they came. Despite feeling a bit apologetic to his two brothers whom he had not spent much time with due to the development of the Wolfsbane Potion, Turais couldn't help but feel giddy about how close they were to achieving a consumable potion. By the time he was due to return to school, Damocles told him that he should have the final Wolfsbane Potion recipe completed this month, re-tested in the next two months, and submitted before the school term ended. Turais’ transcript on the novel discovery of the usage of aconite roots would also be submitted alongside the Wolfsbane Potion to the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers for peer-review. They are expecting the approval to be granted sometime before school term starts and Turais cannot wait for the world’s reaction when the results are released.

These two weeks only furthered Damocles’ determination to include Turais as a joint-discoverer of the Potion, but Turais couldn't help but feel uncomfortable with the prospect because he had the unfair advantage of knowing parts of the Wolfsbane Potion recipe. Everytime he was overwhelmed by those thoughts, he forced himself to envision a younger Remus’ hopeful smile. Somehow, those thoughts managed to dull his stabbing guilt into a dull ache and allowed Turais to forget... at least temporarily.

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June 5, 1970 (Friday)

The final two months of Turais’ first-year went much more peacefully compared to the first-half. Thankfully, Turais cemented his position as one of the top-circle Slytherins and as others
finally accepted that it was a permanent arrangement, they grew more respectful and yielded to his status, even the older students. However, Turais made a point to not abuse his new-found power and instead, remained as helpful and approachable as always. The other first-year Slytherins all looked up to him as their benevolent leader and Turais tried his best to deliver on that front.

Turais was also glad that Synde and Bellatrix have graduated from Hogwarts, meaning that he will no longer be in their presence. However, he knew that they would continue on to join the Death Eaters as soon as possible so Turais decided it was not entirely good news.

Due to the impending vacancies in the Group, as per the Charter (Turais could imagine Malfoy’s voice whenever he came across this phrase), the graduating students were allowed to nominate their successors for the upcoming school term. There were no surprises on both counts.

Bellatrix Black had decided to retain the seat within the Black family (and as a friendly gesture to Malfoy, who was courting her sister) and nominated Narcissa Black. This time, there was no opposition; in fact, Turias was genuinely supportive with Narcissa’s induction as he knew she was one of the few older Slytherins with a moderate view.

Synde nominated Avery Jr., an upcoming seventh-year and future Death Eater, to replace him. Knowing that they were outvoted, Turais and Alex voted along with the majority. However, Turais allowed himself a slight comfort knowing that the moderates were now in the majority.

In the school at large, Turais’s influence continued to grow as the first-years from other Houses also gravitated towards him. With the exception of a few older students, most did not prohibit the first-years from their Houses from associating themselves with Turais, and by extension, Alex and Jonty, because they were “the rare, right sort of Slytherin”. Turais knew this was the best he could do with the time he had, and he could only hope that it was enough of a change to survive the summer of 1970, when war was supposed to begin according to his previous timeline. Furthermore, Turais could only hope that the world had changed enough to delay the onset of the war for longer.

The staff were also equally taken by the brightest first-year student they have ever seen. In their eyes, Turais was the model student who took care of all students without discrimination of blood purity or House. This, of course, was with the exception of Professor Dumbledore, who continued to look at him with guarded suspicion. However, Turais always avoided crossing his path and so far, he had been successful at avoiding any exchange of stares or words, let alone a confrontation.

Yaxley’s sentencing also came sooner than expected with the backlog of cases piled in front of the Grand Jury Court. Orion mentioned that Arcturus was furious that his grandson was attacked and expedited the case. As a legal adult, he received the maximum sentence punishable, as strongly pushed by Arcturus, and would spend a life-long imprisonment in Azkaban. While Turais couldn’t help but feel bad for his demise, but he was comforted by the fact that many lives could potentially be spared without his involvement in the First Wizarding War.

Now, Turais was sitting at the Slytherin table at the end-of-year feast. The Great Hall was decked out in the Slytherin colours of green and silver in celebration of Slytherin’s first win for the house cup in seven years. Professor Slughorn caught Turais’ gaze and motioned a cheers in his honour. Turais had no doubt that he and Alex were the top house-points earners for their house.

Just as the students were starting to grumble about the late start to the feast, Dumbledore arrived.

“What an incredible year this has been! Before you head back to your homes are the summer,
I hope your heads are a little fuller than they were when you arrived… before you get them empty once more before the next year starts.

“Now, for the awarding of the house cup. In fourth place, Ravenclaw, with three hundred and ninety points; in third, Gryffindor, with four hundred and ten points; in second we have Hufflepuff with four hundred and forty-two points while Slytherin comes up on top with five hundred and three points. Congratulations to Slytherin House!”

Cheering and shouting erupted from the Slytherin table and Turais received numerous pats on the back from his fellow housemates. As the golden House Cup was handed over to the beaming Horace Slughorn, the cheering crescendo-ed to a maximum.

Professor McGonagall shook hands stiffly with the jubilant Slytherin Head while placing her other hand on silver Quidditch Cup as though she sought relief through physically contacting with at least one of the two trophies that had made residence in her office for the past several years.

Although Slytherins did not win the Inter-House Quidditch Cup this year (as a matter of fact, the last time they have won it was a decade ago), Turais would make sure that they snag that trophy as well for the Slytherins next year, with him as the Seeker of course. He felt a bit of guilt towards Professor McGonagall and the Gryffindors... but he now played from the competing team and… well, he earned her both Cups multiple times in his previous timeline so she really shouldn’t complain that much (even if she had no recollection of them).

Turais smiled inwardly to himself. He was surrounded by two amazing friends and many more acquaintances in the Slytherin House. He was in a prime position to challenge Malfoy's hold on House politics. Next year was shaping up to be an amazing year.

***

June 19, 1970 (Friday)

Exam results soon came and Turais was, to no one’s surprise, the top of his class as he gained Outstandings for all his classes; although he felt guilty since he already learnt the materials once before; Pierricoeur came in second with one Exceeds Expectations; Alex came in third with all Outstandings except for two Exceeds Expectations in History of Magic and Astrology. There was grumbling from a few Ravenclaws who vowed to dethrone him next year and Turais secretly wished them good luck. Pierricoeur, on the other hand, brought that animosity to the extreme by giving him the death glare every time they crossed paths. But it really didn’t deviate much from his normal behaviour, so Turais ignored it all the same.

Suddenly, Turais found himself on the Hogwarts Express heading back to London. As the scenery of trees and fields were slowly replaced by concrete and buildings, Turais grinned widely in his seat, daydreaming about what he would do with his brothers for two whole months. Alex had yet again received permission (a letter from a house-elf) to stay with the Blacks for the summer holidays. If Alex’s relationship with Sirius and Regulus during the Easter break was any indication, Turais was sure that he would become an honorary Black by the time school term started again.

He felt something hard smacked against his skull. “Turais! You are evicted from this compartment!” Jane said with a smirk.
“Unhand me, young lady!”

“Not a crazy Gryffindor anymore?” Jane asked cheekily. “Wipe off that grin on your face, Turais. You look like a lovesick boy who is going to see his crush after two months apart.”

“Let him be, Jane, Turais always goes crazy where his brothers are involved. You’ve seen worse on the train ride back last winter. Now, that was carsickness-inducing horribleness,” Alice smiled at the memory.

“Yeah, I don’t even know how he managed to survive without them for all these months from the way he acts around them sometimes. They are inseparable, those three,” Alex said as he shook his head. “You’ve got to see it to understand it.”

“Are all of you going to the Quidditch World Cup in Canada this year?” Turais asked while pointedly ignoring all the comments.

“Oh, definitely!” Gerald yelled. “I’m sure England will win it this time!”

“People say that every time, Gerald. And I have yet to see it happen once,” Jonty teased.

Turais searched his memories for information regarding the winner of the 1970 Quidditch World Cup finals? Was it Liechtenstein or England, Canada or Syria? Turais couldn't say for sure.

“Well, it’s different this time because Royston Idlewind has finally retired! But I’m just sad that I never got to see him in action…” Gerald said.

“Who’s Royston Idolwine?” Alice asked, she looked at Jane, who just shrugged.

"Muggleborn here, remember?” Jane said with an eyeroll.

The boys looked at the two girls as though they suddenly changed into two large, yellow canary birds.

“What? Surely you know who Royston Idlewind is?” Gerald asked incredulously. “He is only the World’s Best Chaser, that’s who. He led the Australian Quidditch Team to victory four years ago.”

“Yeah, although I don’t like him because he hates crowds. Honestly, which Quidditch player on Earth would hate their fans for supporting them?” Jonty said.

“I heard rumours that he has a high chance of becoming the next International Director of the ICWQC…” Turais said. All the boys shuddered at the thought while the girls looked at him blankly. “International Confederation of Wizards Quidditch Committee.”

“Why is he so bad?” Jane asked.

“Well, he’s just a damn stickler for the rules. So he’s no fun. He reminds me a little of you, Alice,” Gerald spoke as Alice whacked him with her book.

“I don’t know about y’all, but I’m watching for -” Turais began to say.

“Catherine Westermont, we know, Turais,” Alex rolled his eyes and Turais scoffed. “She is the best-est Seeker in the whole wide world and you are in love with her. I’m glad she is chosen as the Seeker for the English team or else I would not hear the end of this one.”

Turais ignored his friends’ teases and taunts and turned to Jane. “The final match is
happening late August this year, so I can ask my father to get extra tickets if you want to go, Jane?” Jane does not look too impressed so Turais tried to explain again.

“It’s a big deal, Jane. This is the Wizarding equivalent of the FIFA World Cup,” Turais said. This time Jane’s face lit up with recognition.

“Oh, that! Now, I’m interested,” Jane spoke with an interested spark in her eyes.

As the boys were explaining the history of the Quidditch World Cup, the train signaled its arrival at the station.

“Hey, remember to write to me -” Jane said excitedly, but then suddenly frowned. “ - Actually, I think my neighbours would find it odd that several owls are perched on our roof all the time.”

“Why don’t you give us your telephone number?” Turais asked as he pulled down Jane’s trunk for her.

“Yeah, we can call you,” said Alex.

“Right, brill.” Jane quickly rummaged for a spare piece of parchment and scribbled down a series of numbers.

“What’s …. a fella-tone?” Gerald scrunched up his nose at the numbers. “And is this a communication spell?”

Jonty pulled out his wand and chanted, “0-7-9-1-”

Jane snatched the slip of paper from Jonty’s hand and stuffed it in Turais’ hand instead.

“Nevermind, just owl.”

Jonty flushed red at the blatant snub.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everybody,

The link to the semi-final match-ups is here: https://forms.gle/2nHvVsRs1FsRUoXP8 Voting closes upon the next update.

The next chapter is Chapter 21: A Love Called Family and will be posted in a few days. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-28
Hey everybody,

I hope everyone that celebrated Thanksgiving had an amazing time with friends, family, and loved ones! And happy long weekend for those who are taking Friday off as well.

There was a hidden Potter (not James or his mother, Euphemia) cameo in this story already. Let me know if you have spotted him!

This is part two and the full chapter for this week's update! Enjoy!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-30

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**CHAPTER 21**

**A LOVE CALLED FAMILY**

June 30, 1970 (Tuesday)

*PARIS SURPRISE ATTACK; 2 DEAD, 15 INJURED*

by Andy Smudgley

*French Ministry Issues Condemnation of Violence*

*Declares Attack as Isolated Incident*

Yesterday, four men attacked a popular Wizarding café on the Rue de Babylone, several blocks away from the French Ministry. The café is operated by a non-profit pro-equality society known as the Mouvement des Droits des Cracmols (Squibs Rights Movement) and its proceeds are directed towards promoting equal rights for Squibs. The French Ministry has confirmed that two British nationals were present during the attack, including the Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts from Hogwarts, Mr Joris Zīverts, who is currently under treatment at Saint Geneviève. According to the witnesses, his actions have been instrumental in minimizing the casualties...
July 1, 1970 (Wednesday)

Turais woke up early today for some unknown reason. Well actually, he had a clue. He had not been sleeping well since he returned home mostly because he dreaded the news of the start of the First Wizarding War. But that hadn’t happened yet, as Turais was trying to calm himself and drift back to sleep.

The keyword was “try”.

After lounging in his bed for a further ten minutes, Turais decided to start his day early (again like the past two weeks) and headed to the kitchen. As he passed by Sirius’ bedroom, he heard a loud snore that tore through the silence and Turais had to muffle his usual shock and amusement.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs, he found Kreacher already putting out ingredients that, Turais recognized, was part of his regular breakfast that he always requested.

“Good morning, Kreacher,” Turais said cheerfully.

“Master Turais has risen early as usual. What an upstanding young man he is,” Kreacher complimented him as he shuffled slowly, hunch-backed, across the kitchen and reached for the drawers sacked with pans. “Would Master prefer his regular breakfast?”

“Yes, please,” Turais said pleasantly as he unfolded the Daily Prophet to scan over the headlines in search for mentions of Muggle attacks or Voldemort’s proclamation as the new Dark Lord. To his surprise and relief, neither headlines have appeared in the newspapers yet.

He turned his attention to the stack of letters at the corner of the table. Curious, he shuffled through them. There were posts from Gringotts and from family acquaintances such as the MacMillans, Selwyns, and Sayres. At the bottom of the pile was a letter addressed to the Black family household with the Lestrange family crest and seal - it was the wedding invitation for Bellatrix and Rodolphus Lestrange.

Turais shivered at the prospect of attending the wedding. But considering that Arcturus and Pollux’s relationship had never recovered from the all-time low after Walburga’s eviction, Turais favoured his chances of being able to avoid that dreadful engagement.

“Here is Master Turais’ breakfast,” Kreacher announced as he charmed the piping, hot breakfast from the kitchen counter to the table.

“Thank you, Kreacher,” Turais said, “I always tell others in Hogwarts that Kreacher makes the best breakfast in the world.”

Kreacher’s normally droopy ears lifted slightly at the praise. He bowed before croaking, “Master is always so kind, too kind.”

“Well, I give praise where praise is due, Kreacher. No need to be too humble. You have always served our family well, remember that,” Turais said as Kreacher bowed again as he walked away with an increased sense of levity. Turais smiled. He knew exactly what would make Kreacher happy, and it was to appeal to his sense of honour to have served the Blacks properly. And he knew there was a kind, fragile soul despite the hardened layers from centuries of Black family treatment.
Just as he was about to eat his first bite of breakfast, a jet-black, official-looking owl flew through the kitchen and dropped a thick, green envelope on his plate, just missing the eggs. It immediately hopped off the table and flew out the window, which meant that the letter did not require a response.

Turais lifted the envelope up and saw that it was addressed to him. He flipped it around and saw a matching green wax seal. On a closer inspection, it read ‘M.E.S.O.P.’. Unsure what it was, Turais broke the seal and pulled out the letter.

MOST EXTRAORDINARY SOCIETY of POTIONEERS

Chief Potioneer: Charlicus Finbok

(Order of Merlin, Second Class)

Dear Mr Turais Rigel Orion Black,

We are pleased to inform you that your transcript ‘Novel Identification of Different Neutralization Reactions for Aconite Leaves and Aconite Roots’ has been peer-reviewed and accepted by the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers and will be published as the cover story in the September 1970 edition of Potions. Please find enclosed a copy of the approved transcript and a list of required items for publication.

We await your owl by no later than 15 July.

Yours sincerely,

Ermentrude Viridian

Deputy Chief Potioneer

Turais quickly scanned the second piece of paper, it listed that he would need to send in a self-portrait that would be shown as part of the magazine cover and a few supporting documents. Damocles had already prepared the rest of the documents and told Turais he would send them when the acceptance letter arrived. Turais was honestly quite surprised that his discovery had been accepted so quickly. But his experiments were simple and quick to replicate and the results were easy to test and verify, so maybe that was the reason.

His body was thrumming with excitement as he ran up the stairs, skipping his floor, to his father’s room and banged on his door.

“Father, wake up!” Turais shouted in between knocks. “Father! My transcript got accepted
Orion opened the door of his ninth consecutive knock. He was still dressed in his night clothes with a shawl on top. Turais waved the opened envelope in his hand excitedly at his father.

“What just happened, Turais? You what?” Orion asked, his eyes were still half open and his hair tousled.

“Father, read the letter!” Turais thrust the letter into Orion’s hand. Orion quickly scanned the letter as his face split into a large smile. “Son, you did it! You are a published potioneer! The cover story on top of it all, that’s great news!”

Alex’s bedroom door opened to a groggy boy who was yawning widely. “Wassa matter?”

“Alex! My transcript on aconite got accepted! It will be published as the cover story in the September edition of *Potions*!”

Alex’s eyes snapped into focus and glistened with excitement. He lunged and embraced him while gasping, “Woah. That’s amazing, Turais! Congratulations, we need to celebrate. You need to write to Jonty and Alice and Jane and Gerald to invite them over. You need to write to Professor Slughorn and Damocles. Wait, you write to them. I’ll write to your friends. Right, who else -”

“Alex, calm down. You’re more excited than I am,” Turais extracted himself from the boy back and laughed at Alex’s flustered look. “We can do that after breakfast and telling my brothers.”

“Is this going to be a family tradition,” Orion asked amusedly. “Being woken up by a Black on the first of July? Sirius will receive his Hogwarts letter next year and Regulus’ the year after, I doubt I will get any sleep on either those days either.”

“Yes, it is,” Turais grinned.

When Turais and Alex reached the kitchen while Orion woke up his brothers, Turias saw two barn owls perched on the kitchen table beside his unfinished breakfast.

“Our Hogwarts letters!” Alex exclaimed as he went to untie the Hogwarts letters from their legs. Amidst all the excitement for his transcript acceptance, he had forgotten all about his second year letter and the fact that he had an excuse to ask Orion to buy him an actual broom!

“Father! Father! Our Hogwarts letter has arrived.” Orion appeared at the doorway as Turais was about to dash out. “Father, can you buy me a broom, please? Please! I want to try out for Seeker for the house team this year!”

“Alright! Alright!” Orion laughed at Turais’ pleading, puppy-eye looks. “But it only be because my son got a cover story for *Potions* !”

“YES! Siri! Reggie! I’m going to have a racebroom!” Turais jumped up and down ecstatically as his brothers did the same beside him, equally as excited.

“Can I have a turn?”

“Me too! Me too!”

“Of course! Father, can we go buy it today ? I already know which one I want - The Nimbus 1700! It’s the best broom in the market, way better than Comets and Cleansweeps.”
“Okay! But you all know the rules, breakfast -”

“- at least two eggs, one piece of toast, and a glass of juice! We know, father!” The brothers said simultaneously, much to his father’s mild annoyance and amusement.

“- that and your dress robes for the family portrait.” Orion announced as Sirius groaned and slapped his hands over his face.

***

The Black household opened the door of the Stutterbutton’s Photography Studio to a strong whiff of gunpowder and a haze of purple mist. Sirius gagged aloud and stuck his tongue out, which formed an expression that completely contradicted the immaculately prepared appearance of robes and proper pureblood grooming. Turais stifled a laugh as his father smacked Sirius on the head gently for his display.

“Sirius, please try to act appropriately,” Orion shook his head in exasperation as he tried to readjust the tie which Sirius had once again tugged off-center. “I just want one nice family portrait this year.” Every year, Orion brought his sons to take an albumful of family portraits. While Turais was entirely supportive of the idea for he never had a chance to experience this in his original timeline with his parents, Sirius had made it an absolute chore for Orion to convince him to don his dress robes properly.

“Come on, Siri. I want a good portrait of all of us so I can bring it to Hogwarts with me this year as well,” Turais said as he nudged at his fidgeting brother. When there was no response, Turais went in for the kill with his puppy-eyes and pouty lips and whined, “Please?”

Sirius looked at his older brother’s pitiful looks and surrendered. He sighed dramatically while saying, “Fine… just one.”

“One good portrait. No weird faces or poses or messing up your clothes. I’ll get father to buy us ice cream after. Deal?” Turais bargained. He thought the deal was pretty good for Sirius.

Sirius perked up at the mention of ice cream but still pretended to consider for a moment before nodding and stopped moving. Turais grinned at Orion, whose eyes filled with relief as he could finally fix Sirius’ outfit on a still body.

“Ah, Heir Black, the annual family portraits?” Mr Shuttermeyer greeted. He had been in charge of their photo shoot since they were babies. He definitely had noticed the disappearance of Walburga from the family since four years ago, but he never mentioned anything. But his eyes widened at Alex, who he had never met before. “Who is this young gentleman?”

“Mr Shuttermeyer. This is Alexander Fawley, a school friend of my eldest.”

“Pleasure to meet a Fawley. I haven’t seen Mr Fawley in a long time,” the man supplied pleasantly.

Alex’s expression did not betray any of his emotions. However, Turais saw the slight tensing of his shoulders at the mention of his father.

“Sir, in addition to the usual, I will need a self-portrait as well,” Turais stepped in, removing
the focus on his friend.

“Of course, young Mr Black,” the man said as he guided them into the studio set-up. “What is the occasion, may I ask?”

“My eldest's latest discovery will be published as a cover story in *Potions*,” Orion spoke proudly as the photographer’s eyes widened.

“That’s splendid news! If I may offer my congratulations to you, Mr Black. I will ensure you have the perfect photo to accompany your achievements. Now, would you mind stepping up and taking the self-portrait first?” Mr Shuttermeyer gestured Turais and he stepped into the set. “*Potions* requires a standard three-second picture, so let’s do a three-second series of six.”

Turais settled on the stool as he followed the photographer’s every instruction. He was determined to pose for the perfect shot, however, Sirius was equally as determined to sabotage all of his shots.

*Click…*

Sirius made a silly duck face which failed to elicit a response from his older brother, who was smiling pleasantly, albeit, slightly stoically, at the camera.

*Snap! Click…*

Sirius made a weird chicken clucking sound with a cross-eyed look. Turais barely smothered his laughter.

*Snap! Click…*

Turais’ defenses crumbled and he laughed without inhibition.

*Snap! Click…*

Turais managed to school his expression back into a controlled smile but he felt his jaw muscle twitching.

*Snap! Click…*

Turais shot an angry glare at Sirius, who brought a very realistic imitation of a dying flobberworm, and glanced back to smiled pleasantly at the camera.

*Snap! Click…*

Turais stood up and left the studio to strangle said banshee-shrieking flobberworm off-camera…

*Snap!*

“Well, I think we’ve managed to get at least one good one,” Orion said to Mr Shuttermeyer dryly as he glanced insouciantly at his eldest son’s half-hearted fratricide attempt on his middle son. Turias’ fingers were wrapped around Sirius’ neck as he pretended to strangle him while Sirius screamed bloody murder. The corner of Mr Shuttermeyer’s mouth twitched in amusement. “I would like two small copies and one large framed copy of all the photos as well as the negatives.”

“Of course, Mr Black,” the photographer while looking at Regulus, who now joined the fray and tugged at Sirius’ robes to mess up his outfit. “Your children are as lively as always.”
“That’s an understatement, I’m afraid,” Orion allowed a small smile. “We can take the family portrait next, but please allow me a few moments to fix my second son’s outfit again.”

The Black family miraculously managed to have not one, but three acceptable family portraits, including one where Alex stood by Turais as he smiled shyly while waving his hand at the camera.

***

“Are you certain you don’t want a broomstick, Alex?” Turais asked Alex as they were waiting for the shopkeeper to return from the storage with Turais’ brand-new Nimbus 1700. Alex was still holding onto the picture that he was part of and looking at it as though it contained the secrets of the universe. Turais knew the feeling, so he let his best friend be.

After gathering all their school supplies, they have finally reached the main attraction of this shopping trip - broomstick shopping. Orion was in the back of the store looking at Puddlemere United memorabilia with his brothers.

After a minute, Alex responded as though Turais had just asked the question, “No, I think I am okay, Turais. I don’t really enjoy it that much. Also, I have something else I wanted to buy...” His eyes were still glued to the photo and Turais barely suppressed a grin.

“But I saw you in flying lessons last year. You were brilliant and flying loops around Mister William,” Turais countered.

“I’ll just stick with my books safely on the ground,” Alex said with a sense of finality as he tore his gaze from the photo for once and placed it carefully into his inner pocket.

“If you insist... but you are always welcome to borrow my broom if you ever want to,” Turais shrugged. “Also, we should go check out the service kits and Charm books for Quidditch players. And a Snitch so I can practice.”

Quality Quidditch Supplies had always been Turais’ favourite shop in Diagon Alley. He glanced around the store at the broomsticks on display and smelled the familiar scents of broom polish and dry twigs. He then laid eyes on the Nimbus 1700 that was in the window display that gleamed brilliantly under the showcase lighting - the broom that he will be getting his hands on very soon.

As usual, young faces were pressed up against the window panes as the children looked at the broom longingly. Amongst them, Turais easily identified the boy with distinct messy, black hair and glasses - a face he had seen in the mirror for many years in a past timeline long ago.

James Fleamont Potter.

Just as he was lost in his thoughts, he realized that the pair of hazel eyes were staring straight back at him through the window. Flustered, Turais looked back at the counter where the shopkeeper finally returned with two broomsticks. They were identical in appearance except for the tail end twigs.

Both broomsticks were handsomely built and reflected the sleek and agile designs that Turais loved about Nimbus. The broom handles were made of mahogany, which provided the light brown
colour that was reminiscent of the Nimbus 2000, and coupled with Goblin-made iron crossbars and
finishings. On both broomsticks, the tail end twigs were straight and converged neatly at the tip. However, the twigs on one broomstick was of a darker brown colour while the other was of a creamier beige colour.

“Is the broom with the darker brown twigs made of mahogany-hazel and the other one made of mahogany-birch?” Turais asked, referring to the handle and twigs. The shopkeeper looked surprised at his knowledge.

“Yes, Mr Black. Hazel will provide more precision in turning while birch, which is the newest offering from Nimbus, will provide a faster ascension,” he confirmed.

“I would like the mahogany-birch broomstick, please.”

“Thank you, Mr Black. How will you be paying?” The man asked politely.

“My father will be paying for it,” Turais said and then turned to shout towards the back of the store. “Father!”

Orion emerged and proceeded to conclude the transaction while Turais turned his head back to the window display only to find James Potter still staring at him with mild jealousy.

“What does he want?” Sirius appeared beside him, crossing his arms while narrowing his eyes at the boy outside. Sirius clearly remembered James from last year.

“He was staring at me purchasing the broom, Siri. He is just jealous,” Turais said calmly as he saw James wave at Sirius. “Many young boys want a racebroom, myself included. He means no harm.”

“He better not. I won’t forgive him for insulting our family last year,” Sirius scowled at the boy, who stopped waving and was clearly taken aback by the amount of spite on the second brother’s face.

“All done, Turais! Your very own broom!” Turais turned away from the window and saw Orion holding the perfectly-wrapped broomstick horizontally with both his hands. Turais took the broomstick carefully into his hands and wrapped around the broom handle, enjoying the familiar feeling of joy and elation that he associated with flying.

“Thank you, father,” he whispered reverently into the broom.

“I also got you the broomstick servicing kit and the Charms book for Quidditch players and a golden snitch so you can practise. They are your early birthday presents, I hope you like -”

Turais hugged Orion around his midsection. “That’s perfect. Thank you, father.”

“Glad you like it, son,” Orion patted the back of his head gently. “Now you need to promise me to flatten the Gryffindors and win the Quidditch Cup this year.”

“Well, that’ll be easy, father,” Turais looked up and smirked. “I will promise to catch the snitch five minutes into the game every time.”

“I’ll hold you to your words, Turais. Now let’s head home to try out your new birch Nimbus 1700.” Orion lifted the bag of merchandise and walked away from the counter.

“It’s a mahogany-birch Nimbus 1700, father,” Turais said cheekily.
“Did you just *sass* your father, Turais?” Orion scolded with a twinkle in his eyes. “I technically bought the broomstick. I can take it back right now.”

Orion made a move towards Turais, who jumped out of his devious attack and hugged his broomstick protectively as they left the store.

“Now I want a turn on the broom too.” Orion said good-naturedly as he pushed open the front door.

The moment Orion stepped out of the store, a boy with skewed glasses appeared in front of him and shouted around him. “Hey Turais, do you remember me? I’m James Potter. I met you last year at Flourish and Blotts. Did you just get a new Nimbus 1700? You’re so lucky!”

Turais eyed Orion who had already raised his mask and displayed a stoic expression. The playful eyes dimmed and transformed into a guarded pewter grey.

Turais looked at James and said, “Oh hello, James. I do remember you. This is my father, Heir Black. This is my youngest brother, Regulus. And that -”

“Sirius, I remember you!” James beamed at the boy as he adjusted his glasses. Sirius remained unmoved by the wave of positivity. “Or was it Siri, I -”


James’ smile faltered for a moment before he shrugged it off and continued cheerily, “My cousin who is going into fifth-year told me *all* about you, Turais. He said you can speak to snakes and that you are super clever and super nice too!”

Turais stopped for a moment.

‘There’s another Potter at school? He must be Charlus and Dorea’s descendant! He didn’t have a portrait in the Manor and they only mentioned him in passing. I’m glad he’s still in school next year.’

“Oh, that’s great. What is his name?” Turais was wracking his brain to see if he had encountered a Potter.

“He’s called Kaiden. He said he was there when you spoke to the snake and saved your grey-haired friend from the big, scary snake. He said it was so cool when you told off the other - wait a sec - you are grey-haired -” James gasped loudly as he pointed at Alex, who tensed at the sudden attention. “Are you the Alex? Wicked! Look, Kaiden said that -”

James’ hero worship was quite entertaining if it weren’t for Orion’s disapproval rolling off his body. It was so intense that Regulus immediately snapped into attention in alarm.

James, who was clearly immune to the rigidity around him, continued to ramble on about the tales his cousin Kaiden told him. He clearly found everything in Hogwarts super exciting and interesting. Sirius, on the other hand, remained unimpressed as he fully embraced the infamous Black vengeance.

“- and so he also said Turais Black was one of the good Slytherins -”

“Hey! Stop pretending you think we are cool, Potter,” Sirius interrupted. “We know you think we are evil. Stay away from us.”
“I never said -” James started to defend himself when a woman strode over calling his name.

“James! Stop running away without telling us, there are bad wizards -” Mrs Potter stopped as she saw the Black family.

“Hello, Mr Black,” she said tensely as she glanced worriedly at his son, who was clearly oblivious to his mother’s concern. “I am so terribly sorry for my son’s behaviour. Please excuse him, he is very friendly.”

Noting Orion’s stern silence, she eyed their purchases and attempted in strike up a dialogue again. She said with faked cheeriness, “I see that you shopped for a new broomstick today for your eldest son.”

“Yes, Lady Potter. Now, if you would excuse us, we have a busy day ahead,” Orion said coolly.

“Of course, Heir Black. we should be heading our way as well. Say goodbye, James,” Mrs Potter nudged the bespectacled boy, who was distracted by a particularly nasty-looking plant nearby.

“Bye, Mr Black, Turais, Sirius, Regulus. I will see you next year at Hogwarts,” James said before he was forcefully dragged away by his worried mother and disappeared into the crowd. Eyeing the lingering tension, Turais thought quickly to say something.

“So, you have now met the prankster from last year, father.”

“He was an… interesting boy,” Orion’s mask lifted as his demeanour turned warm once again.

“He is quite hyperactive. But I’m sure he meant well,” Turais said.

“As expected with the Gryffindors. Flashy without substance,” Orion said with a hint of disgust. “Let’s head back home -”

“Uh… Mr Black,” Orion turned towards Alex. “Can I go to Fawkswind’s Boutique to pick up an item?”

“Oh yes, of course, Alex. I totally forgot. Let us head there now.” They turned around and Turais wondered what Alex needed to get from the high-end store at Optim Alley. But Orion distracted him from his thoughts.

“Turais, as I was saying, I want a turn on that broom that I just bought,” Orion reminded Turais once again.

“Yes, father. You can have a turn on my broom.”

***

July 31, 1970 (Friday)

It was Turais’ twelfth birthday. Per his normal routine since the beginning of summer, he woke up early. But today, like at the beginning of this month, he could not return to sleep. So he
decided to creep down the silent hallway to go down to the kitchen despite it being the break of dawn. As usual, he found a newly-delivering newspaper sitting on the kitchen table. He unfolded the *Daily Prophet* and was pleased to draw a blank on both Muggle attacks and Voldemort’s proclamation.

Summer break was half-over and Turais was finally beginning to feel hopeful that he had successfully delayed the onset of war. Summers were the logical starting time for the rise of the Dark Lord as most children have returned to their home and were mostly vulnerable to attack. If Voldemort did not strike now, Turais was confident that the war had been delayed until next summer. Regardless, he knew what his birthday wish would be.

Suddenly, the front door creaked open as he heard a couple of voices in a hushed whisper. Turais palmed his wand and walked quietly towards the kitchen doorway, staying out of view.

“Please keep your voice down, Turais is a light sleeper,” Orion said softly.

A few seconds later, he heard them pass the threshold and a creak on a loose floorboard near the door as there was a collective intake of air.

“Sorry!” A girl’s voice squeaked followed by multiple “Shush!”

Another few seconds later, he heard them inch midway to the kitchen before he heard a dull thud followed by a hiss of pain and a couple slaps on fabric. Turais could only imagine it being Gerald kicking the solid wood drawer in the hallway. He bit down on his lips to stop himself from laughing.

Yet another few seconds later, he heard another noise, a much louder bang, but from upstairs.

“I overslept, darn,” Sirius said loudly.

There was a collective groan near Turais as their subterfuge was ruined, not by one of their own, but by the eternal plan destroyer.

“Damn it, Sirius! Turais must’ve woken up from that.” Turais was amused that Orion swore out loud, and in front of impressionable eleven and twelve-year-olds. He took care to never swear in front of them, but something he caught him when he thought he was alone in his room. Clearly, Orion was very annoyed.

“Sorry, father,” Sirius whispered to angry muttering. Turais decided to put them out of their misery as he walked out of the kitchen doorway and into full view of the group of crouching adults and children with gifts hovering idly behind them. They all looked up in shock, which reminded Turais of alarmed meerkats.

At that thought, Turais couldn’t hold back anymore and laughed into the silent house. When he stopped, he saw Orion standing up and patting down his jacket.

“Damn it,” he muttered before shooting an annoyed glare at Turais and walking past him to the kitchen.

***
An hour later, Arcturus and Melania, Turais’ paternal grandparents and Turais’ closest friends: Alice, Gerald, Jonty, and Carl alongside Alex and his brothers, sat along the kitchen table as Orion bought out a gigantic golden Snitch cake made of treacle with fluttering, golden sugar frosting wings.

After a horribly out-of-tune (mostly due to Sirius) rendition of Happy Birthday, Turais made a wish.

‘I wish the Blacks and the Potters will stay safe and happy while the war will not start anytime soon.’

Turais opened his eyes and blew out the twelve candles that stood proudly atop the golden Snitch, which disintegrated into a fine, golden mist that smelled like cinnamon and honey.

They dug in to the cake and the delightful breakfast spread Kreacher prepared (all of his favourites and in large quantities) and started to chat happily.

“Where did you buy the cake, father? It tastes amazing,” Turais asked after finishing his first slice in record time and was already starting his second.

“Pudding Lane Bakery by Mrs Puddington,” Orion responded. “Their waitlist is very long. I had to place an order for this cake three months in advance.”

“Thank you, father,” Turais abandoned his cake and jogged over to his father and placed a kiss on his cheek while hugging him tightly. He saw Arcturus frown at the intimate gesture. But he did not comment and silently took another bite of the cake instead.

“Anyways,” Orion gave Turais a quick squeeze before standing up. He took his wand and Summoned the presents stored upstairs. “Shouldn’t you be more excited about presents?”

“Well, I’m content to be able to share today with my family and friends so -” Turais was speaking sincerely until Orion pulled out five golden tickets that had ‘416th QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP FINAL MATCH - TOP BOX’ printed on them.

Turais gasped and hugged his father tightly. “We got top box seats in the Quidditch World Cup finals! Thank you, father!” Turais released his father and composed himself once more before walking towards Arcturus, whom he knew had a hand in obtaining the tickets.

“There you, grandfather. I will enjoy your generous present,” Turais said calmly, but allowing a hint of elation and appreciation to leak into his tone.

Arcturus nodded approvingly at his manners and said, “Happy twelfth birthday, Turais. Congratulations on your Potions cover story, this present is well-deserved.”

He then extended his hand. As Turais shook it, he was surprised by the second hand that clasped onto his shoulder. Although the gesture was simple, it spoke volumes in front of outside guests. Turais smiled a bit more brightly and Arcturus nodded before letting go. He also gave Melania a gentle hug before returning to his seat.

Now, beside him stood a towering pile of gifts wrapped in different papers. He unwrapped the top one, which was a long, thin box. Turais could already guess what it was.

“It’s a feather quill,” he guessed triumphantly.
“But it’s not any feather quill…”

Turais looked at his best friend seated behind him mumble softly into his shirt. Turais opened the exquisite, mahogany box and saw a magnificent feather flashing spontaneously like a tempest in electrifying blue… gold… grey… navy blue…

Turais’ eyes widened in recognition as he placed the opened box on the table and pushed it towards Alex, who looked up with a horrified expression. “No, Alex. I’m sorry but I cannot accept this gift. This is too much. Keep it for yourself.”

Alex glared at Turais and pushed the box back while Jonty stood up to take a peek and gasped. “Merlin, I’ve never seen a thunderbird feather quill!”

“Turais… just accept it. Please… it’s the least I can do.” Alex turned to him so only Turais could see his pleading eyes.

‘The least? It’s probably worth as much as all the other gifts in the room put together, and that includes five Quidditch World Cup final match top-box tickets.’

Unwilling to embarrass his best friend, Turais relented and silently pulled the box back towards him. They were going to have a talk after.

“Well… thank you… Alex. I don’t know how I deserve this gift, but thank you very much, truly. You being an amazing friend is a gift of its own. We will talk later,” Turais said not-so-eloquently as he reached to squeeze Alex’s shoulder. Alex gave him a tight but grateful smile.

“Now let’s do this one.”

He took the simple black envelope and took in his brothers’ fidgeting looks. He opened it up and saw a card with a hand drawn picture on the cover. It depicted his family lying together in the living room with his Nimbus 1700 circling the couch they were lying on. Although the colouring spilt out of the borders and the stick figures were coarse, it was the best drawing Turais had ever seen. Blinking to keep his tears at bay, he quickly flipped open the card to see the different goofy family portraits that they have taken over the years. He didn’t realize he was crying until he saw a teardrop splash onto one of Sirius’ weird faces.

He looked up to find their chairs empty as he felt two sets of arms around his shoulders. “I’m sorry, Turais. We didn’t want to make you sad,” Regulus said apologetically.

“No, no. I’m not sad. These are happy tears. This… is perfect. I love you two so much,” Turais reached his arms around his brothers’ shoulders and gave them both a crushing hug.

After a while, Jonty spoke to Alice in a loud whisper, “I see what Alex meant on the train. We really had to see it to understand it.”

That broke the spell over the table as Turais released his brothers and clawed at Jonty while the rest of the table gave off a chuckle. Turais wiped his tears away with Orion’s proffered handkerchief and turned to a large box wrapped in gold paper with a large silver bow on the top. Turais eyed Jonty with a knowing look.

He opened the box and looked in. Inside the box stood a miniature modeling of an upside-down yacht named H.M.S. Slytherin with the keel painted with the Black family crest that contrasted strongly against the silver hull and green sails of the boat.

Besides the quite literal and unoriginal wordplay on his name, Turais could not really extract
any other meaning from this gift. He understood the message all the same and was grateful on his abilities.

“A literal gift of his name? Really, Jonty? I spent the entire morning lugging around that? That is such a waste of my magic!”

It wasn’t Turais, but Carl who spoke. Jonty merely shrugged and Turais rolled his eyes but grinned.

“This gift is hideous, Jonty. Wait until your birthday, you’ll regret this gift,” Turais said teasingly and Jonty flashed him a grin, “But thank you, I appreciate it.”

Turais then looked at a poster rolled up beside the remaining gifts. He unrolled it and found himself looking at the familiar blond, fair-skinned lady with freckles on her cheeks.

“It’s an autographed poster of Catherine Westermont! Thanks, Gerald!” Turais grinned at the Quidditch fanatic who smiled back.

He placed the poster on the table and turned to the small rectangular gift that clearly looked like a book.

“Alice, I’m guessing this one’s yours.”

“Actually… it’s Jane’s. She owled it to me before she left for the United States,” Alice said shyly. “But I did buy you a book?”

Turais nodded. Jane’s parents had a sudden change of plans and decided to go for a family trip to see the Grand Canyon, which was a place Dave wanted to see before he was diagnosed with cancer. Turais understood the sense of urgency when a family had been through such a traumatic event. He picked up the other rectangular gift beneath the first one and unwrapped them.

Jane’s book was titled “Muggles to Magic, Magic to Muggles: How Magic and Technologies Influenced One Another”, while Alice’s was titled “Essential Potion Discoveries across the Ages”.

“Thank you, Alice. This is a very thoughtful gift, I’ll promise to read it cover to cover very soon. I’ll also thank Jane later.”

Turais finally turned to the final present in the pile, presumably Carl’s. It was a small box that just large enough to hold a Quaffle that was elegantly wrapped in the Black family colours of green and black with embroiderment of red and yellow around the edges. White dots and lines that formed the constellations Orion, Canis Major, Leo, and Carina danced and travelled between green and black background, which symbolized day and night.

“Woah, Carl. That is some amazing Charms work. You will have to show me how to make this!” Turais exclaimed.

“Of course, it’s not too difficult,” Carl smile, his cheeks flushed pink at the compliments. “I’ll show it to you later today if you want.”

“I will not let you leave before you do,” Turais grinned. “I’ll need you to teach me the Charms for what you have inside the box too.” He had a good hunch.

Turais took care to remove the wrapper gently and was surprised to see the embroiderment and pattern shift as the wrapping paper returned to a large rectangular paper.
He opened the box to find a star lamp and looked at Carl with a raised eyebrow, prompting him to explain.

“Well… who was the one who said my gift was too literal?” Jonty smirked and gestures the moving horoscopes on the wrapping paper and the star lamp. Carl bristled indignantly.

“This requires a demonstration. If I may?” Carl cleared his throat importantly and stood up to place his gift on the centre of the table. He then extinguished the lights and closed the curtains while igniting the torch inside the star lamp. Immediately, the constellations appeared on the ceiling and the walls. However, the four constellations representing the Black family shone far brighter than the rest. Then gradually, those constellations rearranged them to form the faces of their respective family member they were named after. Orion’s trademark handlebar moustache and upturned lips, Sirius’ mischievous grin, Regulus’ shy smile, and Turais’ carefree laugh. Carl whispered a word and the labels for the constellation also changed, Turais realized, from their names to the same word - “love”.

Carl explained, “The constellations will change into their faces and their current emotions will be shown if you say the word -”

“Home,” Turais breathed.

***

Turais’ friends spent the day browsing stores in Diagon Alley and playing Exploding Snap. They also talked a lot about the upcoming semi-final matches of the Quidditch World Cup.

England defeated Australia for their best showing in recent memory. They would be competing against the host nation team of Canada. Gerald was equal parts excited (“England made it to the semi-finals, I knew it! And they will definitely win the Cup!”) and vexed by the news (“Oh no! The Canadians have an excellent winning streak! But they'll lose.”).

The other side of the bracket saw a face-off between the Liechtenstein team (“Basically everyone living there is on the national Quidditch team! But they are all so good! How?!”) and the rising Quidditch stars, the Syrian Quidditch Team. (“The Syrians won’t win this year, but maybe they will next time. I have seen it in my teacup and I can feel it in my bones!”).

Turais also discovered that all of them will be attending the final match, albeit not in the Top Box. However, they promised to meet up at the campsite at some point before or after the match.

After his friends left, Turais opened the gifts from his family. Compared to his friends’ gifts, they were all impersonal and borderline hostile, especially when it came from his maternal side of the family.

For example, Pollux and Irma (Turais assumed that he was forced to) sent him a heinous 16th-century porcelain vase that depicted the decapitation of muggles by wizards. While Cygnus and Durella, the parents of the three Black sisters, had sent something less grotesque, Turais looked warily at the complete collection of books on blood purity supremacy.

Turais decided he did not want to think about what the veiled messages might be behind all those gifts, therefore, he planned to have Sirius “accidentally” break some things and burn others at some point when he returned to school; Sirius agreed to be clumsy.
Turais looked around his room and saw all the opened gifts and wrapping papers that are littered everything. And then he saw the long brown box that sat idly on his desk.

Turais took the beautiful wooden box and the invaluable gift that laid within it and walked up to his best friend’s room. He saw the door was half-closed so he moved to knock when he suddenly heard loud screams - Sirius and Regulus’ screams. He held his hand and opted to peek into the room instead.

“Stop! Alex… ahhhhck! Stop!” Sirius screamed at an even higher octave in between gasps.

“The Tickle Monster never stops! Mwaaahahahaha - ” a deep, timberous voice boomed.

“Stop! Tickle Reggie! He’s the most ticklish of us all!” Sirius panted out. Clearly the Tickle Monster eased off his attack and considered the proposition.

“No! Sirius is the most ticklish-est - ahhhhhh!” Regulus screamed as the Tickle Monster turned its attack onto the next unfortunate victim.

Turais looked at the large feather in his hand that flashed and glowed blue, gold, and white majestically in the dim hallways. Then he looked up into the room and saw the brilliant twinkle in his friend’s shining blue eyes that lit up like a supernova when Regulus climbed onto him for his retaliatory strike.

Turais watched and smiled in realization. He quietly retreated back to his room and placed the quill in the centre of his cupboard. Stepping back, he saw the magnificent feather luminating its surrounding darkness with the dynamic vibrancy and lustre, but it was no longer as striking for he had seen something even brighter - something he saw in his own eyes and cherished every single day.

Turais never mentioned the gift again.

Chapter End Notes

It’s the 1970 Quidditch World Cup Final! I wonder who Turais will run into?

Did anyone go back to find where Kaiden Potter made a cameo? Let me know in the comments if you found him!

The next chapter is Chapter 22: The Seven Potters. Until next time!

- ravenclawblues 2019-11-30
The Seven Potters

Chapter Notes

Hey everybody,

I am posting the chapter early this week, happy reading!

Finals are starting so next chapter will be posted in two weeks' time (so no update next week).

- ravenclawblues 2019-12-06

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 22

THE SEVEN POTTERS

August 21, 1970 (Saturday)

ENGLAND V LIECHTENSTEIN

by A. Carnierus, Quidditch Correspondent

Dramatic Win over Host Nation For Best Showing in A Century

Face Off with Dark Horse Liechtenstein for Top Prize This Sunday

A seemingly inconsequential late-game penalty in a brutal five-hour match had dramatically resulted in a narrow victory for England. The penalty was called in favour of the English side, which Chaser and Team Captain Gerard dutifully executed. This narrowed the score between them and then-score leader Canada to a 140-points difference. Seconds later, English Seeker Catherine Westermont had caught the Snitch, as she led them to a comeback win and a final score of 560 to 550 against the host nation team (see pamphlet for match predictions). Now, the two European teams will face-off tomorrow in a battle of epic proportions (see page 2 for team details)...

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August 22, 1970 (Sunday)
“Come on! Wake up, you lazy bum! It’s England versus Liechtenstein today!” Turais screamed into Sirius’ ear. Sirius moaned and pulled his duvet desperately over his tousled hair, mumbling something incoherently.

Kreacher suddenly appeared on the bedside drawer armed with a tub filled with ice water and a wicked grin. Turais stepped away from the bed just as Kreacher mercilessly turned the tub over Sirius’ body with his boney arms.

Emerging from the crash of icy water, Sirius shouted and spluttered as he shot up to a sitting position. His hair was drenched and draped like seaweeds over his forehead. Kreacher snapped his fingers and disappeared with his incriminating evidence, leaving Turais with a furious, growling pup.

He suddenly had flashbacks to the moment Dobby dropped Petunia’s pudding onto the floor followed by an enraged roar as -

Sirius pounced at Turais with all his might, slamming the older brother’s back on the floor painfully out of his reverie.

After “successfully” getting Sirius out of bed at the expense of Turais’ demise, the Black household awaited for the Ministry-designated Portkey, which was a dirty leather boot, in the living room to transport them to a campsite in Western Canada. At the exact second of their departure time, Turais felt a tug on his navel as he jerked irresistibly forwards and banged his side painfully against Alex as they spun in swirling colours until suddenly -

Turais’ feet slammed into the ground and he toppled over, flat on his stomach. Feeling queasy in his stomach, he closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths until he flipped around. Suppressing the nauseous feeling that bubbled up inside him, he opened his eyes and saw four wind-swept faces staring down at him.

“For all your magical prowess, why can you never Floo or Portkey properly?” Orion asked teasingly as he pulled his eldest up from the dirt floor.

Alex snickered as he patted Turais’ robes in an attempt to get rid of the dirt. Turais looked around to see they have appeared in a large cave with only one opening.

“Twenty-two past ten from 12 Grimmauld Place, London, United Kingdom.”

A bored voice blared behind them. Turais turned to see two men dressed in brown robes with dark circles under their eyes standing beside the cave entrance tunnel. They were clearly on duty for longer than what was appropriate.

“Welcome to White Goat, Alberta, Canada. You have arrived at the International Portkey Arrival Port One. Please proceed to the Customs Office straight ahead and please note that anti-Apparition and anti-Portkey wards are in effect across the entire campsite.” One of them croaked as the other man held out a hand and Orion handed over his used Portkey.

They lined up amongst wizards and witches from around the globe. Then, when it was their family’s turn to enter the inspection room, they passed through a cascading magic waterfall that washed away all undetectable and latent magic - similar to miniature version of Gringotts’ Thief’s Downfall. Behind the curtain of spells, they found themselves inside one of the several heavily warded rooms where two Customs officers awaited behind a screen of protective Runes. The room was so thick with aggressive protective and anti-Dark spell enchantments that they poked and probed on every inch of his skin and his magic; it felt like being submerged in an iced-over pond.
with the uncomfortable stabbing sensations from coming in contact with the freezing water. Finally, a wand-check was performed to search for improper magic uses and to link it to the magical profile of the witch or wizard before they headed out the other side of the room.

After exiting the office, Turais noticed that they have emerged from the cave and were stood atop a hill that was relatively unoccupied as opposed to the bustling camping grounds below. The Quidditch Stadium, where the match would be held in a few hours, stood magnificently as it glistened in gold and silver at the tip of a distant peninsula surrounded by luscious greenery.

He looked further to the right and saw the clear, turquoise lake, which created a perfect image of the structure, cloudless, blue skies, and snow-capped mountains. Unlike the mountain ranges that he had seen in Europe, Turais noted the endless chains of dark and sharply-chiseled peaks that towered mightily over the scenic forest.

Ignoring the rumbustious Quidditch fans surrounding him for a moment, Turais closed his eyes and immersed himself in the warm sunlight and rustling leaves. A breeze gently brushed by his face and he inhaled deeply. The turpentine, cool scent of resinous junipers and woody cedars filled his nostrils. He also detected notes of fruitiness above the earthy undertones. It felt… different but pleasant, nonetheless.

“This place is wonderful!” Turais gasped when he opened his eyes once again. He had never been to the Rocky Mountains before and he now wondered why on Earth he did not bother to travel here before.

Orion chuckled at his son’s reaction and said, “Yes, Turais. I’ve been here many years ago when I was a teenager with my own grandfather, Sirius Phineas Black. We spent the summer fishing and hunting in the forest hundreds of kilometres northwest of here. On our last night, we even saw two thunderbirds fighting atop one of the mountains, it was the most breathtaking -”

“Orion!” A large, middle-aged man with sandy, pepper hair cried out as he stood midway up the steep hill, panted out loudly. Before he had to trudge up the remainder of his way, Orion spared the man his trouble and walked down to meet him instead.

“Martus! Pleasure to see a familiar face in this international crowd,” Orion said pleasantly as he walked up to shake the man’s hand and continued descending alongside a boisterous crowd of Australians, judging from their yellow robes and partially-transfigured kangaroo tails that swung behind them, that they saw in the Customs line-up behind them. Even though they were still halfway up the slope, the canopy of pines, spruces, and firs growing at the foot of the hill have completely blocked out their view.

“Hello, boys! Ah, this must be young Mr Alex Fawley. Pleasure. Are you related to the Ollivanders? Because that grey hair will remind me of Mr Ollivander ever since he ambushed me,” Martus said as he shook Alex’s hand enthusiastically. Turais frowned at the idea that the wandmaker would ever attack a jolly man as Martus.

Martus Weaver, a Ravenclaw, was one of Orion’s closest friends and a fellow yearmate in Hogwarts. In fact, all of Orion’s closest acquaintances were Ravenclaws. As Martus worked at the Gringotts branch in Italy, he only dropped by a few times to visit Orion every year, but their friendship persisted. Martus scheduled to meet up with the Black household when they arrived as their tents were set up next to each other.

“Hello uncle Martus, I haven’t seen you since I went to Hogwarts! How -” Turais said cheerily.
Suddenly, a large crowd in red, blue, and white with top hats emerged from Customs and started roaring out, “U. S. A.! U. S. A.! U. S. A.!”

Knowing that it was hopeless to continue the conversation here, Martus mouthed something and gestured them to start hiking down the hill.

“You’d think the Americans have won the Cup judging by their enthusiasm!” Marcus shouted out.

“Wait! What happened between you and Mr Ollivander?” Alex asked quickly, clearly eager to hear more about the wandmaker’s antics.

“Well, after I bought my first-year wand, I left the store and barely took two steps when a man suddenly pounced on me. When I turned around, I only saw a messy head of Ollivander greys. It turned out that he has mistaken me for another kid who ran away with a wand,” Martus sighed as he recalled the incident.

“But why would they steal a wand? It won’t work properly!” Alex exclaimed at the absurd idea.

“Well, most children don’t know that until they get their first wand. I always wanted to steal my father’s wand to do magic. I think he was just desperate enough that he just nicked an extra one on his way out while his father was buying a replacement wand,” Martus explained.

They have made it to the base of the hill and the edge of the campsite. Turais could see hundreds of wizards and witches with different outfits and dresses weaving in and out of sight between the messy rows of tents and gigantic tree trunks. Suddenly, two wizards in smart brown robes Apparated directly in front of them as they made chase behind two teenage boys carrying fire torches that shot out golden stars and sizzled against the tent fabrics.

“No fire-producing spells or items on camp grounds!” They bellowed over the rancorous laughter and noisy chatters.

“Anyways, Turais! How was your first year at Hogwarts? I bet you were busy with Slughorn dragging you around his parties.” Martus shouted as he winked at Turais’ blush. “Well, just wait until next year when you are the youngest person to get a cover story on Potions! I believe congratulations are in order. I’m wondering why my son can’t be like you, working on making potions safely indoors - he’s always running around dragons!”

“Hands off my son, Martus,” Orion snapped playfully while pulling Turais away from a foul-smelling, snapping plant in the arms of a short, plump man. “I still don’t know how your Gresham managed to be sorted into Slytherin.” They stepped in between two long rows of tents amongst many that littered across the forest floor.

“Your guess is as good as mine, Orion. But I keep telling you that he must’ve conspired with my brother so that they can split the winnings,” said Martus laughingly as he leaped over a thick tree root and barely avoided a charging moose with a beaver on its back. Two Canadian Ministry wizards were giving chase as the onlookers laughed. All the while, the three brothers were struggling to climb over the roots and getting dirt and moss on their palms. It was moments like these that Turais wished he could grow up soon. After clearing the obstacle, Turais helped his brothers up while casting his eyes forward. The glowing sunlight was now peeking through the thinning layer of trees as they neared the edge of the dense forest.

"Pommel's Oak-Aged Mead! Official partner of the Quidditch World Cup!" A vendor
bellowed as he walked past.

“I’ll never forget that. You told me to go all in with my five Galleons on him being a Gryffindor. Only Adelpius bet Slytherin and he won the entire pool of what - one hundred and ten Galleons?” Orion said as he paused when a couple little girls covered in red and blue body paint zoomed across their path on their toy broomsticks.

As Orion spoke, they have passed by the last of the large conifers and had reached a large, sun-lit clearing. Instead of the mature trees that surrounded the area, small, young conifer saplings that went up to Orion’s height littered the area. Compared to the forest floor where tents were erected messily around the uneven terrain and compact vegetation, this was a neatly laid-out city of tents where rows upon rows of differently shaped and sized tents, clearly magical, stood. People milled around, sporting various costumes and memorabilia of the two finalists. The red and white combination was favoured by most. Somewhere far to their left, there was a large bang as thick red and blue smokes rolled outwards. Probably Liechtenstein fans, Turais thought.

“Woah - father, can I create a betting pool for my Sorting?” Sirius, who zoomed ahead, asked as he ran his fingers along the flat, circular leaves of young aspens. Occasionally, he would hold the branches for a fleeting moment as he passed by before releasing them and watch them bend back and forth like a pendulum.

“No, Sirius.”

“Ah, shucks…” Sirius absentmindedly grabbed a tree branch and let go as he stretched it to its limits...

\textit{Thwack.}

\textit{Sirius}!” Turais fumed as he rubbed his reddened cheekbone. Sirius looked genuinely apologetic but also amused so he swapped between a pout and a smile every few seconds. The adults that passed by him frowned with confusion and concern.

“I’m not waking you up next time. You will just have to miss the Quidditch World Cup final,” Turais scolded. Sirius placed his arm around Turais and muttered a quick “Sorry!” Turais glared but his anger melted at his puppy-eye looks.

“By the way? Who are you most excited to see, boys?” Martus glanced back at the three boys.

“Patrick Gerard!” Sirius shouted excitedly.

“Simon Quigley!” Regulus also shouted at the same time.

Both Gerard and Quigley were Chasers of the English team and in Puddlemere United, the Black family’s favourite League team. Gerard was the League’s Top Chaser for the last season while Quigley was the highest-paid player in the League.

“How about you, Turais?” Martus asked when Turais didn’t respond immediately.

“Oh, he’s totally infatuated with -” said Orion casually.

“Father! I’m not in-” Turais felt his cheeks heat up as he began a feeble protest. But Sirius began to crow and coo unhelpfully. Turais wanted to strangle his bratty brother.

“Turais is \textit{in looooove} with Catherine Westermont,” Sirius slurred as he dodged Turais’
enraged grasp to dart in front of Martus for protection while giggling wildly.

“I’m not!” Turais looked up at the bemused Martus. “Martus! She’s a perfectly decent Seeker!” Catherine Westermont was the prodigal 28-year-old Seeker for Appleby Arrows and the best Seeker in the League for her eighth consecutive year. And she was Turais’ favourite professional Quidditch player despite his allegiance to Puddlemere United (because let’s be frank for a moment, Chudley Cannons was a terrible team).

And most importantly, this was one of the few times he did not feel like he was being a thirty-odd-year-old pedophile creeping on girls that could be his daughter. He was still having difficulties accepting the fact that if he was to marry someone of a similar physical age in this lifetime, it would always feel strange to him psychologically. He shuddered to think what would happen if he was to be reborn into a third life.

“Your son knows how to pick ‘em,” Martus fake-whispered to a smirking Orion.

“Uncle Martus!” Turais felt he was burning up with embarrassment, which was frankly ridiculous, “I -”

“Father, why can they use toy broomsticks? Won’t the Muggles see them?” Regulus winked at Turais as he provided a much needed distraction from his “not-a-celebrity-crush”. Turais sighed a breath of relief as he observed a large group of children a few yards away having a mini Quidditch match with two goalposts and toy brooms.

“Canada is large enough to find many secluded places where Muggles wouldn’t be. This place is very remote and hard to get to using Muggle methods and there are also many Muggle-Repelling enchantments, so it is okay here. But if the Finals were hosted back home, we would need to be much more careful,” Orion explained as he squinted up ahead and over the rows of British and Liechtenstein flags. “Ah, I see our tent!”

After a few more minutes of walking and bumping into various shoulders, they have reached the other side of the clearing, which was in the shadows of the nearby trees.

“Ah, here we are! Perfect location. The Quidditch stadium is just beyond these trees.”

A tall, black three-storey tent was erected in front of them just before the other edge of the forest, towering over the nearby tents. The silver poles and pegs shimmered as Turais saw wisps of protective runes appear and fade away.

“Come on, boys! Let’s check out our home for the night. Martus, I’ll just get them settled in,” Orion waved as he held up the tent flaps for the boys to enter. Turais jaw dropped as he (quite literally) saw golden shimmers in the air as he took in the luxurious multi-storey building, complete with suites, a living room on the second floor, and a kitchen that occupied the entire first floor. The design was reminiscent of the Black Manor with the majestic yet hauntly ambiance, completed with curvilinear furniture and decor. Two Black Manor elves suddenly popped into view with various cookware and ingredients as they were already preparing their meals.

Catching Turais’ gaze, Orion commented airily, “Don’t mind the house-elves, Turais. None of the tents offered a basement unfortunately so we have to make do with having them mill around in full view. But it is only temporary.” Turais nodded without commenting. Orion showed them the rest of the tent and their rooms before leaving the tent to meet up with his other acquaintances. Alex retired to his room, claiming that he was completely exhausted from the trek and wanted to nap before the match began.
“Turais!” Sirius shouted as he opened the door and walked into his room without knocking; Regulus followed behind. “I want to explore the campsite instead of staying indoors. It is so boring!”

Turais grinned. He was thinking about exactly the same thing. Plus, someone had to make sure they were safe from all the strangers, right?

“Okay. But three rules. One, we need to stick together at all times. Two, no talking or following strangers. And three, when I say we need to leave. We leave, no complaints. Deal?”

Sirius groaned while Regulus readily nodded his head.

“Fine…” Sirius said, "Let’s go!”

The three brothers snuck out of the tent behind the house-elves after a well-timed distraction with falling pots and set off across the campsite.

The sun was now fully above their heads as Turais could see the city of tents scattered in between the large conifers.

"Where do you want to head off to first?" Turais asked as he observed the bustling crowd before his eyes. When there was no response, he turned around to ask his brothers again, only to find himself all alone in the middle of busy intersection.


"Sirius!" Turais yelled as he looked in every direction, hoping to find two bobbing heads of black hair. "Regulus!"

'How can I lose them within minutes of leaving the tent?!' Turais screamed in his mind. 'I am not letting Sirius talk me into sneaking out ever again!'

"Young man. Omniculars. Five Galleons a pair," a vendor walked up to Turais and he waved him off and trod back towards their tent.

"Sirius!" Turais' heart rate started to rise as he peeked through the front gardens, sundials, and fountains of various magical tents for his brothers.

"Emma!"

"Regulus! Come out this instant! You're in so much troub-"

"Ooof -" 

Turais slammed into another body as they tumbled onto the ground with Turais lying on top.

"I'm terribly sorry," Turais mumbled as he righted himself and saw the other boy sprawled on the ground, clearly winded. "Um, let me help you." Turais reached out and heaved the other boy back on his feet.

"I'm sorry," Turais apologized again.

"It's alright," the other boy, who looked around Turais' age, said as he patted down his robes to rid him of the grass. He sported a different accent from his own, but it was not American. So Turais guessed he must be Canadian. "I should be the one apologizing. I didn't watch where I was
They both stood awkwardly and eyed each other.

"So -"

"So -"

They spoke at the same time before stopping again. Turais took the plunge and said, "So, I guess I will be seeing you around. I need to find my brothers."

"Oh," the boy said in surprise. "I'm trying to find my sister too. If I lose her, I'm going to be in so much trouble."

"Tell me about it -" Turais said as he looked over the boy's shoulder and spotted his brothers chatting animated with a girl a few yards away and in front of the merchandise stands. "- SIRI! REGGIE!"

Sirius whipped his head towards Turais' direction and waved at him excitedly, completely obvious to Turais' fright and plight.

"EMMA!" The other boy shouted as the girl looked over and stood there stonily.

The two boys ran over to their position in a huff.

"Hey Turais, I -" Sirius started to talk.

"SIRIUS! What did I tell you about staying close to me -" Turais yelled with rage and fury.

"EMMA!" The other boy shouted with similar ferocity. "How dare you run off on your own! You are grounded! -"

"And you too, Regulus! You should know better than to walk with Sirius without notifying me -"

"But -" Sirius tried to argue.

"And I will never sneak us out ever again after this stunt you've pulled!"

"Yeah, what he just said! Sirius! We are heading to our tent right now!"

"Eustace," the girl, Emma, said in a quivering voice. It was only now that Turais noticed that her eyes with red and brimmed with tears. "I -" She burst out in tears as she burrowed her face into the boy's robe.

"Oh, Emma," Eustace wrapped his arms around Emma's head and patted it softly. The fire in his eyes dissipated and was only left with deep concern. "What happened?"

"I..." the girl hiccuped between her watery words, "I... got lost. You... you were walking t...too fast and I couldn't find you..."

"I'm so sorry, Emma," Eustace said softly. "I'm sorry I yelled at you."

Emma sniffed as she rubbed her eyes on the front of his robes. Then, she emerged and pointed at Sirius and Regulus. "T...they found me by myself and off...fered to help me find you. I hope they are not in trouble."
Turais looked at his brothers for confirmation of the story and they both scratched their heads sheepishly.

"I... tried to call out for you but I guess you didn't hear us," Sirius offered. "You always told us to help those in need..."

Turais felt his anger ebb away and was left with only relief and... a bit of pride. He drew his two brothers in and hugged them. "You both did the right thing. I'm so proud of you. I'm sorry for yelling at you just now. I was worried."

"It's okay, Turais," Regulus said. "We're sorry too for leaving you." Turais felt Sirius' head nod in agreement on his left.

"Okay, let me know next time," Turais sighed as he ruffled their hair fondly.

"So..." Sirius asked in a pleading voice, "Can we still look around?"

Turais sighed and shook his head in exasperation. "Fine." While his brothers did their weird celebratory dance, Turais turned back to Eustace and Emma. "Do you want to join us?"

Eustace eyed his sister, who gave her an almost imperceptible nod. "I guess we can stay for just a little bit."

Sirius, Regulus, and Emma immediately ran off towards the nearby merchandise kiosks that displayed a variety of joke items and Quidditch memorabilia and chatted excitedly amongst themselves. Turais and Eustace, on the other hand, hung back and walked together as they kept a close eye on their siblings.

"Pardon me. I believe I haven't properly introduced myself," Turais turned towards his newfound companion. "I am Turais. The eldest of the three brothers."

"And I am Eustace," the boy said, "You British are quite concerned with being primp and proper, aren't you?"

"My brother would beg to differ," Turais quirked his brow at his Sirius.

"Sorry," Eustace said with a grimace. "I meant no offense."

"And you Canadians are quick to apologize, aren't you?"

Eustace gave a small laugh. "You are quite right. So how old are you, exactly?"

"Just celebrated my twelfth birthday last month," Turais said. "Sirius, my second brother, is nine years old while my youngest brother, Regulus, is eight years old."

"Oh! He's the same age as Emma then," Eustace replied. "And I am fifteen."

"So, you're entering fourth year at Ilvermorny, I gather?"

"So you've gathered correctly," Eustace confirmed with a smile. "And you? Hogwarts?"

"Correct. What house are you in?"

"When I was standing on the Gordian Knot during my Sorting, I was honoured to be selected by two different Houses, both the Horned Serpent and Pukwudgie," Eustace said. "But I ultimately chose Pukwudgie. It is the House that rules a wizard's heart, they say."
"Why did you not choose Horned Serpent?" Turais asked.

Eustace sighed. "I knew Horned Serpent was the most famous House and produced many well-known witches and wizards, but... it's... it's boring. You know? And my family has always been sorted into that house. I want to be my own person and create my own legacy, apart from theirs."

"I can appreciate the sentiment," Turais said. "Why don't you guess what House I'm in?"

"Slytherin," Eustace said. Turais gave him an amused look. "Guess how I knew?" Turais shook his head and shrugged. "Well, because I haven't heard any gossips about anyone being disowned from the Black family."

Turais choked upon hearing his words. "That was... unexpected."

Eustace laughed. "You might not know this, but the magical community on this side of the pond actually keep a close eye on your affairs."

"Really?"

"Well, in the Canadian Ministry, we still have a position called the Magus Chancery that is currently held by Lord Patrick Arkenstone. That office technically holds the Council Prerogative, or the highest office of the country, but ever since we repatriated the Constitution a few years ago, the role is largely ceremonial. I swear the Americans have an even larger fixation on British politics and all the antiquity despite their apparent love for a republic."

"Huh, I didn't even know that."

"We are brackish waters to you, I'm sure," Eustace said with depreciating humour.

"I assure you that I never thought such a thing," Turais laughed. "So what does your family do?"

"Oh, we own a meadery," he said. "And you?"

"That's brilliant. My family is sort of a landed gentry," said Turais.

"What is that?" Eustace asked in confusion.

"So basically we collect rent from our properties and invest the gold," Turais explained.

"Huh, that's weird, dude," Eustace scrunched his face, thinking hard. "What happens if you invest in the wrong businesses?"

"Well... your passive income will be less than your expenses. Then you'll run into debt," Turais suggested.

"I guess so. I don't like the idea of sitting on your hands and just hoping that the gold comes in," Eustace admitted, "Sounds like an easy way to empty your vaults, you know? Anyhow, Emma and I should head back now. We have some preparations to do before the game starts."

"It was nice meeting you, Eustace. Let's keep in touch," Turais took his hand and shook it. "I would love to have a pen-pal. What is your family name?"

"I thought you've guessed," the older boy looked surprised. "Pommel. Eustace Pommel."
"Great! I guess I will see you next time," Turais said.

"And next time will be sooner than you think," Eustace said before he walked ahead to collect his sister.

Once they said their goodbyes, the three Black brothers continued to stroll around the campsite. They were just about to head past the two rows of flags before they heard their names.

"Turais!"

He saw a girl waving at him in the distance.

"Natalia!" Turais said as they walked up to the girl. "Fancy seeing you here."

"Won't dare to miss the biggest Wizarding event in the world for anything!" she grinned. "Can you believe England made it to the Finals?!! I'm still trying to wrap my mind around this. I honestly thought the Canadians had it in the bag!"

"It was surely a surprise for all of us," Turais agreed.

"Oh, how rude of me," Natalia said. "Let me introduce you to my family." Natalia poked her head into the modest, brown tent behind her. Moments later, the Arkenstones appeared. "So, this is my dad, Lord Patrick Arkenstone - " Turais took the man's firm grip. " - My mom, Lady Winnie Arkenstone - " an acknowledging tip of his head, " - and my twin brother, Noel."

Turais turned to the boy beside her. They had the same short, blond hair, freckled cheeks, and tanned skin. "Woah, the resemblance is uncanny."

"Yeah, but I wear the look better. I'm also the better twin," the boy smirked as he shook Turais' hand. "Soon-to-be ex-Ravenclaw and aspiring Magizoologist."

"Same as Natalia then," Turais commented. They were both entering their seventh and final year in Hogwarts.


"You have the makings of a great Dragonologist!" Turais laughed.

"Speaking of Dragonologist, we've just met Master Gresham Weaver!" Noel said with a sparkle in his eyes. "We asked to see if we can study dragons under him after we graduated and he said he would consider it after looking at our NEWT scores next year."

"That's brilliant! My father is good friends with Gresham's father," Turais said. "I'll put in a good word for you if you'd like."

"That would be amazing. Thank you, Turais!" Natalia gasped.

Lady Arkenstone placed her well-curated nails on Natalia's shoulder and said to Turais, "Would you and your brothers like to join us for a cup of tea by any chance?"

"Oh, right. I forgot to introduce ourselves," Turais said embarrassingly. "I am Heir Turais Black. They are my brothers, Sirius and Regulus." His brothers gave a unified bow.

"As for tea..." Turais hesitated as he eyed his brothers. Surely, their idea of "exploring" was
not visiting other people's tents. "I... I -"

Natalia said quickly, "Turais, you don't have you if you -"

"Oh hush, Natalia," Lady Arkenstone said as she engaged in a silent staring contest with her daughter. "Please do join us if you have a moment to spare."

"Honestly, Turais, you don't -"

"We'd love to," Sirius said as he nudged Turais sharply with his elbow.

"Brilliant," Lady Arkenstone said as she held the flaps for the three brothers to enter. "Blinky," Lady Arkenstone called out with her soft, melodious voice as a house-elf appeared in front of her and was bent forward in an exaggerated bow. "Would you be so kind as to put the muffins into the oven? And please bring out some tea and biscuits for other guests? Oh, and also some of the elderflower cordial as well as the fresh batch of carrot cakes."

"Yes, milady," the house-elf responded before disappearing into thin air once more.

"My wife is very proud of her cooking," Lord Arkenstone said adoringly as he placed his hand around her waist while gesturing Turais towards the couches.

"And with ample reason," she responded with a smile. She turned towards the Black brothers, "Please make yourselves at home - not you, Noel!"

The offending boy had leaped over the back of the couch and splayed his limbs across it without care. Natalia tutted and stormed noisily to one of the two armchairs and curled up defensively. Soon after, Blinky reappeared with a wide array of finger foods and sweets. As the party was seated, Lady Arkenstone immediately offered various drinks and food.

"What would you like to drink, Mr Black?" she asked sweetly.

"Water will suffice," Turais said.

"Water only? That surely cannot do," she gasped. "You must try the cordial if nothing else. It is very refreshing against the summer heat."

"You will have to indulge her on this one," Lord Arkenstone said. "Many want a glimpse of her recipe. I'd think it must be some family magic if I didn't know better."

"Alright," Turais grinned as he took the large frosted glass from her. She also handed two more glasses to Sirius and Regulus as they sipped the drink happily. She looked at him eagerly as he took a sip. Turais' eyes widened as the cool liquid hit his palate. Clearly his expression appeased her as she smiled brilliantly.

"Now, dear," she said as she offered him a slice. "You must try this with my homemade carrot cake. They are paired so well as if they were soulmates." She looked on dreamily as Noel snorted into his glass.

After another round of "persuasion", it seemed as though Turais had consumed more food than he normally ate in an entire day. Suddenly, Lady Arkenstone turned her attention to Turais with a sudden change of expression from her cheery disposition.

She said in a serious tone, "So, I've heard that Natalia has been facing a bit of difficulties in her House -"
"Mom -" Natalia complained as her mother shot her a withering look.

"- in her House regarding her father's politics," she pressed on as if she was never interrupted. "Is that true?"

"Mom, I'm fine. Honestly!" Natalia protested as her father hushed her to silence. He, too, was looking at Turais intensely as though prompting him to speak.

"There has been some incidents," Turais said carefully as he tried to understand Natalia's non-verbal cues. "But I think it should be better next year, considering some of the more problematic people are no longer present."

"Do you mean Yaxley?" Lady Arkenstone asked sharply. "Was my daughter the one harmed -"

"MOM! I told you it wasn't me -" Natalia said in frustration. "The papers said underage student. Underage! I was already of age when it happened."

"Hush, love, or I will send you to your room. You know how you can never trust those papers entirely," she said. "Mr Black, I wish for you to be completely truthful with us."

"It was not Natalia, Lady," Turais said. "I can attest to that. On my magic."

The parents' eyes met as they nodded at each other, looking more relaxed. Lord Arkenstone spoke up, "Thank you, Mr Black. My daughter just tends to shield us from her woes."

"Dad, you're speaking as though I'm not here," Natalia groaned.

"Oh, love. I had to hear from Xavier Steward that that my daughter was kicked off the team," he admonished. "And by Pucey, no less."

"I think the incoming captain might be more impartial than Laughalot," Turais said.

"Do you think Wilkins is a good choice?" the Lord asked.

"Dad! I told you Michael is my best friend," Natalia groaned. "You've met him multiple times as well! You know he's a perfect choice!"

'Wilkins is the new Slytherin captain? ' Turais thought in surprise. 'Right, Lord Arkenstone is a School Governor so he knows about student nominations. Wilkins seemed to be a friend of Natalia's. Surely that means Natalia had a great shot at returning to the team.'

"I think he will be a good choice," Turais said diplomatically. "He seems to be quite... principled, if nothing else."

"You mean 'stuffy as heck'," Noel snorted, "That chap has the humour of a dead Goblin. Hmmm... Nat, that might explain why you're the way you are -"

"I dare you to finish that sentence," Natalia pulled out her wand and pointed at her twin,

"Natalia, behave," her father said. Natalia stuffed her wand back into her robes as Noel stuck his tongue out tauntingly.

"How about at school?" Lady Arkenstone asked. "Is she being bullied?"

"Mooom! I'm legally an adult. I can deal with a roomful of teenagers," Natalia said
exasperatedly. Her mother glared at her.

"She is doing fine at school, Lady Arkenstone," Turais said soothingly. "I'll keep an eye out as well. But I truly don't think Natalia requires that."

Lady Arkenstone seemed to be placated by Turais' words for now as Turais breathed a sigh of relief from the sudden pseudo-interrogation session.

After exchanging a few more pleasantries that were not school-related, Turais bid them farewell as the Black brothers returned to the rancorous crowds. They have been out for only an hour, but to avoid getting caught missing, they should head back in half an hour. They were browsing aimlessly, passing through thick smogs of blue and red smoke that originated from painted tents of Liechtenstein supporters with numerous banners that screamed: "Für Hekates, Chefttrainer und Quidditch!". A joyous crowd of Leichtenstein supporters were also leaping around in a group dance around a cauldron.

"Are you lost?" Sirius asked as Turais turned to find his brother looking at a boy of similar age. He was fair with flaming red hair, but most importantly, he was trembling as though it was the dead of winter. His eyes darted between the three brothers with fear. "Hey, it's okay," Sirius continued with a soothing voice. "We would like to help you... do you want us to call the Ministry wizards?"

"NO!" the boy shouted as several adults turned towards them in concern. The boy looked panicked and his voice quietened so much that Turais could barely hear him speak. "No... I don't need help. I... I just need to stand here. M...my brother told me to wait for him here..."

"But it's not safe to be alone here," Turais said. "Can we lead you to your tent -"

"Aigel!" A familiar voice sounded from beside him as Turais saw Pierricoeur strolling down between the tents towards them with a bag of treats in his hand. His looks were murderous as he approached them. "Aigel! What did I tell you about not talking to strangers?!" Pierricoeur spared Turais one glance but refused to acknowledge him or his brothers.

"I...I'm sorry, Le-"

"Let's go!" Pierricoeur grabbed the boy's hand and twisted it in a painful angle. The boy whimpered as he was dragged off into the crowd.

"What was that?" Sirius said as he saw them turn a corner and out of view. "Turais, was he the rude Muggleborn that you told us about constantly?"

"Yeah," Turais said as he frowned. "I -"

“Sirius! Turais! Regulus!”

Turais turned to see the one and only James Potter jumping up and down, waving at them with a saucepan in his hand, beside him was a teenager with almost identical appearance but only much taller. The older boy grabbed the younger boy before he could run off and said something into his ears. It clearly annoyed him as they argued for a while before the younger boy’s shoulders slumped in defeat and headed over.

‘He must be Kaiden Potter, the fifth-year.’

James ran over excitedly while his cousin trailed behind.
“Hey Turais,” he said breathlessly, his eyes glanced up at Turais but then quickly turned to Sirius. Pushing his glasses back up the bridge of his nose, he said breathlessly, “Hey… Sirius, how are you doing?”

“Fine, Potter,” Sirius said curtly.

“Umm… I would like to… to… saysorryaboutcallingyouevil,” James mumbled as he bowed his head. Turais could see his ears turning pink.


“Umm… I told Kaiden that I called your grandfather… evil,” James grimaced at the word, “and… um… he said I was mean… and I should saysorry.”

“What?” Sirius asked, this time with a hint of amusement. “Say what?”

“I’m sorry! Okay! I’m not saying it for a fourth time, Black,” James yelled at Sirius’ face indignantly. His cheeks were rosy and his eyes stared intensely. Sirius looked shocked at the outburst for a moment before bursting out into laughter.

“I heard you the first time, James. But I just like to see you squirm,” Sirius smirked.

“You git -” James was about to continue when Kaiden caught up. At this distance, Turais could identify the Black features that were present on Kaiden but absent of James. Unlike James’s hazel eyes, glasses, and wild hair, Kaiden had the Black’s grey eyes, spectacles-free, and had tousled but tameable hair. Nonetheless, the Potter genes were strong in the two boys and they could pass as brothers.

“James, you should not insult someone who you just apologized to. That’s like… the second rule to apologizing,” the taller boy admonished the shorter boy.

“What’s the first rule, then?” James narrowed his eyes through his lens.

“Actually saying ‘sorry’ without mumbling it or yelling it,” said Kaiden.

“Well I ain’t saying it for the fourth time. That’s the third rule,” said James, but he hesitated as he turned back to Sirius. “Umm… you forgive me, right?”

Sirius narrowed his eyes and thought for a while before relaxing his facial features and said, “For now.”

“So that’s a yes, ha! Kaiden, I told you I could do it,” James said triumphantly and he pumped his fist in the air as Turais pondered on whether that pathetic apology even qualified as an apology. He shook his head mentally as he was beginning to understand why Lily hated James so much at the beginning of school. He was a bit of an obnoxious git.

“So! Do you want to check out our tent? It is two stories high, I’m pretty sure it’s the tallest!” James shouted proudly.

“What do you mean, James? I don’t know if I can even see your tent but I bet you can see mine. It’s the tall, black one right there!” Sirius pointed at the Black tent.

“Woah! I haven’t seen that tent for the past two weeks. That’s totally not yours. You’re lying. But anyways, mine’s better inside, Sirius!”
“Sure, whatever you say, James. I need to see it to believe it,” said Sirius. Turais and Kaiden’s gazes met and they both let out an exasperated sigh and shook their heads at the two younger boys.

As they walked towards the Potter tent, Turais mentally prepared himself for meeting not only his once-grandparents but also his once-extended Potter family.

‘They are alive. I will get to meet them. I will be able to converse with them. What should I say? Oh Merlin, I’m not ready for this. I’ve never even met another Potter before. I’m freaking out. Breathe in. Breathe out.’

Turais had arrived just as he was able to regain his senses. As it turned out, the Potter lived only a few tents away from them. They also got the prime tent sites closest to the stadium, which made sense as they were well-off too.

‘The Potter family - the family I never had a chance to grow up with and know.’

Suddenly, another more disturbing thought entered his mind.

‘They all died in my original timeline before my birth, even Kaiden. I will need to save them. I have to. I can’t let the Harry Potter in this world to grow up without knowing his family like I once did.’

“Hey mum, dad! I met my friends!” James’ shout into the tent returned Turais back to the scene in front of him. He will need to act normally and try to get close with them. The Potters and the Blacks are still at odds and a wrong move might be disastrous for Sirius and James’ friendship as well as his ability to become familiar with them. Turais schooled his expression back into a pleasant smile to mask his turbulent emotions.

“James! What did I say about strangers -” Mrs Potter appeared from the tent flaps as she concentrated on scolding James when she looked up and saw the three Black brothers. Her eyes darted to Turais. “Oh, um… hello, Mr Black, sorry for James’ behaviour once again -”

“Oh, no worries, Mrs Potter. I believe Sirius and James made up and their misunderstanding has been cleared up. Right, Sirius?” Turais nudged Sirius, who looked up at him, blinking and confused. “Right, Sirius? The apology?”

His eyes blinked once more, then widened. “Oh? Oh! That, yeah, James said sorry, and I think that’s good enough for me. Anyways, this is my older brother who you’ve met, Heir Turais Black, and this is my younger brother, Regulus Black.”

“Hey mum, can they come in and check out my chocolate frog card collection, please?” James was clearly bored with the conversation and wanted out. Mrs Potter tensed as she glanced at Turais, as though looking for permission.

“Hey Siri, Reggie, do you want to go with James while I talk with Mrs Potter and the rest of them for a while? It’s boring and you really don’t want to stay,” Turais spoke to his brothers.

“Yeah, really boring. You know what’s less boring, chocolate frog cards!” James said dramatically.

His brothers eyed Turais and Turais nodded. Mrs Potter also nodded curtly at her son, who shouted in excitement, as the two younger Black brothers followed a bouncing James into the tent.

“Well, please do join our family for a cup of tea,” Mrs Potter invited as she held the tent flap
for Turais and Kaiden to enter.

Through the crevices, Turais could see the four figures seated around the sitting room. Turais mentally steeled himself. Despite knowing that no amount of preparation would be adequate for what was about to happen. Mrs Potter gave Turais a confused expression and Turais realized that he was standing like a fool in front of the tent.

Turais breathed in deeply and shook his arms nervously.

‘Here I go…’

Chapter End Notes

So you have met Kaiden Potter! Are you ready to meet all the Potters now?! Turais is mightily nervous.

Please follow the link to determine the winner of this edition of the Quidditch World Cup! https://forms.gle/9yFA2vpes6W25kuL6

Next chapter is Chapter 23: 1970 Quidditch World Cup Final. Until next time!

- ravenclawblues 2019-12-06
1970 Quidditch World Cup Final

Chapter Notes

Hey everybody,

Finals are over! And winter holiday is on the horizon. I wish everyone enjoys the festivities and have safe travels.

I am equally excited and nervous to share this chapter with you. Hope you enjoy it!

And I spent a grand total of 30 minutes to whip up the two photoshop logos so here you go. 😊

- ravenclawblues 2019-12-19

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 23

1970 QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP FINAL

August 21, 1970 (Friday)

ENGLAND V LIECHTENSTEIN

by A. Carnierus, Quidditch Correspondent

(page 2 continued)

Meet the Teams:
England National Quidditch Team

Nickname(s): The Three Yellow Dragons

Head Coach: W. Flyworthy

Home Stadium: River Piddle Stadium, Dorset, England

ICWQC Code: ENG

Previous World Cup Title: 1869 (sole title)

Official Robe Colours: Red and White

Chasers: J.C. Bagsworth, P. Gerard (C), S. Quigley

Beaters: T. James, C. Jones

Keeper: H. Zachary

Seeker: C. Westermont

Liechtenstein National Quidditch Team

Nickname(s): The Blues-Reds, The Team of Two Families

Head Coach: F. Frommelt

Home Stadium: Rhienpark Stadion, Vaduz, Liechtenstein

ICWQC Code: LIE

Previous World Cup Title: 1930 (sole title)

Official Robe Colours: Blue and Red

Chasers: A. Konzett, O. Vogt, E. Wenzel

Beaters: P.E. Frommelt, P.T. Frommelt
Turais steeled his resolve and entered the tent. He found the interior to be akin to a cozy three-bedroom suite with a small living room, kitchen, and bathroom. The red and gold gave off a warm vibe as though he was back in the Gryffindor common room. Then his gaze landed on the five adults that were all seated on the couches with their teacups and biscuits, relaxed and happy.

He felt the air sucked out of his lungs as he tensed. Yet he felt himself irresistibly drawn to them as his legs moved forward without his brain’s command as Mrs Potter guided him to the living room area. She seated him on one of the couches and also offered him some tea, which he accepted gratefully. He desperately needed something to do with his hands to hide his nervousness about the upcoming conversation.

He glanced at the five people sitting around him, observing their features and mannerisms while mentally comparing them with the portraits he frequently talked to in the Potter Manor. They were alive, breathing members of the Potter family that he had always wanted to meet but never could… until now.

The man sitting closest to him on his right, Fleamont Potter, had grizzled, greying hair with unconquered curls sprung unruly around his ears and nape. His right eye squinted quizzically through the monocle at him.

“I am Lord Fleamont Potter, but please call me Fleamont. People keep forgetting that the title comes from having a family seat in the Wizengamot. I prefer to limit its use only in the proper setting, separate from my private life.”

“As you wish, Fleamont,” Turais expected the lack of aloofness from the man but he was still surprised from the openness he displayed to the Heir of a family they were in a feud with (an unofficial feud, that was).

“And this is my wife, Euphemia Potter, née Shafiq,” Turais nodded at James’ mother, who looked slightly unnerved. Turais guessed that she was still worried that James had offended his family in some manner. “And you are the eldest son of Orion and Walburga Black?”

Turais nodded. His lips felt parched and he licked it nervously under the unfamiliar weight of their gaze. He never felt quite so pressured to make a good impression before. And he really wanted them to like him.

“Heir Black, you look just like Orion when he was your age - almost identical - except for those vibrant emerald eyes.” Turais turned to his left and faced a middle-aged woman who looked eerily similar to Bellatrix, with the long wavy shoulder-length hair and sharp facial features. However, her jaws and cheeks were softer while her eyes were also kinder, although Turais could still detected a sharp glint within those grey eyes though.

“I presume you are great-aunt Dorea, pleasure to meet you. And please call me Turais,”
Turais gave a little bow and Dorea tensed at the gesture.

“Very well, Turais. And no need to bow to me. We, Potters, are less rigid people compared to your family. And please call me Dorea, I don’t need to be reminded of my age and status,” Dorea said as she gave him a tight smile.

“As you wish... Dorea,” Turais said. The tension in the room was still palpable and Turais was starting to feel like he was unwelcomed. But who could blame the Potters? Ever since Dorea eloped with Charlus, then Lord Sirius Phineas Black, Arcturus’ father, stopped all official communication between the Black family and the Potter family. That was basically one step short of declaring an open feud between two families and Arcturus neither had the mind nor the incentive to change that. Hence, the two families have not been in direct contact with each other for at least three decades.

And here Turais was, crashing into the Potter tent with the newest generation of Blacks as though the past thirty odd years of thinly-disguised feud never occurred.

“So, does Heir Black know you are running about and walking into a Potter tent?” Dorea asked carefully. “I’m sure you understand the delicate position that our families are in.”

“No, we snuck out to explore the campsite,” Turais said truthfully. “And I understand the ongoing situation between us. But please believe me that I bear no ill intentions.” Upon his words, he felt some of the tension in the tent evaporated.

‘Was it because I showed a rebellious streak? Well, thanks for the idea, Sirius.’

“Well, well. I didn’t think I would live to see the day a Black ‘sneak out’ of anything but trouble,” a second man who Turais recognized as Charlus spoke. “Of course, besides you, Dorea. You snuck out on the Blacks - ouch!”

Dorea stomped on her husband’s foot hastily and flushed as she saw Turais looking at her.

“No offense taken, Dorea,” Turais said with a smile as Charlus scratched his head sheepishly. “Some branches of the family are problematic,” Turais pressed on to make a good impression. And, it was the truth. “My grandfather Pollux sent me a 16th-century vase that depicted the beheading of Muggles by wizards for my twelfth birthday, which was just blatantly distasteful. And my cousin Bellatrix is plain sadistic.”

The Potters blinked at Turais’ words. Clearly they hadn’t expect a Black, the Heir no less, to speak badly about his family.

“Well, colour me surprised, Dorea. Kaiden is right; he is the rare sort. By the way, I’m Charlus, happily married to Dorea and unfortunately saddled with this broom-head dork.” Charlus shook Turais’ hand warmly as Kaiden scowled, looking mightily offended by his father’s words.

“Dad! You’re embarrassing me!” Kaiden cried out.

So Kaiden was Dorea’s son who was attending Hogwarts. But why didn’t Kaiden have his own portrait at the Potter Manor? It was Wizarding tradition that one sat down for a portrait when they were of age, especially for traditional pureblood families such as the Potters. Turais gulped as he considered the implication while eying the animated, carefree boy in front of him.

Turais also knew that Charlus, or Kaiden’s father, and Fleamont were third cousins. So Kaiden was almost as unrelated to James as purebloods sharing the same family name could possibly be. Stranger yet, Turais was technically second cousins once removed with Kaiden
through Dorea, making him *more closely blood-related* to Kaiden as Turais Black than when he was as Harry Potter (fourth cousins once removed - does this even count as being related?). But in his mind, they were still indisputably part of the Potter family.

“Were you just humouring me with nods and affirmations, father?” Kaiden snapped mildly at his father over his mother’s head.

“Well, can you blame me, Kaiden? My mind still refuses to associate his face with what he just said,” Kaiden’s father responded. Then he peered at him inquisitively, “Are you sure you’re a Black?”

“As much as you’re sure you’re a Potter, Charlus,” Turais returned readily. Charlus blinked at the quick retort.

“Well, you sound just like my wife here. Nice to meet you, Turais,” Charlus shook his hand. “I’ve heard many stories from Kaiden, many good things, in fact, which surprised me. If you would forgive me, but -”

“Charlus, if I may be frank for a moment -” He had to address the erumpent in the room, “- My father’s branch of the family is quite different from my mother’s. So if your perception of my brothers and I are solely based on Dorea’s immediate family or my maternal side, you are gravely mistaken. I implore you to keep an open mind,” Turais spoke firmly. “As Dorea should know, my maternal family’s influence on us is limited.”

Charlus was sufficiently abashed while Dorea arched her thin eyebrows in surprise. Despite not appearing at any family gatherings since she married Charlus Potter thirty-odd years ago, she was never disowned by the family and therefore knew of Walburga’s shameful expulsion by Arcturus through the Black family magic. She understood Turais’ veiled insinuation.

“Of course, Turais. Please forgive us. It has been a long while since our families conversed cordially over a pot of tea,” Dorea smiled before moving to a safer topic. “I’ve heard from Fleamont that you are the youngest person to ever be awarded the cover story of *Potions*. Congratulations, your family must be most proud.”

“Oh, were you one of my peer-reviewers, Fleamont?” Turais gasped in surprise when Fleamont nodded. But he then realized that Fleamont was the inventor of the Sleekeasy’s Hair Potion and a renowned Potioneer in his own right, so there was a high chance Turais’ transcript could have made its way into his hands for review. “It was an accidental discovery, I didn’t do much to deserve the cover story, really.”

“Well, it is a fundamental change in our understanding of Potions, Turais. You might not realize it, but for centuries we assumed that all herbaceous plants must be used in its entirety in potions. Now, you’ve discovered that parts ofaconite, an herb, could be used separately. You should be able to imagine how useful it is, considering your joint endeavour on a certain potion,” Fleamont smiled at him, his eyes twinkled. Turais knew that the potion was still under review for safety and efficacy and the news was still confidential. “In all frankness, I truly believe the discoveries made during your creation of the product might far outweigh the actual product itself. And that is saying quite a lot.”

“Well, I am just glad the knowledge can be used for some good in the world. Merlin knows the world needs it, now more than ever,” said Turais, remembering that the threats of war still loomed heavily despite the festivity and facade of peace.

“And how is Hogwarts treating you? Kaiden here is most excited about you. He never stops
raving about you,” Dorea smiled and patted her son’s head and ran her hand through his hair. Kaiden shook his head in an attempt to stop the affectionate gesture.

“Mum! I’m almost seventeen -”

“You’ve just turned fifteen -” Charlus interrupted.

Kaiden paid no attention and continued protesting, ”- and an adult. Can you stop petting my head? And it’s not my fault that all the first-year girls can’t stop gushing about the kind, clever, and handsome prince from Slytherin.”

Turais felt his cheeks heat up uncomfortably as he blanched at a disturbing thought.

‘This is so awkward. I don’t want first-years to crush on me. In fact, let’s not think about this. Yes, ‘ignorance is bliss’ has never been truer.’

“Aw, you’re blushing, Rais,” Kaiden smirked as he conveniently pointed out the painfully obvious fact. “Don’t worry, just wait until you get to fourth-year, imagine all the gifts you will receive -”

“No, we’re not talking about my crushes, Kaiden,” Turais said exasperatedly but in good humour, “And my name is Turais, not Rais.”

“Well, I ain’t calling you Too-Raise, ugh!” Kaiden made disgusted expression. “That such a mouthful -”

“Why?” Turais sniped. “A two syllable word is too advanced for you, Kay?”

“Only one person has ever called me that. But I can make an exception for you, Rais,” Kaiden grinned impishly. Turais couldn’t help but roll his eyes.

“Kaiden, stop teasing him,” Dorea scolded her son before turning her head back to Turais. Meanwhile Kaiden was making a funny face and sticking his tongue out behind his mum’s head. Turais cracked a smile as he shook his head. “He gets over-excited sometimes -”

“Hey, that’s James you’re talking about. I’m all mature and got him to apologize to Sirius. Apologize! He never does,” Kaiden said offendedly.

“Yes, yes. Of course, you’ve achieved such a lofty achievement,” Charlus said dismissively.

“Well, I think it’s an achievement worthy of a new broomstick -” Kaiden started when his parents both scoffed at him.

“Your Cleansweep works just fine -” said Dorea.

“And you just got that last year -” Charlus finished the sentence.

“But dad, the Nimbus 1700 is so much better! I can’t win the Quidditch Cup and I’m captain this year -” Kaiden whined.

“Nice try, but it’s still a no -” Charlus shot down the idea.

“Uncle Fleamont, how about my birthday -” Kaiden quickly turned to his uncle.

“You’re not buying him another broom, Fleamont -” Euphemia turned to her husband.
“Don’t look at me, you heard your mum, Kaiden,” Fleamont raised his hands in surrender and smiled apologetically.

“Well Kay, I have a Nimbus 1700 and you bet I’ll be getting on my House team this year. I will personally make sure you’re put in your proper place - which is - without the Quidditch Cup,” Turais teased as Kaiden groaned in his hands.

“Urgh, maaa! A second-year has a better broom than a fifth-year Quidditch team captain -” Kaiden sobered up suddenly, " - Wait, what position are you planning on taking?"

"Seeker -"

"Maaaa! A Seeker that has the best broom on the market. We'll never stand a chance. How’s that fair?" Kaiden whined again.

“It’s not fair, that’s sort of the point,” Turais pointed out. Kaiden let out a screech similar to the dying wail of a banshee.

“Turais - do me a favour and stop riling him up,” Charlus said as he side-eyed his dramatic son, who had now collapsed onto the couch messily. “Especially if you’re not helping to clean up this mess of a human.”

“The Potter ancestors are turning in their graves that a Black has beaten us to a better broom,” Kaiden cried out.

“I’ll go ask their portraits for you,” Turais said with a grin. “I’m certain they are perfectly content.” And he knew that for a fact.

Kaiden shot up and glared at him. "You're some clever clogs, aren't you?" He turned dramatically towards his mother and gestured the offending boy across him. "Maaaa! Look at what I have to deal with!"

“Yes, yes. I see a sweet young man who can control your unruly behaviour,” Dorea said as she winked at Turais. Kaiden looked betrayed.

"Fitha! You have seen me play. You know how good I am. If I can have a Nimbus, I will definitely snag the Cup!" Kaiden said pleadingly. "Turais, tell them!"

"I... uh... I actually haven't seen you play..." Turais admitted. "I didn't even know you were on the team until James told me."

Kaiden stared at Turais with slacked jaws.

"H...how - what? - huh?" he asked incomprehensibly. "I played three games this year, wait, only two actually because..." Kaiden's expression turned sheepish.

"Because this bumbling fool accidentally squirted bubotuber pus into his eye the day before the Gryffindor-Slytherin match," Charlus completed the sentence as Kaiden flushed. "Thank Merlin that you're not so irreplaceable that they managed to squeak out a win without you."

"Oh! You were the Chaser that was substituted out for that match," Turais suddenly recalled.

"Yeah..." Kaiden rubbed the back of his neck. "But the other two games!"

Turais remembered that the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff game was the day after his duel with
Yaxley so he missed that match. As for the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw match... he was busy editing his Potions transcript and passed on the match.

"Yeah, I missed those matches, sorry!" Turais said but Kaiden had already abandoned this plan and was reverted back to his whining tactics once more.

"Maaa! But a Nimbus -" "Did I hear Nimbus? Can I get a broomstick?" James shouted as he emerged from his sleeping area.

"NO!" All the adults in the room shouted. Turais couldn’t help but laugh alongside the family.

"No Nimbus for me -" Kaiden said dejectedly.

“Well, I don’t even have a broom, Kaiden,” James complained as well. Turais saw the adults grimace. Clearly this conversation happened quite often. He looked around the room and took in the sight of the six Potters in front of him. He could almost imagine what could have been if Voldemort didn't try to take over the world. He would have been in this room as the legitimate seventh Potter. But despite the imperfection, Turais wanted to be in their presence in whatever capacity possible. The last thing he wanted to do was leave this place but he also knew not to overstay his welcome on the first visit.

'There will be other opportunities really soon,' Turais comforted himself.

Schooling his voice, he spoke up teasingly, “Well, this is a conversation I surely do not want to engage in.” Turais placed his tea on the side table and stood up. “And I think it is about time I take Sirius and Regulus back to our tent before my father finds us missing.”

“Of course, we wouldn’t want to get you into trouble,” Dorea said quickly as she stood up. “James, go tell your friends that it’s time to leave.”

James ran out of view and after a minute, brought out a disgruntled Sirius who was dragging his feet. Regulus, on the other hand, quickly walked over to Turais’ side.

“Turais, can we stay for a bit longer? James has the gold version of Bertie Bott!” Sirius whined. Bertie Bott was a very rare card and the special gold version was one of the most exclusive cards in the collection. It was rumoured that there were only 77 cards in circulation.

“Siri, remember rule number three?” Turais reminded his brother. “We don’t want to have father becoming worried.”

“But Turais -”

“Sirius, now,” Turais said firmly.

“Turais -”

“Sirius! I will not repeat myself.” Turais used his “Heir Black” voice, which caused everyone to jump at the tone. Then he said in a normal voice, “Say goodbye to James and the Potters, we can visit them after the match if they are fine with it. Okay?”

Sirius nodded quickly and obeyed.
“Of course, you can visit anytime, Sirius,” James said before asking his mother. “Right, mum?”

“Yes, of course, dear,” Euphemia smiled. This time, it felt relaxed and genuine.


“Thank you for your hospitality. It was a pleasure to meet all of you,” said Turais. As he exited the tent, he couldn't resist the temptation and took one final glance at the family. His gaze connected with Dorea, and very briefly, Turais froze. However, she smiled and Turais relaxed. He gave a polite nod and the gesture was returned.

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Miraculously, Orion did not notice that his sons were missing. Their father appeared barely a minute after they have returned to their tents and told them to get ready in an hour for a quick meal before heading over to the stadium ahead of the crowd.

Turais took the opportunity to hide himself in his room to process what had just transpired.

His family. All so alive. So energetic. So Potter. They were so much better than he could ever imagine and beyond his wildest imaginations. Their portraits were a pale imitation of their true personalities... and the friendly banters without heat or worry of offending anyone, unlike the way he had lived for the past decade where he had to consider his every word, plan his every move, analyze everyone's intentions and motives...

Seeing them had caused something to rupture deep inside him, as though a heavily scarred wound had been rubbed raw and bleeding once more...

Turais felt a small splatter of liquid on the back of his hand and realized that he was crying. Tears of regret in his previous lifetime and tears of joy of a gained opportunity in this one. Turais would make sure to protect them with all his might.

He must.

Not only for him. But also the Harry Potter of this timeline.

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"GO ENGLAND GO! GO ENGLAND GO!"

Bright lights of red and white flickered through the tent flaps as Orion eyed the entrance with annoyance.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang followed by loud shouts and screams from outside the tent. Orion placed the fork down on the table and left to investigate the matter. The four boys could hear Orion's voice shouting out: "Take this ruckus away from our - oh, hello... "
Orion's shout turned into a silent murmur as though he was in a conversation with someone. Turais', as well as his companions', curiosity overcame their patience as they walked down the stairs to find Orion casting both a Silencing and Freezing charm on an alphorn-like object that was lying on the grass.

"What is the matter, father?" Turais asked as he ventured closer. Before he got a closer look at the object, Turais noticed his cousins, Gerald and Geoffrey, standing outside the tent.

"Hey Gerald, Geoffrey!" Alex greeted as the red and white smoke started to flow out of the tube once again. "What on Earth is th-"

"GO ENGLAND GO!" The object blared like an Alarm Spell at maximum volume as everyone jumped and covered their ears. "GO ENG-

"SILENCIO!" Orion shouted as object fell silent once more.

"That scared the bejesus out of me," Alex panted as he uncovered his ears. "What the heck is this?"

Gerald scratched the nape of his hair in chagrin. "Well... I bought it from a vendor and it's called a Dissimulator, apparently. It's supposed to shout out cheers, emit smoke, and flash in colours of your supporting team but..."

"But it seems like its malfunctioning from the looks of it," Geoffrey finished with a grimace. "And Gerald spent five Galleons on it too."

"Yeah," Gerald said dejectedly as he kicked at the idle Dissimulator. "What rubbish... it was working fine until I was about to come in -"

Orion's eyes shot up upon those words. "Ah... I probably know what the issue is."

"You do?" Geoffrey asked.

"It is likely that the wards around the tents are identifying this... Dissimulator as a weapon... a threat, if you will, and is, therefore, interfering with its function," Orion said.

"I'm inclined to agree it is a threat to my hearing," Turais supplied with a grin.

"I'm going to transfigure it into something else so it can bypass the wards for now," Orion said. "Just make certain to not transfigure it back inside the tent. I seriously hope this thing doesn't become a permanent fixture in Quidditch matches..."

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The Macmillan brothers spent the rest of the afternoon with them talking about everything related to Quidditch, including theoretical Quidditch player match-ups, player and team statistics, and gameplay strategies. Jonty and the Steward family also came for a short visit. All the while, Orion was occupied with visits from many of his friends and acquaintances.

Hours filled with laughter passed by quickly until it was finally time to head up to main event of the day. On their way to the stadium, Orion purchased some ridiculously overpriced
Omnioculars for everyone and followed the largely empty lantern-lit trail towards the gigantic stadium. Turais stared up the tremendously tall gold walls and sideways to the seemingly never-ending structure in awe.

“This stadium seats around seventy thousand people,” Orion explained as they headed towards the ticket witch at the entrance and handed her the tickets. This was the Black brothers’ first World Cup games, hence, this made the treat all the more special.

“Top box tickets!” The witch exclaimed as she checked their tickets. “As high as you can go, Mr Black.”

The Black household entered the almost-empty stadium as they climbed up the stairs. Passing by numerous doorways to their left and right that led to various floors and seats, they continued to climb until they found themselves looking up at one of nine small boxes in a column that extended higher than the rest of the stadium like the horn of a mountain. Six of the lower boxes housed seven people each while the top three boxes could fit a large group of thirty people. All of these boxes were located at the highest point of the stadium and exactly halfway between the goalposts. They had the best views that money and power could buy in this tournament.

“Top Box Five - the Black family. Please follow me,” one of the many Canadian Ministry guards that stood between them and the boxes checked their tickets and directed them to their designated location. Turais guessed that the increase in security was due to the gathering of the most prominent members of society in this tiny sliver of space. As they passed the gates, the wooden stairs that they trudged up on were now covered by thick, heavy purple carpets with golden handlebars that reflected the status of the guests who used them.

Once they reached the box, they found that Arcturus and Melania were already seated together in one end of the line of seven purple armchairs. Beside the seats laid a lavish spread of local delicacies and snacks: caviar, salmon, honey, Angus beef sliders, Okanagan red wine, a basket of locally-grown fruits, and a constantly refilling plate of Pommel’s Canadian Oak-aged mead bottles.

"Pommel,' Turais thought, 'That name sounds oddly familiar.'

“Father, mother! I see that you have beaten us to our seats. Brilliant view, isn’t it?” Orion greeted his parents, gesturing the panoramic view of the entire Quidditch pitch and the advertisements that flashed brilliantly above the empty pitch. Orion immediately opened up a bottle of red wine and sampled its content.

“Of course it is,” Arcturus said sharply. “I am, however, disappointed to have just found out that Abraxas Malfoy succeeded in snagging Top Box Four with his very generous donation to the Canadian Ministry’s Department of Magical Sports and Recreations.”

“But, grandfather, this is actually a blessing in disguise. Top Box Number Three contains the family members of the English team. Do you really want to be directly below all the thumping, screaming, and wallowing?” Turais pointed out as Arcturus considered his arguments. After a moment, Arcturus seemed to have accepted that the potential suffering of the Malfoys was enough to appease his wounded pride and he relaxed his frown. Turais shot Orion a small grin and received one in return.

As they waited, thousands and thousands of witches and wizards began to fill their seats and the stadium steadily grew louder and noisier. The boxes above and below them also filled gradually. Turais was beside the adults greeting and meeting various important Canadian, British, and Liechtenstein Ministry officials.
Various family members of the Liechtenstein and England Quidditch teams greeted them as they passed by to reach the reserved Top Boxes Two and Three. During the greetings, Turais recognized some of their last names from famous Quidditch players from the Quidditch league teams, such as Quigley and Gerard. Turais almost gave an undignified squeak when he met the older brother of the star Seeker for the Team England, Collin Westermont. Orion gave him an amused look after the encounter as Turais blushed at his embarrassing fumble.

They also met the prominent Canadian and American magical families...

"Turais!" Emma shouted as she climbed up the stairs with her family behind her. Eustace, Mr and Mrs Pommel were also present. Emma ran over and gave Turais a big hug.

"Oh hello, Emma. Eustace," Turais greeted as he saw Orion and Arcturus raise their eyebrows. He was so caught out this time.

"Oh, dear me," Mrs Pommel said in pleasantly surprise. "I didn't know that our kids have met before today."

"I'm sure they've just met today," Orion said with a knowing look while Mrs Pommel blinked in confusion. As the adults made small talk, Turais and Eustace engaged in their own conversation.

"I guess that's what you meant by 'next time will be soon than I think'," Turais muttered as he shook hands with him.

"You're busted, aren't you?" Eustace said with sympathy. "Sorry 'bout that. I just knew you were on the guest list in the Top Boxes so there was a good chance we'd meet here."

"Well, I should have known. Your family sponsored half the event and your labelled mead is everywhere," Turais admitted.

"You're not in any trouble, are you?"

"Don't worry," Turais said as he eyed his father. "I'll survive."

Eustace grimaced.

As it appeared, the Canadian Berrycloths and Pommels were guests of the Canadian Ministry in Top Box One. The American Perrys and Bonnevilles scored Boxes Six and Seven below them while the French Lefévres landed with the eighth box. Turais greeted his fellow Slytherin first-year, Stefanie Smethwyck, when he saw her arrive with the Lefévre party and they were very excited to see each other in a place thousands of miles away from home.

When the movement around the Top Box trickled down, Turais excused himself and rejoined his brothers and Alex to look out into the stadium, soaking up every single detail of the largest event in the Magical World without the worries of an impending Death Eaters attack.

“HEY, SIRIUS!” James Potter’s voice sounded out from below. Turais leaned forward slightly over the railing and saw the entire Potter household... and Wilkins... standing four boxes down from theirs.

“HEY, JAMES!” Sirius waved at the boy below. Turais turned to see the adults raising their eyebrows questioningly.

“Sirius met James Potter in Diagon Alley a few times over the two summers and they became fast friends,” Turais offered the half-truth as he ignored the portion where they were at odds for
those encounters and then reconciled today.

“Oh, really?” Orion asked. “I was under the impression that they were… unfriendly… unless something happened between last month and… today?”

Orion gave Turais a piercing look and he gulped.

‘He knows.’

“Father, I will explain everything afterwards. It is a complicated story.”

“Hmmpf… I wonder what magic Fleamont Potter used to snag those tickets, I never thought of him as an avid Quidditch fan…” Arcturus muttered to himself before addressing his grandsons. “The Potters are a Light family and they do not treat families like us with the respect we deserve. But… since Sirius…” Arcturus’ expression flashed on annoyance, ” - has reacted to the call of that Potter boy, and etiquette dictates that we must engage with them… Sirius -” Sirius snapped to attention and froze. “- please sharpen up your act, I do not want to be embarrassed by your behaviour any further.” Arcturus motioned to leave their box and travel to the Potters’ box.

Turais was now relieved that they have met the Potters prior to the match and had an ice-breaker conversation about his family. At least the Potters would not be openly hostile towards them. Hopefully, Arcturus’ sharp tongue would not be too scathing. But Turais could only hope.

After climbing several staircases down and nodding at the newly acquainted American and French families. They have reached Top Box Nine. As Arcturus came into view, everyone in the box stood up.

“Lord Black,” Fleamont walked up to Arcturus and shook his hand. “I did not expect to see you.”

This was quite a monumental moment. Lord Black and Lord Potter conversing with each other. This was a first in many years.

“In the Top Box or in your box? Lord Potter,” Arcturus returned with a slight mockery in his tone.

Fleamont laughed joyfully as though Arcturus had just said an especially funny joke. “Both, Lord Black -” Arcturus’ face remained impassive, “- but it is because I couldn’t believe we managed retrieve Top Box tickets - it was a bit of a surprise. But I’m glad we managed to obtain them, especially since we watched England win the quarter- and semi-final here as well.” Turais looked closely at the boy, who stood beside Kaiden and did not share any resemblance with the Potter family, and widened his eyes in realization.

"Nice to see you well, Dorea," Arcturus stepped forward to greet his estranged relative.

"You look well yourself, Lord Black," Dorea curtsied.

Pointedly ignoring Charlus, Arcturus immediately turned to the odd Slytherin in the room. “Ah, you must Carmichael Wilkins, a surprise to see you here with the Potters,” Arcturus shook hands with the boy with dark hair, hazelnut eyes, and a strong facial features that was arranged with a frown that largely contrasted the mostly jovial expressions of the Potters.

“Pleasure to meet you too, Lord Black. Lord Potter heard of my immense interest in Quidditch through his nephew and I am very grateful for his invitation to the Top Box,” the boy said with a frown.
“I did not realize your two families shared such a strong bond,” Arcturus said inquiringly.

“Oh, I wouldn’t put it as such. Kaiden shares the same intense passion for the sport as Carmichael and they respect each other immensely both on the Quidditch pitch and off. Now that Carmichael is turning sixteen in under a week, I just couldn’t resist to treat this as an early birthday present considering we had a spare seventh ticket.”

“Of course, that is quite generous of you,” Orion said pleasantly. "I have heard that Carmichael is quite the Quidditch expert. Please allow me to congratulate you on becoming Slytherin Quidditch Team captain -” Orion continued with a slightly less warming tone as he turned to Kaiden and said, “- and to you as well, Kaiden Potter, for becoming the captain for Gryffindor.”

“Thank you, Heir Black,” Kaiden responded stiffly.

“Well, I wish you good luck, although I’m afraid I have a vested interest with the Slytherins," Orion said cordially. "Furthermore, Turais, my eldest son here, intends to try out for the team once he returns to school.”

Fleamont laughed at his words. “No harm, Heir Black. There is more than enough support for the Gryffindors in my own household, especially when one of our own is on the team,” Fleamont said and gestured his son, James. “Well, my son James is quite excited to spot your second son, Sirius. I was wondering if you could spare him for a moment so they can reacquaint themselves?”

Arcturus looked like he was on the verge of refusing when Turais stepped in, "Grandfather, I would like to chat with Wilkins regarding the Quidditch trials this year as well."

He considered Turais' words for a moment, his eyes flashing knowingly at the excited Sirius, before relenting.

“Very well. Please be careful,” Arcturus said to Turais, although everyone knew the words were directed to Sirius. “We will head back to our box then, Lord Potter. Please enjoy the match.”

“Of course, Lord Black. You as well. I will ensure that Sirius is returned safely to your hands,” Fleamont said.

Turais turned to the adults and said, “Grandfather, I will follow you up shortly.” Arcturus nodded and beckoned Melania and Orion to follow him. Sirius and James were bubbling with excitement but held their composure until the adults went out of sight. Turais said to Sirius, “Okay, Siri. Do not annoy the Potters or Wilkins, do you understand?”

Sirius nodded absent-mindedly before he bounced into the box and started to chat with James animatedly. Turais nodded at Wilkins, who narrowed his eyes at him, before asking Regulus, “Reggie, do you want to join them?”

Regulus shook his head and Turais brought him back to their box after a quick wave at the Potters and at Wilkins.

As they climbed up the wooden staircase, a familiar figure with long, pale hair stood atop their designated landing.

"Turais, fancy seeing you here," the older boy drawled as he shifted his cane from one hand to the other.

"Likewise, Lucius," Turais said.
"I see you have lost a brother along the way," Malfoy said. "I do fear for your family. I don't know how much shock your allies can take from having two unconventional sons of Black," Lucius looked at Regulus, "Perhaps that's why there's a third. For the likely case that both you and Sirius lead your family to ruins, at least someone will survive your family's legacy."

"Fighting words, Lucius," Turais said as his arm wrapped around Regulus defensively. "I'll ensure that our family is the one that comes out on top through this impending conflict."

"Impending conflict?" Malfoy chuckled. "The last one never ended."

On that note, he turned and left the landing.

After a moment, Turais collected himself and guided Regulus up the stairs. When he reached the family box, he found Arcturus engaged in a conversation with none other than the Minister of Magic, Eugenia Jenkins, and Abraxas Malfoy. Lucius Malfoy was stood beside his father and merely arched a brow when Turais arrived. The Ministry aides hovered beside and glanced nervously between three of the biggest players in the current British political world - only Dumbledore was amiss.

" - air is cleaner the higher up you are, Arcturus," Abraxas Malfoy said.

"I quite agree, Abraxas. And nice to meet you too, Minister. I hope the riots are not giving you too much of a headache?" Arcturus asked casually.

Eugenia Jenkins pursed her lips as she narrowed her hawk-like yellow eyes at his grandfather. After a moment, she spoke in a crisp, authoritative tone, "Thank you for your concern, Lord Black. The arrests and raids have been very successful, however, I have become quite impatient with the lack of verdicts from both the High Court and the Grand Jury Court on the recent... incidents. Pray tell what I can do to remedy the situation?"

"Now, Minister. Our court is overwhelmed with the amount of cases that your highly effective Aurors Office has presented. They are simply arresting too many people for crimes that lacked any incriminating evidence and most of which I believe would turn out to be frivolous lawsuits," Abraxas Malfoy smirked at the Minister’s thinning lips. "Perhaps you could consider an amnesty as we have discussed previously?"

One way Abraxas Malfoy amassed power and influence was by slow-walking and staying many cases that implicated his allies. Due to the High Court’s jurisdiction of appealing cases and overseeing new trials, he could effectively stall and delay any minor cases indefinitely by overturning rulings and controlling the appeals process. This is particularly effective at controlling his allies as the difference between any time spent in Azkaban to house arrest was enormous for any family.

Arcturus Black’s Grand Jury Court dealt with more severe cases, such as murder and usage of Unforgivables. Due to the nature of those cases, which would inevitably end with at least a sentence in Azkaban, was less readily useful for controlling allies as the difference between one year or one month in Azkaban was negligible to most. Azkaban was, well, Azkaban.

"Abraxas, my friend, my Court will continue to extend our offer to take on some of the more sensitive cases from you -" Arcturus glanced mildly at his fellow Lord. " - we are always here to help whenever you are willing to accept it."

"I doubt that would do any good, Arcturus. The Guilford case has been passed to your Court for nearly five months now and I have hardly received any news of its advancement," Abraxas
Malfoy responded.

Arcturus had agreed to Turais’ request to stay the Guilford case in order to control Evan Rosier’s vote in the Group meeting. Secretly, Turais thought that Arcturus was ready to agree to anything in which he could get back at the Malfoys. In this case, it would be curbing Lucius Malfoy’s influence in Hogwarts.

“I know that you have special interest in this case and I will forgive you for your rash overstepping,” Arcturus said as Malfoy senior bristled, “If I recall, your Court spent one year on an assault and theft charge combing through the intricacies, I assure you that a murder charge requires an even closer scrutiny. However, I promise you that more straight-forward and well-established cases, such as the Yaxley case, would easily be fast-tracked. Wouldn’t you agree, Minister?”

The Yaxley case, which Turais was involved in as a victim, was provided a sentence in three months, nearly unheard of in the Grand Jury Court where cases typically stew for years. Of course, Arcturus’ pressure on the case as his own grandson was involved helped advance it in record speed. But Jenkins understood that if Arcturus was motivated enough, she would be able to get much more done with Arcturus’ help instead of Abraxas Malfoy’s, who had no intention of ceding his control over his allies.

Minister Jenkins glared at both men who have given her much grievances in the Ministry with thinly-veiled contempt. However, she had decided that one of them was the lesser of two evils and gritted out, “Of course, Lord Black. The DMLE might see fit to amend the charges of certain high-profile individuals -”

"Now, Minister. I'm sure that wouldn't be wise," Malfoy said. "I maintain that the individuals arrested are purely based on circumstantial evidence, which would never be strong enough as evidence to push for an Azkaban ruling. Furthermore, you have a vested interest in keeping these cases low-profile. And the best way to do that is through me."

Minister Jenkins considered his words, but something hardened in her gaze as she was about to speak.

“Now, Minister. We are at the Quidditch World Cup finals,” Abraxas Malfoy interrupted hastily, clearly disliking what he saw on the Minister's face. “Enough dry talks of politics has no place in this festivity -”

To Abraxas Malfoy’s rescue, the voice of the Canadian Department Head of Magical Sports and Recreations boomed from the Top Box One. “Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the final of the four hundred and sixteenth Quidditch World Cup!”

The spectators screamed, shouted, and clapped as thousands of flags waved in the air. Amidst the rancorous noise, Minister Jenkins quickly excused herself to rejoin the British delegation at Box One while the Malfoys headed to the box above them. Sirius also appeared with Kaiden Potter right behind him. Turais mouthed a thank you at Kaiden, who waved goodbye before he disappeared, as nothing could be heard over the intense noises. The Black household reentered their box as the final match was about to begin. Turais looked out to see the large advertisement board had now become a black scoreboard that showed in a small message from the titular sponsor of this edition of the Quidditch World Cup showed above the country names, “Pommel’s Canadian Oak-aged Mead: Proudly Canadian since 1763 - presents: “. Directly below and in bold, white font shouted the words “ENGLAND: ZERO, LIECHTENSTEIN: ZERO”.

“And now, the England National Team Mascot!”
The entire stadium roared in approval for the English team as an even louder, yet oddly musical, roar sounded from outside the stadium. Three juvenile Common Welsh Greens circled the stadium as they swooped down towards the pitch while dragon trainers circled around them on their brooms. There were screams and shouts at the sight, but they were quickly drowned by the yelling and applause as the dragons executed an intricate flying pattern over the pitch with no signs of endangering the crowd. On occasion, they roared in melodious synchronicity and fired narrow jets of flames in the air.

“How did we manage to transport dragons as our mascot?” Turais gasped at the grand display.

“The British Ministry pulled out all the stops when they saw that the English team had a chance to make it to the final match,” Arcturus explained as his face reflected the bright flashes of green flames. “And no one would dream of opposing such a majestic entrance for the English team.”

After what felt like an extremely short performance, they flew out of the stadium as the entire stadium was on their feet with the amazing show.

“I will now present, the Liechtenstein National Team Mascot!”

A small quadrant of people in the left-side roared in approval as the rest of the stadium gasped and voiced numerous “oohs” and “aaws” as a flood of crups ran into the pitch as their collective yips sounded throughout the stadium. They organized themselves into a large shape that resembled a crup with its characteristic forked tail, then it reorganized into the flag of Liechtenstein, and then the names of each of the players on the Liechtenstein National Quidditch Team.

"While crups are cute, I'd think it would be wise to change their mascot into something more ... grandiose," Orion commented.

Turais nodded, but he didn't have the heart to tell Orion that the Liechtenstein team would officially change their mascot to an augurey named Hans. Turais thought the crups were waaaay better than that oversized and malnourished-looking bird.

As they exited the stadium, the crowd applauded politely and settled down for the commencement of the match.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen. Please give a loud welcome to the England National Quidditch Team! I present to you - Bagsworth!”

A speck of white shot out onto the pitch from far below them to the feverish cheers of the entire stadium. It seemed as though the entire British Wizarding population turned up for this event (which was probably actually what happened).

“Gerard! Quigley! James! Jones! Zachary! Aaaaaand - Westermont!”

Turais held his Omnioculars and focused on the Seeker. Turais dialed his Omnioculars on slow-motion as he rewatched the entrance of the blonde, fair skin lady with delicate facial features fly gracefully into the pitch. Suddenly, he felt a nudge at his shoulder.

Turias looked away from his Omnioculars just to see his father's eyes twinkle with mischief. “Snap out of your daze, Turais, you’re drooling -” Turais quickly wiped at the corner of his mouth with his right sleeve and saw the wet patch on his robe afterwards. His face burned up in
indignation and his father lips quirked up. “- and you’re about to miss the entrance of the Liechtensteinian team.”

Turais realized that the English team had already finished their lap around the stadium and were hovering at the goalposts at the right side of the stadium.

“And now, the Liechtenstein National Quidditch Team! I present to you - Konzett! Vogt! Wenzel! Frommelt! Frommelt! Frommelt! Frommelt! Aaaand Frommelt!”

Seven blue figures shot out onto the pitch one after another and proceeded to circle the stadium.

“Thank Hecates for small mercies,” Arcturus spoke as he watched the procession in a laid-back manner as he poured out some mead into a frosted crystal water goblet and sampled it. Clearly fitting his palate, he sipped a bit more of the golden liquid. “At least none of them are Chasers, or else this match would’ve been impossible to follow.”

Turais agreed whole-heartedly.

“And now we present our referee from Japan, Chairwitch of the International Association of Quidditch, Fuyumi Akiyama!”

A Japanese lady with black hair that was tied into a tight bun and wearing the standard pure gold referee robes strode out onto the pitch with a glistening silver whistle between her lips and a wooden crate levitated behind her. She mounted her broom, a Nimbus 1701 that was not available for purchase yet, and kicked open the crate as the four balls burst into the air. She blasted a shrill sound from the silver object as she flew after the scarlet Quaffle, the only visible object as the Bludgers and the Snitch has already disappeared, and signaled the start of the match.

“And they’re OFF!” The Canadian shouted over the excited roars of the crowd. “And Bagsworth holds first possession! To Gerard! Quigley! Gerard! Konzett! Wenzel! Back to Quigley!”

The passes between the players were so quick that Turais could not keep track even with the aid of the Ominoculars. Learning from experience, he kept the speed dialed to ‘normal’ despite the difficulty to follow for he would miss all the real-time action in ‘slow’ speed and clicked the ‘instant play by play’ button to understand the various tactics each team was deploying.

“Gerard! Quigley! Gerard! Quigley! GERARD SCORES!”

The stadium shook in excitement from the stomping and cheers. The English team executed a perfect ‘Formation Looping’ where two Chasers went parallel with each other and quickly passed the Quaffle between them in rapid succession until one of them could score at the goalposts.

"GO PATRICK!" Sirius screamed out as he leaped and stood up on his seat. "GET THAT TRIPLE HAT-TRICK!"

“Ten-zero to England!”

“Now Vogt! Wenzel! Quigley!” The Liechtensteinian Frommett twins smashed a Bludger towards Quigley at the same time for a ‘Doppelbeater Defence’ as the extra fast Bludger punched into the English Chaser’s stomach and causing him to drop the scarlet ball, which was quickly confiscated by Konzett from below.

“Konzett! Vogt! Wenzel!” Wenzel raised his arm to score, or so Turais thought, when he
suddenly threw the Quaffle directly below him and out of view while Keeper Zachary flew to intercept him, leaving the lower goalposts unguarded.

“KONZETT SCORES!” Konzett turned out to be directly below her teammate as they used the ‘Porskoff Pass’ to divert the Keeper’s attention.

“Ten-ten tie!”

"Gerard! Quigley! Wenzel! Gerard! Konzett! Bagsworth! Foul!"

The English supporters chanted "Foul!" as they saw the Liechtensteinian Chaser crash violently into the English Chaser.

"Penalty for England!" shouted the Canadian official as the English crowd roared in approval.

In the next twenty minutes, a flurry of changes in Quaffle possessions, thanks to the sharp aims from either teams’ Beaters, resulted in a steady trading of points. Now the score stood at forty-forty for both teams.

The match became faster and more brutal as the Beaters no longer held back and smashed the Bludgers with all their might at the opposing players while all the Chasers were battered and bruised from their attacks. Given that neither team was able to gain a decisive edge over the opposing team, it was increasingly apparent that the match would be decided by the catching of the Snitch.

Suddenly, Turais watched as Konzett zoomed past the English Keeper when another English player zoomed directly in front of her as she crashed into him. A whistled blasted as Akiyama signaled a foul by the English side. The English team was circling the referee and arguing with her heated while the entire stadium “booed” at the decision. The Crups were yipping enthusiastically at the outcome, however, and they leaped up and down en masse adorably. The crowd responded accordingly, temporarily distracted by the adorable display of elation.

“Dangerous body block by James! A penalty to Liechtenstein!”

Afterwards, the two sides were still at an impasse while neither team saw another penalty in a surprisingly clean match. Turais suspected that was because neither team was losing desperately by large margins and placed their hopes on their respective Seekers while aiming to keep the game tight.

"GO SIMON!" Regulus shouted. "ALMOST THERE!"

“QUIGLEY SCORES! -” Regulus made an ear-deafening shout that Turais never thought he was capable of. "One hundred and ten - one hundred to Eng- Westermont makes a dive!”

Turais gasped as he saw his favourite player dive down as her blonde ponytail streaked behind her head with her right arm stretched impossibly far in front to reach for the evading Snitch.

“Westermont has spotted the Snitch! Father!” screamed Turais as he stood up in excitement.

“Where’s the Snit-” Alex asked.

“Right there!” Turais yelled as though Alex would find it just from that vague instruction but he couldn’t focus on explaining right now.

The entire crowd was screaming and the three dragons were roaring for their Seeker to catch
the Snitch for England. However…

“Frommett is coming from behind!” Turais screamed.

Frommett gained on Westermont inch by inch as his arm was now parallel to her - broomtail, waist, shoulder - while they both zoomed incredibly quickly after the golden ball. But the pitch ground was fast approaching…

“No, they are going to crash!” Turais watched in horror as both Seekers steered into each other in an attempt to pull up. But they tangled into each other just before crashing and tumbled onto the ground with a heavy thud and a sickening crack. Turais could see a broom snapped into two halves while the players laid in a heap beside it on the ground, unmoving. The entire stadium inhaled a shocked breath as they waited for the fate of both Seekers.

“What is happening?” Turais shrieked but his eyes were still glued onto his Omnioculars at the unfolding scene. Two teams of medi-wizards rushed to the site.

“Both Seekers are currently out of action. The referee has called a time-out. Medi-wizards are currently rushing to their aid.”

One of the mediwizards waved at the referee frantically as she flew down towards the pitch and conversed with them. They have already separated the two unconscious players and were transporting them off to the sidelines of the pitch while Akiyama approached where the bodies once lied. There, she reached into the shallow pit of upturned grass and dirt to pick up a golden ball…

“It’s the Snitch! It’s not moving - someone caught the Snitch!” Turais shouted as the Canadian confirmed the news.

“The referee has confirmed that the Snitch has been caught by one of the Seekers! The match is over! But there will be a delay in the results as she will have to confirm with the presiding metal-charmer for the golden Snitch’s flesh memory and ‘first touch’. Whoever touched the Snitch first has just won their team and country the four hundred and sixteenth edition of the Quidditch World Cup.”

Turais watched as the referee mounted her broom and flew into the tunnel.

“All golden Snitches have never been touched by a bare hand since its creation as the makers wore gloves at all times. This is to ensure that whenever there is a disputed catch, the flesh memory of the Snitch will provide the knowledge of whoever came into contact with the Snitch first.”

The murmurs in the crowd turned into thunderous applause as the two Seekers were regaining consciousness.

“- and of course, in the case of a Snitchnip, flesh memory can confirm which team’s player committed the foul - and the referee has returned from the review!”

Turais saw the referee re-emerge from the tunnel and walked towards both teams that have already assembled themselves without their Seekers in the centre of the pitch, hovering just above the ground.

“The referee has just confirmed the results and - WESTERMONT HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH! ENGLAND: TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY, LIECHTENSTEIN: ONE HUNDRED! ENGLAND WINS!”
The black scoreboard turned green as the white letters and numbers turned gold in confirmation of the final score. The entire stadium erupted into screams of delight as they realized that England has just won the Quidditch World Cup.

“This is England’s first appearance in the final match in more than a century and its first Quidditch World Cup win in the same amount of time. Let’s hope it takes them less time for their next one! What an amazing game!” The Canadian concluded his commentary as he cancelled the Sonorous charm.

“Westermont caught the Snitch, father! Westermont caught the Snitch! She was brilliant! I - ” Turais stopped when he finally removed his eyes from his Omnioculars to see the adults look at him with a slightly appalled but mostly amused expression. “Um… I mean - I just think she’s quite brilliant!”

“Now,” Orion shouted over the cheering crowd and smirked at his son’s embarrassed look. “Freshen yourself up. Westermont looks like she’s up and you’ll see her very soon!”

Turais looked out into the pitch to see the English Seeker supported by her elated teammates as they landed from their victory lap. Turais looked into the Omnioculars to see her tired but brilliant smile with her hair tossed messily around her face.

“Hey Turais, come on with me to the Box One,” Arcturus motioned Turais to follow him as they climbed up to the very top where they found a large platform enough for sixty people to comfortable stand around. There, he saw a mixture of Canadian, British, and Liechtensteinian officials mingling along with the Malfoys, Berryclothes, and Pommels. A tall, lean man was staying at the very front of the platform with his wand to his neck and announced, “The Quidditch World Cup itself is brought into the Top Box!”

A dazzling white light illuminated the entire stadium as two wizards carried a vast golden cup from a secured room at the back of the box and handed it to the Canadian Minister of Magic.

“Let’s put our hands together for the gallant runner-ups - Liechtenstein!”

Behind Turais, a stream of seven tired and mildly disappointed Liechtensteinian players climbed atop the stairs and passed by him to entire the box. The crowd was clapping energetically for this tiny country that outperformed all nations but one. The Seeker Frommett had to be carried by his twin brothers, the Beaters, to his seat.

“And I am now pleased to announce the winner of this edition’s Quidditch World Cup - England!”

The entire English team walked in on their own two feet, grinning happily as the Canadian Minister invited Minister Jenkins to present the Cup with her. The two women lifted the Cup for the crowd to see and transferred it to Gerard, the English team captain. The crowd roared with approval as he showcased the Cup. Then he looked back to beckon the limping Seeker forward and shared the Cup with her as they both lifted the Cup with the entire team surrounding them in the thunderous applause.

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The Blacks and the Potters strolled on the torch-lit pathway through the dark forest back to
the campgrounds together. The sole reason why they were together in the first place was Arcturus' eagerness to stay away from Abraxas Malfoy and that Potters was apparently the lesser of two evils. But Turais couldn't complain. More time with the Potters was always a win in his books... but in the presence of the entire Black family (those who mattered to Turais anyway)... Turais was a bit concerned.

"That was an evenly-matched game, wasn't it?" Kaiden asked. Wilkins had excused himself as his family tent was in the opposite direction of where they were heading.

"Exhilarating. And a nail-biter to the end," Turais agreed mindlessly. "The Snitch catch is one that will go down in the history books."

He was busy eyeing Orion, who was engaging in a polite but tense conversation with Charlus in front of them. Meanwhile, Arcturus and Melania were chatting with Fleamont and Euphemia in front of them. Further ahead yet, Dorea was holding hands with James as the boy was chatting excitedly with Sirius and Regulus, probably about chocolate frog cards.

"You look like you're expecting a duel to break out at any moment," Alex whispered into Turais' ear.

"That's just a polite and long-winded way of saying you look constipated," Kaiden said as Alex stiffened at the insinuation. Turais shot Kaiden a glare but the boy didn't seem to notice. "Relax... England just won. Everyone is in a good mood. If they are going to fight, it will not be today of all days. Plus, we are emotionally repressed British purebloods. We won't commit such an atrocity at the world's largest event of all places either."

"You'd think," Turais said gravely. "But you heard Dorea. Both families have not engaged each other for the past thirty odd years. And on the first meeting after the hiatus, all the Lords and Heirs are in the same place. Can you tell me in good conscience that this doesn't concern you the slightest?"

"Fine," Kaiden conceded. "But they are doing well so far. No wands are unsheathed yet, Rais."

"What did you just call Turais?" Alex asked Kaiden, sounding quite scandalized. "You said Rais?"

"Uh... Turais said he doesn't mind," Kaiden shrugged.

"I did not say that, Kay, you just did it regardless of my protest," Turais retorted.

Alex continued to stare at the two boys in question with burning intensity like a hyena fixated on his newest prey.

"We just met today," Kaiden said defensively as he shifted uncomfortably. Then in a lower voice, he said, "We just happened to have met each other before the match and chatted for a brief while."

"That's how Sirius and James have resolved their differences..." Alex said in surprise. Then, he smacked Turais on the head, "Did you sneak out of the tent while I was resting?"

Turais smiled sheepishly as Alex huffed. "Honestly! You always act like a reckless Gryffindor. Did you know your father placed a Tracking Spell on you three?"

"What? When?" Turais asked in surprise.
"He did it right when you entered the tent," Alex explained. "When he was holding up the flaps to let you three in, I saw him pull out his wand and muttered 'Observa Vestigium'. Then, there was this cloud of golden - "

"Golden shimmer," Turais mentally slapped himself on the forehead. "It's a modified Tracking Spell." That's how Orion knew they met up with the Potters.

"You Slytherin purebloods have weird parenting methods," Kaiden shook his head. "But at least the kneazle is out of the bag."

"Yeah... I suppose," Turais said. "Do you think our families will ever get along with each other?"

"I mean, we are off to a darn good start with our generation," Kaiden said. "James is getting along with your brothers. You haven't murdered me yet. So I'm hopeful?"

Turais hummed noncommittally as he eyed the two families once more. Maybe this could be the start of something different.

And just maybe... the two families could build closer ties with each other without all the angst and animosity.

"As long as neither of us invite each other back for tea," Turais mumbled as he recalled Dorea's words. He wasn't sure if either family was prepared for an extended encounter yet.


Some days, Turais really thought that Goddess Bad Luck had cast a Taboo curse on him. Today was one of those days as he found himself with a filled teacup and saucer in his hands as he eyed the palpable tension around the large dining table in the Potter family tent. And this was all Sirius and James' fault - and their damned Chocolate Frog cards. And why were they the ones who landed everyone in this awkward conversation while they were having a jolly good time comparing their card collections right this moment?!

"Why are you muttering about Chocolate frog cards?" Alex whispered. Turais turned to his companion who was clearly enjoying this late night gathering with as much enthusiasm as he was. Very little, that was.

'Ooops... did I say that out loud?' Turais sighed internally.

"Don't mind me," Turais sighed heavily as he sipped his Earl Grey tea. The tea was quite good, so that was the saving grace, Turais supposed.

It was not that he minded that the Potters met with the Blacks. In actuality, he wanted both families to get along well for the eventuality of Sirius and James' flourishing friendship. And for a more personal reason, he wanted this to happen for his own selfish reasons as well. A good relationship between the two families meant that Turais had more of an excuse to spend time with the Potters, which was all he wanted for himself. He just wanted this one thing.

But was this meeting too premature?
Turais sighed again before placing his cup down. He looked up from the rim of his china and saw Arcturus and Orion frowning at him.

Charlus cleared his throat and braved the tension. With a strained nonchalance, he asked, "So... where is Walburga?"

Dorea stepped on her husband's foot and he barely stifled a moan of pain. However, the damage had been done as the temperature of the room immediately fell by several degrees.

"She is not present at the current moment," Orion said stiffly, his handlebar moustache unyielding.

"I... I... see..." Charlus said haltingly as he tried to read the room, "... that -"

"Why don't you eat some of this custard cream, honey?" Dorea shoved the biscuit into her husband's mouth hastily. "You said they were absolutely delightful."

Charlus' munching provided the sole source of sound as the rest of the table fell silent once more. After a short while, Fleamont cleared his throat and gave a second attempt to break the ice.

"So, Arcturus -" Arcturus froze slightly as Turais winced. "- May I extend my sincerest congratulations to your eldest grandson's achievements," he said as his eye twinkled at Turais through the gold-rimmed monocle.

Arcturus sat up straighter in his chair and tugged on his robes. " Turais is the future Heir of the family. It is but natural that he shall start to live up to the family name. It is, of course, all in his blood."

"Indeed," Fleamont acquiesced good-naturedly. "He is a good lad. My nephew says so many times himself -" Kaiden looked up as though he was a unicorn caught at wand-point. " - He thinks very highly of your eldest grandson."

"Does he now?" Arcturus asked, his voice now with a hint of warmth.

"Ah... of course," Kaiden said. "It's the truth. The majority of Gryffindor looks upon him favourably. Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw as well."

Arcturus turned to look back at Turais with an approving nod. "I've heard that he has gained much positive fanfare in school. Hopefully that will only increase with his joining of the Quidditch team this year. I expect he will become Head Boy, prefect, Quidditch team captain, and the British Youth Representative to the Wizengamot in due time." Kaiden gave Turais an incredulous expression upon hearing those words. Turais understood how the high expectations that Arcturus just listed out sounded to the lay ears.

"I'm sure he will," Kaiden said quickly with confidence. "He is top of his year and an role model for his peers. I'm certain that he is going to be a brilliant Seeker as well."

Arcturus quirked his eyebrow. "How did you know Turais Seeks?"

Kaiden paled at the question. "Uhm... I... um -"

"We were just talking about Quidditch on our way back from the stadium, grandfather," Turais jumped to the rescue as Kaiden sagged with relief. "We bonded very quickly... over Quidditch... and... our mutual respect of each other as top competitors."
"It seems to me as though my two grandsons have quite the affinity with your sons," Arcturus stated. "Considering they have just met each other."

Weak chuckles sounded from the Potter family as they eyed each other warily. However, Arcturus did not press the matter any further, thankfully.

"So, Lord Potter -"

"I shall insist you call me Fleamont," Fleamont said calmly.

"I don't think that is wise -"

"We are neither in the Wizengamot chamber nor in the company of others. Let us wear our titles like garments and shed them when it is not longer the occasion."

Turais was fairly certain that if they were in the chamber or otherwise in public, they would not have even addressed each other.

Arcturus paused momentarily and pursed his lips. Finally, he said, "As you wish... Fleamont. I suppose I shall have to extend the same courtesy to you."

"I hope that would not be too much trouble, Arcturus..." Fleamont smiled warmly. "... and you as well, Orion."

Orion nodded without much choice.

"So, Fleamont," Arcturus started again. "What are your opinions on the new bill regarding the St. Mungo's expansion?"

As the adults dove into political talks, the children discreetly excused themselves from the table.

"Oh Merlin, that was nerve-wrecking," Kaiden gasped after they were a safe distance away. "I think I need a healthy swig of the Draught of Peace."

"Ditto," Turais sighed as he looked back at the table. If anything, this was a better outcome than Turais would have hoped for in a first encounter between the families. He turned back to Kaiden and asked, "I can't believe Fleamont was able to force my grandfather to address him by his first name. I don't think he has ever done that for any of his enemies."

"But I don't understand what is all the fuss about the titles?"

Turais did not understand this archaic and confusing concept of properly addressing a person as Harry Potter. It was only until he grew up in the Black household that he finally grasped the intricacies of this important cultural aspect.

"I thought you'd know this, considering you're..." Kaiden asked with uncertainty. Alex shook his head in embarrassment.

"No matter. Crash course on titles. To properly address a person is one of the cornerstones of pureblood etiquette," Kaiden explained. "There are different levels of familiarity and corresponding etiquette accompanying each level. The first and lowest level of familiarity pertains to strangers. Both parties refer to each other using honorifics such as Mister, Mistress or Miss. If the person has a title, such as being a Lord, Lady, Heir, or Master, those honorifics would be used during the introduction instead. The parties could revert back to the normal honorifics for the rest of the
"How do you know if the other person would allow you to address them as Mister or Mistress instead of Lord or Lady?" Alex asked.

Kaiden frowned as he thought for a moment. "It is implicit. After you addressed someone as Lord for the first time, you can address them as Mister in the same conversation afterwards. If the Lord does not make his objection known, he has agreed to the switch." Alex nodded thoughtfully.

"So, the second level pertains to business contacts. For private relations at this level, titles such as Lord or Lady could be dropped in favour of Mister, Mistress or Miss. But for business and public settings, the usage of the professional title is still applicable. For example, my father would address Dumbledore as Headmaster while Dumbledore would address my father as Senior Auror.

"This remains true until their familiarity advances to the next level, which corresponds to casual acquaintances, such as classmates or family friends. At this level, the honorifics could be dropped in a private setting where one refers to each other only by their last names. Professional titles would be dropped in public settings in favour of Mister, Mistress or Miss.

"The fourth level is friendship and is where the titles become more variable. Depending on the comfort and familiarity between the pairs, they might refer to each other from last names to first names to nicknames in both a private or public setting.

"Of course, if a person deliberately addresses the other party incorrectly or fails to rectify their mistake after being corrected by the offended party, this would be a big breach of etiquette," Kaiden summarized succinctly.

"Oh, so if Dumbledore and your father were in the same room and Dumbledore addressed your father as Mr Potter instead of Senior Auror Potter, your father has been insulted by him in this case?" Alex asked.

"Potentially. But if my father tells Dumbledore to refer to him as Senior Auror and Dumbledore fails to address him properly him a second time, that is when it is a big issue," Kaiden said.

"So is that why Turais' father was so stoic with James and Mrs... um... Lady Potter? Did they unintentionally offend him?" Alex asked as he eyed Turais carefully. Kaiden raised an eyebrow inquiringly and Alex explained, "We were at Diagon Alley and I think James called his father 'Mr Black'. I think Mrs... Lady Potter made the same mistake."

Turais nodded at Alex. "That's true. They did address my father incorrectly. But I don't think that was the sole reason why my father was defensive. He is just wary of Light families in generally."

"But I am surprised that Aunt Euphemia made that blunder at all," Kaiden said. "Granted that I don't see her in the company of people who make a big fuss of these matters much. But now that I come to think about it, I've learnt all this from my mum... now I wonder if my father actually knows all these rules too... but it's really just a bunch of pureblood baloney anyway," Kaiden said dismissively. "Our family doesn't care much about titles or designations and -" Suddenly, Kaiden realized he was in the company of Turais and stammered, "- a...and well... there is nothing wrong... with that..." he finished weakly.

Turais smirked a little at Kaiden's discomfort. But upon that, Kaiden also relaxed slightly. "I'm not a stickler with titles either. They are quite pompous and pretentious -"
"Exactly! " Kaiden exclaimed excitedly as though he was just granted unfettered permission to rant on the subject, "I'd hate to be 'Heir Potter this' or 'Lady Potter that'. That irks me."

"Yeah, but it was was still positively conniving of Fleamont to force my grandfather’s hands in such a manner. He had no grounds to refuse Fleamont’s request either,” Turais commented.

"Well, of course," Kaiden said. "Both his parents were in Slytherin. He must've picked up some tricks from them."

"Wait, what?!" Turais was shocked. He never asked his ancestors which Houses they were in. He just assumed they were all in Gryffindor. In hindsight, it was a silly assumption.

"Henry and Josephine Potter were both in Slytherin," Kaiden repeated.

"I thought all Potters were Sorted into Gryffindor," Turais said as Kaiden snorted.

"That doesn't even make sense. Not every Potter can share the same courageous and brave traits. As a matter of fact, I know there was a few Ravenclaws and Slytherins sprinkled in our family tree despite the Gryffindor dominance."

"Well, Turais' family were all in Slytherin," Alex spoke up in his defense.

"I'm sure if you looked hard enough, there's bound to be the, Merlin forbid, odd Hufflepuff or Gryffindor in your family tree somewhere," Kaiden said. "But they might've been struck off your family tree before they could say 'I'm the black sheep' if your family history is anything to go by."

"You're probably right," Turais concurred. Kaiden placed his hand on Turais' shoulder.

"What you've just said bears remembering," Kaiden said in an irritatantly soothing tone. "I'm always right."

The older boy smirked as he walked away from two spluttering Slytherins.

Chapter End Notes

Logo credits (for vector usage):
https://images.app.goo.gl/wifPPudWKitia1j2A (Quidditch player in Liechtenstein team)
https://www.aliexpress.com/item/32835233796.html (Quidditch player in England team)

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Hey everybody,

I made the artistic decision to put Henry Potter as a Slytherin despite the fact that the Potters are traditionally associated with Gryffindor. But Sirius can buck the Slytherin tradition to become a Gryffindor, so there is no reason why Henry Potter could not be sorted into Slytherin. In addition, there was no explicit mention that Henry Potter was a Gryffindor, or in any House, in fact.

The next chapter is Chapter 24: The Serpent’s Lair as we follow Turais to the start of
his second year. Look forward to it!

- ravenclawblues 2019-12-19
Hey everybody,

I will be heading for vacation so I am posting next week's chapter early.

Everyone enjoy your vacation and see you next year!

As always, I’d love to hear from you.

- ravenclawblues 2019-12-23

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 24

THE SERPENT'S LAIR

August 23, 1970 (Sunday)

WESTERMONT'S MAJESTY EMBLAZONS ENGLAND TRIUMPH

by A. Carnierus, Quidditch Correspondent

England 260 : 100 Liechtenstein

Rejoice! To the accompaniment of expression of praise, thanksgiving, and in some cases, utter disbelief, England became Quidditch champions of the world by defeating Liechtenstein on August 22, 1970 at White Goat, Canada. This day marked the first time in a century that England has reclaimed the throne...

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September 1, 1970 (Tuesday)

Before Turais knew it, the rest of summer had passed by. He had finished saying his teary goodbyes to his family just an hour ago and was now barreling towards Hogwarts on the scarlet train with dark, ominous clouds hanging low on the horizon. Jonty had disappeared from the compartment as soon as the train started moving and had yet to return. But as the scenery
transitioned from highrises to suburban neighbourhoods, the boy reappeared.

"I just heard from Shafiq that Professor Zīvert is not returning as the Defense Against the Dart Arts Professor this year," Jonty panted as he entered the compartment. "He's being replaced by Professor Jeanette Talbot."

"Aw man..." Gerald said in mild disappointment, "I liked him. He was a great teacher. What happened to him?"

"I've heard that he has sustained some terrible injuries in the Paris attack this summer and is still recovering from his wounds," Jonty said.

"I hope he gets better and can return to us soon," Alice said.

Turais frowned at the news. He wasn't surprised that the Defense professor was being replaced due to the knowledge of the curse, hence, he had not allowed him to be too attached to the professor. But Zīvert was a good teacher and this was a terrible reason for him to become unavailable for the position.

Snapping his book shut, Turais stood up and announced, “I’m going to check on the first-years.”

“Why, Turais? You’re not a Prefect,” Jane asked. “Also, I didn’t have a chance to fill you in on my trip to the Grand Canyon yet!”

“Sorry, Jane. We will have time when we get to Hogwarts, I promise. But, I would just like to get to know them before they are all scattered in their own Houses. And I would also like to announce to them that I will be continuing the homework club so they can ask us questions about homework, if you would like to help with it,” Turais said.

“Of course we wouldn’t mind, Turais. Your homework club was so helpful last year. I would have done so badly on the Potions project if it weren’t for you three,” Gerald said appreciatively to the three Slytherins.

“Nah, you’re fine, Gerald. You just always mix up your Fluxweed and Flaxseed and your Snargaluff and Shirvelfig,” Jonty commented nonchalantly.

“I’m getting confused just from hearing the words next to each other,” Gerald grabbed his hair in frustration as the rest of them laughed.

“I best head off now if I wish to get to the end of the train by the time we arrive at Hogwarts,” Turais exited the compartment.

He was so distracted by the Slytherin House politics and creating the Wolfsbane Potion with Damocles that he barely had time to check on his fellow yearmates. This time, he was determined to get a head start and familiarize himself with the first-years and try to sniff out Prometheus.

To be honest, he still had no clue how he was to approach this problem. How did you tell if a first-year would become a mass-murderer? Turais highly doubted that he would’ve realized what Voldemort was capable of doing if he went to school with Tom Riddle without any previous knowledge - at least not about the Horcruxes. But still, he had to try. Fate and Death have decided that Turais should be reborn in this body and told him he would have a fighting chance to stop Prometheus; so he would have to trust that this task was doable. And now, he would have to start by introducing himself to as many first-years as possible and creating the friendliest environment between Houses as possible.
So if Project “Find Prometheus” failed, Project “Overhaul Slytherin” would have to remain his top priority.

He had now reached the front of the train and started to scan the compartments for first-years. He looked into the second compartment and saw four girls in all-black school robes. Finding his targets, he knocked on the compartment door and slid the door open slightly.

“Hello, I am Turais Black and I am just walking down the train to welcome all the first years. What are your names?”

“Hello Turais, I am Amelia Bones,” the girl with grey hair and brown eyes said. Then, she introduced her fellow yearmates. Sitting beside her was Stacey Donavon and across from her was Valeria Sloan. Finally, across from Amelia was Cassidy Brown.

“Pleasure to meet you all, and I was wondering if you have any questions for me regarding Hogwarts?”

“Aren’t you too young to be a Prefect?” Cassidy’s eyes narrowed at him and his green and grey tie suspiciously.

“Oh, I’m not a Prefect, Ms Brown,” Turais said gently.

“Then why are you doing this?” Cassidy demanded.

“Stop this, Cassie. You’re being rude. Mr Black is a nice person,” scolded Amelia as she turned back to Turais, who stood awkwardly and was taken aback by the hostility. “I’ve heard about you from my brother. Are you familiar with Edgar Bones? He graduated last year.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know him personally. However, I hope you’ve only heard good things,” Turais said as he smiled slightly.

“Of course, Mr Black! Did you really save two first-year Muggleborns from three sixth-year?”

“Oh that...” Turais blushed slightly, remembering the outcome of that fateful night. “I got in a bit of trouble -”

“But you shouldn’t! You did the right thing!” Amelia looked horrified at the notion that Turais was in any trouble because of his heroic actions.

“But you shouldn’t duel in the hallways, it’s the school rules. No matter what, don’t do it!” Turais said hastily.

“But you duelled against three sixth-year students and won! That’s so impressive!” Amelia spoke feverently, her voice shown with admiration and awe. "My uncle also personally vouched for your brilliance as well... although I'm not sure how the two of you would have crossed paths..."

"Is that so?" Turais was surprised that he received such high praise from Lord Bones. And indeed, he had only met him briefly during Ministry-related functions, but there was never any substantial conversations between them... except... Lord Bones is a member of the Grand Jury Court so he was part of the court that decided the Yaxley case. He was magically bound by oath and unable to reveal that Turais was the victim of the case as he was underage, but the Lord might have been impressed by his actions to give him a ringing endorsement.

"Yes!" Amelia said excitedly. "I look forward to emulating your achievements!"
“Now, now. Your brother didn’t tell you that story so you could get yourself in trouble, Ms Bone,” Turais spoke hastily. He did not anticipate such support in the form of a child version of Amelia Bones.

“Well, the rules are wrong then. You did the right thing and you should not be punished for it. My point is that you’re a good person and Cassie should be nice to you.” Amelia shot a pointed look at her friend, who flushed and looked down at her lap.

***

“Hi, I’m Turais Black, a second-year, and I’m welcoming all the first-year students to Hogwarts. What are your names?” Turais had uttered a variation of this introduction for the tenth time and met about three dozen students.

“Janice Shafiq, please call me Jo. And this is my friend, Stella Thurkell,” the blonde girl said enthusiastically as she nudged her equally excited friend. “Please join us!”

Turais accepted the invitation and sat down on the seat across from them as they started to chatter quickly.

“You are the youngest person to be featured in Potions! I’ve read the teaser snippet of your transcript on the uses of aconite in the August edition. How did you do it?” Janice asked.

“It was a lot of good luck and a bit of critical thinking,” said Turais. “Do you like Potions class? You’re very young to be starting to read journals. I’m very impressed.”

“Thanks. I try to read them but they are so complex that I never fully understand them. But I think Potions will be my favourite subject,” Janice said.

“I don’t understand Potions at all!” Stella said despairingly. “I don’t understand why stirring the pot in different directions makes any difference? Also, the potion ingredients are all so smelly and disgusting.”

“Stella, I don’t know why you are so against the class. It is perfectly interesting,” Janice said, annoyed.

“Don’t worry, Ms Thurkell. I will be able to help you with your Potions homework if you have any questions. I made a homework club for my yearmates last year and I intend to continue it this year. So if you would like, you can join us,” Turais said kindly as Stella’s eyes sparkled with thankfulness. “Also, our Potions professor, Professor Slughorn, is a very good teacher. You should be able to learn a lot from him. However, I won’t be able to help you with avoiding the smell and squishiness of the ingredients.”

“That’s so nice of you, Mr Black. Thank you!” Stella said. “You wouldn’t mind if we spread the word about your homework club right? Many people will find it very helpful!”

“Of course! Remember you bring all your friends,” Turais responded. The girls beamed at him.

***
“Hi, I’m Turais Black.”

“Turais! What are you doing, terrorizing first-years?” Dolohov snarled as Turais turned away from the compartment to see the large seventh-year Slytherin stroll down the corridor. Turais was halfway down the train when he was reminded by the unsavoury part of his school experience.

“Antonin! How was your summer?” Turais asked with a faked cheeriness.

Dolohov ignored the question and stopped when he stood a foot away from Turais. He looked into the compartment of frightened first-years and back at Turais. “You’re Heir Black. People should come to you, not the other way around like a commoner, especially when they are filthy.”

“Antonin, thank you for your concern. I am quite well aware of my title and I do not need your reminder. Please don’t interfere with my activities when I never interfered with yours,” Turais interrupted. “If you have nothing pressing, I would like to continue with my own affairs.”

Dolohov sneered and strolled away without a word. Turais narrowed his eyes at the shrinking figure before relaxing his frown back to a small smile as he turned back towards the first-years.

“I’m so sorry about that. I assure you that not everyone in Hogwarts acts in such a rude manner. Let me start over, I’m Turais Black, a second-year, I -” Turais was starting over for a second time when he was interrupted again. This time, it was a first-year in the compartment.

“You’re a second-year,” the boy sitting near the window on the left asked. “You just faced down a seventh-year! That’s so cool!”

“Yeah! The boy was so rude the last time he came by!” The boy beside him spoke up.

“What do you mean? What did he do?” Turais asked sharply at the second boy.

“He just came in and asked all of our last names and started to call us filthy half-bloods and mudbloods! He’s the one terrorizing us, not you!” The second boy said angrily, clearly affronted by the older boys antics.

“Don’t worry, I’ll have a word with Dolohov later,” Turais said darkly.

“I thought you were his friend? You referred to each other by first names,” a third boy who was sitting at the other window seat spoke sharply with his arms crossed.

“We’re definitely not friends. We just pretend to be nice to each other in public. But I will not respect him if he hasn’t earned it. I apologize on his behalf for causing you any discomfort -”

“But you’re a Black, why should I trust you?” the same boy spoke.

“What is your name?” Turais asked calmly.

“Why? So you can insult me and my family as well?” He said harshly.

“No, I do not believe in pureblood supremacy. Blood purity does not matter to me. As you just saw, Dolohov claims he is a pureblood but he has worse manners than a troll. Blood purity clearly didn’t do him any good,” Turais said firmly.

No one spoke for a long moment until the same boy spoke up again. “The name is Ralph.
McLaughlin, muggle father and witch.”

“I’m Orlando Dearborne, muggle father and witch as well,” the first boy said.

“Midas Kingston, Muggleborn,” the fourth boy spoken for the first time.

“Is Tobias Kingston your brother?” Turais asked wryly. Midas flushed red.

“Yes… is he famous? He refused to tell me anything about Hogwarts…”

“Let’s just say he is well-known for being… prone to instigating certain unfortunate events in classes…” Turais said slowly with a rising sense of apprehension for the fate of the first-years if his brother was any indication. Midas flushed even redder and Turais decided to spare him his scrutiny and turned to the second boy.

“Lloyd Hendrik-Wong, pureblood but I’m from Hong Kong so you might not recognize the last names,” the second boy said.

“Any chance you are related to William Hendrik, a Healer?” Turais asked, the last name and his origin rang a bell in his mind. Lloyd’s eyebrows shot up in surprise.

“Yes… he is my step-dad. He bonded with my birth father a few years ago,” Lloyd said, curious. “How did you know my step-dad?”

“I have close ties with the Selwyn family - Carl Selwyn is a close friend of mine and I recall the last name in a conversation once,” Turais confirmed.

“Oh, yes! Uncle Carl used to work with my parents at St. Matthias’. He still visits us every year!” Lloyd said excitedly. “Wait… you’re Turais! Right, Carl mentioned that I will meet you at Hogwarts during his visit this summer! It’s nice to finally meet you.”

“We should organize a meet-up with you and Carl during the breaks,” Turais smiled at the surprising mutual connections. “If you would like to, we can arrange something for Christmas and Easter breaks.”

“That will be awesome! I was planning on staying in Hogwarts but I will write to my dads to see if they are fine with it. Thanks, Turais!”

***

“Oompf!” Turais sprawled on the ground with a much larger boy with messy black hair and grey eyes on top of him. They were lying flat in front of another compartment where the first-years looked on with interest and amusement.

“Kaiden! Gerroff me!” Turais’ shout was muffled by a mouthful of fabric.

“Hi, Rais! How was the rest of your summer? Mine was spiffing, thanks for asking!” Kaiden mercifully clambered off Turais’ body as he started to stand back up.

"I thought you were supposed to be the mature one,” Turais scowled as he patted his robes to get rid of the dust.
“Well, James is not here so I will be both the mature and immature one,” Kaiden grinned at Turais’ annoyed look.

“Aren’t you just a little too friendly to someone who you’ve met for the third time?” Turais wanted to maintain the scowl but he found his lips twitching in amusement. It’s good to interact with another Potter.

“Technically fourth time, Rais. Remember the snake-hissing stunt you pulled in front of the greenhouses?” Kaiden smirked.

“Snake-hissing? Your vocabulary is severely lacking for an almost-adult,” Turais scoffed.

Kaiden ignored the jab.

“- back to your question. What can I say, Rais? We share some of our handsome looks and I feel like there’s the soul of a Potter somewhere in there waiting to take over,” Kaiden poked playfully at his chest. “Don't ask me why, but I just feel like you are part of the family… like you are my long-lost brother. But I guess you are my cousin if nothing else.”

‘You have no idea how true that is, Kaiden.’

“Stop changing the topic. You’re a Prefect,” Turais retaliated with a jab at Kaiden’s shiny badge on his chest. “You should not be tackling people to the floor, especially in front of first-years.”

“That reminds me, you’re not a Prefect. Why are you making rounds checking in with the first-years? Trying to steal my job?” Kaiden ignored the complaint and teased.

“Well, if you did a better job, then I wouldn’t have to pick up your slack, Potter,” Turais teased. The first-years laughed.

“Oh, testy! Kids, beware of this little snake here, he’s mean,” Kaiden stage-whispered at the giggling first-year onlookers.

“Hey, you hairball-coughing poor-excuse of a large furry cat -” Turais retorted to the “oohh”’s and “aahh”’s of an appreciative audience. “- watch your mouth or you might find a Quaffle rammed up in it.”

“Oh, you’re on, Black!” Kaiden grinned as they finally turned back to the first-years, who are now sufficiently entertained by the play-fight to speak freely about their concerns.

***

Turais paused outside the compartment when he saw Pierricoeur sitting beside a boy of similar disposition.

“Hi, I’m Kaiden Potter and I’m a fifth-year Gryffindor Prefect.”

“Black, why are you here?” Pierricoeur asked as his brother, Aigel, shifted uncomfortably beside him.

“Pierricoeur, I can’t say it’s a pleasure. But for your brother’s sake, maybe we can bury the
“What’s a hatchet, Turais?” Kaiden asked as Pierricoeur looked at Turais in scrutiny.

“It’s a muggle saying, sorry,” Turais mentally berated himself for the slip.

“What’s a hatchet for a moment.”

Um… so as I was saying, I’m a Prefect so if you have any questions or concerns about Hogwarts, please feel free to find me or anyone with this shiny badge.” Kaiden pointed at his badge. “So what’s your name?”

Pierricoeur’s younger brother looked at his older brother, who nodded. The boy turned towards the two of them.

“Hi, I am Aigel Pierricoeur,” the boy spoke softly. It was so quiet that the rumbling noise of the train almost drowned his voice.

“Hi, Mr Pierricoeur, nice to meet you again,” Turais smiled kindly but the younger boy just frowned at the gesture.

“Okay! You’ve done your introductions. Now can you both leave?” Pierricoeur snapped as he pointed at the door.

“Okay… thank you for your time, Mr Pierricoeur,” Kaiden said pleasantly as he led Turais out of the compartment and closed the door behind them. As they strolled away, Kaiden spoke again.

“That was so strange…” whispered Kaiden as he waved into a compartment. “Pierricoeur looked so… controlling and his brother was so meek.”

“I don’t know what to think,” Turais admitted. “Pierricoeur and I did not get along since day one. So it might’ve been that.”

"But you have met his younger brother previously?" Kaiden inquired.

"It would barely count as an encounter," Turais sighed as he recalled the situation. "He was standing alone at the campsite in the Quidditch World Cup and Sirius thought he was lost. So he walked up to him and asked if he needed assistance. But the boy was completely freaked out by our presence and Pierricoeur showed up seconds later to whisk him away."

"That's very odd indeed," Kaiden said. "I'll keep an eye on him if he ends up in my House."

Turais nodded, although he highly doubted that Aigel Pierricoeur would ever be Sorted into Gryffindor.

Soon enough, they reached the end of the train and there were no more first-years in sight. There were a few future Death Eaters, such as Jugson and Travers, but they were harmless first-years that Turais could keep under control for now. But Pierricoeur's brother was a surprising twist in the equation and Turais vowed to keep a closer eye on him. By in large, however, Turais was no closer to figuring out who Prometheus was and how to stop him.

"Brrr..." Kaiden sounded as he cast his view out the window at the end of the carriage. Fat droplets of icy water pelted on and trailed down the frosted window while the wind whipped around the rest in maddening swirls. "I pity the first-years who have to brave this weather across the Black Lake."
Turais hummed his agreement. Suddenly, he remembered one burning question he wished to ask Kaiden.

"Hey Kaiden, when is your birthday?" Turais asked.

"Aw, I didn't know you liked me so much. Thank you for your present in advance," Kaiden said as Turais scoffed. "I'm turning sixteen on July 17."

'July 17 is when he turns sixteen. So Kaiden must have died before his seventeenth birthday then because he did not have a chance to sit down for a portrait,' Turais thought. 'Dorea and Charlus' portrait never mentioned anything about Kaiden or his death... so I will have to keep a close eye on Kaiden's safety for the next two years.'

Snapping out of his reeling mind, Turais exclaimed, "What? Really? I thought Fleamont said the Quidditch World Cup tickets were presents for your sixteenth birthday!"

"Well, they were a bit early for my birthday," Kaiden shrugged. "But in my defense, Michael's birthday was last week so it was a perfect present for him!"

"And by Michael, you mean Carmichael Wilkins?" Turais asked as Kaiden nodded. "Huh, I wouldn't have guessed you were such close friends with Wilkins, considering he was a Slytherin, rival team Beater, and all that."

"Well..." Kaiden spluttered and looked uncomfortable for a slight moment before recovering. 'Well... our friendship is sort of an open secret... as in everyone knows but pretends that it is not happening..." Turais raised his eyebrows at the information. "... It's for all the reasons you've just listed. I've known and played with him in Quidditch summer camps ever since we were able to mount a toy broom. But now that we are both made Quidditch team captains, I think people expect us to play-act as rivaling team captains and be hostile with each other despite knowing that we have been friends for a long time.

"But Michael and I are both very serious when it comes to Quidditch so I don't think that would be too much of an issue..." Kaiden's voice trailed off as he sighed. "It's the same thing with Natalia. I've heard from her that you two are on friendly terms. She lives just a few miles north of me and we're childhood friends. And as you know, she is a brilliant Chaser and she always comes over to my place to play Quidditch. But at school, we sort of have to pretend we barely know each other even though everyone knows we're close outside of school. I sometimes wish we can go back thirty years before all this ridiculous Slytherin-Gryffindor animosity..."

For the first time, Turais saw a different facet of Kaiden's life that he was not privy to previously. This serious side of Kaiden was completely opposite to the carefree, spoilt image that he portrayed usually.

"Your pseudo-secrets are safe with me," Turais said comfortingly.

Kaiden faced Turais and gave a weak grin. He punched Turais' shoulder lightly and said, "Knew I could count on you, Rais. Always had a good feeling about you." Kaiden cleared his voice and returned to his more cheerful self and announced, "Well, I think we are almost at Hogwarts. You better re-join your friends and change into your robes. I'll see you around."

“Catch you later,” Turais replied as he gazed out the back of the train out onto the endless train tracks under the darkening skies.

Well, full steam ahead on project “Overhaul Slytherin” then.
And new additional mission objective: Protect Kaiden Potter.

***

All the returning students were chatting boisterously in the Great Hall as they reunited with their old friends after two months while they waited for the arrival of the first-years. The enchanted ceiling showed torrents of rains cascading down towards the floating candles before they disappeared above the flickering lights. There was also the occasional flashes of lightning and claps of thunder.

However, the dreadful weather could not dampen the interest on the incoming professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts.

"Woah... she's really pretty..." Jonty said dreamily as he rested his cheek on his arms to continue to stare at the new professor. "I hope she stays for the next six years..."

"I though you were extremely disappointed that Professor Zīvert was not returning this year," Turais smirked as Jonty sighed airily, his eyes still glued to the front of the hall.

After a few long seconds, Jonty finally registered that Turais was talking to him. "Huh... were you talking to me?"

"Don't mind me," Turais smiled. Jonty nodded absent-mindedly. However, he was far from being the only person whose attention was monopolized by the new Professor. Turais noticed that many of the students were also sending not-so-subtle gazes at the staff table. Professor Talbot was, objectively, a traditional beauty by the strictest of standards. He could definitely see the appeal - her waxy blonde hair, dazzling blue eyes, a blinding smile...

Alex smacked both boys on the head as they tore their gazes from the sight.

"Can you two stop gawking at the professor? That's rude," Alex scolded. "Also, Turais. Weren't you about to tell us something urgent?"

Turais blinked and suddenly remembered what Alex was talking about. "Ah - right, I saw Pierricoeur and his brother on the train -"

"That was his brother?!!" Jonty exclaimed. “Man, I was about to feel sorry for that boy. Now... not at all.”

"I hope he doesn't cause you any trouble," Alex said as he turned around to eye Pierricoeur at the neighbouring table. "If his brother's passive aggression is any indication..."

"I don't think his brother is anything like Pierricoeur," Turais said.

"I guess we will have to wait and see," Jonty said darkly, but Turais could see his eyes wandering back to the front of the room.

The doors swung open as Professor McGonagall walked down the middle of the Hall with a group of drenched and trembling first-years behind her. Turais craned his neck to observe the passing crowd and spotted the wet, red hair of Aigel Pierricoeur bobbing amongst the crowd. Suddenly, his eyes connected with Pierricoeur over their heads and the Ravenclaw narrowed his
eyes warningly. Unfazed, Turais stared back with equal force between tearing his gaze from the boy to the Professor.

The Sorting Ceremony went normally as the fresh class of students joined the Houses they would call home for the next seven years. Then, Professor McGonagall announced, "Pierricoeur, Aigel!"

Jonty sat up and nudged Turais' side. He whispered, "Here we go..."

But said boy did not emerge from the crowd.

"Pierricoeur, Aigel!" McGonagall said once more.

This time, the boy did make his way slowly to the front of the small group of remaining first-years. He slowly climbed the stairs, his form trembling. Turais did not know if it was from fear or from the cold. The boy turned around and gazed at his brother, but due to this distraction, he tripped on the last step and sprawled in front of the stool... and in front of the entire school. The Hall filled with muffled laughter at the boy's demise with the Slytherins contributing most towards the noise. Turais looked at Pierricoeur just to find the boy’s eyes were filled with worry.

‘Interesting...’

Turais had never seen anything but anger and annoyance across the boy’s face. Very interesting indeed.

McGonagall helped the boy onto his feet and instructed him to climb the stool, this time, without any incidents. She placed the Sorting Hat onto his head as his closed eyes disappeared from view.

The Hat sat still on his head for one minute... two minutes... Time slowly ticked towards the five-minute mark, the threshold of a true Hatstall, as the Hall started to whisper in equal parts of annoyance and curiosity.

"It's been more than four minutes!" Jonty whispered. "I wonder what he's so torn about."

Younger siblings usually joined the House that their older siblings were in. Unless they were like Alice, whose family did not have a strong affiliation to any of the Houses. But the Pierricoeurs have been known to be affiliated with Ravenclaw and Leon Pierricoeur was in Ravenclaw as well. So it would be a surprise if Aigel Pierricoeur would buck the tradition -

"SLYtherin!"

The entire Hall was shocked into silence as everyone suddenly realized the implication. It was the first time in thirty-odd years that a Muggleborn was sorted into Slytherin. And the last time this happened, the student was Tom Riddle (of course, Turais knew Tom Riddle was a half-blood, but no one else knew that fact.)

Jonty and Alex's jaws dropped... so did most of the Slytherins. McGonagall's eyes also widened as she stilled for a second before pulling the Hat off. The newly-minted Slytherin looked out into the crowds with his eyes glistening with tears and his lips quivering. Turais turned towards Pierricoeur just to find his hardening gaze staring towards the staff table resolutely.

Turais' heart was racing. That boy could be Prometheus. Given his blood status and Pierricoeur's open disdain for purebloods, his brother would most definitely have been subjected to intense bullying if he was sorted into Slytherin in the previous timeline.
It was imperative that Turais took care and shielded the child from harm to prevent the creation of a future hatred-filled monster.

"Go on, now," McGonagall said softly as she nudged the boy gently towards the Slytherin table, but the boy perched still like a statue and remained unresponsive. His eyes darted between the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables frantically.

The Slytherins have also recovered enough to start muttering angrily at what had just transpired.

"Did I hear that correctly?"

"A Muggleborn? In Slytherin?"

"I'm transferring to Durmstrang! This is ridiculous!"

Amidst the mild chaos, the new Slytherin gathered enough of his wit to slowly descend the stairs towards them. But the first-year Slytherins immediately spread themselves apart to occupy most of the benches and shot looks of dagger at the trembling boy, daring him to even think about sitting near them. The boy looked mightily lost as Turais started to shift over and give room to the boy. No one deserves this treatment, not even Pierricoeur's younger brother. However, someone beat him towards the friendly gesture.

"Alex! What are you doing?! Sit down!"

Turais realized Alex was standing up in his spot, fixated at the boy currently standing at the end of the Slytherin table. He swung his legs over his seat and started to walk towards the boy.

"Alex! Stop..." Jonty hissed as he lunged for Alex's robe but missed.

He walked up to the boy and shook the his shoulder gently. The boy turned his head to gaze up at Alex with his watery eyes. Alex whispered something to the first-year. For a moment, the boy looks transfixed at Alex. Then, somehow, those were the magical words that he needed to hear as he walked with Alex back to their location at the Slytherin table. Flint, who was seated beside Turais, immediately scooted as far from Pierricoeur as possible. Alex ignored him as he placed Aigel between Turais and himself, buffering him from the other wary Slytherins.

The rest of the evening went without another hitch, although the gaze from the other Slytherins and Dumbledore weighed heavily on them.

After the feast drew to a close with Dumbledore's normal speech on school announcements and cautionary words on school unity, all the student started to exit the Great Hall.

"Hey Turais, Jonty, head down first. I want to talk to my friend for a moment," Alex announced as he glanced briefly at the Ravenclaw table. He patted Pierricoeur on the shoulder's gently. "Take care of him for me."

Jonty scrunched up his nose in disgust while Turais stepped up. It seemed as though Pierricoeur was afraid to leave Alex's side as he had to physically pry the boy away from his friend as Alex walked away in search of someone.

"What are we? Baby monster sitters?" Jonty grumbled in disgruntlement. Turais shot his friend a warning glare as the first-year tensed up noticeably, looking ill with dread. Without context, one might think he was being walked towards his execution. However, that might not be too far from the truth in this case.
The rest of the walk was uncomfortable and awkwardness hung heavily in the air. Especially with the loathing stares the rest of the pureblood Slytherins were giving him. However, no one dared to utter any disagreement in Turais’ presence.

Once they reached the common room, Turais had to leave Pierricoeur with the first-years as he took his spot near the middle of the room with the rest of the Group. As it turned out, the Leader of Slytherin, not the Prefects, always addressed the first-years. Turais shuddered at the abhorrent memory of the introductory speech and subsequent terrorizing last year. This year, things were going to be different; he would be certain of that.

While Malfoy was addressing the first-years, he took the opportunity to survey the room. In fact, things were already different. Bellatrix and Synde had graduated and were no longer present. Yaxley was rotting in Azkaban and probably losing his mind (Turais decided not to give it too much thought). And for Nott, while he was still in school as a seventh-year, he was no longer a member of the Group and waited amongst the other spectators. He glanced across the room and found him seething with anger and muttering with his friends, Mulciber and Tremblay.

His fellow second-years now joined the spectating crowd, waiting in trepidation. Suddenly, the entrance doors opened and Alex slipped into the common room and took his place beside Turais. Turais raised an inquiring brow at Alex and his friend mouthed “later”.

Turais returned to look at his fellow members in the Group. Besides him, now there were two moderates, Alex and Narcissa. Rosier’s vote was under his control and therefore, posed no risk. Malfoy would never dabble with anything remotely incriminating so he was not a cause for concern. So, only Avery and Dolohov remained as the hard-liners. However, Avery was more of a Nott in many respects - an incompetent bully that had a loud bark with no bite. Hence, Dolohov remained as the most dangerous player in the Group.

“- and that is all, good night.”

Malfoy concluded his speech as the first years started to head to their dormitories, unsuspecting of the impending encounter with the Group.

Dolohov stepped into the centre of their path and towered over the first-years dangerously. They halted dead in their path in alarm, frightened at the sudden attention placed on them by him… and the entire Slytherin common room. Dolohov then proceeded to step into Bellatrix’s shoes and roared out a speech reminiscent of the one delivered from the year before.

“Hello, first-years. I am Antonin Dolohov,” said Dolohov viciously. “There are a lot of unwritten rules in the Noble House of Slytherin but the most important one you must remember is that there is a group called the Group of Seven. They have the final say in every House matter. You must always obey them without exception, or you shall face your just punishment!”

The first-years flinched at his tone and some of them cowered slightly.

“Now, who here is not a pureblood?” Dolohov spoke, although his eyes were trained on one particular boy that was cowering at the back of the group.

Turais schooled his expression into a haughty frown with the regal continence of the Black Heir.

“Antonin,” Turais decided to step out of the crowd and walked until he stood beside the boy in front of the nervous first-years. “We should not terrify the first-years like this on their first night in Hogwarts.”
Dolohov plastered a pleasant smile on his face as he turned and looked down at Turais. Turais knew that he was absolutely furious for his interruption as he could feel the anger roll off his body in waves.

"Forgive me, Antonin. I merely speak from my own experience from just one year ago when I was being given the speech," Turais spoke calmly.

"Oh really, Turais? I was under the impression that you adapted quite well," Antonin glared.

"You have the wrong impression then," Turais said dismissively before turning to the first-years. He gave off a small smile as he visibly dropped the air of superiority.

"Hello, I am Heir Turais Black, second-year, but you can call me Turais. I care more about superior morals and the will to succeed. Blood purity is second to all that," Turais spoke as he flashed Antonin a glare to dare him to argue against him.

"I am going to continue a study session I started last year for the first-years to help you succeed in your studies. They will be starting next week everyday after dinner and you are all welcome to join. Now hop on along to your beds, you all must be tired," Turais said cheerfully as he beckoned them to walk around the two boys.

The first-years darted their eyes nervously from one boy to another and back, unsure of what to do.

"Don’t worry about Antonin, everyone. If he has any issues, he will take it up with me in private," Turais said firmly, "We don’t want another Nott or Yaxley situation on our hands, do we now, Antonin?"

Dolohov fumed as his eyes flashed dangerously. But he did not make any moves.

"Now hurry on now, you don’t want to sleep in and be late for your first day of classes," Turais said cheerily again as the first-years finally decided that they would follow his words and passed by the two older Slytherins. However, they still eyed them with fear as they walked past the duo. Turais smiled at them encouragingly. He also took care to give Aigel a quick squeeze on his shoulder in reassurance.

After he saw them disappear up the staircase to their rooms. Turais masked his expression once more before he turned back to the silent Dolohov.

"Antonin," Turais said sternly. "I know that this may come as a shock. But Aigel Pierricoeur was sorted just like you and I once were. He is as much of a Slytherin as you and I."

"You may convince your goons that, but the rest of the House disagrees with you," Dolohov spat as he took one step forward. "And I would have to wreck your idyllic disillusionment, but you are in the minority, Turais. Tomorrow, the House will sign a petition to request for a re-Sort. The majority of the School Governors are family members of current Slytherins. We will see this through."

"This is not the first nor would it be the last time that a Muggleborn would walk through these doors," Turais said as he pointed at the entrance. "I’d suggest you make peace with the fact that Aigel Pierricoeur is here to stay. I heard the last Muggleborn Slytherin was the brightest student that Hogwarts has ever seen. He was also part of the Group of Seven. So I would caution you to form your conclusions so soon."

"That may be true, Turais. But do you know where he went after graduation?" Dolohov
sneered. "He ended up working in Borgin and Burkes as a salesperson. Ha! So much for being the best student in Hogwarts! Then he disappeared off the face of the Earth. Quite a fitting end for a mudblood. I would like to send a bottle to whoever did the final deed. He did all of us a service by putting him in his rightful place for even daring to think he could ever best us purebloods in anything."

'If only you knew the truth,' Turais thought.

"Perhaps," Alex's voice cut through his thoughts. Turais turned to look at his friend in awe. "But Aigel Pierricoeur is now my protégé," the entire room gasped, "- thus, under my protection. So whoever harms him will answer to me personally."

Alex levelled his gaze with Dolohov, who clenched his jaws tightly. “You will pay for this insolence, Alexander!”

As Dolohov walked off, Turais could see Alex sagging with nervousness under the scrutiny of the entire Slytherin student body.

Turais stepped forward and looked around the Slytherin common room once before announcing to the crowd, “I stand by what Alex just said, if anyone threaten the first-years for any reason, you will have to answer to me as well. Consider yourselves warned.”

They returned to their dormitories. But once the door was closed, Turais and Jonty turned their full attention onto Alex, who looked mightily alarmed.

"What the heck was that, Alex?" Jonty demanded. Then, he mimicked Alex's voice, "'Aigel Pierricoeur is now my protégé.' What possessed you to say such a thing?!"

"I... I..." Alex's eyes pleaded Turais for help. "I...

"Alex must have his own reasons now," Turais said. "I, personally, think he did the right thing -"

Jonty spluttered as he looked at both boys as though they grew a second head. He place the back of his hand on Alex's forehead, "No fever..." he peered into his eyes one by one. "... not Confounded..." Jonty looked at Alex sharply. "What's that weird inside joke that you and Turais shared? - Turais don't answer."

"Uhm... uhm... three dine mice?" Alex said uncertainly.

"Okay, not Polyjuiced either," Jonty said analytically. Then, his face contorted into fiery rage. "Then WHAT THE HECK IS WRONG WITH YOU?!"

Turais was taken aback by the outburst.

"You!" He jabbed his finger in Alex's face, "Him!" He pointed up to the first-year dormitories. "He is the brother of Mr Stick-Up-His-Arse-And-Petty-Hater Leon Pierricoeur! He's the enemy! You've seen what he has done to Turais! To you! Why are you fraternizing with impure breeds?!" Jonty threw up his arms and paced around in a small circle. "Oh Merlin, save me. I'm going to die of frustration. I'm. Going. To. Die. Of. Frustration. Right now. Right. Freaking. Now!"

Alex's lips quivered. Then he fled the room. Turais was torn between chasing after Alex and talking with Jonty.

"Jonty." Turais said sternly. "Did you realize what you just said?"
Jonty stopped pacing and whipped around to face Turais. "What did I do wrong? Pierricoeur *is* the enemy. He wronged you both too many times to count. He's - oh..." Jonty's face turned pale as he remembered what he just said. "I didn't mean to..."

"Whether you meant it or not," Turais explained patiently. "You just said something really hurtful about Alex's heritage."

"Oh bloody hell, Turais," Jonty started to pace around the room again. This time, his fingers were carding his hair in anxiety. "B...But Aigel from the same family as that devil-child. How can Alex -"

"Jonty -" Turais said as Jonty raised his hand up to stop him from speaking. "Stop trying to justify your actions. And you also said it yourself. Alex is a half-blood and Aigel Pierricoeur is a Muggleborn. I think due to their similarity in blood status, Alex naturally feels protective towards that boy. I'm going to check on Aigel to see how he's settling in." Turais turned and headed for the door.

"But Turais," Jonty said weakly. "Trusting that boy is a mistake -"

The door swung wide open as a frantic Alex ran back into the room.

"Hey Alex, I'm sorry -" Jonty started to apologize as Alex interrupted him.

"Turais, you need to come with me right now!"

Turais ran after Alex, who turned to head up the stairs for the first-year dormitories. As they reached the top floor landing, Turais could already hear some commotion behind one of the four first-year dormitory rooms. He opened the door just as Aigel was thrown onto the ground right in front of his feet. His face was bruised and tear-stained. His lips were split and bloody. His robes were torn and disheveled. The characteristic green and silver crest on his robe was now a glaring hole that showed the pearly white dress shirt beneath. His missing tie was also in the clutches of one of the boys.

Turais immediately knelt down to help the boy up and he darted behind Turais, away from his roommates. Turais' heart broke a little, but he was also furious and appalled that some first-years were capable of inflicting so much cruelty towards a virtual stranger.

The other five boys frozen as he eyed each other nervously. Turais' eyes glanced over their guilty faces and then turned his gaze to one of the poster beds behind them. Feathers were scattered everywhere, the pillowcases and bed-sheets were sliced and torn, his belongings were spilt across the carpeted floor.

"Someone explain what just happened," Turais' cold, harsh voice reverberated in the semi-circular room. None of the boys motioned to speak. Turais added, this time with more force, "NOW!"

The five first-years jumped upon the intense fury laced in the singular icy word.

"We... he... is a m...mudblood and we... were defining... our relationship with... him... for the next seven years..." one of the boys, Jugson, said stammeringly. However, his face was defiant and without remorse for his actions.

"You shall address me properly, Mr Jugson," Turais said coldly and waited.

Jugson's face twisted into a harrowed grimace before he spat out the word, "Mr Black."
forcefully and with extreme distaste.

"Heir Black for you, Mr Jugson," Turais said.

"Heir... Black," he gritted out unwillingly.

"Bear that title in mind, Mr Jugson," Turais said and addressed the five boys. "I am the Heir Presumptive of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black. I am a member of the Group of Seven. I can make your life a living nightmare in Slytherin. And unfortunately for you, I am only in my second year so we will have six long years together before I graduate."

The five boys gulped.

"How you would like our relationship to be defined for the next six years will be dictated by your behaviour," Turais continued. "I'm sure you have heard of my reputation. If not, you will discover it soon enough. Behave like proper, courteous human beings is my sole requirement from all of you. That means no bullying, no violence, no name-calling, being respectful to one another. If I hear that you violate my most basic requirement, you will find yourself in the most undesirable position possible under the school rules. Am I understood?"

The boys nodded quickly, although Turais could sense anger building up in two of them: Travers and Jugson.

"Also, Mr Fawley has just announced it to the House that he has taken in Aigel Pierricoeur as his protégé -" all six first-years stared up at Alex in shock, some in anger as well. " - and Mr Fawley is my protégé. I am sure you all understand what that means..."

"Yes!" the five boys shouted in unison.

"Good," Turais nodded. "I expect a verbal and written apology from all of you to Mr Pierricoeur before the night is over. Remember, what you have done tonight was a severe offense and it will not be tolerated. Consider this your first and final warning."

Turais guided the frightened child out of the room and took him down the stairs. On the way, numerous Slytherins eyed them with burning curiosity before Turais isolated themselves in the relative safety of their room. However, even there, they were not immune to the inquiring stares as Turais' roommates, Flint, Rivers, and Urquhart, were huddled together on Urquhart's bed and whispering.

Turais carefully sat Aigel down in his chair as he knelt down to examine his wounds. Alex was next to him while Jonty stood by the door and watched the entire process silently with a frown of his faces.

"Where do you feel pain?" Turais asked gently. Aigel stayed quiet as he stared at Alex's face unblinkingly through his swollen eyes.

Turais tried again. "Do you give me permission to examine your wounds?"

Aigel continued to stare at Alex until he gave a quick jerk. Turais smiled and nodded encouragingly, although the first-year probably didn't notice his smile at all.

"I will start with several basic Diagnostic Charms, then I will examine your superficial wounds from the head, then your torso, and finally, your limbs. If you feel pain or discomfort or wish me to stop at any point, just give me a sign, okay?" Turais received a second jerk of approval. Turais pulled out his wand and cast a Diagnostic Charm for damages to respiration, consciousness,
spine and nerve, spell and curses, and then for broken bones.

"You are doing great, Aigel," Alex said softly as Aigel nodded.

Every Charm came back normal and Turais relaxed. Aigel only had superficial wounds. "So no injuries that an easy *Episkey* or *Ferula* can't fix."

Aigel nodded again as some tension left his body. But his eyes were still trained on Alex with great intensity. Turais scanned his wand over Aigel's body. There were a few bruises and cuts on the face, arms, and chest, but he was otherwise unharmed.

"The next step might sting a little -" Turais said.

"Hey Aigel, do you want to hold my hand tightly?" Alex said as he held out his hand. Aigel carefully placed his hand on Alex's palm.

Turais then cast a broad-spectrum *Episkey* spell. Aigel winced as the wounds were disinfected, then healing rapidly. Turais could see the little boy was biting hard on his lips to avoid yelling out. His hand was squeezing Alex's hand tightly.

All bruises immediately turned dark purple and faded significantly. The cuts also mended and turned into days-old scab. Aigel's eyes widened in wonder and surprise as he touched his face gingerly where his wounds were. Perhaps being a little too enthusiastic, he prodded one of his bigger bruises and hissed in pain. Turais chuckled softly and summoned his Murtlap Essence, which flew into his hand moments later.

"The wounds are not fully healed yet," Turais explained. "It will take a few more days before it clears completely." He held out the vial of solution. "This is Murtlap Essence. you can apply it directly on your bruises and cuts. It has a cooling effect and will help dull the pain."

Aigel's eyes darted between Turais' face and the bottle. He bit down on his lower lip and took the bottle from his outstretched hands.

"Thank you..." Aigel said in a small, shaky voice. "T...Turais." He turned his head slightly to face Alex. "Thank you... Alex."

Once Alex returned after escorting Aigel back to his room, Turais dragged Alex out of the room and to one of the hidden alcoves at the corner of the common room.

Turais faced Alex in the relative darkness. "Why did you declare Aigel Pierricoeur as your protégé?"

"Do you also think I'm making a mistake?" Alex breathed out.

"I think you did the right thing, for the record," Turais said. "But I want to understand as well."

Alex stayed silent for a long moment before he sighed. "Pierricoeur talked to me in private right after the feast."

"What did he want?" Turais asked sharply.

"He... he... wanted me to take care of Aigel for him," Alex revealed.

"And you promised..." Turais said as Alex nodded.
"I know he is the enemy and he has been absolutely horrid to you and I for the past year. But I felt he was sincere with his request and... I have been on the receiving end of your kindness as well so I, of all people, understand what it means to be helped in a time of need and in this House."

Alex turned to face Turais directly and placed his hand on Turais’ forearm. "I am lucky to have someone like you as a friend and mentor," Alex said sincerely. "I want to be like you for someone else. And he's definitely going to be eaten alive in Slytherin... even worse than me..."

Turais looked up at Alex's wistful face. He nudged his friend and said softly, "Hey, don't get maudlin on your first day of school."

"I'm not maudlin, Turais. I'm just introspective," Alex said with a smile. "Come on, it's almost midnight. We don't want to sleep in on our first day of school either."

"And about Jonty, he's really sorry."

"Oh, don't worry about Jonty. I'm not mad at him. I know it was the heat of the moment. I'll talk to him later," Alex said quickly. "But please don't tell him about this conversation. He will think I am stupid."

Turais nodded, "Promise."

Although he didn't like the secrecy, but he would respect Alex's wishes. But what was more important was that Alex was finally feeling comfortable in his own skin.

When they returned to their room, they found Jonty engaged in a shouting match with their three other roommates.

"- I know you don’t like what you saw anymore than we do -" Flint's voice shouted.

"Damn you, Flint! I’m with Alex and Turais until the end of the line," Jonty shouted. "Don’t even think about this division tactic. It will never work!"

"If that makes you sleep better at night," Urquhart sneered. "Black loves his toys broken. And you're not even close. Just remember that you will always play third wheel to those two. Potentially fourth wheel too with that mudblood in the fold."

"Shut your trap, Flint!" Alex yelled as he slammed the door open. "Do not insult my friends."

"I see that you have grown a backbone over summer, Fawley," Flint said, his eyes flashing dangerously. "That's good. I love it when they fight back a little. Keeps things interesting, doesn't it?"

"You're not playing with anything under my watch, Flint," Turais said coldly.

"Of course, Black," Flint yielded. He turned back to Alex, "I'll wait and see how you'll fare when you're without your knight in shining armour, Fawley."

"In your dreams, Flint," Turais said.

"Perhaps," Flint said warningly. "However, the difference between dreams and reality is action. Your little pet project with the half-bloods is unsavoury but, nonetheless, marginally acceptable. But this shameful situation with a mud- Muggleborn?! - Someone is bound to act in response to your atrocious behaviour, Black. And I’m hoping it would be very soon."
Hey everybody,

New characters are now in play! What do you think about Kaiden Potter, Carmichael Wilkins, and Aigel Pierrickoeur?! Did these characters change some of your initial theories?

Also, this year doesn't seem to be quite in the bag as Turais once hoped...

Next chapter, Chapter 25: Wolfsbane, will be posted after New Year's Day. Hope you all have a great finish to 2019.

- ravenclawblues 2019-12-23
Hey everybody,

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday and I wish you all a wonderful year ahead.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-03

FIFTEEN DEAD IN VILLAGE FACTORY EXPLOSION

Jack Berry

August 15, 1970, 7:45am - Fifteen men, including a married man with six children, were killed when part of a brick dust extraction tower collapsed on to the roof of a machine shop at a Cheshire works. Mr Derek Warrington, managing director of the factory, stated that something had started a fire in the dust extraction tower which caused the wall to fall.

Firemen across the two counties of Cheshire and Merseyside from four districts, Halton, Warrington, City of Liverpool, and Knowsley, raced to the scene. A spokesman for the fire brigade said: "There was no fire damage inside the boilerhouse where the dust extraction terminates - the likeliest place that would have caused an explosion. However, our men had also spotted multiple sites where the fire might have originated, which is highly unusual."

The police had confirmed that this incident is being treated as a case of malicious arson...

September 2, 1970 (Wednesday)

It was seven-thirty in the morning and Turais left Alex and Jonty behind and walked up to the first-year dormitories to check on Aigel. He knocked on the door and Travers answered the door. Upon seeing the older boy, he immediately directed his sight towards his feet.
"I would like to speak with Aigel," Turais said.

Travers turned his head and said, "Pierricoeur, Heir Black would like to talk to you."

Aigel appeared behind Travers and slipped out the door.

"T...Turais, good morning," the boy said with his head ducked.

"Good morning, Aigel," Turais said. "Have they apologized to you yet?"

"Yes, of course!" the first-year responded immediately as he nodded his head enthusiastically.

"Woah, woah! Okay, okay!" Turais laughed as Aigel blushed.

"Sorry," he squeaked. "And... thank you for the Murtlap Essence. It worked really well."

"May I take a look?" Turais asked. He had not been able to steal a glance at the boy's face yet.

Aigel tilted his chin up towards Turais shyly. The bruises and cuts were still visible but they were almost completely healed. Turais nodded in relief.

"Let me or Alex know if your roommates ever mistreat you, okay?" Turais asked. "In fact, you can find us if you want to talk about anything that is bothering you. Consider it a standing offer."

"I will," Aigel gave Turais a small smile, the very first one.

"Okay," Turais said, "I'll see you at breakfast. Remember to be there by eight for your timetable."

"I will," Aigel nodded. "And... thank you." Aigel said quickly as he turned around and ran back into the room.

Turais walked back to his room to find Jonty and Alex waiting for him in the common room with their eyebrows raised.

"I just wanted to check on Aigel's injury," Turais commented. Jonty looked like he wanted to comment but swallowed it and frowned instead.

“I already did this morning,” Alex said, shrugging at Turais’ surprised expression. “He is my protégé. Therefore, he is now my responsibility.”

Turais looked at Alex with a new sense of pride while Jonty said a disagreeing sound beside them. He couldn’t resist himself from knocking their shoulders together. “Wow, my Alex is all grown up and mature now!”

Alex scratched his neck in embarrassment as his cheeks were reddened. “You’re exaggerating. It’s not even a fraction of what you do on a regular basis -“

“Urgh! Does that mean you're going to mother us as well now, Alex?” Jonty dragged his hands down his face. Then, he pointed at Turais, “Father hen,” he then pointed at Alex, “Mother hen. I go to Hogwarts so I can escape my parents... not to be with another set of parents!”

The two boys laughed at Jonty’s words and they left for the Owlery. After Turais had sent off
his mail to his family (with ample teasing from Jonty) and Alex had sent off his heavy letter to his father, they arrived at the Entrance Hall where they saw Pierricoeur peeking down at them from the Grand Staircase above and full of concern. When he noticed Turais and Jonty, his face turned into a scowl and leaned away from the ledge. However, Turais was surprised to detected... concern?... from the boy’s demeanour.

'That's new,' Turais thought.

"Turais, Jonty. Go ahead first," Alex said. Turais and Jonty eyed him and Pierricoeur carefully. But he nodded and left walked with Jonty to the Great Hall, leaving Alex alone with Pierricoeur.

"I wonder what Pierricoeur wants this time," Jonty grumbled as he stabbed at the sausages in front of him sulkily.

"I'm sure Alex can handle himself," Turais said calmly.

Jonty eyed the Muggleborn Slytherin, who was alone as his year mates formed a buffer zone around him, down the table warily, "I really don't like this, Turais... and for it to be a Pierricoeur of all people." Jonty turned towards Turais and said solemnly, "A Muggleborn Sorted into Slytherin is never a good sign. This school year is already cursed."

The serious, dark look that his friend was making him uncomfortable. Compounded by Turais' sneaking suspicion that the boy was the child-version of Prometheus, Turais knew he needed to keep a close watch on him.

"Don't be so dramatic, Jonty," Turais said with a dampened cheeriness. "I'm sure it wouldn't be so tremendously horrifying as you are implying." Turais knew he would keep a close watch on all affairs, as usual. So nothing catastrophic was likely to occur without him detecting it well in advance,

"I think you're the one who is not grasping the full extent of this," Jonty said in a hushed tone as he eyed his surrounding. Jonty motioned Turais forward. He leaned closely to catch what the boy was saying. "My father was at Hogwarts when the last Muggleborn was in Slytherin. He never mentioned anything more than vague stories, but from what I have gathered from eavesdropping on all those conversations, those years were haunted by terrible, terrible events."

Turais leaned away from a frown. "Again, that does not necessarily correlate with a Muggleborn being sorted into Slytherin," Turais said despite knowing that last time around, Tom Riddle was a different kind of terror. "It might have been a coincidence -" 

"You're the one who always told us to be on our guard at all times, Turais!" Jonty gritted out. "I guess I will just have to save all our hinds and keep an eye out for him," Jonty grumbled as he jabbed his fork at Aigel. Letting out a grunt of frustration, he speared his hashbrowns and stuffed it into his mouth. Turais looked over to the first-years and saw that most of them avoided him like he was contagious with dragon pox.

If it weren’t for timetable distribution, Turais would have invited Aigel over to sit with him. But he made a promise to himself to include Aigel for every meal until the first-year was able to connect and make friends with his peers -

"No," Jonty's voice said firmly. Turais turned his attention to his friend. "No."

"You don't even know what I was thinking about," Turais protested.
Jonty waved his fork disapprovingly. "You're easier to read than you think, Turais. And I bet this plate of food that you were thinking of inviting that boy to our meals -" Jonty looked Turais dead in his eyes, "- and don't even think about it. Not under my watch."

Turais sighed, half in exasperation and half in irritation that Jonty guessed correctly. "Fine, we will not have Aigel Pierricoeur with us for meals."

"Better," Jonty said. "And listen, Turais. I'm telling you this because I think of you as my friend. Otherwise, I could care less that you date a Gryffindor Muggleborn, have ten children, and live your merry life. And I don't even mean that as an offense. But this situation you have with Alex and that boy is political suicide! Stop. Involving. Yourself. With. Him!"

"I appreciate the concern, Jonty. I really do," said Turais to the disgruntled boy, who let out a snort. "Hey Jonty, listen at me -" Turais pulled the plate of food away from Jonty, who unwillingly gave Turais his full attention while chewing his food noisily, "- I have reservations about the boy as well. And not only him, but his brother as well. But have you heard the saying 'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer'? Currently, I can't decide whether either of them will turn out to be genuine allies or our arch-nemeses, but let's not judge them for crimes they have yet to commit."

Turais knew he needed to keep an eye on the Pierricoeur brothers’ development. But for now, they were just innocent, if slightly jaded, eleven- and twelve-year-old. Even if they were candidates for Prometheus, Turais would only have to make sure the seeds of destruction would not take hold in their mind. And he could easily do that by showing them kindness.

"Fine. As long as you know to be wary," Jonty said warningly as he pulled the plate of food back in front of him. "They will strike when you least suspect and in the most unpredictable manner. But you will not stop me from doing some sleuthing of my own."

Turais bit down on his lower lip at the proposition. Ultimately, he settled for the compromise. "Agreed, but I will maintain my rights to interfere with any form of bullying. And also for daily visitation -"

"What is this? A child custody court battle?" said Jonty.

Turais ignored the remark, "- and for all its worth, I'm truly touched by your concern for my well-being."

"I'm not concerned about your well-being here, Turais," Jonty sighed. "What I'm worried about is your reputation."

"You know I don't care about optics," Turais argued.

"Maybe you should consider such frivolous matter that you deemed to be beneath you," Jonty hissed back as he threw down his eating utensil. "Gosh! I can't believe I need to explain this to you of all people, Turais. The only way you can maintain your power is through your status. And your status is maintained by your reputation. That boy will drag your name through the mud and your words will, then, carry no weight. When that happens, how are you supposed to achieve everything you Aspired to do?"

"But only the Slytherins care about these thing, Jonty," Turais replied as he gestured the Great Hall. "Look around you. The rest of the school doesn't spare a thought on whether someone is Muggleborn or pureblood."
"Turais, perhaps you are the one who should look around yourself," Jonty pointed as Turais looked down their table. "This. This table. They are the sons and daughters of those in control of our government. Montague's father is Deputy Head of Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Carrow's father is Head of International Magical Office of Law. Avery's father is the Deputy Head of Magical Transportation. And - Crabbe's Deputy Head of Floo Network Authority. Tremblay's family owns Port-On-Call, the largest Portkey Service in Britain. Rivers' father is Under-Secretary of the Ministry. Do you see a pattern here?"

Turais nodded as Jonty continued. "Of the what? - five, six families I have just randomly listed, how many of them are allies to your family and, most importantly, you? Big, fat zero! L'oeuf! Maybe Rivers is one-half at most. But sure, get in the good wills of the Light families and get your dream majority in the Wizengamot.

"Have you thought of what happens when the bill is passed? The Ministry - the executive branch - needs to act on it. I know it wasn't fair to only list off your political rivals' positions. I am also aware that your family has allies in key positions in the Ministry. But if you don't have these families on your side, or at least not hate you outright, they form a large enough portion of the government that can slow-walk every actionable item. Then, the bureaucracy of it would just destroy the implementation of every idea you have. How much good would that do then, huh?" Jonty challenged.

Turais found himself with a loss of words. He never considered what happened beyond the Wizengamot. What Jonty said was true. Even if he successfully brought together the Lords on both sides of the political spectrum, that would do no good if the rest of the government did not comply with the legislative branches.

"Listen, Turais," Jonty pleaded. "You have to consider the bigger picture here. Yes, the Wizengamot is the most visible portion of the Ministry because that is where all the shouting and fighting occurs. But what happens behind the scenes matters too. The only reason why the Light families seems like they are having their way is because all the current Heads of the major departments are their sympathizers. But once their terms are over and we elect a Minister that is sympathetic with the Dark families, those positions would slowly be filled with these people's parents. And believe me, they will make life as difficult as they possibly can for those they oppose."

"Okay. Okay. Points taken, Jonty," Turais said as he raised his arms in surrender. He understood better now and how he should navigate the waters ahead. Let Alex engage with Aigel and distance himself from Aigel in appearance. Of course, he would still be hugely involved with them, but in a less visible manner.

"Make sure you remember to consider all the angles," Jonty warned as he went back to his food. "You're clever enough to figure this out, somehow. I know you can."

Turais grinned as he swung his arm around Jonty. "I'm glad to know you have faith in me, my personal political strategist."

Jonty waved away his comment and shrugged off his arm nonchalantly. "I'm only watching out for my own interest. I am a Slytherin after all, in case you forgot you are one yourself."

"Sure," Turais grinned as he turned back to examine the breakfast items only to find Nott glaring at him with great intensity. Ignoring him, his eyes locked onto a particular dish on the table. "Oooh, they're serving treacle tarts for breakfast today."

At that, Turais successfully made Jonty break into a small grin - his first of the day. He shook
his head and said, "Only you, Turais, would eat treacle tart for breakfast. Only you."

As they dug into the breakfast spread in front of them, Alex returned to the a Great Hall and seated himself beside Turais. Moments later, Pierricoeur appeared as well and took his seat at the Ravenclaw table. His eyes immediately searched for his brother and his brows furrowed worriedly.

"He was agitated because he noticed Aigel's healed bruises on his face this morning," Alex muttered into Turais' ear. Turais nodded understandingly. He looked over to the first-year, who was sat alone like a lone island amongst the rest of the Slytherins.

"He didn't threaten you or anything, right?" Turais asked, connecting gazes with Pierricoeur. Pierricoeur gave Turais a curt nod before rejoining a conversation with his housemates.

'A nod from Pierricoeur? That's new as well,' Turais thought.

Alex grimaced. "Let's just say there were a few heated words exchanged, but everything has been resolved. I explained the situation last night and the role you played. And hopefully, he will be less of a menace this year since we did him such a huge favour." Jonty snorted disbelievingly as he shook his head at their naiveté.

"We? It's all been you, Alex," Turais said as he scooped a hearty amount of scrambled eggs onto Alex's plate.

"Thank you, Turais. Oooh! Treacle tart! Your favourite, Turais," Alex said as he spotted the dessert. "I bet this was Slughorn’s doing. Anyhow, I couldn't have done it without you."

"Just let me know whenever you need backup," Turais said as Alex smiled appreciatively. Suddenly, a familiar jet-black owl flew into the Great Hall and headed towards Turais.

"It’s an owl from M.E.S.O.P.!” Turais exclaimed as Alex snapped his attention towards the incoming bird. As it flew along the Slytherin table, a lot of the students, who were casually chatting with their peers, were equally as captivated by the immaculately groomed bird.

As expected, the owl dropped a magazine in front of him before flying away without landing. Turais lifted the magazine and read the title that screamed ‘ACONITE - LEAVES VS. ROOTS’ with the subheading ‘Start of the Herbaceous Renaissance?’. He saw the familiar face of a young boy, unmistakably a Black in the monochromatic grey, looking back at him. He had almost perfectly-combed hair, except for the characteristic rebellious lock of his fringe that was always dangling over his right brow, and a charming smile with his jaw muscle twitching as though he was on the verge of a full-on laughter.

‘So they ultimately did choose the second picture I took when Sirius was making that weird chicken clucking sound.’

They sent in the three pictures where Turais was not outright laughing, frowning, or leaving the photo frame for the editors to choose from. Turais had a hunch they would pick this one because it was a more relaxed smile and also hinted at his boyish charm appropriate for a happy, young Pureblood heir.

“Woah! Your transcript is finally out?” Jonty snatched the copy of Potions out of Turais’ grip and started to flip through it when another jet-black owl, flew into the hall.

“Did the owl forget something?” Alex asked quizzically.

“I’ve never heard an owl forget to deliver an item before,” Turais squinted at the owl. “Hold
They learnt the truth soon enough as the owl delivered the green letter and landed gracefully. Turais took the green envelope and opened it.

MOST EXTRAORDINARY SOCIETY of POTIONEERS

Chief Potioneer: Charlicus Finbok

(Order of Merlin, Second Class)

Dear Mr Turais Rigel Orion Black,

We are pleased to inform you that the New Potions Application on the joint-discovery named, tentatively, “Wolfsbane Potion” with Mr Damocles Belby for the expressed usage of:

1) Easing the symptoms of lycanthropy; and,

2) Preventing werewolves from losing their mental faculties post-transformation

has been peer-reviewed and conditionally accepted by the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers (hereafter referred to as M.E.S.O.P.) for demonstrating its safety and efficacy. Therefore, the final phase of Ministry-approved clinical trials will proceed prior to the final approval of your application. The transcript for the new Potion (without the methods and potion recipe) will be published as the cover story in the October 1970 edition of Potions. Please find enclosed a copy of the approved transcript (with the methods and potion recipe redacted), a list of required items for publication, and an invitation to the Head Office of M.E.S.O.P..

We await your owl by no later than 5 September.

Yours sincerely,

Charlicus Finbok
Chief Potioneer

Turais dropped the letter in shock as Alex reached for the letter and dropped it in the same manner moments later. Turais’ mind went blank as he felt his magic and blood coursing throughout his body. Although he had been expecting this for a long time, he still couldn’t believe the day had finally arrived.

“Turais, were those two owls from M.E.S.O.P. -” he then took in Turais’ shocked expression and looked sharply at letter in Turais’ slacked grip. He peered down at the letter from behind his shoulder and when he was finished, his eyes were shocked with admiration and his hands were shaking with excitement. The entire table was looking at their Head of House with intense curiosity as to what news had caused such an effect.
“Turais…” Professor Slughorn said shakily as though he was struggling to breathe, “Turais… my boy, the Wolfsbane Potion has been conditionally approved for clinical trials? The Wolfsbane Potion has been conditionally approved. The Wolfsbane Potion has been conditionally approved! What amazing news!”

Professor Slughorn said the sentence three times loudly - each time with increasing confidence - to hammer in the truth and Turais silently thanked him for that. However, he could only feel the frantic pounding as his heart threatened to escape from his chest as he breathed heavily.

“Turais, my boy! A Potion that alleviates symptoms of a werewolf during full-moon. A Potion that keeps them sane during full-moon. You’ve done it!” Professor Slughorn shouted as Turais felt dizzier and more disoriented by the second.

“You’ll get an Order of Merlin - definitely second class but potentially first class - for this discovery!” Turais heard Professor shout out when a flare of magic rushed up into his head as the world turned black.

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Turais opened his eyes and immediately shut them again. “So bright…” he mumbled.

He felt two pairs of hands squeezing both his hands gently as he felt a soft caress on his cheek.

“Hey Turais, time to wake up,” he heard Orion said somewhere to his left. Turais turned his head slightly to hide away from the light.

“Can I sleep in today?” Turais mumbled into his pillow. “I was just dreaming that the Wolfsbane Potion was conditionally approved. I want to go back to that dream…”

Turais heard a couple of amused chuckles. Those chuckles did not belong to Sirius and Regulus; they were adults. Confused, Turais sat up with his eyes still closed; it was still too bright. “Father, are there visitors today? I’m not even dressed properly… and why is it so bright? I thought we replaced the curtains.”

Some more chuckles. Something was definitely not right.

Turais creaked his eyes opened and saw a few figures surrounding his bed. He blinked as the images focused.

“What? Why am I in the Hospital Wing?” Turais turned to see his father and his brothers. He then looked forward to see Professor Slughorn and Madame Roland. “What happened?”

“Well, you fainted during breakfast this morning,” Orion spoke softly. “Seems like you got a bit too excited and your magic ran wild.”

“What? I’m not at home? I thought I was dreaming of being back at Hogwarts and wait…” Something clicked in Turais’ mind when his memories came back to him. He looked at Professor Slughorn. “Did I actually receive a letter telling me that the Wolfsbane Potion was conditionally approved?”
“Yes, my boy, it seems so,” Slughorn beamed as he held the green envelope out. Turais took it gingerly as he re-opened the envelope. The wax seal was broken already, he noted mentally. He read the letter over again, three times, to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

He looked up at Orion, whose eyes glinted in the lightest shade of cloud grey. It was filled with joy, with pride, with gaiety.

“We did it,” he said faintly as he motioned for a hug, which Orion indulged him. “I can’t believe this. So many lives will be changed for the better.” The impacts the Potion would make finally reached his mind. Although the Potion was not actually released to the public yet since it is still in clinical trials, the Ministry has now approved that the Potion was safe for consumption. Now, actual lycanthropic patients could sign up and be enrolled in the Ministry-regulated experimental Potions program to test for the Potions efficacy. The Potion would now directly benefit some werewolves now!

“No more painful transformations. No more uncontrolled werewolves harming innocent people. It’s here,” he breathed.

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 Apparently, Turais fainted and fell unconscious for three hours, much to Turais’ embarrassment, in front of the entire school. He wouldn’t be able to live this one down anytime soon and was already imagining all the taunts and teases he was going to receive soon. Professor Slughorn had excused Turais from classes for the rest of the day to “recuperate” with his family, although Turais knew he was pampering his prodigal and soon-to-be Order of Merlin awardee second-year student. However, Turais accepted it all the same as he could use the free time to show his brothers around the castle.

Unlike last time when they visited him at night, this time they came during the height of the day; therefore, once Madame Roland signed him off, Turais toured his family around the school grounds and showed them the Quidditch Pitch, the Black Lake, the greenhouses and then finally headed back to the mostly-emptied Slytherin common room.

Sirius and Regulus were very excited during the entire tour as they got a sneak-peek at Hogwarts before their time at the castle while Turais was glad to have a taste of what life with his brothers would be in the future.

The reception to the Slytherin common room was mixed, however. Orion glanced at every brick and step with a sense of nostalgia; Sirius was generally uncomfortable and claimed everything was cold, wet, and unpleasant (Turais secretly agreed with him); Regulus loved the Slytherin common room as much as the rest of the castle. Regulus quietly told Turais that he was feeling hungry when Turais realized that they have missed lunch due to the tour and it was two in the afternoon already. Therefore, Turais guided them to the kitchen in the Hufflepuff section of the dungeons.

“Turais, why are we heading to the Hufflepuff basement?” Orion asked, confused. He clearly had no knowledge where the kitchen was.

“Father, trust me. I am certain I know more about the castle than you do,” Turais challenged with a smirk.
“Oh, do you think so?” Turais thought Orion was going to rise to the challenge but, to his surprise, his father didn’t. “That would be highly likely, Turais. I did not spend a lot of time exploring the castle during my time and I mostly kept to myself.”

Orion looked forlorn. But Turais saw his murky grey eyes spiraling and settled into an unyielding steel as his masking resurfaced and looked impassive once more. Turais was slightly taken aback by the amount of defense he mounted to block the sadness that he saw seconds ago.

‘What happened during his time in Hogwarts?’

He was distracted from his thoughts by the screams and squeals from Sirius and Regulus as they saw a few ghosts floating through the walls in the adjacent hallway.

Due to the proximity of the Black Lake to the Slytherin dungeons, the hallways were constantly cold and damp despite the powerful Warming and Drying enchantments. However, as they entered the Hufflepuff basement, the cold and damp air slowly turned warm and dry, in part due to the furnace in the kitchens nearby and in part due to being surrounded by land once more. The hallways also seemed more brightly lit and cheery, to Sirius’ contentment.

Soon, they arrived in a hallway lined with food-themed paintings and Turais stopped in front of the painting of a fruit bowl. Turais turned to his father and lifted an eyebrow, Orion returned a smirk and motioned for him to continue. Turais reached for the pear in the fruit bowl and tickled it as Sirius and Regulus leaned in wondering what their older brother was doing.

Suddenly, the pear giggled as Turais’ brothers jumped back in alarm. Orion laughed at his two younger sons, who both grinned sheepishly. Turais grabbed the large green door handle that was in place of the disappeared pear and opened the door.

He heard the three gasped as they walked into an enormous, high-ceiling chamber that looked like a replica of the Great Hall above it. Some house elves were walking around carrying cleaned cookware to one end of the hall while others were cutting ingredients to prepare for dinner in a few hours. A familiar house-elf noticed Turais and walked up to them.

“Mister Black, I is Quincy. How may I help sirs? Does sir have another snake to feed?” He said in a squeaky voice.

Turais crouched down and looked at Quincy, whose large black orbs widened even more at his action. “Hi Quincy, I don’t have a snake to feed but I do have my family. We missed lunch so I was wondering if you have any food we can eat?”

Quincy nodded quickly, his pointy ears straightening in excitement. “Yes, mister Black. You is very kind. Quincy is honoured to serve kind mister Black and his family. Please follow me.”

Quincy walked them to a nearby table and many different house-elves swarmed around them delivering plates and cups and various food items: tea, bread, cheese, milk, jam, apples, and ham. Looking at the spread on the fully covered table, it was like a luxury picnic buffet.

As they dug in, Orion finally brought up the topic of the Wolfsbane Potion again. Turais was grateful because he really wanted to process what had happened and he had the best person beside him to talk about it.

“So… my son’s already a published Potioneer, but he had just discovered a new Potion and will likely become an Order of Merlin awardee, if Professor Slughorn has any say in the matter…” Orion trailed off, clearly processing the events as well. He clasped his hands together as his eyes
“And be the youngest person to have an Order of Merlin,” Turais added helpfully, trying to be happy at the idea but failing as his guilt weighed down even heavier.

“Yes… and that. Oh Merlin, what have I done… what have our House done… to deserve you,” Orion took in a shuddering breath and closed his eyes.

Turais had no answer. He didn’t deserve it. All of the honour should have been Damocles’. He was a “time-traveller” who had the benefit of learning everything once before and knowing facts that are still unknown to those at this time. And for Merlin’s sake, he was the Master of Death. He had an inherent advantage to begin with…

But... because he was the Master of Death that’s why he could be reborn as Turais Black and change things for the better in this world when he couldn’t for his original one. His purpose for coming here was to change the future. Now that he had changed it, why was he feeling guilty? But he just saved the werewolves from many years of suffering because he said something and sped along the process of the potion, which was the right thing to do… right?

“Turais? Turais? Are you feeling unwell again? Do you need to go to Madame Roland again?”

Orion was shaking his shoulder. Turais snapped his attention to his father’s worried expression, realizing he was lost in his own thoughts.

“No… I’m feeling fine, father,” Turais said, “I just… I just don’t think I deserve the Order of Merlin… if I get one… it should be all Damocles, he did all the hard work. I literally just told him to use aconite roots only and switched some steps on his potion recipe around. I did absolutely nothing else. I haven’t even brewed the potion to completion once. I still don’t understand how Damocles could submit it as a joint-discovery… I just don’t deserve it. He does, but I don’t,” Turais admitted his guilty conscience and felt a knot in his chest loosen up a fraction. Although it was not the complete truth as he could never mention being the Master of Death, the guilt he was feeling was completely real.

“Turais, if you didn’t tell Damocles what you knew, it could have taken him many more months, maybe even forever, for him to come to the same results. I read your letters when you mentioned that Damocles said your involvement in his project was the singularly most important event that precipitated the completion of the Wolfsbane Potion. Damocles had worked on this project for years, and he is an accomplished Potioneer. Have some faith that he can tell what factors were important to allow his project to fruition,” Orion said.

“He wouldn’t have offered you joint-discovery if you just told him to add water into a cauldron and start a fire beneath it,” Orion added for extra emphasis.

Turais chuckled at his words. “I’ll have you know that adding water and starting a fire under the cauldron are very important in potion-making.”

“Alas, I’m not a Potions Master,” Orion said and Turais’ snort turned into a laugh. Orion laughed alongside him. A minute later, Turais’ guilt creep back into his mind.

“Turais,” Orion said softly, sensing his son's troubled mind had returned. “Remind me. Who did the experiment on the difference in neutralization reactions on aconite roots compared to its leaves?”
“Me,” Turais said softly. That was true, he was the first to discover the difference in aconite leaves and roots in this timeline, although he wasn’t aware of that fact until he met Damocles.

“There you go. You discovered something novel and you, as kind-hearted and generous as you are, shared your knowledge with Damocles that allowed him to develop his potion. You might feel like you have only contributed very little in this project, but, as Damocles said, it was potentially the most important part of it. The significance of a contribution does not always correlate with the amount of effort or time. You don’t have to feel guilty of anything,” Orion said, placing his hand around his son’s shoulder and pulling him into his warm embrace.

They hugged in silence for a long time as Sirius and Regulus wolfed down their food noisily and the house-elves busied themselves around them.

“I’m going to have an Order of Merlin,” Turais said softly, finally feeling a peace of mind and stopped objected the thought.

He didn’t feel like he deserved the Order of Merlin as Harry Potter for defeating Voldemort because he was forced into the prophecy and saving the world because of Voldemort, not by his own volition and choice. Hermione did eventually get through his thick skull the fact that he could have run away and did nothing. But he didn’t, and that was more than what she could have said for nine-tenths of the Wizarding population. This time, he managed to achieve the same honour without the added weight of the prophecy and rescuing the Wizarding World from the brink of destruction. It was awarded to him purely due to his own choices and academic accomplishments. Without the sense of responsibility and duty attached, he only felt elation and contentment.

“Can you imagine your grandfather Arcturus’ face when you receive the Order of Merlin before he does? He’s been trying to buy his way into one for years now. He will be so proud and jealous at the same time. I can’t wait,” Orion chuckled at the thought as Turais felt a gentle rumbling by his side. Turais smiled at the thought too.

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At around the time that classes ended, Turais parted ways with his family as they headed home while Turais met up with his, presumably, worried friends in the common room. When he entered the common room, he found it mostly empty. The students have not made their way back yet.

However, he found Nott and Dolohov locked in a seemingly intense conversation.

They caught him standing by the entrance and stopped talking. Nott disappeared up the staircase while Dolohov plastered a fake smile as he stepped forward.

“Hi Turais, how are you feeling? I hope you are not too surprised by your own achievements, seeing that you were taken ill like a fainting damsel.”

Turais’ eyes narrowed at the false pleasantness. He did not miss this about Hogwarts.

“Thank you, Antonin. I am very touched by your concern. Perhaps you should try it sometimes. Having achievements, I mean,” Turais smiled back.

At his words, Dolohov’s fake smile transformed into a sinister leer. “I won’t get too cocky,
Black, if I were you. You may be book-smart, but you still have much to learn about how the world works. And unfortunately, you will find it does not revolve around you.’”

“Thank you for your valuable lesson, Dolohov. I am always eager to learn, you know. But only from those who are better, in moral and in ability,” Turais also dropped his smile and stared back with an intense warning.

“Well then, here is my penultimate lesson for you, Black. There are evidently some things that no magical abilities can save your hides from,” Dolohov snarled.

“Lesson noted, Dolohov,” Turais retorted with equal force.

The two boys stared at each other across the empty Slytherin common room until they heard the deep rumbling of students’ footsteps near the entrance. Dolohov turned to head up the staircase but Turais called out, curious but also sniffing out any details of his threats.

“When is the last lesson?”

Dolohov stopped in his tracks but did not turn around. Then he spoke softly, “You will find out soon enough.”

He disappeared up the staircase just as the students flooded into the common room while Turais continued to stare at where Dolohov just disappeared. He did not like the ominous declaration. Not one bit. Could people stop issuing death threats for one year? Was that too much to wish for?

Suddenly, he felt a hand clasped on his shoulder from behind.

“Hey Turais, are you okay? Jonty and I went up to the Hospital Wing during lunch but Madame Roland said you left already,” Alex appeared on his left while Jonty popped into view on his right.

“Yeah, I’m okay. Madame Roland said I was just a tad too shocked by the news. I just spent some time with my father and brothers exploring the castle afterwards. Sorry for not telling you,” Turais apologized mindlessly.

“It has not even been twenty-four hours and you miss them already? You must be breaking some kind of ‘dopiest brother’ record. I have to tell Alice and Jane,” Jonty said beside him. Then, Turais felt a slight nudge to his side. “Hey, are you alright? Why are you staring at the staircase?”

Turais blinked and saw that he was staring at a couple fourth-years making their way up the stairs. He snapped his head and looked at both his best friends.

“It’s nothing, just lost in my own head a bit. It’s been a wild day,” he said with a pacifying smile.

“Ain’t that the truth. Blimey, you’re going to be an Order of Merlin awardee if Slughorn has any say in it,” Jonty punched him in the shoulder playfully. "He has been droning on and on about this the entire class today -" Suddenly, his eyed narrowed at someone in the distance. "- I’ll be right back..."

However, Turais did not hear what he said as his mind returned to Dolohov’s thinly veiled threats.

‘I will find out soon enough…’
Chapter End Notes

Threats against main characters is a universally bad omen. Turais is in for a ride. Yikes.

That being said, I am proud and excited to reveal the title for my next chapter - Chapter 26: A Star Seeker was Born. For those of you who were waiting for some Quidditch action by Turais. It's here! See you next update.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-03
Hey everybody,

New update. And the plot thickens...

As always, I’d love to hear from you,

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-10

⚠️ Note:

I anticipate some questions regarding blood status determination.

My story will follow the system where one's grandparents would determine the person's blood status. A pureblood would be anyone that had four pureblood/half-blood grandparents. For example, both Turais' paternal and maternal grandparents were purebloods, so he would be a pureblood. A half-blood would be anyone with a combination of Muggleborns/Muggles/pureblood/halfblood. For example, Harry Potter's children with Ginny Weasley would be half-bloods because Harry's mother, Lily, was a Muggleborn. A Muggleborn would be anyone who had four Muggle/Muggleborn grandparents.

So blood purity fanatics such as the Gaunts would pride themselves as having NO MUGGLE ANCESTRY at all. In this story (and this should be canon-compliant), you could be a pureblood with distant Muggle ancestor as long as it was beyond your grandparents. But you might be looked down upon slightly by, say, a Malfoy or a Black as they boast complete magical ancestry.

So by this system, there is a bit of debate on whether the Pierricoeur brothers are considered half-blood or muggleborns. For the purpose of this story, since they had four Muggle grandparents, they would be considered Muggleborns.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 26

A STAR SEEKER WAS BORN

September 4, 1970 (Thursday)
Dear readers, it is to my utter surprise to report that we have a Muggleborn Slytherin in our newest class of Hogwarts students. Aigel Pierricoeur, youngest son of the renowned Arithmancer Emmanuel Pierricoeur, was confirmed to be sorted into Slytherin two days ago. Throughout the history of Hogwarts, the House of Slytherin has been the house of choice for most pureblood families. In fact, most family members from the Sacred Twenty-Eight were sorted into this house. It also has the unofficial reputation as being the most selective in the blood purity of a prospective student. While this theory has never been proven as the ancient magic vested in the Sorting Hat has never been studied, one might consider it to be highly plausible as Salazar Slytherin, the founder of this House, was known to emphasize the importance of magical ancestry and heritage.

However, today's story is not about the dry facts of history. Instead, I would like to bring your attention to what transpired during the Sorting. Multiple sources identified that Alexander Fawley, cousin of former Minister Hector Fawley and second-year, coming to the aid of the nervous first-year.

"I have utmost confidence that the Sorting of Aigel Pierricoeur shows the efforts made by the Headmaster to make Hogwarts a more inclusive place has reaped its rewards. I am very proud that Alexander has become a leader and stepped up at this crucial moment," said Lord Fawley when asked about Alexander Fawley's behaviour.

However, his faith in the second-year's judgement might be sorely misplaced.

"He is already a blemish to our reputation as a whole," Johannes Grassley, a sixth-year said. "Fawley was a fool to try and invite him into our fold as though he belonged."

His peers have voiced similar concerns and discomfort about their newest addition.

Tracey Morrison, a fellow housemate, said: "He is... quite frankly... odd." Her friend, Regina Bennett added, "He constantly looks at me silently, which is quite unnerving."

If the addition of such a character proves to be so divisive, the Headmaster should remedy the situation by yielding to the request of a re-Sorting...

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September 4, 1970 (Friday)

"Incendio," Alex said as he set the small heap of letters aflame. Beside him, Aigel eyed the ceiling of the Great Hall with fear and trepidation.

It was the morning after The Daily Prophet ran the first of several articles penned by Sclandora Gosp that sent pureblood families into a frenzy. Aigel Pierricoeur has received more than a dozen letters from readers, several of which were Howlers that shouted obscenity after
After the third Howler, it convinced Jonty that the first-year Muggleborn could use some emotional support after all and asked Aigel to join them for breakfast.

"It's going to be fine," Turais said comforting as the boy nodded numbly while staring at the pile of burning ashes.

Suddenly, another owl passed over their head and dropped yet another Howler. However, it landed straight in Alex's lap this time. Alex's eyes widened as the Howler sprung to life and contorted into the shape of a mouth.

"Alexander!" A harsh, raspy voice boomed from a green envelop menacingly over their head. "Have you decided that you have not brought enough shame to our family name? How dare you associate yourself with that boy! -" The envelope-and-letter lips formed a vicious snarl that was sent towards the direction of a cowering Aigel Pierricoeur. "- Boy! You are not welcomed in this House and stop poisoning our brilliant young minds -" The Howler whipped back and flew right at Alex's face"- Watch your step, boy. If I ever see you sink to even lower levels..." With that unfinished threat, the Howler gave a final hiss with its ribbons flapping wildly before tearing itself into pieces.

Turais eyed his friend with concern. It was the first time he had heard the elusive voice belonging to Alex's father. But Alex just fixated his gaze somewhere over Turais' shoulder while maintaining a blank, emotionless expression. Aigel, who was sitting next to Alex, tugged on Alex's robe gently. Alex turned to give the first-year a reassuring smile before returning to his stupor. Tenebrus, Jeremy, and a handful of Slytherins sitting nearby pretended to take interest in their breakfasts to give them a semblance of privacy.

"Are you alright, Alex?" Turais couldn't help but ask. But Alex's expression were closed off and he was unresponsive. Turais sighed. He would have to give Alex some time before he lowered his defenses once more.

"At least your father still has some sense in him," one of the older Slytherins, Grassley, yelled out. His friends shouted out a chorus of approval.

"Lord Fawley, or the former Minister for Magic, wrote to him approving of his actions," Jonty shouted out as he waved today's newspaper in the air as proof.

"That pathetic Muggle-loving Minister was a complete joke," Grassley continued. "It seems like the hermit Fawley was the only one with proper pureblood upbringing in his dying family. Unlike his deceitful spawn and his tainted blood -"

"Ten points from Slytherin and detention for the week, Mr Grassley!" Professor McGonagall shouted out sternly as she trotted over from the staff table.

"You can't punish me for telling the truth, Professor," Grassley responded.

"Make that twenty points from Slytherin," McGonagall said. "It is not the truthfulness but the cruelty of your words that is the real issue here, Mr Grassley. Verbal bullying and any other forms of bullying have no place in this School."

The Professor turned around to a silenced Hall in which all students were trying to observe the latest Slytherin drama. After a brief moment of consideration, she addressed all the students present.
"It has been brought to my attention that certain articles have been published in regards to the Sorting Ceremony several days ago. The Headmaster had indicated that no student was ever re-sorted in Hogwarts history and he does not intend to break this tradition now. Hopefully this would set the records straight and any rumours, or in some cases, wishful thinking -" the Professor glared at Grassley, " - will lie to rest."

Grassley fumed but remained silent. After a loathing glare, he returned to angry muttering with his peers. The Professor turned to look at Alex and Turais with a hint of concern, but Turais nodded on their behalf. McGonagall pressed her lips thinly and nodded.

Slowly but surely, the Great Hall returned to its normal activities. Just as the students were finishing up and ready to head to their first class of the day, Professor Slughorn strolled in.

"Turais!" Slughorn beamed as he walked up to him. "I'm glad I found you!"

"Yes, Professor?" Turais asked as the Slytherins all turned their attention to their Head of House.

"I have decided to host a party in you and Damocles' honour for the approval of the Wolfsbane Potion for clinical trials!" Slughorn said excitedly as most of the table looked on with varying expression. Some were in awe and others were seething with jealously at the blatant favouritism.

"That is..." Turais stuttered, "T...thank you, Professor. But that is not necessary..."

"Nonsense, m'boy!" Slughorn clapped his hand on Turais' back. "This is a wonderful achievement, which means a celebration party is in order! I've already sent out invites to my contacts in M.E.S.O.P. as well as the Ministry of Magic Research Committee that will be involved in the approval of the Potion. They will be wonderful contacts for your professional network and future career. It's never too early to start cultivating those relations."

"I... well, thank you, Professor," Turais said as Slughorn waved off his comment.

"Anything for a future Order of Merlin awardee," Slughorn said proudly. "I'm always glad to see my students go on to be successful. Oh - I almost forgot -" Slughorn pulled out a stack of invitations, " - invitations to your party. Invite all the friends you want - carte blanche. I know you have many friends, so just come to me if you run out!"

Professor Slughorn trotted off as Turais looked at the stack of invitations in his hands. Turais recognized the world-changing role Professor Slughorn had in bringing Damocles and him together as he would have to indulge the Professor's antics - at least this time. He would also have to order an entire shipment of crystallized pineapples to sincerely thank Professor Slughorn for his involvement.

What he did not expect (although he should have, in hindsight), was that all the students were now blatantly staring at and discussing about him, which made him very uncomfortable. But Turais recognized it was a small price to pay for the benefits of many inflicted with the condition.

"Hey," Turais nudged Alex as he handed him an invitation. The name "Alexander Fawley" immediately appeared on the envelope in a beautiful cursive font. "Would you like to attend my party?"

Alex broken out of his stasis and received the invitation. His lips tucked upwards minutely. "I thought you wouldn't wish this on your third-worst enemy."
"Well, it seems like I will not be able to get out of this one, considering I am the guest of honour," Turais said. "So as my best friend, you'll just have to give me your unconditional support."

"I see how you treat your closest friends now..." Alex teased.

"Please don't abandon me to the wolves," Turais pouted and used his puppy-eye looks on Alex.

"Urgh... fine," Alex said in mock disgust as he placed the invitation in his pocket. "The things I do for you."

Turais grinned. But Alex's smile soon disappeared as his expression closed off once again.

"Am I invited to this fancy party of yours or do I need to gatecrash it?"

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September 11, 1970 (Friday)

It was the day of the Slytherin House Team Quidditch trials and Turais was grateful for the excuse to escape the Group meeting. When Turais approached Carmichael Wilkins, the Slytherin Quidditch Team captain, to inquire about trying out for a position last week, Wilkins immediately called upon Malfoy and told him to excuse Turais from the Group meeting for today in preparation for a long trial session. Alex, who was eager to avoid the meeting too, also pretended that he wanted to try out for the team as well.

Therefore, they found themselves walking with Jonty down to the Quidditch Pitch after classes.

"Good luck trying out for Seeker, Turais!" Fabian Prewett shouted out on his way towards the stands as he spotted the three Slytherins approach the Slytherin team captain with their brooms.

"Thank you, Gideon!" Turais shouted back, deliberately saying his twin's name instead.

"I take back what I said to you and sod off!" The seventh-year Gryffindor chided bemusedly as he made a rude hand gesture.

"I didn't know you were close with the Prewett twins," Jonty commented as they continued towards the Slytherin captain, who was engaged in an animated discussion with... "Huh, isn't that Potter?" Jonty pointed towards the Gryffindor who clearly contributed the most towards the conversation both in words and in hand movements. At some point, Wilkins gave Kaiden a withering look and the boy immediately dulled his movements... but only for a brief while before he started waving his arms wildly again.

"What were you saying about the twins?" Jonty returned to the previous conversation.

Turais shrugged. "I meet them occasionally. As you are probably aware, my aunt Lucretia is married to Lord Ignatius Prewett."
Jonty slapped his forehead in realization. "That completely slipped my mind."

"- have to replace that buffoon Pucey. Laughalot was clearly under a Confundus when he swapped her out." Kaiden's voice was clearly heard as the Slytherins approached the duo. "Now I know you don't like me interfering nor should I be helping you build a better team... but PUCEY! Really?!!" Kaiden took Wilkins by the shoulders and shook him violently. "- You can do better than that, Michael, much better -"

Wilkins visibly rolled his eyes as he shoved Kaiden away with his hand squarely on his chest. He then took a few steps away from Kaiden for extra distance. His dry, scratchy voice sounded, "Kaiden, I know what I'm doing -"

"You clearly don't since you are keeping him on the roster!" Kaiden made an attempt to claw at the clipboard but Wilkins physically held the boy at bay. Undeterred, the Gryffindor captain whipped out his wand to levitate the clipboard out of Wilkins' hands. But the Slytherin quickly countered by casting a weak Shield charm followed by a mild Stinging Hex at the boy. "Hey Michael, you're not playing very nicely -"

"So, ahem! Black. What are you -" Wilkins shouted out as he spotted the incoming Quidditch hopefuls. He held his arm out to keep the energetic Kaiden at bay.

"Hey Rais!" Kaiden waved excitingly. "Looking mighty fine today, Steward!" It was Turais' turn to wonder about the relationship there as he looked at Jonty questioningly.

"We have a symbiotic relationship on inter-House information exchange," Jonty whispered into Turais' ear.

Turais snorted before whispering back. "Is that what you call your glorified gossip circle?"

Jonty bristled predictably.

Meanwhile, Kaiden had taken advantage of Wilkins' momentary distraction as he snatched the clipboard and feather quill from his grasp and started scribbling. "Turais is trying out for Seeker -" Kaiden said as the quill moved across the piece of parchment before shoving both items back to the disgruntled Wilkins. "- here, Michael. All done for you."

"Kay, here to scout out the winning team Seeker?" Turais teased.

"That's funny because you are looking at the winning team captain," Kaiden smirked and puffed his chest.

Wilkins gave Kaiden a questioning look as he jerked his thumb at Turais. "Kay?"

"Ah! Long story - I'll tell you later, Michael!" Kaiden said hurriedly as he smiled at Turais. "Good luck!"

Turais smiled. "Thank you, Kaiden. I'll try my best."

"Well, try your best now. But don't try too hard on the actual matches," Kaiden joked.

"No promises there," Turais returned.

"Ahem! " Wilkins cleared his throat aggressively as he gave Kaiden a pointed look who, for once, seemed to have taken note and decided to spare the Slytherin captain more headache.
"Good luck to the rest of you too!" Kaiden said before wisely sauntering away.

Wilkins muttered something that sounded suspiciously like "Pillock Potter" as Kaiden shouted out, "I heard that, Michael!"

The three second-years shared an amused look while Wilkins cursed under his breath.

“So... ahem, Seeker, huh. That’s good. Wait over there with Blishwick and Eibon. Also, nice broom there - Mahogany-birch Nimbus 1700 - better not waste it or I’ll nick it for myself. How about you, Fawley?”

“Uh, same?” Fawley muttered.

“Broom?” Wilkins asked gruffly as he glanced at the boy’s empty hands.

“Uh… I’ll just use one of the school ones.”

Wilkins stared at Alex’s face for a moment and decided he was one of those time-wasters. “Fawley, I’ll spare you the trouble. Just head to the stands and I’ll say you failed the Chasers trial.”

Alex gasped out a breath of relief.

As captain of the Quidditch Team, Wilkins held great respect and power in the Slytherin hierarchy. Therefore, although he was not in the Group, he was in the loop with top-circle politics and the happenings. Fortunately for them, Wilkins was also a Quidditch fanatic who placed Quidditch above House politics; therefore, Turais guessed that whenever it came to Quidditch-related business, he was clearly willing to turn a blind eye.

“And you, Steward?”

“Chaser.”

“Oak-hazel Cleansweep Five...” Wilkins eyed the platinum finishing approvingly. “… Plus. Worse than a Nimbus 1700 but better than the Cleansweep Six, at least the current oak-aspen one. Join the largest group over there.”

As the three walked the remaining trail down into the Quidditch pitch, Turais heard a quiet rustle nearby and reached for his wand.

"Who's there?" Jonty asked as he pulled out his wand moments later.

Turais turned to his right to see a jittery boy walking out from the shadow of the tree. It was Aigel.

"Aigel, what are you doing here?" Alex exclaimed as he walked towards him under Jonty's suspicious gaze.

"Um... I heard it's the Slytherin Quidditch trials," Aigel said as he scratched his head sheepishly.

"You're not planning on trying out for the team, are you?" Alex frowned. "First-years are not allowed to have their own brooms."

"N...no," Aigel shook his head. "I just wanted to see what was going on... if that's okay..." Jonty snorted as Turais nudged him disapprovingly.
"Why are you hiding in the shadows then?" Jonty asked sharply.

"I... I.." Aigel's eyes darted to Alex's face and flushed before looking down on the grassy path. "I... just wanted to see your performances."

"That's great!" Alex shot Jonty a warning glare and put his arms around the boy. "I'm heading to the viewing stands. Why don't you join me?"

Aigel's face split into a big, dazzling smile as he immediately tugged Alex towards the stands. Alex gave a helpless shrug and allowed himself to be dragged away.

"That boy better make up believable excuses next time. He's a Slytherin, for Merlin's sake," Jonty shook his head as he hid his wand once more. They eyed their retreating backs as Jonty spoke up again, "I seriously think that boy has imprinted on Alex like how those ducklings do. Either that or he's up to something. Why can't the Pierricoeurs act like normal human beings?"

"Don't be rude," Turais admonished. "I find it quite endearing." In fact, he was happy that Alex had made a friend on his own. Although there was a part of him that was bothered by the fact that Aigel might be Prometheus. Jonty made a retching noise and Turais thumped on his back, hard.

'Keep an open mind, Turais,' Turais thought to himself. 'Don't jump to conclusions. Just stay vigilant.'

Quite honestly, it was important for Alex's social development as well to have a group of friends that did not only consist of Jonty and himself. In terms of ulterior motive, that meant Turais would be able to keep close tabs on the boy through Alex. This indirect monitoring might work in his favour in the long run.

They walked over to the side of the pitch and joined their respective groups while Alex and Aigel headed off to the stands where four clusters of students wearing different house colours sat. It was a convention that team trials were open to viewing by other House teams as opposed to the closed practice sessions. Hence, historically it was also when the other House Team members were known to jinx and hex potential rivals and prevent them from making the teams. It was all part of the “fun”, and Turais agreed. Rule-breaking and being enraged by them were and would always be an integral part of the game. He didn’t condone them and was furious when it happened to him, but let’s be honest for a second, it wouldn’t be half as entertaining without them (at least when in moderation ).

The whistle sounded to signal the start of the trials. Wilkins sat on his Comet 220 and zoomed up to join the current members of the team. His Comet was the latest model of the series and was on par with Jonty’s Cleansweep Five Plus and Turais’ Nimbus 1700; they were all the top broom offerings alongside Shooting Star 70, which was the last good broom from the company before its collapse in 1978 from his original timeline. It was a weird feeling to see the best brooms available now would end up becoming undesirable school brooms by the 1990’s.

Turais looked up to Wilkins as he used a Sonorous to address the hopefuls.

“So everyone here should know that there are open spots for one Chaser, one Beater, one Keeper, and one Seeker. But unlike some stupid, sentimental Gryffindor -” An angry rumble sounded from the Gryffindor section and Turais could hear Kaiden’s indignant shout “Hey, Carmickey!” which Wilkins ignored. “ - the current members will also be tested again with the short-listed hopefuls. So be prepared for a long haul. Seekers, this is your first test. Learn to sit back and watch others have all the action. Now as usual, Chasers are up!”
The Chasers were first tasked with ball passing with several Quaffles while hovering stationarily in a large circle. Wilkins eliminated all the players who were deliberately sabotaging other players with absurd passes and players who fumbled with every catch. That shaved off half the group. Then, they did several laps around the stadium while passing the Quaffle amongst themselves and further eliminated half the group. Jonty was eliminated in this stage and headed off to the stands, although he didn’t look too dejected. Finally, they were aiming shots at the hoops from different angles and flying speeds. After that, only five players flew to his satisfaction.

The Slytherin section was now the largest group filled with rejected Chaser candidates as they muttered angrily while watching the shortlisted members taking turns grouped with the two current Chasers, Pucey and Montague, on quick passes and flying combos. The current Chasers were also put on rotation and placed in various groups of three with two new hopefuls at a time. Pucey’s ineptitude, which did not come as a surprise to any given his dismal performance as Chaser last year, was completely exposed as he fumbled with passes and missed perfect throws compared to Natalia Arkenstone, who melded with any partners Wilkins assigned her with. Finally, after two full hours, Wilkins has decided on the new Chasers.

“The Chasers for this year are Pyrites, Montague, and Arkenstone -“

“WILKINS! What did you just -“ Pucey roared as he flew up to the captain.

“ - Backups are Harper, Riley, and Vance, in that order. Beaters are up! ”

“WILKINS! My father will hear about this!” Pucey yelled as Wilkins zoomed off to the Beaters group, ignoring Pucey completely.

"Natalia!" Turais shouted as he ran over to the jubilant Chaser. "Congratulations!"

Natalia gave him a radiant smile. "Thank you, Turais! I'm glad that Wilkins had the backbone to kick that bumbling fool off the team."

"Well, Wilkins is quite serious about Quidditch. But most importantly, you deserve this position," Turais smiled.

"Thank you for the encouragement last year," she said. "I'm just really glad Wilkins has been made captain so I have a chance to fight for a Chaser position. I hope you make the team as well."

"Don't worry. I will," Turais grinned.

Natalia gave him an approving nod before waving goodbye to join the rest of the Chasers. Turais also turned his attention back to the Beaters trial.

Wilkins was one-half of the Beaters pair, so he personally engaged in the trials. First, he had them aim the Bludgers at levitated targets. Then, the successful few did drills on batting passes and were tested for reflex by defending the three Chasers from four Bludgers at a time. Wilkins was a fierce player all-around but particularly excelled in defence. His incredible talent was on full display as he almost single-handedly defended the Chasers from all four Bludgers for two minutes when he was paired with a particularly terrified Beater-hopeful. His foul temper was also on full display afterwards when he dressed down that player so loudly the entire pitch could hear him without the Sonorous .

“MAX, DON'T BECOME A BEATER IF YOU ARE GOING TO FLY AWAY FROM THE BLUDGERS!”

He ultimately announced that Cornfoot would be his partner and Gibbon would be the back-
up. Turais was suddenly extremely glad he would not end up on an opposing team as Cornfoot and Wilkins made a scary pair of Beaters. They were able to fend off four Bludgers for ten minutes and also took out all the designated targets in a record time. Wilkins even gave Cornfoot a rare grimace that, Turais guessed, was supposed to be a smile.

“Keepers are up!”

Only four Slytherins were vying for the position and it quickly whittled down to one when it became painfully obvious that three of them couldn’t catch a Quaffle, let alone guard three hoops. Gibbon, who tried out for two positions, was mediocre at best so Wilkins gritted his teeth as he was forced to announce the position.

“Gibbon, you are Keeper,” he said with great reluctance. “And you and I are going to spend a lot of quality time together. And don’t you dare land yourself in detention. I don’t care if you have to French-kiss McGonagall out of one, you will do it!”

Gibbon, along with all the students present on the stands, made various noises of disgust, horrified with the mental image. Wilkins ignored them all and continued.

“Seekers are up!”

Turais mounted his broom and kicked off the ground with a fourth-year girl and family friend, Emma Blishwick, and fifth-year boy Eibon. The sun has almost completely disappeared beneath the horizon now as the Quidditch viewing towers cast long shadows across the orange-lit fields. Wilkins joined them shortly after.

“Now, a-hheem, I have nine Snitches released on half the pitch with four Bludgers set. Whoever catches the most Snitches in the next fifteen minutes will become Seeker. On my whistle.”

Wilkins’ whistle sounded as Turais zoomed ahead towards the designated area and immediately saw specks of gold glistening in the setting sun. He veered right at the closest moving light and immediately dived as a Bludger whistle past his right ear and grazed his flapping robes. Sighting the first Snitch, he reached his right arm for it as he saw another Bludger swing into his view. He performed a barrel roll as it shot harmlessly over his body while keeping his sight on the Snitch. He reached for a second time and closed his hand around the cool metal.

‘One.’

He stuffed it in his pocket as he propelled towards another Snitch that was racing towards a Quidditch viewing tower. He leaned into the broom and pushed for the highest speed as he heard the air whistle a warning of an incoming Bludger. He knew he could out fly the Bludger at this pace and focused on the Snitch and the fast-approaching tower. The Snitch darted upwards at the last moment and Turais pulled up sharply after it, inches from the flapping fabrics. He heard a loud crash below him as he closed his hand of another Snitch; the Bludger must have smashed into the tower.

‘Two.’

He did a backflip-twist to return to the pitch as he saw a Bludger roaring directly towards him. Turais quickly banked right as the Bludger missed the handle by a fraction of an inch. That was a bit too close for comfort as Turais’ heart raced, but he would have to think about it after.

He saw another glint directly beneath him hovering very close to the pitch floor and Turais
tipped his broom down for a straight, vertical dive before twisting into a horizontal path straight for the Snitch, which he pocketed with ease.

‘Three.’

Turais thought he was on track to getting the most Snitches when he heard the whistle. He turned to look at Wilkins who was on the ground.

‘Trials are over!’ He yelled. The crowd at the stands were murmuring excitedly and pointing at their direction.

‘There’s no way fifteen minutes has passed. Did the others catch the rest of the Snitches already? Oh no... that means I tied with three at best or lost otherwise.’

Turais raced down towards Wilkins and dismounted from the broom as the other two joined him moments later.

“What? It was three minutes tops, cap. Why did we stop?” Emma Blishwick asked.

“Yeah, I didn’t even catch one yet! Four Bludgers are too much, cap!” The boy shouted in discontentment. Turais’ heart dropped to his stomach. He couldn’t believe someone caught double the amount of Snitches than he did in the same amount of time.

“You didn’t catch any? I didn’t catch any either,” Emma exclaimed. Both of them turned to stare at Turais. "Turais... did you..."

“Wait… what? I thought you caught six Snitches, Emma,” Turais fished his pockets and held out the three stilled Snitches in his right hand. “I only caught three, I don’t know why Wilkins stopped.”

They turned to Wilkins who was shaking with an intense grimace on his extremely flushed face. The veins by his temples were bulging dangerous. He looked like he was about to explode.

“Uh… are you alright, Wilkins?” Emma asked hesitantly, pulling her broom closely to her body. Turais suddenly realized that he and Eibon did the same thing institionally as well. Wilkins pulled out his wand and they flinched. But he pointed it at his tensed-up throat and turned to the stands. He bellowed in his magically magnified voice, and Turais was surprised by the thick emotions, “BLACK IS SEEKER! BLACK IS SEEKER! THANK MERLIN AND ALL MY ANCESTORS! BLACK IS SEEKER!”

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Turais was trapped in a bone-crushing, bear hug from the team captain for several minutes listening to his play-by-play analysis of the three catches as though Turais did not witness them before he suddenly realized they were in the middle of the Quidditch pitch in front of dozens of students, including Gryffindors. But then, he decided that Turais was the reincarnation of Merlin and that he really didn’t care about the other students because Turais was smooch! and proceeded to hug him even tighter for several more minutes.

When he finally released Turais, Wilkins looked as though he had fallen in love with Turais and kept sending obvious love-sick glances at him as they walked towards the Slytherin changing
rooms. He even walked himself into the wooden door frame as he tried to enter the narrow doorway beside Turais and fell onto the ground while still maintaining a dreamy grin, much to the amusement of everyone else who witnessed it.

In the changing room, Wilkins formally introduced the team to each other. The three Chasers were Noalan Pyrites (sixth-year), Cyrus Montague (seventh-year), and Natalia Arkenstone (seventh-year). The two Beaters were Carmichael Wilkins and Brookes Cornfoot (fifth-year). The Keeper was Strafford Gibbon (sixth-year) and the Seeker was Turais Black, himself. Wilkins said his name with a slight tremor of barely contained excitement.

When they re-emerged from the changing room, Turais saw Jonty and the Gryffindor team standing calmly while Kaiden was jumping up and down ecstatically, an uncanny parallel to James Potter’s behaviour. Wilkins immediately stepped in front of Turais protectively and placed himself between the Gryffindor and his new favourite person in the entire universe.

“What do you want, Kaiden?” Wilkins growled at the sight of the opposing team captain.

“Calm down. I just wanted to say congratulations,” Kaiden continued to bounce, which was starting to make Turais nauseous. “Oi, that was awesome! Your third catch was the textbook Wronski Feint but with the added catch, oh Merlin! Why were you sorted into Slytherin? Why can’t you be our Seeker? Can I ask Dumbledore for a re-sort? I should ask -”

“Hey, Kaiden! Snap out of it! He’s mine!” Wilkins snarled possessively at Kaiden and stabbed a finger at his chest. “If I see you within ten feet of him, I will whack you with Bludgers until you wished you were never born.”

Honestly, Turais was a bit thrown off by the seemingly genuine animosity rolling off of Wilkins against the Gryffindor captain. If this was an act, they deserved awards for their performances. However, Kaiden totally shrugged off the ominous threat and continued to bounce cheerily.

“Cheer up, Carmickey!” Kaiden said cheerily despite Wilkins’ darkening scowl.

‘Carmickey?’ Turais thought as he raised an eyebrow. ‘And Wilkins lets him get away with that?!’

"Stop looking like a dying flobberworm," Kaiden continued. "I can’t wait for the Ravenclaw-Slytherin match now. I will need to film it using a cine-cam! Wait, I don’t have one. I will have to ask my dad to buy me one then!"

“Stop bouncing, Kay! You are making me sick,” Turais finally burst out. Wilkins lashed out upon hearing his words and grabbed Kaiden’s shoulders to still his movements. Turais heard Jonty muttered something about "know how we feel" and "Christmas train ride".

“You heard him, Kaiden. If he misses even a single hair or feels the slightest discomfort from your actions. You will have a talk from my bat, face-to-face ,” said Wilkins while waving his battle-hardened companion in his hand menacingly.

Kaiden frowned for a moment before turning to Turais and fake-whispered, “Loosen him a little, would you?”

At Wilkins’ second growl, an actual growl, Kaiden leapt away quickly and ran for the rest of the Gryffindor team standing nearby. “Bye, Rais. See you around.”

Wilkins turned around to Turais and his deep scowl turned into an awkwardly stilted smile
that contorted on his face unnaturally.

‘Um, please stick with frowning and glaring… please?’

“Black, please catch the snitch in the first five minutes of our first match so I don’t need to get a heart-attack over Gibbon’s Keeping skills,” Wilkins said as he placed his rough hand on his shoulder.

“I’ll try…?” Turais squeaked out and Wilkins did the hideous smile again.

“Good. And I’ll have a word with Malfoy when we get back about training dates.”

The official Slytherin Quidditch team managed to enter the Great Hall ten minutes before dinner was finished. The Hall was completely empty except for a professor who was sitting at the Head Table - Professor Castiella Trelawney, the Divination Professor - Turais recognized. Once they reached the table, everyone was stuffing their faces and plates messily with food before they disappeared. As they were finishing up, they were interrupted by another group of Slytherins.

Lucius Malfoy strolled into the Great Hall with the members of the Group of Seven behind him.

“Carmichael, how were the trials today? Pucey pulled quite the ruckus in the common room and some of our members were too eager to hear the news so here we are.”

Turais eyed Alex, who Turais supposed had returned to the common room already, but the boy shook his head minutely in confusion as well. Everyone stopped eating as the Group settled onto the same table. Alex elected to sit beside Turais as the conversation continued.

“It went well, Lucius -”

An audible gasp sounded from the staff table. Turais turned to see Trelawney's bulging eyes staring at them as she rose from her seat, trembling. Her bony fingers pointed at them as though she was counting something. After that task, she gasped again and looked as though she was about to faint.

"I cannot comprehend why anyone would ever hire that hysterical woman," Dolohov sneered as the old Professor darted down the centre aisle while casting frantic gazes at the table. Once she left the Hall, Wilkins continued to answer Malfoy’s question.

“It went well, Lucius. Except for Gibbon, who will need a lot of training to bring his Keeping skills up to par, we are well-put together,” Wilkins said.

“I see that Turais is sitting with the rest of the team. Has he been selected for a position?” Malfoy asked with curiosity.

“Yes, he is the newest Seeker for the team. I am confident that we will win the Quidditch Cup this year with him on the team,” Wilkins slapped him on the back hard and Turais felt winded.

“Really?” Malfoy arched his brow, “That is high praise coming from you, Carmichael. But given the usual training session, he would be scheduled to miss most of the Group meetings.”

“I’m sure I won’t miss much. Alex would gladly relay the happenings to me afterwards,” Turais said.

“If you insist, Turais,” Malfoy acquiesced.
“I thought you would prefer that the Slytherins win the Quidditch Cup this year, I am sure a slight accommodation in exchange for this is worth it,” Turais said smilingly as he stood up from the table.

“Of course,” Malfoy said pleasantly as he rose as well. “I hope you can deliver what you just promised.”

***

Afterwards, Wilkins led them back to the Slytherin common room where he gathered all the housemates to make the official announcement of the new Slytherin Quidditch Team. The announcement and student reaction was relatively normal until he reached the reveal of their new Seeker.

“And finally, the new Seeker on our Team is... Turais Black.”

Turais could feel the stillness in the room as the students all stared at him intensely. Turais could imagine that half of the students were absolutely awed that the second-year was the top student in his class, a magically-powerful wizard, a member of the Group of Seven, a soon-to-be Order of Merlin awardee (if Professor Slughorn was to be trusted), and also a great Quidditch player; the other half of the students were seething with jealousy and hatred for the same reasons.

Reading the room and sensing the tension-filled silence, Wilkins continued on. “I don’t care what you feel about Black, but what I do care is that Black stays safe, healthy, and able-bodied to participate in all upcoming training sessions and matches. If I catch even a single person breathing weirdly around him, your parents and Dumbledore will be the least of your concerns. Good evening.”

He turned his gaze just to see Dolohov staring at him with a murderous loathing that sent an involuntary shiver down his spine. He was reminded, once again, of the dangerous undercurrents of threats.

‘I will find out soon enough…’

***

September 12, 1970 (Saturday)

"I think Nott is up to something," Jonty whispered as he laid beside him on his bed, shoulders touching.

Turais closed his book and gave Jonty his full attention.

"So... I was tailing Aigel -" Jonty held his hand up to preemptively stop Turais from interjecting. " - and I don't need your permission to do so. But that's not the point. So I followed
him to the fourth floor and he was apparently heading to Gobstones Club so it was a false alarm.

BUT! But! I noticed that Nott was slinking around suspiciously. I mean, there's no reason for him to be there. And then I thought, poking my nose into everyone's business is my duty so I followed him. But he turned a corner into a dead-end hallway and when I peeked, he was nowhere to be seen!"

Turais froze. The description of that hallway sounded vaguely familiar.

Jonty mimicked his head exploding in a dramatic fashion. "That is one interesting mystery to solve, isn't it, Turais? What do you think happened? I'm sure there are secret passages in this castle and I bet he was using one."

'Secret passage. Secret passage to... Hogsmeade!' Turais' mind screamed out. That was it. Jonty just described one of the seven hidden passages from Hogwarts to Hogsmeade.

And it was one of the four routes that he had never used because they have been discovered and blocked off by the time Harry Potter went to Hogwarts for the first time. Maybe the passages were still accessible at this time,

Turais schooled his expression to a feigned nonchalance.

"Interesting, indeed," Turais agreed. "But I suggest you not to investigate into this any further."

"Why?!!" Jonty whined. "Nott must be up to something -"

"Listen to me, Jonty," Turais said. He needed Jonty to keep himself out of this whole ordeal surrounding Nott and Dolohov for his own safety. "This is something between Nott and I and you should not involve yourself in this, not this time."

"Hold on a moment," Jonty asked shrewdly. "It's just Nott acting suspicious. But why are you automatically assuming it has something to do with you? You know something, don't you."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Turais said hastily as he opened his book once more, but Jonty quickly slammed his palm on the book cover.

"You'll tell me right now, Turais. I will figure this out one way or another," said Jonty. Turais glanced at Jonty defiantly and the other boy sighed. "Fine. If you're not telling, then I will have to ask Nott."

"Don't you dare -" Turais growled as he sat up and pinned Jonty down, who was wide-eyed and looked frightened. Turais released Jonty and calmed himself down before speaking, "Nott is highly dangerous. Stay out of this, Jonty. I don't want you to get hurt. Promise me, please."

Jonty nodded quickly as he scrambled back to a sitting position at a respectable distance away from Turais.

"I'm so sorry for the outburst, Jonty. I just did not want you to be implicated in my personal qualms with Nott," Turais said.

"It's okay, Turais," Jonty said softly. "My pa always told me to stay out of our people's business - always as in 'everyday always' - I deserved that. And it's not like I didn't know you and Nott are like mixing oil and water. I guess I just - I don't know - wanted to see what he was up to and if he was planning something against - I guess, you?"
Turais gave Jonty a small smile. "I appreciate it, Jonty. But I think I will take on him by myself for this one."

Jonty nodded and did not speak for a long while. Turais saw how Jonty desperately wanted to say something, but he was eyeing him with unease. Giving the boy a questioning look, Jonty took the gesture as permission and immediately blurted out, "But secret passages though?!"

Turais grinned.

***

September 13, 1970 (Sunday)

After eavesdropping from a couple sixth-years that Nott was currently in detention with Professor McGonagall. Turais decided to abandon his normal weekend studying session and head to the fourth-floor. Relying on Jonty's description and his scant memory, he searched the whole area close to the classroom where Gobstones Club was held. Fortunately, there was only one dead-end hallway in the vicinity that fit the description entirely.

Turais walked up to the three barren and inconspicuous walls. He reached out to his magic and started muttering the incantation, "video sed non credo, ipsum revelare!" (I see it, but I do not believe it. Reveal itself!) repeatedly. Turais then started running his palms over the rough stones on all accessible surfaces while trying to detect any abnormal magical boundaries or signatures. Sure enough, he encountered a slight but detectable shift in magical intensity at a particular spot on the wall. He ran his hand up and down that area and discovered a faint outline. Satisfied, he followed the outline and mapped his way along the magical boundary that arched just above his head and down the other side. Turais realized that it resembled a jagged, and narrow crevice.

Stepping back and opening his eyes, Turais looked at the unassuming stretch of stones. However, he now knew that that was the exact location of the hidden doorway. Turais pulled out his wand and tapped on the wall, willing it to grant him passage. From deep within the walls, there was a rumbling sound that reverberated and increased in intensity. After a few moments, the wall started to quake, crack, and split in front of his eyes until it formed a narrow, veneer crack that could barely fit a slim, grown adult.

Turais peered through the entry into the utter darkness and pointed his wand.

"Lumos maxima."

The tip of his wand shot a glowing orb of light through the crack. He saw the orb impact upon the wall several feet away and lit up the entire narrow but, otherwise, standard low-ceiling tunnel. Convinced of its relative safety, Turais shuffled through the crack sideways. Once he passed through, he tugged his robe free from one of the edge just as the entryway sealed him off from the castle.

In his hunched-up position, Turais lit his wand with a handy *Lumos* and started to venture down the tunnel filled with cobwebs and dust. Along the way, Turais noted that the tunnel became so narrow that he had to crawl on his hands and knees with his wand between his teeth. He also noticed that there were footprints visible on the thin layer of fine dust, suggesting that he was not the only user of this tunnel.
"Appare Vestigium."

The Tracking Spell emitted a heavy layer of golden mist that settled onto the trail of footsteps before him. The results confirmed Turais' suspicion that, indeed, Nott was the user. Fortunately, it seemed as though there was only one set of magical profile, which suggested that no one else besides Nott was utilized the passage. This was great news for Turais.

After twenty minutes of walking in the darkness, Turais finally reached the end of the tunnel. Pointing his wand around him found a ladder leading to a wooden trapdoor above. Casting a Disillusionment Charm over himself, he stored his wand away and climbed up the ladder. Carefully loosening the hinge, Turais pushed the door upwards and peeked through the tiny gap. In his line of vision, he could see boxes labelled books directly in front of him. Hearing no noise, Turais opened the door higher and found himself at the back of a dim room that resembled a small basement library. On the right side of the room, there were a series of narrow windows near the ceiling that provided some natural light.

Turais guessed that he was on the bottom-floor of the bookstore in Hogsmeade called Tomes and Scrolls.

'So Nott, and perhaps Dolohov, likely has knowledge of a secret passage to Hogsmeade. That means they could smuggle anything from outside undetected,' Turais thought to himself.

This was a huge security breach and Turais decided him needed to seal this passage permanently. Turais climbed back down the ladder and closed the trapdoor behind him. Then, he cast a permanent Locking Spell on the hinges and performed a series of Shield Charms on the trapdoor to prevent anyone from blasting off the trapdoor in brute force.

Hopefully that was enough to deter whatever Nott or Dolohov had planned.

***

September 18, 1970 (Friday)

Turais was finishing up his homework when the door slammed open with a loud bang. His dorm-mates all jerked out of their sedentary positions into high alert as they saw Nott walk through while dragging Jonty by the ear, who was squirming in his grasp. Avery Jr., Dolohov, Montague, and two other seventh-years strolled in behind them.

"Black!" Nott shouted, "Come out here at once!"

Turais and Alex shared a confused look. But seeing that Jonty looked panicked and guilty, Turais had no choice but you figure out what has happened. Once they entered the common room, they found that it was filled with students.

"Steward, here -" Dolohov kicked Jonty on the back and caused him to tumble onto the floor, "- has been caught sticking his nose where he shouldn't be - in our dormitory."

Jonty quickly scrambled up and crawled behind Alex and Turais in panic.
"I'm not sure if I understand your meaning?" Turais asked calmly under the gaze of all the students.

"Don't insult my intelligence with your act, Turais," Avery said. "We all know how close you are with Steward. You were definitely trying to undermine us with your nefarious schemes."

Turais turned to look at the boy, who ducked his head in shame. Turais had a feeling that Jonty was just snooping around, unwilling to listen to him and let up on Nott. He glanced back at the seventh-years. If they wanted to gather an audience to shame Turais into admission, they were not receiving one. But if they wanted his public apology, well...

"I had no plans to, as you put it, ‘undermine’ you. However, I will apologize on his behalf for any inconvenience that you may have experienced," Turais said. "And I will guarantee that it will never happen again."

"See to it -" Dolohov said, looking satisfied. Turais was surprised that he was so lenient. Nott looked at Dolohov as though he was betrayed.

"Antonin!" Nott hissed, but Dolohov ignored him.

"- or someone else might take the fall for your inadequacy to keep your minions in check," Dolohov said as Turais saw his gaze landing on the first- and second-years. "I’ve several designs I would like to test out. For example, someone might just find some defective Potions ingredients used in the first-year Potions class that will cause some interesting injuries..."

So Dolohov was holding the safety of other students hostage. Turais knew there was no way he could protect everyone at all times if Dolohov decided to go through with his threats, therefore he could only nod curtly. Upon that silent admission, Dolohov’s Cheshire Cat grin only grew wider.

"Noted," Turais gritted out.

Chapter End Notes

Turais had been made Seeker. Surprise. Surprise.

Jonty had been in a bit of trouble as of late. Yikes.

The next chapter is Chapter 27: The Phoney War. Until next time.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-10
The Phoney War

Chapter Notes

Hey everybody,

New update! There will be a time-skip of sorts in this chapter.

Enjoy!

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-17

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 27

THE PHONEY WAR

January 25, 1971 (Thursday)

LORD DENNIS PRINCE DIES AT 103

by Demelza Keats

The Man with Mixed Legacy Succeeded by His Son, Hardwin Prince

Lord Dennis George Prince was found unconscious at his residency late yesterday afternoon by his house-elf. After being rushed to St. Mungo's Hospital, he has been declared dead due to natural causes.

Lord Prince left behind a mixed legacy where he aligned with Dark families for the majority part of his early career. In particular, he was famously recognized as the commissioner of the anonymously published book called the "Pure-Blood Directory". This book, which was widely believed to be penned by Cancankerus Nott (although Lord Prince never confirmed nor denied the claim), was arguably the most influential piece of writing on the 20th century and its ideas have shaped the ideology of entire generations on blood purity after its publication.

However, after Grindelwald's revolution, Lord Prince has seemingly experienced a change of hearts where he severed his relationships with his former allies and joined the Light families, proclaiming that "[he] was a misguided young man with a self-consuming thirst to prove [himself] in the worst means possible". He has frequently said that the publication of the "Pure-Blood Directory" was a "grave mistake" and that if he could time-travel back, he would "smack the sense into [his] younger self with a Beater's Bat".
While one might think Lord Prince has denounced his blood purity ideologies after his official split from the Dark families, a domestic affair that has, once again, catapulted him into the spotlight. The disowning of his daughter, Eileen Prince, had come on the heels of Eileen Prince's marriage to a Muggle named Tobias Snape. Many believed that Lord Prince disowned his daughter due to her marriage to a Muggle, but Lord Prince has vehemently denied those claims. It has been a largely publicized affair where he came under immense pressure from the magical community to retract his decision, but he never bowed to those pressures.

After that event, Lord Prince has slowly retreated from the public eye as his son and Heir, Hardwin Prince, started acting as his father's proxy in the chamber more frequently. The last time Lord Prince set foot in the Ministry was eight years ago.

Hardwin Prince has been described by his peers as a fiery, ill-tempered man that resembled his father in his youth. While he has yet to break ranks from the Light alliance on any vote, his allies worry that he might soon become an opponent. Their fear is not unfounded as Heir Hardwin Prince has been increasingly vocal in his criticisms against Ministry-backed policies. In such a politically charged chamber where neither side could afford to lose a single vote, this presented a terrifying prospect for the Light alliance...

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

Today’s task in Transfiguration class was Untransfiguration, which involved undoing previously transfigured items, and was a more difficult branch of Transfiguration. They were each given a black feather quill to untransfigure.

Turais swung his wand as though he was writing a check mark and said, "Reparifarge ."

The black feather quill untransfigured smoothly into a rolled-up parchment, which turned out to be a list of to-do items that was due in two weeks, including a fourteen-inch essay of Untransfiguration and the transfiguration of a snuffle box into a book using their arsenal of known Transfiguration spells. It was a clever assignment that used a variety of the most difficult spells they have learnt in this class up until this point.

Alex also successfully untransfigured his quill and groaned as he saw the instructions.

"Why, Professor? This is so much work… urgh . And we also have the study sessions to run. I don’t even know how you manage to do all that on top of your Quidditch training sessions."

Turais grinned at his friend as he waved his hands in a mystical fashion. “I have my secret magical abilities,” he said mysteriously for which he received a well-earned punch on the arm.

***

February 9, 1971 (Tuesday)

Four days ago…
“Hey, sorry everyone!” Turais shouted as he sauntered into the Potions classroom with his Quidditch gears and school bag into a classroom with nearly one hundred and fifty students. They were mostly first- and second-years with a few older students volunteering as tutors.

A chorus of “hey Turais”s and “hello”s echoed throughout the largest Potions classroom in the castle which Professor Slughorn has kindly offered when he caught wind of Turais’ “little” venture. But even so, the room was barely large enough to house the sheer number of students that turn up. There were nearly a hundred students in both years and a good portion of them were regulars. Turais was glad that they found this useful. Despite it being a lot of work, Turais was happy that he could help others learn and succeed, especially when he was in a position to do so.

“Hey,” Turais slapped Jonty and Alex on their backs as he plopped onto the chair beside them. He also waved at Aigel who sat on the other side of Alex. After a while, he opened his eyes and finally laid eyes on the two plates of food in front of him. He exclaimed, “Thank you to whoever did this!”

“It’s all Jane,” Alex said absent-mindedly as he edited one of several scrolls of second-year Transfiguration essays. Turais shouted a “thank you” to Jane, who was at a nearby table helping a group of first-years with their Charms homework.

She laughed and shouted back, “It’s Alex, you dummy! He kept saying that I picked the wrong foods so I got frustrated and just handed him an empty plate in the end.”

Indeed, everything on his plate were his favourites - shepherd’s pie, thick-cut fries, sauteed broccoli and mushrooms, healthy servings of apple pie, treacle tart, bread pudding and also a glass of chilled pumpkin juice to finish it all off.

“Thanks, mate,” Turais knocked his shoulder with Alex and hummed happily as he dove into his food. After a few more bites, he wiped his mouth and shouted, “Okay, so who has questions?” A dozen students quickly rushed over to him and formed a line as he started to get to work.

After two hours of seemingly endless questions, Turais shouted, “Let’s end a bit early today and see you Thursday!” The students shouted their thanks as they packed up.

Then, in a low voice, Turais leaned over to Jonty and whispered in his ear, “You know what today is. Make sure to stay behind for your extra practice on making wishes.”

Jonty beamed.

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

“How did you two untransfigure the feather so quickly?” Jonty gasped when he turned around to see his best friends’ desk. His own black feather was still sitting on the desk idly. “Actually, don’t answer that.”

Turais knew Jonty was still miffed from last week when Professor McGonagall said Turais and Alex had “raw talent” for magic.
“Well, Jonty. Since you know the next assignments. Do you want to work on that first? We can help you with your feather after classes today?” Turais suggested. Jonty’s frown loosened a little and gave a nod.

“Summon the snuffle boxes over please, Alex,” Turais sighed. This would take at least fifteen minutes of their precious talking time. Despite spending almost every moment, awake and asleep, together, they all somehow realized that Transfiguration class was the best time for a chat. Professor McGonagall gave up shouting at them for their chatters sometime last October and did not bother them unless they started to disrupt other students. But this would never happen as he always casted various anti-eavesdropping Charms around them in case of “sensitive information”.

Three snuffle boxes floated from the storage cabinet and onto their respective desks.

‘Okay… snuffle box to mouse first.’

“Snuffifors.” The snuffle box transfigured perfectly into a black mice.

‘Okay… then mouse to bird...’

“Avifors.” The black mice turned into a jet-black raven that screamed “Ca-Caw!” Turais looked around in alarm just to see everyone staring at him blankly, wondering what on Earth he was doing transfiguring items into birds rather than focusing on untransfiguration.

“Ca-Caw! Ca-Caw!” Alex’s raven also croaked and joined the cacophony of noise that filled the room.

“Mr Black! Mr Fawley! What on Earth are you -” Professor McGonagall approached their tables and stopped as she looked at the unrolled parchments on their tables. “Well… five points to Slytherin. Please continue on -”

“Ca-Caw!” Turais’ raven turned to the professor and blared out aggressively.

“Silencio.” Turais pointed at his bird, which proceeded to open and close its mouth silently. It paused mid-croak and turned to Turais questioningly. Turais looked at it apologetically and whispered as though it would understand him, “Sorry, raven. You were misbehaving.”

He turned to look at Professor McGonagall, who was trying very valiantly to suppress her smile. She eventually was able to regain control and school her expression back into an impassive look.

“Make that five more points to Slytherin,” said Professor McGonagall before walking away.

“She usually gives you two five points per person, why is she was stingy all of a sudden?” Jonty hissed. “Aren't you her favourite student? She even hugged you, I mean.”

Turais thought back to how it came about.

***

September 22, 1970 (Tuesday)

Approximately five months ago...
Today was the day Turais was invited to visit the headquarters of M.E.S.O.P. and also a photo-op for both the press and the institution to officially announce the discovery of the Wolfsbane Potion. The rest of the students were in class as Turais was waiting in the Slytherin common room fully dressed in a proper dress robe when Professor Slughorn came to retrieve him.

“Turais, my boy, you look smart and photo-ready. Follow me to Professor McGonagall’s office please. We are going to use her Floo. By the way, thank you for my year’s supply of Bolandi’s Exquisite Crystallized Pineapples. It is my favourite.” Professor Slughorn said. “How did you know?”

Turais just smiled politely and offered no answer. Professor Slughorn did not press for the information and just hummed happily. When they entered her office, Professor McGonagall was standing by the fireplace and gave him a rare smile and said, “I am very proud of your achievements, Mr Black. You are a brilliant addition to our school and the staff are delighted to have the honour to teach you.”

Professor McGonagall stretched out her arms and Turais thought she was gesturing for a hug so he wrapped his arms around her midsection. She stilled tensely for a moment before patting his head gently twice.

“Ahem. Mr Black, it’s almost time for your arrival at the headquarters.”

Turais saw her flustered expression through the licks of green flames as he shouted “M.E.S.O.P. Headquarters!”

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

‘I might’ve misinterpreted her hand movements. That was awkward. She might’ve just been pointing at the Floo.’

Turais shrugged at his potential mistake and turned back to the raven, which now looked at him reproachfully as though it was demanding him to unmute it. When it saw Turais had no intention to do so, it clicked its beak in a show of aggression and stepped towards him menacingly. Turais hastily cast the spell before it could attack his face.

“Vera Verto… argh!”

The raven was about to leap off the table as it transformed into a crystal, clear water goblet, which teetered near the edge.

“That was a close one,” Alex said as Turais pushed it back to the relative safety at the center of the desk. “By the way, am I the only person who thinks it’s weird that things are so normal around here? Not that I am complaining, but I mean… no one has tried to maim you yet. That’s new.”

Turais thought in silence as he eyed the water goblet for any imperfection or intricate patterns. One imperfect Transfiguration now will make the object nearly impossible to transfigure later on as the mistakes will amplify exponentially after each addition spell. Credits to Pierricoeur’s Laws of Transfiguration Interactions.
The goblet looks fine to his eyes despite the hastily-cast spell and Turais was satisfied.

What Alex said was true. He maintained constant vigilance and used the Cloak of Invisibility whenever necessary, watched out for Nott and Dolohov amongst other threats, and kept out of Professor Dumbledore’s gaze. And the last five months have passed by very peacefully, except for that incident. But Turais knew he couldn’t relax his guard. The threats were real, and even if they weren’t, it couldn’t hurt to be cautious. Also, there still hadn’t been any Muggle attacks yet so that’s a win.

***

January 4, 1971 (Monday)

Approximately one month ago...

Turais was returning from a quick chat with Professor Slughorn, who wanted to personally welcome him back to Hogwarts from the break and a happy new year, when he saw Andromeda pacing in front of the blank stretch of wall that led to the Slytherin common room. It was after curfew and Turais was surprised to see her outside the common room area.

"Andromeda," Turais greeted as he approached his cousin. Andromeda's face snapped up upon seeing Turais as he saw her frantic expression.

"Turais," she said as she stopped and faced him. "H...How was your holiday?"

"Splendid. And yours?" Turais asked. Andromeda had seen him at the Black Ball as well as at the Black family Christmas party, so this question threw him off balance momentarily.

"T...That's good to hear," she said absented-mindedly as she glanced around the empty corridor.

"I suspect our holiday plans is not the sole topic of conversation you had in mind?" Turais prompted.

"No," Andromeda said tensely. "Would you mind following me to somewhere more private?"

Turais raised an eyebrow, but he nodded. Then, Andromeda guided him to a nearby unused classroom. It was a large classroom with two doors on either side of the room. After casting some basic Privacy spells around the room and the door, she started.

"What I am about to say is of great importance," she said quickly. "I was with my sisters at the Lestrange Christmas Party this holiday and I overheard a conversation with you as the subject."

'The Lestrange Christmas Party. Bellatrix has married Rudolphus Lestrange in the past summer.'

Andromeda scanned Turais' expresion before continuing. "I believe there is a plot against you that is in motion."

"What is it?" Turais asked.

"I could only hear fragments of the conversation and there was nothing substantial. Only that
"Must be what?" Turais asked quickly.

"Must be... taken care of..." Andromeda grimaced. "...promptly and without a trace. Also, someone said everything was in order. You're in serious trouble, Turais!"

This piece of information confirmed his suspicion. The Lestranges were Voldemort's staunchest allies. Turais bet that Voldemort was plotting against him. But that was not news itself. What was unnerving was that Turais had no idea what they were planning.

"Do you know who were involved in the conversation?" Turais asked Andromeda. She shook her head.

"I don't recognize their voices, Turais. I... I stole a glance at the guest roll but there were only members of the Lestrange extended family and no one glaringly suspicious."

"But those people could have been private guests that did not appear on the guest roll," Turais said. "But good thinking to check the guest roll though, Andromeda."

"I'm sorry I cannot be much help, Turais," Andromeda said nervously. "But I thought that you should be made aware of the potential threats against you."

"No, Andromeda. You have done a lot, thank you," Turais said sincerely.

"Turais... you... you don't think they... actually mean..." Andromeda stuttered in a hushed voice, "...take care as in... murder. Right?"

"I hope not, Andromeda," Turais said with uncertainty.

"We need to tell your grandfather, Turais," Andromeda whispered. "Or... or Dumbledore. If they are plotting murder, this is way beyond our abilities and we need to keep you safe."

"Andromeda," Turais said soothingly. "I can handle this. Please rest assured."

"Turais!" Andromeda hissed loudly. "How are you able to handle a genuine death threat? You're a second-year -"

Suddenly, he heard two pairs of footsteps approaching their location. They turned back to each other with eyes widened.

"You didn't cast a Disillusionment Charm on the door, did you?" Turais said. Andromeda shook her head in shock.

Too late for that now. Turais grabbed Andromeda's forearm and pulled her towards the second door. He unlocked the door silently and the two Slytherins slipped out of the room just as the other door creaked open. Peeking through the slightly ajar door. They observed two boys enter the room.

They were Dolohov and Nott.

“What is it, Brutus?” Dolohov snarled.

"Is it going as planned? You're not messing up, are you?" Nott whispered nervously. “And can you go any faster -"
“I can’t go faster - you dimwit. Also, I’m not like you. I don’t make mistakes,” hissed Dolohov furiously.

“Fine! Just make sure it’s ready by then. I have my material prepared already. If it weren’t for the stupid blocked passage, I wouldn’t have to rely on you.” Nott responded nervously.

“That's not my issue, Brutus. Also, this is your only chance, if you spoil this -” Dolohov snapped.

"This method will work. It did once already, Antonin -" Nott stopped abruptly.

The door creaked open and Professor McGonagall’s voice rang in the empty room. “What are you two doing here at this hour, Mr Nott and Mr Dolohov? Curfew was fifteen minutes ago. Ten points from Slytherin apiece.”

A pair of footsteps left through the other door hastily as Professor McGonagall slowly closed the door and strolled away.

"What are they talking about, Turais?" Andromeda said softly.

"I don't know. But I have to keep an even closer eye on them now," Turais whispered back.

"You don't think they have anything to do with what I just told you, do you?" Andromeda said as her eyes widened she connected the dots. "Turais! This is insane. They can't send children to do commit these monstrosity. We have to tell someone -"

"Andromeda," Turais said firmly. "I know this is unfair of me to ask you of this, but stay put and do not do anything. We cannot afford to alert them that we know of their plans."

"Turais! This is insane. I cannot do that -"

"You don't know what they are capable of doing, Andy ," Turais said. "I cannot put you in harm's way. Just stay out of this and let me handle this, please. If you wouldn't obey, I'll pull my rank and command you as Heir if I have to."

Andromeda looked at Turais, furious. But she ultimately gritted out, "This is your neck on the line, Turais. But I really don't like the sound of this."

'Me neither.'

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

“I think Nott and Dolohov are up to something, but I just don’t know what it is,” Turais said. “Especially Dolohov, he has been giving me the evil eye every time I see him.”

“But he hasn’t done anything. So maybe he has just decided to graduate without a fuss? Especially when Malfoy’s not going against you and Wilkins is taking you under his wings, it will be hard for him to get away with bullying you into anything,” Alex analyzed.

The likelihood of that was close to zero, considering what Turais knew. But there was no
need to scare them. Also, if Jonty knew anything was happening, then he might be tempted to hunt for information again. And Turais did not want that to happen, especially since Jonty had been on his best behaviour since that alteration with Nott in September.

“I rather keep it this way,” Turais said slowly. “Last year was too crazy for my taste. I can really use a year where no one wants to attack me.” He transformed the water goblet into a porcupine.

‘I’ve had enough near-death experiences my last time around.’

“Well, unless you don’t count the two Ravenclaw girls who pushed you down the stairs trying to ask for your autograph,” Alex snickered at the memory as Turais levitated the agitated porcupine and rotated its body such that its quills were directed at his friend’s neck.

***

October 2, 1970 (Friday)

Approximately four and a half month ago...

“Turais!” Two Ravenclaw girls ran up the Grand Staircase as Turais was travelling to his Charms class.

“Hey Jo, Stella. How may I help you two? Question about Potions?” Turais asked as the two first-year girls reached the first stairs landing. They were both flushed pink in the cheeks, Turais noted.

“Ummm…no… sort of… Turais? Can we ask… you to… um -” Janice Shafiq glanced at her friend for help.

“To… um… sign these!” Stella Thurkell shoved two magazines right into Turais’ chest, pushing him back. Turais instinctively stepped back to rebalance and realized there was nothing to step on except air, twisted in the air and tumbled as screams filled the air.

“Ms Shafiq! Ms Thurkell! What are you doing?” The fifth-year male Slytherin prefect, Evelyn Napier, appeared at the bottom of the staircase. He then saw a second-year crumpled halfway up the staircase with two boys standing beside his crumpled body nervously. Quickly, he dashed up and found the Slytherin in a daze.

“I’m perfectly fine!” Turais said loudly. Despite the reassurance, the two Ravenclaw girls broke into tearful sobs.

“You two, explain!” Napier gestured the two crying Ravenclaws as Turais started to right himself.

“We… we… wanted to ask… Turais to sign our… Potions subscriptions,” Stella said sobbingly.

The two girls shakily held out their copies of the October 1970 edition of Potions that was titled “POTION FOR WEREWOLVES!” with a photo of Damocles and Turais beaming, with their arms around each other’s shoulders, at him.
“I didn’t mean to push him down the stairs!”

The Slytherin prefect shook his head in pained exasperation.

***

_February 12, 1971 (Friday)_

“Ouch!” Alex exclaimed as he rubbed his neck and glared at Turais. Turais hummed happily at his successful attack and cast the spell at his porcupine gratefully.

“_Hystrifors._” The porcupine turned into a pincushion.

“Well, they meant no harm. Although Wilkins scared them off quite badly, _and_ the entire school for that matter, in the entirety of October after that,” Turais grimaced at the memory of an over-protective Wilkins.

***

_October 14, 1970 (Wednesday)_

*Approximately four months ago...*

“Kaiden! _Step! Away!_” Wilkins pointed his battle-tested Beater’s bat at the approaching Gryffindor Quidditch captain. His iron grip was tightening painfully around Turais’ forearm. Turais was marched down from the Slytherin common room to the Quidditch pitch with “extra protection” that involved the entire team surrounding Turais and Wilkins.

“Relax, Carmickey,” Kaiden said teasingly at his Slytherin counterpart. “I was just going to ask Rais to sign _my copy of Potions._” Kaiden grinned mischievously as he pulled out a copy of the “Best-selling _Potions_ magazines in history - Special double-month edition: _ACONITE ROOTS IN POTIONS FOR WEREWOLVES!_” as he waved it just outside of Wilkin’s bat range. Two days after the release of the October 1970 edition of _Potions_ , Turais and Damocles had signed a deal for a special issue of _Potions_ on their achievements and have received a hefty sum with decent royalties. And Kaiden had clearly thought it was funny to buy one as a practical joke.

Turais rolled his eyes at both boys.

Then, Wilkins threw his bat at Potter, who dodged it easily, and proceeded to pull his wand out and incinerate the magazine. Kaiden feigned disappointment and horror as his magazine burst into flames and ashes. He then grabbed Wilkins’ bat from the floor and examined it.

“Give it back, Kaiden!”

“Well, you’re the one who threw it. I’ll be nice and - _catch!_” Kaiden threw the bat at Wilkins who leaned backwards to catch his precious bat while Turais was dragged along with him.

_Plonck!_
Turais barely deflected the bat with his magic as it hit the wall in a clatter.

“Woah... that was some mad reflex, mate,” Kaiden gasped in awe just before Wilkins launched himself onto the offending boy.

***

**February 12, 1970 (Friday)**

“Well, he is… intense…?” Alex said cautiously. His porcupine squirmed and paced around the desk trying to avoid his wand tip.

“That doesn’t even begin to describe it,” Turais sighed. Wilkins was as serious about Quidditch as Wood was and trained twice as hard. The best thing that came out of it was that they had regular training sessions on Friday evenings to a Turais got to avoid most of the Group meetings; Alex was not amused with being stuck in the room without Turais. “It’s just going to get worse until tomorrow’s match is over, especially when we have a chance to win the Cup.”

His pincushion was now an owl hooting sleepily at him, its half-opened yellow eyes blinking slowly. “We’ve been training almost everyday for the past two weeks. I wouldn’t put it past him to sleep on the ground next to my bed tonight just for the sake of ‘extra protection’.”

“Again?” Alex’s face crumbled as all three boys shuddered at the thought.

***

**October 31, 1970 (Saturday)**

**Approximately three and a half months ago...**

Wilkins did not end up sleeping in Turais’ room, thankfully, but it was a very near miss. Turais was able to convince him that he was a light sleeper, hence, the presence of a foreign person would affect his sleep and his subsequent performance against the Gryffindors; Wilkins agreed reluctantly.

After changing into his Quidditch robes, sporting the green and silver colours instead of the red and gold, Turais headed down to the Great Hall with his best friends. Most of the second-year students were wishing him good luck, and that included a pinched-face Pierricoeur that was dragged along by his brother, Aigel. In general, many people were very excited that a second-year would be playing as the starting line-up of a Quidditch match.

This match was considered the match of the decade as the Slytherins finally had a serious chance in winning against the Gryffindor. Furthermore, the Gryffindors have beaten the Slytherins resoundingly in their last seven match-ups. Therefore, none of the current students in Hogwarts have ever witnessed a victorious Slytherin team over its Gryffindor rivals, which only served to further excite the school.

However, Turais was calm and unstressed for his pre-match breakfast compared to when he
was Harry Potter in his original timeline. After all, he had seen things that were more important in life than winning a scholastic Quidditch match, so he was determined to enjoy it instead of worrying about it. He was still excited though, but the sense of dread and nervousness that generally accompanied it was no longer present.

“Hey, Turais. We’re supposed to root for Gryffindor but we just wanted to wish you luck,” Jane and Alice said quietly.

“Hey! You two Gryffindors, scram!” Wilkins shouted from down the table. Turais rolled his eyes and the two girls smothered their laughter with their hands. However, they ran away quickly afterwards as Wilkins started to pelt pieces of cereal at them.

“Calm down, Carmickey -”

“Shut up, Kaiden! Black, time to head down.”

“Can’t wait to lose, Carmickey? We do have the best team because I’m on it.”

Turais flashed Jonty and Alex a confident grin as he left the table. Kaiden also walked over to the entrance to shake his hand.

“My parents sent you their well-wishes on your first Quidditch match. But I’ll just wish that you wouldn’t lose too badly.,” he said as Turais snorted.

“In your dreams, Kay, I -”

But that was all he managed to say before Wilkins proceeded to pounce on them and then forcefully drag Turais out of the Hall to head down to the Quidditch pitch alongside the rest of the team.

“Okay, team,” Wilkins addressed the team, who were all stone-faced and grim, in the changing room for the pre-match talks moments before the match was about to start. “We trained incredibly hard for the past two months and I have a really good feeling about this one. We will flatten the Gryffindor team and make Kaiden crawl away sobbing like a baby. We will win today! Good luck to you all,” Wilkins spoke somberly.

Turais headed out behind the team but suddenly felt a familiar rough hand hold him by the shoulder. He turned around and Wilkins whispered to him, “Black, just -”

“ - just catch the Snitch in the first five minutes. Yes, cap,” Turais rolled his eyes at Wilkins. He scowled but said nothing as he trudged towards the bright sun-lit pitch and the distant cheering and chattering. Turais was pretty sure he’s the only one on the team who could get away with this amount of cheek.

“The Gryffindor Team!” A loud male voice boomed in the distance as a thunderous applause followed.

Breathing in deeply, he shook his body loose of tension and stepped out onto the pitch as well. Loud cheers erupted from the Slytherin stand for their newest and youngest player on the team.

“And... the Slytherin Team!” Turais looked up at the podium to see a Hufflepuff boy, maybe fourth-year, shout. The audience was less enthusiastic but it was still a respectable reception. As Turais walked to the middle of the field, he also heard a few scattering of applause from the Gryffindor side, to his surprise.
Mister William, the flying coach, was refereeing as he stood in the middle of the field with his broom by his side. Once Wilkins and Kaiden shook each others' hands, Mister William said while glancing at both sides, “I want a nice, clean game from both teams. Now, mount your brooms, please.”

“On my whistle.” Turais adjusted his grip on his broom as he stared at his counterpart, a seventh-year girl called Yolanda Fields.

A loud blast sounded across the field as the fourteen players rose up into the air along the referee.

As planned, Turais veered out to the edge of the pitch to survey the perimeter.

“Kaiden Potter of Gryffindor has first possession of the Quaffle - first match as captain - and a quick pass to Rachel Findley - her first match as main Chaser - and back to Potter - no, he took a Bludger and the Slytherins have taken Quaffle, Pyrites - arrrrrr - has possession - good hit aimed by Cornfoot - Wilkins’ new find - passes to Arkenstone, nice move there dodging Prewett’s shot - don’t ask me who, can’t tell - goalposts ahead - Findley intercepts but Arkenstone passes back to Pyrites - Walters climbs but it’s out of reach - SLYTHERIN SCORES!”

A loud cheer filled the Slytherin stands as groans sounded from the Gryffindors.

Turais was almost at the opposite end of the pitch when he saw Fields dive towards the Gryffindor stands. The crowd nearby seemed to have realized their Seeker in pursuit of the Snitch and fell silent while watching intensely.

“Fields seems to have spotted the Snitch - the newest Slytherin Seeker and prodigy and future Order of Merlin - sorry, yes Professor - Turais Black chases after her - a Bludger from Wilkins - she dodges and continues - no, she lost the Snitch -”

“Keep your eyes open, Black!” Wilkins shouted. As Turais was about to nod at him, he saw a flash of gold appear beside the Beater’s head and he leaned forward immediately.

“Montague barrel rolls past MacGregor’s grab - ducks the incoming Bludger from Prewett but drops the Quaffle - Potter gains posses - and… has Black spotted the Snitch? Yes! Black is the youngest in the field and my younger sister’s first crush - sorry, Professor - and Hilary to you too - sorry, flies past Wilkins and suddenly made a dive - almost vertically - no, he’s going to crash - NO! - he pulls up in time, that was terrifying - wait, he’s raising his hand up, he’s waving at the referee - what’s that, is that the - BLACK CAUGHT THE SNITCH! - SLYTHERIN WINS! - The quickest catch in recent memory - what’s that, yes, really - two minutes and twenty-four seconds - Hilary, your crush has done it! It’s the shortest match in Hogwarts history.”

The Slytherin stands roared in celebration and their victory. The Gryffindor teams hovered disappointedly around their goalposts as the Slytherin team landed by their exit to celebrate.

“YES!” Wilkins touched down and threw himself at Turais, who tumbled onto the grass on his back. The rest of the team piled around him to pat his head and shoulders in delight.

“I knew you could catch the Snitch in under five minutes!” Wilkins looked like he was about to kiss Turais so he quickly extracted himself from the pin and scrambled away from his captain.

“SLYTHERIN: ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY - GRYFFINDOR: ZERO! First win for Slytherin over Gryffindor in seven years .”

Turais was walking back to the Slytherin changing room with his team huddled around him
when he saw a familiar figure walking across the pitch from the guest viewing stand.

“Father!” Turais abandoned his cheering teammates and walked towards his father. However, they did not embrace for it was a public setting under the watchful gaze of too many wandering eyes. “Why are you here?”

“Well, I can’t miss my son’s first Quidditch match and I want to see how my broom works,” Orion ruffled his hair, slightly damp from the November mist and perspiration. “Awesome job. First match and quickest catch in history!”

Turais looked behind him to see his grandfather waiting by the gates with his two brothers. Orion followed his gaze and grinned, “Sirius and Regulus are here as well. Special perks when your father is a School Governor.”

Turais waved excitedly when Orion suddenly said in a low, dangerous voice, “We are going to have a nice little chat about that stunt you pulled for that Snitch afterwards.”

Turais gulped nervously.

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

“Hey,” Alex’s voice shook Turais out of his reverie. “I never asked, but why do Wilkins and Potter call each other by their first names? Aren’t they supposed to be the ultimate enemies? Slytherin Quidditch Team captain versus Gryffindor Quidditch Team captain - the epitome of all rivalries.”

Turais snorted and said, “You read too many romance novels. There is no fantastical epic rivalry going on. In fact, I’d think they get along quite well.”

In fact, Turais had finally worked out their confusing way of addressing each other. Kaiden preferred to call Wilkins "Michael" in non-Quidditch situation and "Carmickey" in any Quidditch-related setting. Why Carmickey, you might ask? Who knew. But Kaiden seemed to be the only person who could get away with calling Wilkins something other than "Wilkins", "Captain", or “cap”. Wilkins, on the other hand, only referred to Kaiden by his first name and addressed everyone else by their last names. It was a mind-boggling system with an equally unlikely friendship so perhaps there’s truth in the madness.

But everyone else seemed genuinely worried whenever the two captains crossed paths as it seemed like some sort of scuffle would always break loose. And from Turais' observation, they were not play-acting as well. Kaiden and Wilkins genuinely interacted like they were rivals whenever it was Quidditch-related business. However, there was a major difference on how they approach the sport.

Wilkins had a "no nonsense"-type mentality while Kaiden fully embraced a "work hard, play hard” attitude. It seemed as though Kaiden was also determined to rile up Wilkins at any given opportunity and Wilkins rose to the bait every single time despite being a calm, collected boy the rest of the time.

How on Earth they managed to stay friends despite their personality clashes was beyond his
“What makes you think they get along well?” Alex asked. Turais gave him a "Really?" expression and Alex’s eyes widened in comprehension. “Right. Wilkins. Quidditch World Cup. Potters. Top Box. Understood.”

“Wait, what?” Jonty asked confusedly as he turned around completely to place his water goblet on Turais’ desk. Then, he stood up to straddle his chair backwards. Turais turned to the center of the classroom to see Professor McGonagall’s disapproving glare, but she just shook her head and turned back to Dante Pierce, a Hufflepuff.

“Well, Wilkins was with the Potters at their Top Box,” Turais explained. “You won’t see me inviting a random Quidditch team rival to go to the Top Box with me.” Jonty transfigured his goblet as he spoke and a porcupine now resided quietly on his table beside his sleepy owl.

“Well, the thing about Potter and Wilkins is old news. I knew they were friends since beginning of last year -" Jonty saw Alex's incredulous look. "- What?! It's an open secret that they are close friends. I thought everyone knew..."

"Well you clearly didn't bother telling me this," Alex punched Jonty on the shoulder.

"Must've slipped my mind," Jonty shrugged as he mindlessly massaged the site. "But what I don’t understand is how they struck up a friendship to begin with. They’re polar opposites. Wilkins is… prickly...” Jonty poked the porcupine to make it move but it just curled up tighter. "... and Potter is flamboyant."

“Boggles my mind as well,” Turais agreed. "Anyhow, time to get this done. Liberifors. ” The owl warped and turned into a thick journal with a brown cover and yellow spine.

“It is about time, Mr Black,” Professor McGonagall smiled wryly as she walked up to their desks. She lifted the book and inspected his work. Satisfied, she placed the journal back on his desk and said, “You would’ve been done in half the time if you weren’t busy chatting with your friends. Five points to Slytherin and you won’t need to submit the essay to me, Mr Black.”

Before she could walk away, Jonty asked, “Professor McGonagall, why aren’t you giving us five points each this week? And Turais deserves at least fifteen points for finishing the assignment two weeks in advance.”

The students around them paused to eavesdrop on the conversation. It was apparent after their first year that the Transfiguration professor had a soft spot for her three second-year Slytherins and indulged them more than most could dare to dream of. But Jonty was pushing even that limit.

Turais saw Professor McGonagall’s lips thin dangerously as her gaze flash briefly at Turais’ broom before opening her mouth. Turais immediately understood and said to Jonty quickly before she could utter a single word. “Quidditch is serious business, Jonty. I assume you we will make up the missing points next week.” He then gave McGonagall a winning smile, which she narrowed her eyes at him while looking annoyed before leaving without a word.

“What do you mean, Turais?” asked Alex. Then the reason dawned upon him. “You mean like those terrible two weeks after the Slytherin-Gryffindor match?”

***
November 20, 1970 (Friday)

Approximately three months ago...

“Mr Black! If I hear you whisper even one word, you will get detention for a week!”

Turais jumped in his seat as he leaned back into his chair away from Jonty. The whole class stilled as the realization settled in on them.

“Am I hallucinating? Did the professor just threaten our Turais for detention?” Hilary Hawthorne, the second-year Hufflepuff who had her crush announced by her older brother in front of the entire school, whispered to her friend as her voice travelled across the silent room. Although it was a very quiet whisper, it was loud compared the chilling void of noise in the rest of the room and spoke of the thought that was crossing everyone’s mind.

“Ms Hawthorne, unlike your Mr Black who has a perfect clear, crystal water goblet without any etchings, you have not even attempted the spell. I suggest you focus on your studies instead,” Professor McGonagall snapped. Hilary flushed and snapped her jaw shut.

Professor McGonagall had been in an incredible foul mood and all the students were tip-toeing around the ticking time bomb. She did not award Turais with any points for his works as normal and actively avoided their corner of the classroom.

“It’s been two weeks already, can’t she let it go?” Jonty hissed.

“I heard you, Mr Steward! Five points from Slytherin and detention after class today!”

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

Turais grimaced. “If there is one thing her impartiality falls apart because of, then it’s Quidditch.”

“Can you not win the match next week?” Alex groaned. “I can’t stand another two weeks of death glares and silent treatment.”

“Well, it’s against Ravenclaw so she should be less affected. I’m more worried about our fates in Charms class. Remember Professor Flitwick after Hufflepuff pummeled the Ravenclaws?”

“Yeah…” Jonty trailed off as he focused on his transfiguration from the porcupine into a pincushion. A gentle “hoot” sounded from Alex’s desk, indicating he was almost finished the assignment as well.

“... but you got something good out of it too,” Jonty winked at Turais as he jabbed the cute pincushion with his wand. Turais stuck out his tongue.

***
December 1, 1970 (Tuesday)

Approximately two and a half months ago...

“Hello, class,” the tiny professor squeaked but lacked the signature cheeriness in his tone. “Because Mr Kingston, the one in first-year, set fire to the entire box of feathers last period. We will be unable to revise the Levitation Charm. However, I have once again prepared the pieces of cloth in front of you so you can practise the Severing Charm from last week. You may begin.”

Turais was attempting to refine his technique by slicing exact and intricate patterns on his piece of cloth when he heard a hard thud of a book contacting someone’s skull.

“Mr Shepard, you are a wizard, not a baboon brandishing a stick!” Turais saw Professor Flitwick’s usual long, black beard cleaved off jaggedly while the severed hair laid at his feet.

“Detention after class today!” Professor Flitwick said furiously before strolling away from the shocked Hufflepuff while the others tried their best to stifle their laughter. The rest of the class went by in relative peace, albeit tense, as Professor Flitwick snapped and terrorized multiple students about their poor wand movement. Just as they thought they had successfully escaped more drama as class ended, the Professor’s high-pitched voice shouted out again.

“Ms Rashley! Have you spent the entire period drawing Mr Black instead of working on your charms… and you as well, Ms Summerbee! And Ms Vengal?! ” The three girls looked straight at him in horror and snapped back at the Professor, debating on which person’s knowledge of their actions was the more terrifying prospect of this reveal. “Ms Rashley, five points from Hufflepuff; Ms Summerbee and Ms Vengal, ten points from Slytherin. Mr Black! -”

The professor turned towards Turais, who sat up in shock. ‘What did I do?’

“ - stop distracting the female students in this class.”

Turais wanted to protest, but he saw the angry glare from the professor and decided it was best to just stay silent. Jonty and Gerald grinned unhelpfully beside him.

Meanwhile, Alex was just silently casting Charms at his cloth with sadness in his eyes. That was when he remembered it was that time of the year again, just like last year, when Alex would hide himself until he opened up again a couple weeks later...

***

February 12, 1971 (Friday)

“I wonder how many girls in school have a crush on you, Turais?” Alex asked with a smirk.

“Well, Valentine’s Day is coming up!” Jonty said in a sing-song voice. “We’ll know then - I’m guessing fifty!”

‘How do I deal with a girl’s crush? Also, I have the mental age of a thirty-something-year-old and having eleven-year-olds crushing on me is highly disturbing and creepy as heck!’...’
“Ms Clark! Is that a drawing of Mr Black that I see on your desk?!” Professor McGonagall screeched from the back of the room.

Turais groaned into his arms on his desk, feeling a headache building up.

***

“So, I propose a resolution to encourage our members to join the Knights of Walpurgis upon graduation and promote their values in a more visible manner.”

Malfoy brought up an atrocious plan, in Turais’ opinion, in the regular Group meeting tonight. It was Turais’ first participation in the meeting in a long while since it collided with Quidditch practices. However, he was quickly reminded by Malfoy as to why he was thankful to avoid so many meetings. He would have to block his terrible idea and fortunately, he had the votes to do so.

Malfoy had the power to introduce resolutions that bound all Slytherins but he had to rely on the regular members (or at least four of them) to agree with his proposal in order for it to be effective. However, Turais had Alex and Rosier’s votes in his camp so Malfoy would not be successful. Thank Merlin for small mercies.

“What exactly do you mean by ‘a more visible manner’,” Turais asked curiously.

“Turais, the Knights believe that the Wizarding society should be rid of those with impure blood. Hence, I am proposing that we should follow their noble ideals and initiate the process in Hogwarts. We should strongly encourage them to return to their world,” Malfoy said maliciously.

‘I’m sure “encourage” means extreme bullying. That’s not going to happen under my watch.’

The resolution failed as Turais, Alex, and Rosier voted against it. Malfoy was not pleased, but there was nothing he could do but fume as per the Charter. However, tonight’s meeting left Turais wondering what prompted Malfoy into wanting to promote the Knights’ platform. Was it his father? Was he in contact with Voldemort and his cronies?

***

February 14, 1971 (Sunday)

Today, Turais was especially determined to stay under the radar and away from everyone. Girls, boys, students, staff, friends, enemies - everyone! Therefore, he snuck into the kitchen at the crack of dawn to ask Quincy to make him a large batch of sandwiches, enough for the entire day, and hid in the Goblins’ Rebellion history section in the furthest corner of the library where no students ever willingly went.

There he was reading up on Potions literature on its effects on Muggles when he saw Jane strolling into his secret location and laying her eyes on him. Upon seeing Turais, she blinked and
then smiled hesitantly as she walked towards him with both hands behind her.

“Hey Jane, what’s up, how’s your brother doing?” Turais asked in a quiet whisper when Jane remained standing by his table.

“Hey Turais, he…is, uh… doing well,” Jane whispered back as she bit her lower lip nervously. Her eyes darted sideways. Turais thought her voice sounded rasp and he wondered if she was getting sick.

“That’s great! Listen, Jane, I’ve actually been thinking about your brother’s illness just now and how I might have an idea for researching a new potion -”

Jane cut him off and brought forth her hands. It was a pink box containing a large home-made treacle tart that was tied neatly with a red ribbon bow.

“Um, Happy Valentine’s Day, Turais!”

***

“So… Jane has a crush on you, huh,” Alex’s eyes narrowed his eyes at the gift suspiciously.

Turais returned to the dormitories after curfew, just to be sure that no one could ambush him with a gift in the halls, and broke the news to his friends.

The three boys now stood in the Slytherin dormitory in the aisle between Turais and Alex’s bed as they stared at the treacle tart box that was lying innocently on Alex’s bed.

“I didn’t see that one coming,” Jonty turned his head to face Turais, his face in disbelief.

“Me, neither,” Turais continued to look at that box, slightly panicking.

“That makes the three of us. So… what did she say exactly? Start from when you first saw her in the library,” Alex turned to look at Turais too. Turais felt uncomfortably warm between them as they stared at him.

“Uhmm… I saw her coming into the library. She walked up to me. I asked her about her brother and suggested a new Potions recipe for his brother’s illness -”

“Talking about diseases is so romantic, Turais,” Jonty quipped.

“ - and she handed me this box as she said ‘Happy Valentine’s Day’ to me and blushed heavily. It was so much that I had to comment and say ‘you’re blushing so hard your hair’s turning red’, then -”

“Urghh, Turais! You don’t tell a girl she is ‘blushing so hard her hair’s turning red’!” Jonty groaned, slapping a hand on his face. “You are so tactless. For all your brilliance, you are so useless with girls.”

“And transportation - he does not mix well with the Floo or Portkeys,” Alex amended drily.

“Well, I’m sorry if I don’t have much experience with girls, Steward,” Turais snapped, feeling slightly defensive. He couldn’t argue with Alex about transportation, however.
‘Honestly, I have only ever had romantic feelings for two girls: Cho, who I had a crush on but it ended disasterously, and Ginny, who I married. So put me in the “lack of experience” department please.’

“What will you do?” Alex asked.

“What can I do? Say no!” Turais stated as though it was the most obvious thing to do; and it was. “I’m too young to think about this.”

“Why in Merlin’s sake does this not happen to me?” Jonty fell back on Alex’s bed. “Of course the cleverest chap in school who is also an amazing Seeker is the first to have crushes. And he is now turning them all down because that’s the most obvious thing to do when girls crush on you. I resent you and all your good fortune!”

While Jonty wallowed in his own pity and sorrow, Turais ignored his complaining and asked Alex, “So what do I do? How do I reject her without ruining our friendship?”

Alex looked directly into his eyes. “Mate, do you really want my opinion? I have zero experience with girls. Neither does Jonty. You’d have better luck asking a mating Hippogriff than us.”

Turais sighed and pinched between his brows. He could feel another headache coming. “What about the treacle tart? Should I just throw it away?”

“No!” they both shouted.

“It’s a perfectly good treacle tart -” Jonty said.

“- and finishing it is the least you could do to soothe her broken heart -” added Alex.

“- plus you love them, everyone in Hogwarts knows that by now, at least your crushes do,” Jonty finished unhelpfully.

“Alright, alright,” Turais relented.

Turais decided that eating the treacle tart wasn’t exactly a chore. Plus, Jane probably put in a lot of effort making it herself. Jonty was right, it was the least he could do.

Turais transfigured a knife and took out the tart.

“There’s a Stasis Charm on the box to keep the tart warm. Clever girl.”

He started to cut the tart into small slices, and licked his fingers that were dirtied in the process. He hummed in enjoyment as the rich flavour hit his tongue - a sweet, caramel taste with a hint of citrus and… berries? It’s a different flavour that what he’s used to but it was still very delicious. Turais took one of the slices and savoured every bite of it.

“Hey, do you two want some?” Turais asked when he was finished the slice, feeling completely content.

“Nah, I’ll have it later. I’m too full from the shepherd’s pie the house-elves made tonight. It was extra awesome,” Alex said.

“Same here. I’m stuffed to the brim and I don’t want Jane’s effort to go to waste on me. You’re the intended recipient,” Jonty fell onto his bed and rubbed his abdomen.
“Well, there’s no way I can finish this on my own. I’m going to share it with the other Slytherins then.”

Turais levitated the tart and walked out to the common room.

“Hey, I have a treacle tart here but I can’t finish the whole tart. You can have a slice of you want,” Turais announced.

“Valentine’s Day gift, Black?” A fifth-year boy crooned and his friends laughed.

“Laugh it up, Sykes. At least I have gifts,” Turais returned before placing the tart on one of the tables. He turned to see Nott eyeing at him intensely, as though he could burn holes in his face by staring.

“Nott, you’re not a basilisk and I’m not going to drop dead just because you look at me murderously. Quit staring,” Turais snapped and walked back towards his dormitory.

As he reached for the doorknob, he started to feel a sharp pain in his stomach. He grabbed the doorknob to stabilize himself but crumpled as he lost focus. His mind was overwhelmed by the excruciating sensation, as if he swallowed a ball of lava that was burning through his stomach and flowing through his veins as it spread to his peripherals.

‘Poison... Treacle tart...’

He vaguely saw the door open with Alex and Jonty’s puzzled, then horrified looks. He could hear someone shouting into his ears and feel someone shaking his shoulders but he was preoccupied with intolerable pain that was overloading his senses. With his last vestiges of consciousness, he heaved himself from the hunched position as he felt every inch of his flesh burning in protest from the movement. He used the remnants of his rapidly fading strength to crack open his eyes and look down the Slytherin common room as he saw Nott smile at him maliciously.

‘Jane... Nott... Dolohov...’

His last thought was the sight of Jane’s panicked expression with her black hair slowly turning red... her face slowly replaced by Nott’s demonic grin.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter speaks for itself, really...

I would love to hear your comments and thoughts as always!

The next chapter: Chapter 28: The Tempest, is on schedule. Until then.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-17
Hey everybody,

26 comments on one chapter?! 1018 subscribers?!

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who is on this journey with me. I am really surprised and humbled by all your feedback and thoughts on my last chapter. I cannot adequately describe how fulfilling it is for me to know that my writing evokes such responses from other people. Sometimes, I still have trouble believing people are reading and enjoying what I write 😊.

Also, I would like to issue an apology as I did not have a chance to respond to your comments. Last week was a bit hectic for me but I promise I will get around to them soon.

Thank you so much and I hope I will keep writing a story that deserves your continual support.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-24

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER 28

THE TEMPEST

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February 23, 1971 (Wednesday)

POISONING CASE SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

by Andy Smudgley

Heir Black Remains Unconscious

Tectonic Shifts in Wizengamot Politics

Since the announcement of the terrifying attempt on the life of the Heir Presumptive Turais Black, the case has been shrouded in mystery. The Aurors were clearly mystified as well as they were unable to provide any details regarding the potential culprits, murder intentions, or even which poison was used for the past two weeks. The lack of progress on the high-profile case has troubled many parents who are worried that their children’s safety was at risk.
Turais Rigel Orion Black, aged twelve, is the eldest grandson of Lord Arcturus Black. Despite his tender age, he has already exhibited immense potential and is considered one of the rising stars in the Wizarding World. In addition to being a published, two-time featured author in "Potions" and co-inventor of the Wolfsbane Potion, Mr Black is widely anticipated to be awarded the Order of Merlin for his contribution to the field of Potions in the near future.

In a surprisingly move yesterday, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore has publicly addressed the issue in the Wizengamot chamber and urged parents to remain calm. He restated that Hogwarts remained one of the most well-protected and safe locations in Wizarding Britain and the world. However, he has refused to answer any questions and left the chamber immediately after his address.

Some members questioned the claim and pointed towards the death of a third-year Muggleborn and current resident ghost at Hogwarts, "Moaning" Myrtle Warren, in 1943 (see page 8 for more information). Others questioned the Headmaster’s refusal to transfer Mr Black to St. Mungo’s Hospital where better support could be provided and accused him of endangering the Black Heir’s health.

Turais Black’s poisoning has not only raised tension between the Dark families and the Chief Warlock, but also caused a rift in the Malfoy-Black alliance. Anonymous sources have stated that the Black alliance has severe mistrust against the Malfoy-led coalition as they believed they played an important role in the attack on the Black Heir.

"The current thinking is that some of Malfoy’s allies have broken faith with the Black alliance by attacking one of their best and brightest," the anonymous staffer revealed. “They are nervous to lose them as allies, but they are also furious with the situation at hand. There is generally a lot of confusion right now."

This rift was visualized when Lord Black and Lord Malfoy entered the chamber separately for the first time since their alliance has formed. Regardless, it seems as though Lord Black is at a crossroad...

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‘Back so soon, young Master? I was not expecting you.’

‘I swear I was not trying to get myself killed. I’m not trying to abuse my powers as Master of Death. But still, I can’t believe I fell for that. It was Polyjuice Potion, wasn’t it? And to think I was the one who pulled this trick on Draco Malfoy last time around... you’d think I would recognize it...’

‘Do you choose to return then?’

‘Of course! Wait... am I completely healed when I return?’

‘Yes, you will return to a completely undamaged body. The extensive damage your body has sustained is more difficult to heal that a simple Killing Curse.’

‘What does that mean? How is death by poisoning different from death by the Killing Curse?’
The Killing Curse involves the severance of a person's soul from its mortal vesicle. The body of a person is left untouched. Death by poisoning involves the violent destruction of a person's body and magic that culminates in the detachment of the soul from an irreparable vesicle.

Brilliant, I really don’t want to stay in the infirmary for any longer than strictly necessary.

Very well. But please remember this. Due to the extensive damage to your body, you will find that a few days have passed to order for your body to heal itself. On that note, take care.

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February 24, 1971 (Thursday)

Warm hands were on his cheeks, as a familiar voice called quietly and rhythmically like a hymn, “Turais - Turais, it’s time to wake up now. Wake up.” The voice echoed and reverberated melodiously inside his skull. “Wake up… Turais…”

“No… no…” He wanted to sleep for a long, long, long time.

“That’s right, Turais. Wake up now… wake up…” The voice was filled with warmth, light, and safety. Orion. He reached out to his senses. Softness. Warmth. Smooth. Was he in his dormitory? Was he in the infirmary? Was he in his bed at home? Everything was so bright.

“Turais!” This time, Orion’s voice boomed in his head so loudly that he felt himself flinch. “If you don’t wake up right now, you are going to be in so much trouble!” He tried to squirm away from the painful noise and hide in the blinding white light…

Turais opened his eyes and immediately shut them again. “So bright…” he mumbled. He felt two pairs of hands squeezing both his hands painfully, crushing his bones together unnaturally, and soft breaths caressing the skin.

“Water…” Turais’s lips and throat felt as dry as a desert. He felt something metal pressed against his lips and he parted his lips slightly as the cool, refreshing liquid flow messily into his mouth and down his chin. He felt a soft cloth wiping his chin gently.

“Send for the Headmaster,” Turais heard someone say in an echoing and distorted voice.

‘Madame Roland?’

He attempted to open his eyes again. This time slower as he creaked them open inch by inch. Stopping to adapt to the brightness of the environment. Eventually, he could focus on the high stone ceiling completed with gothic arches.

‘The Hospital Wing.’

He tried to tilt his head to observe his surroundings but found himself quite immobile. His body felt like it was run over by the Hogwarts Express more than once. Every bone and every joint in his body ached and burned. Ignoring the discomfort, he turned his gaze from the ceiling to his right and found his brothers. Their grip were firm and desperate, as though they were drowning in a stormy ocean who spotted a floating log. Their pale grey eyes were surrounded by blood-red
streaks and wet with tears. He wanted to give them a large hug but he realized that his entire body failed to respond to any of his movements. With all his effort, he gave their hands a light squeeze and their shoulders dropped in relief by the tiniest fraction.

"You might be feeling a bit distressed with your lack of mobility, Mr Black," Turais turned his attention to the school nurse. Madame Roland continued, "Your body has barely recovered from the effects of the poison and you are under a medically-induced Stasis to prevent further aggravation. But there is no impediment of your ability to speak."

Turais nodded but then quickly realized that he barely managed any movement. He gave her a quick quirk of his lips and Madame Roland nodded understandingly. He panned his gaze past Madame Roland and two other persons in Healer's robes, to the person who had awakened him.

There, he saw the swirling greys, like a dissipating winter storm, which barely clouded the haunted emotions welled below. He took in the dark circles around his eyes that contrasted sharply against the bloodless face that was tense with constraint. He then looked at the strained smile formed by the tight muscles and lines that never reached his eyes. He looked calm and peaceful, except for the quivering mustache that covered his trembling upper lip and the rough, unshaven jaw that had never marred his face in the past twelve years.

Meeting his father’s eyes once again, Turais suddenly felt an incessant throb in his heart and a suffocating weight on his chest as though a tsunami of cement was mercilessly crushing the last breath out of his lungs.

Turais felt the burning prick of tears in the back of his eyes as he realized how silly he was - to have thought that since he could not die, he could promise Orion that he would stay safe without a guilty conscience - to have thought he could afford to be reckless as to think that death was of no consequences - to have thought that his family would not be affected by the news of his apparent demise. He never had a family to live for or worry about when he did something stupid - yes, he had life-long friends, a wife - yet it was somehow different to grow up alongside brothers whom he had shared everything with and a father who loved him selflessly.

Guilt, shame, embarrassment, and anger came roaring into his mind of how he underestimated Nott and overlooked the oblivious signs that he should’ve caught. He thought back to the fateful decision where he slighted Nott at the Malfoy - the time when he shamed Nott in front of the entire House to climb up the social hierarchy - how he ignored Andromeda's advice to notify others instead of thinking he could handle the situation on his own - to the sight of Nott grinning with malevolent glee when he thought his enemy was taking his final breaths in excruciating pain and agony…

It was because of his choices, his decisions, and this was his deserved fate.

Turais felt like he was falling even though he was comfortably lying on a bed. His brain was swirling in panic and fear… and pain. He blinked and his heart pounded as he realized he was suffocating.

“Damn it, Turais! Breathe,” Orion held his face in both his hands. Turais focused on the warmth that enveloped his cheeks as he remembered to breathe. He sucked in a wheezing breath. A second breath. A third.

“I’m sorry, father,” Turais blurted out as hot tears inadvertently rolled down his cheeks. “I should’ve known better. I should not have picked a fight against Nott. Or Yaxley. Or Dolohov. You were right, I can’t keep myself safe. I broke my promise. I made all of you worry. I knew they were up to something -”
“It’s alright, son, you’re safe. That’s all that matters right now,” Orion said softly, caressing
his cheekbones with his thumbs steadily.

“No, it’s not alright, father! Do not excuse my behaviour, I don’t deserve it!” Turais shouted
thickly. “You told me the most important thing to you was my happiness and my health. But you,
Siri and Reggie being happy is what makes me happy. And I made you all worried and I almost
died . I -” His voice sounded incredibly small to his ears. Unable to even turn his head, Turais
opted for the second best option and closed his eyes as he tried to hold his tearing heart together.
Tears continued to stream out of his blinking eyes. He felt painful squeezes on his hands but he
didn’t care.

“Turais! Son! Listen to me. Yes, we were worried. Yes, you almost died. But it wasn’t your
fault -”

Turais shook his head and shouted. “No! I deserve it! I slighted Nott in the first place! Why
did I need to do that?”

“No, son -”

“There were other choices, I could’ve done it a different way! I could’ve -”

“LISTEN!” Orion roared.

Turais’ words died in his throat at his commanding tone but Orion had already softened his
expression. “Yes, you and Nott had a long, patchy relationship. Yes, you might have embarrassed
him in front of everyone. But that does not mean you are responsible for his actions. And that
definitely does not mean he has a right to harm you in any way. Do you understand?”

At Turais’ silence, Orion asked again, “Do you understand?”

Turais could not bring himself to acknowledge his father’s words.

“If I may interrupt,” Sybril Quinn spoke gently. Turais snapped up to the woman violently as
he just noticed her presence. If Orion’s immediate flinch was any indication, his father was equally
as oblivious. Her melodious voice acted as much-needed balm to soothe his burning chest. “I
would like to run some diagnostics on Mr Black since he is now conscious.”

Orion quickly cleared his throat and shifted his posture. However, “Of course, Sybril. Thank
you,” Orion said quickly.

“I will be right by the door, Turais. It will be quick,” Turais heard Orion said as two pairs of
hands slacked their grip on his hands as the silent Sirius and Orion walked away with their father.
Turais could now register the stinging sensation in both hands as the blood moved normally once
again. He could also feel the pain and tremors.

Madame Roland rolled the privacy curtains away as the two familiar private Healers, Sybril
Quinn and Oberion Proudmore, approached his bedside. Sybril Quinn was a lady with greying hair
and a grandmotherly disposition. She had been the Healer who delivered Turais, as well as Orion
before him. Oberion Proudmore, on the other hand, joined when it became apparently that Orion's
household would be expecting their third child. But a decade was no short time either, so they were
both near and dear to Turais’ heart.

“Hello, Turais. We are going to conduct the regular battery of diagnostic tests. As always,
Please alert us to any discomfort during any part of the procedure.”
Turais nodded at them. “Thank you, Sybril. Oberion.”

They began to cast diagnostic and monitoring charms on him as Madame Roland returned to his bedside. Turais spoke up to ask his burning questions, “Madame Roland, how long was I…”

‘Dead? Unconscious? Breathing? Not breathing?’

“Mr Black, you were unconscious and barely breathing for almost two weeks. You seemed to be in a sort of stasis, but in a state deeper than the sleep induced by the most potent Draught of Living Death. I can’t explain it any better because I’ve never seen this in my entire life, but…” Madame Roland explained as she placed her tray of potions on his bedside but then trailed off as she turned to give him her full attention.

“But… we were expecting the worst. Despite having signs of innate magical healing, they was no evidence that you would ever regain consciousness until today… you were closer to death than anyone has ever been… barely alive by any definition. It was really a miracle,” Madame Roland finished softly.

Two weeks... He was unconscious for two weeks because of his negligence. He had no one to blame just himself. Guilt and shame continued to weigh heavily on his mind, but he would have to address those emotions later. First, he needed to make sense of everything.

"Why... why was I not transferred to St. Mungo's?" asked Turais.

The three Healers stiffed and then shared a look between themselves.

After holding a silent conversation, the male Healer cleared his throat and broached the subject gently, "The three of us has communicated our wish to transfer you to St. Mungo's where you could receive a more holistic Healing support. However... Headmaster Dumbledore was quite adamant that you stay put in case the Portkey transport triggered any latent effects of your condition. And your grandfather consented, so..."

Turais frowned. Granted, there were several injuries and curses that would be aggravated by Portkey transport, but Turais had never heard of an adverse reaction between poisoning cases and Portkeys. Even if what Dumbledore said was applicable to his case, there were protocols in place for alternative transportation. Something about this explanation was not sitting right with Turais, but then he was immediately distracted by a numbing sensation throughout his four limbs.

All the muscles in his body suddenly stiffened, then relaxed. Turais gasped.

"Sorry, Turais," Sybil said softly as she quickly lifted the Diagnostic Charm. "It seems like there is still some residual effects of the poison on your peripheral nerves."

"It's... okay..." Turais breathed out. "It... it just felt... odd -" Suddenly, the privacy screen were torn open as Orion barged in.

"Is he okay?" Orion asked frantically as he grasped for Turais' hand. "I heard a gasp and -"

"Turais is fine, Orion. Breathe," Sybril said calmly as she patted the man on the shoulder. "I was just doing the standard Diagnostics on Turais and caused a bit of discomfort. But it is nothing to be concerned about -"

"He just woke up after ten days at the brink of death, Sybril," Orion snarled as he tightened his grip. "I get to be concerned. He's my son, not yours. "
Sybril's hand froze and Orion's eyes widened as he realized the hurtful words he just spat out. "I... I will wait outside."

Without a word, a flushed Orion released Turais' hand and darted out of the enclosed space.

"I... I would like to apologize on my father's behalf, Sybril," Turais said apologetically as Sybril drew the screens together once more. "He... he was just worried and..."

"Don't worry, Turais," Sybril said with a comforting smile. "I've known Orion my whole life. I've watched him grow up and I know his temperament like the back of my hand. He's probably hiding in an alcove somewhere sulking right now."

A smile crept past Turais' consciousness and went on full display on his face. "You'll have to tell me this story sometime," said Turais.

"I have many stories that you'd love to know," Sybril said with a twinkle in her eye. "Perhaps I will divulge one when you recover." Turais smiled appreciatively.

“And... can you... Madame Roland... keep whatever our conversations private, patient confidentiality and such?"

Madame Roland nodded, “Of course, Turais. You have my words. But if you don't mind me saying, it was very heartwarming to see how much you and your family care for each other.”

Turais gave her a quick smile as she continued on her task again. “I know they do. I am very fortunate.”

She gave him another smile and they were silent for the remainder of the check-up. By the time Madame Roland removed the screens, Turais saw a group gathered. Besides his family, Arcturus and Melania, as well as Professor Dumbledore and Professor Slughorn were also present.

“Besides the observed residual effects in his peripheral nerves, I am delighted to say Mr Black here has a clean bill of health,” Madame Roland declared. "But I would have to restrict Mr Black to bed rest and Stasis for at least three more days to ensure that his condition is truly stabilized."

“So he will make full recovery? There will be no lasting or hidden damages? No effects on his magic? No curses?” Arcturus asked incredulously.

“Lord Black, your grandson is in peak condition,” Madame Roland said in affirmation. The two private Healers also signed off their approval. All the adults released a breath of relief.

“What was the poison? I know it was in the treacle tart,” Turais asked.

Dumbledore glanced at his brothers and Orion caught his gaze. “Mother, I think Sirius and Regulus are tired from all this excitement. They should go for a nap.”

“I’m not tired -” Sirius started to protest until he met both Orion and Arcturus’ gazes. He visibly faltered and turned towards his bedridden brother. "Turais, I’ll see you real soon, okay? Don't be scared."

"I'm not scared," Turais said with a smile. Sirius nodded as he walked towards his grandmother. Regulus also gave Turais a quick hug before running after his brother and Melania as they headed to the guest room suites. After the doors have closed, Dumbledore gathered the attention of the group.
“Professor Slughorn has just finished his analysis an hour ago and I wished to break the news to everyone.” Dumbledore stated calmly.

“Well, then tell us, Headmaster. Skip the exposition,” Orion snapped. Arcturus seemed a split second from the same outburst as well.

“Horace has determined it to be a poison known as Solanum Diabolus –” everyone in the room gasped. “- also known as the Devil’s Nightshade, in the treacle tart that Mr Black ingested.”

“What!” Orion shouted as he quickly held Turais’ hand tightly once again as though he needed the physical contact to reassure himself that his son was safe.

“The Devil’s Nightshade? How did anyone get their hands on that poison?” Arcturus asked sharply with a sense of urgency that Turais had never heard.

“What’s the Devil’s Nightshade?” Turais asked. The name sounded ominous. He had heard of a lot of poisons that contains nightshade, but never this one.

“If the Elixir of Life forms one end of the spectrum, the Devil’s Nightshade forms the other,” his father explained darkly, his jaw clenched.

“Yes. It is an extremely powerful, poisonous substance that is brewed with multiple species of poisonous nightshades, each lethal and illegal in their own right, to create a poison with such complexity that makes its determination extremely difficult,” Dumbledore explained. “Horace has only determined it for he has exhausted all tests for all known poisonous substances, leaving only this option.”

The unanswered question on how Turais managed to survive hung imperiously over them.

"How could that poison have escaped the detection of your wards, Headmaster?” Arcturus accused.

"Lord Black. I assure you that the wards are all in perfect order," Dumbledore said.

"But this poison must have come from somewhere if it didn't originate from the castle!” Orion said. "Or else, it must have been some inherent loophole built into the wards since its creation. I demand a thorough search of the castle for any secret passages."

"Of course you would be well-acquainted with those aspects of Warding, School Governor -“

Orion’s eyes flashed dangerously as he leaned forward in an offensive stance. Arcturus immediately placed a firm grip on Orion’s wrist before addressing Dumbledore icily, “What are you implying, Headmaster?”

“Nothing at all, Lord Black. But to your point, School Governor, my staff has already conducted two thorough searches since the incident occurred...” Dumbledore said calmly, "...and we have discovered three of such passages and, have since, permanently blocked them already.”

Turais surmised that those were the three hidden passages that were inaccessible in his previous lifetime, including the one which Nott had knowledge of. At the same time, he was relieved that the four passages that he had knowledge of were still functional.

"That is a severe security flaw and you will be held responsible, Headmaster," Orion said. "I will bring this to the attention of the Board of Governors."
"I expected no less," Dumbledore said soothingly. "Therefore, I have taken the liberty to send forth the discovery of these passages to the Board. Ah - I see this is news to you. Perhaps your mail must have been turned up at your residence. But rest assured that some of the members have already expressed gratitude to my swift and decisive actions. Some have also accepted my explanation that the Warding in Hogwarts is so ancient and complex that the Head of Hogwarts cannot be held responsible for every loophole in it."

Orion seethed with rage. Turais knew that Dumbledore had just revealed that he still enjoyed the support of some School Governors. Since any decisions from the Board must be made unanimously, this effectively ended any of Orion's threats to wield his office as a weapon.

Arcturus stepped and asked, "Have you confirmed who the culprit is?"

"Unfortunately not," Dumbledore said. "Mr Fawley and Mr Steward claimed that Ms Stahl gave the gift to your son as a Valentine’s Day gift. Is that true, Mr Black?"

Turais nodded.

"When did you converse with her?"

"Around two in the afternoon. I remember it was soon after I... um... ate in the library," Turais said. None of the adults seemed preoccupied with that implication, of course, as murder took precedent.

"However, Ms Stahl had been escorted by Mr Avery to the Hospital Wing and remained here for the entire day of the incident. She has accidentally ingested a Zonko’s joke product known as Manegro Minstrels which contained the Manegro potion and caused her hair to grow uncontrollably. Madame Roland could attest to that and she has her magical signature on the diagnostic record to prove her alibi," Dumbledore looked at Madame Roland, who nodded to confirm.

"But, I’m not sure if it was actually Jane," Tuais said slowly as he thought back to when he saw “Jane” in the library. “I suspect Nott has Polyjuiced himself as Jane to approach me.”

"Polyjuice Potion?" Dumbledore asked sharply. “And Mr Nott? That is a serious accusation - the act of murder and identity theft.”

Turais’ irritation flared. “Headmaster, I did not poison myself with this Devil’s Nightshade poison to wrongfully accuse someone. I have my reasons.” Turais was also surprised by the dripping venom in his voice.

Dumbledore flinched at his tone as the Black family stared fiercely at the old man’s insinuation.

“When we conversing in the library, I have observed her black hair turn red before she fled,” Turais continued on, ignoring Dumbledore’s expression. He didn’t have time to deal with a person who was determined to slow-walk each and every decision just because he was from a Dark family. “However, I didn’t recognize the hint then and I even commented that she was blushing so hard her hair turned red. You can confirm with my friends, Jonathan Steward and Alexander Fawley. They even made fun of me for being tactless.” Turais laughed at the thought, though it was mirthless laughter. “I suspect Nott because he has red hair and we did not have the best of relations ever.”

“But what is his motive for killing you, Mr Black?”
“I don’t know, Headmaster, but the entire House knows we hate each other. I don’t know how to prove his involvement but I know he must’ve had a hand in this.”

Dumbledore hummed as he considered the information. Then he turned his attention to the Potions professor. “Horace, I know the seventh-year students just finished their end-of-term project on brewing three potions simultaneously. And I am aware that one of the potions is the Polyjuice Potion. Would the stealing of Polyjuice Potion by a seventh-year have been possible?”

“Well... I suppose so… Albus. I made sure to vanish the potions after I finished inspecting their cauldrons and took a sample as they are all restricted potions. But I’m afraid I might not notice if someone deliberately stole a swig just before the inspection or even before the potion was completed to smuggle it out of the classroom.” Professor Slughorn spoke weakly.

“But Mr Nott is not in NEWT Potions class. He did not pass his Potions OWL two years ago,” Dumbledore spoke.

“How about Dolohov?” Turais asked. Now he finally knew what they were plotting this entire year. Something that even his abilities won’t save him. Of course, no one physically human could survive the Devil’s Nightshade if it was as lethal as Dumbledore had stated. He died from it almost instantly too. It was only because he was the Master of Death that he was able to return to his body.

“Mr Dolohov is in NEWT Potions. Mr Black, are you suggesting that Mr Dolohov is implicated in this as well?”

“Yes, Headmaster. On my second day back, my family came to school because I fainted. And when they left, I returned to the common room to find Nott and Dolohov in a conversation. Afterwards, Dolohov approached me and threatened me.”

“He threatened you?” Dumbledore’s eyes widened.

“Yes, I have my memories. You can see it in the Pensieve if you need to,” Turais said fiercely. However, Turais feared that all evidence would be circumstantial and would never be traced firmly back to the pair in a way that guaranteed arrest and conviction of their crimes.

The hospital door creaked open as Professor McGonagall appeared. “Headmaster, the Aurors are outside.”

“Thank you, Minerva,” Dumbledore turned to Turais. “Mr Black, are you feeling well enough to speak with the Aurors?”

Turais nodded as his father gave him an encouraging squeeze. A pair of Aurors walked in while Professor McGonagall went to retrieve the Pensieve. Turais recognized both men, they were Aurors Sayre and Moody.

“Auror Sayre and Auror Moody, I would say it’s a pleasure but I’m afraid the situation is quite dire,” Dumbledore spoke. “Mr Black here has awaken and would like to speak to you about his accusations.”

Turais told the Aurors, in full detail, his suspicions regarding their hidden activities and threats, his full history with either students, and finally, extracted his memories of those events to all the adults in the room once Professor McGonagall retrieved the Pensieve.

In chronological order, they watched Turais’ memories - his first encounter with Nott at the Malfoy ball - Nott’s bullying in first year - their duel in the hallway - Dolohov’s threat at the start
of term - Nott and Dolohov’s secret rendezvous before Professor McGonagall walked in on them - the Polyjuiced fake Jane and her hair turning red before she hastily dashed out of sight - the memory of him wondering what to do with the tart and subsequent poisoning as he saw Nott’s satisfied expression.

After they emerged from the Pensieve, Orion was grasping Turais tighter than ever as the Aurors shared a grim expression with the rest of the staff. And then, they confirmed Turais’ fears.

“I would have to agree with Mr Black that the two students are worth investigating based on his memories and their past history,” Auror Sayre said slowly as he looked directly at Arcturus. “Unfortunately, for this particular case. These evidence are all purely circumstantial. Lord Black, I'm sure you agree with me that there are no legal grounds to bring Nott or Dolohov to court. Also, cases built solely around memories will not hold in court. And even if, for the sake of argument, we do submit the memories, we cannot prove that the memories have not been altered. Neither could we sufficiently prove that they have committed the poisoning, nor their usage of the Polyjuice Potion, nor their theft and purchase of Polyjuice Potion, nor their involvement with procuring the actual poison. I am sorry, Mr Black, but there is nothing we can do unless more evidence present themselves.”

“I have feared this much, Auror Sayre,” Turais grimaced. “But thank you for listening nonetheless. At least I lived to present my case.”

Arcturus and Orion were all thrumming with frustration. However, they all knew clearly that there was no way to indisputably link the crimes to those students.

“What can we do?” Orion asked finally. “I cannot allow my son, who was attacked by a fellow student last year and then poisoned by two suspected students, to continue studying in such an unsafe environment… I am forced to withdraw my son from Hogwarts, Headmaster.”

“No, father. I must stay,” Turais spoke fiercely.

“Turais, I cannot protect you from the distance and clearly Hogwarts is too dangerous for you to stay any longer!” Orion said fiercely.

If Turais, a son of the School Governor, was to withdraw from Hogwarts, and if his family was to spread an unfavourable word on Dumbledore’s incompetence to other families, it would result in a large wave of panicked families withdrawing their own children from Hogwarts. As much as he hated to admit it, but Dumbledore was currently the only person Voldemort feared. The students would be much safer at Hogwarts than anywhere else as he would never dare attack Dumbledore in his own domain. He must think of a way to convince his father to allow him to stay - and this meant eliminating the two threats.

“Headmaster, who knows about my revival?” Turais turned his attention from Orion to Dumbledore.

“No one beyond these walls,” Dumbledore confirmed. Auror Sayre shot Turais a knowing glance. He must have thought of a similar plan as the one Turais was about to suggest and spoke up. “Headmaster, then hold off the announce of Turais’ recent change in his health condition. We have a chance to smoke out the two culprits into admission and we must strike while we have the element of surprise.”

“Aside from us and the Healers, no one knows of his awakening. We could spread a false rumour to suggest that Mr Black has passed away to convince them that they have succeeded. With their defenses lowered, we have a higher chance to trick them into admitting their crimes,” Moody
“However, if we announce that I am on the mend but still defenseless instead of declaring that I am dead, the two of them will have to come and finish the job. We just have to pretend that I am unguarded, then they will take their chance and we can catch them in the act,” Turais recommended instead.

“No! I am not letting you become bait for some murderous lunatics to try and kill you a second time!” Orion protested.

“Father, I will be well-protected. All the protection will just be hidden from plain sight and they will spring into action. Is it correct, Auror Moody?”

Moody gave him an approving smile, the second one he had ever received and turned to the Headmaster. “Headmaster, if you could approve the involvement of a large Auror task force for this mission to lure two highly dangerous and capable murderers and rid the danger posed to the entire student population?”

Dumbledore sensed that he was caught in an indefensible position as he had to ensure the safety of all students.

“You cannot be serious, Headmaster! You are going to risk my son’s life to catch two dangerous murderers? I will present my case to the Board of Governors for your removal!” Orion fumed angrily.

“Father, this must be done! As you said, there are two dangerous murderers who clearly have no issue with the amount of casualties that may result from their actions to accomplish their goal. You saw my memory. You saw how I offered the treacle tart to the entire House and Nott made no move to prevent anyone to eat the tart. It was a miracle that no one ate a piece before I collapsed. Jonty and Alex could have eaten the tart too, and I thank Herates that they both refused and it was all thanks to a particularly tasty shepherd’s pie. Are you not alarmed and chilled by all this? They are a threat and they must be removed!”

Turais knew that Orion was being irrational over the fear of losing his son after such a near miss. But he didn't know Turais was once a trained Auror. Suddenly, an excellent thought came to his mind.

“Actually, one of the Aurors can take a Polyjuice Potion to pose as myself so I will not be directly in harm’s way,” Turais said placatingly while sending a cursory glance at the Aurors.

“Yes, that would be an excellent idea, Mr Black,” Auror Sayre said affirmingly.

Orion fell silent for a moment. Turais knew his father understood that he could not stop Dumbledore or the Aurors from acting and his assent was merely symbolic. However, after a while, he gave a quick nod.

“Thank you for your cooperation, School Governor Black. I also approve the Aurors’ operation for the capture of the culprits of Mr Black’s poisoning and attempted murder. The Hogwarts staff will be in full cooperation with the Aurors,” Dumbledore announced.

Orion clutched Turais' hand tightly but he refused to look at his eldest son. Turais knew his father was barely containing his rage. But this had to be done and he had to recognize that...

Right?
March 2, 1971 (Tuesday)

The few days after his reawakening was a head-spinning affair. In between Turais' slips into unconsciousness, he witnessed the tactical planning of the Aurors on their approach to capture Nott and Dolohov in addition to Orion's attentive care. However, Turais could tell that Orion was still holding a grudge over their unfinished conversation since he first awoken.

But for the first time, he did not find the courage inside him to broach the subject. Apparently, neither did Orion. They were usually so transparent with each other that this seemed to break every single unspoken rules between them. But Turais knew that the subject of his involvement in his own poisoning was a sore point for the two of them and... for once... he felt that he could not bear to think of the possibility of losing Orion's trust and love for him due to his reckless behaviour if he came clean with his actions. He would rather have this tense yet cordial relationship with his father than risk having no interaction.

The plans were finalized two afternoons ago when they decided to execute the plan today, four days after Turais woke up from the poisoning, due to the enormity of the threat that the two culprits posed to the students. At breakfast, Dumbledore would announce to the entire school of Turais’ improving condition without apparent reason. The entire school knew that Turais had been poisoned but the news that Professor Slughorn had determined the poison’s identity was not revealed. Of course, Professor Slughorn’s apparent inability to identify the poison was plausible due to the obscurity and difficulty of detecting said poison.

In the afternoon, the Hospital Wing would deliberately be vacated due to a planned emergency that would cause Madame Rolande and the Healers to be called away. Of course, Nott and Dolohov would be notified of this information discreetly so they could be prompted to act. However, upon arrival and after sufficient evidence had been collected, they would be sorely disappointed and surprised that the Turais Black that they tried to attack was posed by a Polyjuiced Auror Moody while the rest of the Auror team would appear and apprehend them. The irony of this plan did not escape him and Turais desperately wanted to finish this and put this behind him.

However, the hardest part of the plan was not waiting.

On Sunday, Turais was finally released from his Stasis. Relishing in his new-found freedom, he could not resist checking on his friends. But what he saw... and his argument with Orion...

February 28, 1971 (Sunday)

Two days earlier...

Summoning his Cloak of Invisibility, which Turais knew was in his highly-secured trunk so no one would know it was removed, he donned it and snuck out secretly when his family returned to their duties to keep up the appearance and respond to the intense interest that their family,
friends, and colleagues have had upon hearing the news of the young prodigy’s dire condition. For extra measures, Turais cast various Disillusionment Charms, all Auror-grade spells for tracking missions, before heading to the Slytherin common room.

He waited in the nearby hallway and waited. A short while later, he heard thunderous footsteps before a large group of second-year Slytherin students came into view. Turais was surprised that all twenty-one students in his year were presently huddled in one giant group, barring his two best friends.

" - still can't believe we lost against Ravenclaw!" Urquhart moaned. "I believe Steward now. This year is actually cursed."

"Stop being superstitious, you wanker!" Flint retorted. "We lost because Black was not the bloody Seeker. Simple as that."

That was by far the nicest thing Turais had ever heard Flint say about him. Fortunately, someone else noticed it too.

"That's almost, if not outright, a compliment from you, Flint," Ingrid Summerbee said.

"Shut up, Summerbee. Not everything about your dream husband is perfect," Flint growled as the group walked back Turais' position. After a tense moment, he spoke up again. "But I still can't believe Malfoy poisoned Black."

"What do you mean?" Ingrid piqued up in obvious interest. Turais, also intrigued, trailed after them to continue eavesdropping on their conversation.

"Well..." Flint stopped walking as he glanced at both sides of the corridor. Then, he directed everyone down to a nearby abandoned classroom. Turais barely made it through the door just as Flint as closing it. "Let me ask you, what is Malfoy's specialty?"

"Are you suggesting that..." Elliot Bletchley, a fellow second-year boy, said hesitantly, "that Malfoy had a hand in poisoning Black?"

Flint nodded darkly. "We all know that Malfoy's family magic specializes in dark potions. And we know his father had something to do with poisoning that mudblood Minister. So it's not far-fetched to assume he has something to do with Black's demise."

"But why would he do that?" Matthew Lowe blurted out. Flint smacked the boy's head.

"Are you thick? The Blacks are the Malfoys' biggest political enemy besides Dumbledore and the entire Ministry," Flint said. "Of course they would do it! They have everything to gain if the Black alliance crumbles. The Dark and Grey families would not join the Light families in any fantasy, so they will have to align with Malfoy."

"But will poisoning Turais do that?" Ingrid asked worriedly.

"Yes, Summerbee," Flint said. "Your future hubby is the linchpin in all this mess and a big, fat obstacle for Malfoy. You were here for the past two weeks. Can't you see the shift in House dynamics already?" Everyone nodded. "And I don't like this one single bit. Black better get well soon and bring his annoying arse back here. I don't know how much of this high-handed oppression I can handle."

"What do you mean, Flint? I thought you hated his guts," Katheryn Vengal, another secret admirer of Turais, scoffed. "You always looked like you were about to strangle him yourself."
Flint panned his gaze around his peers. "Listen, I am going to say this once for those of you whose family does not have a family seat in the Wizengamot. My family is aligned with the Malfoys so I'm obligated to be antagonistic towards him just as Steward is obligated to play nice with him. He's also a pretentious, attention-seeking, and self-righteous arsehole. But I have no love, whatsoever, for what has happened in this common room in the past week.

"And... we've all seen what happened to those who spoke up and those ... 'Undesirables'. And I know that none of you were excited to see that. So you can guess where I stand on Black's return," Flint finished.

The second-years looked at each other nervously. After a while, they all nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, after this week, Black seems more than reasonable," Albert Runcorn said.

"And he doesn't tell me what to think and what to do..." Bletchley said guiltily. "... I know we've said terrible things about wishing he was dead or maimed in a ditch somewhere..." he threw a loaded look at Flint and the boy actually looked embarrassed. "... but now I really rather have him around..."

Flint said grimly. "No matter what happens, as second-years, we are near the bottom of the Slytherin hierarchy. So must stick together and protect each other until Black... until things change... hopefully, for the better."

The second-years were enjoying a companionable silence until suddenly, the classroom door swung wide open. Then, Avery Jr. stepped through with a dangerous smirk. Everyone looked up in alarm and froze. "I hope I am not interrupting something important."

Flint cowered as he took a step back and dipped his head. "O...of course not, Ave... Heir Avery. Do... you wish to speak to us?"

"No. I was just wondering why my delightful group of second-years went unaccounted for despite being the first to leave the stadium," Avery said calmly. "I just want what is best for you. You do remember that as Slytherins, we have the noble and arduous task of safeguarding the sanctity of our tradition and blood purity in the face of the festering disease that plagues the minds of other Houses. I would be disappointed with any of our brood was led astray. Am I clear?"

"Clear as crystal," Flint said shakily. Avery glared at the rest of the group and they also nodded quickly. Satisfied, Avery stepped out of the room.

"All of you should return to the common room at once. It would not do if someone thinks you are up to something undesirable," Avery called out as he walked away without a backward glance.

All the second-years released their shuddering breaths.

"That was absolutely petrifying," Katheryn gasped.

Turais agreed. What exactly happened during his absence?

"We best head back now," Rivers mumbled as he shook Flint's shoulder. "We don't want to get on Avery's bad side."

After the second-years returned to the common room, Turais returned to the corridors and waited as more Slytherins walked past him.
He caught snippets of the various changes that happened in the last week through their conversation.

" - can't even talk to my boyfriend now because he's a Muggleborn -"

" - Allison is a pureblood but I can't talk to her because she's Gryffindor -"

" - I'm glad Malfoy is finally doing the right thing. Black was a nuisance -"

" - not worth the risk, did you see what happened to that first-year? Absolutely horrifying -"

" - my father said there's political in-fighting between Malfoy and Blacks' alliances -"

" - I think Dumbledore poisoned Black -"

" - that's ridiculous -"

" - Why didn't they kick that blood-traitor Black out of the Group -"

" - apparently, because of some stupid Charter rules that said if he remained in Hogwarts, he cannot be removed -"

" - I hope he comes back, these few days were terrifying -"

" - rather have a Muggle-lover as leader than this blood purity terrorism -"

" - hush, that's a dangerous thing to say! -"

" - do you think Dumbledore knows about the Charter so he refused to move Black to St. Mungo's? -"

Turais gathered that a lot had changed for the worse in this House, but he knew he must concentrate on apprehending Nott and Dolohov as this was his priority.

After most of the House passed by, he finally spotted his two best friends walking solemnly down the hallway towards him in the company of his other friends, Alice, Jane, and Gerald.

“Are you okay, Alex?” Alice asked, full of concern, as she handed a batch of sandwiches over to him. Alex did not take them. “You haven’t eaten anything today. You need to eat to keep up your strength.”

“No, thanks,” Alex’s voice croaked. It sounded dry and scratchy. Turais’ heart squeezed as he imagined what could’ve caused it.

“No, Alex. You will collapse. The last time I saw you eat anything solid was three days ago.” Jane said urgently.

“No, Jane. Please don’t… just leave me alone…” Alex sounded lifeless.

“Yeah, drop it, Jane. Don’t force Alex,” Jonty said. He looked better than Alex… but only slightly. Dark circles showed beneath his eyes and his skin was a shade of pasty white. The usual mischievous glint in his eyes was absent. Turais wondered how much sleep he had gotten in the past few days.

“Jonty, you know that he can’t go on like this. And you are almost as bad!” Jane took the sandwiches from Alice and them into Alex’s hands once more.
“Yeah… Alex… we can’t bear to see you like this…” Gerald said hesitantly as he eyed them guardedly, as though the two Slytherins would lash out at any point.

“Yeah, Alex. Turais wouldn’t -” Jane said.

“Turais is dying!” Alex screamed at Jane, his desperate voice rung in the dark, dungeon hallways. “He’s never going to wake up again! The last time I saw him was last Thursday. He was so pale… barely breathing. His pulse was so weak, it’s like… it’s like he’s already dead.” Alex crumbled to the ground and started to weep. His head rested on the cold walls uncomfortably as his body shook. Jonty and Jane sat down beside him as they soothingly patted his shoulders back while Alice and Gerald looked on with concern. No one knew to say or do. “They wouldn’t even let us visit him now, he must be getting worse…”

“Alex, you must eat. What if he wakes up just to find all of us weak and tired and sick? He wouldn’t want that? Would he?” Jane asked softly.

“He’s never going to forgive me. I… I… pushed him to eat the treacle tart but I didn’t eat it myself. I told him that it was the least he could do. I killed him. I killed him…” Alex’s sobbing turned into a messy cry. “I took Turais away from Sirius and Regulus and his father when he gave me a family, a home… this is how I repay them…”

“Me too. I should have listened to Turais when he told me not to snoop. Nott must have sought revenge on me too. Why did I not listen to him? Why was I so stupid?!” Jonty shouted and his voice was thick with emotions. Tears were threatening to spill from his red-rimmed eyes as he blinked them away furiously. “I even said his love for treacle tart was well-known to everyone. Of course someone would put poison in a treacle tart to poison Turais. That boy would eat any treacle tart in front of him…”

“No! We’ve talked about this too many times. It’s not your fault!” Jane said firmly, though tears were glistening in her eyes. “You wouldn’t have known. He thought it was me. He thought Jane gave him the tart, that’s why he never suspected it. Someone deliberately exploited his trust in our friendship to poison him.”

“Nott! I told you, Jane. It’s Nott!” Alex shouted. "Andr - someone told me that it was Nott and Dolohov!"

“But there’s no way to prove it, Alex. I know we never got along with Nott and Dolohov. But many Slytherins don’t like what he stands for either. Even our own roommates Flint and Urquart hated his guts," Jonty said. "Anyone could have poisoned him. Heck, Avery could be in on it as well! And we might never be able to prove that they did it -”

“I’m so useless. Turais was right. He was all paranoid since Yaxley last year. And all I did was make fun about it,” Alex grieved. “Hell, I even joked that no one has tried to kill him yet… he’ll hate me if he ever wakes up.

“I have so much to tell him, to explain to him, to apologize, to say sorry, to have him forgive me… He can’t die, he just can’t ….!” Alex’s voice broke as a wave of new tears rolled down his cheek. Suddenly, his eyes gleamed with tears and determination. “I have to find him…” Alex said softly but with a new sense of determination.

“No, Alex. You have done nothing wrong. It’s not your fault, mate,” Gerald said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“No, you don’t know anything about me,” Alex said venomously as he shook off his hand.
roughly, then his face crumbled once again. “I goaded Dolohov. I taunted him. I went up against him. He must’ve took revenge on me… on us… to hurt us through Turais… if I didn’t try to be bold and save Aigel… I need to tell him it’s all my fault…”

“No Alex, you heard Professor Dumbledore. He is in a critical condition. You can’t go!” Alice spoke.

“Then when do I go? When he is actually dead? When he can’t hear me anymore? Or should I talk to the picture on my bedside table while reminding myself that his father and brothers are never going to smile like that again?!” Alex shouted as the seven members of the Slytherin Quidditch team appeared in the same hallway, Wilkins spotted Jane and snarled.

“I told you to never show up here again, Gryffindor mudblood!” Wilkins waves his bat menacingly as he approached the group. “I knew you were trouble! I just don’t know why Black ever bothered with you and your kind -”

“Shut up, Wilkins,” Alex said. Wilkins stopped walking and flicked his eyes towards Alex at his seething tone. “I know you just lost the match but you will not insult my friend.”

Wilkins hesitated, but only for a split second as he was about to spew out some profanities again. But before he could utter another word, Emma Blishwick spoke up, “Cap, don’t you need to debrief us about the match?”

Wilkins turned around to narrow his eyes at the replacement Seeker, who did not cower from his gaze to her credit, and spat, “We have a lot to talk about, Blishwick.”

He turned to look back at Jane. Turais was surprised to see the glistening moisture in the sixth-year’s eyes as he jabbed his bat menacingly at Jane.

“Black is the most bloody talented Seeker I have seen in my entire life. If he…if he dies… if I ever find out you or whoever it was that poisoned him, I will make sure my father personally oversees the damned Dementor’s Kiss being administered. Mark my words.”

He strolled down the corridor and slammed his shoulder against Jane as he marched past the group. Except Natalia, the rest of the team followed silently and avoided any eye contact. After they disappeared into the doorway, Alex hissed towards the group again.

“Please forgive Michael,” Natalia said quietly. “He has been very distraught about the entire situation. He cares really deeply for Turais so -”

“Arkenstone!” Wilkins’ voice reverberated in the hallway out of view. Natalia gave them an apologetic look before catching up to the rest of the team.

“It’s Nott! I’m going to kill him!” Alex’s sapphire eyes flashed red.

“Now, now. Alex, that’s your anger speaking,” Alice said as she eyed him worriedly. “You don’t mean it -”

“What if I do?” Alex hissed maliciously at his friends. Turais saw a murderous glint that he had never thought could appear in his best friend’s eyes as the Slytherin common room door appeared once more. This time, the two faces that Turais hated the most in school appeared. “YOU BASTARD!”

Jonty threw his arms around Alex’s shoulder to stop him from throwing himself at the two seventh-years while Alice, Jane, and Gerald tried to contain him by holding down his four limbs
onto the ground.

“So I’ve heard from Wilkins that the halfie and mudblood were wallowing in sadness together,” Dolohov’s unrepentent voice rang throughout the hallway.

“I know you poisoned him. You’ve stooped so low that you pretended to be a mudblood to trick him into eating the tart because he was a good person and trusting like that! You will not succeed!” Alex yelled.

“Oh, I have, already -” Dolohov admitted airily while Nott tensed beside him.

“I knew it!” Alex shouted while the other second-years’ hands slackened at the blatant admission. However, the fight seemed to have left Alex as he remained rooted at his spot.

"And more than once as well," Dolohov revealed. "Remember his visit to the infirmary on the first day of class?"

“Dolohov!” Nott interrupted nervously.

’Hold on a second,’ Turais' mind reeled. 'Did I faint because Dolohov poisoned me? Was that a trial run to see if I was susceptible to poisoning?'

Suddenly, everything Dolohov said to him made sense.

’There are some things that no magical abilities can save our hides from," Dolohov once told him,’ Turais recalled.

Dolohov knew Turais was a formidable opponent with great magical skills. He knew not to engage Turais through a duel, so naturally, he would turn to the possibility of poisoning Turais instead. Dolohov must have snuck something relatively harmless and untraceable, such as a weak Sleeping Draught, into Turais' food to see if his magic protected him from poisoning attempts as well. And clearly it didn't, therefore buoyed by the prospects, Dolohov planned to murder Turais in cold-blood.

“Stop being a coward, Nott,” Dolohov said calmly. “For the record, what I meant was I succeeded in performing a particularly pesky Transfiguration Spell assigned on the first day of classes. Don’t let your mind jump to conclusions -”

“I will kill you for what you’ve done to Turais!” Alex’s face contorted in pure rage and fury.

“I’ll like to see you try, worthless half-blood. You better double-check your pumpkin juice, someone might just accidentally slip something into it. But maybe you’ll drink it even if you knew anyways… so you can join your boyf-” Dolohov leered dangerously.

“Alex! No!”

"Do not defame him with your filthy mouth!" Alex roared and tore himself from his friends. Nott scampered to shelter behind Dolohov while Dolohov lazily drew his wand and blast Alex with a Body-Binding Spell.

Alex’s limbs immediately snapped together as his momentum caused his rigid body to tip forward. A sickening crunch sounded when Alex’s nose broke upon impact. Dolohov walked up and hovered over his unmoving body.

“A new world order is coming. Black and his creature and mudblood-loving ways will die
with him. You’ll join him soon enough, but before then, I will enjoy watching you despair as the world burns,” said Dolohov as he stepped on Alex’s back to walk over him. The others covered in the distance, horrified and rooted at their spots. A cold terrifying laughter rang in the hallway as they turned around the corner and out of sight.

Turais tore his gaze from the two seventh-year boys back to Alex’s vibrating body. His limbs were now lying limply by his sides as he sobbed into the floor. The curse was lifted but he made no indication of moving. His friends quickly scrambled over as soon as the two seventh-year disappeared and flipped him over as the muffled sobs blared out into a messy gurgle.

“Alex, we need to get you to the Hospital Wing. Your nose is broken,” Jonty said as he tried to lift Alex’s slack body.

“What do we do? Who’s going to stand up to them now? They are murdering children in cold-blood now, what will they do when they graduate?” Alex asked nasally as he stared at Jane. His entire face was smeared with blood from his broken nose.

None of them spoke as the uncomfortable truth hung over them menacingly. A chill went down all of their spines, but this time, it was not due to the drafty air of the Slytherin dungeons.

Turais forced himself to leave the scene. He would have to extract a promise from the staff and Aurors to look out for his friends and, especially, for Alex and to stop them from doing anything stupid and reckless. This trip reinforced one idea - Nott and Dolohov must be apprehended at all cost.

He slipped back into the guest suite and finished canceling his charms. Just as he was about to take off his Cloak of Invisibility, he heard the door open once more. Orion had returned. Turais breathed a sigh of relief as he arrived from his little expedition just in time.

“Where did you go, Turais?” Orion asked. Turais froze, he was still under the Cloak. There was no way - “Are you going to stand there for the rest of the day, Turais?” Orion asked as he stared straight at where Turais stood invisibly.

Orion sighed and drew his wand. “Accio Invisibility Cloak.”

The Cloak did not budge for no Summoning Charm could summon a Deathly Hallow.

“Are you really forcing me to walk over and tear that piece of cloth off you?” Orion asked again calmly. He was not too distracted by the fact that the Cloak did not get Summoned; perhaps he thought Turais was just clutching the Cloak very tightly.

Recognizing defeat, Turais heaved his Cloak off and appeared in the full view of his father. “How did you know -”

“You really think I would not have placed an Undetectable Tracking Charm on you or a Monitoring Spell on every inch of this room and the Hospital Wing after all that?” Orion said, his voice tired. “I’m a failure of a father, but I’m not that useless, son.”

Turais mentally berated himself for not checking himself and the room for latent spells, but at the same time he knew Orion had every right to ensure his son’s safety, especially when Turais was the one constantly walking into trouble.

“You’re not a failure, father. How many times do I have to tell you that to convince you that?” Turais said fiercely.
“If I’m not a failure, then tell me why my eldest son keeps getting himself in life-threatening situations! Why does my son not come to me when he discovers an attack on his life!” Orion’s voice slowly turned into a shout. “First, Nott; then, Yaxley; now, poisoned by one of the deadliest substances known to wizards… what am I doing wrong? What can I do to keep you safe? Why are you putting yourself in harm’s way?” By the end, Orion sounded absolutely furious, more furious than Turais had ever seen his father act.

“I… I…” Turais was at a loss for words.

‘I need to do this? I can’t help it that others are trying to kill me? But I am deliberately and actively confronting them…’

But he knew the Orion did not care about any of those things. His family was most important to him; everything else just fell to the wayside. Turais struggled to find an answer that would resonate with his father.

“I…”

“Turais, remember what I told you the summer before you left for Hogwarts - how I told you to keep your head down and out of trouble?”

Turais nodded.

“I truly meant it, more than I think you realize…” Orion said tiredly.

“When I was in Hogwarts, there was this secret group who called themselves the Knights of Walpurgis - yes, Turais - the very same group that is currently gathering strength against the Ministry had their humble origins in Hogwarts. The core members of this group were all two or three years my senior. Besides forming their little secret group, they were all eventually members of the Group of Seven. They had a strong hold over House affairs for all those years. No one dared to even breathe without their permission for terrible, terrible things happened to all those who went against them. Therefore I pretended… I pretended to be mediocre student who did not excel in anything. A completely average wizard was an invisible one.

“The mediocre, unremarkable Heir Black - the person who was utterly undeserving of his prestigious title - of course, they did not say that to my face, but I knew it all the same. So I hid,” Orion’s sorrowful eyes turned to Turais. “I’m a coward… I hid… I withdrew myself from everyone and everything in Slytherin, so much that the Knights would not want me even if they wanted a Black in their midst. But I succeeded, they never approached me and I went through the years being undesirable… but also unharmed.

“But then you were... the shining, prodigal Heir Black and a Parselmouth - the paragon of all pureblood Heirs - and the son of the most undesirable Heir Black in our family history…” Orion trailed off. “You might have thought I was just another pureblood father who spoiled and doted on his Heir unconditionally for all these years. Yes, I would have loved you regardless of all that - but you are also my pride, you are everything that I wasn’t able to be. You are the Heir that the family deserves - not me.

“You’re the only thing I’ve ever succeeded in doing for myself… for my family. The world is yours if you wish for it, but only if you can live until you can reach for it. I feel like I am always so close to losing you… the day I heard from Dumbledore that you were poisoned… I felt like my world has imploded…”

Tears started to roll slowly down his father’s cheeks.
“Father, I -”

Orion walked towards him and clutched his robes tightly.

“Turais, can you promise me to stay out of trouble? Don’t engage with anyone remotely dangerous… quit the Group… quit the Quidditch Team if that will keep you safe… I can’t lose you… I can’t…” His tearful gaze searched his son’s eyes for the answer he sought.

“Father, I… I…” Turais tore his gaze away from those scrutinizing, grey eyes. “I… can’t promise you that… I’m sorry -”

Orion released Turais and stepped back from his son, as though touching his son burned every inch of his skin. Turais’ heart clenched at the sight of his father’s obvious gesture to get away from him. Turais swallowed thickly trying to keep the bitter taste from his mouth.

“Why?!” Orion demanded harshly. His gaze hardened to an unyielding steel. “You just told me a few days ago that my happiness is the most important thing to you! You being safe, healthy, and happy are my only conditions! Is that too much to ask for a father?’

‘No, it wasn’t. But… why can’t I just promise him…? The world won’t be safe…”

“Why can’t you do that for me?!” Orion screamed.

“Because the world -” Turais matched his father’s volume, desperately trying to make his father understand, as angry tears pricked his eyes and threatened to spill.

‘No, I will not cry in front of Orion for this. I am doing the right thing. I am right!’

“You know I don’t care about the world!” Orion hollered, his voice mired with pain, pleading, and frustrated anger. Turais’ heart fragmented from the desperation in his father’s tone. “I care about you, I care about our family! I care -”

“But there will be no family if the world is destroyed!” cried Turais loudly.

“You don’t know if the world will end!”

“What if I do?!”

Orion stared at Turais angrily, but Turais had detected a shift in his gaze. His eyes now shone with a new sense of determination that paled the swirl of emotions that were just present seconds ago.

“You know what? I don’t even know why I’m arguing with you, Turais,” Orion calmed his voice and breathed deeply. “You might not act your age, but you are still twelve and I am your father. I am withdrawing you from Hogwarts after this -”

“No, father, you cannot -” Turais said, his heart dropped at the return of this conversation. He walked forward to grab his father’s robe as he turned to head for the door.

“Yes I can, and I will!” Orion kept walking despite Turais’ desperate tugs.

“Father, please reconsider -”

“No -”

“Father! Please!” Turais begged as he kneeled down to drag his father’s robe down and stall
his movements. Orion turned around to look down at his son, the tears on his cheeks have dried
now, leaving only faint trails at ran down his face.

“I am going to Dumbledore right now !” Orion said harshly, ignoring Turias’ plead. Turais’
mind was blank with ways to argue against Orion’s actions -

“FATHER, I WILL LEAVE THE FAMILY IF YOU INSIST!” Turais screamed. He
regretted the words as he soon as it spilled out of his mouth. Orion’s face contorted into shock as
he realized what his son just suggested.

“TURAIL RIGEL ORION BLACK! HOW DARE YOU… How dare you…” Orion swung
his wand and pointed at his kneeling son. For the first time in his life, Turais felt genuinely terrified
that his father would harm him. The blood drained from his face in horror.

“... how dare you…” Orion’s wand was shaking violently along the rest of his body. “…how
dare …” He dropped onto his knees and his wand clattered onto the floor uselessly. “…how dare
…”

Turais started to reach across to his kneeling father. “I’m sorry, father -”

As soon as Turais’ hand touched his robe, Orion’s gaze snapped back at him. Hegrabbed his
son’s forearm painfully and dragged them both onto their feet as he shouted, “GET OUT! LEAVE!
I DON’T WANT TO SEE YOU!”

“I’m sor -” Turais winced but he pulled backwards away from the door while Orion leaned
forward to it with all his might.

“LEAVE!” Orion reached the door and turned the door handle to the empty hallway.

“No, fa -” Turais struggled to tug his arm from Orion’s firm grip to no avail. Orion swung the
door open and twisted Turais’ arm painfully as he dragged him towards the doorway. In
desperation, Turais used a non-verbal wandless spell.

“Relashio! ”

Orion’s hand immediately retracted from Turais’ forearm as Turais scrambled back further
into the room. Orion turned to face Turais and his eyes were now filled with burning betrayal as his
teeth grounded against each other tightly.

“YOU USED MAGIC AGAINST YOUR OWN FATHER!”

“Father, I sorry -” Turais’ mind was blank in panic as his body shook violently.

“I DON’T WANT TO SEE YOU!”

“Father, please don’t,” Turais begged.

“I DON’T WANT A SON LIKE YOU!”

At those words, Turais felt his spirit shatter. Even though he could have easily deflected the
 tendrils of Orion’s magic approaching him, he allowed it to sweep him off his feet and throw him
out of the guest suite into the opposing wall. Then, the door slammed shut on Turais’ face as he
laid motionless on the cold, hard stone floor. He messed up completely. He knew he had
irreversibly hurt his father but he did not know how to fix this situation. Maybe he would be in a
better mood after an hour… maybe they can talk it out then…
But when he returned, his father was not present. The only sign that the conversation occurred was the black, shimmering Cloak of Invisibility that pooled uselessly where Turais discarded it.

***

March 2, 1971 (Tuesday)

Turais looked at the empty room, void of all evidence that Orion was ever here. There was no sign that his father had spent days locking himself in his room crying and worrying about his son, who laid unconscious and closer to death than anyone had ever been; there was no sign that his father had spent hours putting up a brave smile while his heart shrivelled dead as his two younger sons panicked and cried about their bed-ridden brother; there was no sign of his father’s tears of joy when he returned to his room with his three sons, all alive and safe, as he felt his heart beat once again.

Instead, Turais saw the absence of his father and his brothers … the loss of warmth, love, happiness…

The dormant feeling of isolation and loneliness that he had not felt for many years, so long that it was almost unrecognizable...

No, waiting was not the hardest part.

Chapter End Notes

So, angst warning...?

I hope you’ve enjoyed the chapter.

As always, I love to hear your thoughts, comments, and reactions from all of you!

The next chapter, Chapter 29: Repercussions, is on schedule. Until next time.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-24
Hey everybody,

Happy Lunar New Year to everyone who observed this holiday!

Also, thank you and welcome to all of you who commented on this story for the very first time! I'm glad I successfully lured you out in the last two chapters and I hope to hear from you in the future.

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-31

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CHAPTER 29

REPERCUSSIONS

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BRIDGE FAILURE RESULTS IN FOUR DEATHS

Thomas Salisbury

Exeter, Devon - The local fire department has confirmed that a portion of the Countess Wear bridge has collapsed into the river Exe February 26, resulting in the death of four local residents. Their bodies have been recovered several hundred meters downstream.

The preliminary results from the Devon Field Office personnel assessed the site of the bridge on March 1. After the assessment, they suspect that the likely cause was a construction support fault from scour under the raft foundation.

However, the structure had just finished its upgrade less than one month prior to the incident...

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March 2, 1971 (Tuesday)

The entire castle was in an uproar after Dumbledore’s announcement that Turias’ condition had improved immensely overnight. After school today, students from every House gathered around the base of the staircase that led to the Hospital Wing and tried to get a glimpse of Turais
and say their well-wishes. There were many tears shed, much to Turais’ embarrassment and gratification. If anything, this was evidence that his presence was strong in the school and commanded respect from many.

As according to the plan, Professor Slughorn announced to the entire Slytherin House that Turais was on the mend and that he would positively survive this experience. Turais was, however, still unconscious but was expected to remain so for the rest of the day. Slughorn provided the memory of his announcement for viewing and everyone saw the evident shock and frustration that crossed Nott and Dolohov’s face. Turais took time to also focus on Alex and Jonty’s cautiously optimistic expressions.

Professor McGonagall revealed a fabricated lie in a conversation with Professor Slughorn when Nott and Dolohov were within earshot. The lie was that the two private healers were heading to St. Mungo’s to finish the preparation for Turais’ revival potions and that they would return before midnight; once the potions were administered, Turais would awaken.

With this information, Nott and Dolohov would have a two-hour window to strike - between curfew and midnight. The Aurors believed that if they were to appear, it would be immediately after curfew as they would not risk running into the returning private Healers.

Final preparations were made. The Aurors had already placed complex and undetectable Monitoring and Recording Spells around the Hospital Wing while they concealed themselves in the rooms neighbouring the ward. Turais and Arcturus were also waiting in their guest suite with Deputy Head Auror Meliflua, the leader of the operation, where all the Monitoring equipment were set-up. They were watching the scene unfold from the audio-visual Monitoring Spells shown on a large array of Foe-glasses and sound boxes. Beside the large panel of images that offered multiple views of the nearby corridors stood multiple Dark Detectors and Secrecy probes were calibrated to focus their detection range at the Hospital Wing area.

As it approached curfew, Moody took the Polyjuice Potion that was effective for four hours. After a swallow and a grimace, the Auror laid down on the hospital bed as a newly transformed Turais. Now, all they could do was wait.

In the distance, the Clock Tower, knelled solemnly for ten times. Madame Roland left the Hospital Wing and locked the doors as per her normal routine and headed off, leaving the ward with only one Auror guard at the door.

Five minutes. Ten minutes. Twenty minutes. Forty minutes. Then, the Clock Tower knelled eleven times.

As Turais started to worry that Nott and Dolohov would not appear and this elaborate plan would fall to waste when a disturbance occurred near the base of the stairs.

“Conway, move away from your post,” Meliflua said to the Auror guard through a Non-Verbal Concealed Communication Charm. This charm allowed the Aurors to communicate through a secured mental link via thoughts or words. “They might be drawing you out.”

The Auror, glowing in green on the panel of images, nodded as she left her post by the Hospital Wing doors and slowly climbed down the staircase.

‘Three figures, under Disillusionment Charm, at the two o’clock position behind the pillars.’

‘Three figures?’ Turais thought. ‘Who was the third person involved?’ Suddenly, Turais realized how little he understood of the dangerous situation he had placed himself in. He had, once
again, overestimated his abilities.


‘Copied.’ Conway slowly inched to the base of the staircase, paused to check both directions, before turning left and inched down the hallway. The path to the Hospital Wing was now clear from the pillars which the attackers, glowing in red, were lurking at.

When she was twenty feet away from the staircase, she heard three pairs of muffled footsteps running across the hallway and towards the staircase.

‘Attackers on the move to Hospital Wing.’

“Conway, do not engage. Continue path away from action.”

‘Copied.’ She deliberately ignored the noise and pretended to continue her search as the three attackers climbed up the stairs.

“Moody, they are at the door,” Meliflua notified the young Auror.

‘Copied.’

Turais heard the soft incarnation of the Unlocking Charm used through the audio Monitoring spells as the door creaked open slightly.

“Homunum Revelio,” one of figures whispered with its wand pointing through the tiny crack. After confirming that there was only one person in the room, the door opened wider as they slipped into the room. “Nott, stand by the door and alert us.” Two figures close the door behind them as the third stood outside the double doors. The two attackers surveyed the room and locked onto the awaiting Auror.

On the largest Foe-glass, two red figures walked cautiously towards the green Moody that laid still on the bed. The Aurors quietly gathered by the Hospital Wing entrance out of view and Stunned Nott while the two attackers inside the Hospital Wing was still unaware of the situation.

“Black,” Turais gasped as he heard Avery's voice. The boy slowly approached the bed until he was hovering over the silent Moody, “I don’t know how you managed to survive the Devil’s Nightshade, but you will certainly not survive the Killing Curse. So long... Avada - ”

Moody immediately opened his eyes and whipped out his wand from beneath the blanket as he threw the blanket at the two assailants. The team of Aurors quickly barged into the room and shouted multiple Stunning Spells towards his bed as Moody rolled away and onto the ground for cover.

The two red figures collapsed to the floor and turned grey, indicating that they were now incapacitated. The Aurors muttered the counterspell for the Disillusionment Spell and revealed the unconscious figures of Dolohov and Avery.

Avery was part of the plot against him?! Turais was stunned. Just how much of this plot against him was he not aware of...

“All assailants down. Grade three criminal protocol in effect,” Meliflua concluded. He stood up from his post and covered the ongoing image of green figures swarming around the two grey figures for the arrest.
“The mission was a success, Arcturus,” he said with a relieved smile. “The culprits behind your grandson's poisoning have been apprehended.”

“Thank you, Emerterius. But I am afraid the three of them are only the visible tip of the iceberg,” Arcturus said. "Three boys who are barely of age cannot be solely responsible for such a cruel and meticulously-planned assault on my Heir. You must keep investigating deeper into this matter."

"I agree, Arcturus," Meliflua's demeanour returned to one of absolutely professionalism. "Please rest assured that the Auror Office will do everything to ensure your grandson is safe and well-protected. In fact, I believe that Head Auror Shafiq has been discussing with the Headmaster on how to increase the castle's protection."

"Thank you for your support in these tiring times. I will be sending a letter of recommendation for your team in the near future,” Arcturus said as he extended his hand, which the Auror took without hesitation.

A junior Auror rushed into the room and muttered something urgently into the Deputy Head Auror's ears. Meliflua’s smile turned into a frown as the Auror continued.

"Is there a response team on site yet?” The subordinate shook his head.

"What?! How is that - we will deal with that later - tell Davies' team to escort those three to the Ministry and the rest to meet at the entrance - we are heading out right now!"

The man immediately ran out the room as Meliflua turned back to the two Blacks.

“Please excuse me. An urgent situation requires my immediate presence elsewhere.”

“Of course. If that’s all, I would like to take my leave with my grandson,” Arcturus said accommodatingly.

“Thank you. Everything will be in order and your Court will receive the Auror reports within the week through the normal channels of disclosure.”

Arcturus nodded as he led Turais away from the room and back to the guest suite.

Meliflua quickly barked his orders to pack up as he strolled off to the Headmaster’s Office. "Whittemore and Quills. Stay behind to pack up the equipment. Everyone else follow me to Lancashire at once!"

“You wish to speak with me, grandfather?” Turais asked as Arcturus closed the door.

Arcturus did not respond and cast a series of anti-Eavesdropping and anti-Concealment Charms around the room. Satisfied, he turned back to Turais and spoke grimly, "I thought you were better than this."

"What do you mean, grandfather?” Turais asked.

"Andromeda has revealed everything to me, including the conversation you two shared earlier this year. I am greatly disappointed that you did not consult me on this matter of such magnitude and importance,” Arcturus said.

"Grandfather. It was all speculation with proof -" Arcturus raised his hand to stop Turais from speaking.
"Don't take me for a fool, Turais. I know what you did. You knew that it was genuine threat of your life and you thought you were capable of dealing with the situation. Clearly that was not the case," Arcturus said. "I would have believed such reckless behaviour would be possible from your brother, Sirius. But not from you."

"I apologize, grandfather," Turais said. "I am in the wrong this time."

"Indeed you were," Arcturus said. "Consider yourself fortunate that you escaped this unscathed. But Merlin knows how lucky you were."

Turais hung his head dejectedly. He deserved all this scolding. He overestimated his abilities and he recognized his fault in his own actions.

"Moving forward," Arcturus said as Turais snapped up in attention. He couldn't believe Arcturus was finished scolding him. "You must be very mindful of Lucius Malfoy and Dumbledore’s actions."

“You are suspicious that this was Malfoy or Dumbledore’s plot to eliminate me?” Turais asked in surprise.

“No, I do not. It is obviously an act of terrorism by three pureblood fanatics. While the Averys, Notts, and Dolohovs are aligned with the Malfoys in the Ministry, the Malfoys are too self-preserving to ever commit such an act while Lucius is still in Hogwarts. Abraxas would never chance his precious son’s reputation and standing. Neither would Dumbledore for he would not risk losing the immense clout and influence he wields over impressionable youths as Headmaster. I firmly believe this is the three families’ selfish plan to curry some type of favour or goodwill. But to whom, I cannot say for certain."

“Then why?”

“My sources tell me that the Malfoys have secretly been in contact with Voldemort and the Knights ever since our refusal to an alliance with them. But communication between them has increased dramatically after your poisoning. While an alliance between them would be unfavourable for us, it was to be expected since Voldemort wished to gain a voice in the Ministry. At least for the near future, there would not be any changes to the dynamics of the Ministry. It would still be the Malfoys and us against Dumbledore. But… if you were out of the picture…” Arcturus trailed off and looked at Turais expectantly.

“Then, the Malfoys will be able to unify your half of the Dark families with help from Voldemort to form a united front against Dumbledore,” Turais grimaced.

“Yes. In fact, your poisoning has rattled the faith of many of our allies already under the persistent attacks from Abraxas. Fortunately, I was able to subdue their panic until now. But only barely. Remember, you are an invaluable piece to our family in this growing conflict. Be mindful of your status, Turais,” Arcturus said, “I know that the Malfoys will try to undermine our support again if the opportunity arises. We cannot afford to cede more ground to them.”

“I understand. What about Dumbledore?”

“He will continue to find ways to undermine the Dark families, especially us and the Malfoys. But Lucius Malfoy will be leaving Hogwarts in two years while you will remain for the next six years. You will soon become Dumbledore’s main priority and he will try his best to curb your influence. Even the slightest misbehaviour on your part would be exploited by him. You must be careful.”
“So you don’t object to me staying in Hogwarts?” Turais confirmed.

“Of course you must stay in Hogwarts, Turais. I actually agreed with Dumbledore to not transfer you to St. Mungo’s. Despite being poisoned by an unknown substance and remaining unconscious, your condition was stable. There was nothing more St. Mungo’s could have provided in your case than what you have been receiving for the past two weeks. Also, you are a member of the Group of Seven. I’m sure you are aware that being away from school for an indeterminable period of time is ground for Malfoy to remove you without your consent.

“Disregard anything your father might have told you. He never had the vision nor the strength to carry the weight of his familial duties. The Black family cannot shrink from their troubles and tremble in fear. This will not inspire our allies and we must capitalize on all the sympathy you have gained from your peers. It will be useful to regain our political strength in the Wizengamot. Meanwhile, I will be ensuring your safety in a different way, especially considering what has just transpired…”

Turais stopped listening to what Arcturus had to say as the world turned static while his thoughts occupied his mind.

Arcturus would not have allowed Orion to withdraw Turais from school. The fight between him and his father was all for nought. And now he has ruined the one thing that was important to him. His family.

Turais felt his breathing turning shallow. This was when Orion would calm him down, hug him, and listen to Turais’ concerns. But Turais knew Orion wouldn’t be there for him.

Possibly ever again.

***

March 3, 1971 (Wednesday)

It was decided that for Turais’ convenience and for the on-going investigation, Turais should pretend that he had indeed miraculously healed and woke up the day after the capture of the three students. The usage of the Devil’s Nightshade poison was also concealed as they deemed it to be an important evidence that could potentially be traced back. Finally, the news of Nott, Dolohov, and Avery’s second attempt on Turais’ life was also contained. Turais wasn’t too miffed about all this secrecy; there was enough controversy to handle without these added details.

Now, Turais found himself hidden outside the Great Hall as Dumbledore addressed the entire school in a morning assembly before breakfast as he planned on entering the Hall after the announcement.

“Hello everyone, it is my deepest regret to announce that the culprits of Mr Turais Black’s poisoning have been found to be students of this school. And since they are of legal age, I will be able to reveal their names. Mr Janus Avery, Mr Antonin Dolohov, and Mr Brutus Nott -”

The Great Hall gasped in shock. Rumours ran wild in Hogwarts and the Wizarding community in response to the Black Heir’s poisoning. Some claimed it was by the Malfoys to eliminate the threat posed by the Blacks on their path to power; others claimed it was by the Ministry who had been at the mercy of both families and finally decided to act; a very small
portion of people even believed it was Dumbledore, who had openly acted against the Dark families in the Wizengamot, to eliminate a rising star amongst the pureblood families. But no one anticipated it to be the works of three fellow *Slytherin* seventh-years.

After a long moment of quick chattering and muttering, Dumbledore rose up both hands authoritatively as he motioned for the students to quieten down.

“Mr Janus Avery, Mr Antonin Dolohov, and Mr Brutus Nott -” Dumbledore repeated calmly. “- have been apprehended by Aurors early this morning amidst overwhelming evidence and will remain in their custody for the foreseeable future. This is an extremely horrifying moment for all of us - having students committing the most terrible crime against another student. However, I will use this incident as a cautionary tale to those remotely considering to do harm just to achieve their goals. That would be unwise and the consequences would not be mere detention, but much more severe.”

Dumbledore’s gaze swept throughout the halls as he met the disturbed and troubled eyes of his students.

“I am certain that all of you are in shock right now. However, I do have uplifting news to announce amidst this unfortunate incident. It is my greatest pleasure to announce that Mr Turais Black has regained full health -”

Another gasp sounded collectively throughout the Hall. However, this time, it was of delight and accompanied with squeals of relief and happiness. Dumbledore quickly motioned for silence as the Hall fell silent once more.

“- and he will be rejoining our midst very soon. I’m sure all of you will give him a warm welcome but please make sure to give him plenty of space. He has just experienced a very traumatic incident that almost claimed his life and will naturally need time to ease himself back into his routine. This is all and I wish you all a pleasant rest of the day,” Dumbledore finished as he stepped off the podium.

Turais was about to step around the corner into view but he hesitated.

‘How will they react? Probably happy that I am alive. How should I react? Smile and pretend that everything is back to normal when everything has changed for me…”

Normally, Orion would be here, being his overprotective self, and ask if he was sure he could handle the attention…

‘I don’t deserve any warm welcomes… in fact, I don’t deserve anyone to notice me…”

Turais looked around the Entrance Hall, searching in the void despite knowing he would not find what he seeked. His heart squeezed painfully again as the throbbing ache inside his chest that dulled all his senses. Despite being a few steps away from the bustling Hall, Turais had never felt lonelier.

Suddenly, he realized that he didn’t want to lose Orion for himself. He always thought that he had to stay in the Black family to protect Sirius and Regulus from falling into their tragic ends. But somewhere along the way, his body and mind realized that Orion was his father as well. His love for Orion was personal and their bond was real; he was just to blind to see it. Until now… but it was too late…

‘You literally told him you would abandon him… and now you are worried that he would
He turned his back to the giant oak doors and the crowd and headed down to the dark isolation of his four-poster bed. That was where a person who abandoned his loving father belonged.

***

March 4, 1971 (Thursday)

“- haven’t seen him at all -”
“- the curtains were shut -”
“- for two days now, I’m worried Mr Black -”
"- Professor, is he suffering from magic backlash -"
“- Auror-grade Shield Charms, Minerva -”
“- not possible, Horace -”
“- try this then -”

A loud bang sounded as the curtains were shredded into thick strands of ribbons and pooled onto the ground. Light from the dormitories attacked Turais’ eyes as it spilled onto his bed and into his eyes. Four figures - two adults and two children - stood at the end of his bed.

“Mr Black!” Professor McGonagall shouted. “What is the meaning of -”

She faltered as she took in the curled up, disheveled figure whose eyes stared lifelessly at the wooden beam closest to him. She also took in his red-rimmed eyes, and sallow, bloodless cheeks with a photo frame tucked between his arms and chest.

“Mr Black,” she tried again, speaking softer this time. “Your friends were worried about you. They said you didn’t talk to anyone nor attend any classes since you were discharged Wednesday morning. Is… that true?”

Turais just continued to stare at the wooden beam. In all honesty, he did not feel hungry. He took care of his physical needs with a few simple Spells (taught in Auror Academy for prolonged espionage missions) and used Freshening Charms to stay clean. He had done way worse during his Auror field op days. He didn’t want to talk either. He just wanted to be left alone.

‘Yeah… being alone sounds good…’

“Turais, please talk to us…” Alex’s voice sounded distantly. “Just a word. Any word…”

“Yeah, Turais. We’re really worried,” Jonty’s voice said. “Speak to us, we beg you.”

“Mr Black, I will have to break through your Shield Charms if you don’t respond.”

Turais knew he had casted multiple highly powerful Shield Charms around his bed, some
variations were even his own innovations. Even if she somehow managed to destroy all that, he was still the Master of Death and could just cast a completely impregnable Shield Charm afterwards.

‘But that is too much trouble. I’ll have to recast all the Charms…’

“I’ll like to see you try,” Turais croaked. He felt his scratchy throat and parched mouth from lack of water, but no matter, he had Hydrating Spells so he stayed hydrated even without physically drinking water.

“Mr Black!” McGonagall shouted as she was about to scold the student for his cheek, but then caught herself. “What’s the matter? Are you still feeling unwell? Do you need to go to Madame Roland -”

“Just leave me alone please,” Turais pulled his blanket over his head as the darkness surrounded him once more. He ignored the mutters and the few muffled explosions, which Turais guessed was her futile efforts on disabling his charms.

Later that day, Turais repaired all the curtains and he was once again isolated with our his sadness and regrets.

***

"You don't reckon Black has gone mad?" Turais could hear Urquhart whispering.

"By mad, you are not suggesting..." Rivers lowered his voice nervously, "... the Black Madness? -"

"Hush! " Flint said immediately. "That's complete bullocks. The Blacks don't have a blood malediction."

"That you know of, Flint," Urquhart returned. "You can't know every family inflicted with a family curse. But we all know for a fact that Black males go mad and die young. Every last one of them. Not a single one lived past one hundred."

"Well, here's a fact for you, Urquhart," Flint said. "This Black is doing a damn good job finding his way six feet under the ground without a family curse interfering."

"That's because he is insane to go around picking fights with everything he sees! And it seems like the bigger the target, the fiercer he gets. What Slytherin does that?" Urquhart hissed. "Black is a lucky bastard to survive whatever took him down. He has to see that."

"I doubt it," Flint said darkly. "He's too stubborn to change and he has clearly been on a warpath since he first step foot in this castle. Don't you find it odd that he never acts his age? He talks down at Malfoy as if he is an adult scolding a child."

"Yeah..." Rivers agreed. "I have noticed that as well. But I find it oddly comforting..."

Flint snorted. "You would, Rivers. You and your sensitive little soul crying over that dead bird -"
"Flint. It was that one time! -" River said heatedly as the door creaked open.

“Be quiet, all of you!” Alex's voice sounded. "Get out of the room if you are not sleeping. Turais is feeling unwell and -"

"Cut it, Fawley," Flint snapped. "We're leaving. Go ahead and play nursemaid to Black."

Alex closed the door shut as he juggled two plates of food haphazardly. When he turned around, he noticed that Turais was observing him.

“Um… sorry about that… I was -"

Turais returned beneath his covers, feeling ashamed and disgusted of himself. He heard his footsteps shuffling towards his bedside followed by two faint thuds as the plate of sandwiches and a glass of pumpkin juice was placed on the table.

“Turais…” Alex’s voice sounded after a series of clanking. “I brought you some lunch. There's sandwiches and pumpkin juice… I’ll put them on your bedside table. Please… have some…”

When Alex shuffled back from his bed, he heard him pause for a minute before climbing into his own bed.

Turais did not touch any of the food. He didn't deserve any of his friend's kindness.

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“Turais…” Alex’s voice. “I brought you some fresh food… you really should eat something… I don’t know happened, but I think it has something to do with your family and I see that you are very upset… I… I…” Alex faltered at the lack of acknowledgement from his best friend, who remained completely hidden in his cocoon of linen.

“I … will let you rest, sorry for disturbing you…”

Hours later, Turais returned to his fitful sleep.

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March 5, 1971 (Friday)

For the entire day yesterday, Turais only heard the faint footsteps, occasional tinkering of silverwares, and soft whispers. He thought he would be able to abide to his isolation in accordance to his well-deserved punishment today as well until…

“TURAIUS! WAKE UP!”

This time, it wasn’t Alex’s voice, but Jonty’s. Turais shifted in his bed and looked up to see an enraged Jonty who was glaring at him in a rare display of hostility that he had never felt from
the salt and pepper-haired boy before him. He was several inches away from his bed and Jonty wanted to be much closer but his Shield Charms, which adjusted the allowed proximity with the level of hostility, would not allow him to be any closer.

“I know you are suffering from something, Turais. But you can’t just wallow in your pain and suffering in that bed. Surely, you understand how much you are affecting people -”

Turais moved to disappear into his blanket once more before Jonty shouted again.

“TURAI$! Don’t you dare ignore me! Do you know Alex is torturing himself because of you? When you were unconscious, he did not eat, drink, or sleep. He was determined to ignore all of us that we thought he’d get his death wish. Thank Merlin you woke up, he was so… alive that I forgot this was the real Alex that I knew. But then you decide to pull this stunt and lock yourself away… do you have no idea what you are doing to us? To him? You’re always the smartest one, the sharpest thinker, the most mature… but why are you so stupid this time? He thinks you blame him! Do you blame him?”

Turais stilled.

‘Do I blame him? Of course not! That’s nonsense. Only Nott, Dolohov, and Avery are responsible. Why would Alex think that?’

“If you do, hit him, punch him, hex him! Do something, anything! If you don’t, you need to talk to him, tell him. He feels guilty for goading Dolohov during the Group meetings; he feels guilty for dismissing and joking about your paranoia about them; he feels guilty for having a hand in getting you to eat the poisoned treacle tart!” Jonty shouted angrily at his friend.

Then, Jonty whispered forcefully, “Your silent treatment is hurting him -”

Those quiet words slapped him across his face. Turais turned sharply to look at Jonty’s grim and serious expression. However, he just gaped at him as he was rendered completely speechless.

‘No… I didn’t want to hurt anyone… not more people… I’ve hurt Orion and Siri and Reggie already… I can’t have another person on my guilty conscience…”

“He keeps bringing you food every day after every meal yet he doesn’t eat anything himself. I don’t understand why it’s affecting him so severely but it is… and he’s not doing well. Please talk to him … I… I can’t lose both of you to this…”

The fire in Jonty’s eyes started to die down as his features began to soften. Then, he turned and looked beside Turais with an inexplicable expression. Following his gaze, Turais turned to his bedside table, noticing for the very first time that it was filled to the edge with many of his personal favourites: apples, ham and cheese sandwiches, shepherd’s pie, bread pudding. However, there were also many non-school food items such as Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans, packs of Sugar Quills… and even a bottle of Madam Rosmerta’s Butterbeer under a permanent Cooling charm. Turais did not realize, or more so that he chose to ignore, his best friends were affected through his own suffering.

Now, he realized that not only did he hurt his family, he had also neglected his best friends. Suddenly, he remembered that he had a friend to comfort and a school to confront.

“Where’s Alex?” Turais asked frantically.

Jonty smiled softly as he walked towards Turais’ bed. As Jonty hugged him, he whispered, “Welcome back.”
Alex looked pale and his skin was sallow. His eyes were wide with a sense of shock and fear as he studied Turais’ face intently, as though he might disappear at any moment.

“So.. um… I’m sor- Oompf!” Alex ran forward and wrapped his arms around Turais’ waist in a tight embrace that knocked the breath out of him. His head knocked against Turais’ in the hastiness as Alex hissed in pain but neither boy seemed to care.

“I’m so sorry, Turais,” Alex breathed, his voice sounded watery. “I didn’t know things would turn out like this. I swear I didn’t know Nott and Dolohov were going to poison you. If I knew, I wouldn’t have made those jokes… I mean, if I knew, then I would’ve stopped them first, of course, no… report them… I’m not making any sense again -”

Turais chuckled at the ineloquence of his friend’s speech. He didn’t realize how much he missed his friend’s awkward ramblings. “It’s okay, Alex.”

“No, it’s not!” Alex argued as Turais realized that he was crying now. “I riled Dolohov up when you told me to steer clear. I shouldn’t have taken in Aigel as my protégé. I dismissed your worries about Nott. I made you eat the damn treacle tart. I never meant to hurt you, I swear. It’s all my fault. You’re my best friend, I’m sorry.”

“I believe you, Alex. I was never angry at you… I just…” Turais struggled as his tears began to well up at his next words, but he needed to be strong for his friend. He took in a deep breath to calm himself as he ruled back the tears. Then, he whispered shudderingly, “Father is mad at me. We had a huge fight and… I said something terrible, very hurtful… and he might disown me.”

Alex inhaled a sharp breath as he pulled back from the hug to look at Turais with his large blue eyes. Turais noted that his cheeks were wet from the recent tears that were shed. “What happened?”

“I messed up very badly,” Turais whispered his crimes helplessly. “My father wanted to withdraw me from school. And I argued with him about. Then I said… I said I will leave the family if he insisted. Then he grabbed me and made me leave the room and… I used a Repelling Charm on him… I just told my own father I would abandon him and then used magic against him.” A sob escaped from his throat but Turais held his tears back. He would not cry. He needed to be strong for everyone around him. Biting down on his cheek, he willed himself to not cry. Alex pulled him back into their hug and patted his back soothingly.

“I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to make you worry, but my father… I deserve this, I’m such a terrible son. I told him I would abandon him then why am I so scared that he would disown me? I literally asked for it,” Turais laughed humorlessly.

Alex stayed silent as Turais ranted and ranted. It felt cathartic to finally be able to begin and process what had happened. After what seemed to be hours later, Turais nudged Alex slightly and they separated.

Wiping at his nose with his robes clumsily, Turais sniffed and told Alex, “I’m sorry to unload this on you… especially when you were hurt by my actions until today… but I just don’t know who to talk to about this… and.”
“Turais,” Alex interrupted as he curled his hands around Turais’ shoulder and stared directly into his eyes with an incredible amount of sincerity. “You are my best friend. You’ve always been here for me. Let me be here for you too.”

Turais didn’t know what he did to deserve Alex, but he just nodded and gave him another crushing hug. They were locked in the embrace for a long time until Turais’ stomach growled in complaint.

“Thanks, Alex. I’m a mess, ain’t I?” Turais slumped his shoulders in defeat.

“Well, not as bad as me,” Alex joked self-deprecating as he gestured his puffy eyes and tear-stained cheeks. “But at least that just proves that you’re human. I was beginning to worry that you were a god who lived amongst men,” Alex teased gently as Turais chuckled. “But let’s talk about that later. I’m famished and I’m guessing you are too.”

Alex guided Turais back to his bed as they sat side-by-side in front of the large pile of food. Turais turned to Alex and said, “We are going to talk about your ‘I’m going to starve myself to death’ attitude later too.”

Alex tensed but then grinned at him sheepishly. Turais nudged him in the arm as Alex hissed in pain. Turais immediately looked at him with concern but Alex nudged him back painfully. For the first time since his fight, Turais dared to hope that things could one day be resolved.

***

“Oompf!”

Wilkins was glaring daggers at him and strolled over with such a dark expression that Turais thought he would be physically mauled by the Quidditch captain before he was taken by surprise with a silent bone-crushing crush where Turais’ head was squished uncomfortable around his sternum. They stayed in that position for a long while right in the middle of the common room in the full view of all the students. However, everyone looked and then shrugged - it was a commonly known fact that Wilkins was completely enamoured with Turais as much as one could platonically.

“You are in so much trouble, Black!” Wilkins shouted into his right ear but it lacked the usual bite. In fact, his voice was trembling alongside his entire body.

“Can I get out of it if I promise to catch the Snitch under one minute?” Turais mumbled. Wilkins gave a small snort.

“Depending on how Kaiden does next week I might need you to hold off catching the Snitch instead. But are you okay for practice tomorrow? You don't need to attend if you’re not up for it.”

“No, cap. I’ve missed enough practices. I don't want others to accuse you of favouritism.”

Turais felt Wilkins’ hesitant nod.
“That was the most idiotic thing you have ever done!” Andromeda screamed at Turais' face before giving him a big hug. "Don't you dare try this again. You cannot imagine the horror of needing to explain what happened to your grandfather and father. You owe me so, so much!”

Jane hugged him. Alice hugged him. Gerald hugged him. He was sensing that there would be a lot of hugging today.

Everyone who had a crush on him wanted to kiss him; everyone who was remotely close with him wanted to hug him; everyone who was remotely acquainted with him wanted to shake his hand; everyone who had heard of him wanted to take a look at him.

“Black, I just want to say they were despicable human scum for doing this to you -”

“Black is back!”

“Hey, Turais. How are you feeling?”

“Turais, I’m glad you’re back. It must’ve been dreadful -”

“Turais -”

“ - Mr Black, I -”

Turais was honestly overwhelmed by the number of well-wishers that approached him in the Great Hall and in the hallways for an inquiry into his health or a handshake. At some point, he was merely politely nodding while tuning everyone out. Jonty and Alex acted as his bodyguards and valiantly tried to shield him from anyone who approached him with any intention of doing more than saying a quick comment. They were quite successful until…

“Oompf!”

Turais felt someone snaked their arms around his chest from behind and tackled him from behind.

“Kaiden! Can you stop tackling me -”

“You are in so much trouble, Rais!” Kaiden’s voice sounded above and behind his head, but he sounded like his perpetual joking tone. “How dare you make all those young ladies cry in the common room! I thought multiple Moaning Myrtles have made permanent residence in the Gryffindor Tower.”

Then Kaiden’s hands wandered around his chest and stomach in search for something. Honestly, both Kaiden and James Potter had no sense of personal space or brain-to-mouth filter.

“Jeez, Kay! Do you Potters have no sense of personal space?” groaned Turais as Kaiden finally removed his offending hands.

“Why are you so skinny? I mean, you are always on the leaner side but this is worrying even for you. Have you been eating? Do I need to force-feed you -”

"Potter! Hands off and step away at once! -" Evelyn Napier shouted as he parted the crowd and walked up towards Turais, who was still tight in Kaiden's embrace.

"Potter! You are a prefect for Merlin's sake,” Napier sniped as he squared his jaw. His tone
was clipped and disapproving. "You should know better -"

"I get it," Kaiden mumbled as he finally released Turais and fixed his crumpled robes. He placed a hand on Napier's tense shoulder and patted it. "Napier, don't get your knickers in a twist. Breathe a little, won't you?"

Napier's nostrils flared as he pushed off the boy's hand. "Keep your hands to yourself, Potter! You need to learn what personal space is!"

"What is that? Never heard of it," Kaiden said with a wink before turning his attention back to Turais. His voice turned serious, "Please take care of yourself, okay?"

"Okay," Turais nodded.

"Good!" Kaiden beamed.

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March 6, 1971 (Saturday)

For the fourth consecutive night, sleep eluded Turais as he woke up tired and frustrated. However, he managed to make himself presentable with the help of his friends while he stumbled around groggily.

"Hold your head still, Turais," Alex said exasperatedly as he carded his fingers through Turais' head with pomade. "Stop tipping forward for just one second."

"Uh, Black?" Alex's hands stilled as Turais opened up his bleary eyes. It was Flint and Urquart, who were both standing awkwardly a few metres away. Rivers also stopped folding his pyjamas to watch the proceedings.

"Yes, Flint. Urquhart. What is the matter?"

"We... uh... we just want to say we are glad that you have recovered," said Flint.

An awkward silence settled in the room as everyone looked at Turais intently, gauging his reaction.

"Thank you, Flint. I appreciate your concern very much," Turais responded. Flint nodded jerkily before he quickly exited the room with Urquhart right behind him.

"Well, I would've never expected that Flint would be anything but absolutely antagonistic," Jonty snorted as Alex resumed his arduous task of making Turais' hair less messy. "Guess he was shaken by everything that has happened in the last few weeks."

Turais turned towards Jonty as Alex hissed with anger at the sudden movement. "I meant to ask, what did happen in the past two weeks?"

Jonty's eyes darted towards Alex for a brief moment before returning to Turais. "Malfoy and the rest of them have just been extra obnoxious and unbearable than usual. But they have been far more restraint ever since you've returned, even if you haven't showed your face that much."
Turais gave both his friends a hard stare and they were both flinching awkwardly. He knew they were hiding something, but he decided to spare them some dignity. He would find out after some easy investigation soon enough.

Eventually, they left the room and entered the common room where he saw the two fifth-year Slytherin prefects, Evelyn Napier and Hestia Lowe, leaning against the wall by the entrance silently. Napier spotted him and he immediately nudged his companion, who snapped her gaze upwards. Turais nodded as he passed them, slightly concerned about the abnormality of their attentiveness to his movements.

"Are you okay, Turais?" Alex asked with concern as they walked through the dark dungeon corridors.

"Yeah, you look terrible," Jonty said. Alex nudged Jonty in the ribs, who hissed in pain and cradled his injury. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see that the two prefects were trailing behind them still.

"Bad night's sleep, that's all," Turais said as he yawned. He swore he cast a Rennervating Spell on himself this morning, but no matter. He would do so in private later on. He loosened Alex’s grip with his free hand while patting it placatingly.

Turais halted in his step and turned to face the two fifth-years behind them. They abruptly stopped in their tracks as well. "Napier. Lowe. Why are you two following me?"

They exchanged confused glances before turning back to him. "What do you mean, Black?"

"If you were aiming for subtlety, I think you are failing miserably," Turais said. "You have been following us since we left the common room. And don't get me started on how I always see one of you trailing behind me for the past two days."

"What do you mean, Black?" Napier repeated, sounding genuinely confused. "Of course, we are trailing behind you."

"Wait, what?" Turais was now the one who was confused.

"Lord Black wrote to our parents and said we need to protect you at all times," Lowe said. "Lord Black wrote that you were aware of this arrangement."

"Oh... I see," Turais said lamely. He had no idea this was what his grandfather meant by "extra protection". He suddenly felt like he was the big bully while Napier and Lowe were his goons and bodyguards.

"Uh... you are dismissed?" Turais asked.

"Negative, Black," Lowe said.

"It was worth a try," Turais sighed as he resigned to his fate. "Are you going to test my food for poison before I take a bite as well?"

Napier procured a vial that contained a murky, brown solution as an explanation. Turais immediately recognized it as bezoar juice, which did, in fact, explain quite a lot.

Turais sighed. "I'm just going to mention it here and now that I can give you the slip if I really wanted to, but I don't want to make your lives difficult. So, please just don't make mine difficult."
"We don't doubt your abilities, Black," Napier said dryly. "We will make sure we are not unnecessarily abrasive into your normal routine. But I'm glad we are at an agreement."

Turais nodded as they emerged from the dungeons and reached the top of the Grand Staircase. Suddenly, someone cut into Turais' path and Turais was about to side-step him before Napier jumped forward between them.

"Sorry, I -" Pierricoeur started to say until he looked up and realized he was faced with a stern-looking Napier. Then, he saw Turais behind him and his gaze hardened significantly. His lips were pinched and his cheeks rushed with angry, red blots until his companion shook him out of his stare.

"Leon, don't make a scene," a fellow Ravenclaw mumbled as he tugged Pierricoeur towards the Great Hall. "Come on..."

Pierricoeur gave Turais a final, frustrated glance before he allowed himself to be guided away. Turais couldn't help but be disappointed that Pierricoeur's antagonism had returned. Turais had thought that he had made inroads into establishing something resembling a friendship between them in the months prior to being poisoned, but it seemed like all that goodwill had been wiped clean after merely two weeks.

"I meant to ask, where is Aigel?" Turais asked as he continued on his way to the Great Hall. "I haven't seen him in a long time, it seems." Something shifted on Alex's expression as Turais noticed the boy tensing up.

"Alex?" Turais asked warningly. He knew he was cranky whenever he lacked sleep. And recently, his frequent restless nights was really taking a toll on his patience.

Jonty was about to reveal something when Alex interrupted.

"Aigel... he was feeling unwell so he spent a few nights in the Hospital Wing," Alex said as he gave Jonty a pointed glare. Jonty fumed but looked away and remained silent.

"I should visit him after breakfast then," Turais decided as they walked into the Entrance Hall.

"Turais..." Alex said hastily. "That's not necessary. I -"

Just as he was about to step into the Great Hall, a hand grabbed his forearm from behind.

"Turais, something’s not right."

Slightly irritated that he had yet to get some nourishment or a cup of tea, he turned around to glare at Jonty questioningly. Jonty tilted his head towards the Great Hall and Turais complied with a sigh. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. There were the staff at the end of the Hall, there were students sitting at their tables eating, there was the delicious smell of breakfast food, there was a nice pleasant silence that he always wanted in the Great Hall...

Turais snapped out of his languidness, his irritation was now forgotten. He realized that the normally boisterous Hall was unusually subdued. The casual laughter and loud conservations were replaced by intense muttering. Then he realized that students from three of the House tables were occasionally sending inquiring gazes towards one table in particular.

Turais looked at the Slytherin table. Despite the calm facade, Turais recognized the thrumming tension of worry and even... excitement? As compared to the usual obnoxious
conversations that filled the air between fellow Slytherins, they were huddled into small groups of close acquaintances as they whispered urgently amongst themselves while pointing at the newspapers in front of them and casting suspicious glances at each other.

“What is going on?” Jonty whispered to them. “Why is the mood so…strange? And why are the others looking at you like this?”

Turais noticed the glances too. Many of the Slytherins darted their eyes between the other Group members: Rosier, Malfoy, and Narcissa, who were at their usual spot in the middle of the Slytherin table, and Alex and Turais who were still standing by the doors.

“Something must’ve happened on the news this morning,” Alex pointed out the numerous newspapers that were spread open.

Turais looked out and saw that Kaiden was close by. He, too, was holding up a newspaper. "Stay here if you don't want to go to the Gryffindor table," Turais addressed the two prefects before he walked briskly towards Kaiden. He was sitting at the end of the table with the Prewett twins, a brown-haired girl whose name him couldn’t recall, and another black-haired boy who played as one of the Gryffindor Chasers called MacGregor.

“Hey, Kaiden,” Turais said as Kaiden snapped in alert. Frowning, Turais slid into the opening beside him. “Can I borrow your newspaper?”

Kaiden hesitated for a second before slowly holding out his paper. Turais snatched it and turned it over to the front page. His eyes widened at the big, bold sentence that occupied the entire front page, “MASSIVE MINISTRY COVER-UP! DEARBORN ATTACK NOT AN ISOLATED CASE!”

He flipped through the newspaper and read the cover story quickly as dread slowly rose up inside him. The Dearborn attack, which occurred almost a week ago, was the first attack on a Wizarding family and also the first instance that the Aurors came across the unknown assailants. While the Auror Office was able to thaw their plans on breaking into their home (for what reason, Turais did not know), Deputy Head Auror Meliflua was fatally wounded in the fight. The reporter, Andy Smudgley, was appalled that such an attack could escape the law enforcement's notice. Therefore, he dug deeper into the case and discovered that this was only one of a series of attacks that escaped detection from the Auror Office.

Turais was deeply troubled.

How could the Auror Office not have noticed the signs that pointed towards a serial attack on Muggles? There was no way multiple attacks of any kind would have gone unnoticed.

Turais then turned his thoughts to how the Deputy Head Auror Meliflua who had just helped Turais execute the plan to capture Avery, Dolohov, and Nott was now lying on his death bed...

Turais shuddered.

"Did your father know about this? How could this have happened right under their noses?" Turais asked Kaiden as he flinched. "Sorry, I didn't mean to sound accusatory."

"It's alright..." Kaiden said slowly. "You're not the first person to ask me this today. I honestly have no idea but I'm definitely writing him today to get some answers. This is -" Kaiden looked as though he was at a loss for words. " - this is unimaginable - I can't process this right now..."

In the previous timeline, Voldemort would have already declared himself as the new Dark
Lord and his Knights as Death Eaters. They would have started to terrorize the Wizarding population by now...

But they have done none of those things. Instead, the Knights of Walpurgis were still called the Knights of Walpurgis. They have publicly denounced the culprits and their involvement in the attacks on Muggles and “blood-traitor” pureblood families. Voldemort had not declared himself as the Dark Lord. This was completely different.

Turais had no doubt that these Muggle attacks, along with the attack on the Dearborn family, were the works of the Knights. He would bet that these attacks were to stoke fear in the Wizarding community and cause the public to lose faith in the ineffective Ministry and attract even more support from Wizarding families who were disillusioned by the ineffective Ministry against the growing unrest.

Regardless, Turais still couldn’t believe that the start of a silent warfare had snuck upon him and he didn’t realize it. He had been so diligent and watchful for the past two years. But he didn't account for the fact that all Muggle attacks were censored out of the newspaper by the Ministry. He should have anticipated that the Ministry would be in denial and cover-up the early Death Eater attacks. This was a rude awakening.

“If I can’t even pinpoint the date of Voldemort’s rise with the amount of knowledge that I have, how am I supposed to stop Prometheus? Had the timeline changed too much for his knowledge to even be useful anymore?’

Turais suddenly realized that someone was shaking his shoulder violently. Turais turned to see Jonty’s hand on him as he asked, “Hey Turais, a Knut for your thoughts?” Turais looked up from the newspaper and saw seven pairs of eyes watching.

“I think it’s worth at least a Galleon,” Turais spoke grimly. “I think that war is upon us.” Turais unconsciously crunched up the newspaper in his tightening fist.

Currently, no one but the innermost members closest to Voldemort, or the Death Eaters, knew his true plan. Everyone else might only have a slight suspicion that the group was behind all the attacks while the Ministry still did not have a clue on how to effectively stop their raids because their guerilla attacks were highly efficient and unpredictable. Unless they catch them in the act or gain a physical profile of the members, they would be in the dark for a long time.

But there was nothing Turais could do politically. He could call out that Voldemort was behind all the attacks but he had no proof. He had no evidence for his claims and would only attract more unwanted attention. In addition, he couldn't afford to have Voldemort relocate his Horcruxes, especially when he did not know the location of the diary and the Hufflepuff Cup.

He could actively seek out potential Death Eaters and eliminate them but he had almost zero information on the identities of the Death Eaters during the First Wizarding War and the major events that occurred during that war. Most of the Death Eaters he was familiar with were either children or currently in Hogwarts. He would do much more good keeping a close eye on them in Hogwarts.

He knew what he needed to do.

He needed to alert the Auror Office with an anonymous letter exposing the Knights and let them do their jobs. But this was sensitive information. Information that few people knew at this point in time. He needed to tell someone he trusted beyond a shadow of doubt. He looked up and saw the boy sitting across him.
He had his answer.

***

Turais watched as the school barn owl disappear into the distance. Embedded in two Self-Disappearing envelopes and one magically-reinforced envelope was his letter to Charlus Potter exposing the inner workings of the Death Eaters.

If all went well, his letter would be sent to the Hogsmeade Post Office where the outermost envelope would disappear, leaving the second envelope inside exposed. The clerk would then send the letter off to a post office in France. By sending the letter outside of Britain, it would make the mail international and basically impossible to trace back. The same situation would occur in France and the innermost Privacy-reinforced envelope would make its way to Charlus’ desk. With the letter sealed by a Privacy Charm, the message protected by an Encryption Charm, and a timed Incendio Spell, only Charlus would be able to read the letter and for a limited time only. Turais also took care to use a self-operating typewriter (with the self-operating Charm off to prevent his magical signature from being imprinted on the paper) to ensure that no information could be gleamed from the print. With these measures in place, it was practically impossible to identify him as the writer.

Senior Auror Charlus Potter,

I write to you as an ordinary citizen with important information that you may find interesting. I know that you are a staunch supporter for blood equality and for peace, and I assure you that I am the same. In particular, I have no love for the Knights of Walpurgis and any of the values they stand for. I would like to make certain that the evils of pureblood fanaticism and violence of war will never be able to take root in our society ever again.

Before I dive into the details, I would like to apologize for this secrecy. But revealing my identity will not be beneficial to the current situation. You need not know my true identity and I will deter you from trying as I assure you that this letter is un-Traceable by any means known to the Aurors.

What I am about to reveal to you is of utmost importance, and you may only relay this information to anyone you absolutely trust with your life, body, and soul. I cannot stress this enough and you will understand my rationale for this extreme caution later in this letter.

The group that is responsible for the recent attacks calls themselves the Death Eaters, and their leader is someone who they refer to as Lord Voldemort. While you might not have heard of this name previously, you must have heard of its association - the Knights of Walpurgis.

Yes, the Death Eaters is the innermost circle of the Knights and consisted of the most ardent, most trusted followers of Lord Voldemort. They are radical pureblood
supremacists, militaristic, highly dangerous, and currently hidden behind the facade of a peaceful organization. Lord Voldemort's closest allies have a visible branding on their forearm that depicts a skull with a snake coiled around it. It is called the Death Mark and functions similarly as the Protean Charm which can alert the Death Eaters and act an emergency mode of communication with Lord Voldemort across vast distances. However, this mark is present only on the most loyal and faithful members of his council. A similar marking formed in glowing green light would be visible above their sites of attack on magical families. Please be on the look-out for those evidences.

The two requirements to become a Death Eater are: 1) the individual must be married and 2) the individual must have graduated from Hogwarts. However, they are known to manipulate under-aged Death-Eater hopefuls to do its bidding. I highly suspect that the poisoning of Turais Black was one of such examples.

Several members that I have knowledge of being part of the Death Eaters includes members of the Avery, Lestrange, Malfoy, Mulciber, Nott, and Rosier family.

I have read from the *Daily Prophet* article written by Andy Smudgley (whom I have great respect for due to his journalistic professionalism and integrity) which delved into how the Auror Office did not respond to any of the ten Muggle attacks within the past six months.

I know that the Intelligence Department has a Spell Contravention Map (SCM) among other sensors that can pinpoint the location of illegal magical activity across Britain. It is sensitive enough to not only detect the Unforgivable Curses or other specific Dark curses, but suspicious magical patterns such as multiple Incendios at a location or erratic Apparition activities.

Judging by the Auror report of the Dearborn attack, the six unknown assailants were taking down the wards of the Dearborn residency in a coordinated fashion. The spells used in ward-breaking are part of the list of monitored spells for the SCM.

Therefore, there are only three logical explanations for this situation. One, the equipment used for surveillance and intelligence-gathering had been damaged and went unnoticed. Two, the equipment had been deliberately compromised. Three, the results gathered were kept secret and hidden from the Aurors.

Regardless, there is a high likelihood that the Auror Office has been compromised in function. And as someone once told me, 'constant vigilance', one can never be too careful, especially when there is a plausible chance that there is a defector within your ranks. Hence, please heed my advice and be selective with whom you reveal this information to.

In addition, I understand that as an Auror, you cannot base your investigation on my words solely. Therefore, please just keep this information in the back of your mind and treat this as a standing theory. Then, conduct your investigation as you normally would. If the evidence presented before you agree with my words, then consider it further. If not, discard it.

Finally, as a word of advice, please take great care in identifying suspicious magical patterns prior to each attack and see if you can decipher the location of subsequent attacks or determine their operation bases. Also, take care to monitor Dark creature activities diligently. The Death Eaters will likely ally themselves with them. However,
do not discriminate against them, as that will only fuel sentiments of alienation.

I wish you the best of luck.

Sincerely,

Anonymous protector

Chapter End Notes

The plot thickens... What has been changed? What has stayed the same?

As always, I would love to hear your thoughts and comments!

The next chapter, Chapter 30: The War on All Fronts, is on schedule. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-01-31
March 5, 1971 (Friday)

DEPUTY HEAD AUROR MELIFLUA DIES FROM COMPLICATIONS

by Andy Smudgley

Dearborn Claims Complaints went Unheard for Months

Around midnight of March 2, 1971, a planned attack against Benjamin Dearborn near his residency in Lancashire was thawed by the Auror Office early yesterday morning. After noticing suspicious activities around the residency, Mr Dearborn alerted the Law Enforcement Unit, which quickly dispatched an Auror Task force when it became apparent that it was not a case of minor misdemeanor. Indeed, once the Aurors arrived on the scene, the assailants immediately attacked the Aurors and both sides engaged in a protracted duel that resulted in the injury of Deputy Head Emeritus Meliflua.

While this tragedy was been extensively covered for the past few days, it must be questioned whether the tragedy was preventable in the first place. Furthermore, one must wonder how it was possible that the Aurors were only alerted of the incident when a resident happened to come upon the assailants with half of his wards destroyed. Can we sleep at night knowing that we are safe in our own homes?

In one of his statements, Mr Dearborn revealed that he has noticed suspicious activities near his residency since last November. Furthermore, he has notified the Law Enforcement Office and expressed his concern. However, he has never received any adequate response or follow-up investigation...
Besides the war, the Ministry, and the Auror Office, there were many things, Turais sensed, that he was being deceived by omission. On numerous occasions, he noticed that upon entering a space, conversations ended abruptly and suspiciously. It occurred with such frequency that Turais knew it pertained to matters of substantial consequences.

What exactly was hidden at such great lengths and at the expense of so many became apparent to him when he was travelling between classes today. And that realization occurred when he came across something he had not witnessed since the start of his first year in Hogwarts.

“Your families are next, half-bloods!” A sixth-year Slytherin called Phillius Volant shouted at two second-year Hufflepuffs that Turais recognized as Sigmund Notley and Brian Carpenter. Their backs were pressed up against the wall as they hid behind their textbooks in fear from three advancing fifth-year Slytherins. There were other students in the corridor but none of them spoke up.

“Maybe these ‘Vigilantes’ will do us a great service by cleansing Hogwarts of those with impure blood such as yours -” Volant continued.

Turais couldn’t believe the nonsense that was spewing out of that boy’s mouth.

“Volant! Ten points from Slytherin and back away right now!” Lowe shouted out. Volant eased off compliantly with a smirk on his face. “My apologies, Lowe. I should have steered clear from your normal route -” Volant stopped abruptly when he noticed Turais. Surprise and shock immediately replaced his gleeful expression.

“Volant! What is the meaning of this?” Turais shouted as well in his cold fiery “Heir Black” voice as he strolled up in front of them with Alex and Jonty behind him. The three older Slytherins recoiled slightly as they backed them far away from the two younger students. He looked at Sigmund and Brian and motioned them to get behind him. They quickly scampered out to safety.

Turais turned to the female prefect. “Lowe, You were aware so this?” Turais asked angrily. At her silent admission, Turais addressed the offender once more. His gaze filled with burning intent and fiery scorn as the boy shrank ever further beneath his gaze.

“I... ” Volant sputtered. “Malfoy -”


“Malfoy said that half-bloods and mudbloods should be persuaded to leave Hogwarts -”

“When did he say that?”

He thought back to the last Group meeting before his poisoning. Obviously, Malfoy was moving against him secretly while he was laying half-dead in the infirmary.

“Um... um... when you were still in the infirmary-”

“I will have a word with Lucius later. But I will not excuse this terrorizing of other students,”
Turais said coldly. Turais took one more step forward menacingly. Despite the extreme height difference, they folded themselves impossibly small and far away from his movement as though they wanted to bury themselves into the stone.

“If you still wish to converse with a second-year, I can gladly be of assistance.”

“No, Black. I—”

“If not, then leave us,” Turais interrupted with an icy tone. “Consider yourself warned. I will not hesitate in putting you back in your place if I heard about any more misdeeds.”

Volant gulped. Tapping his two accomplices, Gage and Trouche, out of their shock, they retreated hastily.

Turais turned to Sigmund and Brian and inquired, “Did they do anything to you? Any curses or hexes?”

They shook their heads but were clearly still shaken from the event.

“Let’s get you to Madame Roland for a Calming Draught,” said Turais. The rest of the students parted to either side of the corridor to let them pass.

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“Excuse me, Madame Roland,” Turais said when he entered the infirmary.

“Mr Black, how may I help you?” she asked gently.

“I’m actually here for some Calming Draught for Sigmund and Brian,” Turais said.

Madame Roland narrowed her eyes at the boys and nodded as she guided them to the far side of the Hospital Wing. Turais could feel a slight chill from her changed demeanour.

“Wait here for a moment, I’ll come back with the potions. Mr Black, you may leave now, thank you for bring them to my attention,” she said as she turned around and trotted back towards one of the beds that was surrounded by privacy screens.

Turais nodded at his yearmates before heading out of the infirmary. It was then that Turais realized that most of the infirmary beds were in use. While he was passing by one of the many privacy screens set up, he heard Madame Roland’s voice.

“Mr Pierricoeur, your ribs should be all healed. You are all cleared to leave,” she said. Turais halted. Despite feeling a bit guilty for eavesdropping, Turais’ curiosity won out.

From behind the screen, Turais heard Pierricoeur’s worried voice. “How about Aigel? Is he going to be okay? He’s been unconscious for several hours already.”

Madame Roland sighed. “Your brother sustained quite a heavy injury from his fall down the Grand Staircase. I placed him under an induced coma so he can heal properly. Are you certain that he slipped and fell?”

“Y... Yes,” Pierricoeur’s voice said shakily. “What else could that be?”
“This has been the third time your brother was admitted into the infirmary in two weeks, Mr Pierricoeur. And there has been an abnormal uptick of injuries as well,” Madame Roland explained. “I just wanted to make sure. Do remember that you can also tell your Head of House if you encounter any problems, including personal matters.”

Turais could hear Madame Roland’s footsteps towards Turais. He immediately darted towards the exit. Moments later, she drew the screens back to show a pale-looking boy. Pierricoeur’s eyes immediately locked onto Turais suspiciously. He quickly grabbed his bag and strolled towards him and the exit.

Turais opened his mouth to inquire after his health but the Ravenclaw just walked past him without a hint of recognition. Turais called out after him, “Pierricoeur, are you okay -”

“Save your breath, Black. You’re just like the rest of your pureblood hatchlings. Just stay away from my family!” he snapped without turning his head before disappearing down the stairs.

***

“Why haven’t you told me that Aigel has been bullied?” Turais asked Alex.

Alex dropped his quill, startled, before ducking his head in shame. “How did you find out -”

“I was in the Hospital Wing and I saw both Pierricoeur brothers there for medical attention,” Turais said. “Combined with what Volant just did this morning and the fact that the Hospital Wing was at full capacity, I think you are hiding something huge from me.”

“I… I’m sorry, Turais,” Alex said without turning to face him. “It’s just… you are going through a rough time… and you didn’t have to worry about everything else that is happening -”

“What is ‘everything else’?” Turais asked urgently.

“Uhm… “ Alex’s eyes darted frantically. “Uhm… Malfoy decided to push through that resolution about promoting pureblood values while you were recuperating -” Turais’ heart fell to his stomach. “- and Rosier voted with the rest of the Group. I couldn’t do anything to block it. Then… then… Malfoy also forced through a resolution barring any Slytherin from telling you what happened after Dumbledore said you would recover fully - I swear I wanted to tell you and deal with the repercussions later but then the bullying decreased drastically so I thought it wasn’t necessary…”

So Malfoy jumped at Turais’ absence as an opportunity to advance his agenda. And Rosier… he must not have anticipated that Turais would recover; with his deterrent removed, he had no reason to oppose Malfoy’s agenda. Basically, Malfoy had just green-lit all Slytherins to join Voldemort and bully all half-bloods and Muggleborns. This was terrible news.

In the face of Voldemort’s Muggle attacks outside Hogwarts, Turias bet that Malfoy grew excited with the idea of emulating his actions within Hogwarts by allowing the Slytherins to terrorize half-bloods and Muggleborns. However, he knew he would never get Turais’ support for an official announcement to support his bigoted proposal. Therefore, he took the opportunity when Turais was invalid from his poisoning and subsequent emotional instability to enact his agenda secretly.
“...But... but...”

“But what?” Turais asked softly.

“But... but... I feel so useless,” Alex finally looked at Turais with his tearful eyes. “I’m ashamed, Turais. I almost got you killed. Then, I couldn’t protect the one legacy that you were trying to establish. I’m Aigel’s protégé but he was bullied and I can’t do anything to stop them. What kind of useless piece of rubbish am I?”

Alex started sobbing.

“Oh Alex,” Turais pulled Alex in for a tight hug, but the boy suddenly twitched as he hissed in pain.

Turais immediately released his friend as the boy averted his eyes from him. His blood chilled immediately as he asked, "Are you injured as well..."

Alex stayed silent and Turais feared for the worst.

"Alex..." Turais said slowly. His mind was whirlling at high speed and speeding towards his worst fears. "I'm going to draw up your sleeves."

Alex swallowed but gave Turais a nod. Turais gently rolled up the boy's robe sleeves to reveal various patches of bruises of purple and maroon, mostly healed, that marred his pale skin. Turais’ breath hitched, then he couldn’t help but make a pained, whimpering sound. He pulled the sleeve back down and stared at his lap. "Was it...?"

"It was before you recovered..." Alex said softly. "I tried to protect Aigel... I really did... but they..." Alex's sobbing started to get louder once again. "...I'm nothing without you. Jonty couldn't do anything either."

"Why didn't you tell me..." Turais swallowed the huge lump in his throat. He could feel tears welling up in his eyes, but he couldn't cry in front of Alex when his friend desperately needed support and strength from him.

"I... I..." Alex wiped his eyes messily. "I was scared... I didn't want you to think poorly of me."

"You silly boy," Turais pulled Alex back into a hug. This time, he took care to be more gentle. "Such a silly, silly boy. I wouldn't think less of you if you told me all this.”

“Why wouldn’t you?” Alex cried as he pushed himself away from Turais. “I’m a half-blood. People think I’m halfway to being completely useless already. This just confirmed what they knew from the beginning.”

“Oh hush,” Turais said soothingly. “I never thought you were useless. You’re one of the most brilliant students I have had the honour of befriending.”

“But you do now!” Alex tensed up. “Turais, just say it. Just say I’m worthless. You don’t need to pretend anymore. I’ve always been your broken toy. Your vanity project,” Alex said miserably. “I don’t hate you for that - Quite the opposite - You’ve given me the best dream I’ve ever hoped to live in and you’ve kept it up for such a long time too -”

“What are you talking about, Alex?” Turais said. “You’re not a toy, let alone broken. You’re not my vanity project either. You’re my best friend, Alex -”
Alex snorted wetly. “Why do you have to be so noble even now, Turais? See! I can’t even hate you properly when you say stuff like these -”

“Listen to me, Alex,” Turais grabbed Alex’s shoulder. Alex took a moment to square his shoulders before turning towards Turais, as though he was preparing himself to face certain rejection. “Listen - I don’t know who put those ideas in your mind about you being my vanity project. You. Are. My. Best. Friend. And that’s the truth of the universe.”

“But… what… how…” he spluttered. “How would you still want to be my friend after all this?”

“Because these incidents were not your fault and were beyond your control,” Turais said fiercely. “People forced these things to happen. They were out of your control. I don’t blame you for what has happened.” Alex looked as though he was about to argue. “You’re a wonderful person, Alex. Why can’t you see that? I like spending time with you. Voluntarily. No one is forcing me to be friends with you. I don’t have any ulterior motives.”

“But… but… you’re a Black!” Alex argued weakly as he wiped tears with his sleeves. “You shouldn’t be with someone like me. Jonty, maybe. But not me, or Aigel.”

Turais could barely suppress his eye-roll at this timeless “because you’re a Black” argument. “What about being a Black? No one told me that a Black cannot be friends with a half-blood. No one told me that a Black cannot be friends with a Gryffindor. No one tells a Black what to do. When am I going to get through that thick skull of yours that I genuinely enjoy our friendship.”

“Probably never,” Alex admitted. Turais pulled Alex in for a second hug and Alex willingly followed this time.

“But who planted those terrible ideas in your head, Alex?” Turais asked. “I never, not even once, said you were my vanity project, or my broken toy, or anything remotely demeaning.”

“Everyone told me so…” Alex mumbled. “After you were poisoned, everyone told me how I was useless without you supporting me -”

“And you believed them?” Turais asked. “You believed people who disliked you since the beginning instead of someone who has been your friend since the very beginning?”

“Well, when you put it this way… you make the idea sound so stupid,” Alex said with a loud sniff.

“Well, you are a brilliant person with a terrible case of misjudgment, clearly,” Turais said softly. “But I am disappointed that you did not tell me the truth, Alex. Friendships are based on trust -”

“You… you still trust me?” Alex interjected.

Turais let out a sigh of frustration. “Alex… I swear if you ask me another question like this -”

“Oh, all right!” Alex answered immediately as he wiped his tears. “I’m just making sure… But I messed up quite badly…”

‘I messed up too,’ Turais thought.

“That’s all in the past and we have all made some mistakes,” Turais said tiredly. “Now, we just need to figure out how to resolve them.”
Turais recognized he was now at a serious disadvantage, but he also recognized his own fault in all this. He mentally berated himself for wallowing in his emotional turmoil and failed to notice this development. Had it not been for Volant’s slip, he would still have been completely blindsided.

He had to act. And act swiftly.

Turais stormed out of his room into the common room. Immediately, he spotted Malfoy seated leisurely in his chair when he returned to the Slytherin common room. He was sitting in his usual seat by the fireplace. As usual, his closest allies sat on the couches around him… and one of them was Volant.

Just the sight of them made Turais’ anger flare up. After a quick deliberation on how to make his disapproval, he decided to confront Malfoy about the Volant incident in front of the entire House for maximum impact.

“Lucius, may I have a word? I would like to talk about something that Volant did today,” Turais said loudly as he strolled up to him with no intention of keeping the conversation in private. All the students stopped their conversations and looked at the two boys with unconcealed interest.

Malfoy and Turais had always maintained a unified appearance in front of the Slytherins despite all the disagreement they had behind closed doors. This was in part due to the politics of their respective families in the Ministry, who are united in their fight against Dumbledore’s faction. A public feud between them, Heirs of the two most powerful political families, could have disastrous consequences for their Lords and their alliances.

However, Turais had to signal to the entire House that he will not stand for violence against others due to their blood purity. Furthermore, if Malfoy intended to undermine him when he was bed-ridden, he needed to show that he was willing to strike back accordingly.

“Turais, it is nice to see you. How was your day? I -” Malfoy asked pleasantly.

“Volant, ah, nice to see you here too. Maybe you can tell Lucius what happened today?” Turais turned to the fifth-year, who looked like he wanted to be anywhere but under the intense gaze of the two boys.

“What is it, Phillius?” Malfoy uttered through his tightly clenched teeth. His eyes flashed dangerously at the person who potentially embarrassed him publicly. Volant shrunk even smaller as the two boys sat beside him scooted away from him, keen to avoid the uncomfortable spotlight.

“I… I…” Volant’s eyes darted between the two powerful figureheads of the Slytherin House.

“Spill,” Turais said coldly. “There is nothing you can do but to tell the truth, Volant.”

“I… threatened two half-bloods in the corridor today and -”

“What did you say, exactly word-for-word?” Turais asked.

“I said… I said… that their families are next and that... and that…” Beads of sweat were forming by his temples as his pupils dilated slightly in anxiousness.

“You said that the Vigilantes will do the school a great service by cleansing it with those of impure blood,” Turais finished as he turned to Malfoy once again. “And Lucius, I’ve heard the most peculiar thing from Volant that you encouraged this while I was bed-ridden despite knowing that I full-heartedly opposed such actions.”
However, Malfoy gave Turais a sinister smile. Turais paused.


He then turned to Turais and said smilingly, “Turais, I sincerely apologize for this miscommunication. But this slipped my mind entirely due to your traumatic incident.”

Turais braced himself for the news despite knowing what happened already.

“However, the Group has passed and officially announced a resolution two weeks ago to encourage our members to join the Knights of Walpurgis, promote their values to other students, and to remind students who are undeserving of a magical education that they are unwanted in Hogwarts.”

Turais’ expression betrayed no surprise. He knew that Malfoy must’ve tried very hard to keep this news out of Turais’ attention ever since he returned to avoid a confrontation. But it was too late now, Turais couldn’t afford to lose any more ground. He must put his emotional and familial issues behind him now to focus on fully re-inserting his dominance back into Slytherin politics.

“Apology accepted, Lucius,” Turais said mildly. “I was not aware that you were so desperate in your ventures that you would avoid confronting me with your thoughts. I thought we were the closest of allies and I am quite disappointed that I was the last to know your once-rejected proposal.”

Malfoy tensed a bit but then relaxed again. “I’m sorry that you are unduly harmed by this turn of events, but I’m sure you’ll forgive me…” Malfoy took in an uncharacteristic shuddering breath and Turais narrowed at the act. “Turais, your poisoning told a toll on many… and we thought it was Ms Stahl who poisoned you. The rest of the Group was quite eager to avenge you and we might have been a bit too… excited.”

“Your concern for my health is heart-warming, Lucius,” Turais gritted out. This pathetic little acting was grinding on his nerves. He turned and panned his eyes across the entire common room.

“I would also like to announce to the entire House present in an unofficial capacity that I will oppose any acts of violence or terrorization to any members of the school. If I see any occurring, I will not hesitate to respond,” Turais announced to the room before turning back to Malfoy who was scrutinizing him with his narrowed gaze. “Lucius, I am sure you will indulge me. Just like you, I’m still recovering from the toll of my poisoning and I am just a little sensitive to any events that might remind me of it.”

“Oh, course, I understand,” Malfoy said cordially, but not enough to powder over his thinly-veiled loathing. “My well-wishes go out to you for a speedy recovery.”

Turais hoped that his declaration would nullify the effect of those resolutions for those who feared him enough. But he needed to officially repeal the resolutions immediately.

For this, he needed a plan. And this plan involved filling the vacant seats in the Group left behind by Dolohov and Avery with someone he trusted.

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March 9, 1971 (Tuesday)
"No," Wilkins said before Turais could even finish his sentence.

"But Wilkins. This is important!" Turais argued. "And you are the only one who is eligible for this position *and* whom I trust!"

"Why don't you nominate your friend, Steward?" Wilkins questioned. "Or heck, keep it in the family and nominate Andromeda Black?! They seem fairly pro-Black."

"Because Lucius Malfoy will never agree to their nomination!" Turais explained. "You're the Quidditch captain. Your family is respectable even though you don't have a seat in Wizengamot. You have enough clout in the House that there is no real ground for anyone to oppose your nomination."

"The answer is still no, Black!" Wilkins said as he started to walk away.

"You know that the Charter does not state I need the consent of the recommended person, Turais announced as Wilkins whipped around to face Turais with his face twisted into a disgusted snarl.

"You dare!" Wilkins shouted.

"I have to repeal the resolutions and I have to implement rules of equality in the house," Turais said solemnly. "Did you see what happened in my absence? I cannot legitimize their actions further with a formal resolution that *encourages* such behaviour to be in place. I have seen the repercussions from my lack of involvement manifest itself into a hideous monster of bigotry that caused undue terror amongst the half-bloods and Muggleborns. I will not stand by and do nothing."

Turais' voice turned pleadingly. "Wilkins, please consider my proposition."

Turais could see Wilkins' resolve weakening. But just as he thought he was successful, Wilkins' expression steeled as he uttered the word with finality.

"No," Wilkins said as he jabbed his finger into Turais' chest. "I will not be strung along with your quest to get back at Malfoy."

"I cannot allow Malfoy terrorize others purely based on their blood status, Wilkins. That is not right!" Turais said angrily. "I need you as the fourth vote to repeal the resolution!"

"No," Wilkins said firmer as he stopped packing up his gear and turned to look down at Turais.

"But why? Unless you actually believe -"

"I don't believe in what Malfoy is suggesting, Turais. But I cannot vote against Malfoy!" Wilkins shouted at Turais frustratedly.

Turais frowned. Did Malfoy have some leverage over Wilkins that he didn’t know about. He thought Wilkins was a pretty upstanding and decent Slytherin all things considered. “What do you mean you can’t vote against Malfoy? Does he have leverage against -”

"No, Turais. Not like what you’re thinking," Wilkins sighed as he took his bag out of the locker and slammed it shut. He sat down on the bench heavily with a huff and hung his head in surrender.
“Then why, Wilkins?” Turais pressed on.

“My mother and my older sister all work in the High Court under Lord Malfoy. My father received his post as Department Head of Magical Law Enforcement due to Lord Malfoy’s recommendation. I cannot afford to cross Malfoy for our livelihoods. Do you understand?” Wilkins spoke down at the floor. “That’s why I didn’t want to get involved with that little Group in the first place! I didn’t want to have a hand in any decision that was against my conscience... He has been pushing me to remove Natalia from the team because of her father’s actions in the Wizengamot and I have stood my ground. But here you are, being a second puppet master trying to drag me deeper and deeper into your political battles.”

Then he looked up at Turais and he said, "Black, why do you always have to play saviour and meddle with everything? Why do you have to nominate me to the Group? Have you ever wondered why I was not in the Group despite my standing in the House? I have been offered a seat many times and refused. I was able to stay away then, I will not be swayed and used by you now."

"Wilkins, surely you understand my character," said Turais. "I am not like Malfoy. I will not use you like a pawn. I will not rule over Slytherin in the same manner -"

"I genuinely thought you have more wisdom than this, Black," Wilkins said with heavy disappointment. "But clearly you are merely different, but not better than Malfoy. Both of you are self-righteous and believe you are doing the right thing, but both of you are looking to push forth your political agenda through becoming the Leader of Slytherin.

"You speak loftily about justice and equality, yet you choose to gain control of an unjust and discriminatory institution as a mean to achieve your ends. The Group of Seven is an oppressive and enslaving body exploited by the powerful families such as yours to reign superior over Slytherin. Have you ever thought that no matter how just your intentions are, the inherent injustice of the institution where you seek to implement your plans will make your actions unjust?" Wilkins continued. "You may very well be a benevolent dictator, but you are a dictator all the same.

"As long as the Group of Seven exists, there will be no justice or equality. And even if I join the Group, my vote will be chained to Malfoy or another more powerful member. Pardon me for choosing inaction over complicity," Wilkins finished as he stood up and walked away, leaving the boy standing in the empty room wondering about his actions.

Was he a hypocrite? Was he just like Dumbledore or Voldemort and was becoming another manipulative person? Was he just imposing his will depositly on everyone around him?

Turais immediately gathered all his belongings. He needed to explain himself to Wilkins.

He ran out of the changing room to chase after Wilkins, but Wilkins was already near the entrance of the Quidditch Pitch where the Gryffindor captain walked in from the opposite direction.

"Wilkins!" Turais shouted, but Wilkins continued walking away. In the distance, he could see Kaiden walking in their direction.

“Get off my pitch, Michael! My team will be here in a few minutes. We do have a match against the Hufflepuff tomorrow,” Kaiden shouted jokingly as he walked towards the Slytherin captain. His smile and twinkling eyes suggested that he was merely riling Wilkins up, but Wilkins walked past them without acknowledging the Gryffindor captain. Kaiden looked like a kicked Crup at the lack of reaction.
“We’re heading off, Kay, the pitch is all yours,” Turais said when he ran up to the Gryffindor. As he tried to move past them, Kaiden hugged Turais tightly. Turais watched as Wilkins trudged through the gates. Irritated by Kaiden's untimely actions, he squirmed and tried to extract himself from Kaiden’s hold. Feeling his rejection, Kaiden released him with a frown, but his hand was still wrapped around Turais' wrist.

“I only meant Carmickey. You’re always welcome to join my team,” Kaiden winked as he tried to converse once again. Turais, slightly frustrated at this point, watched as Wilkins walked further and further up the path leading towards the castle. “By the way, how are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, thanks for the concern. Truly,” Turais said, starting to get impatient. “Hey, I’m in a wee bit of a hurry -”

Kaiden made a wounded sound. “What? You don’t have time for me?”

"Kaiden, let’s talk after. I really need to talk to Wilkins -" Turais tried to wrench Kaiden's fingers off his wrist one by one. He could barely see Wilkins now.

"I can’t suffer two rejections in such a short period of time,” Kaiden pouted.

“STOP IT, POTTER! I’m leaving!” Turais yelled as he flung his arm violently from Kaiden's clutch. He knew he overreacted, but he just couldn't put up with Kaiden's antics at the moment.

“Hey, Rais! Wait up!” Kaiden shouted after him as he went from a brisk walk to a run up the hill.

Turais ran past the gate to see the Wilkins had already disappeared without a trace. He continued to climb up the hill until he hit the forked intersection that led to the Forbidden Forest, Black Lake, and the castle. Wilkins was nowhere to be seen.

“Turais! I’m sorry,” Kaiden's voice was directly behind him. Upon hearing his voice, Turais' anger boiled. Why couldn't the boy take a hint?! A hand reached out and grabbed his left wrist.

“Let go of me!” Turais gritted out as he swung his arm again but the older boy’s grip was too strong.

“Relashio!” Turais yelled as he felt Kaiden’s hand recoiled from his wrist.

Suddenly, Orion's voice blared out in his mind: ‘YOU USED MAGIC AGAINST YOUR FATHER!’

Turais’ entire body tensed. He suddenly felt as though the floor dropped beneath him with him free-falling through space. Panic and fear coursed through his veins and throughout his entire body as his thoughts went on repeat.

‘I used magic against my father... I’m so sorry, forgive me... please don’t disown me... I used magic against my father... I deserve this... I’m so sorry, forgive me...’

“Breathe, Turais!” Turais faintly registered the shouting and two large, warm hands on his face… a face was looking down on him…

Kaiden continued to repeat those words as he ran his hand soothing down Turais' back. Soon after, Turais' mind stopped spinning as his green eyes refocused onto the Gryffindor's grey ones.

Once he felt that he had calmed down enough. Turais gasped breathily, "T...thank you, Kaiden."

Kaiden's worried gaze ran over his facial features. "Thank Merlin. I thought I had to send you to the infirmary. I would've been in so much trouble."

"Yeah? With who?" Turais attempted for a light-hearted joke, uncertain if it felt flat due to his tone.

However, Kaiden clearly understood his intention and cracked a grin. "With your admirers, of course. They think I molest you enough as it is. They will lynch me if they knew I laid my undeserving hands all over your back."

Turais rolled his eyes as Kaiden helped heave him to an upright position on the grass. Kaiden continued to soothe Turais in silence as he steadied himself.

"So..." Kaiden glanced at Turais nervously as though he was mustering up confidence. He whispered, "So... is this about your ... father?"

Turais' breath hitched as he realized he might have sounded his thoughts out just moments ago.

“Hey! Breathe!” Kaiden urgent calling shot through the silence. Noticing an intense shaking by two hands on his shoulder, Turais snapped his attention back to the messy black-haired and grey-eyed boy in front of him. He gulped in a deep breath and released it stutteringly.

Turais took a few deep breaths and calmed himself before asking urgently, “How much did you hear? How much do you know?”

Kaiden raised his hands in surrender. “You mentioned about being sorry and being disowned by your father -” Turais groaned and Kaiden paused until he was sure Turais was fine. “- and I promise I will not tell a soul. I solemnly swear. Although I might act goofy most of the time, I know it is not my place to tell anyone about this.”

Turais took a moment to process the information he just heard.

“Thank you, Kaiden,” Turais said softly. “This means a lot to me.”

“I'm part-Black and I'd fancy myself as having an inkling of how difficult life can get in your - in our family. If it gets to difficult, please feel free to talk to me,” Kaiden spoke softly. “I meant what I said back on the Hogwarts Express. You are like a younger brother that I’ve always wanted, and... I genuinely want to help you.”

Turais nodded as they fell into a thoughtful silence for a long time. They stayed like that until the Gryffindor team announced their arrival with their loud chattering up the trail.

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March 10, 1971 (Wednesday)
Two days after the breaking news, people started to properly react to the situation. And Turais noted that there was quite a discrepancy in reaction between the Slytherin House and the rest of the school. While many Slytherin students were worried and contemplating what the attacks by those "unknown Vigilantes" meant for them or their families, the rest of the school seemed to quite oblivious to undercurrents of a looming war. Turais suspected that the cause of this difference was because many Slytherin students had close familial connections to the Death Eaters, and those who didn't had were naturally more perceptive to the changing mood of their House. It was slightly unnerving that most people still treated the Ministry cover-up as a scandal rather than a genuine warning of pureblood supremacy rearing its hideous head.

In particular, Turais was more than confident that Lucius Malfoy knew exactly what was happening. The Slytherin was extremely cautious, even more than usual, around Turais. He also strengthened his mental shield to such a level than if Turais were to be tear down his shields, his mind would be shredded in the process. In addition, Turais suspected that he was being fed information from his father. While Abraxas Malfoy was not a Death Eater in his past timeline and Turais was sure he wasn't one in this timeline either, Turais had no doubt that he had close relations with Voldemort and his Death Eaters. It just so happened that with Turais’ intervention and along with a weary Arcturus that the Blacks had yet to fall in line with Voldemort. But Turais knew he would have to work hard to maintain this status.

There was also the situation at Auror Office, which Turais found to be quite odd. However, Turais could not pinpoint the root of his suspicion, but he knew that Kaiden was his best source of information for now. Therefore, when he saw Kaiden patrolling the hallways alone, Turais immediately seized at the opportunity.

"Kaiden," Turais called out as Kaiden stopped to look at him questioningly. Turais ran up to him and asked quickly, "About the ministry cover-up... did your father respond?"

"Ah that..." Kaiden suddenly looked very uncomfortable. "Apparently, the Auror Office had no idea that the Muggle attacks involved magical foul-play. It was not a cover-up because they had no idea it was happening in the first place."

"What?!" Turais asked in shock as Kaiden winced. Turais pressed on in a whisper, "How is that possible for the entire office to miss such a large issue?"

"I don't know, Turais," Kaiden hissed. "Apparently, they are doing a review on all the cases now to confirm the claims made in the Daily Prophet."

It was impossible to have no intel on any suspicious activities that culminated into ten attacks within six months. Even when Harry Potter was faced with the issue of Prometheus, there were many signs leading up to the final assault despite their inability to understand what was happening - the series of suspicious Muggle attacks without signs of magical foulplay - the giant caches of illegal Portkeys - the series of magical attacks that acted as red herrings... There was no possible way that Charlus, as a Senior Auror, would not have an inkling since he was part of the monthly intelligence meetings...

"What about the Intelligence Department?" Turais pressed. "They have a spell contravention map that detects all illegal magical activities in Britain."

"I... I really don't know, Turais," Kaiden said apologetically. "I didn't ask him that many questions."
Turais sighed and decided that Kaiden had told him all he knew. "I apologize for sounding aggressive. This was just... unexpected."

"Don't worry. I find this situation incomprehensible as well," said Kaiden. "I can't begin to imagine how Catherine is faring..."

"Catherine?" Turais asked.

"Catherine Shafiq. Ravenclaw. Same year as me," Kaiden said. "Her uncle is Desmond Shafiq, Head Auror. He is also aunt Euphemia’s older brother. I can't imagine the amount of questions and criticisms being lobbed at her."

Turais grimaced as Jonty shouted out from behind, "Turais! We are going to be late for Charms!"

"Thank you, Kaiden," Turais said as he ran back to join his friends.

***

"I'm sorry for all the horrors that you have experienced for the past few weeks. I will ensure that all of this will be rectified," Turais told Aigel softly. Aigel nodded jerkily, but avoided Turais' touch.

"I... I'm glad you are back... Turais. I... know... I am safe now," Aigel said. "Please don't get hurt again."

Aigel flushed. Then he turned tail and darted out of the alcove.

"Do you think Pierricoeur will understand?" Turais asked as he slumped onto the cool, stone pillar.

"Despite being a Ravenclaw, he is quite passionate and irrational when he chooses," Alex admitted. "I'll try to talk to him... the past few weeks have been hard on us all... you especially..."

"The hostility against Muggles, Malfoy's aggression in school, my quarrel with my father, the trouble in the Auror Office, my argument with Wilkins ... I feel like the walls are closing on me from all sides," Turais closed his eyes and sighed as he curled into himself. "I can't believe so much has happened in my absence and the aftermath is so far-reaching. I'm... I'm just so tired of it all."

"Everything will work out," Alex said after a long silence. Turais creaked his eyes open and looked at his companion.

"How are you so sure?" Turais asked quietly as he observed Alex.

"Because you're here," Alex said simply as he looked up at Turais and met his gaze unwaveringly.

At the boy’s earnestness, Turais almost believed in him. But wouldn't that make life so simple?

And he knew that life was not simple.
March 12, 1971 (Friday)

“You are delusional if you thought, even for a moment, that I would consider any of your suggested candidates,” Malfoy scoffed. "We both know you are aiming to secure a fourth vote in your camp, and that will not happen under my watch."

It seemed too trivial and inconsequential to be arguing about the replacements on the Group after his near-death experience and the rise of Voldemort. But there Turais was, skipping Quidditch practice to sit in the Slytherin side chamber as he refused to yield to Malfoy’s murderous stare. The events from the past two weeks brought a lot of things into perspective and Turais was no longer impressed with Malfoy’s pathetic political games. The Lucius Malfoy who operated in the shadows after he graduated was highly dangerous, but the current Lucius Malfoy in Hogwarts would not dare risk his reputation and standings; he would have to deal with the dangerous Malfoy when the time came. However, Turais was surprisingly glad that some things will never change despite how much everything had changed around it, and this included Malfoy’s tenuous grasp on his power and his precious little Group.

“Without my nomination, your allies will never be inducted into the group,” Malfoy said thunderously.

“Well, without my votes, you will never be able to confirm anyone you would like,” Turais returned mildly. He knew there was no way Malfoy would ever nominated Jonty or Andromeda, but he would like to remind their esteemed leader so how tenuous his hold on his power was.

Dolohov and Avery’s seat were vacant due to their arrest, leaving Turais, Alex, Narcissa, Rosier, and Malfoy to determine the replacement. As per the Charter, Malfoy held the power of nomination as Chair. However, he required the majority, or three additional votes, to confirm and induct the replacement. Turais, who had a staunch ally in Alex and a strong hold over Rosier’s vote, denied Malfoy any chance to form a majority and confirm a candidate that Turais disapproved.

The filling of this vacancy was important. In order to repeal resolutions, which was Turais’ goal, four of the members must vote to retract it. So Turais could not yield his position... and neither could Malfoy.

“Well then, I suppose we are at an impasse, Lucius,” Turais said.

"Then as an impasse this shall remain," Malfoy said."Meeting adjourned."

"You cannot leave the two seats unfilled indefinitely, Lucius," Turais said.

"In fact, I can," Malfoy smirked. "I suggest you take time to read the Charter closely."

Malfoy swept out of the room and left Turais behind, fuming.

"What happens now?" Alex asked once they returned to their dormitories.

"I don't know," Turais signed as he rubbed his temples. He did not expect Malfoy to just avoid the entire issue. But Malfoy was shrewd, it was to his benefit and to Turais' detriment to
maintain the status quo when he could not fill the vacancies with his own allies. Turais just didn't have the numbers to retract the resolutions.

He would need a different plan.

And he would read the Charter to the last letter.

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March 19, 1971 (Friday)

The past week was an incredibly solemn affair. Ever since the exposé on the Muggle attacks, students were on a constant lookout for bad news. However, much to Turais’ surprise as well, there were no new Muggle attacks. But Turais knew better than to trust that a lack of news coverage meant that no attacks were occurring. Most of the battles now seemed to be in the form of words with the battlegrounds being the opinion columns of the newspaper. Several prominent figures from the Light families started to point fingers by writing scathing opinion pieces against the Knights of Walpugis, but the Knights denied responsibility and restated his stance against violent means, claiming that they were a pacifist group that aimed for meaningful changes within the Ministry through democratic and legal means. Turais snorted in his mind that Voldemort would ever try to initiate changes through passing legislation in the Wizengamot. Turais thought darkly because he knew the only “meaningful” changes that Voldemort would cause was to plant supporters in key positions and plot to control the Ministry in the shadows.

At school, Dumbledore had reminded them repeatedly about school unity in the face of adversity and cautioned them to stay alert against any suspicious activities. However, Turais doubt that it did much to calm the troubled minds.

While the student body at large did not understand what these events meant, the Slytherins were most fractured than ever. Most of the Slytherins were worried about their families’ standing in the impending conflict and the roles they would soon be forced into. The more bigoted half of the House was excited that someone was finally enacting a plan to eradicate those of impure blood while the other half was unsure whether the radical change was welcoming.

However, one thing was for certain. The House now knew that the Malfoy and Black Heirs stood divided on two issues. While Malfoy was sympathetic to the Vigilantes’ cause and indifferent to the suffering to those of impure blood, Turais was sympathetic towards blood purity equality and disallowed any violence against any students. In light of this, the House was split on how to act. A large majority of the students did not want to cross either boys so most opted to revert back to status quo and conducted bullying at a normal intensity - at least to Turais’ knowledge.

Malfoy was clearly unhappy with how the effects of the Group’s resolution had been curbed by Turais’ interference, but he would not risk an open feud with Turais, especially in such volatile times. So, he could only resort to rage in private. Turais was not better off. Malfoy refused to reopen the discussion for the replacement nominees unless they were his allies, which resulted in failed discussions again in this week's meeting. Turais could see that Malfoy was not pressed to name the replacements and enjoyed upending Turais’ plans. But nothing could be done about the situation for now.

Turais also announced to most of the first- and second-years during one of the homework
club sessions that anyone who faced any form of threats or bullying should speak to their Heads of House and also notify him so he can ensure those bullies never acted inappropriately again. So far, he only had to have a few choice words with a few sixth- and seventh-years. Turais called it a win as the situation could have been way worse, but he had since been busy doing nothing but keeping an eye out for his fellow students. At least it got Turais distracted from his ongoing family matters and his constant exhaustion aided him with his recent insomnia.

Amidst all the chaos brewing both inside and outside the castle, it was hard to remember that Quidditch matches were still occurring. Last Sunday, Gryffindor pulled off a comfortable win against the Hufflepuffs with a final score of 350 to 130. The healthy score placed them in second place just ahead of the 340 points amassed by the Slytherins but behind the Hufflepuffs, which had 520 points. Ravenclaws brought in the rear with a close 300 points. As a result, Wilkins had ramped up his back-breaking training schedule for the Quidditch team as they prepared for the upcoming match against the Hufflepuffs in May.

Speaking of the Slytherin captain, he had been determined to avoid being alone with Turais for the past week. The team also recognized the increased tension between the two players, but no one dared utter a word about it. Turais wanted to apologize to Wilkins in private but he realized that Wilkins did not want to be approached by him under any circumstance. And Turais was resigned that this animosity would likely last until after Easter holiday.

And speaking of Easter break, Turais did not have much time to think about his plans due to his preoccupation with the political sparring against Malfoy and half the Slytherin House. Therefore, it came as a surprise when Professor Slughorn announced the sign-up for those staying in Hogwarts when he suddenly realized that Easter was upon him.

"I don't think I am going h...home this holiday," Turais confessed to Alex a few days ago as they were working on their Charms essays.

Alex's quill paused for a second before continuing. "Sounds good to me. I need to do my literature review for that pesky Defense term project. Want me to sign up for you as well?"

Turais nodded silently, feeling immensely grateful.

Today, however, put his plans on a tail-spin as he had received an owl from Sirius asking him to return to 12 Grimmauld Place. Upon reading Sirius’ hasty scrawl, Turais almost broke into tears. He had written his usual daily letters home, but he had not received a letter since his poisoning.

Dear Turais,

Reggie and I have missed you very much. We hope to see you this holiday.

Love,

Sirius and Regulus

Judging from the messy state, Turais imagined that they went behind Orion’s back to secretly send him this letter. But Turais wasn’t certain if he was welcomed back at home. Orion didn’t
write a single word to Turais since the incident nor did his brother mention anything regarding his father. Did he even want him back?

That question was partially answered the following night when his Head of House called him for a private meeting.

"Turais," the big-bellied man said, "I have just received Heir Black's permission form for you to return to your home this holiday and I have taken the liberty to remove you from the list of students staying for holiday..."

Turais barely suppressed his surprise and elation before Slughorn continued.

"...and you know what caught me by surprise?" Slughorn said with a hearty laugh. But his gaze was focused squarely at Turais as though he was trying to observe his reaction. "I received a letter from Lord Black inquiring about whether your father has sent a permission form. Was it ever in doubt that your father would like you returned under his custody? Your family is practically inseparable," Slughorn chuckled. “There clearly must have been a miscommunication. Wouldn't you say, Turais?"

Turais' heart sank but he schooled his face into a neutral expression.

"Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Professor. If that is all...?"

Slughorn's face fell at the lack of response. But he quickly cheered up again and said, "Of course. And would you please notify Mr Fawley that I removed his name from the list as well since I have just received his father's permission form as well?"

"Of course."

Turais' mind spun at the implication. Orion was forced by Arcturus to allow his eldest to return unwillingly. And Arcturus was worried that Orion would not follow through with his instructions so he sent a letter to make sure Orion did as he was told.

If Orion did not intent for him to return, then he shouldn’t. He didn’t want another confrontation to sour their relationship, especially in front of his brothers and Alex. He also didn’t want his brothers’ lives to be any more difficult with his presence if Orion turned hostile. Furthermore, he didn’t know if he was prepared to face his father yet. He could always fake that he was working on a new potion to avoid going home.

While he was pondering his options and his response to Sirius' letter, he heard two people climbing up the stairs to the Owlery.

"- we have only one week to ourselves as it is,” Wilkins’ voice sounded.

“He needs our help, Michael. You can see how miserable he has been for the past few weeks.”

“But we’ll have to babysit them,” Michael grumbled.

“But don’t say that,” Kaiden scolded. “At least not about Turais. He’s still your friend even if you two had a minor disagreement.”

Two figures turned into the large, drafty room as Turais recognized the two Quidditch captains.
"Fine," Wilkins said as he reached out and grabbed Kaiden's hand. "But that doesn’t negate the fact that their plight is of far less importance to me than -"

“Hey, Kay, Wilkins,” Turais said, announcing his presence. The two boys froze as Wilkins immediately withdrew his hand. They looked up at him and Turais noticed their panicked expressions.

"Sorry for the scare," Turais said apologetically. “Is everything all right?”

Kaiden rearranged his expression into a cheerful smile while Wilkins’ shocked expression darkened into a frown.

“‘Yes, Turais. Absolutely! I was actually trying to find you. This is perfect!’ Kaiden beamed. “Now listen, I know you are planning to stay at Hogwarts for Easter holiday. What I am proposing is…”"

“Kaiden!” Wilkins hissed but Kaiden ignored him.

“- for you to come to my place. I do think a couple weeks away from the empty, gloomy hallways will do you much good… and we can play Quidditch everyday, of course!”

Turais felt his jaws drop. Kaiden was actually offering him to stay with him? He would get to live with and learn about Charlus and Dorea. That was his lifelong dream as Harry Potter… but he also had a family he could return to now. But did Orion want him back? But the Potters…

“Um… thanks Kaiden,” Turais said stammeringly, "I… didn’t expect this at all… thank you for the offer... but are you sure? I don’t want to impose on your family -”

“Nonsense, Rais,” Kaiden said dismissively. “I’ve already asked my parents and they are willing to host you.”

“Oh, well…” Turais was seriously considering the offer until he realized that Alex would be left behind in Hogwarts if he accepted the offer. There was no way Alex would stay with his family if Turais was not there with him.

“Actually, no thanks -” Wilkins’ posture relaxed immediately. “- Alex will be left behind and all alone in Hogwarts since he was adamant about staying with me. I should -”

“Then bring him with you to my place,” Kaiden said firmly. Wilkins’ expression turned angry again, even more so than when he first saw him. “My parents are fine with that. We have plenty of empty rooms to fill.”

“I will ask Alex but he should be fine. Are you -”

“Yes. Doubly positive. Triply positive,” Kaiden said with finality. “Alex would be fine with it too considering… so this is settled then, you’re meeting up with me at Hogsmeade Station on the last day of school. Do not get on the Hogwarts Express. My dad will pick us up there since we live just south of the Anglo-Scottish Border near Wooler.”

"Charlus?” Turais asked. "Doesn't he have work? Everyone must be dreadfully busy with everything that has happened in the Auror Office."

Upon hearing his words, Kaiden's eyes sparkled with excitement. "Well, you are going to find out anyway..." He walked closer to Turais and whispered, "My dad just told me he was promoted to Deputy Head Auror -"
Every word sounded like funeral bells to his ears.

Turais snapped his attention towards the boy as his heart clenched. Charlus was made Deputy Head Auror? Turais knew that as the war progressed, even management Aurors would have to lead raids due to shortage of manpower. In addition, department heads and their deputies were high-profile targets for the Death Eaters that sought to weaken the Ministry from within.

And this all just meant that Charlus' life was potentially more threatened than ever before.

"- and Head Auror Shafiq allowed him two weeks of holiday during Easter before he officially took up the position!" Kaiden drew back and scanned Turais' face, clearing searching for Turais' congratulating words.

"I... I'm shocked," Turais managed, although every word he uttered physically pained him. "Congratulations, Kaiden. I know how coveted the position is amongst Senior Aurors."

Kaiden broke into a brilliant smile as he hugged the Slytherin. "Thank you, Turais! I am so excited for my dad! He is not the most senior Auror by any stretch and we all thought he would not chosen for the promotion. I bet he fought tooth and nail for it. Anyhow, I will let my parents know that you and Alex are coming with us!"

Turais realized that he had already made up his mind despite the persistent tug of guilt, which he willfully ignored. He had to seize this chance to live with the Potters, especially when everything suddenly became that much more urgent with Charlus being thrust in the centre of the conflict... This was a selfish decision that he had made for himself.

Now, he had a difficult letter to write to his brothers.

"Okay, thank you so much for the offer, Kaiden," Turais said gratefully.

"Anytime," Kaiden smiled gently before he led a grouchy Wilkins away.

Dear Sirius and Regulus,

I am so glad to hear back from both of you and I have missed your letters. I hope you are both well-behaved in my absence and not causing too much trouble. Unfortunately, I will not be returning home this holiday as I will be staying at Hogwarts to conduct some Potions experiments.

I miss you both so very, very much and I am sorry that cannot be there with you. Please continue to write back. I will see you this summer, which will be very soon.

Love,

Turais
Turais has been presented with two options... and he has decided to choose the Potters. How would this decision play out?

As always, I love to hear from all of you.

The next chapter, Chapter 31: An Easter with the Potters, is on schedule. Until next time.

- ravenclawblues 2020-02-07
An Easter with the Potters

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone,

I am publishing this update early this week. Cheers!

Also, I just realized that I incorrectly used "Repulso" for the Revulsion Jinx (a jinx that forces the target to release its grip on whatever it is holding) rather than the actual spell "Relashio". I have no idea where I got or how I made up the word "Repulso" and I have edited the previous chapters to "Relashio".

- ravenclawblues 2020-02-13

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 31

AN EASTER WITH THE POTTERS

March 9, 1971 (Tuesday)

CONTENTIOUS DEBATE ON SANCTIONS AGAINST THE KNIGHTS

by R. A. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

Calls for Minister Jenkins’ Resignation Turn Serious

Since the exposé on the cover-up of Muggle attacks, the Ministry has quickly responded with their claim of plausible denial, however, most of the Wizengamot was unconvinced of their explanation.

Lord Patrick Arkenstone proposed sweeping legislation to increase Aurors’ legal powers. Many members decried the legislation as an unjustified and opportunistic power grab on behalf of the Ministry. The majority of the Wizengamot was also hesitant with such drastic measures as there was no clear evidence that linked the Knights to those attacks to warrant his proposed legislative actions. However, despite the fierce opposition, these legislation are expected to pass the Wizengamot before the Easter recess.

Another highlight was the controversial proposal that centred around Lord Arkenstone. As a lifelong proponent for increasing integration of Muggleborns into the Wizarding community, he proposed to enact protection laws specific to minors with mixed or full Muggle parentage. However, this proposal was hugely divisive as many members viewed them as unfair towards purebloods…
Kaiden, Turais, Alex, and Natalia were sitting around the couches at the Three Broomsticks with their fingers wrapped around a steaming mug of Butterbeer each. It was already April, but nature was reluctant to loosened its tight wintry grip over its constituents. The gentle curls of toasty warmth emanated from the fireplace when the flames suddenly sparked green and erupted into a large column of fiery blaze. Two figures walked out in rapid succession as Natalia immediately placed down her mug and jumped out of her seat.

"Mother, father!" Natalia said with delight as she wrapped her arms around their necks. The two adults were taken surprise by the weight as they stumbled backwards with two heavy trunks in their hands.

"I've never seen you so excited before," Patrick chided but gave his daughter a tight hug all the same. "Should I be offended because it is the Romanian trip, not me, that you are excited about?"

Natalia and Noel were going to spend the holiday in Romania at a Quidditch training camp, which was conveniently located close to the dragon sanctuary where both siblings wished to study their Masteries at. This was both a training camp and a scouting trip to survey their potential place of study.

"Aw, father. Don't be so petty," Natalia laughed. "You know how much I love you."

"Do I now?" Patrick quirked a grin as he handed her the trunk followed by a booklet. "Your trunk and your Portkey passes to Romania. Keep them safe for your brother as well, you know how disorga-"

Natalia snatched it from his grasp at once and gave her father another big hug. "Don't worry, father. We will be perfectly safe."

"Where is your brother, by the way?" Winnie asked as she looked around.

"Oh, he is having last-minute travel jitters," Natalia laughed. "I just think he has a small bladder -"

"Shut up, Nat," Noel said as he reappeared from the hallway that led to the washrooms. "Mother. Father."

Natalia flashed the Portkey passes and Noel's face lit up, in part due to the fireplace flashing green again.

"Hey everyone, sorry I am late. I was caught up with some angry memos," Charlus said as he walked out of the Floo. "Quite temperamental - those pecky things."

"Hey, Charlus," Patrick said as he rested a hand on Charlus' shoulder. "I'll be dropping by at yours later. Winnie and I are just going to see these two off at the Ministry."

"Of course," Charlus said. "I need to let the boys settle in as well. Floo over anytime." He walked over to Natalia and Noel. "Have fun and stay safe. I personally vouched for two you to go
on this trip. I don't want your father to bite my tail off."

"We promise," Noel grinned. "Thank you for convincing them to let us go on this trip."

"Well, I guess this is it," Kaiden said as he hugged Natalia and Noel in turn. "Have fun in Romania and I'll see you in two weeks."

"We will!" Natalia said.

"Just make sure you don't become a Horntail’s meal or get trapped inside a coffin by vampires," Kaiden said. "We still need to settle that tie from last summer."

"Your filthy liar!" Natalia laughed as she placed the Gryffindor under a head-lock. "I won over your gormless arse so many times you will never catch up. Don’t try to con me, Potter."

Natalia placed more pressure on Kaiden until he squirmed and yelled, "Uncle! Uncle!" Natalia finally let go as Kaiden rubbed his sore neck with a deep scowl.

"Well, I guess I will see you soon, Natalia," Turais said as he extended his hand. Natalia ignored it and gave him a hug instead.

"I'll miss you too, kiddie."

As Turais watched the Arkenstones Floo away, he felt an odd sense of finality. He quickly discarded the thought.

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After Floo-ing from Hogsmeade to the closest public Floo in Wooler, Charlus guided the three boys on a twenty-minute walk towards their final destination.

"And here we are - the Potter House," Charlus announced as they were walking down the private road leading to the cottage with their luggages hovering behind them.

The Potter House was a quaint, thatched cottage that sat at the edge of the village of Earle. The village was composed of a handful of sparsely located cottages and a small civil parish in the centre. It was so small that there were no stores in Earle and they all shopped in the larger town of Wooler just a half-hour walk away. As a result, it was also the perfect location for wizarding families to live in while avoiding prying Muggles. Case in point, the Arkenstones lived just beyond the river that marked the northern boundary of the Potter grounds.

As Charlus had described during their journey, the House overlooked a three-acres plot of land that was lined with trees and tall hedges around its parameter. The Potters had sectioned a small corner as Dorea’s personal herb and vegetable garden while repurposing the rest as a full-fledged Quidditch pitch. Of course, multiple wards and strong Muggle-repelling Charms were cast to prevent stray glances from nosy neighbours.

Turais noticed two cars parked at the front of the house when the front door opened. Dorea appeared at the doorway and started to walk down the stairs.

"Wand out," Dorea shouted.
"Mom!" Kaiden groaned out as he hunched his back in a brooding fashion. "We're not even through the front door yet."

"Wand. Out," Dorea said sternly with her palms opened, beckoning. Kaiden mumbled something under his breath as he whipped out his wand and slapped it into his mother's hand grudgingly. Then, she gave her son a big hug. "Welcome back, Kaiden."

"I think you need to sort out the order of your greeting phrases," Kaiden grunted out, but he returned the affectionate gesture.

"Welcome to Potter House, Turais and Alexander," Dorea smiled warmly as she gave both of them a quick hug. "I won’t ask you for your wands but please don’t use them. If I see one Charm or Spell being used, I will confiscate both your wands. Understood?"

"Of course, Dorea. Thank you for hosting us despite the short notice," Turais responded.

"Oh, it's not a bother," said Dorea. "I, for one, am glad that there are two extra pairs of eyes to watch out for Kaiden's antics. Although I do have Charlus for Easter holiday for the first time in ages." Her tone was clipped.

"Oh, honey. Not this again," Charlus said as he directed all the floated all their school belongings through the door. "I've spent Easter holidays at home before."

"Taking time off to go on a three-day Quidditch bootcamp does not qualify," Dorea said. "Neither was visiting your aunt Freuda."

"That was years ago! And Freuda was terribly ill from that dreadful cold. I had to visit," Charlus exclaimed.

"I meant taking a vacation for your own well-being, Charlus," Dorea said.

"Great-aunt Freuda was my gobby relative that was full of tosh," Kaiden whispered as he started to drag his belongings into the house while his parents continued to argue away in the background. "She passed away two years ago, Merlin rest her soul. I was half-worried that she would turn into a ghost and haunt us forever."

"Ah. My sympathies," Turais said. Once they passed the threshold, Turais asked, "Are your parents okay?"

"Yeah, this is normal," Kaiden said calmly. "They have this argument every holiday. Mom insists that dad overworks and dad disagrees. Believe me -" Kaiden gave Turais a dry look before pushing Turais up the stairs. "- Hurry up and unpack! I want a turn on your Nimbus before the sun sets today."

"Why didn’t you just ask?" Turais said. "I would’ve lent it to you anytime."

Kaiden gave him a doubtful look. "You really think I would dare to ask Michael’s beloved seeker for a turn on his broom. He will have my head if he ever found out, thinking I’m trying to jinx it or something else as crazy. Merlin knows why he takes Quidditch so seriously."

Kaiden flicked the switch as the light turned on in the room.

"So my room is next door. Your luggages can go here in the closet - what?" Kaiden said as he saw Turais staring at the light switch and then at the light above in awe.
"Oh - this is electricity! I bet you haven't seen this before!" Kaiden said excitedly as he moved back to the switch panel and turned the dial beside it instead. The light grew dimmer and then grew brighter again. "Isn't this marvellous?! Muggles have the best inventions."

Turais has been so removed from Muggle technologies ever since he became Turais Black that he scarcely batted an eye when they were no longer around him. But now, this simple piece of light fixture, had once again captured his rapt attention.

"I know -" Kaiden said as he heaved Turais' trunk while Turais continued to admire the room. There was a desk lamp that was connected by a cord to... yup... an outlet. There were vents along the wall near the ceiling... yup... cool air conditioner air was blowing out of them... " - we have to give it to the Muggles for inventing air conditioning. Especially when I cannot cast my own Cooling Charms. That's why my mom is so strict about wands. Magic and Muggle technologies don't mix."

"I just cannot believe your family knows so much about Muggle technologies," Turais said.

Kaiden gave the trunk a final kick before he slammed the closet door shut. "Fleamont, Euphemia, and James don’t. Resistant to change, that’s what my dad calls them. Dad fancies himself as an 'enlightened' wizard. It is probably because of all the time he had spent guarding the Muggle Prime Ministers back when he first started out as an Auror. Learnt loads about Muggle culture during those wild years. Said he drove his parents mad when he first electrified - is that the word? - this place."

"Wow..." Turais said.

Once they deposited their belongings, Kaiden immediately dragged Turais through the house. "The Quidditch Pitch is out back of the house," Kaiden said excitedly as they moved through the hallway with their brooms in their hands. "We can go through the kitchen to the backdoor -"

"Hold your horses, young man," Dorea said as she held out her flour-covered arm and blocked their way. Charlus was sitting at the dining table reading today's papers. A retro-styled - or in this era - modern television perched atop the the far counter and was showing Monty Python’s Flying Circus - a rerun, likely. "The garden needs some work on degnom -"

"Noooo!" Kaiden dropped his broom as he covered his ears in denial. "I can't hear a word you say -"

"Kaiden! Chores first, then Quidditch!" Dorea said as she confiscated the broom lying on the floor, her eyes narrowing at her son's display.

"Mooom!" Kaiden moaned. "Why are there always chores waiting for me when I come back from Hogwarts?!

"We can do it quickly -" Turais said quickly.

"Oh no, Turais. You rest up," Dorea placed the broom by the fridge and turned towards Turais with a kind smile. "It's a small garden patch. Kaiden can handle it by himself." She then gave Kaiden a warning glare before the boy dragged his feet towards the garden instead.

"Why do you never ask the house-elves from the Manor to help us?!" Kaiden complained. "James never needed to degnome the Manor grounds!"

"Because this is a simple task! And they have other important things to do," Dorea said as she
turned her attention back to kneading her dough.

"This type of menial task is exactly what they do," Turais heard Kaiden muttering under his breath.

"What was that?" Dorea asked sharply.

"I was just saying how James never needs to do any chores," Kaiden complained. "Mooom, this is so unfair."

"Well, if you want fairness, I can take away your broom so neither you or James have one," Dorea said with her hands on her hips. "How about that?"

Kaiden pouted as he turned towards his father for support. "Dad!"

"Kaiden, just do it. It'll take an hour at most. And it builds character," Charlus said.

Kaiden looked betrayed. But he recognized his defeat. "I'll see you after holiday, Rais," Kaiden moaned dramatically.

"I'll come with you," Turais said as he placed his broom by the doorway.

"You're our guest, Turais. It's Kaiden's job," Dorea said firmly. Charlus' gaze quickly quirked up to Turais before returning to his paper.

"I insist," Turais flashed Dorea a quick smile before following the Gryffindor boy. "Come on! Between the two of us, we'll be done in no time!"

Kaiden looked at Turais skeptically, then signed again. "I guess two pairs of hands is better than one... actually, that’s only true if you’re not James. But anyhow, do you even know what a gnome looks like?"

“Trust me, Kaiden,” Turais said as they reached the garden. Turais immediately spotted the tell-tale trails of overturned dirt beside the lawnmower and near the mulberry bushes.

"They tend to infest the bushes, you can spot the upturned soil - oi! - where are you going, Rais?" Kaiden called out as he ran after the second-year.

Turais stuck his head into the bush and saw the entrance to one of the gnome-holes. Suddenly, an unseemly creature popped out from the depression and surveyed around it. It walked out to investigate the border between Turais' shadow and the sunlight and scratched its tiny head. While it was suspicious at the strange phenomenon, it did not have the sense to peer upwards towards the source of the shadow. Turais immediately seized the gnome's leg and dangled it upside-down. He re-emerged from the bush as the gnome screamed and shouted. But it quickly fell silent after Turais swung it around several times before throwing it far over the hedges.

"So you do know how to de-gnome a garden! Blimey, that gnome must've landed thirty feet out, at least!" Kaiden gasped incredulously. He turned towards Turais with admiration in his eyes.

"Of course. who do you take me for?" Turais scoffed as he searched for another gnome. This time, he didn't even near to enter the bush as the other gnomes started marching out beneath the bushes to investigate the calls of distress.

"Well..." Kaiden grabbed a gnome and flung it far away similarly. "I thought you've never seen a day of work. I can't really fathom someone like you out here de-gnoming."
"I'll take it as a compliment then," Turais threw two gnomes this time as the gnomes continued to walk towards them, clearly attracted by the commotion.

"You're definitely better than James. That's for sure," Kaiden grunted finally before they turned their full attention to the small army of creatures. "He doesn’t know anything about chores seeing he has an army of house-elves. Last time he was here, he called it a day after he picked up his first gnome and it bit him. Mom didn’t even scold that little brat who left me with all the de-gnoming."

They made quick work of the gnomes and soon, the garden was void of gnomes while they walked away without a single bitten finger.

"So, I see you had a successful de-gnoming session," Charlus commented as the boys re-entered the kitchen. Flying Circus was still playing in the background. Charlus tilted his head towards the kitchen window where a visible line of gnomes was walking away from the garden in retreat. Dorea, on the other hand, was looking at Turais strangely.

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever, dad," Kaiden said as he took his broom from beside the fridge. "Rais, let's go play Quidditch. Finally."

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April 3, 1971 (Saturday)

It was his first full day at the warm, comfortable Potter House with Alex and the Potters. Once again, Quidditch was in full swing.

Due to Alex’s disinterest in the sport, James being grounded without a broom, and Charlus taking the Easter holiday off from his work as the incoming Deputy Head Auror, they always had an odd number of players. Therefore, the three players: Turais, Kaiden, and Charlus, always had to take turns playing the one-on-one Chasers' match.

“Can I try your broom?” James whined as clasped Turais’ hands tightly. “Pleeeeeease.”

“No, James,” Turais said for the hundredth time in the past week. “Your mum said you can’t even touch a toy broom. And I’m inclined to agree considering how you managed to set your -”

“My great-great-grandfather on fire, yes, Turais. It’s just a portrait, geeez,” James rolled his eyes. “I apologized to him afterwards many times.”

Turais grimaced at what James would have considered as an apology. But then, he finally learnt why Eldritch Potter always sported a slightly singed wig and tattered robes.

“Come on, Turais!”

“And the answer’s still no.”

“Rais, it’s your turn to face my dad,” Kaiden said as he descended.

“Just admit your father’s still has the skills, Kaiden!” Charlus said gleefully. "I'm not voted the best Chaser in the Ministry for no reason."
“The sun was shining directly in my eyes!” Kaiden deflected.

Turais snorted loudly as he turned his nose up towards the thick layers of grey clouds that filled the skies.

“What sun are you looking at, Kay -”

“Just drop it,” Kaiden grumbled.

Deciding that he was feeling generous, Turais spared Kaiden with the shreds of dignity that the boy possessed.

“I'll avenge your tragic showing,. Don’t worry!” Turais smirked as he jetted off to join Charlus.

“You bloody wanker!” Kaiden shouted behind him as there was suddenly a loud voice that thundered across the pitch.

"James!” Dorea’s voice boomed from the Potter House with the aid of a Sonorous charm, “Your mother asked you to return home an hour ago -" James groaned. "- you better head to the Floo now or else you're grounded without a broom for two more weeks."

"Why? Moooooom!” James whined immediately after the announcement ended. "You're the worst."

"You best head home now, James," Charlus called out from above.

"Fiiiiine," James said as he dragged his feet towards the direction of the house.

"Bye, James!" Turais shouted out as James gave a wave.

Shortly after, Charlus, a former Chaser and captain for the Gryffindor team, won over the Turais in a dominating fashion.

“You did spectacularly for a Seeker, Turais,” Charlus said as he flew towards Turais with the Quaffle on his side. “More than spectacularly, in fact. You should consider Chasing if you’re ever tired of Seeking.”

“Thanks,” Turais grinned. He eyed Kaiden, who was lounging lazily on the grass below them. This was the first time Turais had a chance to talk to Charlus in private. Therefore, he reached out and stopped Charlus from descending. Charlus turned around and eyed Turais in confusion. "Hey, Charlus. Would you mind if I was candid with you for just a moment?"

"Out with it, Turais," Charlus said with a friendly clap on his back.

"Is it wise to take on the position of Deputy Head Auror considering the recent events?"

Charlus' smile froze slightly before it turned serious. "I appreciate the concern, Turais. But as an Auror, it is a privilege to serve as Deputy Head Auror to protect the civilians, especially in such turbulent times."

"No, Charlus. What are your actual thoughts?" Turais asked.

"You caught me there, Turais," Charlus sighed casually. "There was no one who was willing to take on the position, so I -"
"Charlus. I know rehearsed lines when I hear them," Turais said mildly. Furthermore, he didn’t believe for a moment that no one wanted the position. The Deputy Head Auror was the most coveted promotions as it basically guaranteed promotion to Head Auror and, eventually, the Head of DMLE. "What do you truly think? The lack of intelligence for ten attacks in the span of six months is more than just slightly suspicious and you know that. The scale of this information black-out is truly unnerving."

Charlus considered the boy in front of him for a moment. Finally, he spoke. "You're absolutely correct. I'm worried. Very worried, in fact. And that is exactly why I must take on this position. The increased clearance level will allow me to investigate what went wrong with in our Intelligence-gathering and Surveillance. Hopefully, I will be able to uncover something useful."

Turais nodded. He now understood Charlus' intentions. After all, he literally wrote to Charlus about this matter specifically. But... it didn’t have to be him in the hot seat, honestly.

"But does it have to be you? I’m certain that there are others who share your suspicion," said Turais. "The Dea-unknown vigilantes are a belligerent force that must be contained. They have already claimed so many innocent Muggle lives."

"It's true that many of my colleagues share my suspicion. But I will only believe what I see with my own two eyes. And in the odd chance that there is someone suspicious amongst our ranks, I don't trust anyone but myself," Charlus said firmly and held his hand up to stop Turais from arguing. "Also, we will apprehend those terrorists. I doubt they are anything more than a bunch of fringe fanatics vying for the attention of the populace."

Charlus sighed before continuing, "Turais, I don't think you should worry too much. Before, they had the advantage of being operating in the dark. Now that we know of their existence and with the expanded powers, it will be much easier to prevent their attacks. Furthermore, ever since the article came out, all attacks seemed to have stopped. Perhaps now that we are on the lookout, most will be deterred from acting."

Turais thrummed with frustration and annoyance. 'Why are you so damned stubborn?! You're going to die from this.'

"You're putting yourself in harm's way though, Charlus! You know for a fact that the Department Head of Magical Law Enforcement and all its deputies are always the first targets in any major conflict. You should consider your family! What about Dorea? Kaiden is still underage -"

"Turais, I thank you for your concern," Charlus said sternly. "But this is a matter of national security and a major breach in our law enforcement system. They must come before my family. There will be no family if there is no nation."

Turais was momentarily shocked when he heard the words. These words were almost exactly the same words he uttered to Orion. When did he become so hypocritical? But Charlus’ survival in the near future was more important.

He shook off his disturbed mind and pleaded again. "Charlus, please reconsider."

"Turais," Charlus said. "I have made up my mind on taking the position and I will not be persuaded. Consider the matter thoroughly discussed."

Turais quietened. Who was he to Charlus? He was just a runaway heir of a family they were feuding with. A person who was currently a guest under their roof. What right did he have to
dictate Charlus' life decisions? None at all. There was nothing he could do or say.

"Just... just stay safe and stay vigilant," Turais said lamely.

"There's a good chap. And I'm an adult. I know how to take care of myself," Charlus clapped Turais' slumped shoulders and gave a small smile. Around the same time, they spotted Kaiden's languid movements as he started to stir from his afternoon nap.

They both descended and landed beside the waking boy. In his groggy voice, Kaiden asked with a wide yawn and stretch. "So... who won?"

"Turais won," Charlus said immediately. Turais shot the Auror a questioning glance as the man's eyes twinkled with mischief. "I think he's an even better Chaser than -"

"Dad, can you stop taking a piss at me -"

"Language, Kaiden," Charlus said disapprovingly as Kaiden groaned. "I meant to say myself, Kaiden. But I'm glad you're not so full of yourself yet to not see your own inadequacy -"

"Stop winding me up! It's like you want me to get mad," Kaiden accused as Charlus broke into fits of laughter. "For Merlin's sake!" Kaiden grumbled as he picked up his broom and stomped away in a huff.

"Don't get your knickers in a twist, son!" Charlus' voice shot through Turais' thoughts as Turais resumed his walk to catch up to the Potters. In the distance, Kaiden raised his hand and made a rude hand gesture at his father in response.

Charlus chuckled as they packed up their belongings (including Kaiden's) and walked towards the two-storey structure with curling, black smoke rising idyllically from the chimney.

"You're just in time for dinner," Dorea said as she shooed the children through the kitchen into the hallway. She planted a kiss on Charlus' cheek and said to the boys, "Patrick and Winnie are Floo-ing in for dinner in a few minutes. Brooms away in the closet and go change. Oh, Charlus - Patrick asked you to drive over later to jump start his car. He also wants to borrow your jack to replace the flat tires."

"Yes, Dorea," the three males said in unison.

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April 7, 1971 (Wednesday)

Turais knocked on the door that led to Charlus' study. After three knocks, the door opened up and Turais entered the room where dozens of poster papers were levitated in front of the walls and bookshelves that lined the room. Charlus was clearly immersed in his work as he pointed his wand
at an identical poster on his desk.

Turais decided not to interrupt his work and opted to observe him silently. The poster in front of Charlus resembled one of the wanted criminal posters where there was a large, rectangular space in the middle of the paper with the word "WANTED" in bold on top. There was also a section with various identifying traits such as name, age, and eye colour listed below where the picture went. At the very bottom, there was a bounty amount. Charlus was currently filling out the details section and Turais realized that the posters around the room were updating with the exact same information under Charlus' handwriting. Turais recognized the spell responsible for the synchronized changes was likely the Protean Charm.

Well... an imperfect Protean Charm, perhaps, as Turais noticed that several posters had the odd misspelling or crooked fonts.

"Oh my!" Charlus' voice startled Turais as he turned around to find the man staring straight at him. "You gave me a fright, Turais."

"Apologies, Charlus. I'm here to tell you that supper is ready," Turais scratched his head sheepishly. "But you were so concentrated on your work that I decided not to interrupt you." Turais gestured the poster around him. "Are these confidential? I'm sorry if I barge in -"

"No, no," Charlus said dismissively as he took off his reading glasses. "These are just hypothetical entries."

"I thought there is no magic allowed in the house due to the electricity?" Turais asked.

"Oh, that's quite right," Charlus said. "But this study is warded off specifically to allow magic since I must use it for work such as this -" He gestured the wanted posters. "I am testing out a Spell and how it can be used for Auror purposes."

"Is it the Protean Charm?" Turais offered.

"Uh -" Charlus sounded shocked. "Uh - precisely. Where did you hear about this, Turais?"

Turais frowned. That question was quite odd. "I don't remember, frankly. I must have read it in a book somewhere."

"Hmmm..." Charlus hummed thoughtfully as he considered Turais. "Is that so?"

Turais felt slightly unnerved under Charlus' weighted gaze. He wasn't sure if he said something wrong to warrant this level of attention, but he cleared his throat and said, "Charlus, supper?"

"Yes," Charlus snapped out of his stare as he flicked his wand. All the papers flew from their position and organized into a neat stack on his desk. "Yes, supper. Of course. We don't want Kaiden to finish up all the food before we even get a chance to see it."

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April 13, 1971 (Tuesday)
It had been more than a week since Turais stayed at the Potter House. As the gracious host, Turais reveled in the familial warmth that Charlus and Dorea provided in the absence of the Blacks. Turais once thought that being able to interact with Kaiden on a near-daily basis at Hogwarts was able to quench his thirst of wanting to be close to his once-family. But ever since arriving at the Potter House, he realized how wrong he was. The novelty of being able to have daily, normal interactions with his once-relatives had not worn off; in fact, it had only intensified. It felt as though the life-long regret that he had learnt to banish to the deepest parts of his soul for decades had slowly crawled back into his consciousness in full force.

In addition, his sense of guilt of having sent Charlus down a perilous path unwittingly unnerved him greatly. But he had no convincing argument to make as Turais Black to deter Charlus from taking position. Turais couldn't believe that his actions would have this unintended consequence. He sent the letter with the intention to keep Charlus safe, but it turned out that this act could be the very cause that sent Charlus directly into harm's way.

Turais suddenly realized the fragility of everyone's lives in this timeline. And Turais had soon realized that he took extreme care to etch every single interaction, every conversation, and every eye contact with the Potters deep inside his mind as though it was their last. Of course he knew his fixations were borderline unhealthy, but he couldn’t deny himself of the chance to fulfill his lifelong regrets. He also knew it was probably never enough to fully heal his deep, emotional wounds, but these interactions came close and did comfort him nonetheless.

However, if his yearn for the sense of family with the Potters was a chronic, dull ache that he had learnt to cope with, his longing for Orion, Sirius, and Regulus was an acute, almost debilitating pain that Turais could barely ignore.

This pain had been troubling Turais during school, but he was able to drown himself with countering Malfoy’s devious scheming, Wilkin’s hellish Quidditch practices, and his intense workload with his homework club. But when those thoughts no longer distracted him, he was forced to confront the uncomfortable reality.

And for the first time, he recognized that he truly missed the Blacks more than the Potters. Yes, he had always wished to have had the opportunity to know them. And yes, he still had an intense and, objectively, unhealthy fixation on the Potters. But now he wondered if the Blacks had nestled themselves snugly in the part of his heart he labelled “family” and “home” for years already.

‘Should I have confronted Orion and tried to make amends instead of running away from my issues like the coward I have been?’

But then, his thoughts would immediately jump back to how he caused Charlus to take the position as Deputy Head Auror.

'I killed Charlus. Charlus is a dead man walking because of me...' Turais felt like his head would split up with all his conflicting emotions and thoughts.

‘- here and we can play Quidditch! RAIS!’ Kaiden yelled as Turais was grounded back in the present.

Turais suddenly realized that Kaiden was seated across from him and Alex was on his right. They were both eyeing him with concern.

‘Did you hear a word I just said?’ asked Kaiden, feeling slightly hurt by the lack of response.
“Excuse him, Kaiden. Turais tends to get lost in his thoughts,” Alex supplied an excuse nonchalantly. However, Turais caught his friend stealing worried glances at him occasionally.

“Hmm, I’ve noticed…” Kaiden said delicately as he glanced at Alex and they communicated through a series of pointed looks, “Turais, Alex and I both know what is troubling you. But we’re here for you, truly.”

Turais nodded. “Thank you. I know I’ve been terribly maudlin and a poor conversationalist for the past few weeks. I won’t insult you by saying that I’m fine, but I am managing.” Perhaps that was also just a half-truth.

“Are you thinking about whether you should have returned to your home instead,” Alex said softly as he squeezed Turais’ shoulder in support. Turais could do nothing else but nod. He could not confess that he was equally bothered by the thought that he might have sent Charlus to his impending doom. Then, he sighed, “I just thought this would be a good option if you were uncomfortable with the idea of returning home. I didn’t mean to make it more complicated for you. I’m sor-”

“No, Alex. Don’t apologize. I appreciate everything that you’ve done for me, especially for going out of your way to arrange this with Kaiden,” Turais told Alex firmly. He saw Kaiden was about to apologize as well and he spoke again, “And don’t you apologize either, Kaiden. You have been so kind by extending a helping hand when I was in need of one. This decision was mine to make and I only have myself to blame.”

“That’s what I worry about most,” Alex spoke softly as he rocked Turais’ shoulder gently, “I worry that you are being too hard on yourself. It’s exactly like what your fa... what I once heard, you look like you are shouldering the responsibility of the entire Wizarding world. You don’t need to.”

Kaiden eyed the two second-years with curiosity and decided it was time to break the oppressive atmosphere.

“Are you two in your forties? Why are you so serious and talking about responsibilities? You’re twelve! You should be talking about Quidditch, games, chocolate frog cards… crushes!"

The somber spell over the kitchen table was broken instantly as Turais scoffed in disdain. “Really? Is this your go-to topic to break up the tension? Girls?”

“Hey! It’s tested and largely effective against you,” Kaiden cried with indignation. “And don’t be discriminatory now. It could very well be a boy you fancy.”

Turais rolled his eyes. “Fine, cough it up, Casanova. Since you’re so willing to talk about it, it is only fair that you share first.”

Turais’ eyes gleamed with mirth as he saw Kaiden spluttered and shifted in his chair slightly. It was a quick slip but Turais decided to pounce on the vulnerability. It was hard to get that shameless boy to be uncomfortable and he was about to milk it to its fullest.

“Ah hah! There is someone! Who is it?”

Kaiden’s frantic gaze snapped towards something behind Turais and he shouted in relief, “Oh, they’re back!”

“I’m not falling for this atrocious excuse -”
Several footsteps traveled up the wooden stairs that led directly to the kitchen at the back of the house. Turais turned to see Charlus turning the door handle and strolling in. A windswept Wilkins stepped in after with his school trunk and Quidditch gears while Dorea brought up the rear.

“Michael!” Kaiden stood up and walked over to give Wilkins, who was fumbling with his belongings, a tight hug. Although the Slytherin team captain had much broader and muscular shoulders and chest, his height only reached his Gryffindor counterpart’s nose. Therefore, his face was uncomfortably squished at Kaiden’s shoulder while his brown eyes peeked just above it.

“Kaiden, you can at least let me put down my stuff,” Wilkins’ muffled voice gritted out but he didn’t push Kaiden away. Wilkins looked past his friend’s shoulder and saw Turais and Alex standing beside their chairs. Nudging Kaiden to release him, he stepped back from the embrace and acknowledged the two fellow Slytherins in the room with a slight nod. “Black. Fawley. Nice to see you.”

“Wilkins, nice to meet you too,” Turais and Alex said with a terse nod each.

Their presence was no surprise to Wilkins. Likewise, Wilkins’ arrival at the Potter House was widely anticipated, mostly on Kaiden’s part. According to Kaiden, Wilkins’ family flat-out stated that Wilkins must stay with his family until the end of Easter Monday. Clearly, the Wilkinses were more religious than the Potters, as the Potters did not observe the holiday. Kaiden had been complaining continuously for the past week on how he was unable to convince Alex to join Turais, Charlus, and him so they can play two-on-two Chasers’ match. Now he had his wish in the form of one extremely competitive Slytherin Quidditch Team captain. So Quidditch was definitely on the schedule, as if it was ever in doubt.

“Now, boys. It’s the holidays and you’re in our home so it is our rules,” Dorea scolded mildly, “During your stay, you have to call each other by first names - no exceptions.” Wilkins blinked owlishly and turned to Dorea as he was about to protest. But under her stern gaze, he relented and turned back to the duo as he grunted out roughly, “Call me Michael. Hearing Carmichael makes me think I’m in trouble with my parents.”

Kaiden beamed as he thumped Wilkins, now Michael, hard on his back. His other hand was inching towards Wilkins’... Michael’s... Beater’s bat.

“There you go, Michael. That wasn’t too bad, was it?” The Slytherin opened his mouth and was about to protest as Kaiden said, “Don’t answer, it’s rhetorical.” Now, Kaiden was engaged in a silent tug-of-war with Michael as he tried to loosen his grip on the bat.

“Ah-hah!”

Ultimately, Kaiden was able to snag the bat by physically prying Michael’s fingers one-by-one from the handle.

“Kaiden, I got this,” Michael muttered as he darted glances between the amused adults and children while Kaiden looked victorious.

“I know, I just wanted to help,” Kaiden smiled and showed off his brilliantly white teeth. His smile was always so infectious and Turais couldn’t help but quirk his lips upwards. Michael also sighed in exasperation and… a worn-out amusement as he eyed the boy. “And you’re too slow. It’s Quidditch time! Turais, dad. Grab your brooms! We’re heading to the backyard right after I put this in our room.”
Kaiden immediately grabbed Michael's hand with his free one and dragged them both out of view.

After a surprisingly even-matched Chaser’s match between the two Potters and the two Slytherins that ended in favour of the Potters, mostly thanks to Kaiden, they headed back to the house for their late supper. Michael had also visibly loosened up around Turais and even called him Rais once during a particularly desperate Quaffle pass from a spectacular tackle from Charlus, but Turais might have imagined it.

"You did amazing, Michael!" A sweaty, wind-swept Kaiden shouted as he plastered himself to Michael. "You almost won the match-up. I can definitely see your raw talent and limitless potential as a Chaser - argh -hahahaha! Stop it!"

Michael, who was trying to get the Gryffindor off of him, resorted to tickling the boy. Said boy immediately sprung off and out of reach as Michael glanced at Turais and Charlus nervously.

Michael cleared his throat and rearranged his robes. "Well, I can recognize your pathetic attempts to convert me into a Chaser so you don't have to deal with Cornfoot and me as Beaters."

"Our match-up is over already," Kaiden pointed out, but he still had a smirk on his face. "I was just trying to make the lives of the Hufflepuff Chasers easier. You know, us Chasers have an emotional support-group because your pair commits extreme Beaters brutality."

"Kaiden, you are aware that we are called Beaters for a reason, right?" Michael said as he pushed Kaiden off from another attempt at a hug.

Kaiden pouted at the rejection but turned to scruff Turais around his neck. Turais stumbled momentarily from the sudden increase in weight.

"Turais is officially my new favourite person," Kaiden said as they reached the bottom of the stairs. "See, Michael. He lets me show my affection properly -"

The door suddenly swung open and slammed on the wall with a bang.

"Charlus! Kaiden! You’re been out there for six hours!" Dorea stomped loudly down the creaky wooden stairs and yelled with her hands on her hips that was reminiscent of Molly Weasley. "The food in the kitchen has not been touched! Did you not even let Michael grab a bite or a nap this entire time?! You do remember about his right arm -"

"My arm feels fine, Dorea," Michael said softly as he scratched his head sheepishly. Turais didn’t even know Michael could look sheepish. "I wasn’t hung-"

A loud growl sounded from his stomach and undermined his entire defense as Dorea just glared at the two Potters, who averted their gazes from the righteous eyes of their matriarch. Dorea whipped out her wand and Summoned the broomstick out of Kaiden's hand and gathered it in her arm. "I’m locking up your broom, Kaiden Potter! You need to learn how to treat Michael better! He deserves better than to constantly put up with your appalling behaviour."

"It's alright, Dorea -" Michael managed to say before he was silenced by Dorea's glare.

"Michael, come now! You must have some tea and biscuits," Dorea said, still glaring at the sulking, broom-less Kaiden. "Kaiden, back to your room!"

"Mum!"
“End of discussion! You’re grounded!” she shouted, already heading back up the wooden staircase. "You need to learn to not take Michael's leniency and kindness for granted."

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"So, how are Natalia and Noel doing in Romania?" Dorea asked as the entire table was savouring the welcome Roast Supper prepared for Michael. Patrick and Winnie Arkenstone also dropped by to welcome Michael and was forced by Dorea to stay for the meal. There was a large plate of roasted lamb with gravy and Dorea's homemade green mint sauce in the center of the table. Around it were three plates of vegetables: Brussel sprouts, carrots, and roasted potatoes. And, of course, there was Yorkshire pudding.

On the other end of the table, Kaiden was busy scowling at his plate as though it broke his favourite broomstick. Dorea pointedly ignored the sulking child and plastered a radiant smile to the other children as she provided endlessly helpings of meatloaf, vegetables, and puddings. All the while, Alex, Michael and Turais shared wary glances with each other and responded with forced pleasantries as they limited discussion to a bare minimum.

"They are having a great time at the Quidditch camp, Dorea. But I do think they are most excited for their visit to the Dragon Sanctuary this weekend," Patrick said with a smile.

"See, nothing to worry about, hon," Winnie said as she patted her husband's hand. "And they are adults now. They can take care of themselves."

"It's their first solo trip outside Britain and they're still behaving like children," Patrick said with a hint of worry.

"They have each other. They've been to many training camps. This one is no different," His wife said softly. "You will see them in a few months' time."

"But under these political climates..."

"I'm sure they will be perfectly fine, Patrick," Charlus said. "I haven't received any news from Romania that is cause for concern."

Patrick was about to say something but he glanced at the four children and decided to remain silent for now.

As soon as they were dismissed, they all made for their rooms on the second floor as quickly as possible without having their intentions made too obvious. Kaiden was asked to stay behind. Michael released a sigh of relief once they reached the safety of the second floor. “Did you see how Dorea was rapping her knuckles against the table? She was -” Michael said to Turais until he realized that they were still not on speaking terms and stopped abruptly.

There was an uncomfortable pause as the three boys eyed each other in the dark hallway.

“Um… Turais, didn’t you have something about Quidditch Seeker tactics to discuss with Wil… Michael?” Alex said casually as he pointed at his bedroom door. “I’m completely spent so I’ll head to bed first. Goodnight.”
Alex gave Turais a pointed “you-better-fix-this-now” look before heading off. As his bedroom door opened and closed behind them, a heavy silence fell over the two boys.

Turais couldn’t bring himself to meet the other boy’s eyes. So he fidgeted with his robes nervously before mustering enough courage to say, “I’m sorry, Wilkins, for all its worth. I shouldn’t have placed you in such a difficult position that you haven’t asked to be in and it was completely unfair of me to even suggest something that violated your autonomy. I’m sorry.”

The older boy remained silent for a while. Just as Turais’ hopes of reconciliation dimmed to nothingness, he sighed and spoke, “I am at fault for overreacting that day. You’re a good chap, Black. I would have gladly helped you if my familial circumstances were different. It’s just that I’m not Heir Black. My family is of minor importance compared to yours, the Malfoys, the Potters, or heck, even the Arkenstones next door. I can’t afford to speak my mind, especially not now when alliances are murky at best. I need to keep myself and my family out of trouble.”

“So are we on speaking terms now?” Turais asked hesitantly.

Michael gave him an small smile. “You heard Dorea, prat. Call me Michael. And you still owe me two Quidditch Cups. I’ve had to suffer through three years of Kaiden rubbing the Cup in my face and it’s my time for revenge.”

***

Turais was heading to the bathroom when he overheard a conversation in the drawing room. It was the Arkenstones. Turais thought the Arkenstones have left the house after dinner. But apparently not. Piqued by the subterfuge, Turais eavesdropped as he crouched on the third step of the staircase.

"Charlus," Patrick's voice said. "We have been receiving death threats ever since that bill on expanding Auror's authority passed the chamber."

There was an audible gasp. Probably from Dorea.

The transformative bill that massively increasing Aurors’ legal authority was passed in a 40-0 vote. However, despite the seemingly landslide vote in favour of the bill, the absent 37 votes spoke volumes. Many of the Lords boycotted the vote in anger at the expedited procedure that Dumbledore used to ram the legislation through the Wizengamot. In order to prevent the filibuster, or intentional and excessive delay on votes for unfavourable legislation, from the Dark families, Dumbledore had broken many parliamentary traditions and precedents to bypass their opposition.

Turais remembered that in his past life, most magi-historians, even Dumbledore’s staunchest allies, agreed this day was one of the most important inflection points that led to the increasing hostility between the Dark and the Light. It marked the beginning of the Dark families’ utter disdain against the Wizengamot and its authority.

Although Death told Turais there was nothing he could have done to prevent this outcome (and quite honestly, Dumbledore would not have been persuaded by the Heir Black of all people), but it was still gut-wrenching to see it unfold before his eyes.

"Have you officially notified the Auror Office yet?" Charlus asked.
"Yes. Desmond said he would be back-tracing those mail as well as placing more Aurors in rotation to patrol the area," he replied. Turais gathered that Desmond meant Head Auror Desmond Shafiq. "Sorry for sounding rude, but I am lacking faith in the Aurors' ability to address my woes."

"That's fair. I also wouldn't keep my hopes up for the back-tracing results, my friend. It is really easy to cover your traces through mail. One can simply mail a letter abroad during the transit and most traces would be lost. Even if you manage to obtain some information, which is notoriously hard to procure, it would be difficult to interpret," Charlus explained. "Is there any reason to suspect that you are in imminent danger?"

"I don't think so... there is not much difference between these and the previous iterations. We are used to receiving hate mail from people on various issues, but it is the sheer volume this time around that took me completely by surprise."

"Although I am not in charge of the Intelligence and Protection programs, I could ask my colleagues to alert me of any suspicious activities," Charlus said.

"If you would do us this favour, it would ease our minds a great deal," Winnie said.

"That's not a bother. Fleamont has been receiving the odd, threatening letters these days as well," Charlus agreed. "Terrible. Absolutely terrible business."

"And just as an observation, Desmond seemed quite... addled when we were together," Patrick said. "Was he taken ill recently?"

"Not that I have been made aware, at least. But the poor chap must be very stressed from all the recent events. Overworking himself from the sounds of it," Charlus replied. "I'm meeting up with him later this week and I will pass on your regards."

"That would be most agreeable," Winnie said. "I don't fancy being in his position right now. With all the social turbulence..."

"If you wouldn't mind me asking, Winnie, is that why you agreed to Natalia and Noel's Romanian trip last-minute?" Dorea asked.

"Frankly, yes," Winnie said. "Patrick and I wanted to keep them out of the picture while the entire situation blows over. We originally pushed for them to stay at Hogwarts where it's safest, but we can't put their careers on hold indefinitely. Also with the entire ordeal surrounding the Black child... I'm afraid our faith in Hogwarts being impenetrable has been shaken a fair amount."

"It is a smart decision to keep them outside the country," Charlus said. Then, he said in a hushed voice that Turais could barely hear, "But I would still maintain that Hogwarts is the safest place in Wizarding Britain, second only to Gringotts. As for Turais, he was poisoned by Armand Nott's son. I am willing to bet all the gold in my vault that the Knights are behind all the Muggle attacks and plots against the Blacks and the Ministry. I am just worried about all the violence that is happening and how it is hurting our young. Especially how they are manipulating the students to do their dirty work."

"Well, that's why I am glad Dumbledore is the Head of Hogwarts. A positive influence on our next generation is of utmost importance. Especially given that Wizengamot politics has become increasingly tribal in recent years," Dorea commented. "However, we are too be responsible for this change in politics as well. The vote on the blood wards last year did nothing but further divide us. You don't often hear me agree with Lord Black's positions. But on that particular series of votes, I do think we made a mistake siding with Dumbledore's strategy."
"I agree we could have managed that situation a bit more delicately," Patrick said with a sigh. "But we received news from France that Lourde Laurent forced a political rival into attacking him through self-defense. The house magic responded and left him half-dead. It was a severe loophole in the Wizarding Laws and declaring the blood wards as Dark magic was the path of least resistance. To amend the Criminal Code requires only a simple majority, but to introduce new legislation, we would have pass through all the committees controlled by Black and Malfoy. I just didn't anticipate the immense backlash that would follow... none of us did..."

"Neither did I," Charlus said calmly. "But I doubt the recent votes did much to ease the tension between the two factions."

"I disagreed with Dumbledore's methods as well, but we did what was deemed necessary," Patrick responded stonily. "His leadership is crucial in this impeding battle against the Knights."

“But despite my intuition that the Knights are behind these attacks, there is no actual proof that they committed all those heinous crimes," Charlus said.

"But that fact alone highlights the importance of expanding the Aurors' legal power, Charlus. How could these Muggle attacks have occurred escape your Offices' notice? How is it possible to have no links - not even one - that could tie those crimes to the Knights? Ten attacks in six months, Charlus! And your predecessor was fatally wounded in the last attack as well," Patrick said worriedly.

"Patrick, my dear friend. Believe me when I say we are doing all we can on the matter," Charlus said soothingly.

"Are you certain you have to take the position of Deputy Head Auror, Charlus? These are choppy seas ahead... a bit self-preservation might go a long way," Patrick said. “You’re family, I can’t help but worry about your safety in the matter even if you call me selfish.”

"This is the third time I heard this today, Patrick," Charlus laughed.

"Really?" Dorea said. "I do recall I only mentioned this once today, against my better judgement."

"Turais was the third, Dorea," Charlus said.

"Maybe that boy has more sense in him than you," Dorea huffed.

"I appreciate your concern, Patrick. But unfortunately, no one was too keen on applying for the position this time around. And... well... someone has to step up and do the job," Charlus said.

"But I've heard otherwise from Jemima. She said you volunteered yourself when no one wanted the position and leaped at the opportunity!" Dorea gritted out.

"Wait. Charlus leaped at the opportunity?" Turais was shocked. 'Charlus volunteered himself? Why would he do that?'

Suddenly, a sense of dread filled Turais' stomach.

'Charlus told me that he will only believe what he sees with his own two eyes and he doesn't trust anyone but himself to investigate the matter... and that matter must have been the scenario that I have told him in my anonymous letter!' Turais thought. 'Was I the one who caused Charlus to take the position as Deputy Head Auror? Did I send him to a premature death?!'
Turais felt himself tremble at the implications. He might have accelerated Charlus’ death. He might have just sealed Charlus’ fate...

"Don't trust every Jemima says. You know how she tends to exaggerate," Charlus said simply. "Patrick. Just out of curiosity, is there any chance that the Wizengamot can designate the Knights of Walpurgis as a terrorist organization?"

"Have you received new intelligence that links the Knights to the recent crimes?" Patrick asked, intrigued.

"Now, Patrick. You know that I cannot reveal anything that is currently under investigation," Charlus said firmly. "But I do recognize that, sometimes, justice better served by bring the fight against evil to a political battlefield."

"Charlus," Dorea scolded harshly. "This is your worst idea yet! Do you know how divisive this would be to our society? Designating the Knights as a terrorist organization based purely on what? - Nothing!"

"I can't promise anything, Charlus," Patrick replied. "I will have to meet with Dumbledore to ask for his opinion on the matter. But I do think he has a similar plan in mind."

"This will spell disaster for all of us," Dorea chided.

"It might," Charlus conceded. "But we must do everything we can to contain the situation before it escalates any further -“

Turais was highly intrigued in the conversation when suddenly, the wall beside him opened up. Taken by surprise, Turais crawled up the stairs as he saw two dark shadows emerged from the hidden trapdoor-like contraption. Then, one of the figures realized that Turais was there, which startled it as it fell gracelessly onto the floor.

"Ouch!" The figure made a muffled hiss.

At the close proximity, Turais finally recognized that he was staring at Kaiden and Michael. They quickly climbed up the stairs as quietly as they could.

“What are you two doing out here at this hour?” Turais whispered. “And was that a secret door leading out of the house?”

“What are you doing out here at this hour and why do you want to know?” Wilkins returned. They stared at each other with great intensity.

“I don’t think this aggressive stare-off will achieve anything,” Kaiden pointed out. “Since none of us are supposed to be out of bed, why don’t we go back to our rooms and pretend this never happened?”

“Not a word,” Michael warned as they crept back into their shared room. Turais remained on the landing for a few moments longer before he retired for the night as well.

***
"Hey Charlus," Turais waved at Charlus, who was on the opposite side of the street. Charlus waved back before he looked both ways of the road and started to make his way across.

A sudden chill went down Turais’ spine as he shivered involuntarily.

"He will die no matter what you do, Harry Potter," Turais heard someone hiss in his ear. “All of them will die, in front of your eyes, one by one...”

Turais whipped around, wand-drawn, only to find himself staring at a red-brick wall.

Suddenly, there was multiple voices shouting and screaming. Turais turned around to see several hooded figures descending onto the street in columns of black clouds as the pedestrians scattered and ran away. Screams and shouts filled the arid air. People were exiting their cars and frantically pressing on the keypads of their flip phones.

Death Eaters.

However, Charlus was seemingly unaware of the chaos around him. He continued to walk towards Turais with a smile.

Turais shouted and screamed at Charlus to "LOOK OUT!" but no sound came out of his mouth as though he was shot by a Silencio. He tried to run towards Charlus but his legs were rooted on the ground as though he was part of the cement.

A figure Apparated directly behind the unassuming Charlus and pointed his wand at his target.

"Avada Kedavra."

Everything suddenly appeared to have slowed down as the blast of green light hit Charlus square on his back. Turais witnessed the moment Charlus' smile froze in place. His body started going slack, then twisting, and finally collapsing onto the road.

A scream tore from Turais' throat as he felt a piece of his heart being ripped out of his chest. But there was no sound. Not even a whimper. Just silence.

He started to feel the ground shake and tremor. The vibration became more and more intense as cracks began to appear on the pavement and buildings. The trees swayed and the flower pots started to crash down from the balconies.

Everything was shaking violently now as the cracks widened more and more until Charlus' body and Turais were swallowed up by the growing chasm.

Turais felt himself free-falling through darkness.

Chapter End Notes

As always, I would love to hear from all of you.

The next chapter, Chapter 32: Whitecaps and Dark Undertows, is on schedule. Until next time.
Hey everyone,

Sorry for this slightly sporadic and inconsistent update schedule for these two weeks. It was midterm season and now it is reading break, so I will be heading off on a much-needed vacation. Hence, I will be posting this week's update early. The next update should be back on the proper schedule.

Hope you enjoy this!

- ravenclawblues 2020-02-16

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 32

WHITECAPS AND DARK UNDERTOWS

April 3, 1971 (Saturday)

**UTWATS PASSES WIZENGAMOT!**

by R. A. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

38 Lords Boycott Votes as Chief Warlock Casts Non-Tiebreaking Vote for First Time in Centuries

_The Undermining Terrorism With Aurors’ Expansion Tri-Statutes (or commonly known as UTWATS) was passed late yesterday evening as 38 Lords staged a walk-out during the final vote._

_In the latest of a series of unprecedented intervention, Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore has finally broken the last, and arguably the most important, of Wizengamot constitutional traditions by voting in favour of Lord Arkenstone’s proposed bill, bringing the final vote to a 39-38 vote in favour of passage._

_The Chief Warlock Flamel’s rule, established during Nathaniel Flamel’s tenure at the post from 1577 to 1697, outlined the conventions of how Chief Warlocks decided their casting votes in the event of a tie. Primarily, they should always vote in favour of continuing debate and most importantly, vote to maintain the status quo._

_Lord Abraxas Malfoy had expressed great outrage against Albus Dumbledore’s actions as he exited the chamber just before the vote: “[Albus Dumbledore] has singularly destroyed centuries_
of Wizengamot tradition in the past two weeks. His crimes against this body symbolizes an utter disregard and disparaging of the very fabric of our society and existence. This is a declaration of war against the oldest political institution in the world and against the entire Wizarding world; and he should not be surprised to find himself in the midst of one very soon.”

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April 14, 1971 (Wednesday)

"-urais, wake up!"

Turais gasped and opened his eyes. He immediately launched his body upwards into a sitting position... and directly into Alex's forehead.

At the hiss of pain, Turais turned to look at the boy who was rubbing his tender face gingerly.

Still panting heavily, Turais looked around him. Instead of the familiar dark green and silver wallpapers, he saw crimson red and gold. The room was also flooded with light... but the light was coming from the wrong angle. Turais' heart pounded as he reached for his wand. Where was he?

Oh.

Turais reminded himself that he was not at 12 Grimmauld Place, but at the Potter House with Kaiden and his family.

Turais spotted a glass of water on the desk and gulped it down.

"I had a nightmare," Turais gasped as he wiped his forehead and neck that were slick with sweat.

"I know," said Alex as he put his hands down. "I was trying to wake you up."

Turais nodded and climbed off his bed. The two boys walked down to the kitchen where Turais made himself a cup of tea. Then, he settled in his usual spot by the kitchen window.

"I'm here to listen if you want to talk about it," Alex said as he sat beside him. Turais nodded as they settled into a companionable silence watching the expansive of rolling hills and woodlands waking up to the brightening skies.

'I killed Charlus... no... It was just a nightmare, Turais. It was just a nightmare -'

"Do you know why I never go home to my father?" Alex asked softly as he looked out of the window. Turais turned towards him, surprised. His train of thought had all but disappeared.

At that moment, Turais recognized the magnitude of this confession. It was a watershed moment that reflected Alex's comfort and trust in him. Up until now, Alex had never confided any information about his family beyond vague abstractions. And the most concrete evidence of their existence was in the form of a disembodied voice from a stray Howler.

"I... I don't know," Turais said. "But you did not have a glimpse of each other for nearly two years. I'm sure you miss each other."
Alex let out a frustrated harrumph. "He is... I don't know if I blame him for it or..." Alex looked as though he was in search of words. Then, he sighed and said, "...my feeling towards him is complicated..." Turais could see him chewing on his lower lip as he considered his next words. Turais waited.

"The reason why I have never told anyone about my father is because... I am ashamed of him... of our relationship... of everything he represents. All of you have fathers that at least show some interest in your well-beings. But my only parent doesn't care about his only son - me. We don't see each other often despite living under the same roof. And I hate myself for blaming him... but at the same time I cannot bring myself to love him..."

"Alex," Turais said softly as his friend started to become incoherent again. "I'm all ears. There's no need to rush."

Alex nodded as he took a deep breath.

"He is always sick," Alex revealed. "He has been ill for as long as I can remember. Sometimes, there are small stretches in between when his condition was in remission and he appeared for meals. But those never lasted for more than a few days. Whenever he was taken ill, he would lock himself up and only rely on the house-elves to tend to his every needs. But even when he was not ill, he would not seek me out. So I can say with absolute confidence that I will just be staring at my four bedroom walls and be slowly driven to insanity. I can't help but hate him... hate everything about my life... I don't want to be trapped in a house where my father is either ill or doesn't take a second glance at me.

"I know I should be there for him and to support him, but I... I just cannot stand the isolation and loneliness," Alex's eyes were pleading. "That's why I would rather stay in Hogwarts alone than go home that first Christmas, Turais, but then there you were inviting me to your home... I can't stand it anymore... the isolation and disregard... not after being with your family last summer."

"Alex... you are always welcome to stay with us..."

"Not if you don't mend your relationship with your father," Alex said quietly. Turais hung his head in shame. He hated the feeling of disappointing someone; he has disappointed so many people already.

"May I ask what the nature of his malady is?" Turais asked softly, attempting to steer the conversation away from himself. "Are there any treatments?"

"I haven't a single clue," Alex said. "As I'm sure you've already gathered. We do not share a tight bond and our interactions are limited. But I have never noticed any outward symptoms or manifestation of his strange affliction. He seemed perfectly normal every time I saw him. But then he would disappear, days on end, without explanation just to return with an able body and mind - at least judging by appearance. But I have noticed that over the years, his periods of illnesses have progressively become longer and his periods of remission have shortened. I have asked the house-elves to send for the doctors but they said he ordered them to never call for outsiders."

"That's very odd," Turais said. "I have never heard of such a condition. Are you sure it is not a certain type of lycanthropy?"

Alex shook his head. "I don't think so. His disappearances are sporadic, unordered - quite unrelated to the positioning of the moon."

"And..." Turais hesitated. "... I have heard rumours that he was maimed in some fashion
following Grindlewald's revolution. Is there any truth in that?"

Again, Alex shook his head. "Once again, nothing outwardly visible that I have noticed. But I suppose some scars may run deep and without trace."

Turais nodded. Mental traumas may be more debilitating than physical wounds.

"Do you think I should return home this summer or should I ask the Potters if they can host me?" Alex asked.

Turais hesitated. "The decision is yours to make but I think you should go back. Especially since he is your only remaining close blood relation."

"I'm glad you think that, Turais," Alex said. "Perhaps you should follow your own advice sometime."

"What?" Turais asked, confused.

"I mean..." Alex exhaled deeply as he wiped at his eyes. "I told you about my father because... because I think you are making a mistake here. I didn't choose to have an ailing, neglectful father that I don't particularly love. But you have an able-bodied, caring father that you just had an argument with. Stop being a bone-head and talk to him, Turais. I mean, I don't even get the chance to argue with my father because that's how little we interact. But you... I just don't think you should deny yourself this chance. I... I would say you are very fortunate to have such a great father and you shouldn't throw it away without trying to mend it."

Turais gulped and could find no response.

"I want you to make amends with your father for your sake, although I do admit that I have a personal interest in seeing you two reconcile," Alex said, his voice quiet. "I want to spend my summer with your family and not with my father..."

Turais could only nod at the words.

"Just... please consider what I said. I... I just don't want to see you experience what I have experienced. Both of you deserve so much more that that..." Alex said as they fell back into a loaded silence.

***

Today was a dedicated studying day as Kaiden and Michael were both about to sit in their OWLs. While Turais and Alex did not have their OWL exams, they had holiday homework to complete. So, the four of them were huddled together in one of the sitting rooms pursuing their academic successes.

Well, at least most of them were trying to anyway.

Michael, Alex, and Turais were sitting on the ground around a table with all their textbooks opened and parchments ready. Kaiden’s spot was notably absent as he had spent the last hour lying
“Michael... I’m bored,” Kaiden announced for the tenth time in the past thirty minutes as he caught the descending Snitch and threw it up again.

Michael, who was nose deep into his OWLs preparation, did not respond. And this prompted Kaiden to throw a cushion at his head.

Michael caught it without looking, but his face contorted into a pained expression as a barely audible hiss escaped between his clenched lips.

Kaiden immediately sat up, concern filled his eyes, as Michael placed the cushion beside him pretending his arm was not bothering him.

“Is your right arm bothering you again?” Kaiden asked as he sidled into a sitting position directly behind Michael.

Kaiden was reaching for Michael’s shoulder, but Michael gripped his wrist first and said, “It’s nothing. I might have slept on it wrong.”

“But -”

“It’s not because of yesterday’s game,” Michael said firmly as he shrugged Kaiden’s hand off his shoulder. He proceeded to continue with his studies once more as though nothing happened. After a few long moments, Kaiden also resumed his sleeping position with a frown.

Half an hour of rare silence later, Kaiden’s voice predictably rang out again.

“Miiiiicccchhhhaaaeeelll,” Kaiden whined as he started to poke the back of his head. “Let’s go outside. It is such a beautiful day. We shouldn’t let it go to waste.”

“Sit down and study for your OWLs, Kaiden,” Michael muttered as he scratched off something from his meticulously written notes. “Get some studying done.”

“But I don’t need them to -”

“To become a professional Quidditch player,” Michael interrupted. “Yes, that’s true. But what happens after your career is over. You know you can’t keep playing forever. What if you are not chosen in the draft? What would you do then with failed OWLs and no job prospects?”

“Urgh, you sound like those two,” Kaiden moaned as he gestured at Turais and Alex's direction. “Talking about responsibilities and the future like an adult. Can we all just live in the present for a minute? We are almost sixteen years old. Our childhood is almost over. We should be exploiting it: acting like brats, being rebellious, playing Quidditch.”

“You’re saying that because you somehow manage to get Es on all your courses without studying and the most brat-like, rebellious thing you can think of is levitating Ms Watson’s cat to the top of one of those wooden poles out in the streets,” Michael said, referring to the utility poles that lined the streets.

“That cat is evil!” Kaiden sat up in a huff. “I’m convinced she is the reincarnation of my great-aunt Freuda returning to haunt me. That or Freuda’s death was a big elaborate scheme to hide the fact that she was stuck in her cat animagus form.”

“You performed the Animagus Reversal Spell that one summer and nothing came of it,”
Michael pointed out.

“Well, first of all, I’m not sure if I said the spell properly. And even if I did, I mentioned that she was permanently stuck as a cat, didn’t I?” Kaiden retorted. “Honestly, the grouchy glare that it gives me every time it sees me is identical to how Freuda used to frown at me.”

“Well, putting any animal with long-term memory on top of tall objects without a way down would cause them to hiss and claw at you angrily in all subsequent encounters,” Michael said logically.

“Are you on her side or mine?” Kaiden kicked the back of Michael’s head with his foot.

“I’m on the side of the logical reason -“

“Blah blah blah superior logic because my father is the Department Head of Legal Magical Forces -“

“It’s the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Your own father works under this department. How many times do I have to repeat it to get it into your wee brain, Kaiden?” Michael said as an owl flew through the window and dropped a letter on Kaiden’s face.

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever,” Kaiden said dismissively as he tore open the envelope. Michael glared at him. “Oh, Natalia says she is having a blast in Romania both Chasing and chasing dragons, get it?” Kaiden wriggled his eyebrows.

“You think you’re so witty when, in fact, everything that comes out of your mouth is cringe-worthy or childish or both,” Michael said.

“Aww, love you too,” Kaiden said.

Michael froze. He turned towards the Gryffindor and hissed with a threatening tone, "Kaiden!"

Kaiden must have detected the severity of his tone as his immediately sobered up. "What?!”

Michael tilted his head at Turais and Alex, who both immediately busied themselves with their Charms essay that they had already completed minutes ago.

Kaiden's eyes darted towards the two boys. A look of surprise crossed his face before he smirked with a teasing tone, "Well, I hope that didn't undermine your cultivated image of a serious, authoritative, emotionless figure with typical Slytherin toxic masculinity and delicate manhood."

Michael scowled and returned back to his work. Kaiden stared at back of Michael's head with an inexplicable expression as though he was lost in his thoughts. A long moment, he blinked and said, "Right... Natalia is asking whether we’d like anything as souvenir. Hhmm... dragon eggs are illegal to transport, right?"

Michael looked up from his textbook gave Kaiden a withering look as though that was the most brainless statement ever uttered. It could very well be.

“Romanian wine, it is,” Kaiden declared quickly.

He then scrunched up his face and bit his lower lip in concentration as he stretched his left arm towards the table. Despite his best efforts, the feather quill and the piece of parchment remained comfortably out of reach.
“Don’t swipe anything off the table. I’m not cleaning up after you,” Michael warned as he continued to scribble. Kaiden seemed to have given up on this tactic and flopped back onto the couch with a grunt.

A minute of rare silence lulled everyone into thinking that Kaiden had finally given up when he suddenly started to chant “Accio quill and parchment” on repeat.

“Kaiden, I’m positive that’s not how wandless magic works,” Michael moaned as he grabbed two fistful of his own hair and tugged on them.

“Accio quill and parchment!” Kaiden yelled for a final time before Michael finally snapped and threw both items at him.

“See! It worked!” Kaiden said with an air of guileless excitement, although the devilish smirk on his face undermined his innocent appearance.

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April 15, 1971 (Thursday)

Inside the warm and humid store that was filled with the aroma of freshly baked bread, he eyed the streets of Belford through the window panes nervously. Despite having a population that was at least a hundred times that of Earle, it was still a quiet, sleepy countryside village. There were only a few pedestrians strolling casually down the wide stone sidewalks, likely towards one of three cafe terraces around the village center for their morning cup of tea or joe. In the empty crossroads, three children were playing ball and laughing without care, only stopping dashing off to the pavement at the occasional car passing through.

Turais glanced at his companions who were finally finished deciding and started to place their goods onto the tray at the counter. To their merit, these Potters were competent with dressing up the children as inconspicuous upper middle-class Muggles visiting the countryside.

Kaiden was wearing a red-checkered pull-over with collar that was neatly tucked into his smartly-creased double knee denims. Michael sported a similar style but wore a buttoned-up blue cotton polo shirt with black dress slacks. Alex wore his own muggle outfit that he brought along his stay. It was a cashmere navy blue trench coat over a dress shirt with brown-checkered trousers. He was like a walking catalogue of the newest fashion in a high-end department store. It was times like these which reminded Turais that despite his family issues, his best friend was a well-provided child.

After their purchase, which Turais deftly handled for his clueless friends, he said while scanning the streets outside for potential threats. Suddenly, Turais caught a dark shadow lurking at a street corner a block away from the square. But in the blink of an eye, it disappeared.

Turais wondered if he had just imagined it.

"I think we should head back now," Turais thought that paranoid or not, returning to safety of the Potter House was the best course of action.

Dorea had tasked Charlus and the four children to buy bakery goods for their visit to the Potter Manor tomorrow. Dorea told Turais that they were going to spend Easter weekend at
Fleamont’s place because it was a family tradition. However, she specified that the items must be from Belford Home Bakery, ten miles away from their home and safety, because the Arkenstones claimed that they were the “up-and-coming Muggle bakery that could make sausage rolls taste just like magic”.

Despite Turais’ protest, Kaiden managed to convince Charlus to let them do all the shopping while he met up with Desmond Sayre for their little brunch just a few blocks away from their location.

Turais knew that most people, including the Potters, still thought the attacks were just a temporary disturbance by a bunch of mass murderer wannabes and that the Aurors would apprehend them soon. But didn’t they were sending their children into largely Muggle areas? Sure, the attacks are only occurring in the south and infrequent at best… and Belford is hardly their top priority targets… but still! It just wasn’t safe, Voldemort could attack Belford at any moment and kill them all! This was -

“Mmmm… this really does taste like magic,” Turais gasped as he took his first bite into the warm, crispy pastry. The juicy and salty sausage burst into intense flavours on his palette and he immediately wolfed down the entire roll in a blink of an eye and turned to look at the bakery case. However, the case was void of sausage rolls (they already bought the last dozen of them) and Turais felt a bit crestfallen. The husband and co-owner of the bakery, John Trotter, had apparently heard the exclamation and gave the satiated child a winning smile behind the counter. He then shouted to the back of the store, “Hinny, gi’z mair sausage rolls!”

“Aye.”

His wife appeared from behind the doorway with a hot, steamy tray of freshly-baked sausage rolls and placed it on the counter. The man muttered something in her ear and she smiled kindly at Turais before nodding and disappearing to the back of the store. John then placed a few of the sausage rolls in a paper bag, held it down over the counter, and motioned Turais to take it.

“Just for you, pet. Don’t eat all of it before you get hyem,” the man gave Turais a wink as he took the bag gratefully.

“Thank you so much,” Turais whispered back before he gave him a last wave and headed out of the bakery. The quartet started to make their way back to the restaurant where they would be travelling back to Wooler using their public Floo.

Along the way, Turais continued to scanned their surroundings diligently, but he found nothing else suspicious.

Maybe Turais was just being paranoid. Being around Kaiden and wanting to protect him at all cost might be taking a toll of his mental health. Turais finally appreciated the wisdom, first-hand, in why the Auror Office never assigned family members to protect their endangered relatives. There was never really a reprieve because one would be constantly worried, especially when they were in close proximity to all the action.

“Woah, did he just give you free sausage rolls?” Kaiden peeked into the bag while shifting his bagful of baguettes and sourdoughs; he then nudged Turais hard. “Wicked!”

“Only works with an angelic, innocent face like Turais’,” Michael commented with a smirk.

“Hey! I have an angelic face -” Kaiden complained as he realized that he just yelled into a quiet street of bewildered passers-by. He faltered but his bruised ego prompted him to slap
viciously on the back of the offending Slytherin.

“Maybe in your next lifetime, Kaiden,” Alex hummed in agreement.

“Why did I have to torture myself with being in the company of three Slytherins?!” Kaiden groaned as he gandered around. "Especially when this is my first time shopping in a Muggle part of town without my parents -"

Michael hit Kaiden on the back. "Can you stop saying that word?" he hissed.

"What word?" Kaiden asked, "Ohhh... you mean 'Muggle'?

Michael hit him again.

"Oooww. Fine. Fine. Fine. I'll stop saying 'Muggle' -" Kaiden paused as Michael hit him for the third time. "I said 'Muggle' again -" Kaiden started laughing uncontrollably and stopped in the middle of the pavement as Michael glared at the boy furiously.

"Way to not draw attention, Kaiden," Michael hissed as Kaiden gasped for air.

"I'm... I'm... so sorry, Michael," Kaiden managed to say. "Promise. Pinky promise."

"So... what other Potter family traditions are there?" Turais asked. "Besides this one."

Kaiden looked at Turais quizzically. "What do you mean 'this one'? There is the Potter family Christmas, which really only consists of our family and James' family. And of course, there are the traditional Solstice celebrations and Halloween... since we are not particularly religious, we don’t really observe any of the Christian holidays besides Christmas... and that's pretty much it."

"Huh?" Turais sounded his surprise. Dorea told him that travelling to the Potter Manor on the last weekend of Easter holiday was a Potter tradition.

“Oooo… can we check out that store?" Kaiden interrupted as he immediately walked off the pavement without care. He darted across the street recklessly just as a police car roared down the street with blaring sirens.

The car screeched to a halt as the officer honked angrily. Kaiden merely looked at the car with endless fascination and stood still idiotically.

The three Slytherins had to drag the brainless gnome of a Gryffindor off the road as the furious officer pressed a final warning before driving off to the distance.

"What in Merlin's name was that?" Kaiden asked with wide eyes as Michael checked Kaiden’s clothing for any sign of injury. “The big blinking light on the top and the loud whirring noise!”

“Why do all Potter boys need to act half their age?!" Turais heard Michael mutter under his breath angrily after he was satisfied with his inspection.

"It's called a police car, Kay," Turais said in admonishment. "The light are blinkers, or emergency light to warn people like you to get out of its way. The sound is the siren to, again, warn people like you to get out of its way."

"Don't use that tone on me, young man," Kaiden huffed. "I know what a car is. You saw my dad’s cars out front. Completely unmodified and completely Muggl- ouch! - excuse you, Michael.
:Anyways, I’ve just never seen ones with those flashy additions."

Turais was about to tease him more, but then he noticed a constant vibration on his side. He turned and found Alex clinging onto his shirt with the tip of his fingers. His entire body was shaking as though he was just dunked into an icy lake and recovered. Beads of sweat were forming near his temple and forehead. His eyes were looking down at the ground but Turais could see them darting everywhere frantically.

"Alex, what's wrong?" Turais asked as he grabbed Alex's trembling hands to still them. Meanwhile, Kaiden started to rummage his clothes. "Alex. Talk to me please."

Alex looked as though he was about to throw up.

"It's... I'll be fine in a few moments," Alex said shakily. "I... I was just shocked -"

"Here!" Kaiden pulled out a vial and shoved it in Alex's hand. "Drink this. It's Calm-a-lot, a Calming Drought. It should soothe your anxiety."

"Thanks," Alex rasped out as he immediately pulled out the cork and downed the entire content in one gulp.

"Give it a few seconds," Kaiden said as he took back the empty vial. "I'm sorry that I caused you such distress."

Alex swallowed heavily for a few times before closing his eyes and shaking his head in disagreement. "No, no. It's just me. I just... I... don't... like cars."

After a tension-filled silence where only Alex's laboured breath was heard, Kaiden spoke again. "I'm sorry. I'm an idiot."

"You are," Alex said, with a clear attempt at a teasing tone. But it was undermined by the slightly pained expression. He finally looked up at his three companions, "I'm fine. Really. The Calm-a-lot worked really well. Don't mind me."

"Are you sure?" Turais asked as Alex nodded violently.

"I'm sure, Turais. Let's head back," Alex said firmly as he started to walk forward, stumbling just a little on his first step. When he realized that no one was following him, he turned back and snapped, "I'm not going to break just because of stupid near-miss with a car!"

The three boys shared an unconvinced glance.

"Okay, fine," Kaiden finally acquiesced. "Just let us know if -"

"I get it! I'll tell you if anything is wrong," Alex flushed. "Can we just... stop talking about it?"

"Of course -" Turais said as Kaiden suddenly gasped.

"Ooooh! Check out this thing here!" Kaiden gushed as he grabbed Michael's hand and disappeared into the store. Turais and Alex shared a bewildered look. One could always trust Kaiden to defuse a tense situation with some completely unexpected antics.

They entered the store and passed by a disgruntled cashier with beady eyes who was looking at the overly enthusiastic Kaiden suspiciously. They found Kaiden burying his nose in a pile of
kitchenware as he squinted his eyes at the “fascinating” Muggle contraptions.

“Woah! What is this? It looks dangerous,” Kaiden exclaimed loudly as he carefully held the wooden handle of an item with five arching steel wires attached to both ends. Michael shrugged while Alex eyed it suspiciously. Turais looked around to see a pair of wandering eyes observing them and hastily grabbed the object from Kaiden’s hand.

“It’s a pastry blender,” Turais said quickly as he touched his finger at the wires. “Look! Not dangerous.”

Just as he was replacing the item back in the bin, Kaiden had already sauntered off down the aisle as he poked at a small item with two looping wires on both ends.

“And what is this thing?” Kaiden gasped as he stuck two fingers into the loops. Turais was momentarily stumped by it until something suddenly clicked in his mind.

“Oh, right. It’s a grape skin peeler,” Turais said, extremely proud of himself.

“Huh, weird. Never thought of needing one,” Kaiden pulled his fingers back out as yet another item caught his eyes. “Ooo, what’s that?”

So the three of them spent a good fifteen minutes chasing after an over-excited sixteen-but-acting-like-eight niffler throughout the tiny store that was its shiny treasure trove until Turais had finally had enough. Glancing around the store, he spotted a giant red, metal box that was of similar size as the cashier desk beside it. It was slightly scratched near the bottom and edges of all sides, revealing the underlying white beneath the red paint. Above the scratch marks were three words in characteristic white, cursive font that said “DRINK COCA-COLA”.

After formulating a plan of revenge, he approached the middle-aged woman who was staring down at her half-finished crossword.

“Excuse me, madame. May I purchase some drinks?” Turais asked politely as the woman grunted and lifted an index finger up. Turais stayed silent for a few seconds until she sighed heavily and placed her pencil on the crossword. Tipping her head towards the constant clunking sound in the back corner of her store, she quipped, “Did his Lordship decide to leave his ivory tower?”

Turais blushed in second-hand embarrassment. “He is quite a sheltered child. I do apologize for his behaviour.”

The woman gave a loud snort but didn’t comment further. She stood up and walked over to the cooler.

“So we’ve got bottles and cans,” she explained as she lifted the metal lid.

“Cans would be preferable. And four of them please,” Turais responded as he turned to shout towards the back of the store. “Hey, Kay! I got us some fizzy drinks. I think you’ll like it!”

“Cool! Let’s do it,” Kaiden scampered into view. Yes! Turais had successfully lured the boy back into the open. Turais quickly paid for four cans of coke to the disgruntled shopkeeper with their change from the bakery.

“What’s that whirring and ‘ka-ching’ sound from the thing?” Turias slapped his hand onto Kaiden’s mouth and dragged him before the woman could swing her crossword book at his face unceremoniously.
Once they were outside the store and a safe distance away, Turais handed out the cans of coke. Gesturing his own can, he said, “You see the tab here? You need to pull it up and then out like this.” Turais demonstrated accordingly and the tab came off entirely to a satisfying crack and fizz.

‘Huh, weird. The tab came off,’ Turais thought as he held up the curled metal tab, ‘But no matter, the can’s open.’

He then placed it to his lips and gulped the familiar refreshing, carbonated liquid followed by a satisfied “ahhh”.

“Okay?” They nodded as they were about to repeat what Turais just did. “Nah-ah. But before you do that. You would want to shake the can as hard as you can for the extra fizziness.”

The three boys shook the can as hard as they could up and down a few times.

“Yes, perfect,” Turais said, “Now, you need to just need to pull the tab and bon appetit .”

Turais stepped back inconspicuously as the boys pulled on the tab. Suddenly, three streams of bubbles and droplets exploded into their faces. Well, one stream gushed up Kaiden’s nostrils while two streams splashed onto Michael’s face. Turais saw Alex’s mischievous smirk as the can opening was directed at the unlucky boy next to him.

“Gah!” the two older boys spluttered as they faces dripped with their sugary content while the two younger boys hugged their stomachs and roared out in laughter. A passing couple also looked at the hooligans in unconcealed amusement.

“Damn it, Turais!”

“Damn you too, Alex!”

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“I knew it!” Alex said in between breaths, bent over with his hands on his stomach. "I knew you were tricking me, Turais."

“Well, we didn’t!” Michael snapped as he turned back to gently wipe down Kaiden's face with his handkerchief carefully. "There, you're all clean... relatively clean at least."

“What about you?” Kaiden asked, his voice was surprisingly quiet and shaky. Michael just mopped his face with a few quick swipes.

“I'm all good," Michael said. He stuffed his handkerchief back in his pocket and proceeded to throw a dirty glare at Alex. “You still could’ve tilted the can towards Turais and not me, brat!”

He saw Kaiden's wistful expression as he sneaked tiny glances at the Slytherin captain. Michael seemed completely unaware of it all.

'Huh... interesting...’ Turias thought.

“Naw, the prankster deserves to have his frustration voiced for the terrible suffering that he has been through,” Turais said happily.
"It's all your fault," Michael grumbled and shot Kaiden a withering look. Kaiden froze when he made eye contact with the boy. Then, he composed himself and grinned sheepishly.

"It was a pretty good prank," Kaiden shrugged before Michael elbowed him in the ribs in retaliation. "We'll get back at those prats, Michael. I promise." Kaiden proceeded to cup Michael's face and lifted Michael's cheeks upward into a strained smile. "There you go, you look much happier. A smile does wonders to your looks."

Michael growled and shoved Kaiden's arms away from him. A shadow of melancholy flashed over Kaiden's expression before he smiled tightly once more.

"There you are, boys," Charlus, who was standing outside the restaurant, called out. Seeing his son's stained clothes and wet, sticky hair, Charlus chuckled and asked, "What happened to you two?"

Turais explained what happened. While he was diving into the tale of Kaiden's disruptive store walk-through, he saw two men sitting by the terrace glancing at them. Their gazes lingered for a moment too long before they turned their attention back to each other once again. Turais' instincts told him that something was amiss with those two strangers. Turais continued his story as he scanned around for other suspicious individuals but there was nothing else. When he was finally finished, Charlus laughed heartily and gave a proud clap of Turais' shoulder.

"That's brilliant, Turais. I remember someone taught me to put Mentos with coke... don't try it with your nice clothes on," Charlus said. He glanced back into the restaurant. "I wonder what is taking Desmond so long. I just wanted to say goodbye and give him my tea blend. Sorry for the wait, boys."

"Maybe he got lost in the john," Kaiden said, his eyes dancing with mirth.

"Kaiden," Charlus chided warningly, but the corners of his mouth quirked upwards.

Turais kept his attention on the two stern-looking gentlemen dressed in three-piece suits that were sitting casually at a table on the terrace nearby. Turais observed the two men closely, analyzing their postures and body movements.

Quietly, Turais asked Charlus nonchalantly, "Is the Head Auror here on official business?"

The Head Auror rarely ventured outside the Ministry complex unless it was for business with other Ministries. In the event that he was on some official business, he would have two Junior Aurors assigned alongside him for protection. But those two men did not seem like Aurors. But from a gut instinct, Turais knew they were likely magical. It was as though there was a faint magical glow around them. However, this was a magical establishment that served both magical people and Muggles, so they were potentially just random citizens.

"No, he was just in the area looking to buy property as a vacation home for his family," Charlus said as Turais felt him gently turned Turais' body away from what he was observing.

"Here in Belford?" Turais asked in confusion. This was nice place, but it wouldn't be Turais' first nor hundredth pick as the location of a vacation home.

"Yeah, something about rediscovering his roots. Apparently one of his ancestor's hailed from Belford. Small world, isn't it?" Charlus said as he eyed the restaurant. "Actually, I think I think we should check on Desmond. Let's go to the back of the restaurant."

They made their way to the kitchen and greeted Ms Stevens, the owner of the restaurant.
"Hey Beatrice, have you seen Desmond by any chance?" Charlus asked.

"Oh, he left through the Floo already," Ms Stevens said as she wiped down the counter. Behind her was a Victorian-esque porcelain lamp that was glowing red. "Looked at his wit's end and muttering about needing to head back in the Ministry at once. Poor man's overworked as it is!"

"Oh, I guess the man forgot all about his precious tea blend," Charlus held up a purple gift bag. "He will just have to wait another week, won't he?"

"Suppose so," Ms Stevens said. She looked back at an Victorian-esque lamp that turned green as an old man rounded the corner from the hallway beside them. "Nice flowers, Greg. Are those for me?"

"It's for me wife," Greg said with a wave of a hand as Ms Stevens chuckled.

"Floo's all yours, Charlus. You need to get your two dirty ducklings sparkling clean."

"Actually, do you have a pen and piece of paper? I want to send something off quickly," Charlus said as he glanced over Turais' head. Turais turned back to look outside. The two men were now joined with two ladies and were visibly more relaxed and talkative. Perhaps Turais was really just overthinking this entire situation. Suddenly, he felt Charlus physically drawing Turais by his side, effectively blocking his view with his body.

Charlus discretely drew his wand and muttered a spell on the paper. Then, he started to scribble something down. Except for the address called Jemima Atticus, every word Charlus wrote down immediately vanished as though it was invisible ink. Turais recognized it as a Privacy Spell that only allowed the intended recipient to read the content. If someone else attempted any Revealing Charm, the letter would spontaneously combust. Charlus' wand then procured an image of four different faces and the bottom of the page. But Turais did not manage to catch a glimpse before it disappeared.

"I'll send it off for you," Ms Stevens held out an envelope and copied the name down.

"Thank you, Beatrice," Charlus said as he led the boys to the Floo chamber. Turais couldn't help but take one final glance at the table of four. It was then that he noticed that the table was now empty, as though it had never been in use.

"Come on, Turais," Charlus said as he offered the pot of Floo powder.

Turais ignored the nagging suspicion and grabbed a handful of powder. Before all the powder leaked out of his fist, he quickly walked into the fireplace and prepared himself mentally. He threw the powder and shouted: "Potter House" as the licks of green flames whipped around him.

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Kaiden and Michael were off on one of their "super secret adventures", which Turais guessed involved Kaiden acting like an idiot and Michael attempting to keep him in check as they explored the curated walking trails. Therefore, Alex and Turais were enjoying a rare moment of serenity in the absence of their resident chatterbox with said chatterbox’s parents.

However, Turais quickly noticed that Charlus and Dorea were exchanging meaningful
“Hey, Alex. Do you mind helping me with something regarding wandlore? I heard you are quite the expert,” Charlus asked casually - too casually.

Subtlety really was not a strong suite among Gryffindors.

“Of course, Charlus,” Alex gave Turais a quick squeeze before standing up. “What do you want to know…”

Their voices faded off as they turned down the hallway. Turais returned to face Dorea, who was eyeing him intently.

“What’s the matter, Dorea?” Turais asked softly. “If it is about my prank on Kaiden, I would like to apologize -”

“That’s not what I want to talk to you about. Charlus and I had a good laugh.” Turais relaxed a little. “I just wanted to discuss with you about your father.”

Turais tensed and his voice came out harsher than anticipated. “What do you mean?”

Dorea continued calmly. “What I mean is that we know you chose to come here because you are avoiding to go home. But I think your father cares a lot about you and I know for a fact that you care a lot about your father. You not returning home might be hurting him in ways you haven’t realized and you should talk to him face-to-face when you see him.”

Turais’ shoulders slumped at her words. After a moment, he spoke softly, “I have been thinking about this too. I don’t know if I made a mistake coming here. Not because you were not an amazing host -” Turais amended frantically and Dorea smiled to indicate she understood what he meant. “ - but because my father might have taken this decision as a rejection. But I really didn’t mean it that way. I just… didn’t know how to face him yet back then. But I think I am ready now.”

Dorea reached out and placed her hand over Turais’ soothingly. “That’s great, Turais. You’re not the first twelve-year-old to have an argument with his parents. Merlin knows how many Charlus and I had and still have with Kaiden. But the most important thing to know is that you two are family. No father can stay crossed with their child forever.”

“You don’t know my family,” Turais snapped. And suddenly, he had the strangest revelation.

‘My family. I’m telling the Potters that the Blacks is my family. And… I doesn't feel strange saying that out loud...’

Turais snapped out of his temporary mental lapse and continued with a softer whisper, “Many before me have been disowned by their parents and Lords for lesser crimes than mine.”

Dorea tightened her grip a little. “Turais, you are forgetting that I, too, was a Black once. Trust me when I say I know your father is an exception to the rules. Please give yourself and him a chance to make amends when you see him. At least once. I know he cares deeply for you, and you know this too, somewhere deep inside your heart. Don’t let your fear rule over your mind. You are much smarter and much braver than this.”

Turais smiled weakly at her, “You make me sound like I’m a fool-hardy Gryffindor.”

Dorea smiled back with a twinkle in her eye. “Well, what I’m actually making you sound like
is a brave, kind, protective soul with a bit of mischief. I was sure of it when I first saw you last summer but I am absolutely certain after these two weeks. Your mannerism and behaviour remind me of the Potter boys, quite frankly. You just have more maturity and a teeny bit more cynicism. In fact, I think Kaiden has taken already taken you under his wings as his younger brother from all the letters he has sent home. You’re definitely invited to his sixteenth birthday this summer.”

Turais grinned and said softly, “If you call those scrawny arms wings.” Dorea cracked a small smile. “And he does show his affection in a way that makes me feel like an abused little brother.” Dorea snorted at the sentence. Turais grinned as well before turning serious, “But I feel the same way about him. He’s like an older brother to me, maybe just a bit on the immature side.”

Dorea’s eyes crinkled with amusement. “That’s what you’re here for, obviously. I need someone to keep an eye on him and keep him from trouble.”

Turais rolled his eyes exasperatedly and they both laughed.

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April 16, 1971 (Friday)

“Boys, are you all packed for Hogwarts?” Dorea asked as she walked up the stairs to check on Turais, who was lunging his school trunk across the second floor hallway to the staircase. The three other boys are already waiting for him in the private fireplace in the guest bedroom. Unlike the fireplace in the living room downstairs that was connected to the public Floo, this fireplace was only linked up to one location with unfettered access - the Potter Manor.

“Yes, mum! If we forget anything, we can just Floo over to get it anyways!” Kaiden shouted from the room next door. Kaiden spent the entire morning madly scrambling for all his school supplies in his frightening messy room. Even enlisting Michael's help did not make much of a difference. So yes, Turais definitely bet that Kaiden forgot something -

"Wait! I forgot my cine-cam!" Kaiden dashed past Turais' room and quickly returned, heaving a large, vintage movie camera in one arm and a tripod in the other. "Man, I wish I could shrink this down."

"Be grateful that your father bought you one in the first place!" Dorea shouted after the boy and shook her head fondly. “Are you ready, Turais?”

“I’m set, Dorea. Thank you so much for hosting Alex and I this Easter, we appreciate it a lot,” Turais said sincerely.

“You’re welcome, Turais. But remember what I told you, I can tell your father loves you very much - call it mother’s instinct. Try and talk to him the next time you see him.”

Turais nodded. “I’ll try to when I see him come summer break, Dorea. I can promise you that.”

Dorea smiled. “It might be sooner than you think, dear.”

“Get a move on, Rais!” Kaiden shouted. “Michael and Alex already Floo-ed out.”
Turais rolled his eyes at Dorea, who laughed at his son’s impatience, and shouted, “Jeez Kaiden, coming!”

Turais walked across the corridor and into the small room that was empty except for a burning fireplace.

"Also Mom! How am I supposed to fit the cine-cam in the fireplace?!" Kaiden asked as he was trying to manoeuver the tripod into the fireplace diagonally. It was apparent that there was no way it would fit.

"Just shrink it down, Kaiden," Turais pointed out the obvious.

"Gee thanks, Turais," Kaiden rolled his eyes as he backed out of the Floo with his unsuccessful attempt. "I wonder why I can't shrink it down. Oh right! Because I don't have a wand!" The boy proceeded to give his mother the stink eye.

Dorea sighed. "I'll bring it with my when we Apparate to the Manor later. Just bring it out by the front door. You don’t want your sparkling new cine-cam to get all dusted up from the soot anyway." Kaiden gasped as he immediately checked his precious tripod for specks of soot and powder.

Kaiden shouted when Charlus entered the room. "Dad! Can you bring this down for me?"

The doorbell chimed and Dorea turned to her husband and said, “Charlus, please get the door. Ms Watson called to borrow several flower pots. They are right by the door."

"Dad! Cine-cam please! Since you are heading down anyway," Kaiden reminded. Charlus gave Kaiden a mildly annoyed expression before indulging his son's request and he scoped the equipment into his arms and out of the room.

"Thanks, dad!" Kaiden shouted as he grabbed a handful of powder. However, he turned a bit too enthusiastically and his arm swung at the thin metal stand, causing the pot to tumble out of its stand and down onto the floor, spilling Floo powder across the carpet messily. Dorea laughed while Turais snickered at the clumsiness of the boy.

"Are you really a Chaser with those butter fingers?" Turais teased. Kaiden placed a hard punch on his arm while his ears glowed red.

"Shut it, Rais!"

"Head on out first, Kaiden. I’ll find some more Floo powder in the kitchen," Dorea said as she disappeared through the door.

Kaiden shrugged and climbed into the fireplace with his school trunk and broomstick in tow. He threw the Floo powder onto the gently flaming logs, which suddenly burst into energetic green flames that engulfed his entire body. “Potter Manor!” he shouted. Once he spun out of existence, the green flames tempered down at once and turned back to a gentle flickering of yellow and red.

"Here you go, Turais," Dorea strutted back into view with a pot with powder filled to the brim. "I'll see you later."

Turais nodded as he grabbed a handful and stepped into the blackened fireplace. He threw the powder down and shouted “Potter Manor!” as clearly as possible into the wall of green flames.

He felt himself spinning when he suddenly slammed into a brick wall and landed flat on his
buttocks.

“Ooomph.”

He looked around to reorient him when he found out that he was in the blackened, soot-covered fireplace of the private quarters in the Potter Manor at Godric’s Hallow. Turais barely had time to pick himself up when he noticed a familiar head of messy hair bobbing towards him.

“Turais!” He snapped his eyes up from his robe to find Sirius looking down at him excitedly.

“Sirius? Regulus?”

Chapter End Notes

As always, comments are always welcomed. I love to hear your thoughts.

The next update, Chapter 33: The Intricacies of Caring, is on schedule. Until next time.

- ravenclawblues 2020-02-16
Hey everyone,

New update. As always, I'm always happy to hear your thoughts and comments.

- ravenclawblues 2020-02-28

CHAPTER 33
THE INTRICACIES OF CARING

April 5, 1971 (Monday)

BACKLASH AGAINST WIZENGAMOT CONTINUES

by R. A. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

Rogue Lords that Crossed Party Lines Speaks Out

After the shocking vote late Friday that saw UTWATS becoming the law of the land, one must return to the question regarding how became such a close vote in the first place. The short answer is: breakaway votes.

Lords Prince and Potter were part of six members from the Light alliance that voted against the bill. On the other hand, five members of the Dark alliance bulked their group and voted in favour of the bill.

"I do not believe that a bill should be passed without the support of the majority of Lords, especially when it was due to the unwanted intervention from our Chief Warlock," Lord Potter spoke as he was leaving the chamber. "As an institutionalist, precedents and standing procedures forms the basis of our rule of law and unspoken decorum on how our government should represent its people. This was a serious undermining of this truth and is nothing but disgraceful. I would like to apologize to all British witches and wizards on behalf of the entire Wizengamot. We have failed you."

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“Why are you two here!!”

“We snuck out to see you!” Sirius said excitedly and his smile was brimming with pride. His youngest brother stood by the door of the dingy room as he twitched awkwardly, torn between running towards Turais or staying put. At the sight, Turais suddenly found himself bubbling with anger.

“What about father?” Turais yelled as Sirius flinched. “He must be so worried! You’re the big brother when I’m not around! Why can’t you be more responsible?”

Sirius’ delighted face fell and paled dramatically. “W...what do y...you mean by ‘I’m the b...big brother’?” Sirius’ frightened voice sounded terribly small. “A...are you not coming h...home with us?”

Turais’ wounded heart fractured more. “I don’t know if Father wants to have anything to do with me anymore,” he said.

“But...but,” Sirius’ eyes darted frantically. “But Father signed your permission form! Clearly he wants you to come home!”

“But he never wrote to me saying -” Turais began to say before something seemed off. “ - Wait a minute…” Turais’ eyes narrowed suspiciously at the now fidgeting boy. “How did you know I’m with the Potters? I told you I was staying at Hogwarts for the holiday.”

“I...” Sirius struggled to provide an explanation as he jerked his arms uselessly. “I-“

“SIRIUS!” Turais barked. “What did you do?!”

“I... I...,” Sirius said in a teeny voice. “I... I might have secretly written to James to see if he knew anything. And he might have told me that he saw you at Potter House. And I might have asked him to help sneak us out of the house...” He shifted uncomfortably in the deafening silence as Turais looked on incredulously. He added quickly, “It was all my fault. Reggie has nothing to do with it. Please don’t be mad at him.”

Turais slapped a hand on his face and sighed heavily. Forcing himself to draw several calming breaths, he started speaking: “Oh, for Merlin’s sake! How did you manage to do all this without getting caught?!”

His emotions were a mess right now. He was caught between being petrified about how Orion was handling the fact that two of his remaining sons were missing and being impressed that Sirius managed to arrange this elaborate scheme without Orion noticing. He would deal with Sirius later, but first, he needed to rectify the current situation.

“You should go home,” Turais said ultimately.

“No,” Sirius said with a surprising amount of conviction, as though he rehearsed this speech many times. “Either you come home with Reggie and I or we stay here with you.”

“What about Father?” Turais reminded Sirius.

“Turais, do you remember what happened on my eighth birthday?” Sirius said. Turais shook
his head. How could he ever forget? But he was surprised that Sirius did. “You told me then that you will choose Reggie and I over our parents anytime. It’s the same for us. Brothers forever,” Sirius said with a weak grin.

Turais choked up at those words as he drew Sirius and Regulus into a tight hug. After a long while, he said, “You two are such brats.”

“But we’re your brat,” Sirius responded. “We’ve missed you a lot.”

“Me too,” Turais said. “I’m sorry for not coming home. I just… don’t think… he would want me home. He hasn’t said anything about me, has he?”

After a long pause, Turais shook his brothers. “Has he?”

Sirius and Regulus eyed each other warily before shaking their heads.

“He hasn’t,” Turais confirmed. Somehow, this fact didn't hurt as much as he thought it would. Maybe he was just beyond numb to the situation at this point.

“But I know he misses you, Turais,” Regulus pleaded. “He doesn’t smile anymore and he locks himself in his room all the time now. He doesn’t even yell at Sirius no matter what he does. Some nights, I see him standing in the dark and just stared at your room. I can hear him… hear him cry, Turais. Father never cries.”

“Turais, listen to us,” Sirius insisted. “Come home with us. Father really does miss you very much.”

“I’ll… I’ll think about it,” Turais said. “This is the most I can promise you.”

Sirius and Regulus nodded reluctantly.

"But you should still going home,” Turais repeated.

"No, we're not. And you can't make us," Sirius said defiantly. Turais sighed.

After this unexpected reunion, the three brothers exited the room just to see Fleamont and Euphemia engaged in a hushed conversation. The second they noticed them, they stopped their conversation abruptly.

“Hi, Turais,” Fleamont said in forced cheeriness. “I’m sorry that I didn’t receive you personally. Welcome to Potter Manor.”

“Thank you for letting us stay, Fleamont,” Turais said. "But can you please notify our father that Sirius and Regulus are here?"

“Oh, no trouble at all,” Fleamont responded. “Your father has already been made aware of the situation. Why don’t you and your brothers go and wash up first? Your friend is in the blue suite and we’ve set you up in the green room for you.”

“Thank you,” Turais said absent-mindedly as he guided his brothers towards the guest wing. If Orion knew they were here, why wasn't he here to retrieve Sirius and Regulus. Unless, Orion was so angry that he didn't want to deal with three of them anymore. This was all his fault...

“Wait!” Fleamont shouted out as Turais turned in confusion. “Uhm… you should come this way.” Fleamont gestured then to follow him down the opposite direction.
“Isn’t the green room this way?” Turais asked.

“Uh,” Fleamont stammered. “No... Y...yes, but this way is faster.”

“But that’s the opp -“

Turais blinked. The opposite direction was most definitely not faster. He had lived here, he knew his own house -

Turais stilled in realization. He’s not supposed to know where anything was. Turais Black had never been to Potter Manor. Turais wanted to slap himself for his gaffe.

“Of course, Fleamont. Please lead the way,” Turais said. Fleamont visibly relaxed as Turais started to walk towards him. Fleamont quickly muttered something into his wife’s ear and she nodded.

At the corner of his eye, Turais saw Euphemia walking hurriedly towards where he was originally headed.

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During dinner, Turais took the opportunity to organize his thoughts. He looked around the table, taking in his brothers’ carefree interactions with James and Kaiden. The adults also did not have a sense of urgency or concern that Turais would have expected from someone who had just received two children from their feuding family uninvited. Furthermore, it didn’t make sense that Orion would not be here given that Fleamont had notified him already (and Fleamont had no reason to lie to him about this). Orion loved his children dearly, he would not deliberately ignore them, especially when they are in the hands of a feuding family.

These logical inconsistencies, in combination with the side glances and hushed conversations that he had been observing the entire day made Turais suspicious that something was happening without his knowledge. He just couldn’t figure out what it was.

This bothered Turais so much that he did not even have a chance to fully appreciate the fact that he was in the company of all the Potters for the first time since last summer.

After dinner, Turais found himself trapped in a long conversation with Fleamont and Dorea as the others slowly retired to their rooms one by one. The choreographed timing of their leave only served to heighten Turais’ suspicion that the Potters had something in store for him. While Fleamont was reciting a particularly long story about his discovery of the Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion, Turais interrupted him.

“ - but the irony of it all was that inventor could not benefit from his own creation and -”

“Sorry to interrupt, Fleamont,” Turais said. “What would like to tell me now that we are alone?”

Fleamont cleared his throat and placed his glass of sherry onto the table. “Well, since our intentions have been revealed, I will go straight to the point. When do you wish to reconcile with your father?”
“Fleamont,” Dorea admonished. “Can you be any less tactful?”

“It’s fine, Dorea,” Turais said. “I prefer it this way. As to your question, Fleamont…” Turais released a long sigh, “I meant to ask to Firecall him tonight -“

“That is great, Turais,” Fleamont’s eyes gleamed with excitement as he immediately vacated his seat. “I’ll arrange to notify Orion right now!”

Turais was gobsmacked at the behaviour. What was going on today? Nothing made sense to him.

Once Fleamont was out of sight, Turais turned towards Dorea. “Dorea, I would like you to be honest with me. Something is not making sense in my head.”

Dorea froze mid-sip, then she placed her glass back down on the table. “What do you mean, Turais?”

“One, I refuse to believe that James was somehow able to arrange for my brothers to sneak out of the house without Orion or your family noticing. As Head of household, Fleamont controls the access points to the Manor and his permission is required to allow them entrance. Therefore, he would have to know about their arrival in advance to adjust the wards accordingly. Because of this, his reaction to Sirius and Regulus’ presence was illogical. Likewise, my father has control of the Floo access in our home and he must have noticed that Sirius and Regulus had accessed the Floo from our house. Finally, the Floo network between my house and yours are not connected directly so there must have been a mediator. Two, your excuse to bring me to Potter Manor was atrocious. You said that spending time at Potter Manor for the last weekend of Easter holiday was a family tradition. But Kaiden had let it slip that this was not the case,” Turais said and paused to consider Dorea’s reaction. To her merit, she barely flinched at his gaze. Turais continued, “The only logical explanation is that both my father and your family knows about the arrangement and decided to bring us together in one place to reconcile.”

Dorea remained emotionless as she met his gaze unflinchingly. Then, Turais uttered the striking words: “Is my father in this Manor right now?”

Dorea blinked. Then, she gave Turais a small, approving smile.

“You’re very perceptive,” Dorea said. “And extremely bright. I can see why you have achieved all these accomplishments at such a young age. As to your question, yes. Yes, your father is here.”

Turais tightened his grip on his glass of water as he heard the words. His father was at Potter Manor.

“B…but…. but why?” Turais asked as clutched the glass to anchor himself.

“I think you know the answer, Turais,” Dorea said softly as she reached out and removed the glass from Turais’ grip. Then, she placed his hand between her palms and rubbed it soothingly.

“But he… I… he doesn’t… he is angry…” Turais stammered as his mind raced. “I said those terrible things to him… he hates me -” Suddenly, Turais understood as blood drained from his face. " - He's here to formally disown me!”

“Turais,” Dorea said calmly. “I’m certain that your father is not here to disown you and I know he does not hate you. Think harder. You’re clever, I know you can figure this out.”
“I c...can’t!” Turais said frustratedly. “Dorea, please just tell me.”

Dorea sighed. “Turais, how were you able to spend the Easter holiday with us?”

“Because I had permission to leave Hogwarts - one that he has unwillingly given due to my grandfather's coercion,” Turais said despairingly. “That is just further evidence that he hates me… he never willingly signed the permission form. That just means he doesn’t want me home… he will never forgive me…”

“Turais, you don’t see it, do you? Orion signed the permission and you were able to leave Hogwarts,” Dorea said as she squeezed Turais’ hand. Seeing his lack of reaction, Dorea repeated. “Turais, he signed the permission form and you were able to leave Hogwarts.”

“I d...don’t understand,” Turais said. Yes, his father signed the permission form, so what? Wait… An idea started to churn in Turais’ mind as the significance dawned upon him. He looked up at Dorea in shock. How could he be so blinded.

Dorea nodded at his reaction.

“Yes, Turais. You know how important names and intent are in the magical world. There was no way you could’ve left Hogwarts if its magic did not verify the intent of your father’s permission,” Dorea explained.

“But… why? If he was willing to forgive me, why didn’t he just write me a letter… or tell me?” Turais asked. He refused to believe that Orion would forgive him that easily.

“Your father is not a heartless man, he is just not a brave man. He is like all Black men. When they are faced with difficulty, they hide themselves away from the opposition instead of confronting it. In your case, he knows he hurt you by pushing you away. But he will never take that first step in making amends because he is afraid to make himself vulnerable and to allow himself to be hurt again. To some, he might also be seen as a selfish man so cares for no one beyond his family. He is also a foolish man for pretending to not care about you when Sirius and Regulus were actively trying to contact you. I am not defending your father’s actions or criticizing him, but this is the kind of person he is and you should realize this by now,” Dorea said. "And don't forget that he is a traditional, vengeful Black. His signing of the permission form is basically equivalent to an enthusiastic invitation considering that the two of you are fighting."

"Trust me, Turais. Although your father is nine years my junior, we have grown up together. We also got along famously well until I eloped with Charlus. But we had fond memories of each other, and still do now. I know your father. He is a deeply flawed man, just like myself, but this is understandable considering the upbringing we both experienced. However, one thing is for certain. His biggest redeeming quality is his love and fierce protection for his children and family. Even if he chooses the completely wrong way to express that love. Turais, can you give him and yourself a chance to mend this relationship based on just this one thing?” Dorea finished off with a question.

Turais stayed silent as he considered her words. He still didn’t believe her. The Orion in his previous timeline was capable of disowning Sirius. He would not willingly travel to Potter Manor.

“How?” Turais asked weakly. “How does he know we are here? Our families do not share such a close bond.” Indeed, the relations between the two families have warmed up considerably. But there was no way Orion would have involved the Potters in such private family matters.

“Turais, do you not think that he knew exactly where Sirius went after noticing Sirius' correspondence with James? Do you not think he let his two precious sons escaped into the
unknown through the Floo?” Dorea explained. “Turais, your father loves you a lot. He just needs someone to push him into action or he will never do anything. In this case, Sirius was the catalyst.”

Turais thought back to Sirius in his original timeline. He finally understood why Orion and Sirius had such a tumultuous relationship until the bitter end.

Orion never stood up for them against Walburga’s transgressions. For example, whenever he clashed with Walburga about her pureblood fanaticism lectures, he would ultimately give up and retreat while leaving Turais to fend for his brothers.

If Sirius exhibited rebellious behaviours that Walburga disapproved, he would merely stand by or leave and pretend nothing happened. Sirius would never get any support from his father against Walburga as he would rather escape from her and then tend to his sons afterwards rather than confront his wife. Point in case, when Walburga issued a Cruciatus at Turais, Arcturus was the one who stopped her and Orion would just worry about Turais afterwards without ever thinking of stopping the Curse or Walburga herself.

When Sirius inevitably escaped from home, Orion would not sought have him out because he was foolish and afraid. He would have acted just like he did with Turais’ escapade with the Potters and not have said a word, even if he was miserable until his death.

He would also genuinely think that Sirius was better off away from the Black household and never held him back as long as he knew Sirius was safe and sound. When Sirius was thought to be a Squib, Orion was willing to lose everything he had with his son in exchange for his safety. He would have sacrificed his happiness for his son.

Sirius and Orion were both foolish men in his original timeline. One failed to see his father’s love and sacrifice while the other refused to stand up against Walburga or to take a single step to mend any misunderstandings or mistakes.

“And most importantly, he was afraid that you would not forgive him for pushing you away. Both of you said hurtful things to the other. And your father also feels guilty for retorting. He thought as a father and an adult, he should do better than act childish and petty. He is afraid that you won’t forgive him,” Dorea added.

Turais sucked in a quick breath. He had never considered that Orion felt guilty and was afraid to confront Turais.

“He is such a foolish man!” Turais said. “Why wouldn’t he say something, anything to try and remedy this?”

“Well, my dear. You made the same mistake. You were afraid to confront your father for fears of hearing him actually disowning you. But unlike him, you have worked up the courage while he might never have,” Dorea said. “Your poor father is still hiding in our guest room at his wit’s end and terrified to confront you until you were willing to talk to him. I have tried many times and failed to convince him to do so.”

“But why, then? Why did he choose to come here and wait for me? Just because of Sirius’ involvement? That simple?” Turais asked incredulously.

“Turais, your father loves you so much he can’t bear to see you placing yourself in any situation that is remotely dangerous. He might claim that he understands what you want to achieve, but he doesn’t have a clue as to why you are so willing to sacrifice yourself to save the world. But even then, he could live with the fact that he might, Merlin-forbid, one day lose you to a stray
Killing Curse. However, he would never forgive himself if you were injured in any way when he willingly pushed you away and out of his life. He is always one push away from acting, and that is what he found in Sirius. That tiny bit of courage,” Dorea said.

Turais knew deep down somewhere that Dorea was right. Orion would always need that push, may it be from him or from Sirius. He also knew that Orion would have never found that courage from Regulus for he was most similar to Orion in that aspect. Regulus, ever the filial and perfect son of the Black family, would not ever dream of sneaking out and meeting up with Sirius in secret.

However, Turais still had a hard time seeing past his faults. He contributed to this conundrum as well...

“But he’s right… I’ve thrown myself into danger with every single decision that I’ve made and see what has happened… with utter disregard of my family’s reactions.”

“From what your father has revealed to me, what you want to achieve is not easy,” Dorea said softly. “The best you can do is acknowledge that you have neglected your family. Now, you will need to move forward and keep your family’s reaction in consideration.”

Turias nodded as Dorea rose from her seat and extended her hand.

“You’re still young so you might not truly understand everything... but that's alright,” Dorea said. "Come on now, it's time for you to talk to your father."

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Dorea led Turais down the hallways of the Potter Manor towards where Orion was. After they stopped outside one of the guest suites, Dorea knocked. Moments later, Fleamont opened the door. Behind him, Turais could see a familiar figure facing the window away from him.

It was Orion.

Turais' heart pounced at the imminent meeting as the door closed gently behind him. The silence was oppressive and stifling, yet oddly, Turais felt more at peace than ever before.

"Father," Turais whispered the word into the void as the man flinched.

Orion turned around and Turais' words died in his throat. His sight focused solely on his father who looked as though he aged a decade in the past month - the dark circles below his eyes, the pasty pale complexion, the unkempt shadow of hair around his chin...

He looked broken and almost unrecognizable. And at that thought, it was as though the floodgates in Turais' mind were suddenly wide open. His rehearsed words were all be non-existent as his direct thoughts threatened to tumble out uncontrollably. But Turais managed to rein in his sudden urge.

"Father..." Turais whispered again as he ventured forward towards him like he was approached a wounded and easily startled creature. "I..."

Orion looked up at Turais directly and Turais stopped at once.
"Turais, I... I... " Orion closed his eyes and took in a deep breath as though he was calling upon his courage. He opened his mouth and said without looking, "Turais, I am sorry I left you without a single word. I’m sorry that I left when you were just barely recovered and when the threat against you was not defused yet. I’m sorry I lashed out at you with my magic. I wanted to reach out and apologize to you. But... but... everyday that passes by the more I’m afraid that you will never forgive me. I’m sorry that I ignored all your letters. I’m sorry that never invited you back home. I... I... gave up on you when you needed me most. I... am truly a failure as a parent and I... don’t deserve to be your father. I understand if you would want to have no association with someone like me -"

"No, father. I have fault in this as well," Orion's eyes widened in shock as Turais pressed on. "I cannot apologize for wanting to go up against those evil-doers, but I should have considered your position in the matter. I should not have slunk off on my own immediately after I recovered from the poisoning when the culprits were still on the loose. I should not have threatened you with leaving the family for something as trivial as schooling. I should have considered that you were emotionally distraught and at your wit’s after guarding by my side for two weeks were I was barely alive. I should not have used magic against you. I should not have brushed off your well intentions and concerns. I should not have decided to not return home for Easter and caused you more distress. You are my father but I was inconsiderate to your feeling -"

"Turais," Orion said defiantly. "No matter what you did or did not do, I should not have given up on you! I’m an adult. I’m your father! I should always be there for my children. I should not abandon you just because you argued with me or used a harmless Repulsion Charm. But I did! And I never remedied the situation. I am a pathetic man who makes all the wrong decisions. I knew, deep in my heart, that I was never worthy to be yours, or anyone’s father. And I have just managed to perpetuate this self-fulfilling prophecy -"

"No, father. You love me and Siri and Reggie unconditionally. And that is all I can ask for in a father. I'm the insensitive, unfilial son. I know that your children are most important to you - that we are the only thing that mattered to you. Yet, I chose myself over your one desire. I chose the Potters over our family. Heck, I even chose the entire world instead of choosing our family. But you, I know you will always choose us over anyone and anything in the world. I know you will sacrifice yourself if it meant keeping us safe. I’m the selfish one and you’re the selfless one. I... I'm the terrible son who doesn’t deserve a father... a family," Turais said miserably.

"No, Nonononono. You've said everything in reverse. I'm the one who doesn’t deserve you. I’m the selfish one and you’re the selfless one. I only cared about my happiness. I only cared about keeping my family safe. You’re willing to sacrifice everything you have to save the world. I can see now why that is important. Families, muggles or magical, are getting attacked and I am not so blind that I don’t recognize that it is the Knights who are orchestrating it all, even if I can’t prove it. You were right all along. If they are not stopped, there will be war. Families will be torn apart without discrimination. And as you said, if the world falls apart, there will be no family. I should be by your side helping you, acting as your constant, protecting you, and definitely not abandoning you. I cannot stress how sorry I am.”

"No, father, you -" 

"No, Turais," Orion interrupted. "I’m sorry for not being there when you need me most. I’m a coward, Turais. When you’re faced with adversity, you confront it face-on. But I flee and hide and... and I am ashamed of myself. I… I despise myself for being so weak! I couldn’t stand up for myself when I was a student in Hogwarts. I couldn’t stand up for my children at home against my wife. And now, I couldn’t stand up for my family against the evils of the world. I’m supposed to be the one who protects you and all I did when you were almost dead was to hide in my room.
"You were always the one with stronger moral fibre. You were always the one who stuck by principles. You were always the better person. Don’t you see, Turais? I can see it so very clearly after all these months apart. For all these years, you never needed me. I’m the one who needs you,” Orion finished.

“No, father. I need you, so very much,” Turais said, hoping his father understood his importance in his life. "You might think I don’t need you or that you’re somehow a lesser person than me. Perhaps you are less courageous or less magically powerful than I am. But I don’t care about those things. You being you and you being by my side are the only things I need in the entire world. You are irreplaceable. I don’t know how to make it any clearer.”

“Turais, my dear son. I’m so sorry -” Orion enveloped Turais in a suffocating hug. 

“Father, I think you should stop apologizing,” Turais chuckled wetly into Orion's robes. “There are too many apologies and not enough forgiveness. I forgive everything you think you did wrong, father.” Orion nodded frantically as he held his son even closer.

There, they sat in each other's silent company for the first time in many months.

“Thank you, Turais. Thank you,” Orion said. "I'm glad we talked." 

“I still can’t believe neither of us reached out one another before now. We’re both so thick,” Turais agreed.

“You shouldn’t be calling your father thick, especially not right after a huge reconciliation like this,” Orion teased but there was no heat.

“But we were both too thick to realize that... that if we just said something to each other, it could have saved us from a lot of angst and suffering,” Turais said.

“I know,” Orion said, “I think... at least for me, I just cared for you so much I was afraid that you would deal the final blow if I ever made the wrong move. But that fear was exactly what almost made me lose you forever. Once again, my cowardice is my nemesis.”

“No, father,” Turais said fiercely, “I would like to believe that since we care so much for each other that we would have reunited no matter what happened and how long it took.”

"Ever the optimist," Orion chuckled. Turais raised an eyebrow as though he was challenging Orion to disagree. “Oh, I'm not arguing with you on this, Turais, oh wise one.”

“Hey, you’re not supposed to be sarcastic with your son, especially not right after a huge reconciliation like this,” Turais used Orion’s words against him. Orion’s eyes suddenly sparkled with joy as he hugged Turais again.

“I've missed you so much," Orion said fondly, “I can’t believe I lived with this emotional baggage for as long as I did.”

“I can't believe it either,” Turais said. "Can we promise to communicate better next time?"

"Of course," Orion agreed quickly. "But I'm not planning on having a 'next time'."

Orion and Turais emerged from the guest room to two nervous, but hopeful faces. Turais gave them a quick smile and they immediately relaxed.

"I am so glad this arrangement worked out," Dorea said happily as she knelt down to give
"Thank you for... for bringing us together, Dorea," Orion said hesitantly. "I... I... can't express - I am in...indebted to you for your aid."

Dorea walked over to Orion and held his hands in hers. "Orion. Don't say such a thing. We are family, there is no such thing as being indebted to family."

Orion looked as though he was about to disagree, but under Dorea's stern gaze, he swallowed his argument and cleared his throat instead. "It's a pity that we haven't kept in touch for the past thirty years. I often wondered about your well-being."

Dorea smiled as she patted his hands gently. "It's the thought that counts. And it's never too late to rekindle our relationship."

Orion nodded. "I hope it is not too late."

"It's never too late," Dorea repeated firmly.

After a small celebration between the Potters and the Blacks, Fleamont insisted that the Blacks stayed for the night.

"That is not necessary, Fleamont," Orion said. "Our home is but a Floo away."

"Orion, this is a joyous occasion and you do not have other commitments," Charlus said. "Don't be afraid to being an imposition to our hospitality when it is freely given."

"In this case..." Orion looked over at Sirius and James' hopeful expression. "I guess I shall have to accept your offer."

"That's settled then," Fleamont smiled into his glass of sherry as the two boys cheered and ran off somewhere in the Manor.

Turais was still humming with energy, high from his recent reconciliation with Orion. Therefore, he decided to take the opportunity to roam the Manor corridors and reminisce the lengthy amount of time he spent reconnecting with the Potter family. His first location was naturally the family portrait gallery, which was in the oldest part of the structure and where all the portraits of the Potters throughout the ages were located. It was the place where he spent countless days conversing with his ancestors and reconnecting with his heritage. But as he was on his way, he realized that Dorea and Orion were tucked away in the corner of a drawing by the fireplace. Curious, Turais decided to change his plans and eavesdrop on them.

" - Dorea, I am immensely grateful that you welcomed me with open arms and without malice despite the fact that I ignored all your attempts to re-establish communication. For thirty years I've neglected you, yet you agreed to facilitate the reconciliation between Turais and I without hesitation... please let me know how I can repay this debt."

"Oh dear, this is not necessary," Dorea's voice said. "I did not do all this so you can be indebted to me. You and Turais are my family, of course I'd help in any way I could," Dorea said. "Especially for my fellow black sheep of the family."

They fell silent for a long while.

"You were right to run away from the family, Dorea. You do not belong in the Black family," Orion said softly. "You always thought that we were the same type of people - the two black sheep
of the family - but that's not remotely true. You're the black sheep. I'm just a Black through and
through. I have the same wicked, twisted soul as everyone else in the family."

"Orion..."

"You know I used to hate you for eloping with Charlus and leaving me behind. I thought I
hated you because you were able to run away from everything and start a new life. I thought I
hated you because you don't have the same responsibility and familial expectations heaped onto
your shoulders. And I... I thought hated you because you could leave while I couldn't."

"Orion..."

"I did. I thought I hated being the Black Heir. But in reality, it was me that I hated most."

"Orion, dear, please -"

"Dorea, please let me get this off my chest. I realized how pathetic I was when I finally
acknowledged that while I didn't want the title, it was the only thing I had. When my father decided
to name Turais as Heir Presumptive, allowing him to take precedence in the line of succession over
me, I was finally confronted with the fact that I was completely expendable and worthless in his
eyes. For all these years before Turais was born, I kept telling myself that, as Heir Apparent, I was
doing it for a noble cause - that I was the only male descendant in my line so it was a familial duty
- that I cannot leave in good conscience as the title would be passed to Pollux's line and I was
saving the world from his fanatical views. But in reality, I was there because I was clinging on to
my title and I was nothing without it. I guess all this just proved that I was a Black no matter how
much I denied it. Vengeful. Bitter. Hypocritical. And my worst vice of all, Jealousy... pitifully so
that I was jealous of even my own son."

"Orion, you don't mean that -"

"I do, Dorea. And I am ashamed of it. The night Walburga and I separated, it was the night of
the Malfoy Ball when Turais revealed he was a Parselmouth. I still don't know if he discovered it
by accident or planned for the reveal deliberately, but something he said has haunted me ever
since."

"What did he say?"

"He said he had leverage. And if we did not yield to his demands, he would leave the House
of Black."

"But... Turais was only... ten? How could he have managed such thoughts?"

"Nine. Turais was only nine. And I don't know, he has always been more mature than his age.
But regardless, I was shaken by what he said. He was right. He never needed his title. Plenty of
families would flock to him with family heirlooms and betrothals even if he was a disgraced Black
heir just in hopes they can incorporate his Parseltongue ability and his magic into the family. If not
for that, look at his accomplishments with the Wolfsbane Potion. He could make a name for
himself without any support from his family. Turais could leave the family any time he wanted and
he would still flourish. And I knew he had the courage to do so. I could see it in his eyes. Heck, I
could tell that even Sirius would leave the family if he really wanted to. But me? I had nowhere
else to go and I would never have the courage to leave the family because I was, and I still am, a
coward."

"Orion... you shouldn't be so hard on yourself..."
"Merlin," Orion chuckled deprecatingly. "Can you imagine being jealous of your own child because he was superior than you in every way? Or just because of the mere fact that he had the damn courage to leave his family behind when you didn’t? I am such a terrible human being - let alone, father - and I did not want to acknowledge how ugly and twisted my soul was. But deep down, I knew it all the same. So I guess I had always expected the day when he would finally leave me and our horrible family behind... and rightly so... And guess what I did when he finally suggested it? Dorea, I lashed out like a madman... then rage immediately gave way to guilt, sorrow, shame. Shame, that’s the word that would describe my entire life succinctly. Shame... what a failure I am..."

"I think that just proves you are more compassionate and loving than rest of the family combined -" Dorea said softly.

Orion sighed. "You don't have to comfort me."

" - and with some terrible anger management issues," Dorea said. "It does not excuse your behaviour, but you have always been a brooding grouch."

Orion chuckled wetly as he sniffed and blew his noses. "Well, you did use to call me Grumpapotomus?"

There was a stilled silence before Dorea blurted out a choked laughter. Then, she chuckled as Orion joined in as well. "You still remember that nickname?"

"Of course I do," Orion said. "I hated - no, I liked - I loved it, Dorea. I absolutely loved it and will love it 'til my dying breath."

"Better." Turais could hear the smirk in her voice. "But to your previous question, no... I refuse to believe a person with such immense darkness like what you have just described would be able to raise three wonderful and sweet children and accept Grumpapotomus as a nickname."

This time, there was no laughter after the nickname, only Orion's heavy sigh.

"They never needed my guidance, Dorea. Especially Turais, he has always been extremely bright and always content with everything in life."

"Everyone has their own battles against darkness, Orion," Dorea said. "Perhaps we have more precisely because we grew up in such a toxic, hostile environment, but everyone has it all the same."

"Dorea, you don't have to comfort -"

"Listen, Orion. I need to make you understand that I'm not so different from you than you think. Yes, I eloped with Charlus because I loved him and I wanted to leave the family. But I weaponized his ultimate act of love to spite my own family. Orion, I am just like you. I hated everything about the Black family. I hated Pollux and Cassiopeia for their blood purity fanaticism. I hated my parents for disowning Marius and casting him out of the house. Did you know what they did to him? They kicked him out of the house without a thread of fabric on his back in the midst of a blizzard. He was only eight, Orion! Eight! And for hours I pleaded for mercy just as I heard my brother's cry and knock grew fainter and fainter. You speak of being despicable because of your jealousy. I will tell you what a truly despicable act is - throwing out your son of eight years, naked in the middle of winter, just because he cannot cast a damn spell."

"What? That is... that is just... EVIL! I'm... I'm so sorry for what you have experienced,"
Orion sounded horrified. "I didn't imagine how terrible your family was... you always seemed so positive and..."

"You didn't know, Orion, and I didn't want you to know. I know that my family never spoke about him and you have never met him," Dorea said. "But my point is that at the age of seven, I have already lost all innocence and love for my family. And so when Charlus proposed, I readily agreed so I could finally get rid of my family name. And guess what I did?

"When he proposed, my parents had contracted the Dragon Pox just a few months prior. The Healers said they would succumb to it due to their old age. So, I held off the announcement until my parents were lying on their death beds. I deliberately steered my two filial, repugnant, abhorrent siblings away and waited until they were laboriously sucking in their final breaths. Then, I told them with glee and pride that I was going to marry a blood-traitor pureblood and they could neither stop me nor disown me. And I relished in seeing their stunned and betrayed expression as they breathed for the final time. That was my ultimate revenge on my own parents. How petty and vengeful would that make me?"

"Dorea..."

"Orion, I didn't tell you this story so we can wallow in sadness, regret, and guilt together. We are both Blacks and we both had complicated childhoods. Our family has been built upon lies. It is no wonder we grew up twisted, vengeful, and tainted with darkness. We have both done regrettable things in the past, but that does not mean it has to be this way for our young. In fact, I think you have done an admirable job from rooting out the darkness in your sons," Dorea said. "When I met your three children during the Quidditch World Cup last year - wait, are you aware of this?"

"I am," Orion said, finally with a bit of levity. "They thought I would leave them to their own devices at the largest Sporting event in the world without supervision. How innocent children are..."

"Keep it that way, Orion," Turais could hear the smile in her voice. "I was glad - extremely glad that they were carefree, happy, and innocent as normal children should be. Well - Turais was a bit too anxious, Sirius was a bit too excited, and Regulus was a bit too stoic -"

"Hey, those are my kids you are talking about," Orion snapped with a hint of playfulness.

"Alright then, Mr Grumpapotomus. But it was then that I knew there was hope for the future of our House. You may think you were everything that you have just described to me, but you were able to contain all of the darkness within you and away from your children. That is the most important thing you can do in your position. And that is what I strive to do for Kaiden as well."

"I will have to ponder on this... but thank you, Dorea. It is nice to be able to talk to you again. I've missed having someone whom I can confide in."

"Thank you as well, Orion. Despite the fact that I have accepted - for many years - that I will never reconnect with my family again, there is always a small part of me that wishes things are different. I'm glad my wish came true."

"I suppose this is all thanks to Turais?" Orion said.

"And Sirius," Dorea said. "Without one or the other, no one would have been able to force you out of your self-imposed exile. I seriously doubt Regulus would ever do something this drastic."
"I guess we will never know. But today, I've learnt to never underestimate children again. Two brats unwittingly caused a thirty-year-old feud to become undone."

"Indeed. But one must also wonder if the adults are the childish ones considering their feud was so easily resolved. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learnt there as well."

"Oh, and excuse me for the abrupt change of topic. But what happened to Marius?"

"Well..." Dorea sighed. "I waited until everyone went to bed and I snuck out of my room through the window with only my pajamas. I was so afraid to find Marius dead... in fact, he was at the brink of it when I found him lying at the front door. So I did whatever my seven-year-old brain thought was best and willed myself to Apparate to nearest place for help. And for some reason - perhaps my deepest desperation or perhaps due to the wondrous manifestation of accidental magic - I managed to not splinch either of us and we ended up at the doorsteps of Potter House."

"Potter House," Orion repeated incredulously.

"Indeed. Perhaps Fate had a hand in my union with Charlus as this is how I met him for the first time. Made quite the first impression, I'm sure. A young girl at the tender age of seven, sobbing hysterically and shaken to the core... Fortunately, Marius survived and Charlus' parents adopted him. Marius Black became Marius Potter and he now works as a Muggle Healer in London. We still meet up from time to time."

"I'm glad there is a happy ending to that story."

"We will all have our happy endings, I'm sure."

"I do wish I shared your optimism, but I am hoping all the same."

Turais melted back into the shadows as his mind processed all the revelation. Sirius and he had mended the chasm that divided the two families for decades. Without one or the other, this entire episode likely would not have happened.

They had just changed the course of history between the two families in a significant way.

Turais returned to the newer parts of the house and found the rest of the adults enjoying the evening breeze. Suddenly, Kaiden appeared from the doorway.

"Oh, dad!" Kaiden stormed into the veranda. "Did you see if I packed my telescope?"

Charlus frowned. "You've packed your own bags, son. If you don't see it, you must have left it behind."

"Can you please get it for me?" Kaiden said with a pout. "We have such rare, clear skies tonight and I want to do some star-gazing with Michael in the attic."

"You know you can Floo home yourself, right?" Charlus sighed as he heaved himself onto his feet. "The Floo is right down the -"

"Thank you, father!" Kaiden shouted as he disappeared into the hallway again.

Charlus shook his head at Fleamont and chuckled. "My son is so spoilt. Anyhow, I guess I will have to run my quick errand," Charlus said as he drained his glass. "Be back in a jiffy."

Charlus' errand turned out to be an unexpectedly arduous one as it had been more than half an
hour since he left the Manor through the private Floo. Even Dorea and Orion had reemerged from their private chat and were now chatting cordially over some beverages.

"Has dad returned yet?" Kaiden asked as he peeked his head through the doorway with Michael in tow. Sirius and James were also present in the veranda for a quick break from their Manor exploration.

"No," Fleamont said as he closed his eyes to focus on the wards. "He hasn't passed through the wards yet." Kaiden plopped into the chair nearby and waited.

"I wonder what caused the delay?" Euphemia asked.

"Perhaps I should go find him," Dorea said. "Men are notoriously poor with their searching skills -"

"Dorea, that's not necessary," Fleamont interrupted. "He has just returned... but through the front entrance..." Fleamont's eyes opened to a roomful of inquiring faces.

'Why did Charlus leave through the private Floo and return through the front entrance?' Turais wondered.

Moments later, Turais could hear footsteps running down the hallway towards their location. Kaiden stood up in anticipation as a haggard Charlus bursted through the doorway empty-handed. His frantic gaze wandered around the room and accounted for every single person, then his face relaxed by a fraction.

Kaiden leaped onto his feet and started to ask, "Dad, where is my -" But Charlus paid no attention. Instead, his eyes focused on Fleamont and quickly walked towards him.

"Fleamont, put your house on emergency lockdown immediately. Close off all points of entry, including the private Floo," Charlus rasped out. Turais could clearly detect the terror in his trembling voice.

Fleamont froze for a moment, then quickly nodded as he closed his eyes and focused on the wards.

Turais could feel the air around him shift and thicken. Wave upon wave of magic radiating from the centre of the house permeated through the walls and space outwards as the ward boundaries strengthened to its upper limits.

The magic around the room started to settle as the fluctuations became less and less noticeable. However, there was a distinct sense of heaviness as though the air turned stale and sluggish.

As Fleamont reopened his eyes, Charlus slumped into Kaiden's once-occupied chair and heaved a sigh of relief. Dorea walked towards her husband and placed her arms around him in an attempt to calm him down. Euphemia quickly poured a mug of tea and thrust it into his shaking hands with the liquid sloshing inside the container. Charlus' eyes were darting frantically, unfocused, and his abnormal behaviour was putting everyone on edge.

Charlus was a seasoned Auror with more than thirty years of experience. If he was shaken this badly, something terrible must have happened.

Everyone seemed to share the same thoughts. Kaiden looked shocked as he stood by the doorway, frozen in place. The rest of the adults held their bated breaths as they waited for Charlus
to reveal the other part of the story. After a few moments, Charlus’ breath seemed to finally have evened out.

“What happened?” Euphemia asked softly, but her voice was laced with fear and concern.

Charlus looked up from his still trembling hands for the first time since his arrival.

"Patrick and Winnie are dead. The Arkenstones are dead."

Chapter End Notes

What did you think about the reconciliation between not only Turais and Orion, but also Dorea and Orion?

Also, what is happening?!

The next chapter, Chapter 34: Bonds Forged By War, is on schedule. Until next time!

- ravenclawblues 2020-02-28
Hey everybody,

New update.

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-06

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 34
BONDS FORGED BY WAR

April 16, 1971 (Friday)

ARKENSTONES MURDERED IN COLD-BLOOD

by Andy Smudgley

Potter Family Under High Alert from Death Threats

On April 16, 1971, a terrible attack occurred near Wooler that left the Wizarding community reeling from the loss of members from the Arkenstones - a highly respectable, Pureblood family. These terrorist attacks were suspected to be the work of an unidentified militaristic group that was also responsible for the series of fatal Muggle attacks that began in February this year. If confirmed, this will be the highest profile attack from the group yet and marks the first instance of an attack against a Wizarding family.

Five members of the Arkenstone family were found dead at their residency two miles north in the village of Humbleton, including Lord Patrick Arkenstone, who has recently been the epicentre of a bitter and controversial legislative war. They will be survived by Noel and Natalia Arkenstone, both currently in Romania and out-of-contact...

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April 16, 1971 (Friday)
"... The Arkenstones are dead."

Dorea gasped loudly as the rest of the room was stunned into an oppressive silence. "What?" Dorea asked incredulously as she clutched Charlus' shoulder until the fabric crinkled. "What... do you mean, Charlus?"

"Patrick and Winnie are dead," Charlus said the damning words numbly, his eyes void of any emotions.

"What?" Dorea asked again. "How? Why? I d... don't understand."

"Dorea, they are dead," Charlus tipped his head down and hid his face in his hands. He took in a breath and released it shakily, "I saw it with my own eyes... I performed the diagnostic charm. They w...were just... just gone."

A tiny sob escaped from Charlus as his shoulders started to shake.

A pang of deep sorrow reverberated in Turais' chest as he realized that Natalia and Noel had just lost their parents forever. He could not say that he was close with them, but he had experienced their kindness and knew that their absence would be felt both in politics and in his friends' lives for years to come. He was also well acquainted with the feeling of loss so he could imagine the pain and horror that the Potters were experiencing.

Turais looked around the room to find everyone in a myriad of emotions, but they all displayed various degrees of horror, sadness, and confusion. Sirius broke away from James' side to be closer with Orion while Regulus and Alex huddled closer towards Turais' side as well. James burrowed deeper into his mother's embrace as his eyes glanced around the room in bewilderment. Kaiden reached for Wilkins' forearm and clutched it as he observed his father weeping silently.

"Oh no..." Dorea placed her hand over her mouth in a terrible revelation. "What will happen to Natalia and Noel? They just lost their parents... they are orphaned..." A pained sound escaped from her as tears rolled down her cheeks. "Oh no... how do we contact them? What do we even say?"

"I don't know, Dorea..." Charlus rubbed his red-rimmed eyes with his fingers. Turais could see that he was struggling to keep his emotions at bay. "I didn't even think about them when I was in the House. All I could think of was you and Kaiden..." Kaiden placed his other hand on his father's shoulder and squeezed in supporting.

Everyone was at a loss of words. What could you say in this terrible situation?

Fleamont walked towards Charlus and knelt beside him. He said softly, "Charlus, I know something harrowing has just occurred. But can you please explain when you are ready?"

Charlus nodded as he took several shuddering breaths.

"As you all know. Kaiden asked me to search for his telescope. So, I returned to the Potter House via the private Floo. And while I was searching Kaiden's bedroom, something outside the window caught my attention," Charlus said shakily, He took a sip of the tea before he continued.

"Kaiden's bedroom was the only bedroom that had a window facing the north... and I knew I was looking directly at Patrick and Winnie's house. I thought I saw a series of unusual flashes. Not the kind where Kaiden used to communicate with Natalia and Noel with using the lights... but they were like bursts of spells. Then, something tripped my security wards and I immediately knew something was wrong..."
Turais gasped involuntarily as he understood the gravity of the situation. The Arkenstones, who lived practically next door to Charlus and Dorea, had been murdered by Death Eaters. Turais closed his eyes and willed himself to take in a calming breath.

Charlus, Dorea, and Kaiden could have easily died tonight. They were right next door to the scene of the crime. Why were the Arkenstones attacked? Turais' mind swum in confusion and shock.

"So... I Apparated to the Arkenstones to investigate the -"

"CHARLUS! YOU DID NOT VENTURE INTO A MURDER SCENE ALONE! The place could be teeming with Dark Wizards! Are you out of your mind?!"

Turais suddenly found that he was on his two feet with his drink split on the carpeted floor. He also had the dreaded recognition that the searing voice belonged to him. Charlus looked up at him in shock and abashment, but he did not deny his claims. Orion looked equally as shocked at Turais' outburst. Embarrassed, Turais returned to his sedentary position quietly, avoiding his father's gaze. However, the attention on him quickly turned to Dorea.

"Charlus!" Dorea shouted as she stood up in fury. "Is that true?!" Charlus remained silent. "I can't believe you would do something so reckless and idiotic! The attackers might not have departed yet! You could have come face-to-face with them! You could have... could have DIED!"

"Honey, I -" Charlus stood up and reached for Dorea, but Dorea slapped his hand away from her. Kaiden looked between his parents in shock and frustration.

"Don't patronize me, Charlus" Dorea snarled as she pointed her finger at her husband accusingly. "You Potter men clearly have no sense of self-preservation and this is the most idiotic... and irresponsible thing you can do to me and our family! Did you think about us at all when you Apparated? We could have lost you forever, you selfish bastard!"

With that, Dorea stormed away.

"I'm sure you just made her terribly worried about your safety, Charlus. I'll go talk to her," Euphemia said quickly as she extracted herself from James and hurried after the other woman.

Charlus crumpled back into his seat and rubbed his face with his hands. "I deserved that. This was my fault... but Patrick..." Charlus sniffled again.

Fleamont closed his eyes and said in a pained voice, "Charlus, I'm so sorry for your loss."

"I did not expect... but I thought that... I thought that maybe I could have a chance to save them from the worst... but I was too late..."

A loaded silence befell the group.

"So..." Fleamont prompted again. "You Apparated to their home and what did you find?"

"The wards were completely torn down. The exterior of the house was unblemished but the front door was blasted wide open..." Charlus continued shakily, "So I cast a 'Homenum Revelio' and realized that no one... living... was present... and I feared for the worst... and immediately, I entered to find Patrick sprawling on the ground lifelessly. His expression was one of shock. He clearly didn't know what happened until the very end. I checked his vitals and he was... gone... just gone..."
"I immediately searched the rest of the house and I saw the Winnie... oh - poor Winnie... in the corner of the master bedroom that was completely torn apart... She must have fought until the bitter end..." Charlus' voice choked up in the end as his lips quivered. "I activated my Auror distress signal at once -" The Auror distress signal was an emergency spell that could be activated whenever the Auror was in peril. It would alert the Auror Office and provide the exact location of the Auror in distress for extraction. "- and as I was waiting for their arrival, I immediately locked down the Potter House and sealed off all entry points. But I was worried that my house was compromised already. So the moment Jemima and the rest of them arrived on the scene, I immediately relayed the basic information and Apparated here because... because..."

"Because of the death threats that I have been receiving," Fleamont finished his sentence. Charlus nodded silently. "That's why you asked me to put the house on lockdown."

"I will be returning to the Auror Office now," Charlus said as he stood up, "But I had to make sure that Kaiden, Dorea, and all of you were safe."

"Of course," Fleamont patted Charlus' shoulder. "I'm sure your colleagues will understand. But are you sure you are up for the task? I understand that Patrick and Winnie are very close friends of yours -"

"I can't stay here idly and do absolutely nothing about the situation," Charlus said firmly, his eyes shone with determination. "They are already dead. The last thing I can do for them is to apprehend their murderers and deliver justice. I also have to make sure Natalia and Noel are notified of the news. I have to be there for them."

"Also, I will need to provide an official statement to the Aurors," Charlus said. "And make sure the threat against you is defused."

"Charlus, I will Portkey to the Ministry with you," Fleamont said as he clutched Charlus' arm. "There will most certainly be an emergency Wizengamot session after tonight's event and I will have to be present for any potential votes. With Patrick’s... absence, we cannot afford to lose a single vote. I have to go," Fleamont turned to Orion. "Orion, would you mind looking after the children and tell our wives that we are heading to the Ministry?"

The Potter Manor was under emergency lockdown. This meant that the wards were at maximum strength and completely impermeable to any form of communication or travel. No person, animal, or object could move past the ward boundaries in either direction with one exception. This was the most extreme measure an owner could take in barricading themselves inside their homes. At the same time, however, it also meant that they were as isolated as they could.

Since carrying messages via Patronuses had not yet been invented (an important relic of Dumbledore’s effort to establish a secret and efficient way of communication between the Order of Phoenix members during the first Wizarding War), therefore, the sole method of transportation and communication allowable was a unidirectional Portkey out of house. And as a Senior Auror (and soon-to-be Deputy Head Auror), Turais just remembered that Charlus had clearance to create emergency Portkeys.

"Of course, Fleamont -" Orion agreed.

"No, you shouldn't leave," Turais interrupted, his voice shaky. Everyone looked at Turais questioningly. "Fleamont, you have death threats leveled against you. I don't think it is wise for you to expose yourself out in the open at this very moment. You should send a proxy in your place."
"I would rather not go as well, but there is no other choice," Fleamont said. "Everyone here is either a minor or a Potter -" Fleamont's eyes made contact with Orion's, "- and... well... I cannot ask you to grant me this immense favour, Orion. The political fallout with you acting as my proxy would be monumental."

"And you are not worried about your reputation?" Orion asked.

"Consider me an idealistic and old-fashioned man," Fleamont said. "I am old enough to remember a time when Lords from every family, no matter if they are Dark, Grey, or Light, could assemble and engage in a civil discussion without the vitriol diatribe."

Turais looked at his father and knew that he was weighing his options and calculating the risks and benefits to offer his aid.

"I could offer my service as I am well acquainted with the procedural rules of the chamber," Orion said ultimately. "I shall act as your proxy, and in return, you shall consider my debt to your family repaid in full."

"What debt?" Fleamont asked in confusion.

Orion scrunched his face in frustration. He gritted out unwillingly, "The debt which I have incurred for your aid in mending the relation between my son and I -"

"Nonsense. Utter nonsense!" Fleamont interrupted. "You are not indebted to us. And even if you are, what I am asking you to do will make the payment ten times over."

"I want to and you are in no position to refuse," Orion pressed on as he challenged Fleamont to refute him. Fleamont blinked several times before he conceded. "If you are worried that I would abuse my voting power as your proxy, I can perform a vow of comity and promise to vote in line with your position," Orion said.

The vow of comity was a non-binding magical vow that proved the performer harboured pure intentions to perform the intended wishes set out by the recipient.

Fleamont considered the proposition for a brief moment.

"I will draw up a letter to make you my proxy," Fleamont said. "But the vow would be unnecessary, Orion -" Orion looked at Fleamont in surprise, "- I just need your word that you will act in the best interest of the Wizarding community."

"But Fleamont, don't you want some reassurance of my good faith before you hand over your power?" Orion argued. Turais knew that Orion couldn't fathom how anyone would be so trusting to hand over so much power to a person without any reassurance.

Fleamont shook his head and smiled. "Your word is sufficient for me."

"I... I give you my word, Fleamont," Orion finished.

Charlus reached for a cloth. "Fleamont, you will be able to spare one of these?" Fleamont nodded. Then Charlus pointed at the cloth with his wand and muttered, "Portus." The cloth glowed in an illuminating blue hue before promptly returning to its normal appearance.

Just before Orion reached for the cloth, Turais halted them.

"Charlus, I have something urgent to speak to you about," Turais shouted out.
"Turais, this is not the time," Charlus said as Orion held his hand and gestured him to stop.

"Charlus, my son often have an excellent reason to speak out of turn," Orion defended Turais. "Please hear him out."

"Not here. I have to see to you in private," Turais said firmly.

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"Charlus, on the day we were at Belford, I have noticed that there was someone observing us from afar in the bakery," Turais revealed. "I thought I was being paranoid from the recent Muggle attacks so I brushed my concerns away. But then I noticed there were four Muggle-dressing individuals that looked... off at the restaurant you were dining with Head Auror Sayre at. But I didn't think much about it at the time as they did not engage in any suspicious activities.

"But now that I know the Arkenstones were... attacked. I wonder if my intuition was correct all along..." Turais said.

Charlus gave Turais a long, calculating stare in the oppressive silence of the study but Turais returned his gaze righteously. After a while, Charlus looked like he made a decision.

"Listen, Turais. I don't know how you were able to pick up on all those things, but... I had noticed the exact things at the restaurant. I was concerned when you were casting glances at them after I did, that's why I tried to steer you away or block your sight.

"The letter I wrote for Ms Stevens to send off was an urgent owl containing their facial composite to my junior partner Jemima Atticus for her to investigate into them," Charlus said. "And can you guess what she found out? There was a police, or Muggle-equivalent law enforcement officer, who reported there where four Muggles found naked and unconscious in a local park half an hour before we left the restaurant. And the four victims' appearance matched the facial composites that I have sent her from the restaurant."

Turais gasped in alarm. Those four person were indeed suspicious. Four people Polyjuiced themselves as Muggles and dined at a restaurant where the Head Auror and his deputy were dining. This was raising all kinds of warning and concern for Turais.

"So are you in danger?" Turais asked worriedly. "Is the Head Auror in danger? Are you two targeted? Where were they following you? Why didn't they attack you?"

"Listen. I don't know the answer to any of the questions, Turais," Charlus admitted. "I was quite alarmed and terrified when I discovered that there were four Polyjuiced individuals with unknown intent right by my side the entire time. Two of them, I could have fought off. But four..."

"But do you think they are members of the Knights? Do you think they have anything to do with the attack on the Arkenstones? No Muggle attacks have ventured this far north yet. I refuse to believe this is a coincidence," Turais said immediately.

Charlus looked at Turais strangely.
"Um, Charlus?" Turais asked, puzzled by the expression on the man's face.

Charlus talked slowly as he kept his eyes on Turais. Turais was slightly unnerved from the intensity of his gaze. "Turais, you seem very knowledgeable about the Knights and their movements..."

Alarm bells were off in Turais' mind as he scrambled for an explanation.

"I started to keep a very close eye on current affairs, especially when it pertains to a group of people that has everything to gain from my death and might have a hand in my poisoning," Turais offered quickly.

Charlus' gaze immediately softened as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "Oh, of course you are. I am terribly sorry for dredging up those memories. I am just a bit on edge with everything that has happened."

"No worries," Turais said, relieved that Charlus bought the explanation.

"But yes... I do have... certain pieces of information... rumours if you will... that suggests the Knights might be implicated in some fashion... and that is also why I abandoned the crime scene and returned to Potter Manor today. I was worried that Fleamont and I were targets of subsequent attacks... but I can only know for certain once I return to the Auror Office. No promises there."

Turais nodded understandingly. "Please keep us posted with the latest."

"This, I can promise," Charlus said.

After Charlus and Orion left for the Ministry, the children were gathered in the sitting room as none of them wanted to return to their beds. The adults indulged them and allowed them to huddle around the fireplace in their pyjamas surrounded by thick blankets that resembled an impromptu sleep-over. However, the oppressive, joyless mood was palpable and none of them were capable of conjuring up any positive topics of conversation.

"I still can't believe Natalia and Noel's parents are really... just gone... Patrick, Winnie, gone. Just like that," Kaiden choked up as he leaned into Michael's shoulder, who had his arm wrapped around Kaiden's shoulders tightly.

Sirius and Regulus snuggled into Turais more closely while James and Alex laid nearby, observing the flames wordlessly as well. Kaiden's sniffing could be heard over the gentle cackling of the firewood. Even the flickering flames of the fireplace seemed depressed and its warmth, less prominent. Or perhaps this was only due to the chilling cold-blooded murder of the Arkenstones percolating in the back of all their minds.

"Do you think the bad wizards will be arrested?" Regulus asked quietly.

"I hope so..." Turais said as he wasted the flakes of dying amber sinking through the air into its metal grave. "I really hope so..."

However, Turais knew this was just the prelude to the reign of terror. There would be many more similar sleepless nights to come.

***
"The Wizengamot has voted to delay all votes until Wednesday," Orion reported to Fleamont. The entire household was assembled around the table with the notable exception of Charlus, who returned briefly to notify Fleamont to downgrade from a full lock-down to a partial lock-down. Multiple Aurors were stationed outside as well as inside the Manor for security purposes.

It was almost dawn. However, the skies showed no signs of light and, instead, decided to plunge further into the abyss of darkness.

"What resolutions were tabled during the debate, Orion?" Dorea asked as Orion drew up a wax-sealed scroll and handed it to Fleamont. Fleamont tapped the seal with his wand as the scroll glowed white and unraveled on its own. The parchment extended down the length of the table and spilled onto the carpet as it continued to roll away.

"Fleamont, this is the full recorded transcript of the session," Orion said as Fleamont scanned the document. "I have highlighted the four resolutions tabled and I will explain it in brief. The first proposal was made by Lord Malek Blumenthal. He suggests further expansion of the legal authorities wielded by the Aurors, including the usage of the Unforgivables in arresting criminals. He also suggests to suspend the writ of habeas corpus and numerous civil liberties -"

"Malek calls for war!" Fleamont frowned as his fists clenched the parchment tightly. "This is preposterous."

"I agree, yet he found enough support from his peers to advance the resolution to a vote," Orion said grimly. "Lord Belius Rivers proposes to commission an audit on the Department of Law Enforcement into the recent mishaps in the Auror Office."

"An audit only in name," Fleamont scoffed and shook his head. "The bureaucracy will doom the institution from its creation. It will be neither independent nor impartial and will definitely not be able to uncover the truth. Lord Rivers seeks only appeasement, not truth."

"Lord Grant Marmont proposed to levy stricter restrictions on Dark magics and increasing the penalties on the existing criminal code," Orion said.

"Ever so industrious. This must be the most palatable resolution of the four - safest option, at least," Fleamont said calmly as Orion nodded in affirmation. "But the current restrictions and penalties are more than sufficient. If these do not deter criminal intents, then nothing will."

"The fourth and final resolution was proposed by Lord Hector Fawley. He started with quite an..." Orion flourished his hand as he searched for an appropriate term, "an ..."

Fleamont arched an eyebrow curiously and tapped the parchment, causing it to speed between his fingers. Then, it stopped abruptly. Fleamont adjusted his monocle and peered down at the transcript.

"Hector says... ‘Lord Black and Lord Malfoy currently have unchecked power over the judicial branch..." Fleamont orated as his lips turned thinner by the word, "... those families that actively seek to obstruct the will of its populace and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil’ - " Turais winced at the words. " - Quite the accusation. Completely unhelpful in the current situation and only serves to inflame the tension in the chamber."
Orion gave Fleamont a piercing glare but nodded in agreement. Orion continued, "Lord Fawley advocates for a public condemnation of the Knights of Walpurgis and designating them as a terrorist group, which would subject all its members and affiliates to investigation and continual monitoring for an indefinite period of time. It will also freeze all assets of suspected members."

"This will have immediate foreseeable implications on Malfoy's allies, and possibly yours," Fleamont analyzed as he continued to scrutinize the print. "I can see the Chief Warlock's fingerprints all over this. Well, it is quite apparent that, in this particular instance, dear Hector is but the Chief Warlock's mouthpiece," Fleamont sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. He pointed his wand at the scroll as it started to roll itself up.

Fleamont smiled with a hint of melancholy and irony as if he was reminded of a bittersweet memory. "In the end, we shall all yield to the wishes of our esteemed Chief Warlock." Orion listened curiously at Fleamont's less than favourable tone as he referred to Dumbledore.

Fleamont looked like he was lost in his train of thought before he turned to Orion and asked suddenly, "Orion, pray tell, who motioned for the postponement?"

"My father," Orion revealed.

"Arcturus is merely delaying the inevitable," Fleamont commented. "The chips have already fallen where they may. Hector Fawley's resolution shall pass the Wizengamot without a shadow of doubt."

"Actually," Orion added. "Lord Malfoy originally proposed for a longer delay, but my father did not lend his support."

Fleamont looked intrigued and hummed thoughtfully, the glint in his monocle focused sharply at Orion. After a few moments, his expression cleared up as he stood up with the large scroll in his arm. "I look forward to the Wednesday session. I am intrigued as to what Arcturus has planned. However, can I reliably say that Fawley's resolution will be passed by an even larger majority?"

Orion remained impassive. However, Turais could tell that Orion was acting like the equivalent of a unicorn caught at wand-point. Fleamont must have accurately accessed the entire situation.

"Don't act so surprised, Orion," Fleamont said as he placed his free hand on Orion's shoulder. "I have been in the chamber for decades and something has yet to take me by surprise. But I shall have to thank you again for your aid today. I hope the experience was not too jarring."

"That would be the understatement of the century," Orion grimaced.

"And what you said was not even a hyperbole," Fleamont said. "I can imagine the shocked face around the chamber. I'm sorry for placing you in such a predicament. However, I could imagine that Lord Black is quite pleased to find that tomorrow's headlines will be void of his family's mentions after the scene Hector made."

"Indeed, Fleamont," Orion responded mildly. "However, I understood the consequences when I agreed to offer my services."

"Regardless, it was very courageous of you and what you have done was not for the faint of heart," Fleamont smiled. "I cannot thank you enough."

Orion's gaze slipped from Fleamont's face to Turais'. "I suppose I found that buried cache of
"courage today."

"Indeed, you have."

"But whatever I have experienced today cannot be compared to the pain and suffering that your family is currently going through," Orion said as he looked around the table. Beneath the table, Orion held Turais' hand tightly as if he was planning to never let go. "I cannot imagine what you are experiencing right now. I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank you for your kind words, Orion," Fleamont said as took off his monocle and he rubbed his eyes tiredly. "Euphemia and I are well-acquainted with them, but we were not close by any means. The same cannot be said for Charlus and Dorea, however..."

"I'm most worried about Charlus," Dorea said softly, her eyes were still red from tears. "He grew up with Patrick. They were each other's best man at their weddings. They are practically brothers and family. The bond they shared... I worry that he will not have time to process their deaths and that he will drown himself in his work to ignore the pain..."

Dorea started to sob again as the table felt silent once more. Orion walked over and sat beside her and pulled her into a side embrace. Dorea allowed it as she rested her head on his shoulder while she dabbed the corner of her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Everything will work out, Dorea," Orion muttered as he patted her shoulder. "You know as they all say, 'Everything looks better in the morning.'"

Dorea looked out to the window where the sun started to rise above the horizon. "Then I cannot wait for morning to come."

***

"How did grandfather react to your appearance in the chamber as Fleamont's proxy?" Turais asked the moment the door closed behind them.

"Not kindly," Orion grimaced. "Especially when he also realized that you spent the entire holiday with the Potters. And on top of that, when he found out all three of his grandsons were at Potter Manor."

Turais gulped.

"Regardless, you don't need to worry about it," Orion said firmly. "I'm your father and I will handle it."

Turais wanted to argue, but he saw Orion's determined expression and decided to stay silent.

"But I would like to remind you that the fallout from this is just beginning," Orion warned. "Even if the gossip between the two families does not make it to the headlines tomorrow, news of this would leak out eventually. At that time, you and Kaiden will be under more scrutiny than ever before..."
Turais could see the unspoken words that Orion was hinting at.

'I'm sorry for bringing trouble into your life,' Turais could see Orion's thoughts in his gaze. Turais reached out and gave Orion a hug, who returned the gesture fiercely.

"I'm proud of you, father. Don't doubt yourself."

Orion's embrace tightened by a fraction.

"Please stay safe in Hogwarts."

"I will."

Orion then sat down on the bed and motioned Turais to join him. "I need to tell you about your grandfather's plan in the Wizengamot so you are mentally prepared."

***

April 19, 1971 (Monday)

"Turais!" Jonty hissed as he entered the compartment where Alex and he sat opposite of each other by the window, in silence. "What on Earth happened this weekend?! The Arkenstones? Your father acting as proxy for Lord Potter -"

Jonty stopped talking abruptly as someone knocked on the door. "It's Wilkins," Jonty observed.

He let the fifth-year into the compartment.

"Uh, Black. I would like to tell you that Kaiden will not be coming back to school until later this week because... because Charlus and Dorea are organizing the Arkenstones’ funeral...” Michael breathed in deeply, “...and they wanted Kaiden to be there to support Natalia and Noel as they were close friends, of similar age, and all that...”

Turais nodded, "Of course, Wilkins. Thank you for the heads up."

Michael gave Turias a pinched smile before he left the compartment.

Jonty eyed Turais carefully before he fell silent, which Turais was grateful for. For the entire train ride, he largely kept to himself on the train ride to Hogwarts. Despite his nervousness, it was his second nature by now to outwardly express a calm and indifferent demeanour. Regardless of whether his friends knew that it was just a mask or not, they kept their distance and provide Turais with some much needed space and silence.

Upon arrival at the Hogsmeade Station, Turais deliberately held back from the rest of the school. But even then, he could imagine a hundred pairs of eyes looking at them curiously and the constant buzz of chatter with him as the subject of gossip.

This did not improve as he reached the castle, especially when Dumbledore stared at him with such intense scrutiny that he felt his soul was scanned thoroughly. However, Turais had learnt to
masterfully tune everyone out from all the years of training. He then redoubled his efforts to strengthen his mask for he cannot afford to show signs of weakness in the Slytherin House of all places.

The Arkenstone twins' absence was addressed during the opening address. Dumbledore, once again, called for unity. Yet, his advice rung hollow and merely felt inadequate to describe the gnawing pain that clawed in his mind.

***

April 20, 1971 (Tuesday)

Turais gasped as woke up drenched in sweat. Breathing heavily, he registered the gentle snores from the other boys in the room as he tried to calm down his racing heart.

A light shuffle of fabrics sounded beside him.

"Are you alright?" Alex's voice croaked out.

"I'm fine," Turais swallowed. "Just a nightmare. Go back to bed."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No... nightmares never hurt anyone before," Turais whispered.

"Okay... " Alex let off a yawn before the blankets shuffled again.

Turais looked at the sleeping figure before he tried to return to his sleep. But it never came.

***

Jonty cursed as he read the cover story on today's newspaper. They were sitting by the Black Lake instead of eating in the Great Hall this morning because Turais knew that the news of Arcturus' actions in the Wizengamot would create quite the stir.

Turais knew that today's front page headline would say "MALFOY AWARE OF ATTACKS?! BLACK'S RIGHTEOUS FURY LEADS TO DECLARATION OF KNIGHTS AS TERRORISTS?"

"Turais, I'm guessing that you knew this was happening already, didn't you?" Jonty asked once he placed the newspaper down. Turais nodded as he munched on a ham and cheese sandwich.

"Of course you did. You woke up early to get food and steered clear of any students this morning."

"Well, I wouldn't say this didn't work out perfectly for us," Jonty continued. "By tying the
Malfoys to the Knights, your poisoning will be connected to all the Muggle attacks and the murder of the Arkenstones. This implies that the Malfoys are working together with the Knights to eliminate both the Black alliance and the Light alliance. Lord Black can practically do whatever he wants because he has all the sympathy votes from your poisoning - the righteous fury. So convenient..." Jonty's eyes turned thoughtful.

Orion revealed to Turais that Arcturus had successfully gathered evidence of close ties between key allies of the Malfoy alliance, namely the Averys and the Notts with the Knight of Walpurgis. While the evidence on its own was circumstantial at best and nothing damning, but given the context of Turais' recent poisoning case and the murder of the Arkenstones, people would inevitably draw the damning conclusion that the Malfoys were somehow implicated in the entire situation.

Therefore, Arcturus postponed the vote so he could engineer a publicity stunt to paint a picture that placed Malfoy's alliance near the epi-centre of the entire conspiracy. This would give Arcturus and his alliance the excuse to vote for the resolution on Wednesday that would name the Knights of Walpurgis as a terrorist group. And no one could blame Arcturus for breaking from the Malfoys as his powerful Heir had just been a victim under the hands of Malfoy's key allies.

All in all, today's news was just a ruse so Arcturus could deal a powerful blow at Malfoy's credibility and political influence through the Ministry's might.

Jonty whistled appreciatively. "Lord Black really has all his angles covered. The Malfoys cannot even accuse the Blacks in return because you were poisoned and no one in the right mind would ever risk their powerful Heir's life for some flimsy accusation. So the Malfoys will have to dig themselves out of this trap that Lord Black laid down in the hard way."

"But isn't this defamation?" Alex said softly. "Smearing the Malfoys with no real proof?"

"What they did to us is a thousand times worse than what we are doing to them!" Jonty said angrily as Alex cowered.

"Hey, Jonty," Turais said calmly. "Don't raise your voice. The volume of your voice does not dictate the strength of your argument."

Jonty paused and lowered the volume. He hissed, "They poisoned Turais! They bullied and hit you! They terrorized the entire school! What did we do now? We just told the world something that we suspected them of doing all along. If they are truly innocent, they will be able to defend their case. I can't believe you are defending them, Alex!"

"I'm not..." Alex said weakly. "You are right, Jonty. I'm sorry..."

Jonty harrumphed as Turais eyed his two friends warily.

The final match between the Slytherins and Hufflepuffs was in two weeks' time. Therefore, they had their special Quidditch practice session today, as well as on every single day afterwards until match day. The schedule was planned for since the beginning of term, but Turais worried if
this intense workload would take a toll of Michael, especially considering Natalia's absence.

But Michael seemed even more determined to follow his plan, citing the need to train the replacement Chaser, Richard Harper, quickly up to speed in order to be competitive for a chance at the Cup.

"Cap!" Cornfoot shouted as he raced through the gates of the Quidditch Pitch.

"Cornfoot, you're late!" Michael yelled as he mounted his broom. "Get your arse on the broom and warm up!"

"Cap!" Cornfoot gasped as he reached them. "Potter has just returned to Hogwarts -" Michael froze. "- and he has cancelled all their practice sessions for this entire week."

After a moment of silence Michael growled, "Is that all?"

"Well, I just thought you'd want to know -" Cornfoot faltered. "- about Potter -"

"Now stop talking at get in the air!" Michael shouted as he shot into the sky with his Beater's bat.

The tense exchange between the two Beaters foreshadowed an extremely tense practice session. Michael, himself, was evidently distracted the entire time. He kept mixing up the signals and tactics while the confused players flew in disorganized formations, unsure of what their captain wanted.

Harper, the fourth-year replacement Chaser for Natalia, was particularly lost as this was his first practice with the starting line-up. He frequently executed his moves poorly due to a mix of nerves and unclear instructions from Michael, but the latter contributed most to his mistakes, if Turais was to tell the truth. In any case, the boy was left to face the full brunt of the captain's wrath.

"I said go LEFT!" Michael shouted at the panicked boy. "Why were you half a pitch away from Pyrites?"

"But you said -" Harper squeaked.

"One more mistake and you are off the team!" Michael shouted as the boy blanched.

"Chop chop, Pyrites! Get the Quaffle moving!" Michael bellowed, "Pass it to Montague - Yes! There you go! - Now pass it back to Arkenst-"

Michael faltered mid-sentence as the entire team winced. Michael closed his eyes and collected himself before continuing as if nothing happened.

"Harper! What are you doing sitting there?! Get ready to receive the pass!" Michael shouted. "Montague, pass the damn Quaffle! The octogenarian Chasers play faster than you!"

Practice ended shortly after and Michael fled the Quidditch Pitch at record speed leaving Harper alone to do the cleaning up. Turais spotted the Chaser struggling to keep the volatile Bludger under his hand as he worked on the restraints. He went over and assisted him wordlessly. With two pairs of hands, they made quick work of the task.

"Thank you, Black," Harper said as he tapped his wand on the combination lock of the equipment room door. The lock scrambled itself as they walked away.
"No worries," Turais said with a wave. As he walked past Arkenstone's locker, his eyes wandered to the family photos that were Spellotaped on the front. Turais' stomach clenched at the sight of the happy family of seven waving at him with brilliant smiles on their faces.

"Oh... uhm... I'm sorry..."

The note of vulnerability in his voice took him by surprise. Turais turned around to face the boy questioningly.

Harper shrugged awkwardly as he avoided Turais' eyes. "I'm sorry that I am here... as a Chaser... I have played terribly yesterday and today -" His eyes wandered to something over Turais' shoulder. " - I know you are all just putting up with me -"

"No, you are playing fine. I know that Michael had been mixing up his calls so you were confused. Those are not your fault. I think he is just struggling after what happened to Natalia. It has nothing to do with you," Turais said comfortingly.

“Thank you, Black,” Harper said softly.

"If you have any question, you can always find me," Turais gave him a reassuring smile before he turned to leave.

***

Turais came across a series of weak sobs as he headed was heading back to the Slytherin common room. In equal parts of curiosity and worry, Turais followed the source of the voice to one of the rarely-ventured halls. There, he spotted Kaiden sitting on a stone bench with Michael by his side, in his full Quidditch uniform. His Beater's Bat was lying on the ground along with the rest of his belongings, strewn messily beside him without the least of care.

So this was where Michael went to in a hurry.

“How are you holding up?” Michael's voice was very gentle and soft, despite the hint of scratchiness and gruff in his voice. It was nothing like Turais had ever heard from the boy.

“I’m... I’m not, Mike,” Kaiden said with a sniffle. “It’s been hard without you there. The funeral preparations. Seeing Natalia and Noel there with no tears left to cry... I... just... I still can’t believe they’re actually gone, Mike. They were just over for dinner the night before... all healthy and without a scratch... I don’t understand...” Kaiden broke down into sobs again.

Turais heard a ruffle of fabrics as the bench as Michael tugged Kaiden under his chin. A slow rhythmic pat sounded softly. Kaiden’s sob was now muffled as he tugged his head into Michael’s shoulder. Turais’ heart clenched and twisted with pain for him as well.

“I keep having nightmares about just how easy it was... that I would be mourning my father along with them... planning his funeral instead of helping him plan the funeral for Patrick and Winnie... how easily I could have lost him because I couldn't wait one night to ask for the telescope... or why I was so stupid to not pack my bags properly. I... I... I almost killed him, Mike. And I'm so scared..." Kaiden sniffed. "It's all my fault..."
"No... don't think like that, Kay," Michael murmured.

"But I can't help but do so," Kaiden said hotly. "If I did not ask him to get the telescope... then he would have never seen what happened at the Arkenstones'... then he would never have gone to investigate... and he would not have been exposed to potential danger... and I feel terrible because I knew my dad was trying to save his best friend... but I just wanted him safe... I didn't want him anywhere near the house even if Patrick and Winnie were dying inside..."

"Kaiden, you cannot think like this," Michael said tenderly as he continued to pat Kaiden's shoulder. "That is a slippery slope."

"But I feel so guilty..." Kaiden said shakily. "I almost killed my dad, Mike... I almost killed him..."

"All that matters right now is that your father is safe. He's not in any danger right now -"

"But he is! Or he will be!" Kaiden said. "And we all know it. I keep telling everyone how happy I am for my father... that he was promoted to Deputy Head Auror... but I'm so scared..."

Kaiden's voice turned into a scared whisper. "I'm so scared that his job is going to get him killed. I don't know what I will do if he's gone... what mom is going to do..."

Michael cooed Kaiden as though he was a spooked child. "Hey, hey, it's okay. You have just been surrounded by too many things that remind you of death. Of course it would affect your mental state..."

"But you didn't see the looks on Natalia and Noel's faces..." Kaiden's voice was frantic. "They were haunted... theirs eyes when gaunt and lifeless... I've never seen them like that in my entire life... it was like they were animated corpses without a soul. I don't want to become like them, Mike, I don't... I don't want to plan my father's funeral..."

"You won't, Kay," Michael said firmly.

"You can't promise that," Kaiden whispered in a hushed voice. "No one can."

"Everything will be alright," Michael said. "This will all pass."

They sat there in silence for a long time before Kaiden extracted himself from Michael's protective arms.

"Thank you," Kaiden said softly as moved to wipe his eyes. But Michael was faster as he pulled out his handkerchief and started to dab the cloth on his face. "Thank you for everything."

"I'm sorry I can't do more..." Michael sighed.

"You're doing more than enough, Mike... I just... I can't talk to my dad about me when he is barely holding himself... Patrick is -" Kaiden's breath hitched, "- Patrick was his best friend forever... I can't imagine how he's feeling right now..."

Michael's hand stilled. "I think he would still want you to tell him how you're doing. He's your father, of course he wants to know how this is affecting you. I mean... I would want to know..."

Kaiden froze as he clutched Michael on the shoulder. "I'm so sorry, Mike. I didn’t even write to you for the past three days... I wasn't thinking straight..."
“Hey, hey, hey. Don’t worry about it, Kay,” Michael said. “You’re here now. That’s all that matters. I know you’ve been busy consoling Natalia and Noel... and you know how I tend to worry needlessly...”

“Yeah, you really like to play mother-hen around me,” Kaiden said, finally regaining a hint of levity in his voice. He reached out to Michael and initiated the hug this time. “But I really don’t mind it.”

“I don’t do that for everyone,” Michael feigned annoyance. ”Only you."

“I know,” Kaiden said fondly as he stared at Michael’s face.

There was a shift in the boy’s gaze as he stared at Michael with great intensity. “And Mike... I just... uhm... just want to run something by you... and you can definitely say no, but I really think I should tell you because I think...”

“Kay, you’re my best friend,” Michael said as Kaiden froze. “You can tell me anything.”

There was an awkward pause, then Kaiden spoke with a strangled voice and strained edge, “Thank you, Mike...” he released the Slytherin from his embrace. “Ahem - Actually... I forgot what I was about to tell you...” Kaiden gave off an unconvincing laugh as he wiped his face.

“What are you sure you’re alright?” Michael asked.

“Definitely, I’m much better,” Kaiden said quickly, the edge persisted. “Thanks to you.”

“Do you want me to walk you up to the Gryffindor tower?” Michael asked as he reached out. Kaiden swatted his hand away and stood up shakily.

“No, no. It’s out of your way and I... I just want to go for a walk and... and clear my mind,” Kaiden said, clearly flustered.

“But I don’t mind at all,” Michael said. “I always walk you up -”

“Mike, please,” Kaiden’s tone turned pleading. “Just... stay here for a moment. I’ll walk alone. Just... stay here and don't move...”

Kaiden bolted past Turais’ hiding spot at a speed that was just slightly below that of a frantic escape. Michael watched on with a pained expression. When Kaiden turned the corner, he slumped back onto the bench and buried his face in his hands. Then, he gave off a frustrated groan and he slammed his hand on the bench.

"Damn it," Turais heard the boy mutter, "Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

Michael let off a shuddering breath.

"Nat, you're usually here to tell me what to do... what should I do... what happens to all of us now... I can't believe you're not here..."

"Kaiden could have died that night... if Charlus did not go back that night... it would have been Kaiden who went... and that idiot would have done the same thing and raced over to your house, Nat.... and I don't know what to do with myself if Kaiden died..."

Michael gulped.

"I feel so guilty for being relieved that it was Charlus who went... and not Kaiden... but how
can I weigh one life over the other..."

After a long period of laboured breathing, the Slytherin captain stood up from the bench, turned around, and knelt in front of it. He placed his elbows on the stone bench and clasped his hands together. Dipping his forehead and resting it on his hands, the boy started to shake as his eyes were glistening with unshed tears pooling at the corners.

He whispered a reverent prayer. But the last part was what caught Turais by surprise.

"... and I pray that you please keep Kaiden safe from any possible harm. I will do my utmost best but I fear it may not be enough. So please provide me with strength and wisdom necessary to weather any storms ahead. Amen."

***

"Charlus, watch out!" Turais screamed as he ran towards the man.

Charlus was running towards Turais as a wall of darkness trailing behind him closely, engulfing everything into oblivion. His robes were in tatters and his body was battered and bruised, but he was still alive and breathing. Turais let out a sigh of relief as his hands wrapped around the man's forearms. But he only allowed himself a moment of rest.

"Charlus, we have to go!" Turais shouted as he dragged Charlus behind him. He shot off Shield charms behind them and blasted their way through brick walls and buildings. Just as Turais thought they were in the clear -

"Turais! In front -"

Turais barely registered the figure with his wand pointing directly at him when Charlus jerked Turais backwards and spun him around, shielding Turais from the man's view.

Then, Charlus' body was enveloped in green light as Turais could do nothing but scream.

"NOOOO!"

Turais caught Charlus' slack, lifeless body as they both collapsed to the ground.

"No! I'm supposed to protect you. Not the other way around!" Turais shouted as tears streamed down his face. He clutched Charlus' body tightly. "No one is supposed to die because of me anymore!"

"What if you were the one who killed him?"

Turais looked up through his tear-clad eyes at the man who murdered Charlus only to find himself looking at a mirror image of himself.

The man twisted his features into a hideous, bone-chilling smirk.

"You are responsible for everyone's death, Harry Potter. You are the one who stood by and did nothing while the world crumpled and burnt around you -"

"NO! That's not true!" Turais shouted as he covered his ears, but the voice seemed to be
originating from inside his head.

"There is no one to blame except yourself -"

"NO! I have to wait so I can destroy all the Horcruxes once and for all!"

" - you can continue to deceive yourself. But we both know the truth."

The voice started to laugh maniacally.

"Shut up! SHUT UP!"

Turais whipped out his wand. He sent a "Confringo" at the man and the figure exploded, yet the voice continued to echo in Turais' mind.

"Look down, Turais. Look at all the deaths you could have prevented if you only acted."

"NO!" Turais shouted defiantly into the void. But suddenly, he felt as though someone was pushing his head down forcefully.

"Nonononono..." Turais sobbed as he felt his head slowly tipping lower and lower. Turais tried to close his eyes but he found that it was impossible to do so.

Turais looked down at Charlus' body only to find himself staring at Patrick's haunted expression. The face warped as turned into Winnie's horrified look as though she was frozen mid-scream. Then, it warped into the face of Dorea... Then Kaiden... and Euphemia... and Fleamont...

Chapter End Notes

The Orion-Fleamont scene is heavily influenced by a particular scene in Book 1 of Milton’s “Paradise Lost”.

I maintain that everyone should read it once in their life. So go check it out.

As always, thought and comments are always welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 35: Checkmate, is on schedule. Until next time.

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-06
Hey everybody,

Due to poor researching on my part, I have been incorrectly referring to Turais as "Heir Apparent" rather than "Heir Presumptive." In the system that has an Heir Apparent, the eldest son of Lord Black - in this case, Orion Black - has the claim to the Lordship with or without the birth of Turais.

However, in my story, I use the system of Heir Presumptive in which an heir's claim can be superseded by the birth of another heir. Since Arcturus named Turais as his Heir Presumptive, this means that Turais *technically* has higher seniority and first claim to the Lordship over his own father, who is only an heir like Sirius and Regulus. So if Arcturus dies, Turais, not Orion, will assume the position of Lord Black.

This is important because Arcturus consciously made Turais the Heir Presumptive upon his birth. Imagine how Orion feels when Arcturus named his eldest grandson, a screaming baby, as "more worthy" of the title of Lord Black than him.

I have edited the previous chapters for consistency and to add further emphasis. Apologies for the error.

With that done, enjoy the new update!

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-13

See the end of the chapter for more notes
During yesterday’s emergency session due to the death of Lord Patrick Arkenstone, former
Minister for Magic and current Lord Hector Fawley delivered a scathing address that accused the
Black-Malfoy coalition and the Knights of Walpurgis as the “axis of evil”.

The following is an excerpt of the jaw-dropping floor speech:

“The Honourable Lords Black and Malfoy currently have unchecked power over the
judicial branch of our government in addition to their perpetual vendetta against the
Ministry from carrying out its fundamental functions, which is to represent and protect
the Wizarding community at large. Those families that actively seek to obstruct the
will of its populace and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil which threatens
the peace of Britain and the rest of Europe…”

Lord Arcturus Black responded swiftly afterwards:

"I would like to remind everyone within these walls that my eldest grandson and heir
presumptive of my family was poisoned not a month ago. And the families of which
their sons have coordinated the poisoning attempt - the Averys, the Dolohovs, and the
Notts - have been shown to have close ties with the Knights. The Honourable Lord
Fawley will, with his sound mind and keen deduction skills, soon note that we are the
last people who would be in league with a belligerent organization that attempted to
murder one of our brightest and most promising members of a generation."

Amidst a heavy backlash from both sides of the chamber, Lord Hector Fawley retracted his
comment later that afternoon and issued an official apology to Lord Arcturus Black.

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April 21, 1971 (Wednesday)

"Here you go, Black,” A hand on his shoulder shook him out of his reverie. Turais turned to
look at the replacement Chaser as he pressed a small, sealed glass vial into his palm.

“Dreamless Sleep?” Turais asked as Harper sat beside him. “I have no use for this, Harper.”

"Are you certain?” the boy crossed his arms.

"Absolutely,” Turais said as he held the vial out. "I'm fine."

“You are most definitely not fine, Black. I have seen you play during practices before and I
can tell you are not up to par - you even let a Snitch slip from your grasp today -”

Turais snapped his head towards Harper in alarm.

“ - don’t worry, I don’t think anyone saw it other than me,” Harper said hastily as he lifted
both hands up in surrender. “I won’t tell cap either, although I am surprised that he hasn’t voiced
your obvious drop in performance. But he seems too distracted with my ‘abysmal showings’ these
days to notice it.” Harper cracked a grin.

“What is the meaning of all this?” Turais’ eyes narrowed. Harper seemed like a decent fellow
from their limited interactions, but Turais would not call him his friend yet and he would not
discount Harper as yet another typical, conniving Slytherin.

Harper combed his right hand through his pale brown curls and rubbed the back of his neck. Then he sighed.

"Believe it or not, Black. I really do view you not only as a teammate, but as a friend," Harper explained. "Your sense of righteousness and selflessness is uncommon in a Slytherin. I think we need more of that in this House... unity and kindness, especially during these trying times," Harper held his gaze steady as he said firmly, "You will have an enormous role to play in the future, an outsized one even considering that you are a future Lord Black."

Turais evaluated the stiff and still figure in front of him. His hands were clasped tightly together in front as though he was awaiting Turais' judgement.

"Thank you, Harper. I'm flattered -" Turais said as he toyed with the tiny vial.

"Black, please. I might be speaking out of turn here, but I know you are suffering from something. I don’t know what it is, but you were like this ever since you returned from Easter holiday. I’m talking about you at this point, not about winning the upcoming match or the Quidditch Cup, but your well-being," he said softly. "It is slowly eating you up inside and you need to do something about it. At least talk to your friends about it. If you can’t do that, you should find someone you trust to confide in before it consumes you."

Turais fell silent, pondering what the Chaser just said. "Thank you. I will consider your advice."

Harper smiled encouragingly before he stood up and headed over to his locker to pack up. A few minutes later, he appeared in front of Turais once more with his broom and knapsack. "Black, I’m going to head off now. And I promise I won’t say a word about this to anyone."

Turais nodded at him and Harper left the changing room. Turais sat there in silence and darkness for a few minutes longer, pondering on the recurring nightmare he had experienced for the third time that month, before he finally left the changing room.

***

April 22, 1971 (Thursday)

"The vote on Lord Fawley's proposal did not happen yesterday! Your grandfather has decided to delay the vote for two weeks citing that he needs time to consider the facts!" Jonty said as he read the paper. "It was the exact amount of time that Lord Malfoy initially proposed, but this time the Light alliance yielded!"

"But why did he do that?" Alex asked. "Everyone is saying that your grandfather will most definitely be supporting my cousin's proposal."

"I have no idea," Turais lied.

In fact, he knew exactly why because he was the one who requested Arcturus to do so with an urgent owl post on Tuesday night. In the same letter, he requested for Arcturus' presence at the Arkenstones' funeral as he had something of utmost importance to discuss with him regarding the
situation in the Group of Seven.

"There is a reason for everything," Jonty said knowingly as he gazed at Turais. "Isn't there, Turais?"

Turais elected to respond with an ambiguous shrug of shoulders. Jonty wisely did not raise the question again.

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April 25, 1971 (Sunday)

"Natalia, Noel. I am so sorry for your losses," Turais said softly. The twins stood numbly before him as he continued, "I have such fond memories of your parents despite only meeting them briefly on several occasions. But I know they will be missed by everyone who knew them and I know that their legacies of kindness will continue to live on."

"Thank you, Turais," Natalia said softly. Turais met Noel's gaze as they nodded in silent acknowledgement before he stepped away with a heavy heart.

As a private service, the funeral was a quiet affair held near the lake on the Potter Manor grounds. Five closed caskets were placed near the lake with a podium in front of them followed by a few rows of seats. Turais was seated with Orion and Arcturus in the third row. Natalia and Noel were ashen-faced, with sorrow, disbelief, and denial etched deeply into their features. In front of him, he saw Kaiden was sniffling and trembling between Michael and his parents. Several other students close to the siblings also received special permission from their Heads of House to attend the ceremony with their families to pay their final respects.

The NEWTs were usually held in early May, which was in two weeks' time. And typically after the exams were finished, all seventh-year classes were canceled and the students would have one month of free time to enjoy their final moments as Hogwarts students before their graduation ceremony. Therefore, the twins had decided write their exams at the Ministry and and only return to Hogwarts for their graduation ceremony. They would utilized that spare month to settle their family's affairs and to attempt to rebuild their lives away from the scrutiny of their peers.

After the funeral, the crowd headed towards the burial service when Turais walked up to the Potters.

"I know that besides Natalia and Noel, you are the most affected by their passing," Turais said. "If there is anything I can do to help, please do not hesitate to ask."

"That is very kind of you, Turais," Charlus gave Turais a sorrowful smile. "I think this pain is something only time can dull."

Turais nodded understandingly. "Kaiden, if you need someone to talk to in Hogwarts, I just want you to know that I am always available."

Kaiden nodded minutely before Turais headed back to his own family.

"Grandfather, may I have a word with you in private?" Arcturus nodded as he guided them away from the crowd to a secluded spot on the Potter Manor grounds. It felt disrespectful to be
discussing political squabbles in such a solemn, sorrowful event and Turais had to actively shake off his guilty feelings.

When they were a sufficient distance away, Arcturus turned to his grandson, "You said you have a plan to topple Malfoy as the leader of Slytherin, what is it?"

"Indeed, grandfather. For that to happen it requires me to have at least a working relationship with Malfoy. Therefore, the postponement of the vote in the Wizengamot is critical to my plan."

"What is your plan?"

"I am sure you are aware that the Charter states that whenever a student withdraws from the school, he or she immediately relinquishes their position in the Group," Turais said as Arcturus nodded. "And you also know that a sitting Leader can only be removed by a unanimous vote by all regular members."

"Yes," Arcturus said. "The regular members of the Group currently are you, Narcissa, Alexander Fawley, Evan Rosier, and the... two murderers -" Arcturus said the last two words with immense contempt. " - In order to overthrow Malfoy, you will need all the regular members to vote against Malfoy. And as you have mentioned in your previous letters, Malfoy has refused to remove the two members until he could induct someone of his preference. How do you plan on proceeding?"

"I have reviewed the Charter rules thoroughly and I might have a slightly unorthodox solution," Turais revealed. "The exact language of the Charter states that 'the removal of the Chair seeks the unanimous consent of all sitting regular members of the Group.' It explicitly states that all inducted members must vote in favour, however, never did it mention anything regarding the number of sitting members. What I am suggesting is that when Malfoy eventually replaces Avery and Dolohov’s seats, he will have to first officially remove them from the Group. For that brief window, the full membership of the Group drops from seven to five. Then, I could use that time to motion for a vote of no confidence."

Arcturus’ expression turned thoughtful. "During that window, you will command three of the four available votes. Then I can command Narcissa to vote against Malfoy and provide you with the unanimous consent required."

Arcturus looked at Turais, impressed. "However, Malfoy might be aware of this already. That is why he is adamant to keep those vacancies in place. By not filling the positions, the number of sitting regular members remains at six." 

"This is a bet I am willing to gamble on," Turais said. "If Malfoy is aware of this, then he will block my suggestion and nothing changes. However, if Malfoy is caught unaware of this, we have everything to gain."

"You are quite right, Turais," Arcturus commented. "From where we currently stand, there is no harm in trying. And it would be poetic justice to defeat the Malfoys on something they pride themselves in - complete command of procedural rules. I dare say I would thoroughly enjoy Abraxas' sulk if your plan does succeed..."

"In this case, grandfather, I will need you to send a reminder to Rosier to ensure that he will vote in my favour. But Narcissa’s vote is what would I also like to discuss with you today. I could have written to you and requested you to command Narcissa to vote with me, but I do not want to put undue stress on her, especially when she is in a relationship with Malfoy -" Arcturus frowned at his words. " - I would like to work around the situation, which would complicate matters."
“What are you suggesting, Turais?”

“I would like you to withdraw Narcissa Malfoy from Hogwarts temporarily. The timing will be of utmost importance.”

“Continue,” Arcturus said.

“Before the meeting on Friday, I would like to arrange for Narcissa to be called to the Headmaster's Office so she will not be present for the meeting,” Turais said. "The Charter states that once scheduled hour of meeting is reached, any member can request for the meeting to start. And if a quorum is reached, the Chair does not have the power to block the meeting from beginning. Hence, with four members present, I will be able to force Lucius Malfoy to begin the meeting regardless of what happens. Once Malfoy begins the meeting, the first order of business is to remove Avery and Dolohov’s seats. When that is completed, the group's membership will drop to five -”

"Then I will formally withdraw Narcissa Malfoy from Hogwarts. As she is no longer a student in Hogwarts, her seat in the Group will automatically be removed, dropping the membership even further down to only four," Arcturus followed along.

"Four is the minimum requirement for a quorum. Then, I will immediately call for a vote of no confidence on the Leader, which requires the unanimous assent from all regular members. Alex, Rosier, and I are the only three regular members in the group and I will be able to remove Malfoy from his position. This is why you must be able to apply pressure on Rosier's family to ensure he will vote with me," Turais said.

"This plan might work, but I do not enjoy the numerous moving parts that circles Narcissa’s vote," Arcturus nodded thoughtfully as he stroked his chin. "In addition, once you become Leader, you will not be able to fill the vacancies because the confirmation will require Alexander, Rosier, and Malfoy's approval. And Malfoy will most likely not approve any candidate that is not firmly in his camp."

Turais knew the answer to this in his mind. But the answer would not please Arcturus, so Turais would have to lie to him.

"I don’t want Narcissa to be unduly harmed by my scheme. This was the best way to victimize her in the eyes of Malfoy to she would not bear the blame. As for the vacancy issue, I cannot think of a way out of this impasse yet," Turais said. "But we are currently in a deadlock with the nominations as things stand. So I would rather be the leader who controls the nomination if both outcomes are identical. It would be an improvement of my political standing and a severe blow to Malfoy's position."

"Of course," Arcturus said. "I agree with this pragmatic approach."

"Splendid. So let us figure out the logistics and execution of this plan, grandfather," Turais said.

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Turais, Michael, and Alex had just entered the Slytherin common room after returning from the funeral when Malfoy indicated the Slytherin captain to join him by the fireplace. Turais
lingered, however, worried about Michael's mental state.

“Carmichael, how are our chances in securing the Quidditch Cup this year now that Arkenstone is replaced by Harper?” Malfoy asked as he lounged in his throne seat while the others sat around him.

Michael’s jaw clenched slightly before opening his mouth to respond. “If all goes well next weekend and we manage a landslide victory against Hufflepuff. I would say, highly likely.”

Turais noted that his voice was gruff but with an unusual simmering tension beneath the tone.

“Good, I would be most displeased to not have the Quidditch Cup once in my tenure as Leader, especially when the Potter boy is wallowing in his sorrow. I always wondered if he had a romantic relationship with Arkenstone, I guess this confirmed my suspicion -” Michael's fists tightened. " - and we must kick him while he’s still down. You certainly understand my position, Carmichael?”

Turais saw Michael’s hands clenched into two tight fists as he fought to keep his emotions in check. Turais didn’t blame him for he was struggling with his boiling rage as well. How dare Malfoy be so desensitized to human lives?! Turais had always thought Lucius Malfoy was the most redeemable Death Eater, but apparently his humanity only extended to his family in any timeline. But Turais should not have been surprised with this conclusion.

“Carmichael?” Malfoy asked again when he did not respond.

“Understood, Lucius,” Michael gritted up with extra gruffness. “I shall retire to my room now, we have a training session in a few hours.”

“Of course, Carmichael,” Malfoy said calmly. Michael nodded as he stood up and walked past Malfoy’s throne towards the staircase when Malfoy shot out his cane and tapped his shoulder to halt him. Malfoy looked up to the tense captain as he spoke softly, “Carmichael, I have never voiced my opposition in regards to your unsavoury friendship with a Gryffindor - the Gryffindor Quidditch captain no less. But I will not tolerate it if it interferes with your loyalty to Slytherin and me.”

Michael breathed harshly before he gave a curt nod. Malfoy smirked and lifted his cane while Michael walked off.

Malfoy met Turais' sharp gaze and smirked.

"Lucius," Turais said, carefully keeping his anger at bay, "I wish to discuss the question regarding nominations."

"There is nothing to discuss, Turais," Malfoy drawled. "Unless... you have altered your previous stance."

"I am willing to compromise," Turais said. "I will seek to control the nomination of only one out of the two vacancies."

"Why the sudden change of heart?” Malfoy asked. Turais realized that there was genuine chance that Malfoy overlooked the rules of the Charter.

"It is a simple arithmetic problem and political reality, Lucius," Turais said, controlling his growing excitement. "As it stands, I don't have a chance to repeal any of your resolutions and we
will be in a deadlock in any possible scenario. Therefore, I have decided to simply wait you out. By gaining one seat now, I will command three out of the six votes on my side upon your graduation from Hogwarts. Then, I will be able to control the process of electing the next Leader of Slytherin. And by then, you will be moving onto grander aspirations.”

"Indeed," Malfoy said as he turned thoughtful.

"I will await for your consideration," Turais said.

"That is not necessary," Malfoy said smugly. "I have decided to accept your offer."

"Thank you, Lucius."

Turais motioned Alex as they took the long route around the sofa to avoid walking past Malfoy. He wasn’t certain if he would be able to rein in his temper in another confrontation. Turais whispered to Alex that he wanted to check on Michael and Alex nodded as he headed for their room.

Meanwhile, Turais slipped up the staircase and reached Michael’s room to check on him. He knocked on the door to no response. Then he opened the door only to find quills, ink jars, parchments, and books all scattered on the ground around the captain’s feet. He was hunching over his desk and clutching the edge with his hands tightly. His entire body was shaking with repressed rage.

Turais cast the regular spells around the room before approaching the aggrieved boy.

“Michael, are you -”

“NO! No, I’m not okay, Turais,” Michael spat while still staring at the stone wall covered with posters of various Quidditch players. “HE… He… He… did not even acknowledge the Arkenstones’ death. It was their funeral today! He knew where we were but he didn’t even care. He never asked for Natalia’s situation. It was only Quidditch, Quidditch, and Quidditch! And Kaiden… I can’t even defend Kaiden from those salacious slander spewing from those putrid lips and that toxic mind. I’m so useless!” Michael slammed his fist onto the wooden desk, which shook and vibrated under the intense impact.

“Why is our family so weak? Why am I so weak? I want to be able to yell at his face and tell him he’s wrong! But I can’t! I can’t, Turais!” Michael slammed his other fist onto the wooden desk even harder and threatened to split and splinter.

After a long moment when Turais saw that Michael had calmed down a bit. He said softly as he stepped closer to the older boy, “Michael, what if I told you that you have a chance to get back at Malfoy?”

“Turais, we’ve been through this. I can’t act against him because -”

“Because of your family, I know. I know that your sister and mother works as clerks in the High Court. I was wondering if... if they would be opposed to taking positions in the Grand Jury Court -” Michael turned around to look at Turais sharply for the first time. Turais straightened his back to show he had nothing to fear before continuing, “ - under Lord Black. And for your father to pledge his allegiance to my grandfather.”

Michael stared at Turais with a flurry of emotions that Turais cannot properly decipher. Finally, Michael spoke raggedly as those he was out of breath, “Tell me how Lord Black is any better than Lord Malfoy? We will merely be trading one puppeteer for another.”
"That is correct, Michael," Turais said calmly. Michael’s eyes widened in shock of the frakness of the little boy. “Your family will continue to be pawns in this political war. However, that is the reality of your status as a minor house.”

“Then why -” his rage was on the verge of over-spill.

“But,” Turais pressed over Michael’s interruption, “But… While your family’s political standing would not change overnight, with my offer, you will at least have me as an insider and a staunch ally within the House of Black. Currently, my words have immense sway over my grandfather. And after that… I am Heir Presumptive, the future Lord Black once my grandfather passes. Unless you foresee yourself allying with Lucius Malfoy, I am your better option politically in the long-term.”

Turais softened his tone and expression as he continued, “Michael, actions speak louder than words. You have seen who I am, what I’ve done, what I’ve said, and who I’ve allied with. Please consider them. I sincerely view you as a friend, as well as a potential political ally. If you decide to not ally with me, I will be disappointed but we will walk away as friends; at least, that is my wish. But please remember that you are not making this choice under duress.”

Michael remained silent as he continued to stare at Turais.

“Please feel free to consult your parents. You’re a good man, Michael, and I sincerely want what's best for you.”

Michael stared for a moment longer before he nodded.

“I’ll consider your words, Turais.”

“That’s all I ask,” Turais said.

Turais turned to leave the room. However, before he opened the door, he remembered he wanted to tell Michael something.

"Michael, one more thing," Turais said as the captain looked up from his folded hands. "Please give Richard Harper some reassurance during practice. From my observation, he melds well with Montague and Pyrites and is also very diligent. What he lacks right now is confidence and reassurance from his peers. He doesn't feel he belongs with the starting team considering he was thrust into N...Natalia’s shoes so abruptly with our final match so near. We must remedy that.”

Michael looked at Turais for a long while, assessing. "Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Turais. I will take care of that.”

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April 30, 1971 (Friday)

Malfy, Alex, Rosier, and Turais were all seated in the side chamber as the clock struck nine.

“Lucius, shall we start the meeting?” Turais asked calmly. He was fully aware of all the muscles that composed of his facial expression and body language. He cannot afford to lose the
slightest control over them.

“We should wait for Narcissa,” Malfoy said as he eyed the clock with a slight impatience, “I just saw her in the Great Hall a few minutes ago.”

“Lucius, we have already agreed on the two candidates. I would rather not sit around here wasting time when we have a quorum and when we have already agreed on the order of business,” Turais said.

“So I’ve heard,” Malfoy narrowed his eyes suspiciously. Turais returned with his unwavering gaze. "But I don’t mind the wait, Turais."

"In fact, I think you do mind, Lucius," Turais said as he leaned forward. Malfoy frowned at Turais’ challenge. "I have Quidditch tactical discussion with the team tonight to win you the Quidditch Cup that you have coveted for so long."

"Fine then. Let the meeting begin," Malfoy said. "The first order of business is removal of Janus Eliaxius Avery and Antonin Dolohov’s seats. As they have been arrested by the Aurors on felony charges and are unlikely to return, I motion for their permanent removal from the Group. As per the Charter, this motion requires the unanimous consent of all present members. Those in favour?"

Everyone around the chamber raised their hands dutifully as their seats crumbled into sawdust and then nothingness.

“As two of our members were removed, as outlined in the Charter, it is the Chair’s power to name the replacement candidates for induction. The candidates must be confirmed with a majority amongst the regular members, meaning that three members aside from me must vote for said candidate. The Chair recommends - what -” Malfoy continued when Narcissa Malfoy’s chair suddenly disintegrated beside the confused Leader.

Before Malfoy could respond, Turais immediately sprung into action and interrupted. “Lucius, I motion for a vote of no confidence on the Leader’s position.”

Malfoy just sat in his chair with his jaw hanging open mid-sentence. Turais would have to savour his expression afterwards for there was still business to conduct.

“Lucius, as per the Charter, the removal of the Leader from his position requires the unanimous consent of all sitting regular members when a quorum is met. There are currently three regular members and the Leader present, which meets the minimum requirement for a quorum. Therefore, those in favour of removing Lucius Abraxas Malfoy as Leader, effective immediately?” Turais said sternly.

Alex and Turais rose their hands. Rosier delivered the final blow as he raised his hand unwillingly. Lucius slumped in his seat surrounded by empty space.

“Unanimous assent among the regular members. Lucius Abraxas Malfoy is officially removed from the Leader’s position with his status reverted back to that of a regular member,” Turais hurried along. Suddenly, the magic in the room shifted as they felt a rush of magic fleeing from Malfoy and dissipating into the room. Now, there was a simmering layer of gold particles hovering over their heads. The Leader’s powers were now up for grabs as the magic recognized the removal of Lucius as Leader.

“A new Leader must be elected immediately after the removal of the previous Leader. I
recommend Turais Rigel Orion Black as the new Leader,” Alex said with a satisfied smirk, “As per the Charter, a majority of the regular members must support the recommendation to elect the new Leader. Those in favour?”

Alex, Rosier, and Turais rose their hands as Lucius continued to sit motionlessly. Whether he realized that his actions were futile or he was still in shock, Turais did not know. But he was glad for the silence from that boy all the same.

“Three votes in favour. A majority has been reached. Turais Rigel Orion Black is officially elected as the new Leader of the Group of Seven,” Alex said.

The layer of golden magic that hovered gently around their heads slowly concentrated and swirled above Turais. After a few moments, it descended onto Turais as he felt the magic settle upon him.

"How?" Malfoy asked.

"I read the Charter very carefully, Lucius," Turais smiled. "I am always willing to learn from those who are better, in moral and in ability. In your case, I cannot comment on your morality, but I will admit that you have a superior political mind. And I have decided that in order to become the best, I should at least follow the advice given by the best."

"I will not vote for any of the candidates you wish to put forth. Nor will I overturn any of the resolutions that have been passed," Malfoy hissed. "You may be leader but you will require all three of our votes. And I intend to always be the dissenting vote."

"I expect no less, Lucius," Turais said calmly as he linked his fingers together. "But I do not intend to overturn them. Nor do I intend to fill the remaining two seats, ever -" Malfoy's eyes widened as he finally understood Turais' goal. "I will be the last Leader of the Group of Seven."

"You dare break the tradition that rivals the history of the House itself - the very essence that defines our Noble House?!” Malfoy seethed in rage.

"If what I have seen within these walls for the past weeks was any indication, the destruction of this institution shall benefit us more than its existence," Turais countered. "A oligarchy built upon fear, violence, and cruelty has no place in Hogwarts or in society!"

"You speak like a deranged radical!" Malfoy said as he pointed an accusing finger at Turais. "This has been the way of life for centuries. Our sacred duty is to protect this institution from a society that seeks to destroy our traditions, erode our heritage, and mutilate our birth rights. You are part of the elites. You are not like him -" Malfoy pointed at Alex, "- that represents all the disgusting, tainted half-breeds and mudbloods that leech off of our success."

"The way of life that you speak of is archaic, discriminatory, absolutely indefensible," Turais retorted.

"This is the reality of our world," Malfoy returned fiercely. "Without order, there is only chaos."

"The current order does not reflect our changing society. And I shall alter this reality to fit its needs."

"Then you will be crushed by the wheels of society which you seek to displace," Malfoy warned. "Mark my words."
"If my crushed body may guide the wheels onto their correct paths, then so be it," Turais said in finality. Malfoy's eyes widened as he observed the boy's serious, unyielding countenance. An unusual sign of incredulous fear and horror fleeted across his face.

"Y...you are insane!" Malfoy shouted, his disposition wild, as he swept out of the room.

***

"I have assumed the position of Leader of Slytherin," Turais announced solemnly to the full Slytherin student body that was quickly assembled just a minute ago.

The crowd fell deathly silent as they absorbed the news. Then, some of the upper-years began to snicker and laugh with a hint of unease and nervousness.

"Did you just say you are the new Leader of Slytherin, Black?" Sykes chortled. "That's a good one, mate. Impeccable delivery. Almost had me fooled."

Turais smiled as a few more students took it as a sign that Turais was joking. He let the laughter run its course until it slowly deteriorated into another tension-filled silence.

"I'm glad everyone is amused by the new arrangement," Turais said cheerfully. "I will take it as a sign that my reign is well-received."

The smile on many people froze as others morphed into confusion and shock.

"Wait a moment," Flint said, eyes widen and jaws slacked. "You were not joking?!

Turais witnessed as the words sunk into their minds. Their eyes immediately searched for a particular individual for confirmation.

The entire room turned their attention towards the boy who was sitting in his velvet throne and silently looking at the flickering flames. Lucius Malfoy did not utter a single word - a silent admission. That thought finally registered in the minds of many as they turned back to look at Turais with fresh eyes. This time, there was no belittlement, mirth, tease, or disrespect. Instead, those gestures were succeeded by shock, confusion, apprehension, and fear.

"I am sure all of you are aware of my singular cardinal rule by now," Turais addressed the room with a firm, authoritative tone. "Behave like proper, courteous human beings to every person is my sole requirement. This means that no verbal, emotional, physiological, or physical maltreatment will be permissible in this House or anywhere in Hogwarts. There will be no disparaging of other students due to their blood status, House affiliation, political views et cetera. If I see anyone break this basic rule, I will guarantee that they will be punished by the full extent of the school rules. Am I understood?"

No one made any motion or indication that they have heard what Turais had just said.

"Am I understood?" Turais repeated with an increased volume.

That seemed to have shaken them out of their stupor as they all spanned into attention and chanted, "Understood."
"Very well," Turais said with a small smile. "As long as you abide to this very basic, very simple rule, I'm sure we will have a brilliant time in Hogwarts together. Dismissed."

Turais turned and walked back to his dormitory in utter silence. He understood fully that the entire House would be discussing this drastic turn of events the moment he closed the door.

Today marked the day when Lucius Malfoy's reign in Slytherin ended and Turais Black's reign began.

His control over Slytherin was officially completed, but he knew that he would still have to fight the undercurrents of dissent that would inevitably surface and resist his rule. But that was a problem for tomorrow, today he shall enjoy this hard-fought victory.

***

The door opened up slightly as the bustling sound from the common room spilt into the sanctuary. Alex slipped through the opening and closed the door behind him. He walked over to his bed and sat directly across with his legs crossed on the bed.

Turais snapped his book shut and looked up at Alex. "How is the situation outside?"

"Pandemonium," Alex said bluntly.

"Any violence or duels? Should I go out and get things under control?" asked Turais.

"No," Alex sighed. "Malfoy has slunk away from the commotion as well. There is just a lot of shouting and screaming. I think it would be better for them to sort out their emotions and loyalties without you. Your presence would only inflame the opened emotional wounds."

Turais nodded as he opened his book to the marked page and continued reading. Alex fidgeted for a few minutes before Turais decided to address the issue.

"Speak your mind, Alex," Turais said softly. Alex flinched before slouching again as he picked at the loose pilling on his bed sheet.

"Did you mean what you just said in the meeting?" Alex asked quietly. "Will you try to change the world even if you sacrifice yourself in the process?"

Turais looked the boy across the aisle from him. The boy was picking at the seams of his robes mindlessly. His teeth was chewing nervously at his lower lip.

"It won't come down to this -"

"Will you or won't you, Turais? You haven't answer the question," Alex asked again. This time, his voice was quieter but also firmer.

Turais hesitated. Should he lie to the boy? Should he tell him the truth? But look at how that worked out with Orion -

Suddenly, Alex nodded his head understandingly. "I guess I have my answer, you idiotic, self-sacrificing bastard." Alex's tone was not scolding, but it was more like a sigh of resignation.
"Alex..."

"Well, I guess I will just have to tag along to make sure you will not get yourself killed," Alex muttered softly.

Turais stared at the boy for a long while, pondering about their roles in the future.

***

May 1, 1971 (Saturday)

"Hey, Turais," Tenebrus said as he walked up to the trio and sat beside Turais. The other Slytherins, who were all sitting a respectable distance away, immediately started whispering at the sight.

"I was expecting you to steer clear of us for a while," Turais said. It seemed as though many people have distanced themselves from both Malfoy and Turais, assessing the situation and waiting for someone to take the lead before they reaffirmed their loyalty to one boy or the other.

"Well, I have made my intentions known since last Christmas," Tenebrus shrugged. "And I mean, I didn't particularly enjoy panting after Malfoy like a pathetic, unwanted Crup, so... you're not such a bad choice to commit to all things considered." Turais looked at the boy and he gave a nonchalant shrug. "I mean... I know my place in all this, Turais. I'm never going to be a leader like you or Malfoy. I'm never going to be part of your prestigious inner circles. I'm content with where I stand as long as I stay out of all the strife and warfare."

"Don't sell yourself short," Turais said. "You are getting bravery points just for being here at this very moment."

"Well, bravery doesn't sell in this House, does it? Anyhow, I didn't come here to fish for compliments. I'm here because you should consider this if you haven't already," Tenebrus Byrce, a third-year, said as he pulled out a slightly crumpled parchment and pushed it across the table surface.

Turais picked up the parchment and straightened it. It was a pamphlet calling for all interested minors to apply for two positions of the British Youth Representative to the Wizengamot.

"The minimum age requirement is being a third-year. I reckon you might have a genuine shot at this, especially given your political prowess and being able to oust Malfoy as the Leader. Securing Slughorn’s nomination should not be an issue either. And there has been plenty of examples where two members of the same House have obtained both positions."

"Thank you for the vote of confidence, Tenebrus. But I have scarcely heard of this post prior to today... who are the current representatives?" Turais inquired.

"Malfoy and some Ravenclaw seventh-year by the name Tiberius McLaggen," he said.

"Interesting," Turais said as he continued to read the requirements. "Here, they say that the representatives should '... reach out to his or her community...', I seriously doubt any of that has happened or I would've noticed."
Tenebrus grimaced. "No one told Malfoy what he should or should not do around these parts - well, before you, at least - and McLaggen was pretty much using his position for his own advancement, really. I heard he already has a position in the Ministry lined up for him the moment he graduates."

"Hmmm, I will consider this. Thank you for the information."

"Well, that's why I handed this to you," Tenebrus said as he forked some pudding in front of him and started eating.

***

"So... leader of Slytherin, huh," Andromeda said with a smirk. "Not too shabby, cousin."

"Cousin Andromeda," Turais said.

"Tell me, how did you exactly get my sister to vote in line with you?" Andromeda asked. "Did you ask your grandfather to command her?"

"I didn't," Turais replied.

"Then how, Turais?"

"I asked my grandfather to withdraw Narcissa from Hogwarts for fifteen minutes, exactly," Turais said.

Andromeda's smile all but vanished as she looked at Turais solemnly.

"Thank you, Turais," Andromeda said softly. "There was an easier way but you still chose this path. On behalf of my sister, thank you."

Turais knew that Andromeda understood Turais' intention to minimize the damage done to Narcissa' relationship with Lucius by making her an unwitting victim.

"We're family," Turais said simply.

"Unfortunately, she would not view it as such," Andromeda said.

***

*May 2, 1971 (Sunday)*
The House still had not fully come to terms with what had transpired on Friday. However, they had a convenient distraction from the political fighting in the form of Quidditch.

Slytherin defeated Gryffindor (S160-G0) with Turais’ early catch while Hufflepuff obliterated Ravenclaw (H350-R90) back in November. Slytherin’s match against Ravenclaw occurred in Turais’ absence, resulting in a narrow victory for Ravenclaw due to a botched attempt at the Snitch by Emma Blishwick (R210-S180). Gryffindor delivered a resounding victory against Hufflepuff before Easter holiday (G350-H170).

Hence, entering the final two Quidditch matches of the year, each House team won exactly one match apiece. The Inter-House Quidditch Cup winner was first determined by the number of wins. However, if two teams have the same number of wins, then the total points accumulated would be called into consideration.

Currently, Hufflepuff sat comfortably in first place in terms of points haul. But all of that would not matter if Slytherin defeated them. Therefore, it was important that Turais led the Slytherin to victory with a Snitch catch. However, the timing for the Snitch capture would be crucial. Turais would have wait until they built up a significant lead in the points haul in order to prevent either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw from overtaking their points count (and by extension, the Cup) when one of them won the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw match in two weeks’ time.

Minutes before the penultimate match of the season, Turais was in the Slytherin changing room as Wilkins marched in front of the line of players. He delivered his final speech as they awaited for the match to start.

"We have trained bloody hard for the past few weeks. We have perfected our techniques and our strategies," Michael shouted as he walked past Turais. Turais nodded affirmatively. "We have the best Seeker in the form of the one and only Turais Black! -" the boys roared in approval as Cornfoot and Montague gave Turais a punch on one shoulder each, " - I have my perfect better half in Cornfoot! -" another roar of approval, " - And I have finally beaten the Keeper out of Gibbon!" The group laughed and cooed as they clapped the back of the sheepish Gibbon.

"And finally , I have, here, three astonishingly brilliant Chasers: the man who is better suited in the air despite his namesake - Pyrites! The man who deserves the Cup on his fifth and final year on the team - Montague! And the incredible fourth-year who has performed above and beyond our expectations - Harper!" Michael shouted as the group cheered and thumped on Harper back. Harper
laughed as he met Turais' gaze and matched his grin. Turais then turned to Michael, who gave him an almost imperceptible nod.

As the group settled down, Michael's voice spoke again. This time, his voice was solemn and grave, "I know I have not been in the best mental state for the past several weeks. I have addressed this before but I would like to remind ourselves of what we are fighting for today. Natalia is an invaluable member of this team. She is a great Chaser and an even greater friend to me. Even though she is not with us on the pitch today, let her fighting spirit empower us."

The stoic expression on Michael's expression cracked as he shouted one final chant, "Let us win this match against Hufflepuff! Let us win the Quidditch Cup in her honour! Let us put her name on the Cup as she deserves!"

"Aye, Captain!" All the players shouted back as Michael's expression pinched.

After Michael had managed to keep his emotions under check, he said thickly, "Regardless of what happens today and in the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw match in two weeks' time, I am proud of our team and what we were able to achieve. You make me a proud Captain!"

"Aye, Captain!" Everyone screamed in unison... except for Harper.

"Let's go win some Quidditch, cap!" Harper shouted as he suddenly turned shy when he realized he was the odd one out. Turais couldn't help but laugh as the rest of the team joined in. Even Michael cracked a small smile, but it disappeared as quickly as it came.

***

"Harper shoots… and HARPER SCORES! - SLYTHERIN SCORES!" Winston Hawthorne shouted, “And the Quaffle is back in play - Macmillan passes to Polkiss, who fumbles! - And the Quaffle is stolen by the resident Pyrites - arrrrrr - quick pass to Harper and back - back to Harper again and - SLYTHERIN SCORES! This is the tenth goal for the new Slytherin Chaser's first match!"

"Good work!" Turais shouted at the grinning Chaser as he continued to tail the Hufflepuff Seeker, Ted Tonks, closely. Turais spared a glance at the cheering replacement Chaser who was currently doing a small victory lap around the Hufflepuff goalposts while the Keeper Dehlila Parker frowned at the ecstatic boy below her.

“Incredible! Slytherin is currently in the lead with two hundred and eighty points while Hufflepuff is at one hundred and twenty points. Even if the Hufflepuff Seeker catches the Snitch now, they will still lose the game!”

A loud cheer filled the Slytherin stands as they saw their widening lead and almost certain victory over the Hufflepuffs. Turais glanced back at frustrated sigh from the Hufflepuff Seeker beside him as he swung his fist violently in displeasure. Suddenly, he saw a flicker of gold light bouncing behind his left shoulder where his fist was just seconds ago.

'NO! It's too soon!'

Turais tilted his head slightly in the opposite direction while keeping an eye at Tonks. Feigning a gasp, he saw the Hufflepuff turn sharply towards him and away from the Snitch.
Satisfied, he flew out in the opposite direction as he felt Tonks chase after him.

"Rea holds possession and passes to Macmillan - thank Merlin, not Polkiss - sorry, profe -
back to Rea - and Black seems to have spotted the Snitch and Tonks is not far behind -
aaaaaannnndd … Black has lost the Snitch! - I can’t believe - Wait. Black feigned and Tonks took
the bait! He does not look too happy - Back to the goalposts and Pyrites has apparently scored -
SLYTHERIN SCORES! Parker, the Hufflepuff Keeper, is definitely not a keeper for next year’s
team - haha, get it? - ouch !”

Turais eased off his forward tilt as he led Tonks to the opposite end of the pitch. He turned
around to an unimpressed sixth-year boy who was scowling at him; his face darkened menacingly
as he entered the shadow of the nearby Quidditch viewing tower.

“Nice feint, Black!” Tonks barked, clearly not thinking that the distraction was nice at all.


They circled the pitch once more as Turais tailed him faithfully. Tonks was on the lookout to
catch the Snitch and salvage a win for Hufflepuffs while Turais was doing the same but preventing
both of them from catching the Snitch. At the same time, the Slytherins scored another nine more
goals against the crumbling Hufflepuff defense, which returned only one goal of their own.

After the last goal, Michael gave Turais a subtle nod, signalling that Turais was finally
allowed to actively Seek out the Snitch. He released a breath as he felt his secondary responsibility
lifted. It really wasn’t his nature to avoid the Snitch, let alone play bodyguard to the opposite
team’s Seeker.

Suddenly, Tonks zoomed off into the distance. Turais felt his heart stop as he saw the
flickering gold ball fluttering just ahead of him. Turais immediately chased after him. Michael
nodded so he was allowed to catch the Snitch, not Tonks.

Turais put all his force onto the front of the broom as he pushed it to its limits. Soon enough,
he gradually caught up to Tonks by sheer superiority of his broom compared to Tonks’ Shooting
Star 59 and reached for the Snitch as well.

He reached as far as he could muster with the physical restraints of a twelve-year-old boy but
he could see it was not enough compared to the seventeen-year-old Hufflepuff. The tips of older
boy’s fingers were almost touching the golden ball. Turais was about to despair when it suddenly
shot down towards the ground in front of the Gryffindor stands. Turais gasped a quick sigh of
relief as he followed with an immediately vertical drop. He could hear that Tonks was not far
behind.

“Black and Tonks are chasing after the Snitch. This time it does not look like a feint - but
they are heading for the pitch grounds –”

The Snitch plummeted towards the ground along the stadium wall with no sign of stopping
as he realized that it was heading towards the bottom of the pitch where all the wooden planks
criss-crossed the structure!

With a slight moment of hesitation, he dove into the treacherous, wooden maze of diagonal
and horizontal beams that blocked his path.

“The Snitch has disappeared to the bottom of the pitch where they can’t - Black followed!
THIS IS MADNESS! No one can navigate in there!”
The golden Snitch warped through the narrow space in neck-breaking speed and agility while Turais spun and rose and ducked in the dangerous labyrinth where mere inches separated safety from serious injuries. He reached out for the Snitch and he could feel the vibration of the air around the minuscule wings when he saw an impassable cross of beams fast-approaching.

In a split-second decision, Turais decided to forfeit the chase and spun upwards as his robes fluttered from the quick change in velocity. He found him re-emerging at the other end of the pitch where the Slytherin stands were.

He hovered up towards the Slytherin crowds, feeling dejected while his body vibrated, as he realized they were all staring at him with slack jaws and wide eyes. He also spotted Jonty and Alex huddled in the front row. While Jonty was eyeing with glowing fascination, Alex’s eyes were narrowed and furious. He gulped slightly at the intense reactions and felt his heart flutter a little.

“AND BLACK HAS SURVIVED! MERLIN’S BALLS! Did you see that professor?! He either is the best Quidditch player ever or has a death wish! Hilary, go chase your boy! I approve!”

“Black!”

He turned around to face an extremely furious Seeker flying straight towards his and halting just before he rammed into him. He felt a more erratic fluttering from the near miss around his sternum… or the heart.

“That was the most idiotic thing I’ve ever since in my life!” he shouted, “You could’ve died at any one of those beams! You could’ve -” Tonks words died mid-way as he spotted Turais clutching his heart with both hands.

'Oh.'

"Black, are you not feeling so hot?" Tonks asked with concern as he flew over and placed a steadying hand on the boy's arm.

Turais gingerly cupped the struggling Snitch with one hand while freeing the other to reach carefully beneath his tightly-buttoned robes. Upon the touch of his finger, the Snitch became stationary. Turais relaxed and fully reached for the Snitch and raised it over his head. Tonks stared at the golden ball in shock.

" - Wait a sec- apparently Black has pulled a modified Plumpton Pass - or should we rename it as Black Pass! BLACK HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH! SLYTHERIN WINS! Another sensational game from Black and a brilliant show of nerves and talent from our young Seeker! Gryffindors, were you watching this?! He’s got bigger balls than all - ouch! Sorry, Professor. HUFFLEPUFF: ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY - SLYTHERIN: SIX HUNDRED! This must be one of Hufflepuff’s worst defeats in Hogwarts history! I'm a Hufflepuff and I'm not even mad about this! Am I under a Confundus?! - Wait... hey -"

" - That just means you can appreciate a great player, Hawthorne!” Kaiden's voice blared from the same speaker. He was panting slightly as he took possession of the microphone and darted around the box, escaping McGonagall's reach. "Congratulations, Turais! I caught everything on my cine-cam! I was just at the perfect spot to capture your moves beneath the pitch! It's glorious! But the Gryffindors will beat you- hey!” - His voice was succeeded by a series of muffled shouts and static as the Professor tried to wrestle the equipment out of the boy's hand while everyone fell into a heap of tangled torsos and limbs.

Turais grinned as he turned back to the other Seeker. “Sorry, Tonks, I didn't know the Snitch
flew into my sleeve -"

“Stop it, Black. You won fair and square. I never would have caught it, at least not after whatever madness that you just pulled off down there,” Tonks said as he stood up amidst the approving crowd and roaring applause. He reached his hand down and Turais took it, “And please, call me Ted.”

Ted smiled slightly as he broke off the handshake and mounted his broom to rejoin his sulking teammates. Right after, the rest of the Slytherin team flew in. An excited Michael immediately dismounted mid-air and threw himself at Turais, “We did it! You absolute lunatic! Six hundred points!” The rest of the team was slapping him on the back and chatting happily about their favourable prospect for capturing the Quidditch Cup this year.

"Nice catch, Turais," Geoffrey flew down, looking exhausted and disappointed. The boy, ever so courteous, pumped Turais' hand. "You just gave Gerald something to gush about until the end of term."

Immediately after the Hufflepuff Chaser finished, a boy bounced over and launched himself at Turais.

"You are amazing, Turais!" Harper screamed as he wrapped his arms around him.

"You too! Amazing first game!" Turais shouted back as he saw their captain's jubilant smile a few steps away huddling with his friends.

Turais looked up at the scoreboard, which read: “SLYTHERIN: 600, HUFFLEPUFF: 130.” He winced, it was such a merciless slaughtering of the Hufflepuffs that even if they caught the Snitch twice, it wouldn’t have led them to victory.

"We are going to win the Cup this year!" Michael shouted in delight as Turais joined in on the excitement.

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<td>4th Place</td>
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2 Wins | 1 Loss | 440 points
1 Win | 1 Loss | 350 points
1 Win | 1 Loss | 300 points
1 Win | 2 Losses | 150 points

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May 4, 1971 (Tuesday)
Turais woke up especially early today to dress himself. He took extreme care to fix every single strand of rebellious hair in its position and evened out every crease in his robes.

He walked up to the Great Hall with his friends and the two prefects. Just before he entered, he did a final check over his attire and calmed himself. Once he was mentally prepared, he stepped out into the view of all the students.

As expected, once the students closest to the door noticed him, they started to alert their neighbours. In a few moments, the entire Great Hall fell deathly quiet as everyone was looking between the Black Heir, who was standing squarely at the doorway, and the Malfoy Heir, who was seated in the middle of the Slytherin table. Turais looked over to the Gryffindor table and saw Kaiden's frown. He lifted the paper and mouthed: "What on Earth happened?" Turais then turned his attention to Malfoy's position and found the boy staring back at him icily.

Turais walked over to the Slytherin table and stood at the seats directly across from Malfoy. This was the first time Turais spoke to Malfoy ever since he became Leader of Slytherin. The occupants, Volant and Trouche, immediately scampered away. Everyone nearby shifted away audibly from the epi-centre of the confrontation. Even the other Houses perked up at the sight of the two powerful Heirs opposed to each other for the very first time.

Turais sat down on the now-emptyed bench. He eyed the broken egg shells on Malfoy’s egg cup and plate and decided that it was safe to consume. As he reached for one of the eggs on the tray, he glanced at the opened newspaper with the title: "BLACK BREAKS WITH MALFOY ON FAWLEY'S RESOLUTION!" He ignored it and placed the egg on the egg cup in front of him. With a swift downward motion, the egg clacker cracked the shell and he began to tease the two halves apart with a spoon. All the while, Malfoy just sat wordlessly with his utensils at hand, shaking with pent-up emotions.

Turais sprinkled some salt and pepper onto the egg. He took a strip of thin toast and dipped it into the liquid yolk. Just as he was about to take a bite, Napier placed a hand on Turais' shoulder to still his movement. Turais waved Napier’s concern away and the boy withdrew.

"Hmmm... Great choice of breakfast, Lucius," Turais said after a bite. "The soft-boiled egg is simply exquisite."

"Is it?" Malfoy gritted out.

"Absolutely," Turais smiled as he took another bite. "The combination of a buttery taste from the crisp toast along with the creamy consistency of the egg -"

"Turais," Malfoy said with measured rage simmering in his tone. "I have never taken you to be a connoisseur of breakfast items."

"Many things can change in the span of a day, this is just one of them," Turais commented airily. Malfoy’s face turned sour at the words.

"Indeed. The pendulum might have swung in your favour for now, Turais. But it will not remain there forever."

"That is true. Then let’s hope that the current state will be maintained for a long time."

"Many innocent families will be and are already affected by the salacious rumours your family endorsed with this vote," Malfoy said, his voice turned breathier as he shook with rage.
"Your alliance is willing to destroy ours to gain power by enabling the blood-lusting Ministry to turn against us. How noble of you."

"This is not about gaining power," Turais said as Malfoy snorted. "This is about the truth and accountability for the dozens of Muggle lives as well as the Arkenstones -"

"Your truth is false," Malfoy hissed. "The real truth is that Lord Black took the opportunity in an attempt to crush us and gain dominance. The truth is that we had nothing to do with the Arkenstones’ death. The truth is that we are innocent."

"Your family is not innocent, Lucius," Turais retorted. "The Knights seeks to destabilize and fracture our society through the acts of violence and murder. They orchestrated my poisoning as well. And if we remain silent on the matter, we are appeasing them and becoming part of the problem. Are you so blinded by your beliefs and power that you are willfully ignoring the atrocities caused by the Knights on pureblood families? No one deserves to be killed because of their political beliefs."

"I said our family and the Knights did not have anything to do with the death of the Arkenstones," Malfoy repeated in a nearly shouting voice. The rest of the table visibly recoiled as they anticipated an escalation. "We are innocent! Their deaths were caused by the Ministry -"

Turais could not believe what he was hearing.

"Have you stooped so low as to rely on dangerous subversion of facts to clear yourself of all changes?!" Turais gasped. "Are you so deluded by your own solipsism to think that anyone who thinks differently from you are against you?"

"You are the one blinded by your own perpetually obstinate sense of self-righteousness!" Malfoy said angrily, for once abandoning his restraints of the strictest decorum in the busiest place of the castle. "The blood of the Arkenstones do not taint our hands or souls! This is all a ploy by the Ministry to cripple our unity! Open your eyes, Turais! Once they are done harassing us, they will turn their attention towards you and all the dark families shall fall and never recover! This legislation is a death knell to us all."

Turais looked at the heaving Malfoy. "What mephitic odours of amorality and spiritual putrefaction flow from your poisonous words!" Turais exclaimed incredulously.

Why was he so insistent on trying to shed the blame? His inner emotions of pittance must have leaked onto his expression as Malfoy’s face fell. In a rare note of vulnerability and hurt, Malfoy whispered, "You genuinely do not see the falsehood in all this?" Malfoy let out a harsh laugh. "The Ministry has played a brilliant move seeing how you fools are completely ensnared by their deception."

Turais said softly, "The sole perpetrator of deception is your alliance, Lucius."

"Mark my words, Turais. Things are never what they seem. And when the time comes, you shall think back to today and you will despair at your own hubris."

With nothing left to say, Turais rose from his seat and left.

Chapter End Notes
Year 2 is coming to a close and, boy, it was a roller-coaster ride of emotions. But you know what this means for next year...!

Thoughts, comments, they are always welcomed! I’d love to hear from you.

The next chapter, Chapter 36: Interlude - Second Year In Review, is on schedule. Until next time!

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-13
Hey everybody,

I hope you all stay safe and healthy from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, I’m shocked and happy about all the wonderful compliments I’ve received for the Quidditch scene. I did not expect it to be such a hit.

Meanwhile, here’s a new update to (hopefully) brighten your day.

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-17

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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CHAPTER 36

INTERLUDE - SECOND YEAR IN REVIEW

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May 16, 1971 (Sunday)

"We are going to lose the damn Cup this year!" Michael wailed dramatically as the Gryffindors scored yet another goal.

It was the last Quidditch match of the year and Turais was surrounded by Michael, Alex, Jonty, and the rest of the Slytherin team as they stood in the front row of the Slytherin stands. Gerard, Singmund and a dozen Hufflepuff first- and second-years, which Turais knew from the homework club, were also present near him. As their team was out of the running for the Cup, they held the green and silver banners in support of Turais and his team.
“GRYFFINDOR SCORES!” Winston Hawthorne shouted from the viewing stands high above him. It was the podium where Orion was sitting with Sirius and Regulus and the rest of the School Governors and staff.

However, Hawthorne and Professor McGonagall were the only ones he could see from his location. Turais knew the Quidditch Cup sat patiently somewhere beside her. They were so close to it, both location-wise and game-wise that it almost caused him physical pain to not reach for it prematurely.

“NO!” Michael yelled in frustration as the Gryffindors were one step closer to taking away the Quidditch Cup. His sentiment was echoed by the surrounding Slytherin who all moaned and shouted at the dire situation for their House.

It had also been a four-hour long match between the Gryffindors and Ravenclaws and both teams were even matched and equally likely to be a contender for the Cup. It was also in both of their interests to keep the game in play for as long as possible to match the giant score that Slytherin posted two weeks ago.

Slytherin was in the lead with 940 points. However, this lead was decimated in today’s match. Currently, the scoreboard showed that Gryffindors had posted a gigantic score of 430 points. The Ravenclaws had an even larger haul of 480 points in this unusually lengthy match.

After combining the current scores with their scores from the last two matches, both teams were…

“Now, both teams are two goals and a caught Snitch away from overtaking Slytherin’s points haul and snatching the Cup from under their nose!” Hawthorne confirmed.

“Urgh, why can’t either Seekers seek the damn Snitch?! It’s right there! Just catch the damn thing!” Turais yelled frustratingly at the two Seekers who had hovered idly over the Hufflepuff stands for the past four hours. Turais was sure that both teams’ Seekers agreed to not Seek until either team reached their required score to win the Cup. It was not technically disallowed but when his team had everything to lose from this arrangement, Turais’ rage burnt wildly.

“Fields! Martin! Black is complaining for the one hundredth time that you two aren’t doing your jobs properly!” Hawthorne clearly heard his frustration and announced it to the entire stadium. The crowd laughed at the uncharacteristic outburst from the resident goody two-shoes Turais Black.

“Potter is clearly signaling at Black and telling him to shut up! Mate, you’re stealing Wilkins’ job - but Wilkins would never tell his beloved Seeker to shut up - and the Quaffle is back to Hirst, who passes to Mondale and - she takes a hit from Prewett and the Gryffindors gain possession - MacGregor then Potter, back to MacGregor and - GRYFFINDOR SCORES!”

The Gryffindors cheered loudly while the Slytherins groaned collectively. Angry mutters started to simmer once again as their Slytherin banners fluttered uselessly by their sides.

“NO!” Michael roared as he jumped up and down in frustration. His fists were clenched and unclenched countless times as their hopes at the Cup dimmed.

“Now, the Gryffindors have a chance to deny the Slytherins the Cup if they score one more goal and catch the Snitch! And… the Quaffle is back in play with Lee, who passes to Mondale - intercepted by Potter and - well-aimed Bludger by Lorenzo - back to Lee and then to Hirst, nice dodge, to Mondale - ooh, missed pass to Lee and Quaffle is back to Potter - great fake pass - now
to MacGregor - he is ten yards from the goalpost - and Fields has gone for the Snitch! -"

The two Seekers were finally calling off their truce and battling for the Snitch.

The entire stadium silenced at the turning point of the match, but each House did it for a different reason. The Gryffindors were staring intensely at their Seeker and willing that she would catch the Snitch. The Ravenclaws were hoping that their Seeker could block the Gryffindor Seeker from catching the Snitch to prolong the game. The Slytherins were holding their breath as the next minute would likely determine their fate on whether they would break their eleven-year drought of winning the Quidditch Cup.

“I can’t watch this!” Turais shouted as he turned around and closed his eyes. He knew with a sense of dread of what was about to happen. Fields would time it so that the Gryffindor Chasers would score just before she would catch the Snitch. Then, the Slytherins would lose and Turais could not possibly watch as it unfolded before his eyes.

“Martin is speeding towards it as well - both are reaching for the Snitch -”

“I’m going to throw up.” Michael said quietly above him as Turais felt the captain’s strong, muscular arms wrapping around his shoulders. Turais clutched the back of Michael’s robes as tightly as possible while burrowing his face into the fabric. Right now, he did not know who was lending support to the other; maybe they were both just holding each other upright.

“Thomas moves to intercept MacGregor - he fakes and dives - POTTER SCORES! GRYFFINDOR SCORES!”

“We had a good run, we had a good run, we had a good run…” Turais heard the muffled voice of Harper’s self-hypnotizing chant. He also felt Alex and Jonty’s hand squeezing his arms tightly with a similar level of anxiety.

They tightened their grip on each other as they braced themselves for the commentary.

“Martin gains on Fields - Fields attempts for the Snitch - blocked by Martin - they’re getting tangled up - Fields swipes at the Snitch - she -” Then, Hawthorne unleashed an uninterrupted string of innovative swear words before he uttered the following words:

"- MARTIN CAUGHT THE SNITCH! - FIELDS SWATTED THE SNITCH INTO MARTIN’S OUTSTRETCHED HAND - ”

“What?!” Michael yelled into the stunned silence of the entire stadium.

“WILKINS, YOU HEARD ME RIGHT! MARTIN CAUGHT THE SNITCH FOR RAVENCLAW!”

Turais opened his eyes. He couldn’t believe what he just heard.

“GRYFFINDOR: FOUR HUNDRED AND FIFTY - RAVENCLAW: SIX HUNDRED AND THIRTY! But we don’t care because SLYTHERIN HAS JUST WON THE QUADITCH CUP!”

Turais tore himself from the Slytherin captain and turned to look at the scoreboard as Hawthorne confirmed the final score.

“We won!” Turais screamed at the stunned boy beside him as he punched the air with excitement. “Michael! We just won the Quidditch Cup!” Turais continued to shake the
gobsmacked captain who was still staring at the scoreboard incomprehensibly.

Turais saw the exact moment when realization dawned upon the boy as Michael spun him around locked him into a tight embrace. His body was shaking violently and Turais heard an unrestrained sob. Then, the crowd reacted. Turias felt heavy thumps on his back from all the Slytherins as the ambient noise gave way to roaring laughter, shouts, and noisy flaps of frantic waves of banners and flags. He could barely hear Harper’s, Cornfoot’s, and Higgs’ voices chanting “We’ve won the Cup! Slytherins won the Cup!” even though they were right beside him because of the jubilant crowd.

“RAVENCLAW WINS THE MATCH BUT SLYTHERIN TAKES HOME THE CUP FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ELEVEN YEARS!”

Turais felt the brushes of dozens of hands as he was swept by his friends, teammates, and utter euphoria. When he regained a bit of his senses, he suddenly realized that he has been transported to the staff viewing stands. He looked out to the stadium and saw a flood of Slytherin supporters finding their way into the pitch and gathering below the stands close to them.

Professor Slughorn was beside himself as he leaped up and down to the amusement of the professors sitting around him. In the distance, Turais could spot Jane and Alice making their way towards them and celebrating their win. Turais then turned to look around the stand as he found a beaming Orion and his ecstatic brothers. Sirius and Regulus were jumping up and down while waving their tiny green and silver flags excitedly.

Feeling his feet touching the ground, he ran towards his family and hugged them passionately. His brothers seized his neck and waist respectively and squeezed with all their might while Orion reached and shielded all his sons from the rest of the world. Turais felt as though his bones and joints would crack and pop but he didn’t mind at all.

“Okay. Let your brother go get his Cup first!” Orion nudged them as Turais smiled at his father and turned to where Dumbledore stood.

Beside him, there was an enormous Quidditch Cup in all its silver, four-handled glory that gleamed under the late morning sunlight. The metal bowl sat atop a giant column composed of thin bands of silver. Each ring was engraved with the House emblem of the winning Quidditch team and the team members’ names throughout Hogwarts’ millennium-long history. Turais knew his name would be found etched on the bottom-most and newest ring, but most importantly, he knew that Natalia's name would be under the Chasers' column as well.

“And now, Professor Dumbledore will hand over the Quidditch Cup to the winners of this year’s Inter-House Quidditch Cup!” Hawthorne shouted excitedly into the magical megaphone at the corner of the stand.

Dumbledore lifted the magically-lightened Cup and passed it onto the trembling hands of Carmichael Wilkins. He lifted it up and faced the entire stadium to the applause of their supporters. Then, he glanced back and motioned Turais to come forward. Turais stumbled towards the front and Michael passed him the Cup as the crowd responded with a much more enthusiastic cheer.

“We did it, Turais!” Michael shouted with a radiant smile on his face as bittersweet tears rolled down his cheeks. "We did it for Natalia!" Turais chuckled wetly as they hugged again.

‘Yes, we did it. For Natalia. For the Arkenstones.'
June 4, 1971 (Friday)

After the tumultuous second-half of the school term, Turais was glad that Jonty’s whining about the exams was the most dramatic incident in the past two weeks.

The Homework Club was more popular than ever amongst the students as final exams approached. Some third- and fourth-years even approached him to see if it offered help for their years, but Turais had to regretfully decline their pleas for help. His workload was already through the roof with the two years that he was managing, alongside his new self-imposed patrol duties to keep watch of any suspicious activities from his fellow Slytherins.

Ever since the attack on Arkenstones and the passage of the legislation, it has seemed that Voldemort has taken the time to regroup and re-plan in the shadows as there were an eerie absence of any subsequent attacks. However, Turais was not certain if his actions were the deterrents for further attacks on Muggle and Wizarding families. But Turais was glad that the bloodshed had stopped for the moment.

The absence of attacks against Wizarding families lulled the school back into a renewed sense of safety as many viewed that attack was an isolated incident. It was bizarre, to say the least, that most people believed it was a return to normalcy. Perhaps that’s true, if one could ever call a world where constant attacks on Muggles normal. But Turais also understood the psychology beside it. As long as the attack did not affect those you’re close with, it was easy to dismiss them.

Avery, Nott, and Dolohov's murder trial processed under the watchful eyes of Arcturus in the Grand Jury Court. Despite being the sons of pureblood families, he enjoyed the support from most of the Lords on the bench. The Light families lent their support based on the grievous crimes committed against their allies and Arcturus’ allies yielded to him based on the mere fact that someone was unfortunate enough to attack Heir Black and get caught, if nothing else.

Despite the fact that the majority of Lords agreed to the sentencing of the Dementor's Kiss for the three barely legal students, it didn't stop their allies from pulling every single procedural rules in existence to delay the advancement of their inevitable fate. Turais could imagine what a horrible fate it was to be kissed by a Dementor, but he could not bring himself to pity their demise. They were legal adults with full mental capacity and understood their actions, yet they still knowingly
participated in the murder of a mere twelve-year-old child. Such people should never be permitted to roam the streets again.

Now, Turais was once again sitting amongst his peers at the end-of-year feast in Great Hall that was decorated in green and silver and lined with overhead banners depicting the House of Serpents.

Professor Dumbledore addressed the student body and awarded the House Cup to Professor Slughorn for the second year in a row amidst the roaring approval from the Slytherin table. Professor Slughorn proudly placed the golden trophy next to the silver Quidditch Cup in front of him and looked quite smug. Professor McGonagall didn't even look that displeased this year, in fact, Turais might have caught her toast directed at him before the feast started.

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June 17, 1971 (Thursday)

"Do you know which electives you would like to study next year?" Alice asked as she watched the blue birds flutter across the sky. They were sitting out on the grounds by the Black Lake, enjoying the final moments at Hogwarts for the year. In the far distance, a giant tentacle waved in the air as it tried to swat down a bird.

"Definitely not Divination," Jonty declared immediately. "It is a fraud of a subject in my opinion. Pure drivel."

"Why do you say that?" Jane asked. "I find it fascinating that someone can know something about the future just from reading the dredges at the bottom of their tea cup."

"I'm taking Divination next year as well," Gerald announced. "I heard Divination is really popular with the girls..." His eyebrows moved suggestively as Alice swatted him on the head.

"Don't be so naive, Jane," Jonty snorted. "As my father once said, 'If everyone can tell their fortune from staring at a cup of tea, we would run out of fortune buying tea'. Also, you need to be wary of swindlers and scoundrels such as him..." Jonty cocked his head at the Hufflepuff. "...taking advantage of the lonely maiden hearts..."

"Hey! Don't call me that!" Gerald said indignantly. "And don't tell me that thought has never crossed your mind, Jonty."

"It never crossed my mind," Jonty said as he stuck out his tongue. Gerald fumed and clawed at the boy unsuccessfully.

"Hmmmm... I guess you are correct as well," Jane said thoughtfully before she sighed. "Oh well, I still think it is a cool thing to learn about..."

"Well... my father has already told me to take Magical Theory, Arithmancy, and Study of Ancient Runes..." Jonty said as he picked a blade of grass and flicked it.

"But you should get to choose your own electives! They are called electives for a reason, you elect to take the courses you want," Jane protested.
“Well... that's what my father wants. And I want what my father wants," Jonty said sharply. Jane's frown deepened. "But enough about me, what are you choosing, Turais?"

“I have not decided yet," Turais said. "But I know I am certainly not taking Care of Magical Creatures."

“But you are going to consider Divination still?" Jonty said incredulously.

“Well... it could be interesting," Turais said defensively. In truth, he just wanted to see whether Castielle Trelawney was less of a fraud compared to her successor and could actually provide him with some information regarding the future of this timeline.

“You surprise me, my little scholar," Jonty said.

“Need to keep you on your toes, mate."

Jonty snorted. "You already do with all the shenanigans you find yourself in."

"Well... I also can't have you figuring me out so easily now, can I?"

Jonty snorted again as he returned sarcastically. "Yeah, you're a real enigma, aren't you?"

"Jonty!" Alex admonished. "Stop hurting Turais' self-esteem."

"I'll leave that job to you - healing his bruised self-esteem," Jonty said as Alex frowned. "What? - Don't glare at me like that, Alex."

His two best friends continued to bicker while Turais watched on with amusement.

***

Turais was packing up his belongings, still riding his month-long euphoria from the Quidditch Cup and House Cup wins, for his imminent return to 12 Grimmauld Place for the first time in six months tomorrow when he was surprised by the presence of Evelyn Napier in his room.

“Hey Turais, how’s your packing coming along?” he asked casually.

“Good, Evelyn. How’s yours?” Turais said warmly. Evelyn and he had developed a fast friendship as they realized that they enjoyed each other’s company despite being forced to interact starting March.

“I’m thankful to be finished with it yesterday,” Evelyn said as he handed over a scroll to Turais, “I have a message for you.”

“My friend, you’re the bearer of bad news,” Turais joked darkly as he eyed the characteristic purple ribbon anxiously. Turais unscrolled the parchment and read the content.

‘Urgh... I thought I was able to evade him successfully this year... so close.’

“I don’t suppose there is any way out of this?” Turais asked rhetorically.

Evelyn grimaced and gave him a sympathetic look, “I’m supposed to escort you to his office.”
“Well, I guess I’ll have to come along,” Turais flashed a tight smile, “Don’t want to get you into trouble too.”

As they headed up to the Headmaster’s Tower, Turais couldn’t suppress his curiosity. “You wouldn’t happen to know what this is about, would you?”

Evelyn shook his head and said, “I have no clue, Turais. But I would guess that you’re not in too much trouble. Because if you were, it would be a Professor or a team of Aurors escorting you instead of me.”

Turais couldn’t argue with that logic and remained silent until they reached the stone gargoyle that guarded the Headmaster’s Office.

Turais parted with the perfect as he walked towards the gargoyle, which leaped aside as he approached. He climbed up the stairs and raised his Occlumency shields before entering the office with a knock.

“Hello, Headmaster,” Turais announced as the man looked away from his phoenix, which was standing on a golden perch, and towards him. Dumbledore’s eyes shone in bright blue over his half-moon spectacles, which glimmered in the flickering candlelight.

“Hello, Mr Black. I’m glad you are able to join me today,” Dumbledore said cheerfully as he waved Turais forward into his office, “Come on in.”

Turais walked up and remained standing while Dumbledore seated himself behind his desk.

“Sherbet Lemon?” he held up a yellow sweet from his bowl at the corner of his desk. Turais shook his head and refused. “Now, Mr Black, you are not in any trouble. I am just wish to confirm some recent development in your House. If my information is correct, I believe you have become the new Leader of Slytherin?”

“That is correct, sir,” Turais said stiffly.

“Congratulations are in order then,” Dumbledore smiled with his grandfatherly deposition, as though his grandson had just done something admirable. "Please do not be alarmed. This is but a little tradition of mine - meeting the incoming leader of Slytherin, that is. I'm sure you would agree with my course of action."

"That is very wise of you, sir," Turais said stiffly.

"Congratulations are in order then," Dumbledore smiled with his grandfatherly deposition, as though his grandson had just done something admirable. "Please do not be alarmed. This is but a little tradition of mine - meeting the incoming leader of Slytherin, that is. I'm sure you would agree with my course of action."

"That is very wise of you, sir," Turais nodded. "Know thy self, know thy enemy."

"Interestingly put, Mr Black," Dumbledore said with a small chuckle. "Sun Tzu, one of the most influential Muggle strategists in the history of the world..." Dumbledore's words trailed off as his expression turned serious. He leaned forward, interlaced his fingers, and looked at Turais with razor-sharp focus. "Are you an enemy?"

Turais smiled as he leaned forward in return. "I am neither your ally nor your enemy, Headmaster. My loyalty is to my family and my family alone. As long as you do not interfere with my private business and relations, I will not interfere with your schemes."

"Those are not the words I expected from a sitting Leader of Slytherin," Dumbledore said softly. His eyes were still searching Turais as if he was an enigma waiting to be solved. "Please indulge my curiosity. Where does your ambition truly lie?"

“I don’t understand, sir. Why would any Slytherin not wish to seek the most powerful position of their House?” Turais rebutted.
“Of course, that would make the most convenient explanation and I would have accepted it from almost any Slytherin,” Dumbledore offered mildly. “But not from you, Mr Black. Let us not kid ourselves, we both know that is not why you sought out the position. In the past two years, you have caused far more changes to your House than I have ever witnessed.”

"Is the change a favourable one for you, however?" Turais asked.

Dumbledore considered him in a long moment of silence. "I can't yet decide," Dumbledore said. "I only know you are one with great potential... as to the question about whether you work for the progression of society, only time will tell."

"Isn't progress a matter of perspective?" Turais asked. "The definition of the betterment or retrogression in society differs greatly between individuals."

"Therefore, rest assured that I will keep a close eye on your movements to ensure my version of betterment is achieved."

"Is this any different from your previous arrangement?" Turais asked in return.

"Indeed not," Dumbledore admitted with a cold smile. "Thank you for your time, Mr Black."

***

June 17, 1971 (Thursday)

The Ravenclaws, except Pierricoeur, took the results in strides this time around and even joked with Turais and asked him to misread a question or two to give them a shot at coming in first. Turais thought that they might have resigned themselves to the fact that someone who had time to earn himself two cover stories on Potions, play on the Quidditch House team, lead a school-wide Homework Club, and surviving two attempts on his life was worthy of besting them.

Turais and Pierricoeur's relationship had improved from the frigid depths immediately after his poisoning. However, a sense of unease persisted stubbornly.

Evan Rosier graduated this summer, leaving behind a fourth empty seat in the Group of Seven. Turais had read the Charter thoroughly to know that there was no mechanism to add new members into the group with only three members left in the Group and with Malfoy as the sure dissenting vote. Turais guessed it was because the founding members never anticipated there would be a Leader who would willingly sabotage the Group’s continued relevance and existence. So now, the Group of Seven was functionally extinct until all the remaining members graduated. After that time, the Group would cease to exist forever.

Turais believed that was for the best.

On the last day at Hogwarts, Turais was standing outside Professor Slughorn's office nervously. He readied himself and knocked on the door. After a few moments, the door slowly creaked open.

"Oh Turais, m'boy!" Slughorn said cheerily as he opened the door fully. "Why are you in this gloomy castle instead of enjoying the sun out in the grounds?"
Turais breathed in a steadying breath before he asked his question.

"Professor, I would like to apply to become the British Youth Representative to the Wizengamot."

"Oh," Slughorn said with a hint of surprise. "Is that all?"

"And I would like to apply for a Time Turner."

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter, Chapte 37: Potter-Black Relations, is on schedule. Until next time!

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-17
Hey everybody,

This is part two and the full chapter for this week's two-part update! Enjoy!

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-20

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER 37

POTTER-BLACK RELATIONS

EXPLOSIVE ROW BETWEEN FAWLEY AND FLINT

- Catherine Shafiq -

June 23, 1971 (Wednesday)
During yesterday’s afternoon session, Lord Fawley engaged in a vitriol spat with Lord Flint. That heated exchange culminated in an explosive end when Lord Fawley embraced his fiery personality and accused Lord Flint as a ‘pathological liar’ and refused to withdraw his comment. Lord Flint returned fire with an equally unapologetic phrase of ‘subilluminated gobs--te’. Both phrases resulted in their immediate expulsion by the Deputy Chief Warlock, Mr Flack, for the remainder of the debate.

Mr Minchum, publicly elected representative to the open seat of West Country (formerly family seat of Harris), provided a scathing retort to both sides of the chamber shortly after the expulsion:

> The entire chamber should be ashamed of this pathetic showing of basic manners by two esteemed and respectable Lords. We are here to do our jobs: to represent the interests of our constituents, to engage in civil political discourse, and to present the most well thought-out solutions in response to our people’s problems and concerns. With the Ministry's leadership in disarray and their incompetency on full display, the people now turn to us to lead them through these trying and turbulent times. Yet, instead of doing what is required of us and instilling faith, we are squabbling like petty schoolyard children. I urge both sides to return to civility and partake in constructive conversations. We might not agree on various issues, but we must learn to listen to each other with rational minds. Only with cooler heads and unbiased minds shall we prevail.

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July 1, 1971 (Thursday)

"I'm boooorrrred! " James' voice blared out from the kitchen.

"When will our letters arriveeeeee?" Sirius' question was heard as well.

"Coooommmme oooooon, stupid birds! Fly faster!"

It was the crack of dawn and James and Sirius were sitting around the kitchen table in their pajamas. Alex and Regulus were still sound asleep in their rooms while the three adults and Turais were in the sitting room down the hall.

Ever since James had written to Sirius last month about opening their Hogwarts letter together and ever since Orion agreed to it after extracting a hefty promise from Sirius to behave impeccably for the rest of summer, things started to spiral out of control. Both boys seemed to have taken the (very limited) scope of the agreement and applied it to daily Floo-calls, then actual hang-outs, then finally, a sleepover Hogwarts letter watch-party.

Well... this all happened due to some deception on Sirius and James’ part... and Turais might
June 30, 1971 (Wednesday)

The night before...

Turais knocked on Sirius' bedroom door when it was time for James to leave. However, there was no response. Turais knocked again. No response. Quietly, he creaked open the door and found the room to be pitch black. On the bed were two figures huddled so closely that he could not distinguish where one ended and the other started. Turais observed the boys, who were seemingly sound asleep, in perfect silence and stillness... which struck Turais as very odd.

"What is taking so long?" Regulus asked as he appeared beside him. He peered into the room for a split moment before commenting with an unimpressed tone, "They are fake-sleeping."

"I guessed that much," Turais agreed. Sirius was a famed snorer. The fact that it was utterly silent pointed to the fact that Sirius was not asleep. However, he was making a valiant effort into maintaining that illusion.

"Wake up, Siri," Regulus shouted without hesitation.

No response.

"Fine, I'll just tell father to come up then," Regulus said as he turned to leave. Behind him, there was quick shuffling of fabric as Sirius shot up to a sitting position. James abandoned his act and sat up as well, showcasing his messy hair in full glory and puffiness.

"No, Reggie. No. Please don't tell father. Please!" Sirius pleaded.

Regulus turned around and said, "You owe me one favour, brother."

"Come on, Reggie!" Sirius moaned. "Turais is not asking me for a favour."

"That's between you and him," Regulus said with a shrug. "This is between you and me. So take up my offer or leave it. Plus, I'm not the one receiving a Hogwarts letter tomorrow so I could care less about what happens."

"Snitches end up in ditches, Regulus," James warned, but Regulus looked unperturbed.

Sirius sighed before he spat out a single word, "Fine."

Victorious, Regulus smirked. He gave Turais a wink before he walked out of the room and descended the stairs.

James turned to Sirius. "Is your brother always like this?"

"That little rascal," Sirius groaned into his hands and fell backwards onto his bed once more.

"Father! Sirius and James are sound asleep," Turais could hear Regulus shout out downstairs. "I think it is most practical if James stayed for the night."
July 1, 1971 (Thursday)

Potter-Black relations were also at an all-time high - notably among Orion and Turais' generations. However, Turais must admit that while his generation was getting along with each other perfectly, Orion's generation was taking much longer to warm up to one another. And the resistance was mostly on Orion's part as he was still struggling to manoeuver into the unknown territories of friendship with the patriarch of a Light family.

"More tea?" Orion gestured the levitating tea pot that was currently tipped and refilling his cup.

"That is an excellent idea. Thank you, Orion," Fleamont said he allowed his tea cup to be levitated from his saucer.

Turais eyed the adults cast in the amber glow from the nearby hearth. While the light painted a lovely portrait of homeliness and comfort, the inability of the warmth to penetrate through the measured silence failed to corroborate on such desired deception.

"I dare say bringing up three children must have been quite a challenge, Orion," Fleamont's voice shook everyone out of their isolated reveries. "Euphemia and I are exhausted with James alone."

"The worst is behind us -" Orion said neutrally. Yet another fiendish scream split through the inanimate silence. They winced. " - or so I dared to hope."

"I SEE THEM! I SEE THE OWLS!" James shouted.

"THERE ARE THREE OF THEM! THEY MUST BE FROM HOGWARTS!" Sirius shouted. "ONE FOR TURAIS, ONE FOR ME, AND ONE FOR YOU, JAMES!"

Eyeing an opportunity to leave this little tense exchange since a good half-hour ago, Turais immediately excused himself in favour of receiving his Hogwarts letter. Just as he entered the kitchen, he saw the boys pointing at something outside the window excitedly. Soon enough, the three owls barely made it through the window and onto the table when the two boys suddenly pounced onto them. Startled, the owls immediately snipped and flapped their wings in alarm and defense. Ear-splitting screams and high-pitched bird screeches accompanied the fall of civility into a flurry of limbs, talons, and feathers.

"AH HAH!" James emerged victoriously from the scuffle with feathers sticking out of his hair and tiny scratches on his left cheek. In his hand were two envelopes. Sirius was in a similar state but only held one. Meanwhile, the mauled owls hooted angrily as they disappeared in a few flap of wings. "I WON!"

"You cheated," Sirius shouted as Kreacher appeared by the window with a dust pan and broom to sweep away the fallen feathers.

"No, I did not!" James retorted. "But let's open up the letters first!" The boys slapped the three envelopes on the table. "This one is for Turais... wait - This is one is for Turais as well - and the third one as well!"
While the two boys groaned and slumped back into their wooden chairs in sleepy defeat, Turais immediately snatched up the letters. He returned to the sitting room and opened the first letter. It was from Professor Slughorn, who wrote and explained that he had officially submitted his recommendation in Turais' bid for the British Youth Representative to the Wizengamot. However, Turais noticed the lack of any mentions about the progress for his Time-Turner application.

He tore open the second letter. After he scanned the letter, he was silenced by shock and passed it on to Orion numbly.

"Turais, you have just been invited to present as a keynote speaker alongside Damocles at the International Symposium for Potions this year!" Orion said proudly, his eyes shining brightly. He handed the letter to Fleamont and asked him, "Fleamont, you are a seasoned Potions Master. Would you mind telling us what this means?"

"This is an extraordinary achievement, that's for sure. The keynote speakers are usually chosen for their ground-breaking research. Your Wolfsbane Potion had been conditionally approved last year so they must want you to deliver a speech on your findings," Fleamont said. "The International Symposium for Potions is the largest conference for Potions research. Researchers from around the globe will gather and have a chance to present their research and exchange knowledge and ideas. This year, it will be held in Paris. You and Damocles will be the featured Potioneers - the 'main attraction', so to speak - and will have to prepare for an hour-long presentation that is occurring on the final day of the symposium."

"Oh... I don't know about that..." Turais balked at the idea of giving a grand speech in front of an erudite crowd that would tear his work into shreds. He was knowledgeable in Potions to the extent of an ordinary Auror with the dusty knowledge of NEWT-level graduate. He was no professional.

"I think this will be a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and see new things," Fleamont said. "And remember, everyone knows you are new to this field so they will be very lenient. Also, you're not the only person responsible for this speech. Collaborate with him and work out a plan. He can do most of the talking and heavy-lifting if you don't feel comfortable doing so. I'm sure everyone is just ecstatic to be the first to hear from the young man who had an immeasurable impact on one of the most influential Potions in this century."

Turais gulped under the weight of those words. "I'll write to Damocles about this. I'm sure he has received this letter as well and he must be ecstatic at the opportunity. Fleamont, will you be there as well?"

"Why, of course!" Fleamont grinned. "I'm one of the committee members organizing this event."

"So you knew about this beforehand?!" Turais screeched. "Why didn't you give me a warning? Now I only have six weeks to prepare my presentation!"

"I'm bound by a vow of secrecy so I cannot reveal the decisions made," Fleamont said apologetically. "But six weeks is standard for preparing a speech. Also, there isn't a firm framework of what you have to present. You can talk anecdotally about your journey on how you discovered the potion, or you can be extremely technical and describe a few key reactions of the potion in depth, or you can even just recite the key points of the aconite paper that you published. Once again, everyone will adjust their expectations accordingly since you are only twelve - thirteen by the time of the conference. They are not expecting you to regurgitate Potions literature and theorems. So don't over-stress yourself."
Turais nodded mutely as he turned his attention to the third letter.

It was a black envelope with a golden symbol on one side. Beneath it was Turais’ full name penned in an elegant, cursive font in shimmering, gold ink. Turais took a closer look at the symbol, which consisted of a single dot within a circle and a fleur-de-lis protruded outwards on the top-right edge of the circle.

Then, he heard a loud gasp from Fleamont. Turais looked up to find the older man pointing at the envelop with shock and fascination.

"That's the symbol of Nicolas Flamel," Fleamont breathed out.

"What?!!" Orion gasped incredulously as he tilted the envelope so he could confirm. His eyes widened at the sight of the symbol. “Turais, open it up and read it quickly.”

Turais didn't waste a second as he torn open the envelope and read the letter within.

"Nicolas Flamel invited me to visit his residence on the final day of the conference," Turais summarized as he handed the letter to Orion.

"This is an extraordinary opportunity, Turais," Fleamont said excitedly. "Flamel must be really impressed with you for him to extend invitation for a private audience. I can count the number of people who had this immense honour with one hand. Even I had only met him twice in my entire career."

"But I don't know why he would want to see me," Turais said.

"Don't look a gift horse in its mouth," Fleamont said. "Few people can claim to have had a conversation with the legendary Nicolas Flamel. You must go."

"I will write my reply at once," Turais said.

"AAARRGH! THE HOGWARTS LETTERS ARE FINALLY HERE!" James' scream reverberated throughout the house.

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Turais appeared from the fireplace of the Leaky Cauldron to Orion and the surrounding rambunctious crowd of chattering diners. The fire behind him flared up again as his brothers stepped out. After him, the Potters appeared as well. Several people noticed the two families and started to cast curious glances at them. They quickly made their way past Tom, the barkeeper, and into the courtyard. Fleamont tapped his wand on the brick wall and the bricks started to rearrange itself, brick-by-brick, into an archway. Finally, it stopped at revealed a bustling crowd that weaved up and down a narrow passage with the crooked building of Gringotts gleaming in the distance.

“We best get started if we are to finish at least half of the shopping for these boys today,” Orion said as he pulled out the school supplies list for Turais, Sirius, and Alex. "I don't see how we can manage them all today -"

"Orion," Fleamont said. "Why don't Sirius join us to Madam Malkin's to measure for their first-year robes since James needs his as well. We can go to Flourish and Blotts to pick up
everyone's textbooks after. This would save you some time."

"I have booked an appointment for Turais and Sirius at Twilfitt and Tattings," Orion said. "It is in two hours. I have also arranged for our portraits to be taken in an hour's time."

"Ah, of course," Fleamont said. "So why don't you provide Euphemia and I with the supplies lists. We will shop for all the books, potions ingredients, and equipment while James can go with Sirius for their wand-shopping at Mr Ollivander's. That should leave them with enough time to browse for their owls before your photography session. Then, we can reconvene at Twilfitt and Tattings?"

Orion nodded as the Potters walked off towards the direction of Flourish and Blotts while Orion and the five children headed towards Mr Ollivander's. Not even a second later, the two ten-year-olds whined.

"Can we start walking?!" James and Sirius shouted in unison, then they looked at each other in surprise.

"Wicked!" they shouted at the same time.

They laughed loudly in delight.

"Let's go, father! I want to get my wand!" Sirius whined.

Orion frowned. "Sirius, behave. I do not want to hear any frivolous complaints."

"Yes, father," Sirius' smile turned into a sulk in an instant.

"Ah, welcome. Heir Black," Mr Ollivander said with a deep bow as they entered the store. "Mr Fawley -" He said with a hint of surprise " - and -"

There was a loud series of rattling that came from deep within the store as if some foul creature was trying to escape from its confinement. Mr Ollivander cast his gaze down the dark aisle, between the wand boxes that were protruding messily from both sides.

"I might have an idea what that is..." he muttered softly. Offering his apologies, Mr Ollivander disappeared for a brief while before returning. He announced, "It was exactly what I thought. A pesky box of old belongings from my dear mother who passed away decades ago. It had never tried to escape before... Well, actually it did once, a couple of years ago."

"Inheritance magic is extremely powerful," Orion warned with a frown. "It would be wise for you to not ignore its signs."

Mr Ollivander waved his hand dismissively, "Inheritance magic never harms their descendants. But rest assured that I will investigate the matter in due time. But before that, we have something more important to do... So, where was I... ah yes... Heir Potter."

"Who's Heir Potter?" James frowned for a moment and looked around him. "Oh, you mean me!"

Orion placed his hands on Sirius' shoulder and said, "My second child is in search of a wand. As well as Heir Potter."

"Of course..." Mr Ollivander said. He quickly took several measurements from the two boys and he disappeared to back of the store.
After a few moments, he returned with an armful of new wands.

"Please step forward, Mr Potter," Mr Ollivander said as James bounced forward eagerly. He was about to hand the boy his first wand before his eyes snapped up towards the rest of the group. "Mr Potter, wand information - especially the wand core - is extremely personal information. Do you wish for your guests to step outside for a moment while you choose your wand?"

James blinked once before he shook his head and shrugged. "Nah, I'm alright. I'm going to tell Sirius what it is anyway."

"If you are certain... this first one is mahogany and unicorn hair. Eleven -" Mr Ollivander said as James immediately reached up and snatched it out of the man's hand eagerly.

The instant that James' fingers touched the wand, Turais felt a rush of wind and magic swirl around him as the tip of the wand let off a series of red sparks.

"Wonderful!" Mr Ollivander gasped in excitement. "A match on the first try."

James looked at his wand filled with unbridled joy and contentment. Then, he jumped up and down ecstatically. "Does this mean this is an especially powerful wand? To match with it on the first try?"

"My success rate on first-time matches is much better than the other wandmakers, I daresay. However, it's not uncommon to find your wand within three tries," Mr Ollivander said matter-of-factly as James' face fell. "So, unfortunately not."

"Oh..." James said, sounding slightly disappointed. But then, his face split into a wide grin again as he shouted, "But I have my wand, woohoo!" He proceeded to wave his wand around in various dueling stances and making his own sound effects with his voice.

Mr Ollivander cast a wary side glance at the hyperactive boy before turning his attention to Sirius. "So, Mr Black. Please step up as well. This is an Elm and dragon heartstring. Pliable - no - this one is Hawthorn and dragon heartstring - not at all..."

Soon enough, there was a modest pile of tried wands laying on the counter. It was only a fraction of Turais’ pile two years ago but it was still impressive, nonetheless. James was now spinning on a swivel chair at the corner of the store with a wand in his hand; he looked mightily bored. Alex was now largely engrossed with the various wands that were waiting to be tried by Sirius. Meanwhile, Sirius was looking slightly deflated as he stood, back hunched, in the center of the room. But a sense of pride swelled up curiously in Turais’ heart.

“Sirius, you are taking sooooo long!” James complained.

“Wand selection is a delicate task!” Mr Ollivander’s ordinarily wispy eyes hardened as he snapped. He shot a glare at the complaining child, who was clearly unaware of the wandmaker’s fury and continued to spin around. He turned his attention back to Sirius.

"Walnut and unicorn hair. Ten and a quarter inches. Pliable," Mr Ollivander said with a hint of annoyance, perhaps the residual anger elicited by James.

"I don't think it will fit -" Alex said as he scrunched his nose. Not a second later, Mr Ollivander snatched the wand out of Sirius’ hand and replaced with another one. "Not a yew either."

"What are you mumbling about, boy?" Mr Ollivander asked he he narrowed his glare at Alex.
Alex looked like a unicorn at wandpoint as he froze.

"No... nothing," Alex said.

"You were providing a running commentary throughout Mr Black's wand selection process," Mr Ollivander said. "Don't think that I didn't catch it. What are your thoughts?"

Exposed, Alex chuckled nervously. "Sorry, I'll stop talking," he said meekly.

"I don’t say stop. I said ‘tell me what you think’?" Mr Ollivander asked again. His attention fully focused on the boy.

Alex's eyes darted between the man and Sirius for a moment before he said hesitantly, "Well... Mr Ollivander, the wands that are associated with his family traits or his father’s traits did not work,” Alex suggested with his nose buried deep in the pile of wood. “I know Sirius' personality well and I think he would be better matched with the more playful wands? Dogwood or ebony, perhaps?”

Mr Ollivander considered Alex’s words carefully as he studied the boy through his narrow glasses. Then, he disappeared back into the stores briefly before returning with more wands.

“Let us try these, Mr Black. Blackthorn and dragon heartstring. Thirteen and a half inches. Bendy - no, no, no - Try this. Dogwood and unicorn hair. Twelve and three-quarters inches - NO! Give that back, boy - How about Dogwood and phoenix feather. Springy - never mind - Ebony and phoenix feather. Thirteen and a half inches - ah hah! ”

Golden sparks jetted out of the wand tip as Sirius shouted ecstatically. “Turais, father! I got chosen for a wand!”

Turais grinned at his brother as he ruffled his hair. Alex beamed as well as Mr Ollivander gave him an approving glance.

“Fawley, you said..." Mr Ollivander wondered aloud. "I remember a Fawley who wrote to me two years ago. Was that you?” Alex nodded nervously as Mr Ollivander nodded. "Mr Fawley, are you interested in becoming a wandmaker, by any chance?" Mr Ollivander asked. Alex's jaws dropped and hung down uselessly. Turais looked at the boy exasperatedly. This boy needed someone to give him a hand.

“Yes!” Turais said in Alex's stead. "He has always been interested in wandlore and he always mentioned how he wanted to become an apprentice under you. Would there be any chance of that?"

Mr Ollivander hummed thoughtfully. “Pity that you aren’t an Ollivander... although you do look the part, if I can say so myself. Also, your heart and mind are in the right place... Come back after you’ve graduated, I might have something for you then.”

Alex’s eyes widened comically as Mr Ollivander started to gather the unchosen wands.

“Congratulations,” Turais said as he nudged Alex. "Future wandmaker." Alex's cheeks flushed.

“Thank you,” Turais heard Alex whisper as he knocked their shoulders together.

“Are we finally done!!” James shot off the chair and ran back to the counter, his glasses skewed from all the spinning. “I want to leave and see the new Nimbus 1701!”
Orion quickly paid twelve Galleons for the two wands, but before they were able to leave the store, Mr Ollivander called out again.

"Oh, Mr Fawley? I almost forgot to mention this," Mr Ollivander said, "Take care to choose Care of Magical Creatures, Magical Theory, and Arithmancy for your electives. They are very important for your foundation."

Alex nodded enthusiastically in response.

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While James and Sirius were plastered onto the window staring at the stunning art piece that was the Nimbus 1701, Turais and Alex noticed a familiar sight. Not too far away from the Quality Quidditch Supplies store, Turais could see that Michael was heading towards them. Behind him were three adults. Furthermore, there was a female companion walking alongside Michael. Compared to the darker complexion and thick, black hair possessed by the Wilkinses, her skin was fair and her hair was fiery red.

"Hey Alex, look," Turais nudged Alex. "That's Michael, isn't it?"

Alex looked over for a moment before he nodded. Then, he whispered, "Can you see how deep his scowl is? And I thought how he acted in Hogwarts was bad..."

Turais observed the moment that Michael noticed them. His expression turned into one of shock, then of panic, and finally settled with an even darker scowl to grim realization. He looked as though he wished to be anywhere but here.

"Heir Black," the older lady walked up in front of Michael and raised her hand regally, "Pleasure to see you again. I'm sure you recognize my youngest daughter, Lavinia."

"Indeed," Orion said. "It's lovely to see you blossom into such a fine lady, Ms Swire."

"It has been too long, Mr Black," Ms Swire said sweetly as she stepped forward and took Orion's hand with a courtesy.

"Indeed," Lady Swire said. “And this is Mr and Ms Wilkins."

"Pleasure to meet you both," Orion said cordially. "Are your families shopping for supplies today?"

"Not exactly," Lady Swire said as she gestured her daughter and Michael. "We are on our way to the restaurant. My daughter is getting acquainted with young Mr Wilkins. I would love to continue this lovely conversation, but I'm afraid we must head off. Please excuse us."

"Of course, Lady Swire. I must head to our next appointment as well," Orion said smoothly.

Once the Wilkins were out of earshot, Orion commented, "It seems like there will be a courtship between the Wilkins heir and the youngest Swire daughter."

Turais asked Orion, "Father, who are the Swires?"

"The Swires detest the smog-choked London and primarily resides in the French countryside
now. Lady Swire is also the sister of Lord Malfoy’s late wife. Therefore, the two families are bound both by marriage and by politics."

"And how old is Lavinia Swire? I don't recognize her from school," Turais said.

"You would not have possibly met her at Hogwarts since she studies at Beauxbatons. She is sixteen years old if I'm not mistaken."

Now Turais understood, Michael was being forced by his parents into an arranged marriage with the Swires. Such betrothals and arranged marriages were falling out of favour, but they still persisted in more conservative families. Clearly the Wilkins was one of those families.

Turais was just glad that he was in a position to refuse any marriage proposal due to his status, but it was a bit depressing to think about how familial pressure remained a strong force in the lives of young Purebloods.

"Are we expecting a betrothal announcement anytime soon?"

"I doubt it would be within this year as we must have witnessed merely the beginning of this courtship. And males generally do not enter a marriage contract until they are of age. So it would likely be next year, at the soonest."

Turais hummed thoughtfully.

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*July 17, 1971 (Saturday)*

Turais rung the doorbell with Alex beside him. Orion had just Apparated away to Side-Along with Sirius and Regulus.

"Happy birth-"

Turais’ shout stopped when the door swung open to reveal a jittery and scowling Slytherin captain instead of the Gryffindor counterpart whom Turais was expecting.

"Hey, Mich-" Michael placed his hand on Turais’ mouth before he walked outside and closed the front door behind him. "What's going on -"


Turais blinked owlishly before he realized what the boy meant.


"What should they not tell me?"
The three boys whipped around to see Kaiden at the wide-open doorway.

"Oh... just about my birthday present," Michael lied smoothly with a soft smile. He swung an arm around each of the two third-years and said, "Turais and Alex helped me with it and I needed to make sure they didn't spoil the surprise."

"I'm sure they both have more sense than that," Kaiden laughed. "But doesn't that mean you only gave me half a present, Michael, if they were to lay claim to parts of yours?"

"Kaiden, when did I ever only give you a single present?" Michael asked.

"I don't know, maybe my sixth birthday?" Kaiden suggested with a teasing grin.

"You can't hold me accountable for that!"

"Michael, you know I love every gift you gave me," Kaiden said softly while looking down at his hands.

Turais noted that the tips of Michael's ears tinted pink at the comment as the two captains stood in an amiable but loaded silence.

'Huh... interesting...'

Kaiden cleared his throat and turned to Turais. "However, I'm not so lenient on you, young man," Kaiden said.

"Happy sixteenth birthday, you cheeky bastard," Turais said with a grin as he held out the wrapped present.

Kaiden snatched it out of his grasp and proceeded to give him a crushing hug. For a brief second, he felt that his feet were off the ground. "Aw, Turais, love you too, mate!"

"Did I ever mention that I hate being lifted?" Turais said as he tried to regain his breath while Kaiden gave Alex a one-armed hug.

"Nope," Kaiden smiled with all his teeth in glistening white and clearly full of himself. "And even if I did..." Kaiden motioned one finger towards his left ear and the other finger away from the right ear. "... you should know me by now. It doesn't work unless I choose to retain the information. And Michael, would you mind heading to the pitch to get everyone organized since our final Quidditch member has arrived. We will be right there once I get everyone here settled."

"Of course," Michael said with a squeeze on Kaiden's shoulder. "I'll head back to the pitch right now."

"Thank you, Michael," Kaiden said. Behind the birthday boy's head, Michael gave both Turais and Alex a stern glare as a parting reminder of their promise before he disappeared through a doorway. A few seconds later, Orion, Sirius, and Regulus appeared at the front doorstep with a quiet pop.

"Happy birthday, Kaiden," Orion said as he crossed the threshold.

"Thank you, Mr Black," Kaiden said. "My mom and the other parents are in the sitting room. James and the others are upstairs playing Exploding Snap the last time I checked. Alex, I know you're a big boy, but if you don't want to -"
"I'll go upstairs with Sirius and Regulus."

"Great! There are a few third- and fourth-years as well so you can join them, Alex." Alex nodded.

"How about you, Turais?" Regulus asked.

Kaiden wrapped his arm around Turais and said, "Don't worry about your big brother. He is coming with me to play some big boy Quidditch."

"I want to play Quidditch too!" Sirius whined.

"Sorry, Sirius," Kaiden said. "It's big boys only - or Hogwarts students only."

"But I have my letter already! I have all my Hogwarts supplies! I'm a Hogwarts student!" Sirius said hotly.

"Nuh uh - I wasn't done yet -" Kaiden tutted, "- Big boy means Hogwarts student and being on a House Team," Kaiden said. "I banned James as well so no complaints."

Sirius slouched in defeat.

"Sirius, Regulus. I will be with the adults if you need anything," Orion said. Sirius and Regulus nodded as they followed Alex and started to climb the stairs. Before Orion disappeared down the hallway, he said, "Turais, don't forget your gift."

"Don't worry, Mr Black, it's safely in my hands," Kaiden called out as he waved Turais' gift in his hand. He led Turais towards the back of the house. "You have your broom? Perfect! Can I borrow it sometime today? Catherine refuses to let any of us lay a single finger on her broom."

"Of course!" Turais said.

"That's why you are my favourite person, Turais," Kaiden grinned as he wrapped an arm around him. "We are -"

"I thought your favourite person in the world is -" a female voice sounded from above them before Kaiden slapped his hand over her mouth. Turais looked up to see a girl's face, blond ponytail, brown eyes... but upside down. Now Turais noticed that her shoes were attached to the ceiling with glistening purple footprints behind her.

"Gwen! Stop spreading slander about me and stop tracking that goo all over my ceiling. That Zonko's stuff is a hassle to clean out and I'm going to be the one doing it... without magic," Kaiden said when the girl attempted to pry his fingers off of her.

"Alright, alright, alright. Hot-shot captain," she said. Then she extended her hand downward to Turais, "Hi, Black. I'm Gwenyth Orpington and this dingbat's best friend. Please call me Gwen."

"Nice to meet you, Gwen," Turais stretched his hand up and shook her hand awkwardly. "And please call me Turais."

"Gladly, Turais," Gwen said. "I see you hang around this broomhead often enough. If you even need any dirt on this boy, you can find me anytime -"

Kaiden jumped up to claw at Gwen as she crouched upwards and out of reach. "You better hope that Semi-Sticking Charm doesn't wear off in the next few hours, Gwen, or you're going to
Kaiden gave a growl as Gwen stuck her tongue and walked off. He snatched Turais' hand and guided the two of them out into the field. In the distance, Turais could see nearly a dozen people milling around and hovering on their brooms. "So, please ignore everything that Gwen has just said -"

"Who's Gwen?" Turais said with a wink as they saw a set of parents enjoying some tea in the fields nearby.

Kaiden looked at Turais blankly before he smirked and said dramatically, "There's a good chap. Merlin knows how much I love you."

"Save it for your other conquests," Turais laughed as Kaiden waved cheerily at the two adults.

"Enjoy your tea, Mr and Ms Winterbottom," he said loudly. The couple waved back with smiles on their faces.

He turned back to Turais, "Anyhow, I meant to tell you that I will be going to Paris with you in a few weeks."

"What?" Turais exclaimed. "How?"

"Oh! Uncle Fleamont is allowed to bring a plus one," Kaiden said, "Usually Aunt Euphemia goes with him. But this year, she will be with my mom at the annual International Conference for Witches in Spain because my mom is the Chairwitch this year!"

'Woah. I didn't know how well-connected and philanthropic the Potters were,' Turais thought.

"But why did he not bring James along?" Turais asked as they started down a winding path through some shrubbery.

"Because James hates this sort of thing," Kaiden said breezily. "And I might have said that I wanted a change of scenery..." Turais suddenly realized that Kaiden stopped walking.

Concerned, Turais turned around and saw Kaiden's trademark smile was all but absent. He then followed the boy's gaze and realized that they were looking due north... directly at the Arkenstones' old residency.

"Are you doing okay?" Turais asked softly. Kaiden hummed noncommittally.

"You know when we were little, we - Natalia, Noel and I - liked turn the lights on and off... sort of like... those Muggle towers... by the sea..."

"A lighthouse?" Turais supplied.

"Yeah, a lighthouse," Kaiden said with a wist of melancholy. "And we would use the Mo...Morses code to communicate with each other when we didn't want to go to bed. Sometimes, I catch myself looking out the window with my hands just itching to reach the switch. But then I realized that Patrick and Winnie are no longer in this world while Natalia and Noel no longer live there... it's like everything has changed for the worse..."

"You know... their spirits still live within us," Turais said softly.
"I know," Kaiden's lip formed a sad twist. "Everyone says that... but is that even real?"

"Well, how about this?" Turais said. "There are multiple parallel universe where every decision splits into different possibilities. And we are merely living in one of many universes where they unfortunately passed away. But in many of the other universes that we can't see, they are still alive and celebrating your birthday with you today."

Kaiden looked at Turais for a moment. "I haven't heard of that one before. But it's a good thought... that they are still living on in an identical but slightly different world... thank you, Turais."

"Anytime," Turais said gently. Kaiden gave Turais a quick smile before they continued.

As reached the pitch, Kaiden had plastered on his brilliant smile once again. Turais' heart squeezed a little when he realized that he could not recognize his faked smile from his genuine one without the preceding conversation. Then, he wondered how often the smile he saw on Kaiden's face was real.

Above their heads, Turais saw several figures zooming after tossing a Quaffle around. One of them did a particularly tricky save after a dive for the grass.

Fabian whistled and shouted, "Nice one, Shafiq!"

"What took you two so long?" Gideon smirked as he punched Kaiden's shoulder. "Those four couldn't wait for your lazy arses to get here and flew off on their own."

"Hey! I'm the birthday boy. I get to be fashionably late, you clot," Kaiden said with his arms crossed. He was smiling but it did not reach his eyes.

Turais decided to play along. He snorted, "Yeah, he is late but definitely not fashionable."

Kaiden shoved at Turais while Gideon laughed. "Good one, Turais."

"I see almost the entire Gryffindor team is here. But where is MacGregor?" Turais asked. Besides the Gryffindor team, Turais recognized Erika Rea as a Hufflepuff Chaser, Rosamund Mondale as a Ravenclaw Chaser, and a nervous-looking Michael.

"Oh, he is with his best friend in Egypt at the moment," Kaiden said. "Bloody traitor, that's what he is -"

"HEADS!" Someone shouted above. Everyone ducked as they realized the rogue scarlet ball was plummeting towards them, more specifically, directly at Turais. Just as Turais was about to deflect the ball with his magic, the wind sung past his ears as twigs filled his peripheries. Turais instinctively dropped on the grass as he braced for impact.

But nothing came.

Creaking open his eyelids, he held up his hand to block the sun as he squinted at the silhouette hovering just above him. He could see the soft, pink lips curling artistically as silent words formed. However, Turais drifted his eyes upwards as he zoomed in on the electrifying eyes that coloured more intensely blue than any picturesque ocean in the world. Turais knew she was undoubtedly one of the most captivating ladies he would ever meet in any lifetime. She was decidedly stunning - not only in a very classical, patrician sort of way - but playful and approachable as well. Her hair was a deep chestnut brown with streaks of platinum blond braided into an intricate pattern and resting on her left shoulder. Her eyes were warm as a hearth yet fiery...
And they were looking straight at him.

Turais flushed at the sudden realization and immediately averted his gaze. He must have stared at her like a loon and embarrassed himself entirely before even the introductions. Then, he felt a pair of hands guiding him upwards and onto his feet.

"That was a close call," Kaiden's voice rang like an alarm as the ambient sounds came roaring back into his world. Turais blinked as he realized the girl in front of him dismounted with the Quaffle held snugly by her side. Kaiden walked over and tore the Quaffle from her and punched her on the arm. "How dare you abuse Ringo, Shafiq?"

The girl bit down on her lower lip adorably as her eyes glowed with mischief. She dropped her broom and started to smack the offending boy on both sides. Kaiden yelped as he tried to block the attack while he escaped behind Turais. The girl stopped in front of Turais and her eyes flitted to him once again.

Turais felt his breath hitch. And why was his heart pounding? He must've not calmed down from the shock yet, Turais surmised.

"This mean lady here is the Catherine Shafiq that I mentioned before," Kaiden gasped as Turais blinked again. “A complete bully, that’s what she is,” Kaiden huffed as the girl threatened another smack-down.

Suddenly, he realized that he was supposed to introduce himself and he hastily extended his hand, “Nice to meet you, Catherine. I'm Turais Black,” Turais said as he shook her hand. Her grip was sure and steady, Turais noted absently. "My favourite league player is also called Catherine."

Turais did not know why he offered such a useless piece of information and he felt his cheeks warming up again as the girl laughed. It was like the silver bells chiming crisply in the summer winds to his ears.

"I presume that person you speak of is Catherine Westermont," the girl said, her voice honey. "She is my idol and aspiration as well."

“Are... you a Seeker as well?” Turais asked. His voice felt shy to his ears and he didn't like that.

"Yes -" Catherine said with a small smile.

’Wow,’ Turais thought, impressed. He glanced down at the blue and silver robes. Not only was she a Quidditch player and Seeker, no less, she was also a Ravenclaw so she likely had the intelligence to match her appearance as well. She was, well, frankly perfect.

" - Turais?” Turais suddenly realized he was staring at her like a Stupefy-ed idiot. In the same moment, he realized, in mortification, that he missed what she said.

"Huh?” Turais grunted stupidly. She just asked him a question. What was the question?

"I just asked why did you guess that I was a Seeker?” Catherine repeated.

"Uh -" Turais scrambled for any coherent sentence that came to his mind. He blurted out to his mortification, "Because your hands were soft but firm -” Turais groaned internally. What kind of answer was that?!
Now that his shame was complete, he must search for an escape. Turais busied himself with various plans that darted through his mind at record pace. He was a three minute run away from the nearest tree - no, too far. He could mount his broom and fly off - no, Muggles would spot him. He could blast the ground beneath him and bury himself - no, the blast radius of the spell would injure others.

But Catherine's laugh drew him back to reality. And Turais noted that the tone was not unkindly.

"Oh, what a charming young man. I can see why so many girls fall for you."

"Oh no!" Turais flailed his hands. "I'm not interested in girls... I mean I'm not interested in dating girls... yet... I'm much too young."

Great. Now, he sounded like an idiot and a prude.

'But why do you care if she thinks you're a prude, Turais? ' Turais scolded himself as he tried to get a grip of himself again. 'And you're supposed to be a prude. You're physically twelve, not even thirteen yet.' That made him sober up in an instant.

"Haha... I understand what you mean, Turais," Catherine placed her hand on his shoulder. "No one your age is thinking about dating yet. But you will soon."

Turais scratched his head sheepishly. "I can't believe we haven't crossed paths yet - oh!" Turais saw the broom in her hands that was almost identical to his, " - You have a Nimbus 1701!"

"Well spotted," Catherine grinned as she rubbed a gleaming spot on the broomstick. "It's my early present from my parents for my seventeenth birthday next month. This darling is mahogany with a birch-oak hybrid tail - a balance between faster ascension and increased stability. I also customized the tail trim for better aerodynamics."

"That's amazing," Turais gasped excitedly. "I see you also modified the handlebar grip with a titanium finish - way lighter than the platinum ones. You'll need to let me have a turn on it some time!"

Catherine clutched the broom close to her possessively and smirked, "I'll have to think about it."

Turais groaned, but then he and saluted with one arm, "I'll be on my best behaviour, miss."

That elicited a beautiful laugh from Catherine and Turais smiled involuntarily as well. It felt unusually good to put a smile on her face... and it shouldn’t, Turias reminded himself.

"So... how have I never met you if you are on the Quidditch team?"

“Oh no...” she said with a small chuckle. “I didn’t make it onto the starting line-up this year, unfortunately. Only the back-up. So you wouldn't have seen me even if we played each other.”

“You should try out for next year again,” Turais said.

Catherine smiled and said, “I’ll have to see my workload for my NEWT classes first.” Turais couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment while he nodded his head in agreement.

"Of course, school comes first. But what are your aspirations?"
"I want to become Head Auror, just like my father," Catherine said proudly. "I also want to be the first female Head Auror so I can inspire other girls to join the Aurors. There are too few of us as it is." Turais was swept away by the enthusiasm from the girl.

"I'm sure you will be able to do it," Turais said firmly. "I believe in you."

"Thank you, Turais," Catherine said softly. "Not many people think that a woman can or should become Head Auror..."

Turais scoffed, "Don't listen to those sexist people. We have a female Minister, why can't we have a female Head Auror or female Department Head of Magical Law Enforcement? Whoever told you those things clearly are not worth your time or effort and -" Turais realized that Catherine was chuckling and he suddenly became self-conscious, "- sorry for rambling..."

"You're more riled up about this than I am," Catherine smiled as Turais blushed.

"It's just... I... know you can do it," Turais finished lamely.

Suddenly, a thought crashed into his mind.

Turais realized that the girl he was looking at could potentially be the first female Head Auror in the past timeline. He vaguely remembered seeing the portrait of an older lady with a semblance to Catherine’s demeanour beside Charlus’ official Head Auror portrait.

Maybe Catherine was the future Head Auror.

But did she survive the war?

Turais drew a blank in his mind as a chilling wave of dread and uncertainty dampened his enthusiasm to undetectable levels.

There was a sudden pat on his back. Turais jolted back to attention as Kaiden said, "Oi, Turais. Stop turning on your charm in front of the prettiest girl in Hogwarts who puts part-Veela to shame." He looked at Catherine as she chuckled. "Although I must say I'm disappointed, Catherine. I thought you would have a mounted better defense than to be besotted by Turais' silver tongue. That's not even his best attribute." Catherine laughed again.

Turais retorted. "What other attributes do you speak of then?"

"Hmm, I can't say for sure," Kaiden grinned cheekily. "I think they are all rather inferior to mine so I took no notice."

"I disagree," Catherine said as she stepped up and pushed at Kaiden’s chest gently, but strong enough to cause the boy to stumble backwards. "I think Turais is much better than what I've seen of you. Turais, can you believe this boy left me in the middle of a date because Michael sprained his ankle or twisted his wrist or something -"

"You have to stop holding those dates from two years ago against me!" Kaiden huffed. "And in my defense, I thought he was dying."

"A sprain is not a life-threatening injury," Catherine returned. "But that was not even the worst part. This boy abandoned me in the middle of a snowstorm when we were halfway between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts after asking me to spare my outer cloak because 'Michael's hands felt chilly'. It was the middle of January and one of the heaviest snowfalls in nearly a decade. Of course his hands were chilly! I don’t kick up a fuss about most things but I do want my Cloak in the
middle of a blizzard."

"Catherine - I'm so sorry -" Kaiden pleaded. "I wasn't thinking straight back then - everything was a blur."

"Yeah, when it comes to Wilkins, everyone and everything falls to the wayside," Catherine said with a grin. "Turais, I assure you I'm not trying to be petty. But my disastrous dates... yes, plural... with him were too memorable to ever forget."

Turais snorted as he nudged Kaiden. "Well, I see your ego is still well-intact despite all the put-downs you've experienced through life." Kaiden scowled.

"Catherine did a number on him from years ago and now he's all sexually repressed and emotionally stunted," Simon Walters, the Gryffindor Keeper, teased as he ducked a direct blow from Kaiden's fist. "Our collective birthday present to our eternal bachelor should be a wish that he finally gets some action."

The group laughed again as Kaiden gave an indignant shout of "Hey! Who says I'm not getting plenty of action already?!" For some reason, Turais decided to look at Michael and found his expression to be something that could only be described as jealousy. He turned back only to find Catherine mirroring his action. Their eyes met and she rolled her eyes at the Slytherin captain. Turais felt that she was pointing out an inside joke that he didn’t understand.

"Ooooo! " Yolanda Fields, the Gryffindor Seeker, said. "Care to share who's the lucky... or in this case, unlucky lady?"

Kaiden leaned forward into her face and said with a smirk, "A gentleman doesn't kiss and tell."

"Yeah, that's because you kiss and show. But then there's nothing to show," Catherine said dryly as the group roared in amusement.

"Why am I always on the butt end of every joke?!" Kaiden whined.

"Because you’re easy to make fun of," Georgina Findlay, the Gryffindor Chaser, laughed. "And it's part of the job description of a Quidditch captain."

"Michael never gets this treatment though," Kaiden pointed out as Michael's expression cleared up instantly as the attention fell on him.

"Because Wilkins' broody and scary," Gideon said as Michael scowled once again. "And you, on the other hand, are not even threatening, honey-boo."

"I’m scary!" Kaiden bared his teeth in a supposedly menacing fashion that looked downright ridiculous. He gave up the act and said, "Alright, alright! I'll tell you who the lucky lady is... It's my dear Quaffle - Ringo," Kaiden said to a sea of groaning.

"That's just because you catch your Quaffle with your face instead of your hands, you wanker," Rea groaned.

"I'll have you know that I'm the top scoring Chaser this year," Kaiden retorted. "My catches are the very definition of perfection."

"Then our ma is the Muggle Queen of England," Fabian shouted as Kaiden pounced on him.
Michael cleared his throat and clapped his hands together to address the crowd, “Enough of this horse-playing. Let’s get the Quaffle moving. Form two groups!”

"Wilkins' not allowed to be on the same team as Kaiden!" someone yelled as the rest of them chanted in agreement.

"Fine!" Michael growled. "Kaiden and I will be team leaders then!"

***

"Woah!" Kaiden barely avoided a head injury from the Quaffle that was thrown at him with an immense force.

Suddenly, Michael appeared by Kaiden's side when Turais swore he was at the opposite end of the pitch just a second ago. Clutching his face, Michael examined his face and asked, "Are you okay, Kaiden?"

"I...I'm fine," Kaiden gasped as he yanked his face from Michael's hands and put a few feet of air between them. He looked out of breath and completely flustered.

"Get your act together, Prewett!" Michael roared. "Stop lobbing it like a Bludger!"

"Sorry!" Gideon shouted as he flew away to avoid Michael's wrath. Turais continued to observe them until someone shouted his name. Turais tore his gaze towards the commotion as he joined into the fray once again.

"Rea, top-down," Turais yelled as he flew up to intercept the nimble Mondale. Rea veered down and blocked her path as she veered downwards in avoidance and straight into Turais. He punched the scarlet ball out of her grasp and caught it in one arm. Flashing her a quick grin, he shouted, "Thanks for the delivery!"

Turais zoomed towards the opposite end as he eyed Catherine to his left and Fields to his right. He glimpsed an opening to the left flank and shouted, "Shafiq."

The girl immediately dipped as Turais flew over to drop the ball into her possession. He deftly avoided a grab from Gideon as he eyed the girl's position. Just as he was about to pass, her eyes widened as Turais felt a shadow above him.

"Eyes up here, Black!" Fabian's smirk crowded his vision as he kicked the Quaffle out of his arm and chased after it instead.

"Sorry!" Turais said as Catherine waved the apology away with a smile.

He turned back to the fray just to see someone - Rea - swat a free-falling Quaffle away with her broom and out of Kaiden's grasp.

"Watch Ringo fly!" Walters chanted as the stray Quaffle traveled through the air and closed in on the boundary of the property. Kaiden and Catherine chased after it with fervour.

"Why is the Quaffle called Ringo?" Turais asked Walters after he flew up to him.

"It's named after some Muggle band that broke up," Walters said distractedly. "He named his
Bludgers and Snitch after the other three. Kaiden’s a bit quirky like that."

"Oh... I see."

Suddenly, the Quaffle bounced back as if it hit an invisible wall. The two players immediately stopped where the Quaffle supposedly hit and felt the air as though they were miming the existence of a wall. Turais wondered if the wards were strengthened... but why?

Just as they were wondering, Charlus’ voice boomed across the pitch.

"Everyone, return to the house at once!"

They looked at each other, confused. But nonetheless, they returned as directed. Once they entered the house, they were faced with a group of adults that Turais did not recognize until he noticed their Auror uniforms.

"He’s here," Charlus said as he parted the group and pulled him to the front of the room. "Turais Black. Kaiden, please lead everyone else up to the spare sitting room."

Kaiden sent Turais a questioning look but he merely shrugged. He knew as much as Kaiden did about the situation.

Once they were out of view and out of earshot, Charlus nodded at the woman beside him.

"Hello, Heir Black," she stepped up and shook his and Orion’s hand, "I am Jemima Atticus, Senior Auror. I’m afraid I have bad news."

"What’s the matter?" Orion asked as he stepped forward slightly, shielding a bit of Turais’ body from view.

"Brutus Nott, Janus Avery, and Antonin Dolohov have been broken out -"

Orion shouted incredulously as Jemima stood calmly before him, "What? Did you just say that my son’s murderers just escaped your detention?"

"Mr Black," she continued. "An hour ago, when the three of them were in transit to be transferred to Azkaban, their transport was attacked by an unknown number of assailants. This was brought to our attention when the transport did not arrive at Azkaban at its scheduled time. We believe that... that all the accompanying Aurors were killed in action."

"The Auror Office is a joke!" Orion spat. "First, you failed to detect the Muggle attacks. Then, you failed prevent the attack on the Arkenstones. Now, you let three highly-dangerous criminals escape your watch!"

"I understand your frustration, Mr -" Jemima said.

"Don’t say you understand my frustration," Orion interrupted. "You’re not the one whose family is endangered by your incompetency. My son is the one that came up with the plan to capture them. My son is the one who was willing to put himself in danger to apprehend your criminals. This is how your repay all his hard work? Spare me the excuses."

"Mr Black," Charlus stepped in and placed his hands on Orion’s shoulders. "I know this is very upsetting news. But I assure you that the we will be doing all we can to bring them back to justice."
"It seems as though your best is severely lacking, Mr Potter," Orion said bitingly, his eyes filled with rage.

Charlus sighed as he motioned all the Aurors to leave the room. After they filed out, Charlus turned back to Orion, "Orion, I swear on my magic that I will oversee this entire operation personally. I will not spare any effort to bring them in. Your son will be safe."

Orion nodded but his expression remained ever stony.

"With your permission, I will be stationing a team of Aurors at your residence until further notice," Charlus said. "They will not interrupt your daily activities unnecessarily and will protect you whenever you leave your home."

Orion nodded again.

"And... we will need to set up Dark magic detectors, so... " Charlus faltered for a moment before he continued, "... do you need some time to... to clear your house of certain items?"

Orion glared at Charlus, who met his gaze steadily.

"We do not have nor would we keep such items around my sons, Charlus," Orion said venomously. "You can send your Aurors to our house this instant for we have nothing to fear."

"I understand. I'll arrange for the details." Charlus gave Orion a final pat on the shoulder before he left them alone.

Once the door closed behind him, Orion fell into the armchair and buried his face onto his palms. Then, he ran his hand over his face and through his hair. Anxiety and fear exuded from every inch of his skin.

"Father..." Turais said when Orion suddenly snapped his attention back towards him, as though he just remembered that Turais was there. Orion immediately left his seat and knelt before him as he brought Turais into a crushing hug.

"Turais... it will be okay. Everything will be fine..." Orion said softly as he patted Turais' back. "They will apprehend them very soon..."

Turais wondered how much of those words were meant for him and how much were they meant for Orion to convince himself that they were safe.

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July 18, 1971 (Sunday)

The day after the escape of Turais' former schoolmates saw an increase in Auror activities around their house. Under Orion's reluctant approval, he allowed the Aurors to set up various anti-Dark Magic equipment in a spare room adjacent to the ground-floor sitting room. During the setting up, the Aurors looked as though they were expecting to receive a signal overload from the "supposed" ambient Dark magic levels in the ancestral home of the Blacks. However, they were slightly disappointed, and greatly surprised by the lack of Dark magic present.
"I should take the opportunity to hammer this obvious fact into your narrow, prejudiced minds," Orion finally snapped when the distrustful Aurors re-calibrated their equipment for the fifth time because they couldn't believe the lack of background Dark magic picked up by their sensors. "Just because we have a strong history in the Slytherin House and have a natural affinity with offensive magic, it doesn't mean our house is filled with Dark artifacts. And even if we did, we are not so thick that we would leave it here for you to confiscate it."

"So you admit that you do have Dark artifacts!" one of the Aurors, Collingwood, shouted out triumphantly. Orion visibly suppressed the urge to hex the man outright.

Turais knew, from years of experience living in this house, that the Blacks did not keep any Dark artifacts in the house (which also surprised him at first) besides a library full of banned publications. But in and of itself, the books were not physically "Dark" but the knowledge contained within them was. However, Turais was inclined to believe that knowing Dark magic and performing Dark magic were two completely different issues. It was similar to knowing the Killing Curse and actually using one on a person. Every Auror knew the Curse but no one would ever dare accuse them of being Dark wizards.

As for the Dark artifacts in the Black family vault, well, they were in the vault for a reason - because they were in disuse. Furthermore, the vast majority of them were just heirlooms imbued with protective blood magic (blood magic was "Dark" magic in the eyes of the law) that prevented them from being handled by any non-Black members. Turais supposed he could live with that.

"There's nothing, I swear the equipment are functioning properly as it is," one of the Aurors declared as she lifted her wand from self-adjusting dials. Some of her colleagues had some sense to look properly chastised as Orion gave all of them a vindictive glare.

"If you find something, please do notify me. I would be immensely interested to find out what it is doing here and near my children," Orion said in a clipped tone before he walked out of the room.

"I would appreciate if you don't advertise your discriminatory beliefs," Turais admonished them as well. Did Auror training teach them nothing about preconceived bias? "Not all Dark families use Dark magic. Some do, but many don't. Please don't embarrass yourself or the rest of your Office with your ignorance." He gave a pointed glare at Collingwood, who fumed.

"Watch your mouth, kiddie," Collingwood snipped. "We are here to protect your family and we deserve respect -"

"Well, we helped you catch the very criminals that you are now protecting us against," Turais sniped back. "I think you are under the wrong impression as to who the indebted party is here."

Collingwood's mouth opened and closed like a goldfish, but he could not formulate a retort.

The next day, Turais contacted Charlus regarding Collingwood's behaviour and he was reassigned and replaced by another Auror soon after.

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August 8, 1971 (Sunday)
The day for the week-long International Symposium for Potions had finally arrived. After much deliberation (read, argument) between Turais and Orion, Turais was able to convince Orion to go on the trip as planned instead of sitting out for fear of an attack. However, they have decided that Sirius, Regulus, and Alex would remain at home and under the protection of the Aurors.

For the past two weeks, Damocles became a frequent visitor at 12 Grimmauld Place as he rehearsed with Turais for their upcoming presentation. As it turned out, Damocles had been giving presentations on the Wolfsbane Potion since Potions published their work, but presenting as the keynote speaker at the Symposium was the most prestigious honour in his career yet. Therefore, they were both thrumming with excitement and anxiety. They had also decided that Damocles would take over fifty of the allotted sixty minutes of presentation. Damocles would start off with the conception of the potion, his subsequent trials and errors, and finally his bottle-neck phase. Then, Turais would talk about his aconite research (which he was most familiar with) and how it led to his initial collaboration with Damocles. Damocles would take over once again and dive into more detail regarding major breakthroughs that came afterwards.

Today, Orion and Turais made their way to the Ministry International Portkey concourse with their Auror protection unit and met up with Fleamont and Kaiden Potter. Minutes later, their Portkey to France was activated as they spun out of existence.

Turais landed flat on his bottom - no surprise there - as he looked around the room. The room was circular and damp with protective runes that were buried within the thick walls. The walls extended vertically and, seemingly, without end. The only source of light was from the small circular opening far above them. Dim rays filtered through the metallic shimmers in the air into this small enclosure, filling the room with a turquoise sheen that was reflected off the brick walls.

Suddenly, there was a quiet 'ping' to signal the start of an announcement.

"Bienvenue en France. Vous êtes arrivés au Ministère des Affaires Magiques de France."

Chapter End Notes

The picture above is how I imagine Catherine Shafiq. And this is absolutely in no way an indication of my dream type of girl, of course.

The next chapter, Chapter 38: On the Matters of Potions, Hearts, and Time, is on schedule. Until next time.

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-20
Hey everyone,

I hope your quarantine lives are going relatively well.

As April approaches, exams, term papers, and my thesis are all due with the upcoming weeks (apparently COVID-19 cancelled most things but not due dates). So, my updates will be every two weeks from now until further notice.

With that, here's a new update for you!

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-26

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A big thank you to Erina96 for helping with the French usage in this chapter.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

CHAPTER 38

ON THE MATTERS OF POTIONS, HEARTS, AND TIME

July 18, 1971 (Sunday)

TEENAGE MURDERERS AT LARGE!

by Andy Smudgley

Aurors Confirm Azkaban-Bound Carriage Intercepted

Lords of Families Deny Involvement

Just as the entire Wizarding community breathed a sigh of relief at the long-awaited verdict for the unforgivable crimes committed against Heir Presumptive Turais Black, yesterday's shocking revelation revealed the deep-rooted incompetency in the judicial and executive branches of our
According to the Auror Office, the three murderers were bound for Azkaban for the Dementor’s Kiss to be issued. Three Incarceration Carriages, each housing one convict and three Aurors, and a team of four Auror escorts on brooms set off across the North Sea with clear skies. However, the convoy never arrived at Azkaban at its set time.

With the Auror Office declining to comment, Mr Minchum, former Auror-turned-legislator, cited his concerns over the lack of transparency and problematic decisions made by the Aurors:

Over the past months, my faith in the Auror Office has rapidly deteriorated. I am sure my concerns are shared with the general public. To me, the Auror Office is unresponsive, passive, and, frankly, incompetent compared to my time.

I have many questions regarding the decisions made by the Senior Auror management team. Why were such dangerous criminals housed in the Ministry holding cells and not in Azkaban since the trial began? Azkaban is a much more secure location than the Ministry and less prone to incidents. Why were the convicts transported to Azkaban for the Dementor’s Kiss? Why was the Dementor’s Kiss not administered at the Ministry where the convicts were already held? The Ministry could very well bring a Dementor to the Ministry to administer the Kiss rather than risk the possibility of escape during transport. There were so many poor choices made and I’m frankly shocked at their failure to do the most basic risk assessments.

The public deserves to know. They deserve transparency. They deserve accountability. They deserve the truth.

And with the greatest respect, I must say to those calling for more expansive powers they are being ridiculous. My former colleagues clearly do not know how to properly utilize the powers they already possess. Giving them even more power is irresponsible and reckless.

However, I am a staunch institutionalist. I do believe our government will be able to right their wrongs and I pray that they show my trust is not misplaced.

I also caution the public from being too haste to suggest that the Lords of those convicts had a role in their escape. We must respect the rule of law and the fundamental idea of ‘innocent until proven guilty’. There is simply no proof of their involvement and the burden is, and should always be, placed on the Auror Office and prosecution.

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August 8, 1971 (Sunday)


It seemed as though multilingual announcements were not popularized yet compared to thirty years later.
"You'd think they would put an English translation since this is a Portkey lobby for arrivals from Britain," Kaiden grumbled.

Turais was glad that he managed to learn conversational French as part of his Auror training. It was rusty from the lack of use in the past years but Turais had managed to understand everything that the voice said.

"She just said, 'Welcome to France. You have arrived at the French Ministry of Magic. Please proceed to the French Border Agency. We look forward to your visit and have a pleasant journey,'" Turais supplied as he dusted off his palms.

"Well, well, well. Look at you and your fancy Français," Kaiden teased as he motioned to poke Turais in his side. "I can see the girls swooning over you even more now and I didn't even think it was humanly possible."

Turais rolled his eyes just as a door materialized in front of them and swung open. Two of the accompanying Aurors walked out and checked the surroundings. With a quick nod from them, the rest of the group filed out into a wide hallway that led to customs. They were quickly joined by a steady stream of other travelers emerging from their arrival Ports.

"When did you learn French?" Orion looked at Turais with a hint of surprise and suspicion. Turais started.

"Uh... uh... from Stefanie Smethwyck. Her mother's side is the French Lefévres," Turais lied. "She offered to tutor me when I expressed interest."

Orion hummed thoughtfully, but it seemed as though he accepted the explanation.

Along the long stretch of carpeted floors, they walked past multiple French law enforcement officers with hairless and ferocious-looking black patrol felines. Their lidless eyes shone in fluorescent blue as they eyed the passers-by and bared their sharp, pointy teeth seemingly at random.

After walking past a second officer-creature pair, Kaiden sidled up beside Turais and whispered, "Do you have any clue as to what those cat-looking things are?"

"They are Matagots," Turais said as they approached another pair up ahead. "Magical creatures native to France that are used for security purposes in the Ministry. They are completely harmless unless provoked, so just remain calm and you will be fine."

The Matagot of a particularly stern-looking officer eyed them suspiciously. Then, it approached Kaiden, who immediately tensed up at the unwanted attention, and hissed at him dangerously. Kaiden let out a mortified squeak and shrunk away from it before the officer whistled at the creature and said, "Calmez-toi. (Calm down.)"

The Matagot gave him a final stare before answering its companion's beckoning and continued down to terrorize another unfortunate victim.

After a relatively quick security check, they passed through customs and arrived at the Portkey concourse.

"Oooh... wow..." Kaiden exclaimed breathlessly, his eyes wide in awe, as they walked into an enormous circular room. Turais was in awe as well as it was his first time revisiting this place in twelve years.
The Portkey concourse was merely one of a series of interconnected domes that formed the underground French Ministry. They were all connected to their adjacent domes via tunnels composed of patina-coloured arches. It was evident that the architect was heavily influenced by Art Nouveau style of curving, twirling designs and the harmonious marriage of metals and glass that imprinted on the flourishes and the balustrades throughout the complex. Around the room stood marbled statues in magnificent glory as well. Kaiden immediately rushed forward towards the large opening and peered down at the bottom level. There were desks arranged in a circular fashion around the perimeter as people sat on the chairs in the centre. Clerks were milling around the peripheries pushing carts stacked with towers of documents into hallways that extended outwards. Above their heads was a massive oval dome that masterfully interlaced metal borders and glass panes where soft, turquoise light filtered through. Celestial charts and German Renaissance-inspired drawings of magical creatures were projected from a rotating luminous orb suspended in the centre of the room.

"The French Ministry is so beautiful," Kaiden gasped as he looked around with a dazed expression.

"Bien sûr! (Of course!) - " A beautiful woman in Ministry uniform said as she walked up to them. Behind her was a team of French Aurors. "The French Ministry is widely considered as the Best Designed Ministry in the Wizarding World since it was re-designed for the first time in 1799. Ever since, it has undergone multiple renovations and resulted in this masterful blend of various architectural styles spanning the centuries.

"My name is Blanche Bouchard and I am the secretary to the Monsieur Pelletier, the Head of Le Comité de Recherche sur les Potions or the Potions Research Committee. I will act as your personal guide for this week. The British Ministry has notified us that your party will require additional protection -" she gestured the six Aurors behind her "- and we have arranged a team to act as your security detail for the duration of your stay." One of the Aurors stepped up beside her. "This is Auror Senior Gustave Desortilege and he will be in charge of the team of Auror."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle Bouchard," Desortilege said with a much thicker French accent, "Nice to meet you, monsieurs. I will ensure that you all return to Britain safely."

"Thank you so much for your hospitality," Orion said as he shook their hands. Fleamont stepped up and did the same.

"Monsieur Potter, are you related to Auror Potter?" Desortilege asked.

"In fact, we are," Fleamont said with a smile. "We are relatives and this chap here -"
Fleamont laid a hand on Kaiden's shoulder, "- is his son, Kaiden Potter."

"Ah, magnifique (wonderful)," Desortilege said. "Auror Potter is a good friend of mine. I'm glad to finally be able to meet his son. Monsieur Potter, your father has told me many stories about you."

Kaiden's face was split between shock and horror. "I do sincerely hope they were all good things or else I will die of embarrassment right this instant."

"Ah, que des bonnes choses. Ne vous en faites pas! (All of those things are good. Don't worry!)" the Auror chuckled as he gave Kaiden a friendly pat on the back. "

The lady smiled warmly, "If you may follow me, I will bring you on a brief tour around Paris."
"What did he just say?" Kaiden asked urgently.

"He said not to worry," Turais replied as Kaiden groaned.

"When does this phrase ever work as intended?" Kaiden whined as he buried his head in Turais' back. Blanche turned back to look at them questioningly and Turais elbowed Kaiden while smiling innocently at their host.

They arrived at another circular room that was similar to the Portkey concourse where they boarded three of a dozen identical black Ministry-issued cars that were parked in the centre of the room. As they were settled into their seats, Turais was surprised to see that Kaiden and Charlus were adept with buckling up theirs seat belts unlike Orion, who required a demonstration by Auror Desortilege. Frankly, the fact that the two Potters were relatively well-versed in Muggle culture continued to destabilize Turais' expectations of the purebloods. As he shook off the cognitive dissonance, Turais looked around and realized that there was no ramp that led to the street levels. He has never traveled via this method in France before so even he did not know what to expect. His question was soon answered as the car vibrated. Turais discovered that their entire car was being lifted upwards by a platform as the Ministry workers on the ground slowly shrunk into the size of milling ants.

Above them, the ceiling of the doom opened up as green and brown tendrils extended downwards in a syncopated dance, twirling and twisting around them.

"Those are metal strands -" Kaiden pointed out, his face plastered to the car window. " - no, they are tree roots - wait, they are both!" Kaiden gasped with delight as Turais chuckled. While they were still ascending, the strands wove a web of hybrid material as they multiplied and thickened until everything was obscured from view. After a few more seconds, the upward movement stopped as car engines roared alive. The cocoon of green and brown receded downwards as Turais noticed they were in an empty square surrounded by buildings. The other two cars were present metres away.

"Place de Saint-Thomas d'Aquin" was inscribed on one of the metal plaques attached to the building.

"This is Hôtel de l'Artillerie," Blanche said as she pointed at the tall structure next to them. "Le symposium international des potions or International Symposium for Potions will be held beneath these buildings. Renaud, démarrez s'il vous plaît. (Renaud, drive please.)"

They drove past many of the famous Muggle sites, such as the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre. Kaiden was completely taken by everything he saw.

"How do you think Muggles achieve all this without magic? They have truly exceptional minds!" Kaiden exclaimed at one point as he pointed at the Eiffel tower. "I wonder why we can't build something remotely similar to all this?"

"First, it's likely due to the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy prohibiting the very idea you just mentioned," Turais said. "Second, it would logistically take a lot of magic to conceal such an enormous landmark, let alone the effort to prevent and divert Muggles and their transportation safely away from those structures. That's why so many Ministries, such as the British, French, and American ones, extend underground instead of skywards."

"Well, isn't that a shame?" Kaiden asked rhetorically. "If only we can combine magic and Muggle technologies... wouldn't that be wonderful?"
None of the adults in the car responded to the question.

"Well, I suppose there will be many hurdles to overcome before that becomes remotely feasible," Turais said diplomatically.

Kaiden nodded at his words and sighed, "I still think it is a missed opportunity, but... oh well."

The cars have now turned onto the Champs-Elysées. As they approached the Arc de Triomphe, the car headed straight towards the structure instead of following the traffic and driving around it. Just as they were about to reach the curb where a large crowd of tourists were taking photos, Renaud, the chauffeur, pressed a button on the dashboard. Through the windshield, Turais could see that there was a slight shimmer in the air directly up ahead as he drove through it. Suddenly, Turais realized that the Arc de Triomphe had disappeared and was replaced by a large walking district where people milled around with their purchased items. However, he noticed that the nearby stores were selling... Potions ingredients and owls? The store beside it was selling broomsticks and Quidditch robes. Confused, Turais looked around and found that the Arc de Triomphe was now behind them.

Kaiden immediately cranked down the window as the bustling and excited noises of the Parisian crowd entered the car.

Turais caught the sight of a little girl in a woolen petite coat and red beret. She was standing on her toes as she pressed her face against the window counter of a toy store. "Maman! Maman! Je peux avoir un balai pour mon cadeau, Maman! (Mom! Mom! Can I have a broom as a present? Mom!)" She tugged at the linked hand of her mother, who was chatting with the florist in the neighbouring shop as she purchased a bouquet.

"Tiens-toi tranquille, Adèle. Compris? (Be still, Adele; do you understand?)" Her mother said in a warning tone.

"Mais, Maman, je - (But, mom, I -)"

"Ça suffit, (That's enough.)" The woman nodded at the florist before she strolled off with the little girl and out of view.

"Welcome to Montmartre Place Cachée, the largest Wizarding shopping district in France and in Europe," Blanche announced. "The British equivalent is your Diagon Alley."

"Woah... but yours is five times nicer and ten times larger," Kaiden commented.

Desortilege laughed heartily as he turned to joke with the other French Aurors. "Finalement, un Anglais qui a bon goût. (Finally, a British with fine taste.)"

"What did you just say?" Kaiden asked.

"Oh, nothing!" Desortilege flashed a grin.

"Il faut pas pousser mémé dans les orties. Le Chemin de Traverse est le meilleur, (Really! Don't exaggerate! Diagon Alley is the best.)" Turais said as he enjoyed the look of shock, then embarrassment, on the man's face. Turais turned to Kaiden and translated, 'He just said 'Finally, a British with fine taste'. Currying the favour of the French, huh - Kaiden? What a turncoat,' Turais teased.

Kaiden flushed in embarrassment as the adults laughed. He cleared his throat and asked,
"Will we have a chance to walk around today?"

"Not today, unfortunately," Blanche said apologetically as her notepad floated up to her face and flipped to their itinerary. "You have quite a filled timetable for the next few days. But you have the last two days of the week completely free. So perhaps we can arrange a trip for you when Monsieur Black is at Maître Flamel's house."

"That would be most agreeable," Fleamont said. "I'm sure Kaiden would be fed up with all the - in his words - stuffy robes and boring lectures."

"Give me more credit than that," Kaiden huffed. "I'm way better than James."

"We'll see about that," Fleamont said with a knowing glint.

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August 12, 1971 (Thursday)

"This man is officially the most boring speaker of the entire symposium," Kaiden muttered as the room clapped politely. He scribbled down the words "Jacques de Roquetaillade" and the bottom of his piece of parchment. Above it was a list of names from all the presentations they have listened in for the four days, which Kaiden had ranked in accordance to his "Kaiden Potter's Scale of Boring-ness". "I mean, who honestly cares about the fifty different magical properties of mooncalf dung? But I suppose there are things to be said for his persistence and dedication towards something so utterly useless."

"Well, this final presentation sounds interesting," Turais said as he consulted his program. "Aromatherapy and its practical uses."

"If he says sniffing Sneezeworts makes someone sneeze or that smelling food makes someone feel hungry, I quit," Kaiden grumbled.

The session chair introduced the final speaker of the day as the Canadian Potions Master Jardinique Florestine, the pioneering researcher in the newly established field of aromatherapy. Then, a very good-looking man with wavy auburn hair and bright blue eyes took the stage.

Kaiden whistled, "There's a handsome fellow. How have I not seen him featured on the Witch Weekly yet?" The crowd seemed to agree as they all sat up taller and were more attentive than ever. Despite all that, Turais still elbowed Kaiden in the stomach.

"Thank you for that lovely introduction," the man said with a dazzling smile. "Hello, ladies and gentleman, I am Jardinique Florestine and I have - as Master Willow has mentioned - been researching in the field of aromatherapy for the past decade. And today, I am delighted to share with you some of my findings.

"Who here has been to a wedding? Please raise your hands -" all the occupants in the room did as told, " - and who has witnessed a drunken duel of epic proportions between your rowdy uncle with a temper hotter than a Horntail snort and your great-aunt that spits venom more potent than a doxy -" the crowd chuckled as most people kept their hands in the air, " - and finally... at those weddings, have you seen this flower hanging about?"
Florestine tapped his wand on the crystal globe as an image projected up in the air. It was of a shrub that grew multiple large, pendulous, trumpet-shaped flowers in vibrant yellow and magenta.

A few people's hands lowered down, but there was still more than half the room with their hands raised.

"Who knows what this flower is called?" Florestine asked.

"Brugmansia!" a woman shouted from the crowd. Some of the men groaned while the ladies laughed.

"That is correct, madame! This is Brugmansia, more commonly known as Angel's trumpet -" a gentle murmur of recognition swept through the crowd and the speaker nodded knowingly. "- and I can see that many of you are familiar with this - and please put your hands down - thank you for your participation. 'What is so popular about this flower?', you might ask. This flower has become a staple at weddings in recent years for its wonderful fragrance, beautiful appearance, and - yes - it's wonderful name... quite symbolic as well. It's the last time men would refer to their intended as 'angels' and the first of countless times that they would refer to their intended's voice as 'trumpets'." Another ripple of laughter sounded throughout the crowd.

"But what if I told you that this angelic appearance is deceiving?" Florestine leaned into the podium and said mysteriously. "What if I told you that this flower has the power to release your mental inhibitions? To cause you to lose your mental faculties and is the cause of all those fights that you had to clean up afterwards? - Yes... all those fights could have very well happened because the bride insisted that she must have this flower incorporated in every floral centrepiece...

"Back to the Brugmansia, I have managed to capture, isolate, and concentrate the aromatic compound released by the flowers in the form of a perfume and tested it on Hodags," he tapped his wand on the orb and the plant image was replaced by a horned dog-like creature with a frog-like head and glowing, red eyes. The video started playing as the Hodag was pacing around the enclosure calmly. "So this is a Hodag before it was exposed to the compounds -" then the picture showed a hand placing a tube with a perforated cover inside. The Hodag sniffed at the novel object curiously, but not a minute later, it bared its teeth and growled dangerously. Its mouth was salivating excessively as drool streamed down from the corner of its mouth like a rabid animal.

Turais’ eyes were glued to the terrifying sight as he heard the similarly-captivated audience sucking in their breath as well. In the film, the hand then reached in to retrieve the canister but the Hodag immediately pounced at it menacingly and barked hysterically. The canister was then seen to be magicked out of the enclosure instead. Another minute later, the Hodag seemed to have reverted back to normal. And when the same hand reached into the enclosure, the Hodag ran up to it and nudged its head against the hand coyly.

The room was in utter silence as the film ended. Florestine turned to the audience and said cheerily, "Once again, don't be too alarmed by what you have just seen. I need to remind all of you that the canister was full of highly concentrated aromatic compound. What was inside was the equivalent of having one hundred flowers stuck up in one nostril - it's just not going to happen. You would never encounter such a scenario. But it is the most irrefutable fact that aroma does alter a creature's physiological state.

"My theory is that by being exposed to low concentrations of this aroma for a prolonged period of time, as in the case of weddings, certain individuals may become marginally more belligerent. However, once that individual becomes inebriated, the combined effect would increase the likelihood of acts of aggression..."
"And now - all you married men in here can use this fact as a shield against your wives whenever they bring up their less-than-absolutely-perfect weddings fifty years down the road," Florestine grinned as the room laughed. "Off with the gloomy example. Let me show you some more positive ones.

"We all know that teas brewed from valerian, lavender, and or chamomile helps calm our nerves and induce sleep. Therefore, I’ve concentrated the aromatic compounds from these plants and made them into perfume for patients suffering from various degrees of insomnia. As you can see here on the chart, patients with mild insomnia can forgo Dreamless Sleep while a more severe cases only required a reduced dosage. This has very important implications. Sopophorus bean is a key shared ingredient amongst all Sleeping droughts, however, when consumed in high or frequent doses, they are emetic, or nausea-inducing, and most importantly, addictive. Therefore, if we can achieve the same result - sleep induction - with a less harmful option such as aromatherapy, I believe we should consider it very seriously." Turais noticed that the entire room was hanging onto every single word the man was saying.

"Finally, here are some other fun aromatic combinations that you may find interesting. Roses, cosmos, hellebores, and ranunculus together will cause elevated sense of infatuation. Tulips, lilacs, and daffodils will literally give you a spring in your step," Florestine rattled off. "That one might be good for dance classes.

"I genuinely believe my research will revolutionize the field of Healing as many useful aroma-therapeutics can complement the use of Potions with far fewer damage to the body. If you have more questions, I will be around. Thank you and goodbye," the man bowed with a flourish to a standing ovation. He smiled and waved as walked off the stage in the whirl of his robe.

"That presentation was fantastic!" Kaiden exclaimed as they exited the chamber with the throng of people. The four French Aurors that were assigned to them were ensuring that no one was accidentally running into them. "I don't think anyone can top that. He was a charismatic, hilarious, and captivating orator. Did you see how he commanded the audience's attention. Complete brilliance."

"Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it," Turais said as he spotted the man nearby surrounded by a ring of newly-gained fans. "We should go and get his contact information."

"S...should we?" Kaiden asked hesitantly, suddenly displaying an uncharacteristic shyness. "I don't think we..."

"Why not?" Turais asked as he dragged the boy along. "Come on, I want to gain him as a contact as well."

They made their way toward the man and waited in line. All the while, Kaiden fiddled with his robes with his eyes fixed on the ground. At long last, they made it to the front of the line as Turais had to physically nudge Kaiden forward.

Seeing that Kaiden was not about to speak up, Turais opened up the conversation. "Hello, Master Florestine, my friend and I were very taken by your research. It was a wonderful presentation."

"I am very surprised that the presentation was so well-received. Thank you for the kind words," the man smiled as he extended his hand. "Mister..."

"Oh... Black," Turais said as he shook the man's hand firmly.
The man's hand stilled as he looked Turais up and down. Suddenly, his eyes widened in recognition. "Excuse me... but you wouldn't be Turais Black by any chance...?"

"Oh... uh.. yes," Turais said. "Yes, I am -" Upon his admission, the man practically oozed in happiness and excitement. Then, he felt as though there was a bright halo around the man as if charm and appeal were physically manifested and radiating from his body. Turais smiled kindly as he noticed many people, both men and women, around them stopped and gaped at the man.

"Wow," Florestine said in awe as he cradled Turais' hand in both of his own. "You are a personal hero of mine. You have achieved so much at such a young age and is set to change so many people's lives with your research and charity. You are what I aspire to become. Thank you for your hard work, Mr Black -" the man released his hand and rummaged his pocket. He pulled out a card holder and a card, " - please feel free to contact me anytime you want. I'd love your input on my work and to find practical applications for my research. How do you plan on making the most impact in the werewolf community with your potion?"

"Uh..." Turais had never thought of that.

"Do you have any plans to provide the potion to all the werewolves?" Jard asked inquisitively. "The ingredients used are a bit costly for the ordinary citizen... especially given the dosage required and the monthly prescription."

"I am considering these questions," Turais lied a little. "I still have some time to figure out a plan since the potion has yet to be approved."

"Of course, of course! I'm just so excited for this new potion."

"I'm flattered, Master Flo-"

"Call me Jard, please." The halo shone even brighter than before.

"Okay. Thank you, Jard. I will make sure to be in contact," Turais promised. It was getting a little difficult to look at the man as he was quite literally blinding him.

"If you are not awarded the Order of Merlin, I will be the first person to sent a Howler to the Ministry telling them that you have been robbed," Jard said seriously. "Anyhow, I look forward to your keynote address tomorrow. I am all expectation!"

"Urgh, don't remind me of that," Turais thought. But in actuality, he put on a smile and said, "Thank you so much, I hope I will deliver."

"Don't worry, you will be amazing!" Another burst of light almost caused him to raise his arm and block the man from view. Turais turned to Kaiden just to find him gazing at the man reverently. But he was not alone, the females behind him were in a similar trace. Turais had to restrain himself from physically smacking the boy on the cheek for his pathetic look.

Once they were a distance away, Turais asked the muted Kaiden. "What is the matter with you, Kaiden? I've never seen you like this before."

Kaiden flushed bright red. "Well..."

"Looks like someone has a little crush..." Turais teased in a singing voice as Kaiden punched him in the shoulder.

"Shut it, Rais!" Kaiden hissed in fierce indignation as he immediately looked behind them. A
crowd was still milling around the attractive man. "He could've heard you! Plus, I don't have a crush on him! He clearly has Veela magic in his blood!"

"Part-Veela or not, he's more than double your age, Kaiden," Turais continued to tease.

"I did not take you for an ageist. Age is not an issue," Kaiden argued. "It's what's inside - the soul - that counts, Rais. But anyway, I'm not interested in dating him. Can't I just appreciate a good-looking part-Veela without being judged by a thirteen-year-old?"

Turais looked at Kaiden's pink cheeks and shrugged.

"If you say so," Turais said as Kaiden gave him a death glare.

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Once Turais and Kaiden reached their guest suite, they were finally rid of the four Aurors as they stood guard outside the door.

"But you're really okay with that?"

"What?" Turais asked as he shrugged off his outer robe.

"You know..." Turais turned around with an imploring look. Kaiden was generally more eloquent than that. "That I like girls and boys... romantically..."

Turais was confused. Kaiden didn't seem like he was trying really hard to conceal it in the first place, now that Turais thought about it. It was not as though there was much of a stigma against homosexual relationships in the Wizarding world anyway. Curiously enough, purebloods seemed to be more worried about blood status than the gender of their partners... unless you were in one of those pureblood families. But even then, they were only concerned about securing an heir to continue the bloodlines and family names.

And from what Turais had observed, Dorea and Charlus didn't seem to match the description of a conservative pureblood family.

"Yeah, you like boys and girls," Turais repeated sincerely. "Thank you for telling me."

Kaiden frowned. "Uh... aren't you supposed to be more... " he motioned his hand as he searched for the right word. ". more shocked, mortified - I don't know - disgusted even?"

"Why would I be shocked, mortified, or disgusted?" There was really something Turais was missing from the conversation. Unless... "You're not interested in me, are you?"

Kaiden screwed up his face in disgust. "Ew, no. Gross. You're like my little brother. That's just... urgh... I did not need that mental image. But... you know... I just thought you would think I'm an abomination or something?" Kaiden searched Turais' face, perhaps for signs of revulsion. "You know... you're -" 

"If you say 'a Black', I swear I will smack you," Turais threatened warningly. But at least now he understood what all the fuss was about. Kaiden was clearly nervous about Turais' reaction to his sexuality and was worried about their friendship because he was a Slytherin pureblood from one
of those families. "I honestly don't mind -" Turais looked at the boy and couldn't help but smack him on the head for a completely different reason, "- don't look at me like you are expecting me to freak out at any moment."

Kaiden scratched his head sheepishly. "Well, I mean you have a track record of being liberal-minded so I don't really know why I'm so nervous...

Turais softened his gaze and pulled Kaiden into a hug. "Thank you for checking in with me regardless..." Turais released Kaiden. "... wait, is this supposed to be a secret or something? Do Dorea and Charlus know? Because if this is supposed to be a secret, I'd suggest you to be more mindful of your words and actions."

"I'm pretty sure they don't care," Kaiden mumbled. "I haven't been dating around that much since Catherine so it never really came up in conversations. But no, it's not a secret."

"Okay. In any case, no one is going to hear about this from me," Turais said. "This is your private business and you get to decide what you want to do with this information."

"Thank you, Turais," Kaiden heaved a sigh. "Well... this was not how I envisioned this conversation to unfold."

"Because you thought that since I was a Black, therefore I would freak out and break off relations with you," Turais deadpanned.

"Pretty much," Kaiden said, wincing. "But you have to admit that not every Slytherin pureblood would receive the news as calmly as you did. Imagine how your father or grandfather would react to this news. They might force you to break relations with me in fear that I lead you astray."

"Point taken," Turais said. "But I doubt they would care as long as you are not 'corrupting' one of their sons."

"That's the problem..." Turais could hear Kaiden muttering under his breath and he wondered what was the underlying issue there. Which conservative family would view Kaiden's presence as a threat to "corrupt" their son? It must be someone Kaiden was close with... not a Gryffindor because those families tend to be more liberal like the Potters...

'Oh... Oh. OH!' Suddenly, everything made sense in his mind. Turais wanted to scream and smack himself for being so stupid and blind.


"WHAT?" Kaiden shouted. Then, he started to chuckle nervously. "OF COURSE NOT! I'm serious, Turais!" Turais just continued to stare at Kaiden with a raised eyebrow, unimpressed. "... Don't give me that look... Did Gwen say something to you on my birthday because I love that girl but I swear she has some serious issues..."

Turais looked at the frazzled boy in front of him and then thought back to all the interaction between the Quidditch team captains. Were they merely best friends wary of other people knowing how close they were in real life? It was plausible, considering that as Quidditch team captains, they were the physical embodiment of inter-house rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin.

"I'm sorry if I misread the situation," Turais said apologetically. "I understand that you and him have been best friends since your Quidditch kindergarten days, so I might be mistaking your
closeness for something else..."

Turais saw as the boy considered his next words. Then, the boy's shoulder fell as he slumped onto the nearby couch and buried his face in his hands.

"You're not misreading anything..." Kaiden breathed out in defeat as he rubbed his face nervously. "I am in... I harbour certain non-platonic feelings for Michael but it's not reciprocated. I don't think Michael is interested in me in that way..."

"But he's quite fond of you," Turais said as he sat down beside him. "Much more than anyone else in school. He treats you differently than others. That is clear as day."

"As a best friend, that is," Kaiden said miserably.

Turais hesitated. He thought what Michael felt towards the boy was more than mere friendship. The tenderness. The care. But then Michael never showed any other signs beyond that. And heck, the boy was likely in a formal courtship with that Swire daughter. Did Kaiden know about that or did Michael keep Kaiden in the dark. But why did Michael keep Kaiden in the dark then?

Turais had too many questions and painfully few answers. He was also never the most perceptive man in the room so he didn't want to give Kaiden any false hope. And ultimately, he learnt from years of experience that the matters of the heart could only be solved by the people directly involved. Those in the peripheries could only offer support and kindness.

"I... I'm sorry," Turais said as he placed a hand of Kaiden's shoulder, "Do you want to talk about it?"

Kaiden took in a deep breath. "I've been through this for the past few years. I'm alright."

"But Kaiden... this can't be healthy..."

"I know... but what else can I do?"

"Tell him," Turais said. "Tell him you are in love with him -"

"I've thought this through too many times, Turais," Kaiden said as he shook his head. "I can't risk our friendship... I think I'd rather have him like this, at arms-length... forever... than not at all... especially given his family... I need a concrete signal from him before I confess and possibly ruin everything..."

"Kaiden," Turais said gently, "You're not going to ruin everything..."

"But everything will change," Kaiden said hotly. He turned towards Turais, tears welling up at the corner of his eyes. "You can't say it won't. It's twelve years of friendship on the line, Turais. I've know Michael since before we stopped suckling on our thumbs. Do you have a clue about how conservative his family is? And Michael is the only male heir. If they catch wind that I... that I'm interested in him, they will surely force us apart. And Michael and I have never talked about things like this... I don't know where he stands or how he would react if he doesn't reciprocate my feelings... I don't even know if he would be disgusted by my 'perverse inclinations' - as his parents once commented about a homosexual couple in my presence..."

"But... I just don't... I just think Michael is really fond of you... " Turais said. "And I really don't think he will push you away just because you confess your true feelings to him... even if he doesn't return your affection."
"You know that I almost did once..." Kaiden whispered softly. "When I first came back from preparing the funeral... Michael was there being so caring and tender that I had a moment of weakness and almost told him... but then he called me his best friend... I'm scared that is what I will be to him... forever best friend material... never boyfriend or husband material..."

They felt silent for a long while while Turais patted on Kaiden's back soothingly.

"There’s a real possibility that he might never reciprocate your feelings, Kaiden. If that is true... are you going to act as Michael's best friend while pining after him forever and never date?"

"I've tried, Turais. I really have tried to date other people... to put my mind off him," Kaiden's shoulders trembled slightly. "But it was all futile... I can't even romance the prettiest girl in the entire school properly... because I think... he's the only one I want..."

Turais made a pained sound.

"Is it worth keeping yourself from all possible romantic relationships out in the world?"

"Are you asking me if Michael's worth all that?"

"Is he?" Turais' sorrowful eyes looked at Kaiden, who looked back firmly.

"Yes," Kaiden admitted softly. "He's it for me..." Kaiden’s face fell as he started to sob again. "... but knowing this doesn’t make it hurt any less..."

Then, Kaiden's tears gushed out as Turais held him tight while his heart fragmented a little as well.

When the tears finally ran dry, Kaiden leaned away from Turais and wiped his face messily. "Thank you, Turais.. for everything."

"Anytime, Kaiden," Turais said softly. "But are you going to be fine?"

"I have to, don’t I?" Kaiden said with a sad twist of lips. "It’s not Michael’s fault that I’m in love with him. He deserves everything good in the world. And if he wants me by his side as his best friend, I will be that for him."

Turais nodded as he watched the boy retreat to his bedroom, sniffling, while feeling completely helpless on the entire situation.

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August 13, 1971 (Friday)

Turais was on his way to his keynote address when someone called out his name.

"Turais!"

Turais turned around and found himself looking at a vaguely familiar face walking towards him.

The boy eyed the Aurors around him cautiously before he looked at Turais again. "Hey,
Turais. Do you remember me? I'm Eustace Pommel!

"Oh, I remember you!" Turais exclaimed. "I met you and your sister at the Quidditch World Cup! How have you been?"

"It's been great!" the Canadian said. "I'm with my pa here... he's delivering a talk today."

"Oh right! Martin Pommel," Turais said. "I saw his name on the itinerary but the name did not even register."

"It rarely does," Eustace agreed. "Many forget that brewery is a form of potion-making as well, except it uses living organisms instead of dried-up shrubberies."

"Anyhow, I'd love to talk more but I have my speech to prepare for," Turais said apologetically.

"Of course!" Eustace grinned. "Keynote speaker, eh. My pa and I will definitely be in the audience. I will catch up with you during the after-party and good luck!"

"Thank you!" Turais grinned before he continued on his way.

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"Mr Belby! Turais! It is so good to see you both!" Tiberius McLaggen, the recent Hogwarts graduate walked over to greet them. Reporters were standing around them with their cameras ready as they continued to snap photos of the stars of the day. Despite the jovial tone, the man's cheeriness looked terribly fake as though there was a mask plastered over his features. His hair was immaculately styled, yet, the rest of his attire looked deliberately rugged. His suit was proper, yet there were slight blemishes to it that struck Turais as odd and unnatural, as though it was trying to make a statement of sort.

"Junior Under-Secretary McLaggen," Damocles greeted as he shook the man's hand. They paused momentarily as the camera bulbs went off. "It is an honour to have you introduce us today."

"Oh, the honour is mine, my friend." McLaggen flashed him a quick smile before he turned around to face Turais. "I will readily admit that I always had a fascination with Potions."

“Oh? Do you?” Turais asked.

"Of course, Turais!" He released a hearty laugh as he placed friendly clasp of his hand on Turais' shoulder and shook his hand. Turais was surprised by the act of familiarity displayed by the man as they have not even exchanged a word prior to today. However, Turais knew it was all a publicity stunt for his own advancement. None of the actions exuded the warmth and congeniality that were normally apparent. “That’s why I’m here today. I’m the Ministry representative for the Potions Association.”

"What is your particular interest in the field?" Turais smiled tensely as he shook the man's firm, cold hand while facing the continual flashes of camera lights. Turais released his grip but found the man continuing to hold onto his hand steely.

"Oh... a bit of this and that, you know. I love them all. Enough about me, today is all about
you. You are such an inspiration for our young, an exemplary case," McLaggen said, smiling brilliantly at the cameras. "I wished more of us can be just like you. The world will be in a much better state than now."

"I cannot take all the credit, Mr McLaggen," Turais said politely. "I had a lot of support from Damocles, namely, and also immense emotional support from my family."

"Don't sell yourself short, Turais," McLaggen said as he finally released Turais' hand from his grip. The boy's hand was numb from the lack of blood circulation.

"And on that note, Mr McLaggen," Turais asked, "I was just wondering about the Wolfsbane Potion and the approximate time of its approval. Are there any doubts or roadblocks that are stymieing its progress. Damocles and I would be willing to assist you with any questions or concerns the Ministry might have."

“Oh, I’m just a lowly new-comer, I don’t know much about that,” McLaggen said.

"This potion is very near and dear to my heart, as you might know."

"I'm sure it is," McLaggen said placatingly as he patted the boy's shoulder and smiled at the camera. "I've heard that you have applied for the position of British Youth Representative. I would just like you to know that you have an ally in me behind your nomination."

"Do you even have a vote on the selection panel?," Turais asked questioningly.

McLaggen’s eyes widened at something behind Turais and said urgently, "Oh, duty calls. I will see you shortly. Make Britain proud!"

The man disappeared quickly into another crowd of reporters, abandoning Turais and Damocles.

"Is he a friend of yours?" Damocles asked.

“He’s not, I assure you,” Turais said darkly. "I don't think he took NEWT Potions either despite his evident interest in the subject."

“Politicians,” Damocles said understandingly as he observed the retreating reporters. “They take advantage of you and then discard you.”

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"... and this concludes our keynote presentation," Damocles finished as Turais stood up from his stool and rejoined Damocles by the lectern. The entire room filled with international visitors stood up and gave them a standing ovation. Turais found Orion, Fleamont, and Kaiden sitting side-by-side in the front row and beamed at them. They both gave Turais a small wave in return.

"Brilliantly done," McLaggen said amidst the torrent of applause as he shook their hands. "You two have made Britain very proud today."

"Thank you," Damocles said happily.

McLaggen’s eyes were trained on Turais as he gave his shoulder a quick squeeze. "Let us talk
more after the questions." He stepped up to the lectern and addressed the room, "Everyone, we now have time for a few questions. Yes - let's start off with you, madam."

"Reporter from The Wizarding Inquirer speaking," the lady spoke with her wand pointed at her throat - a Sonorous Charm. Her notepad and quill were floating mid-air and ready to start writing down his response. "So how do you anticipate this potion will impact or aid the werewolf community?"

"I think once the Potion receives its final approval, it will make a huge difference in the quality of life for one of our most marginalized groups in society. Of course, the invention of this potion would not solve all the sociopolitical issues or stigma against people affected by lycanthropy, but I hope this will be a positive and much-needed first step in the right direction," Turais responded.

Then, a veiled woman stood up and said with a shaky voice, "I... don't have a question... but I... I would like to say... to both of you, Mr Black and Mr Belby, that... I am so grateful for your talents and heart. I... am a mother to my sweet, lovely boy who was bitten by a werewolf when he was only a toddler. Every full-moon, he would be in so much pain and agony for his transformation and afterwards, he would be bloody and bruised. And it's not just the physical pain, but it was the mental aspect as well. After every transformation, I could see the pain and sadness in his eyes and how his spirit shattered over and over and over again. And I... I... could do nothing but to hug him and be strong for him. But every time I saw him suffer, I felt a knife twisting deep into my bleeding heart. And for the past several years, I thought this was how my life would be forever.

"When I first saw the article, I thought it was a lie. I just couldn't believe it. It was like a dream come true for our family. Mr Black, Mr Belby, you have given me, my husband, and my son hope. So, so, so much hope. When I first told my son about this, we just hugged each other and cried for the entire day because we just couldn't believe this was happening. And now, after every transformation, he would look up at the Potions journal cover that featured your article and portrait that he framed on the wall and I would see that hopeful smile on his face. Because he knew that very soon, he would no longer be in pain. And I am sure that I am speaking for a lot of patients and their family as well. This was all because of you and your excellent work.

"You have touched and changed so many lives for the better already and the potion has not even been approved yet. I cannot imagine what changes this would bring to us when it is approved. Thank you so much... you have my eternal gratitude... just thank you."

Turais felt his heart squeeze tightly and his nose soured. Several members in the audience also sniffed emotionally at her story.

"Thank you for sharing your story with us, Madam. I am delighted to have you here with us today. Your family, and all the other families that are suffering from this affliction are the reasons why Damocles, who - I have to stress this once again - did the lion share of the work, and I worked tirelessly for this potion. It is not a perfect solution, but it is a much-needed stopgap as we seek out even better solutions. We will continue to work tirelessly until that ultimate goal is reached. Thank you."

More questions, some academic and others political, were fielded as they answered competently.

“And a final question from Potions Monthly,” McLaggen announced.

"Thank you. Mr Belby and Mr Black, when are you expecting that the Wolfsbane Potion will be officially available to the public?"
Turais glanced over to McLaggen, who did not meet his eyes.

"This is a matter of Ministry approval so we have minimal control over the process," Damocles answered for him. "However, we are actively reaching out to them to ensure that the potion can be made available at the soonest possible time."

***

After the celebratory party where McLaggen appeared for the first ten minutes and joined in on group photos by the press, the man seemingly disappeared into thin air.

"Have you seen the Junior Under-Secretary?" Turais asked Damocles over a glass of Gillywater. The non-alcoholic beverage fizzed and bubbled in his mouth, causing it to taste quite spicy and refreshing... in a good way.

"I thought I saw him leave not a half hour ago," Damocles said with a sedated grin that hung on his lips since the party started. His face was flushed from the glasses of wine that passed through his hands. As he took another sip, the edges of his eyes crinkled a bit more while waving at someone passing by. "Come on, Turais. Enjoy yourself and stop thinking about sodding politicians! They don't care about us or the bloody Wolfsbane Potion, what they care about is capitalizing on publicity."

"Word. But I can scarcely enjoy myself when my bodyguards are acting like biological wards," Turais commented as he eyed the four Aurors that were encircling the round table they stood by. "No matter. Damocles, I have a proposition for you."

"And what's that?" Damocles said as he set down the wine in favour for a gulp of water.

"I was in a conversation with one of the Potion Masters during the Symposium and he has me thinking about the social implications of the Wolfsbane Potion," Turais said. "The ingredients are notoriously difficult to obtain and the brewing process requires the skills of a Potions Master. People suffering from lycanthropy are already marginalized with little to no job prospects. Their families are also likely under financial stress to support their affected members. I just don't think our invention would be able to help our targeted group without the corresponding social program."

"Hmmm, I have never considered that," Damocles hummed. His grin was now replaced with a sombre, thoughtful expression. "Look, Turais. I'd love to help but you know I'm pants with these bureaucratic or business considerations. I don't even know how to begin to solve those issues you have just pointed out. I'm a Potioneer and Potioneering is all I know how," Damocles shrugged his shoulders.

"So this brings me to my proposition, Damocles," Turais said. "I am suggesting a partnership to set up an Apothecary where we can sell your improved Potion formulations. And part of the proceeds from our earnings will go towards funding the dispensing of the Wolfsbane Potion."

"Hmmm... this could work..." Damocles said. "I have already done a lot of work on your aconite discovery and I have found increased potency for many of the pain and sleeping potions compared to the existing products in the market. This could be a viable business!"

"I'm glad you agree," Turais said. "I can take care of the political side and logistics of the business while you, as the Potions expert, can focus on researching and developing high-quality
potions. And I've got some gold in my personal vault from the royalties we received on the journal sales that I can pitch in immediately."

"But Turais, those royalties - while it was a handsome amount, it was, by no means, a hefty sum," Damocles frowned. "I do have my personal funds but I don't think they are enough for me to cover your half."

"Damocles, I had the goblins invest the money into several companies and the returns were absolutely lucrative. My funds have more than quadrupled since then," Turais said as Damocles' jaws slackened. "I have my half secured."

"Wow..." Damocles nodded numbly. "Okay... that's great news. So... how do we start?"

---

August 14, 1971 (Saturday)

Turais arrived at the doorstep of a decrepit, stone building in the heart of the oldest part of Paris. Except for the golden symbol that marked dully on a wooden plaque above the entrance, the rest of the structure was grey with discolouration and covered in dust. It looked as if the place has not been tended to for centuries.

The messenger witch tapped her wand on the door and it creaked out. She turned and said, "Mr Black, if you would please follow me."

Leaving behind his entourage, Turais walked through a medieval-looking room with odd-looking runes and tapestries hanging on the walls. He also walked by various instruments used for alchemy were placed on all the available surfaces before they climbed the rickety wooden staircase up to the second floor.

"Mr Black," the witch said as she opened one of several doors on the landing, "Please wait for Master Flamel here."

Turais entered the room as the door closed behind him and discovered it was a large study with rows of bookshelves that were completely filled with book. In the centre of the shelves-lined room, there were two armchairs and a table in between them. Turais scanned the room and found himself staring at a particular bookshelf that seemed to be tucked away in shadows of the heavy velvet curtains and hidden from the filtered sunlight flowing into the room. It was like an optical illusion that Turais would have almost missed, except, it was somehow capturing Turais' attention. Intrigued, he wandered over and started to read the spines of the books.

The grandfather clock suddenly chimed one reverberating toll. Something stirred deep within Turias’ core. Then, another toll penetrated to a similar depth once more as a gentle buzz started to resonate within him. Turais unconsciously reached his hand up to massage the centre of his chest. The clock chimed the third and final time as the unfamiliar sensation flooded to a maximum. He clutched his robe and turned to investigate the origin of the sound when he found an apparition in marble-grey stood squarely in the centre of the room. But then, he realized the "apparition" was not an apparition at all.

"Master Flamel," Turais said gasped out, attempting to suppress the trembling in his voice as the sensation ebbed. "It is a pleasure to be able to meet with you today."
"Master Black," Flamel said softly in return. Turais put his hand behind him once again as the episode of discomfort ended as abruptly as it came.

"Pardon me, Master Flamel. I have yet to complete my education at Hogwarts, let alone my Mastery," Turais said politely. "I am no Master."

"Is that so?" Flamel said as his inky black pupils scanned the boy. "In fact, neither am I. To be a Master implies that I have acquired full command or knowledge of something. But it would be prideful and, quite frankly, wrong to think that one could ever fully understand anything. But of course, as with all things in life, there are notable exceptions..." Turais felt taken apart and stripped raw under Flamel’s omnipotent-like gaze. He had an inexplicable sense of vulnerability that he had never felt prior, which unnerved him a great deal. Fortunately, his gaze moved on from him back to his library collection.

"Pray, which part of the my book collection caught your fancy?" Flamel asked as he waved his hand at the numerous bookshelves.

"The books on the subject of time were quite intriguing," Turais said, his voice deceptively calm to his ears, as he pointed at where he was moments ago.

"Indeed," Flamel said, his voice akin to a whisper that Turaid strained to hear. "Most people tend to overlook it until they find themselves in desperate need of it."

"Do you mean knowledge or something entirely different?" Turais inquired.

Flamel gave Turais a small, indecipherable smile in response. He then raised his arms and gestured to the seats in the centre of the room. "Please sit. We shall talk more over some refreshments."

Turais complied as Flamel scuttled to the two armchairs. Turais noted that the frail, old man shuffled his feet noisily in a form that resembled something in between a hop and a run. He picked up a silver handbell on the table and rang it. After they had occupied their respective seats, a couple of knocks sounded at the door. Then, the lady who escorted Turais into the house entered the door with a pot of tea, two cups, two sets of plates and cutlery along with a plate of assorted pastries upon the silver platter. She laid them down on the table between them soundlessly and left.

"Are you well-read on the subject of time?" Flamel asked as he started pouring tea into the two teacups.

"I can't say that I am," Turais said diplomatically. "But I am most certainly interested in the subject. From what I have seen briefly, you have quite the collection on this subject. Are you particularly passionate about it yourself?"

"Passionate, no," Flamel said as he handed over the saucer shakily - so much that the cup and saucer made a series of tinkering sounds. Turais quickly received the saucer with both hands in fear of spillage. "Intrigued. Interested. Those words would be more apt," Flamel said. Then, as though it was an afterthought, he added, "One might find it difficult to maintain passion after being in the same company for such a long duration as mine."

"Ah, I stand corrected. But there are some tomes so old and so rare. I doubt anyone but a serious collector should find themselves in possession of one."

"They were from an old acquaintance."

"Your friend must be incredible. Have I heard of this dear friend of yours?"
"Heard of? Most definitely. Know of? Certainly. But understand? Unlikely," Flamel said musingly as he blew softly into rising mist. Turais found him completely off-kilter from the exchange. Flamel was speaking riddles to his ears.

"With such an invaluable collection gifted to you, I am sure that person values your friendship in kind."

"It's not a gift, merely a loan. I have been indebted with no means to repay it except for my service... which reminds me. I have heard from this dear friend that you are currently applying for a Time-Turner," Flamel said as he stared imploringly at Turais. "Why is that?"

Turais was thrown off by the sudden change of topic. But then he found himself frustrated when he remembered that Flamel and Dumbledore were close friends. Was Dumbledore trying to use Flamel as a way to interrogate him?

Using a measured tone, Turais replied with a hint of stiffness, "I would like to take additional courses to further enrich my education."

"Ah..." Flamel said. "Let us attempt the question again. Why do you seek the Time-Turner?"

"I have personal considerations."

"A more truthful answer yet we move no closer to the truth. Intriguing, how the human mind works," Flamel said airily. "But no matter... What I would like to say is that you should reconsider your application."

"Sir, the application had already been sent off."

"Do not avoid the crux of the matter. Sending off the application is not the end. You may rescind your application. You may turn down the object when it arrives. There is a way if there is a will on your part."

Turais stayed silent. He felt a bit miffed that Dumbledore's machinations extended this far into his life.

Flamel looked at Turais with knowing glint as he placed down the cup delicately. Then, he folded his hands into an imploring gesture. "I have seen many, many things throughout my life. When one reaches a certain overripe age such as mine, one tends to gain insight... perspective into grander questions. Please consider my proposition carefully. One should not meddle with time needlessly, especially when one occupies an exalted station such as yours.

"I shall consider the matter very carefully," Turais said solemnly. However, he doubted that his mind would be changed.

"Very well. It was nice meeting you. I eagerly await for the next time when our paths cross again."

"Likewise."
"Hey, Sirius," Turais said after he knocked on Sirius' bedroom door.

"Hey, Turais," Sirius said as he gathered some parchments together and hid it in the drawer. Turais was able to glimpse the words "glitter bomb" and "prank" on one of the page. He grinned as he settled down on the bed. Sirius turned back to face Turais. "What's going on?"

"I just wanted to check on you," Turais said. "Ever since father and I returned from Paris, I couldn't help but notice that you were a bit quieter than usual. Is there something on your mind that you would like to share?"

Sirius hesitated as his eyes darted side to side.

"Actually... there is something minor... that is bothering me..." Sirius said.

"I'm listening," Turais said.

"So... I was wondering if..." Sirius paused. "... how being in Slytherin is like?"

"You've visited the common room before and you know it is beneath the Black Lake, so it is mostly dim and wet. As for the people, they are all very ambitious, driven, and competitive. Why do you ask?"

Sirius nodded at the information and swallowed heavily.

"What if... I mean... I do not like to be in Slytherin?"

"Do you want to be sorted into Gryffindor?" Turais asked. Sirius looked up at Turais, shocked.

"Uhm... maybe?"

Turais held Sirius' hand and said softly, "Listen, Sirius. I don't care where you are sorted into as long as you are happy. That and also the fact that you genuinely want to be sorted there and not because someone is forcing you."

"It's not about James," Sirius said as Turais looked at him doubtfully. Sirius waved his hands frantically and said, "I'm being honest, Turais. I just... I mean... Slytherin doesn't sound fun... I mean I like you and Alex... but the rest of them... I guess it won't be too bad if you are there with me..."

"Sirius..." Turais said firmly. "Your happiness is most important to me. You being a Gryffindor, or Slytherin, or Ravenclaw, or Hufflepuff will never change that."

"But if I'm sorted anywhere but in Slytherin... father would be so mad..." Sirius said glumly. "And grandfather might force father to disown me... just like all those years ago..."

"Listen, Sirius. Father loves you so very much. He will not disown you over something like this."

"Won't he?"

"I'm sure."

Sirius searched Turais' eyes for the truth. Then, he all but threw himself into Turais' arms.
"Thank you, Turais. I am so glad you are my older brother. You are the best brother ever."

Turais chuckled as he ruffled Sirius' long, curly hair. "Where else would I be?"

"Dunno? Maybe in some other universe being someone else's awesome brother?"

"There's nowhere else I want to be but here," Turais said. And he meant every word of it.

***

"Father. May I speak with you for a moment?" Turais asked as he stood at the doorway to the master bedroom.

“What’s the matter, Turais?” Orion said as he continued to pen a letter. Turais walked into the room, closed the door, and sat in the chair beside the writing desk.

“I would -”

“Oh sorry, Turais. Before you start -” Orion interrupted as he pulled open a drawer on his desk and searched through it. “- I have something from your grandfather for you.”

Orion took out a small, velvet box and handed it over to him. Turais opened it to find a pendant with an emerald and an intricate silver chain. The emerald was oval in shape and encased with a silver cast. The front side of the gem had the engraving of the Black family crest while the back side was etched with protective runes.

"Commissioned by one of our most famous ancestors, Perseus I, this amulet is one-of-a-kind that will provide you from most curses and certain potions, such as Amortentia and Veritaserum,” Orion explained. "As with all Black family heirlooms like the Heirship ring, once you place this on your body, no one can remove this from you by force or by theft.”

“He meant to provide this to you after your poisoning but he ran into some issues declaring its magic to the Ministry and Hogwarts to confirm its safety,” Orion said with a hint of scorn.

"Does this provide any protection from poisons or the Unforgivable Curses?” Turais asked as he eyed the gleaming stone.

"There is nothing that can shield you from all types of poisons, Turais, nor is there an item that can shield you from the Unforgivables," Orion said. "The amulet provides protection specifically against potions that affect the mind by enhancing your mental barrier. It means that you are also better-protected from Legilimency attacks. This will be most useful to protect you when you are at Hogsmeade." Turais gasped as Orion pulled out the signed permission form.

“Why did you not ask me for this, Turais?”

“I... I didn't think you would want me to go...” Turais said softly.

“You are such a responsible child, Turais," Orion said with a sigh. “You are quite correct. I really don't what you outside of Hogwarts. But then I don't think it's fair to keep you away from this essential part of your school experience. Please make sure you have your amulet on at all times for
my peace of mind.”

Turais nodded as he placed the amulet around his neck and placed it beneath his robes.

"Thank you, father," Turais whispered as he took the piece of parchment.

“So... what do you want to talk about today?”

“I would like to talk about Sirius,” Turais said softly. Orion stilled for a short while and then sighed.

“I have a feeling that I know what you would like to discuss,” Orion said neutrally, “it is about his Sorting, correct?”

Turais was surprised. “Y...yes, father.” Well, this conversation would be much easier now.

“I was planning on talking to you about it in a few days,” Orion said. “Once he gets Sorted into Slytherin, I fear he would instantly be an outcast. I was hoping that with you and Alex in the Group, he would at least avoid complete alienation.”

Turais’ heart dropped. Well. So much for an easy conversation. “Of course, father. Sirius is my brother and Alex loves him dearly. We will make sure he is comfortable if he places in Slytherin.”

Orion frowned after hearing the end of the sentence. Turais winced internally. ‘Here we go…’

“What are you implying, Turais?” Orion looked genuinely confused.

“I’m implying that…” Turais’ voice turned incredibly quiet, “… that Sirius might not be Sorted into Slytherin.”

“Of course he is going to be Sorted into Slytherin. What sort-of nonsense is that?” Orion barked out a nervous chuckle as his eyes flashed with uncertainty.

“You know there’s a possibility, and it’s quite high as well,” said Turais, “He has always been atypical as a Black.”

“Well, you are fairly atypical yourself, Turais. And you are growing up to be a fine Slytherin and future Lord Black,” Orion spoke firmly.

“What if I told you that I had a hat-stall because the Hat told me I would do well in Gryffindor?” Turais offered. He knew it was dishonesty by omission but he needed to help Orion to face his fears. Orion looked horrified that his eldest was remotely considered to join the house of lions.


“Father, you know that I would do well in Gryffindor. You always wondered why I’m so courageous. There is some Gryffindor traits in me. That part is apparent,” Turais said calmly. Orion shifted in his seat uncomfortably as he continued, “I knew I would have an easier time in Gryffindor than in Slytherin and it matched my personality better. I had a choice between my duty and my comfort. But I understood my duties as Heir Black and the implications that would arise if I were Sorted anywhere else other than Slytherin. I chose my family over my personal happiness. And I never regretted my choice for one second.”
Orion remained silent but Turais knew he was still reconciling the fact at his Heir just revealed he would have rather been in Gryffindor than Slytherin, the house which the Blacks went to for countless generations.

“I am here to shoulder all those responsibilities. Sirius does not have them. We both know there’s a high chance that he would be Sorted into Gryffindor and he would be very miserable in Slytherin. I know he would be torn when he sits on that stool in two week’s time making the difficult choice between family expectations and his own happiness.

“I know this is a difficult situation for you. But please… please consider telling him that you will be proud of him regardless of which house he is Sorted into.”

Orion buried his face in his hands. “Turais… please give me some time. I… I…”

“Of course, father,” Turais said gently as he left a shaken Orion by himself.

Chapter End Notes

Even though I have mixed feelings about FB as a story, I’m glad it expanded the universe so I have much more canonical locale to play with.

Will Sirius be sorted into Gryffindor?

As always, your thoughts and comments are always welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 39: King’s Cross - September 1st, 1971, will be posted *hopefully* in two weeks' time. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-03-26
Hey everybody,

I definitely procrastinated on my work (totally regretting it now) and whipped up this chapter. I just couldn't resist writing on and giving you a sneak peek of the newest additions to the story. But it's really just because I'm easily distracted in my own home and can't focus on homework...

I hope you enjoy the update.

- ravenclawblues 2020-04-01

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
OLD SCHOOL, NEW HAUNT?

by Scandora Gosp

The Unknown Specter Threatens

Students, beware! For the past few weeks, news of an unfriendly guest has made its presence known to the villagers of Hogsmeade. Ranging from strange scratches to shuddering shrieks, otherworldly sounds have permeated throughout the uninhabited moors which housed only an abandoned shack in the centre.

"[The shack] has bin haur fur years. Whieest an' aw," Mr Young(?), age unknown, a local resident said. The man's accent was too difficult for the reporter to understand, therefore, he reached out to another man who travels by the moor on a regular basis.

Mr Neep, 85, the apothecary said, "I always collect potion ingredients from the woods up north. So, I travel around the moor twice per day. Never in my 86 - what is it? - oh - 85 years of my life had that shack made a noise. It was only since about three months ago that strange noises started to occur on an irregular basis. Had to reach for my Calming Drought the first time it happened in my 89 years - oh, yes, 85 years. But I have never saw anything near the shack in 87 years of my life." Mrs Neep later revealed to us that her husband suffers from poor vision and memory challenges.

We reached out to Headmaster Dumbledore for a quote and, after twenty years of no response, received one saying: "I assure you that our students are safe from this unknown specter. It is quite comfortable living in its new home and has no desire to interact with its neighbours so there will be no house-warming party invitations."

Whether the Headmaster gained a new sense of humour or a new sense of respect for our column, you shall find out in next week's "Dumbledore - Jokester, Roaster, or Mediocre."

***

Mr Waters, a train conductor at King’s Cross Station, prides himself for leading a perfectly ordinary life. Indeed, life here was chaotic as people from various walks of life rushed in and out of the station to their destinations, but that was to be expected in one of the busiest train stations in Britain. Again, nothing out of the ordinary.

However, he was strolling down platform nine after the train to Leeds had departed when he
was forced to be reminded that his perfectly ordinary life was, in actuality, blemished. As he walked past a party of five dressed up in funny robes and pointed hat, he mentally reconfirmed that it was the first of September. He then checked his watch, which told him it was quarter past ten in the morning.

Grimly, he was reminded of the occasion.

"Oh, I am so excited to go to Hogwarts!" a bespectacled boy shouted with unbridled joy. "And to see Sirius as well!"

'Hogwarts, where on the sodding planet is this Hogwarts...’ he thought to himself as another family, sporting a similar fashion, passed by him.

"James, how many times do I have to remind you that we are in a place teeming with Muggles?" a greying woman scolded but her son heeded no attention. She sighed.

'Again. Why are these people saying the word - what was it again? - ah yes, "Muggles". What is a Muggle?' he thought to himself, once again puzzled.

After working at the station for his third year, he had noticed that there was an onrush of people speaking complete jibberish on certain days - most importantly on the first of September.

"Mom! I think I lost my toad!" a short, rounded boy announced.

"Peter! How did you lose it?" his father scolded him. "Where did you last see it?"

"Can't you just summon it?"

"You can't summon an animate object, Peter."

'Summoning a toad? Like a seance?' Mr Waters eyed the various animals that violated all sorts of animal codes. Yet, he was reminded that he had never heard of a single complaint about a stowaway owl or escaped toad incidents on any of the trains.

This was one of the many mysteries that remained unsolved which marred his perfectly ordinary life. And this infuriated him.

"Excuse me, sir," someone called behind him. "Excuse me."

Mr Waters turned around to find a well-dressed lady strolling up to her. "Hi, I was just wondering which one of these columns are considered the third column from the front?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am?" He took a longer glance at the lady. She was dressed properly, if not a smidgen on the plain side. Her confusion was genuine, so she was unlikely to be a prankster or a mad woman.

The lady's eyes flitted down to his name-tag and she opened her mouth, "Oh, I do apologize. I seem to have mistaken you for another."

"What do you mean, ma'am?"

He stopped talking when a man in the uniform of a station guard appeared beside her. Pinned on his right breast pocket was the name, "Donovan Charmsmith.” But the letters on the name tag suddenly rearranged to form the words “Hogwarts Express Concierge” before reverting back to his name. Mr Waters blinked his eyes several times, thinking that his eyes deceived him. He decided
to ignore the incredulous sight and focused on the man’s name. He did not recognize that man or his name from anywhere, not from the employee register or from any of the socials. He could not be a new hire either as he had met them both, one John Reed and one Miles Andrews, before.

"Ma'am, I believe I am the one you are looking for," the man said.

"Oh yes, I do believe so. It is our first time trying to find the barrier. We are non-magical, you see," the lady said, her face filled with relief.

"Of course -"

A wizard posing as a station guard had moved behind Mr Waters while he was distracted by the scene and struck the unassuming man with a dim glow of light.

"Don't worry, ma'am," Charmsmith said to the lady as she looked at the dazed Mr Waters. "Mr Waters is due for a memory alteration. He has an inquisitive mind, this one, but it’s bad news for us."

"Oh... I see," the lady was clearly shocked but she composed herself very quickly, as one must be considering she was unaware of the magical world until two months ago. "Will you do... um... do that to me as well?"

"Are you a parent of a student?"

"Yes, my youngest daughter, Lily, is attending Hogwarts for her first year today."

"Then, no. The Ministry should have sent a pamphlet with all the information on it..."

"Well..." the lady said apologetically. "My other daughter accidentally threw it in the fireplace... we weren't able to salvage all the papers..."

"No worries... you can always write to the Ministry and ask them to re-send you the information," the man said. "If you don't know how, you can ask your daughter, Lily, to do it on your behalf."

They stopped in front of a brick column.

"So this is where you want to be. Make sure to pick up some speed and run straight through the wall and you will find yourself on the platform."

Relieved, the lady thanked the disguised wizard profusely before she headed back to her family.

***

Somewhere nearby, one of the new employees, John Reed, was currently shadowing an older employee in the ticket booth. He, too, noticed the influx of people dressed in robes and caps as though they were the characters from the hidden magical world that his grandfather loved to tell him when he was little.

"What's with those strangely dressed people?" he asked as he eyed a family pointing at the signs. It was his first day of work at this extremely busy node of transportation and was currently
shadowing his supervisor, Mr Ward.

"Your single fare to Manchester, ma'am - have a pleasant journey," the older, more experienced man said cheerily as he slipped a ticket and some change to the lady in front of the booth.

The lady thanked Mr Ward and left. Seeing that she was the last person of the queue, the man swiveled on his chair and turned to the intrigued John as he stretched his arms up high to relax his sore shoulders. "The lot of them appear on the first of September every year, John. Reckon there is an annual convention or parade somewhere up north..."

John nodded as he checked the clock that stood in the centre of the busy lobby. It was half past ten, and there had been more than a dozen parties dressed in such intriguing costumes. He wondered whether he was allowed to join in as well. It seemed fun.

There was a pale and sickly woman that was walking slowly as she held the hand of a little boy with slink, black hair and a slightly hooked nose. Suddenly, a fit of cough overwhelmed the lady as John reached out to hold her steady.

"Are you feeling ill, madam?" he said.

After two more coughs into her handkerchief, the woman wiped the corner of her mouth and gasped breathlessly, "I always feel ill, young man, but I'll live for another day. These coughs have yet to bring me down."

John glanced at the young boy, whose obsidian eyes looked up at his mother. He stood there wordlessly without a word of encouragement or concern, yet the man could feel the intense worry and fear that radiated from the boy.

The mother squeezed her son's hand slightly. "Don't frown, Severus. You don't want lines on your forehead now. It blemishes your dashing looks."

"Mom... I'm not dashing in any way," the boy grumbled, but John could see the boy's shoulder relaxed just a fraction from the words.

"You're the most handsome boy I've ever known," the mother said as Severus quirked a small smile.

"Mom... you're embarrassing me..." Severus grumbled. Then, he looked up at the man and his expression closed off again. "I think we should head out. I want to find a compartment with Lily."

"Of course," she said, then coughed twice more. She thanked John before they headed off. John watched as they disappeared before a small voice sounded near him.

"Excuse me, sir."

There was a tiny tug on his uniform. John looked down to see a little boy, rather pale and thin but otherwise quite handsome. There was also a faint streak of pink that ran from the outer corner of his right eye to the middle of his cheek. It was quite long and seemed painful. He wondered if the boy ventured too close to an unfriendly neighbourhood hound and fell victim to its sharpened claws. Then, John realized he was wearing a heavily-used robe. It was frayed on the edges and with patches stitched on the sides and at the elbows.

A few steps behind him was an aging woman. Her tired disposition and worried eyes weighed heavily on her wrinkled face. Beside her was a tall, grave man who had the same grey
eyes as the little boy.

However, the most striking observation was the barn owl that perched inside a bronze-wired cage.

Taking his eyes off the owl, John crouched down. His gaze was now level with the child when he asked gently, "How may I help you, little one?"

"Ummm... someone dropped this on the floor."

The boy placed a brown wallet into his hand.

"Oh, thank you, young man," John smiled. "The poor chap who lost this will be immensely grateful."

The boy gave him a coy smile before walking back to his parents. Unable to suppress his curiosity, John shouted out.

"Where are you heading to?"

"To school!" The boy said excited as it was the most wondrous phrase he had ever uttered. John wondered again whether he had ever reacted to the idea of school so positively. Perhaps he did once, a long, long time ago.

"Where is that wonderful school of yours?"

"Oh... ummm," the boy paused as he looked up at his father for assistance. He saw the man pull out a single drumstick... (perhaps the boy was a drummer?) and...

Suddenly, John had a nagging sensation that he was forgetting something very important... like an itch that he was unable to reach and scratch...

John was so deep in his thoughts that he didn’t realize the two adults had quickly ushered the young boy towards the platform between nine and ten. When his supervisor recalled him to his post with an angry shout, John had almost forgotten the exchange entirely as the family of three disappeared behind the throng of people and a magical wall.

A few hours later, John would come across a man who was in search of a lost wallet that was curiously in his possession. It was then that he would recall faintly the fuzzy image of a kind, little boy. But afterward, he would think nothing else of it as the memory faded away.

***

Not too far away, Turais was walking with his family surrounded by several Aurors in Muggle disguise serving as their protective details. As the Black family arrived in front of the column that led to the Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, he noted that there was a lanky, blond girl blocking the path. She stomped her feet and shrieked at her mother.

"NO! I'm not going to say goodbye to that freak!" The passers-by turned their heads at the scene before returning to their normal routine.

"Excuse me, madame. You are blocking the traffic," Orion said as he threw a disdainful look
at the Muggle mother and daughter. The mother glanced at Orion once over and realized he was a wizard. Quickly stepping away from the column, she shot off an apology and dragged the teenage girl away.

"Petunia! -" Turais paused as he turned back and strained his neck in search of the voice, but he could only see the mother's head bobbing through the crowd. ":- Lily is your sister, not a freak!"

Turais felt conflicted in regards to Petunia as he stared at the milling crowd. Perhaps not meeting her was for the best.

He turned back to the column and ran through the magical barrier with his cart to the view of the scarlet train engulfed in heavy steam. This was it when it all began... In a few moments, all the Marauders would be on this train as they traveled to Hogwarts for the first time... and Turais would become a part of it this time.

Turais was barely able to keep his anxiety and excitement in check as he said his goodbyes. Orion gave both his sons a big hug and some words of caution. His eyes then lingered on Sirius for a long moment as Turais recognized the internal battle waging inside of him. Sirius continued to look at his father hopefully...

"Sirius, I'm proud of you no matter what happens," Orion said softly in contrast to the firm grip he had laid upon his son's arms. "Remember that."

And that was it. It was not the resounding approval that Turais hoped for, but it was something nonetheless. But Turais could see that Sirius understood the concession his father made and he hugged Orion fiercely.

On another note, Regulus looked like he was on the verge of tears when Sirius gave him a tight hug. Regulus was normally very composed so this outward portrayal of emotion was a surprise to them all.

"I want to go to Hogwarts with you two," Regulus sniffed. "I'm going to be all alone in the house now..."

"Reggie..." Turais said. "You will join us very soon."

"It's one year!" Regulus cried out. "That's so far away!"

"I promise to write to you whenever possible," Sirius promised solemnly.

"No, you won't," Regulus said miserably. "You will forget about me... I know you will." Sirius looked at a loss at the sudden accusation.

"I'll make sure Sirius writes to you," Turais said soothingly. "You believe me, right, Reggie?"

Regulus gave Turais a tiny nod just as the horn tooted warningly.

"I will see you in three months," Turais said.

"I'll miss you both," Regulus whispered before he leaned into Orion's robes. Turais and Sirius gave him a final wave before they disappeared onto the Hogwarts Express.

***
Turais quickly ushered Sirius and Alex into an empty compartment before he dashed out once again.

His mother - Lily Evans - was on this very train. Severus Snape was here as well, likely sharing the same compartment as his mother. And most importantly, James was on the train as well. The three of them cannot meet each other without his supervision. He must control the initial meeting between the three extremely volatile, and potentially destructive, components.

He was passing by compartments and compartments until he peered into one with two children that caught his attention. There was a girl with thick, dark red hair that flowed lusciously down to her shoulder sitting across a lanky boy with a stringy, pallid look and a head of long, black hair. Turais found himself fixated at the revelatory sight of the two of them chatting and smiling at each other with ease and innocence. At that moment, he realized that he had never seen such a glow around the boy. He looked so light-hearted, content, and ... happy.

There she was, the mother whom he had inherited his electrifying green eyes; the mother he wished he had a chance to meet; the mother who committed the ultimate sacrifice against an unspeakable evil; the mother who laid down her life to protect his...

Turais felt a prick of tears behind his eyes as he sniffed. He quickly wiped at his eyes and turned to face the other boy. The boy who would turn into a jaded, cynical man who harboured a secret, unrequited love for his mother; a man who both hated and cherished his past self for all the fond memories and painful nightmares he embodied; the man who sacrificed his all to save the world...

Turais would ensure that neither fate would befall them again.

Turais felt as though he was observing a brilliantly-coloured Pensieve memory until he realized that the two protagonists turned and looked directly at him. The blood drained from Severus' horrified expression and turned his complexion even more sallow. Turais immediately seized up as he realized that he was likely openly gawking at them.

He cleared his throat nervously and realized that his throat felt like the desert. Knocking on their door, he slid it sideways and spoke his prepared lines, "Hello, I am Turais Black and I am just walking down the train to welcome all the first years. What are your names?"

A look of surprise and shock, then apprehension flitted across Lily's face as she turned back towards the boy sitting across from her. Then, observing the boy's continuous gobsmacked stare at Turais, she found the confirmation she sought.

"You’re the Turais Black who is the all-round third-year Slytherin Potions genius, the star Seeker that won Slytherin the Quidditch Cup, the joint-inventor of the Wolfsbane Potion with Damocles Belby, and a candidate for the Order of Merlin?" Lily’s eyes shone brightly, then teasing at her companion. “I’ve heard loads about you from my friend here. You see, you’re sort of his personal hero -”

“Lily! -” Severus hissed murderously as the girl just smiled with deceptive innocence in return. Then, he inadvertently met Turais’ gaze and immediately flushed to a dangerous shade of red. He averted his gaze towards the floor rapidly and he picked at his robes. Severus looked as though he was contemplating whether death by a carnivorous seat or by a well-placed Bombardo was more preferable.
Lily then spoke again, “Severus! Your copy of _The Most Important Potions Discovery Across the Ages_! Now is a good time for you to ask him to sign -”

“Lily!” Severus launched himself at the girl and covered her mouth in an attempt to silence her. “Don’t listen to her. She w... was just joking. W... who would want a r... random person to sign someone else’s book. That’s for... losers! Exactly! Losers. She makes absolutely no sense!” Severus chuckled nervously.

"I personally wouldn't hesitate to ask Catherine Westermont to sign my book on Quidditch greats if I get the chance to meet her," Turais said casually. Severus looked stricken with remorse.

"Hey, Turais?" Sirius' voice sounded behind him. Turais tensed as he turned around to face his younger brother. "What are you doing here?" Sirius looked behind him at Lily and Severus questioningly.

"Uh, why are you not in your own compartment?" Turais asked, feeling the anxiety and tension starting to creep up inside him.

"Oh, Alex agreed to look after our belongings so I just wandered around a little."

"Hi, I'm Lily Evans," she said distractedly as she spotted something outside the window.

"Hi," Sirius said as he turned to Severus. "And you are?"

"Oh! Petunia is here!" Lily shouted happily as she leaped onto her feet.

"Lily! She won't have anything nice to say," Severus held his arm up. "You should just stay put."

"Oh... Severus, I know you don't get along with her -" Severus looked like he was about to argue when he was silenced by Lily's hand motion. "- But she's my sister and I want to say a final goodbye to her..." Lily said as she darted out of the compartment, leaving the three boys alone.

"Uh... so, who are you again?" Sirius asked.

"Who are you?" Severus returned suspiciously.

Sirius frowned. "I'm Sirius Black, Turais' younger brother."

"Oh... well..." Severus carded his oily, black hair nervously as he cast an apologetic glance at Turais, "I'm Severus Snape and -"

"OI, SIRIUS! I've been here for ages trying to find you, did you just arrive?" James' voice shouted from the hallway. Turais just wanted to cast a Freezing Charm on everyone and stop them from interacting. This was a headache and he was going to die from anxiety.

"Hey, James. Yeah, we arrived a few minutes ago..." Sirius waved at James, who just came into view. Severus looked between the two boys nervously.

"Oh, hello again, Turais. Is this our compartment? Where is your luggage and - who is this?" James scanned the boy in the compartment up and down before scrunching his nose in disgust. "Is he your friend?"

"Uh..." Sirius said with uncertainty.

"I'm not friends with him!" Severus blurted out. Suddenly, he saw Turais and he burnt in
embarrassment. "I mean... we are not yet friends -"

"Cut it out," James said sharply as he stepped up in front of Sirius defensively while rising anger blotched his cheeks. He was clearly offended by Severus' outburst. "Sirius is an amazing person and you're not fit to be his friend even if you wanted to."

"James, don't be so harsh with your words," Turais admonished, fearing the escalation of the situation that was forewarned from Severus' bubbling indignation.

"But he started it," James argued as he pointed an accusatory finger at Severus.

"No. I did not, speccy!" Severus stood up and retorted hotly. James looked mightily affronted as he adjusted his glasses subconsciously.


"Okay. Stop! Both of you!" Turais shouted, but Severus was determined to have the last word.

"If you could see beyond the tip of your big, fat nose, you were the one who insulted me and made it sound like being friends with me was horrible in the first place!"

"James," Turais warned the offending boy off. "Severus, you both said something hurtful. You should apologize to each other."

Severus scoffed as he sneered at the bespectacled boy. "Well, I'm not apologizing to spug gadgie over here."

"Why you filthy, little greas-"

James was interrupted as Turais shot a Silencing Charm at him and shoved him out of the compartment.

"Okay, that's enough from the both of you," Turais announced. He turned to Sirius and an excited James who was mouthing something soundlessly in fascination, "Sirius, bring James to our compartment and -"

Suddenly, Lily appeared behind him. She snuck past them and re-entered the compartment in a flash. Her hand was covering her face as he could hear a distant but muffled sob.

"Okay, James. Nothing to see here..." Turais said as he pushed Sirius and James away from the compartment. But Sirius and James refused to budge.

James shook his head adamantly as he peeked at the girl with curiosity. Turais was to die of frustration. Everything was going pear-shaped.

Severus immediately ignored the boys and sat beside Lily. Giving her his full attention, he asked gruffly, "What did Petunia do?"

Lily shook her head in response as Severus looked conflicted between putting his hand around her or not. He ultimately settled with placing a hand on her near shoulder in support.

"It's going to be alright," Severus said soothingly. "You are so much better than she is. She is just jealous of you for your magic."

Lily sniffed. "But she's not like that. She is not a jealous person, Severus."
Severus looked as though he was about to raise an argument but decided to swallow it in favour of calming his friend. "Well, why don't we think about how many new friends we will make in Slytherin -"

James mouthed something angrily as he shoved his way into the compartment once more. He was gesticulating wildly. Lily wiped her tears away as she pulled out her wand. "I know the counter-Charm." Of course. Lily had to be smart and learn the general counter-Charm because why not?

"*Finite,*" she said as James' voice suddenly filled the compartment. "Why Slytherin? Gryffindor is *so much* better!" James turned to Lily and gasped, "Thank you, by the way."

"James!" Turais chided exasperatedly. "No house is superior to the other. They each have their own merits and complements others as well."

"Sure," James said dismissively. "But she clearly doesn't belong wherever you end up." James pointed his finger at Severus.

Well, that caught Lily's attention as she looked up with red-rimmed eyes and stared at James furiously.

"I should have left you mute! Severus is my friend," she said hotly. "He's nice to me and a good friend."

" - and you should leave, whoever you are." 

"Well..." James tugged on his robes importantly and patted his crazy hair. Then, he stuck out his hand snobbishly, "I'm James Potter. And you are...?"

"Crossed! I am cross with you, Potter," Lily snapped, "And I want you to leave right now!"

Lily forced James out with a shove, slid the compartment door shut, and locked it. James looked bewildered at the display.

"I can't believe she turned me down for that slimehead," James gasped, stunned, as he turned to the Blacks.

"Well..." Sirius said hesitantly. "You were a bit rude..."

"What?! I was most definitely *not* rude. That slimy git was the rude one," James bristled. "Are you on his side or mine, Sirius?"

"James..."

"Hmph, I will show that girl - what's her name again?"

"Evans. Lily Evans."

"I'll show Evans I'm clearly the superior choice compared to that boy," James huffed with determination as he started to walk off with his trunk.

'Why is James such a git? Turais thought exasperatedly. 'Well... he is destined to learn this the hard way."

"Uhmm... I think we should apologize to them," Sirius said as he eyed the two occupants of the now-locked compartment. Lily smacked Severus on the head as Severus continued to talk.
Clearly, the boy was recounting the events and Lily was not impressed by the boy's discourteous display either.

"We should," Turais said as he looked at James' shrinking figure. "But the one who needs to apologize most is not present."

Sirius shrugged helplessly at Turais before he knocked. Lily peeked outside the window and saw that only the two Blacks were present before she slid the door open. Sirius peeked his head inside, "Uhm, we would just like to apologize on James' behalf. Uh... sorry."

Lily softened her gaze. Her eyes were still a bit watery from her tears moments ago. "It's not you I'm mad at,..."

"Sirius. Sirius Black, Turais' younger brother."

"Nice to meet you," Lily said. "I'm not mad at you, Sirius. But I'm glad you are not like your friend. At least you know he was wrong, well... partially. Of course, Severus here was in the wrong as well." Lily shot Severus a glare. "Severus, apologize to Sirius right now."

"I'm sorry," Severus mumbled into his robes.

"It's fine..." Sirius said awkwardly in return.

"James is a bit of an obnoxious git," Turais said. "He is not a bad person though. He will grow out of it eventually."

Lily looked doubtful, however. But she did not comment further.

***

Turais and Sirius returned to their compartment when they found that James was engrossed in a conversation with the other third-years. Jonty was still not present. Turais wondered what the latest gossip was.

" - just still think Gryffindor is the most awesome! Ravenclaws are okay, I guess? But no one likes a know-it-all. Slytherins are - well - " James waved at Alex and Turais, " - mostly shifty blokes except for these two and a couple others. And no offense to Hufflepuffs, but they are a bit boring, aren't they?"

The older students in the compartment winced as they all shot worrying glances at Gerald, whose countenance darkened considerably.

"James," Turais warned. "You cannot make over-generalizations like that -"

"But, Turais. I mean... Loyalty. Honesty. Hard-working..." James continued, taking no notice of the charged tension around him. "...They're all fine and dandy, but at the end of the day..."

James then leaned in and whispered conspiratorially, "...it's almost like that saying: 'always a bridesmaid, never a bride.' Ain't it? The spotlight never shines on them, so why toil if you don't get the recognition?"

Turais slapped his hand over his face in embarrassment while Gerald was sending daggers
with his eyes at James in an unusual display of hostility. At the moment, the compartment door slid open to provide a much-needed distraction in the form of one frantic and out-of-breath Evelyn Napier.

"Hey, Turais," the sixth-year Prefect breathed heavily as his eyes darted towards Sirius. "You must be Sirius! It is a pleasure to finally meet the person that Turais is so crazy about! I'm Evelyn, by the way -" the boy said with a smile as he pointed at his shiny badge, " - and a prefect. If you need anything, just find me!"

"Thanks..." Sirius said shyly as he gave Turais a quick elbow in the ribs.

"Why would he need to talk to you when he has Kaiden?" James asked. "And it's not like he's going to be seeing you all that often once he's Sorted into Gryffindor."

Sirius' face blanched as Evelyn's eyes darted between the occupants of the room, notably the Black brothers.

"Uhmm... right..." Evelyn said awkwardly as he rummaged his robes and pulled out two scrolls. He handed one each to Sirius and James. "Slughorn's invitations to lunch. Duty calls! I'll see you all around!" Evelyn left the compartment hastily.

"What a strange fellow," James wondered aloud to the silent compartment as he turned his attention to the scroll. "What's this all about?"

"Professor Slughorn is the Potions professor and also the Head of House for Slytherin," Turais explained. "He invites certain students to join his monthly dinner parties called the Slug Club -"

"What?!!" James chortled. "The Slug Club?! This is hilarious. How self-absorbed or elitist is that man?" He leaned forward and nudged Sirius across from him, who was clearly still in a daze from the boy's previous comment about his Sorting. "Mate, aren't you glad you don't need to deal with this dodgy character constantly?"

Sirius could only nod as he stared down at the invitation.

Ultimately, James' curiosity overruled his urge to boycott the idea of an elite club as he dragged Sirius along with him to the lunch car.

***

Turais resumed his quest to systematically introduce himself to all the incoming first-years when he came across a compartment with only one occupant. Peeking in, he saw a young boy with light brown hair in a set of rumpled and darned school robes. There were obvious patches that were mended over torn bits around his elbow. Turais could see a couple faint, red lines etched just above his left cheekbone as the boy just stared longingly at a framed portrait in his hands.

Turais calmed himself down as he knocked on the door. The boy looked up, then seized up as he looked between the frame and him in rapid succession, and hastily stuffed the frame into his bag and out of view.

Turais slid the door open and said, “Hello, my name is Turais Black -“
Remus’ eyes widened comically as he scrambled to his feet.

“- and I am a third-year. I’m going around and saying hello to all the first-years going to Hogwarts for the very first time. What is your name?”

Remus was frozen on the spot, staring at Turais with wide eyes and trembling in awe and excitement.

“Hello?” Turais asked softly, not wanting to startle the young boy. But his words still managed to send a huge shudder through his entire body.

Suddenly, Remus turned his head around and away from Turais. One second later, he turned back and blinked his eyes several times. He then shook his head dismissively and repeated the same motion again.

“Uh… what are you doing?” Turais was stumped by his actions. But Remus seemingly accepted the fact that Turais was not a figment of his imagination and started to speak.

“I am Remus… Remus Lupin. It’s very nice to meet you… finally…” Remus’ voice gradually went softer until the last word was barely louder than a whisper.

“Oh hello, Mr Lupin. Nice to meet you. Do you have any questions for me?”

“Oh… please call me Remus… only if you want to! You can call me anything -“

“Of course, Remus.”

Remus looked like he was about to faint when Turais said his name.

“Remus?”

“Oh sorry… furry brain, I’m just nervous about school… yeah, school. Just can’t believe I’m here right now… with you… Right, question… um… what if it’s not Hogwarts-related?”

“Sure… I hope I am able to answer it… may I?”

Turais gestured to the seat across from him.

“Of… of course! Please sit.” Remus looked in shock that he was standing then looked as though he was appalled by his lack of manners. “Um… how difficult was it… I mean, the Wolfsbane Potion… to make… I mean.”

“Oh, are you asking how difficult it was to make the Wolfsbane Potion? It was a lot of hard work done by my partner in crime, Damocles Belby. I just helped him with a few things for the Potions ingredients.”

“Thank you for doing this… making the potion… it’s a life-changing potion for… a lot of people. I mean I don’t know anyone who uses it, of course, but -“

“Thank you for saying that, Remus. That was my intention for creating this potion in the first place - to help those in need.”

Remus looked at Turais as though he wore a halo.

“Um… can I… may I shake your hand?” Remus asked shyly.
“Of course! I can give you a hug too, if you want.”

“Really?” Remus yelped out before looking horrified by his shout and asked again meekly.
“I mean… really?” Turais chuckled as the boy blushed. After a quick hug, Remus said quickly,
"I'm so sorry… it's just… you are so… brilliant! I'm nothing like you…"

"Trust me," Turais said kindly. "You will be a brilliant student as well."

"Really?" Remus looked up at him hopefully. His eyes were twinkling so brightly as if it
contained the entire universe of stars. "Do you really think I can be brilliant like you?"

"I don't see why not," Turais said. "I have faith in you."

"Thanks…” Remus said softly.

"Hey, do you want to join my compartment? My brother is starting his first-year too. Maybe
you can become friends before Hogwarts? He's a trouble-maker and I can really use a pair of eyes
to watch out for him and keep him from causing any trouble."

Remus' eyes widened hopefully, “Are you sure?” Turais nodded. "Of course I can help you! I
mean, not that you need any help, obviously…"

“Okay, follow me then!” Turais said as the boy immediately packed up his belongings and
followed him out of the compartment.

***

After getting Remus settled, Turais left the compartment again in search for the fourth and
final Marauder.

Turais had mixed feelings with the boy, with most of it being negative. However, he pitied
him more than anything during his previous life. But despite wanting to keep the Marauders intact,
he really wished that Peter Pettigrew would not be sorted into Gryffindor. That would be one of the
most absolute ways to ensure that the tragedy would not occur again.

As he neared the end of the train, he finally found his target. A small, rounded boy with two
large teeth was laughing at a joke made by another boy in the compartment. He was completely
different from the man Turais once knew - the jaded, haunted coward.

Turais knocked on the glass as the occupants all turned to look at him. He entered the
compartment and said, "Hello, my name is Turais Black. I see that you are all first-years so I was
wondering if you have any questions for me?"

"Uh… no, thank you very much," one of the boys said.

"Very well," Turais said as he turned to Peter, "I'm curious as to which house you would like
to be Sorted into?"

The boy shifted in his seat uncomfortably, "I don't know… maybe, Gryffindor?"

The other boys in the compartment guffawed. "You? Gryffindor?"
Peter flushed in embarrassment as he laughed along. "Yeah... that was a joke, Brock, ... was it funny?"

"Absolute jokester! That is the last place I'd imagine you to be Sorted into, Peter. Gryffindor is for heroes, not scaredy-cats without a drop of courage such as you."

"Young man, who are you to judge him so harshly?" Turais found himself defending Peter, miraculously.

"Who are you to question me?" the boy, Brock, returned. "I'm the one who has known him for years and there is no further thing away from Gryffindor on this planet than him."

"Listen, young man," Turais said angrily. "You better not be sorted into Slytherin because I do not want someone with a piss-poor attitude like yours to bring shame to my House."

"Well, lucky for the both of us that Slytherin in at the bottom of my list since I don't want to be surrounded by inbreds."

"You're lucky that I am determined to set a good example and be civil," Turais warned. "Or else you would've already been hexed six ways to Sunday. Good day to you all."

As Turais left the compartment, he found Peter looking at him with eyes shining with admiration.

***

Turais was suddenly dragged into the cramped toilet by none other than Kaiden Potter. He was then swiftly shoved to the far corner by the sink as the Gryffindor peeked through the tiny gap between the door and wall. All the while, he was chuntering incessantly under his breath.

"... how dare you show up like this... the beard should be illegal... I’m going crazy... complete disregard of my well-being..."

"Hey, Kaiden. What’s going on?"

"... this, Kaiden, is what happens when you don't see him for six weeks... urgh... I can't deal with this right now..."

"Earth to Kaiden -"

"Turais, have you seen how Michael looks?" Kaiden cried out. Then, his eyes widened as he peered out nervously again.

"Uh... no?" Turais said in total confusion. "Michael -"

"Shhh! " Kaiden said. "He's coming!"

"What's -"

"Shut up, Rais!"

Turais did as he was told as the boy continued to crouch. Suddenly, he froze, slammed the
door shut, and put down the latch all at once. Turais found himself dragged by Kaiden to the front as he maneuvered himself into the corner. This toilet really wasn't meant for two children to occupy it at the same time.

Then, there was a knock on the door accompanied by Michael's voice.

"Kaiden, are you in there? -" Another couple of knocks, "- Kaiden?"

Kaiden kicked Turais as he hissed urgently, "Say something!"

"Michael, it's not Kaiden," Turais said calmly. "It's Turais."

"Oh... sorry for interrupting you... Turais," Michael said. "I swear I heard Kaiden's voice in there..."

"Must have heard wrong then," Turais laughed, which sounded extremely forced to his ears. Kaiden expressed his displeasure with a swift kick to his behind and Turais barely swallowed the muffled groan.

"Well... actually, I would like to talk to you about Quidditch trials. I'll just wait for you out here then."

Turais turned around to see Kaiden's panicked expression mirroring his own.

"What do I do?" Turais hissed.

"Tell him yes and get him away from here," Kaiden whisper-yelled.

"Are you alright in there, Turais?" Michael's voice said, sounding worried.

"Yeah!" Turais said. "Just finishing up!" He laughed nervously again as Kaiden glared.

'Why do I get dragged into these situations, honestly?! I never asked for it.'

Turais flushed the toilet and pretended to wash his hands. Then, he carefully slide the door open just enough for him to squeeze past the gap without letting Kaiden be seen.

"Hey - whoa! - "

In front of Turais was a well put-together Michael who definitely grew at least three inches taller since two months ago. His hair was combed up and slicked back. There was a fine mustache above his upper lip and a thick stubble around his jaw that made him look closer to a man than a boy. He also filled up his Quidditch uniform (seriously, did the boy - sorry, man - not own any regular robes?) with bigger muscles. Speaking of Quidditch robes, those were high quality robes rather than the tattered ones he owned for all of last year. He presented like a man fit to be in a courtship... well, apart from the facial hair.

" - what happened to you?" Turais gasped. "Puberty?"

Michael blushed at the comment. "I've been getting a lot of stares on the train... Do I really look that different? It's the beard... isn't it?" Michael started rubbing his chin and producing a few rough scratch sounds.

"Probably," Turais said. "You look good though. But isn't the beard and mustache against school rules?"
"It is..." Michael shifted awkwardly, "I just wanted to grow this out as a protest, you know?"

"Protest against what?"

"You know... against my parents... for..." Michael was gesturing with his brows as Turais understood the implications. Sporting facial hair was not the worst crime for a male in a courtship, but it was definitely not the most socially-acceptable behaviour for conservative families. Some eyebrows must have been raised and some shouting matches must have occurred in the Wilkinses household this summer. But Turais wondered if his act of defiance actually backfired on him as it possibly caused Lavinia Swire to be more besotted with him.

"Understood," Turais said quickly before Michael revealed more about his courtship with Kaiden listening.

"I just wanted to show Kaiden this before I shaved it off for school, but I can't seem to find him on this train. Do you think he'll hate how I look?"

"I'm sure he is crazy for it," Turais said before he winced internally at his unfortunate choice of words. "So... Quidditch trials?"

"Right, so I was thinking..."

Michael started his spiel enthusiastically as Turais directed him down the hall and away from the toilet. At the corner of his eye, he saw Kaiden slipping out and fleeing in the opposite direction.

***

Just as the sun dipped below the horizon, Sirius and James returned to the compartment. Jonty had also arrived a few minutes after.

"Oh dear Merlin," James gasped as he slumped onto an empty spot and splayed his limbs wide. Remus, who was beside him, immediately scooted away to make more space. "Sluggy -" Jonty snorted at the nickname for his Head of House "- droned on and on and on about the people he knew... I mean... who cares!" He turned beside him and finally realized the newcomer in this compartment. "And who are you supposed to be? I'm James Potter." James raised his hand lazily at the boy.

Remus stared at it for a long moment before he snapped out of his daze. "R...Remus," Remus said as he wiped his palm on his trousers and took James' hand. "It's nice to meet you, James."

"Are you the only Remus in England?" James quipped. Remus was at a loss with the question.

"Uh... reckon not... but maybe?"

"He's asking for your last name, Remus," Sirius supplied.

"Oh... OH!" Remus flushed in embarrassment as he scratched his head sheepishly. "Lupin. Remus Lupin."

"Cool name," James said as he sat up from his slouch. "Where's your fratricidal twin
brother?"

"I... I don't have one?"

"He meant Remus and Romulus," Sirius explained with a roll of his eyes. "The twin brothers that founded the Roman Empire. This is a terrible joke, James."

James kicked Sirius on the shin in protest as Remus paled, "Oh... OH! I'm sorry... I didn't -" "You're a bit awkward, aren't you?" James interrupted. Turais made his disapproval known by pointing his wand at him and sending a Stinging Hex. James yelped in pain.

"James..." Turais gritted out. "Play nice."

"I was about to say he's pretty awesome. Like you know... a fun kind of awkward..." James scowled. "Why are you looking at me like that?" James asked defensively when he saw Remus staring at him, gobsmacked.

"No... nothing. It's just... the furry brain of mine is clearly not functional in the mornings."

"See... furry kind of awkward... I like him," James amended. "Anyhow... this wonderful chap here is Sirius Black and he is my best mate."

Both Sirius and Remus looked surprised at the mention, likely for different reasons.

"Oh... I see," Remus said, looking a bit crestfallen again. "Do you know many students already?"

"Of course!" James said with a proud grin. "On the way back, I met Caradoc, Elphias, Marlene, Winston..." James started to list off multiple names as Remus looked increasingly pale. "... and of course, there was our lovely but terribly misguided Miss Evans and her pal, whining greaseball." James recounted with distaste.

"Who's 'whining greaseball'?" Jonty asked, amused.

"It is the boy, Severus Snape," Sirius supplied. Jonty did not look surprised and merely arched an eyebrow.

James snorted loudly. "Is that his name now? Severus," the boy said as he tested the name in his mouth. "Severus, what a charming name... not. Hey, Remus, you're looking rather peaky. Are you feeling ill?"

"No! No, I'm not," Remus said weakly as James continued to look unconvinced. "I assure you I am perfectly healthy. It seems to me that you've already made so many friends..."

"Of course," James huffed proudly.

"Don't worry," Turais said. "James here is abnormally eager. Many people don't know anyone besides their cousins until they reach Hogwarts. You will make your own friends very soon."

"Really?" Remus asked, looking more cheerful in an instant.

"Of course!" Turais said with a smile.

The rest of the train ride passed by quickly as the train stopped just as they finished changing
into their school robes. Turais guided the three first-years towards the boathouse.

All the while, Turais could tell that Sirius was fraught with tension as he remained worryingly subdued compared to James’ excitement.

“Why the long face, Sirius?!” James asked as they made their way down the forest trail. “We are here! At Hogwarts! Can you believe it?!”

“Yeah...” Sirius returned half-heartedly as he kicked at some dirt on the ground.

“Sirius, everything is going to be alright. Just do what you want, your happiness is all that matters. We can deal with the fallout together,” Turais said as he wrapped his arm around the younger boy’s shoulders.

“What’s wrong?” James asked as he flitted his eyes towards the two Blacks.

“It’s... nothing,” Sirius lied. James creased his forehead but did not comment. They walked the rest of the way to the boathouse in relative silence.

“Well.. I’ll see you in the Great Hall in a few minutes,” Turais announced as he watched Hagrid herding the first-years into separate boats.

Sirius nodded before he was dragged away by James. Remus also gave Turais a tiny wave before he followed behind them.

The Thestral carriage brought Turais to the foot of the castle as he made his way to the Great Hall quickly. And soon enough, the first-years appeared in the Great Hall under the watchful gaze of the returning students and staff as it signaled the start of the Sorting Ceremony. Turais attempted to capture Sirius’ attention and give him a reassuring smile but the boy was clearly too distracted by his thoughts to take notice. Professor McGonagall performed her annual ritual of standing by the Sorting Hat and announced the first name of the night.

“Black, Sirius.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, not sorry, for leaving you on this cliffy.

I hope this provided some entertainment and put a smile on your face during this whole self-isolation business.

- ravenclawblues 2020-04-01
Hey everyone,

I hope your quarantine lives are going well.

Here's a new update for you and I hope it will provide a moment of escape for you all.

- ravenclawblues 2020-04-16

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CHAPTER 40

GOLDEN MANES AND FORKED TONGUES

September 1, 1971 (Wednesday)

FAWLEY ANNOUNCES B.A.C. ELECTION WITHIN ONE MONTH

by R. A. Limus, Wizengamot Correspondent

Chair of Second-most Powerful Committee Up for Grabs

The Bill Appropriation Committee (BAC) traditionally begins approximately one month prior to the opening of a new session of the Wizengamot. This is due to its role in selecting and presenting Bills for the Wizengamot to consider once it reconvenes. However, this year also marks the election of a member to the three-year term of Chair in the most powerful committee under the Wizengamot.

The BAC's functions also includes creating subcommittees to further investigate Bills and modifying standing procedural rules. Due to its ability to control the legislative calendar and what Bills get considered, it is widely recognized as the gate-keeper for the Wizengamot. Therefore, the eventual winner will have great influence in shaping the legislative calendar and the politics dynamics within of the Wizengamot.

Lord Hector Fawley, the current Chair, is largely expected to run for the position again. However, his relatively easy win three years ago might not be replicated in the increasingly hostile and polarized political environment. He has some good news in the form of the splintering of the Black-Malfoy alliance since the beginning of this summer. Both Lord Arcturus Black and Lord Abraxas Malfoy are expected to field their own candidate, which might allow Lord Fawley squeak by with a narrow re-election victory.
In addition, Harold Minchum - the elected representative of West Country - had enjoyed a large increasing in popularity as he became critical of the Ministry following the exposé article written by my colleague, Mr Smudgley. However, due to the archaic rules of the Wizengamot, only Lords with family seats are able to nominate. Therefore, it is conceivable that the popular Mr Minchum will have an additional hurdle in securing the nominations.

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September 1, 1971 (Wednesday)

“Black, Sirius.”

Turais watched as Sirius drag his feet up the stairs and hoist himself onto the stool nervously. Then, his eyes disappeared under the brim of the Sorting Hat.

They waited as one minute turned into two, then four. Finally, it passed the five-minute mark as Sirius' Sorting became a true Hat-Stall. Sirius was not a Hat-Stall the last time around, and Turais wondered if... just if... he would be sorted differently this time.

And judging from the pinched lips, Turais knew he was engaged in an internal battle with himself.

"He's not going to be Sorted into Slytherin, is he?" Alex murmured into Turais' ear as the Great Hall started to discuss amongst themselves, intrigued at what was supposedly a straight-forward determination.

"I honestly have no idea," Turais said as he watched on, valiantly trying to maintain an impassive expression as he ignored all the stares that are directed his way. "But I only know that I will love and support him no matter what happens."

Alex looked at Turais with an inexplicably sad expression before shaking his head minutely.

"You are a great brother, Turais -"

“GRYFFINDOR!”

The equally damning and liberating word boomed throughout the hall. The Great Hall was shocked into a stand-still as everyone reeled from what just occurred.

Everyone except for Turais.

He could not be prouder of Sirius for staying true to himself. And he was certain that the involuntary smile was starting to bloom on his face in full-force. But then, his jubilation was suppressed as the Hat was removed from Sirius’ head. He saw Sirius’ wide-eyes searched frantically amongst the crowd. He looked so lost and afraid of the repercussions. Turais knew he had to show his support for the terrified boy.

Drawing the stunned looks from everyone in the Hall, Turais stood up and clapped loudly for his brother as he filled the hollow silence with his sole congratulation and encouragement. Slowly, the other students regained their senses and followed his lead into a degenerate round of applause.

Sirius’ eyes snapped towards him as he looked at the delighted smile. His lips began to
loosen a little bit into a grimace as he joined the Gryffindors with a more confident gait. Jane and Alice both gave his brother a welcoming smile as he sat down.

Turais seated himself once more as he turned his attention back to Professor McGonagall. He realized the two Black brothers have just made a spectacle of themselves and would be the topic in everyone’s letters home, but he couldn’t care less.

Sirius was in Gryffindor! Nothing else mattered right now.

“Evans, Lily.”

His mother from another lifetime gave Severus an encouraging smile before she walked up the stairs. Turais looked as Severus who was pale with anxiety and inflated with sincere hope - the hope that Lily would be Sorted into Slytherin with him...

“GRYFFINDOR!”

Severus' face fell just as James' voice shouted out, "I knew it!" Lily bounced happily towards where Sirius while Severus' tears-prickled eyes trailed her longingly with regret and sadness.

McGonagall called out the next name on the list just as a loud commotion erupted in the back of the first-year cluster.

Turais looked just as Severus grabbed James' robes and shoved him onto the cold, stone surface of the Great Hall. Standing up to gain a better look, he saw Severus straddling James and directing punch after punch. James was merely covering his face with his arms and screaming bloody murder.

"STOP THIS AT ONCE!" Professor McGonagall shouted sternly as she parted the group of first-years and tore the two boys apart. James continued to cry out as he cradled his arms while Severus shot him an unimpressed look. "Never in my entire career at Hogwarts did two unsorted first-years start fighting in the middle of the Great Hall! Who was the instigator?!"

"I saw him shove the boy with glasses on the ground," one of the Ravenclaw said as he pointed at Severus.

"I saw the same thing," a Hufflepuff girl said as the rest of the table nodded.

McGonagall turned towards Severus, who cowered slightly under her gaze. "Mr Snape, what do you have to say for yourself?"

Severus glared hatefully at James, who whimpered loudly as a fellow first-year poked his arm, and said, "Potter was calling me a loner!"

"I -" James shouted. Then, a theatrical wince of pain crossed his expression. "- I think he broke my arm. Can I go to the Hospital Wing?"

"Your arm isn't broken, Mr Potter," McGonagall said. "It isn't even bruised."

“But it hurts so much!” James sobbed tearlessly.

“Not enough for you to cry,” Severus muttered.

“I don’t cry,” James sniffed.

McGonagall turned to Severus. "Mr Snape, do apologize right this instant.”
“Sorry,” Severus spat distastefully without looking at James.

“Mr Snape, did you or did you not start the fighting?”

“Hey! I was not fighting!” James complained. “He’s the one doing all the punching! Everyone saw -”

“Shut up!” Severus shouted.

“Mr Snape!” McGonagall said indignantly. “Get a grip of yourself and behave! But Mr Potter, do keep quiet. We’ve heard quite enough from you. Mr Snape, please answer me, did you start the fighting?”

Severus nodded shamefully.

"Any type of violence is not tolerated at Hogwarts," McGonagall said. "This is completely unprecedented... but you will serve detention for the entirety of next week and... and for whichever House you will be sorted into, that House will lose twenty points. Your guardian will be notified of this incident as well. -" Severus balked, " - I hope you have learnt your lesson, Mr Snape."

McGonagall guided Severus to the front of the group and asked James to remain in the back.

After a dozen more students, Remus' turn came.

"Lupin, Remus."

"GRYFFINDOR!"

And soon after that, it was Peter Pettigrew's turn. As Turais the small, shaky boy climbed up the stairs, he couldn't help but wish he would not be sorted into Gryffindor. Regardless, Turais swore to keep a watchful eye on the boy's development no matter where he ended up.

He would not allow the person who directly caused James and Lily's death and Sirius' imprisonment to commit the same act a second time.

The hat rested on his round head as the hall fell silent. Slowly, the clock inched towards and passed the five-minute mark.

Finally, the Hat shouted out: "GRYFFINDOR!"

Turais watched as the tiny boy scampered happily towards the Gryffindor table while his own heart twisted sourly. He would have to make sure that Peter would never have a chance to betray his fellow friends.

“Potter, James.”

"Excuse me," James said as he waddled through the crowd confidently. Then, he swung his shoulder deliberately into Severus' side and caused him to stumble. "Don't glare at me like that. I said : 'Excuse me.'"

He walked up the stairs, plopped onto the stool sideways, and posed as if he was in deep meditation. A low ripple of laughter permeated throughout The Great Hall at the unorthodox antics. McGonagall visibly heaved a heavy sigh as she placed the Sorting Hat on the boy. But its rim barely touched his head before the Hat screamed out: "GRYFFINDOR!"

Pleased, James' lips split into a cheeky grin as he broke into an celebratory dance in front of
the entire school. It was as though he prepared for this moment his entire life. The boy's impressive display of rhythmic movements with his limbs captured the attention of his peers as laughter and cheers ensued. He rounded out the performance with a flourishing bow and strutted towards the Gryffindor table, who gave him a standing ovation. James looked like he was basking proudly in the attention as he sat across from Sirius and Remus. Professor McGonagall, stunned momentarily, also quirked her lips before resuming her obligatory frown.

There were no other notable incidents in the Sorting until they reached Augustus Rookwood. Turais snapped up in attention as the boy was Sorted into Slytherin. He was followed by Thorfinn Rowle, Albert Runcorn, and Keane Scabior - all of which were Death Eaters or their sympathizers and all Sorted into Slytherin.

Turais would have to keep an eye out for their development and, hopefully, prevent them from following down the wrong path once again.

"Snape, Severus."

The boy walked up to the stool with his sight on the Gryffindor table the entire time. Even on the last second before the rim of the Hat, his gaze was directed towards them. And it was only of tenderness, not malice.

The Hat deliberated for a long, long time - not quite a Hat-Stall - before it shouted out: "SLYTHERIN!"

Once again, Severus' eyes zoomed in on Lily as the Hat lifted. Turais noticed that Lily gave him an encouraging wave amidst the lukewarm applause. Severus smiled ruefully.

Suddenly, Turais' gaze focused past Severus and onto Dumbledore. The Headmaster was staring at a particular person intently, however, the person was not Turais Black.

It was James Potter.

'As though sensing his gaze, Dumbledore's electric blue eyes flicked towards him. Their gazes met for a long moment before Dumbledore was distracted by a question from Professor Flitwick sitting by his side.

Turais watched Dumbledore for a while, but Dumbledore didn't look at him again.

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“Can you wipe that stupid grin off your face?” Jonty snapped as Dumbledore stepped off the podium after his opening address. “It’s frankly starting to grind on my nerves.”

“Sirius chose to go to Gryffindor! I’m so happy for him!” Turais' smile only grew wider as he jutted his head above the crowd to get a better look at Sirius, who was chatting happily with James and Remus. "Can't you see how happy he looks? Alex, tell Jonty how different he is from the subdued, miserable state he was in for the past few weeks."

“You’re disgustingly soppy, you know that?” Jonty wrinkled his nose. But instead of continuing his insults, he turned his focus onto the large plate of mashed potato that appeared in front of him. He immediately scooped a large spoonful and slopped it messily on his plate as he
continued his conquest for the other dishes within his reach.

“That’s Turais for you. He has this giant blindspot for his brothers; they could do no wrong.” Alex jested as he nudged Turais supportively. Turais flashed him a grin.

“Why - *mamph* - don’t you join him - *gnam* - at his table then?” Jonty talked messily as he tore off a huge bite of chicken from his drumstick.

Turais craned his neck to watch the relaxed boy surreptitiously. “Nah, I should give him space to grow and make his own group of friends. That will be better for him.” Apparently sensing his glance, Sirius looked directly at Turais and Turais gave an excited wave. Sirius ducked his head shyly.

“*Urgh…*” Jonty threw down the bone and wiped his hand carelessly on the napkin. He then shoved Turais out of the bench as Turais stumbled onto his feet. “You are evicted from the Slytherin table. Your moony eyes are making me lose my appetite.”

“Wait until Regulus comes to Hogwarts next year,” Alex smirked as Jonty groaned loudly at the thought. Alex turned to look at Turais seriously, “But really. Go if you want to.”

“Nah... look at him!” Sirius was waving his arms animatedly to illustrate his story. He then laughed as James commented on something in return. “He looks so happy and comfortable. I don’t want to interrupt him.” Turais grinned, perhaps a bit too dopily. But whatever...

Jonty and Alex rolled their eyes and shook their heads in surrender. Turais proceeded to sneak a peek every few seconds and smiled to himself the entire time, much to Jonty’s chagrin and annoyance.

Ultimately, the final push, quite literally, came from Alex after several minutes. “We both know you’re just going to be staring at him all night. Don’t bother coming back until you send him off at the Gryffindor Tower. No one will dare say a word against it.” Alex meant the rest of the Slytherins and Turais knew he was right.

“Fine! But if Sirius hates me for embarrassing him in front of his new housemates, I’ll blame both of you,” Turais scoffed with a grin as his friends rolled their eyes at their insufferable friend. “I guess one dinner should be fine.”

The table fell silent as Turais walked down the table and traveled to the Gryffindor table to his brother under the watchful eyes of all the Slytherins. Turais met the silent gaze of Professor Dumbledore but Turais did not acknowledge him as he looked away. As he approached Sirius, his brother immediately jumped out of his seat to receive him.

“Hey, Turais. Are you joining us for dinner?” Sirius asked hopefully.

“Alex and Jonty kicked me out of my table for being too annoying. May I -”

“Oh course!” Sirius said immediately before he turned to the raised eyebrows from the rest of the table. “Well… I mean… I think it’s okay…”

“I’m sure it is fine,” Turais invited himself to the table as he sat down in the empty spot where Remus had already prepared for him. Turais gave Remus a grateful smile and he looked bashful. Sirius followed and sat closely beside him. Now that he was seated, he was obviously taller than the surrounding first-years, who stared at him in shock and awe. Turais shrugged as he spoke, “There’s no school rules against me sitting here with my naughty brother. We’ll just have to be a bit cozy.”
A new table setting appeared in front of him as he scooped some food onto his plate and made sure that Remus and Sirius had their share of food as well. All the while, James was enjoying the rapt attention from his yearmates as he delved into his story.

“So, as I was saying. When I had my first case of accidental magic, I froze the entire ballroom in the Manor. It’s the size of a Quidditch pitch!” James’ voice sounded. Turais could see the attentive crowd of first-years that hung onto his every word. “It was soooo cold ever since my mother needed the house-elves to cast Warming Charms everytime we went in.”

Lily, who was sitting several bodies away from him, merely scoffed at his vastly exaggerated story and turned back to talk to an older student beside her - Pearson, the fifth-year prefect.

“Now, James,” Turais looked at the boy, who was clearly pleased with the amount of attention he has garnered from his fellow Gryffindors, and spoke, “I’ve been to the Potter Manor ballroom and I remember the size was not quite like what you said.” James’ smile froze as he eyed Turais’ knowing glance in shock. His eyes pleaded at Turais to not reveal the truth as his head shook ever so slightly.

“Oi, Rais!” Kaiden yelled from way down the table and saved James from his potential embarrassment (Turais decided to let him off the hook anyways). “Finally decided to join the Gryffindors? Seeker trial is on -”

“Shut up, Kaiden! Stop trying to steal my Seeker!” Michael’s voice shouted from somewhere across the Hall. Turais saw Kaiden flushed as he busied himself with his food while Gwenyth Orpington elbowed him teasingly.

"Oh, that's a lovely bracelet," James commented as he turned his attention to the girl beside him. She was pointing at her bracelet around her left wrist.

"Thanks, James. You're the first one to notice this... I made it myself," the girl said. "Well, my mom charmed it for me to show my name and a word of my choice," James listened attentively as the girl fiddled with one of the interlinked tags. The word "BELLE" vanished and became "ANGEL."

"So you're either an angel or a belle?" James asked sincerely. "Well, I think you could very well be both."

The girl blushed. "I already told you my name, James. It's B-"

"Belle," James interrupted with a charming smile. "Of course I remember. I have excellent memory. I was just stunned by the bracelet."

"Well, I can make you one if you want..."

However, James was already distracted by another conversation as Belle fell silent. "Woah, did you say you have the Ptolemy, Elphias?"

"Yeah!" the boy said happily as he pulled out the Chocolate frog card. "I just drew it from the Chocolate Frog I purchased from the trolley on the train!"

"No way! I've never seen this before. This is awesome," James gasped.

Time flew by quickly as the desserts were vanished while Professor Dumbledore took the podium for a second time.
“There are a few additional start-of-term announcements to be made. First, Professor Talbot has decided to take on the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts in her alma mater of Beauxbaton Academy -” many of the older boys (and Jonty, Turias imagined) groaned loudly, " - and we are fortunate to be in the capable hands of Professor Dearborne. -” the middle-aged witch with a stoic demeanour stood up to a wave of polite applause. "- We have a second new addition to our staff. Madam Roland has returned to St. Mungo's as a Healer and, in her place, we have the very gifted Madam Pomfrey -" Madam Pomfrey stood up to the gentle applause. "Please extend the Hogwarts hospitality to our new staff members. The first-years should make note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden, as reflected in the name - the Forbidden Forest. For returning members, Quidditch trials will be held in the third week of the term. If you are interested, please contact your House team captains or Mister Williams.

“And finally, some of the returning students may soon discover that a new tree has been planned on the edge of the school grounds over summer. Its boundary is marked clearly. Please refrain from approaching it as it could injure you if provoked.”

Mutters broke out upon hearing this piece of information but Dumbledore raised his hands as the Hall was silenced. “This is all. Off you trot to your warm, comfortable beds that await you!”

Everyone started to exit the Great Hall while they discussed the latest announcement. And instead of heading down, Turais followed the Gryffindors and took a right up the staircase while huddled around by the first-years. Turias glanced behind Sirius and him and saw that Peter was trying to talk to James. However, the bespectacled boy was clearly too engrossed in his conversation to notice.

“Why would he plant something dangerous on school grounds in the first place?” Lily asked Pearson to his left.

Pearson shrugged confusedly back at her. She said, “It’s strange that Dumbledore didn’t tell the Prefects its purpose.”

Turais guided Sirius towards the edge of the crowd and asked, “Are you feeling alright?”

“Yeah...” Sirius answered with a sigh as he glanced down at the red-gold crest on his crest. “I can’t wait for them to find out...”

“You heard father,” Turais said. “He is on your side, no matter where you end up.”

“Only because of you, Turais,” Sirius said softly. “I’ve never been happier for the fact that you’re older than me. Can you imagine? Me, the Heir Presumptive, in Gryffindor? It’ll be the top story in pureblood circles for years instead of months...”

“Siri...”

“... and I’ll probably be disowned tomorrow instead of a week from now,” Sirius said deprecatingly.

“Now, Siri. I’ll make sure that doesn’t happen,” Turais said.

“By threatening to leave the family for the hundredth time?” Sirius said. Turais gaped at Sirius before his brother flashed him a grin. Turais gasped incredulously and placed him under a headlock and ruffled his hair roughly.

“You cheeky menace,” Turais exclaimed as Sirius yelped, drawing them an amused audience. “I don’t know why put up with you!”
“Because I’m your favourite person in the world,” Sirius said once he was released.

“Right now you’re not,” Turais quipped. “And I was worried that you were hiding your emotions.” Sirius threw himself onto Turais like a koala spotting the sole Eucalyptus tree within miles. The corners of Turais’ mouth inched up traitorously.

“What do I do with you...” Turais sighed. “...I swear I’m usually not a push-over.”

“Do I see a smile?” Sirius laughed. “I see a smile, Turais!”

“With me you are,” Sirius said.

“And I’m completely taken advantage of all the time,” Turais said. “But are you honestly fine?”

Sirius sighed as he released Turais, “What else can I do? If all goes in my favour, I don’t want to worry for nothing. If tonight’s my last in Gryffindor, I would rather enjoy it than waste it.”

“That’s very wise of you,” Turais said in surprise as Sirius shrugged.

To their right, Turais spotted a tiny boy sidle up on Sirius’ side. Sirius caught Turais’ glance and turned to the boy with confusion.

“Hi,” Peter squeaked.

“Hi,” Sirius returned. The boy’s eyes darted around nervously. “So... Can I help you?”

Peter nodded and said, “I’m Peter Pettigrew.”

“I’m Sirius Black and this is Turais, my older brother.”

Peter nodded said with a high-pitched voice. “Nice to meet you, Sirius. Turais.”

“Same,” Sirius said simply as he started to turn his attention back to Turais. Peter looked between them in panic.

“I am the other hat-stall,” Peter said quickly.

“Oh... that’s... good to know,” Sirius said as he glanced at Turais.

“I’ve met Alphard Black before!” Peter shouted.

“That’s... lovely,” Sirius said uncertainly. "I have never met him before and I doubt I will.”

As Sirius turned back to Turais, Peter looked defeatedly as he slowly melted back into the rest of the crowd.

“Why didn’t you try to make friends, Sirius?”

“I get to talk to them after we get to the common room. Right now, I’m all yours.”

“Silly, you’ll see me at mealtimes everyday at the very least,” Turais said, nonetheless pleased by the answer.

Sirius shrugged when James came up from behind and looped his arms around Sirius and Turais’ shoulder. “Hey Sirius. You too, Remus. We should definitely check out the willow tree
"He just said the tree was out of bound, Potter," Lily snapped at James over the heads of several first-years. "Can you not get into trouble on the first day of classes?"

"Well, gentlemen," James addressed while grinning at Lily lazily, "It seems like we have attracted a worthy candidate to join us on our grand expedition."

Lily rolled her eyes. "I'll pass, thank you very much. I would rather not be eaten alive by a tree."

"I will surely come to your rescue," James said as he puffed up his chest. "We are Gryffindors. We shall fend off any danger that comes our way, unlike a certain Slytherin who will quake in his boots in fear."

"I'm not a damsel-in-distress," Lily said with a scowl, "I don't need saving from anyone, least of all, from you. And don't insult Severus..."

While the two of them continued to bicker, Turais eyed the brown-hair boy beside him who became quite fixated at a spot in front of him. Remus said softly, "Maybe Professor Slughorn is trying to study some medicinal properties of the willow tree." However, clearly no one heard the boy as they all chose to listen in on the entertainment provided by Lily and James.

"I don't want to go with you," Lily said exasperatedly. The Gryffindor students originally between them were now dispersed, providing a clear path for confrontation between the two. The rest of the first-years continued to look between the two with clear interest. "I would rather study up on Charms."

"What?! You would prefer to read textbooks over exploring Hogwarts," James gasped as he placed his hand over his heart dramatically.

"Yes," Lily responded dryly. "Anything is better than whatever you are proposing -"

James' eyes suddenly sparkled with interest as he pointed a finger straight at Lily's face. "That... that's a great frown, we will definitely need that to scare away the Horklumps along the way!"

"The what?" Lily looked so lost at the change of topics that she has momentarily forgotten to maintain her stiff expression.

"Honourable Lady Evans, I invite you to join our company of valiant men -" James continued as Lily's frown came back in full force.

"Which part of 'I don't want to' do you not understand, Potter?" Lily huffed.

"Why wouldn't you want to come, dearest Miss Evans?" James asked, looking genuinely confused. Lily groaned into her hands.

"Maybe because we are not friends?" Lily returned. "And by the look of things, I don't want our relationship to progress further than strangers."

James' hand reached for the fabric over his heart and clutched it. He decried, "You wound me, Miss Evans. My heart aches not for myself, but for you. I would never imagine such cold, terrible words from someone so warm-hearted and fair."
"Get used to it then. There's plenty of heartaches if you continue to cross me," Lily said with a satisfied smirk.

"Always want the last word, huh, Evans?"

"I don't want the last word; I always have it," Lily replied before she darted ahead. James continued to follow her with his eyes admiringly.

“Black! What are you doing here still?! You’re not allowed to follow us to the common room,” Pearson, who was at the top of the stair bellowed out over the crowd. The group stopped moving as they turned to look at the lone Slytherin as he realized they were two corridors away from their destination.

“Pearson, do you really think I don’t know where the Gryffindor common room is by now?” the Slytherin smirked at her and shouted back, “It’s right behind the portrait of the Fat Lady.”

The prefect’s jaw dropped as she spluttered, “W… what… how did… you…”

“Pearson, you heard him,” Kaiden appeared back into view beside the girl, "He knows. There’s no point in stopping him now. Come on, everybody! I want to go to bed!"

As they continued to climb the stairs, James abandoned his conversation with Lily and appeared beside him. “Woah, Turais! How do you know where our common room is? Can you tell me where the Slytherin common room is?”

“You’ll have to find out yourself,” Turais told the awestruck boy, “I’m sure you will find it in no time.”

“Of course, I have a secret weapon,” James said mysteriously and clearly very proud.

“Oh, and what would that be?” Turais grinned at the mention of James’ Cloak of Invisibility.

“It’s called a secret weapon for a reason, Turais,” James whispered. Turais snorted.

“Well, just make you don’t forget to cover your feet or elbows properly with it.”

James stilled as Turais turned to look at the gobsmacked expression of the boy. Teasing him would never get old.

“Woah… Sirius, your brother is so cool!” James gasped in amazement. “How did you know?! Wait, don’t tell me - I’ll figure out all your secrets one day!”

“Just don’t let me catch you in the act, James, or I’ll make sure to report you,” Turais teased the boy.

“Why would you do that, Turais?” James whined as he grabbed Turais’ arm and shook it violently. Turais laughed as they approached the portrait. “Please don’t. I’ll do anything -”

The Fat Lady was in her pink silk dress. She had a wine glass in her hand; clearly she was just practicing her atrocious singing skills when they arrived. If there were things that Turais appreciated from not being a Gryffindor, this was one of them.

“Password?” the Fat Lady asked.

“Black!” Pearson’s voice echoed the hallway. “You need to leave before I say the password!”
Turais acquiesced to the frowning girl who had her arms crossed while staring at him. He turned to his brother and said, “Sirius, you’ll do great in Gryffindor and you’ll make lots of friends. But you’ll tell me if anyone tries to bully you, right?”

“I will, Turais,” Sirius gave Turais a tiny smile.

“Is anyone going to give me the password?” the Fat Lady asked again, this time more irritably.

Turais smiled as he ruffled his brother’s head one last time before turning to address everyone around him. “I’ll see you all around. Remember, homework club will start for the first-, second-, and third-years in the largest Potions classroom the week after Quidditch trials -”

“Am I supposed to stay awake all night?!?” the Fat Lady snapped at Pearson, who in turn glared at the Slytherin.

“Black, now!”

Suddenly, a brilliant idea came into his mind. He turned and walked through the crowd up to the portrait. The Fat Lady looked at him questioningly.

“What is a Slytherin doing all the way up here?”

Turais side-eyed Pearson and spoke pleasantly to her, “Milady, I overheard Pearson at the feast when she said your vocal range is dismally low -” The fact that he was Slytherin immediately fled her mind as she narrowed her pastel eyes at the prefect in disdain. “I think you should prove her wrong in front of everyone once and for all.”

Blood drained from Pearson’s face as she realised what was about to happen.

“How could you insult my ethereal voice and boundless talent?! I’ll show you what range is!” the Fat Lady snarled at the horrified prefect. Pearson shot Turais a dirty look as the Fat Lady started to clear her throat. Turais winked at Kaiden, who already stuck his fingers into his ears and grinned, and retreated hurriedly. The rest of the older students gave him the stink eyes but he just smirked mischievously.

“Bye, Siri. Need to run!” Turais ran past his confused brother and the first-years as the Fat Lady started her first arpeggio scale.

“Ah - ah - ah - AAHH! - ah - ah - ah…”

***

Malfoy just concluded his speech when Turais emerged from the tunnel. Everyone turned their head towards the Black Heir as he entered the dark and damp room that was dimly lit by the flickering flames on the fireplace. Long shadows of the columns were cast onto the entire student body while they stood like marble statues - pale, erect, and in utter silence.

“How nice it is to see you, Turais,” Malfoy said mildly, his voice ringing hollowly around the room. “I was just about to worry that we lost another Black to the Gryffindors. For complete disclosure, I took on the responsibility to deliver the usual speech in your stead.”
"Thank you, Lucius," Turais commented airily as he stepped forward from the shadows, "Seeing that I will be delivering the exact speech for the next four years, I don't mind that you aid me in this task, especially since this is your final chance to do so."

Malfoy’s jaws clenched at the words, “Times are changing, and swiftly. You shall fare well by heeding my advice and choose your allies wisely.”

“Well said, Lucius. Times are changing. But take care to recognize whether the momentum indicates temporary deviations or a more permanent alteration in my favour.”

Turais smiled innocently at the Malfoy heir as the fireplace cackled and snapped softly in the distance.

"We shall see, I suppose... but while you are trapped in this tiny pond flexing your political limb, I will be venturing out into the rolling seas of the real world very soon. I wonder who will make the bigger impact," Malfoy leered.

Just as the confrontation reached a stifling point, the entrance door opened once more. All the Slytherins turned around to see the Head of House strolling into the common room.

“Oh, Turais, m’boy! There you are!” Professor Slughorn said cheerfully as he honed in on Turais as though he was the only person in the entire room. “Can I borrow you for a few minutes? Oh - Mr Malfoy, you as well.”

The two boys nodded as they followed the professor out of the silent common room and headed towards his office.

“I do apologize for my forgetfulness,” Turais said. Despite thinking of all the additional things he could be with a Time-Turner over summer, Turais had totally forgotten about his request in the face of Sirius' Sorting.

“Oh, no harm done,” Slughorn said cheerily. “But it is a slight shame to not be able to have your brother in my House. I have taught all the Blacks, you know... Alas, it was not meant to be.”

“I’m sure he is a brilliant addition to any house,” Turais said diplomatically. Malfoy sneered beside Slughorn at the words.

“Oh, of course, of course. If you are any sort of indication,” Slughorn winked at him as they entered his office. “Talent does run in the family, you know. Please take a seat.”

Once they were all seated, Slughorn started, "So... you might not be aware of this but both of us have applied this year to become the British Youth Representative to the Wizengamot," Slughorn shuffled the papers in front of him and handed Malfoy a letter. "Mr Malfoy, you have been selected for the position for the third consecutive year. Congratulations."

"Congratulations," Turais said as he tried to sound sincere.

Malfoy smirked and said, "Thank you, Turais."

"As for you, Turais, the selection panel has cited their concern in regards to your relative young age - " Malfoy's smirk grew ever larger. " however, they were impressed by the amount of initiative you've shown in the past two years and decided to award you the second seat."

Turais smiled as he took the acceptance letter from Slughorn while Malfoy's face fell at a comical reversal of fortunes. Turais wondered how much of this was due to Arcturus but he wasn't
about to look in the gift horse's mouth.

"Thank you, Professor," Turais said as Slughorn chuckled.

"No worries, m'boy. I always love to aid my best and brightest students on their way to success," Slughorn said. "Mr Malfoy, that is all. Turais, would you please stay behind for a moment longer?"

After Malfoy left, the Professor started again, "So... I received your request at the end of last year. Are you still set on taking four electives in addition to your core subjects?"

“If that is possible. I am not worried about the workload, Professor,” Turais said eagerly.

Slughorn eyed the boy solemnly as Turais nodded with a determined stance.

“I would like to preface that I have complete confidence in your capability, Turais. Now... originally, Professor McGonagall and I were planning on applying for a Time-Turner for you, however, the Headmaster, upon receiving word from the Ministry of your successful application, was adamant that you should not be allowed access… ”

Turais’ heart fell upon hearing those words. He should’ve known that Dumbledore would never have allowed him access to a Time-Turner. Especially after his conversation with Nicolas Flamel. As his hopes of doing more sleuthing with the extra time was now dashed.

“... We tried to convince him multiple times to no avail. Especially considering that he -” Slughorn’s voice stopped abruptly as though he almost misspoke. He cleared his throat and continued. “However, both Professor McGonagall and I think that you are a brilliant student and that you should not be held back in your studies due to this. Therefore, we have jointly decided that you shall be permitted to miss two Potions and Transfiguration classes per week in order to attend your additional elective courses provided that you do well on our final exams and visit us every weekend to ensure your normal progress in our classes.

“That being said, we both agree that your skill levels are way beyond that of a third-year. Hence, we are not that worried about your in-class performance. If you wish to commit to this decision, here is your customized timetable. Sleep on it and tell me your answer by the end of this week.”

Slughorn handed over his timetable and Turais realized that he only had three hours of Potions and Transfiguration classes instead of the normal five hours per week. The rest of them were replaced by a mixture of his four electives.

“Thank you, Professor,” Turais tried not to sound too crestfallen.

Slughorn picked up his disappointment and looked at him sympathetically, “Turais, I’ll divulge some information in confidence.” Turais looked up at the Professor with interest. “Some thirty years ago, there was a brilliant student by the name Tom Riddle - perhaps the most brilliant Hogwarts has ever seen - who, upon his third year, made the exact same request. But Headmaster Dumbledore, then Deputy Headmaster, declined his application as well. They had a tense relationship that never quite resolved and I’m afraid you remind him of that student.”

“But isn’t it wrong to punish me due to his mistrust of another person?” Turias said blithely.

Slughorn sighed. “Turais, despite his appearance of impartiality, we both know that he has an inherent distrust against Slytherin just like everybody else.
“In fact, prior to your first arrival at Hogwarts two years ago, he had cautioned me about you. His exact words were: ‘keep an eye out for the new Heir Black in case he was inclined to follow his family’s footsteps’. I did purely out of obligation but not anymore,” Slughorn eyed Turais wearily and spoke hastily. “In fact, I was certain that he was mistaken after our lunch together on the train. I told him plainly that he had nothing to worry about but he remained unconvinced until this day.”

Turais maintained an air of nonchalance as his frustration threatened to over-spill internally. Despite knowing Dumbledore’s opinion of him, it was still painful to have his suspicions confirmed.

“Thank you for entrusting me with this information, professor,” Turias said warmly. “I understand you have my best interest at heart and I will remember this gesture of kindness.”

“Oh, silly boy. This is such a small matter,” Slughorn said airily but he looked pleased nonetheless.

“Is this all, Professor?” Turais asked.

Slughorn smiled at him sadly as he left the room.

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When Turais returned to the common room, he saw Malfoy sitting in his throne-like chair beside the fireplace. For a moment, Turais did not think much of it until he realized that Malfoy was no longer the Leader of Slytherin.

"Lucius," Turais said smilingly as he stepped in front of the hearth. His figure blocked out some of the flickering glow as his long shadow cast menacingly over the first-years on the couches. In the dim lighting, he recognized several of them: Augustus Rookwood, Thorfinn Rowle, Albert Runcorn, Keane Scabior, and Severus Snape.

"Turais," Malfoy responded coolly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Merely getting acquainted with the first-years, unlike certain terrible role-models."

Turais chuckled at the jab. "We are thinking of different people for that definition."

"Indeed."

"I shall join."

"If you insist."

"I do."

"There isn't room for you," Malfoy gestured at the filled seats on the couch.

"I shall make some then."
"Some things cannot be forced."

"This is fortunately not one of them."

"I'm afraid it is."

"So easily afraid, Lucius?" Turais said. "I would suggest that you not search for your shadow then."

"I don't search for things; they approach me, like commoners to royalty."

"Your name is King Tereus?"

"I refuse the title."

"Royalties may not abdicate."

"You wish me to defend my throne?"

"This chair? Yes, just to keep it warm for me," Turais said as he walked up to Malfoy. "I thank you for your service."

Malfoy glared at Turais for a long while. Even the darkness cannot hide the loathing within his eyes.

"Meeting adjourned," Lucius said towards the first-years as he stood up. "You shall have it since I no longer have use for it, not because you requested it."

"Of course," Turais said.

Lucius moved to leave, but Turais raised his arm to block his path.

"I will have to amend just one thing," Turais said as he looked Malfoy directly in the eyes. "I did not request it. I commanded it."

Malfoy paused as he turned around. Pointing at the door that led to the side chamber where Turais spent countless hours in near despair, Malfoy hissed, "Wake up from your sanctimony. Nothing that happened in there matters in the real world."

"It matters to me."

"This is all but a game."

"And this is just you losing."

Malfoy's nose flared before he walked away as he saw Severus looking at him strangely.

"Severus," Turais beckoned the first-year to sit beside him as he sunk into one of the lofty emerald couches. "Come take a seat. The rest of you, off you go."

The rest of the first-years eyed each other before they darted off beyond the furthest reaches of the waning amber lights. Severus sat down stiffly and pointed at the throne-like chair that was fiercely battled over. "Aren't you going to sit there?"

Turais smiled and shook his head, "I don't care about the chair. But more on that later. What did Malfoy talk to you about tonight?"
Severus bit the inside of cheek. "He didn't tell us anything... just trying to get to know us better, like he said."

"Are there any particular reasons he chose the five of you instead of the other first-years?" Turais asked.

"I... I don't know..."

Turais could tell Severus was lying. He recognized that was Malfoy’s way to consolidate his influence and recruit members as future Death Eaters. He also knew this was the only year in which Malfoy had any interaction with Snape at school and somehow managed to take Severus under his wings in the previous timeline. But ultimately, he also knew to not push the subject if he's not ready to answer. The last thing Turais wanted to do was push Severus away from him.

"It's okay, Severus," Turais said. "You don't need to tell me anything about this matter. Just know I'm always ready to listen."

Severus nodded.

"But there is something you must answer me," Turais said. "Why did you attack James?"

Severus' eyes flashed dangerously at the name and gritted out, "Your brother and him are best mates. You're just like everyone else - the Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs. You wouldn't believe me even if I told the truth!"

"Try me," Turais said simply.

"What makes you different?" Severus said.

"For one, I'm a Slytherin so we think similarly. For two, I'm your friend -" Severus snapped his gaze up to Turais, " - and if the first two reasons don't work, then I'm also the Leader of Slytherin. Are they compelling arguments?"

Severus searched Turais' expression under the amber glow until he turned away and sighed, "Potter caught me looking at Lily walking to the Gryffindor table and he said she was no longer any of my business. I told him to leave me alone and he... he said that... that I won't have any trouble with that because I'm a l...loner."

"Oh... James... why...?" Turais groaned as he rubbed his temples, feeling that a headache was threatening to surface. "Can you not insult people for a change?"

"You believe me?" Severus gasped.

"Trust me. That sounds exactly like something he would say," Turais said darkly. 'Especially to Severus of all people."

"I will try to make him apologize to you," Turais said as Severus' jaw dropped. "No promises there, though."

"Oh... I... uh... wasn't expecting... I guess that sounds good..." Severus fumbled with his words, "... well, thanks."

"Thank you for telling me, Severus," Turais said. "But I do have to say that violence does not solve anything."
"I know..." Severus said. "I know it was stupid of me to attack him right there. If I just did it afterwards -"

"NO!" Turais said sharply. "You need to know that it is never right to hurt anyone, no matter how much they've wronged you. Do you understand?"

"Are you telling me to never fight back?!" Severus asked incredulously.

"I didn't say that. I just said do not respond with violence," Turais said. "You asked me why I fought with Malfoy over a chair that I don't even seem to want, is that right?"

Severus nodded.

"Well... Just a few months ago, Malfoy was still the Leader of Slytherin and he wanted all of Slytherin to bully those who weren't of pure blood," Turais explained. "But I objected that. He needed my support to enact it, but he knew I would never give it. So... when I was poisoned, he went behind my back to order the entire House to do what I said I didn't agree with.

"Malfoy wronged me, but I didn't punch him or hex him. I lived life as usual... and when an opportunity to take the position of Leader from him, I did. Now, I'm the Leader of Slytherin while he needs to listen to me. Isn't this a much better revenge?" Turais asked.

Severus looked at Turais with admiration in his eyes. "Yes... yes it is."

"Revenge should never be about hurting someone or doing something illegal. It should be about living a better life than them and, when the opportunity arises, strike back at them. Do you understand now?"

"I do."

"Good. Off to bed you go, then," Turais said with a smile. "It's your first day of classes tomorrow."

Severus nodded once before he scuttled off to his dormitory, but not without glancing back with an inexplicable expression.

Then, Turais was alone.

He scanned around the cold, damp common room as he listened to the faint crackle of the flames. There were also distant echoes of the alluring music of the Selkies that permeated the subterranean cavern he called home for the past two years; and his home for the five to come.

In the solitude and darkness, he thought about Sirius and wondered how he was faring.

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September 2, 1971 (Thursday)

"Sirius!"

Turais shouted when he saw his brother, James, and Remus, heading into the Entrance Hall. His brother's face lit up in happiness and turned to run towards him.
His brother darted towards him with James in tow. The rows of Slytherin nearby eyed them with disdain but no one dared to speak up against a Black and a Potter, especially not with Turais present.

While most might look upon the alliance with disgust and concern, it was now well-accepted amongst purebloods that the Blacks and the Potters were on friendly terms. The other students also looked at the two brothers with interest. Turais could hardly blame them for two brothers, two Black brothers, were Sorted into two different houses. They would certainly be curious as to how Turais, the brother who upheld all family values perfectly, interacted with Sirius, the brother who defied everything the Blacks stood for.

“Good morning, Siri,” Turais immediately turned his attention to his younger brother. James snickered at the moniker and Sirius rubbed his neck in embarrassment.

“Turais,” Sirius hissed, “You can’t call me that in front of everyone!”

“Why though?” Turais teased as he ran his hand through his brother’s messy, curling locks.

“Turais,” Sirius hissed more urgently as he stepped backwards and swatted his hand away, “We can’t be seen like -” Sirius gestured between them violently as Turias raised an eyebrow in confusion. “- like… this!” Sirius finished lamely.

“What do you mean, Siri?” Turais frowned as he stilled.

‘Did Sirius not want me anymore? Am I an embarrassment to his Gryffindor friends? I knew I shouldn’t have eaten with him yesterday -”

“Turais!” Sirius shouted as he snapped out of his depressing thoughts. “I know what you’re thinking and it’s not that! Everyone was nice to me.”

“I’m sorry, Sirius,” Turais said dejectedly as a pang of sadness hit him. He never thought that Sirius going to Hogwarts would mean that he would lose him. He was looking forward to seeing Sirius everyday again. But now that Sirius had his friends (which Turais was genuinely happy about), he should have known Sirius would not want to spend time with him any-

Turais suddenly felt a warming body wrapped tightly around his torso. He tipped his head down and watched as a pair of grey eyes met his, “Stop thinking so much! I can hear your thoughts from here.”

“Sirius,” Turais said weakly as he tried to push Sirius away. But the boy wouldn’t budge. “Sirius, you don’t have to do this. You’re right, I shouldn’t embarrass you like that. I’m -”

“Don’t say you’re sorry,” Sirius gritted out, “I forbid it. You’re the best-est brother ever and I’m sorry. You can call me ‘Siri’ or any name anytime you want. I just… I just didn’t want to embarrass you in front of them.” Sirius gestured to the table full of curious Slytherins. Turais knew that some were sneering at their “pathetic” emotional display - one unbefitting of an Heir of an esteemed House - but Turais only cared about the opinion of one person in this entire castle regarding his family, and that was Sirius.

“Ehem - soppy,” Jonty quipped unhelpfully beside them as Turais shot him an annoyed look. This was a very special brotherly moment!

“Oh, don’t worry about them. They won’t do anything,” Turais now fully committed into the embrace. “You’re more important to me than all of them combined.”
“Urgh - sops, the both of you. I quit. Come on, Alex,” Jonty exclaimed as he fled the scene while dragging Alex, who stumbled at the hard jerk, with him.

“I know,” Sirius mumbled. “It’s just… I’m a Gryffindor… I must be embarrassing you and they must not be taking it kindly…”

“Oh, you silly boy,” Turais scolded fondly. He deliberately said the next sentences loudly so everyone eavesdropping could hear him, “You’re never an embarrassment. I will beg the Headmaster to re-Sort me into Gryffindor if you just say the words. You know that, don’t you?”

“Now you’re embarrassing me, Turais,” Sirius’ cheeks tinted pink but he looked pleased at the confession nonetheless. Turais grinned at his brother.

“Actually, you did embarrass me,” Sirius said as he looked up at Turias. “You made us stand for almost two whole hours listening to the Fat Lady shriek at her wine glass like a banshee!” Turais suppressed a smile as he glanced at the lifeless Gryffindors splayed over the tables with a clear lack of sleep.

“And we’re going to get you Slytherins back!” James declared confidently.

“Turais is off-limits, James. Remember?” Sirius said as he placed a hand protectively on Turais’ arm. Turais felt a warm, giddy feeling in his heart and he loved it. James made a retching noise as though he was throwing up but Turais ignored him.

“Fine, whatever, I just really want to get back at greasehead over there,” James said as he locked onto Severus. His eyes shone with a mischievous glint that reminded him of his task.

"I believe Professor McGonagall is handing out timetables to the first-years right now," Turais pointed out.

"Okay, we are going to head off first then," Sirius smiled. "Come on, James, Remus."

"Actually, I would like to speak to James for a moment in private."

Sirius looked between them and nodded. "Remus, let's go!" Remus gave a little wave before being dragged away physically by an impatient Sirius.

"So, what's the matter?" James asked. "Are you prepared to tell me the location of your common room?"

"Unfortunately, it is something different," Turais adopted a clipped tone.

"What is it then?" James asked curiously. He continued to look clueless.

"It's about Severus -"

"Why are we talking about some revolting?" James huffed. "I just lost my appetite for breakfast."

Turais ignored his words. "Did you or did you not taunt Severus last night by saying that Lily was none of his business and that he is a loner?"

"You are joking," James gasped. "He was the one who punched me! Why are you mad at me when you should be mad at him?!"

"I scolded him yesterday night. He knows it is wrong to punch you, but he would not have
done it if you didn't taunt him in the first place. You have some fault in this!"

"Do you know why I called him a loner?" James challenged. "He called me a spoilt, pureblood brat who only cares about the latest broom models first. Well, I guess lying greaseball didn’t tell you this, did he? I say that we are even."

Turais hesitated. Severus neglected to mention that fact. If what James said was true, everything changed. Turais said, "Even if that is true, you should try and be the bigger person and not insult him back."

"What? You mean like how I did not fight back when he started punching me," James retorted. "I’m not stupid enough to throw a punch back at that prat even though I really wanted to, but I am not going to just let him insult me."

In the distance, Professor McGonagall shouted, “Mr Potter, you need to get your timetable now!"

"James," Turais pleaded as he grabbed James' arm. "I am not allocating all the blame on either of you. But you need to acknowledge your share of the fault in this," Turais said. "It takes two to argue or fight and you rose to the challenge. Please just apologize to Severus and he will apologize to you as well."

"I will apologize to every person and ghost on the planet before I will ever apologize to that greaseball!" James said. “When he insulted me, did I cry or punch him for it? No! He's the one who can't hold his temper down. He’s the one who needs to grow a thicker skin. He’s the only person who should be apologizing for yesterday."

With that, James stormed away. Turais was left at a loss.

Chapter End Notes

Turais’ point of view:
1. James tells Severus that Lily is no longer any of Severus’ business because she is a Gryffindor.
2. Severus calls James a spoilt pureblood brat and tells James to leave him alone.
3. James says that won’t be an issue because Severus is a loner.
4. Severus punches James, who doesn't return the hits.
5. James deliberately swings his shoulder into Severus as he walks past.
6. Severus lies by omission when asked about the incident.
7. James declares he will never apologize to Severus.

Turais is a frustrated and confused boy because he really wants James and Severus to get along but they refuse to do so...

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 41: Hairy Snout, Stony Heart, will be posted *hopefully* in two weeks' time. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-04-16
Hey everyone,

New update! Also as a heads up, I will also be moving towards a biweekly update cycle (once every two weeks) for the rest of summer (at least) because I am starting a new job.

Stay safe!

- ravenclawblues 2020-05-01

CHAPTER 41
HAIRY SNOUT, STONY HEART

September 2, 1971 (Thursday)

"This is getting too complicated,” Turais moaned into his hands. “I don't understand why James and Severus hate each other so much. They’ve only met yesterday.”

"Why do you and Pierricoeur hate each other so much then?” Jonty asked.

"I never hated him. His hatred for me, however, was likely because they served me first at Twilfitt and Tattings even though he was already there back in the summer before first-year ...” Turais said. "And the rest is history."

"And that was just the one day as well. Maybe it is the same for Potter and Snape,” Jonty suggested. "Even God has a hater in the form of Satan. What makes us puny mortals so special as to not have any antagonistic relationships?"

"But...” Turais stuttered, "But I am supposed to be able to prevent this from happening!"

"What are you? Do you think better than God or whoever reigns supreme up there?” Jonty asked. “Because last time I checked, someone who claimed to be better than a god turned into a cursed spider for eternity.”

"Of course not,” Turais scoffed. “I'm not even suggesting that.”

"Then why are you holding yourself responsible for someone else's relationship problems? Even God can’t solve this given how relationship problems still exist. What makes you think you can solve it?”
"I'm not... it's just... I just want them to be friends," Turais finished lamely. "Or at least not enemies."

"What's so special about them?"

"It's... never mind... I just imagined a world where they don't go after each other's throats."

"You can't mold everything into your ideals, Turais. That's not how the world works. Maybe some things are just not meant to be," Jonty said.

“No,” Turais said defiantly, “I will make sure this, of all things, is different.”

“Now, listen. I don’t know what this imaginary world you are speaking of is like, but what guarantees do you have that your change would be for the better and not for the worse?”

“I... I...” Turais faltered, “I... I’ll just have to make sure it is better then.”

“And how do you propose to do that exactly?” Jonty asked.

“Stop asking me all these questions, Jonty. I don’t have the answer to everything,” snapped Turais.

“You’re the one asking such big questions to begin with,” Jonty frowned. “Stop glaring at me. You know I’m right, mate.”

“Fine, I’m being unrealistic. There, I said it,” Turais huffed as Slughorn made his way towards the third-year cohort.

"What electives will you be taking this year, Mr Fawley?" Professor Slughorn asked Alex.

“Care of Magical Creatures, Magical Theory, and Arithmancy,” Alex announced. Slughorn consulted his tables and tapped his wand on a piece of parchment before handing the completed timetable over to the student.

“And you, Mr Steward?”

"Study of Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, and Magical Theory,” Jonty said dully and received his timetable as well. Slughorn beamed at Turais quickly before heading back to the second-years he skipped.

“But where is your timetable?” Jonty asked.

“I have already sorted out my timetable with him yesterday night,” Turais shrugged. “I have been meaning to tell you both this since yesterday.”

“Was that why he was looking for you yesterday?” Alex asked. Turais nodded in confirmation as he pulled out his timetable and handed it to Alex. As Alex’s eyes widened, Turais shifted uncomfortably as he waited for his friend’s reaction.

“Turais, Slughorn allowed you to drop half of Potions and Transfiguration classes for your electives?” Alex exclaimed as Jonty snatched Turais’ timetable from his hands.

“Wow, that’s blatant favouritism right here,” Jonty confirmed, “But we know you know everything already so you will be fine. But we’re not going to share a lot of classes this year then...”
“That’s why I’m considering not to do those electives -”

“Don’t be daft, Turais,” Alex scolded gently, “You should go for it. Learning new things is important, especially when it seems like you’re just tutoring us in those classes. There is plenty of time for us to see each other outside of class.”

“Yeah, I guess…” Turais said, “but it just feels weird, not being with you two.”

“Well, you’re going to have to do that for at least one class anyways since you’re not taking Care of Magical Creatures.”

“Yeah, at least I still share all the same electives as you, Turais,” Jonty said.

“Actually… you are in a different Study of Ancient Runes... Magical Theory and Arithmancy class than him,” Alex commented as he compared their timetables.

“Aw, man! This stinks,” Jonty bemoaned, “The three of us won’t be together in so many courses and now I have to be alone for all my electives!!”

Eyeing his watch, Turais turned to the both of them and said, “I will head off to Divination now, it’s a long walk a long way to the West Tower. Alex, have fun with Professor Kettleburn. Jonty, have fun at Magical Theory.”

Alex grinned as he waved Turais goodbye while Jonty glared at his breakfast murderously.

Once Turais left the Great Hall, he found himself with a group of third-year who were all trying to find their way to the Divination classroom in the West Tower.

“Hey, Turais!” Gerald shouted as he swung his arm around Turias. “Are you heading to Divination as well?”

“Yes, are you?”

"Of course I am!” Gerald shouted excitedly. "Have you seen her series of Quidditch World Cup predictions last year? She's the real deal! I mean - my predictions were the same as hers but - gosh, she is wonderful! Also...”

'If she can help me find the Hufflepuff's Cup, Riddle's Diary, and the identity of Prometheus with her Inner Eye then I'd be her biggest fan...' Turais thought to himself.

“... I think most of the Hufflepuffs chose this class and Care of Magical Creatures as our electives. The other ones sounded like too much work,” he said airily.

“But isn’t a Hufflepuff supposed to be hard-working though?” Turais teased as Gerald gave him an unimpressed look.

“But aren’t you the one who is all ‘no-prejudice-no-stereotype’ though?” Gerald retorted.

“Touché,” Turais said as Gerald gasped loudly.

“Did I just win an argument against the mighty Black? My life is complete!” He shouted as the group of third-years around them snickered at his dramatic display.

“Well, I'm secure enough with my intellect to yield the occasional argument,” Turais said. “Especially considering how I just lost one to Jonty.”
“That you are,” Gerald agreed. After walking for a few more minutes, they have arrived at their destination.

“The map says it’s here,” Gerald consulted his castle map while looking around. Turais looked up to see a trapdoor and nudged his companion.

“It’s up there,” Turais pointed above their heads.

“Well, how are we supposed to get up -”

As though hearing their demands, the trapdoor swung open and a silver ladder descended from the opening. Turais looked at Gerald and shrugged. “I guess she heard your big mouth.” Gerald shoved Turais slightly off-balance, clearly offended.

All the Divination students climbed up the stairs one-by-one as they found themselves in a large, circular room draped with heavy crimson curtains and scarves that looked as though they have been sitting there for centuries. Twenty small, circular tables were arranged in two rings around a central podium a few steps below them. The air was warm and stale with dense clouds of smoke and particles that Turais wanted to sneeze just based on what he saw.

“Welcome…” a raspy voice sounded from somewhere in the chamber, “please follow your Inner Eye to search for your optimal seat for viewing somewhere…”

Everything was so dimly lit with the single candles on each table and the fireplace that Turais could barely find his way to a table, let alone his “optimal seat” using his non-existent “Inner Eye”. However, Turais did manage to fumble his way to a table with Gerald.

“Welcome to Divination, class,” Professor Castiella Trelawney appeared from the shadows and walked slowly towards the centre of the room. Turais could barely make out the Professor’s appearance but she looked like a large, glittering insect with huge circular glasses, mystical garments of various amulets and rings, and head of white curly hair. She also had a permanent hunch that made her low even tinier than she already was.

“Few people have the Gift of Sight - or in mundane speech - the ability to see through the foggy veils of the future and predict what has yet to come,” she said mystically as she scanned the room, “One of my ancestors, Cassandra Trelawney was a brilliant Seer, the best of her time and after. I, unfortunately, do not wield such immense talent. But I do have a stronger connection to this art than most. While Divination is not a learnt skill, even those that are not Gifted can cultivate their inner magic to synchronize with that of natural magic. If you are fortunate enough, you might just manage to sample a flavour of this powerful magic that flows through space and time.

“Today, we will be studying one of the most well-known branches of divination - tasseomancy. Can anyone tell me what this word means?” Trelawney asked.

Beside him, Gerald's hand shot up. Trelawney gestured for him to speak. "Yes, Mr..."

"Mr Macmillan, Professor. Tasseo is derived from the French word, tasse, which means cup. Mancy is the greek suffix meaning divination. Therefore, tasseomancy is the art of interpreting patterns in a cup. And the most popular form in Britain is reading the patterns of tea leaves."

"Precisely, Mr Macmillan," Trelawney said, pleased with the answer. Gerald gave Turais a smug grin and wink. "I will come around at fill up your teacup in front of you…” she started to give instructions of teacup divination. Turais rolled his eyes and went through the motions. This class was shaping up to be a waste of time. This Trelawney was definitely more modest and clear-
headed than her successor, but she had yet to impress Turais with anything that would keep him in his class for the entire term.

After Turais and Gerald drank the scalding tea, they swilled the dregs and drained the cup as instructed and swapped with each other.

“Hmmm… so there is a presence of a bold and pronounced line of dots in the fourth house…” Gerald wondered loudly as he stared at the cup. Biting on his lips as he flipped through his book, Unveiling the Mists, “… and it represents… a chain. So you have a strong attachment and is bound tightly to your family and friends - true enough…”

"Wow, I'm impressed how quickly you are interpreting this," Turais said.

"It's called reading the book over summer, Turais," Gerald said as he scanned the lines on the book while muttering to himself.

Turais was still staring at Gerald’s cup with little interest. It was partially his fault because he only ever made up his dream chart assignments with 1001 ways to die and never paid attention in class as Harry Potter. But it was also partially due to the drowsiness that was settling in comfortably from the dark surroundings, the soft candle lights, and the sweet incense of cedar, rosewood, and agarwood.

“... a cross in the outer ring, which means… trials and tribulation - fair enough… for life - oh, not good, mate… sorry about that - wait, it also represents the Eastern heavens, which means spring - so troubling times in April then... I guess...?"

“And there is a moon-like shape on the wall of the cup... so failure in academics in the near future? - yeah, right - like that's going to happen...”

“You seem to be doing a pretty good job there, Gerald. I think your Inner Eye has been awoken, opened, whatever the proper term is,” Turais barely stifled a yawn. ‘Do you want to read your own cup too?”

“Turais, you cannot read your own cup - did you not listen?” Gerald muttered, clearly engrossed in the self-perpetuating prophecies on Turais’ life. “So, death by combat - woah - and death by poisoning - that’s surprisingly accurate…”

“Let me see the cup, my dear,” Professor Trelawney suddenly popped out of thin air in front of them. She rotated the cup and analyzed it closely. “A lifetime of trials hmm? And also a strong affinity with death - yes, the black rose - Do you see that, Mr Macmillan?”

“Yes, of course - and a lock in the center of the cup… which means… Turais has been surrounded by death since birth -”

“Life amidst death, indeed… you have a strong gift of interpretation, Mr MacMillan,” she whispered reverently. “We must continue to cultivate your talent. Why don't you join me for an additional hour after classes today?”

Gerald's enthusiasm suddenly dampened. “Uh, I don’t think that’s necessary, Professor.”

“You may yet change your mind, I sense that you will make a consequential decision a fortnight beyond winter’s last breath,” she finished and glided away to the next table.

“Uh, what does that mean?” Gerald asked in a hushed voice.
“I don’t know. You’re the one with the gift of interpretation,” Turais couldn’t help but sound sarcastic. Trelawney turned around at glared at Turais sternly, but Turais couldn’t bring himself up to feel sorry.

"Oh, sod off," Gerald scoffed quietly as he sent a brilliant, beaming smile at the Professor. "Just because you don't have the gift doesn't mean you have to be a prissy mug about it."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm really happy for you," Turais deadpanned. He received a sock on the arm as a response. "Hey, aren't you Hufflepuffs supposed to be friendly? Why are you so violent?!"

Turais received a second sock on the arm as an answer.

After Divination, Turais parted ways with Gerald and immediately sprinted down the halls to the opposite end of the castle. He reached the classroom with mere moments to spare. Panting slightly, as he eyed the filled classroom. Alex, who saw Turais entering, gave him a rueful expression as he gestured at Summerbee beside him. The only opening that remained was the sit in front... which turned out to be beside Pierricoeur.

Grinding on his teeth, Turais steeled his mind as he walked to the seat, pulled out the chair, and sat down beside his long-time enemy.

“Pierricoeur,” Turais said as he sat down beside the boy.

"Black," Pierricoeur gritted out.

Just as he was wondering how to navigate the conversation, Professor Septima Vector trotted purposefully into the room. She charmed the curtains open and flooded the room with natural light.

“Class, turn to page one of your textbooks and read the introduction, you have ten minutes,” the professor with long, black, and curly hair said quickly. As she made her way to the front of the classroom, she slapped her perfectly manicured hands on the desk across the aisle. “Open your book, Mr Pierce! The book isn’t going to read itself.” The Hufflepuff jumped as he opened up the book hastily under the watchful, dark eyes of the professor.

After exactly ten minutes, an alarm blared out from her wand and she said loudly, “Someone summarize the chapter for me.”

She looked out at the nervously awaiting class, “Nobody? I’m just going to pi- thank you, Mr Pierricoeur.”

The boy glanced up at the professor and said, “Karuzos states that there are two branches of Arithmancy, Numerology and Transcendental Logic. While Numerology focuses on the divine and mystical relationship between a number and coinciding events, Transcendental Logic focuses on concrete calculations and mathematics.”

Vector nodded at his words, “Mr Pierricoeur, can you give me an example, not one from what you just read, of Numerology?”

"The number thirteen, Professor," Pierricoeur replied. "This number has been associated with bad luck and is inferred to be the cause of misfortune in many cases. The superstition that when thirteen dine together, the first to rise will be the first to die is an example of such. There is nothing inherently calculable in these divinatory statements and there are only prevailing theories in attempt to explain the inherent magical associations between the number and the events."

"How about Transcendental Logic?"
“A Heptagram forms the basis of most protection wards because it is the most stable and powerful polygon. However, this has no relation with the divinatory properties of the number seven as outlined by Bridget Wenlock. It has been proven to be due to the attraction and repulsion forces between runes. The closer the runes are, the more repulsion force they experience and the more unstable they get. But if the runes are too far apart, the attractive forces would be too weak. The proportional distances between nodes and points of a heptagram has the perfect balance between those forces, hence its configuration is most favourable and stable.”

“Correct. We will touch upon the Carneiro’s Principles of Magical Energetics in January. Twenty points to Ravenclaw,” Vector gave the boy a quick smile before she continued.

"We will focus on a few selected theories in the first month of classes, then we will shift our focus to Transcendental Logic, which is also the main part of our class. There will be a lot more calculations involved. And by the end of this year, Transcendental Logic will hopefully help explain some questions you might have about magic, such as why Transfiguration is an exact magic and why some spells are inherently more difficult to cast than others.”

In the next hour, Turais has struggled with the contents of a class for the first time. Doing calculations and consulting numerical charts were simply outside his comfort zone. On the other hand, Pierricoeur seemed like a duck that took to water in this course. He was clearly in his own element.

By the end of the class, Turais’ head was hurting from all the information and it seemed like everyone felt the same with the notable exception of Pierricoeur.

“I’m surprised that you did not answer a single question in this class yet, Black," Pierricoeur commented with a smirk.

Feeling a bit miffed, Turais turned towards the boy only to find that he had already disappeared.

‘That might be for the better,’ Turais thought. He was thankful that despite having the same classes, Pierricoeur and he never had to endure each other's silent and unfriendly company during the long trek between the Arithmancy and Study of Ancient Runes class.

Eyeing his watch, Turais immediately dashed towards the Ancient Runes classroom, which was, once again, on the other side of the castle. In contrast to the brightly-lit hallway just a door away, the windowless, rectangular room was dimly lit by the numerous candle stands that lined the walls. They cast long, ominous shadows over the entire classroom as pairs of students sat quietly in an oppressive silence. Behind the blackboard was a spiral staircase that led to a landing with a single door that oversaw the entire classroom.

When Turais arrived, he realized that he was the last student yet again. But this time, he was also late.

He knocked on the classroom as Professor Bodrick Mather turned towards him with a single eyebrow arched brow.

"Sorry for being late, Professor,” Turais said while panting heavily.

"Don't just stand there. Go take your seat," Mather said before he turned back to the blackboard.

He scanned for an open seat and found that there was only opening... which is the seat
directly in front of the teacher's desk near and next to Pierricoeur. Turais groaned internally as he shuffled to the seat.

"Didn't even bother with an excuse, Black?" Pierricoeur hissed under his breath.

Turais glared at the boy in shock while he continued to pant slightly. "You were in Arith -"

"Not interested," Pierricoeur interrupted. Turais gaped at the boy as he felt his anger rising. Pierricoeur took a look at his face and smirked smugly.

Turais hissed angrily, "What is wrong with you -"

"Mr Black, Mr Pierricoeur," Turais suddenly realized that the Professor was standing in front of their desks. "Is there something you would like to share with the entire class?"

"No, sir," Turais said. "I apologize for the distraction I've caused."

The Professor nodded as he turned to Pierricoeur expectantly.

Pierricoeur shot Turais a loathing glare before he gritted out, "I apologize as well."

"Good, then I'm sure you will agree to ten points from Ravenclaw and five points from Slytherin," Professor Mather declared.

"Why do I get more points deducted?" Pierricoeur protested. "He's the one who's late as well!"

"Make that fifteen points from Ravenclaw then since you clearly don't know why you were in the wrong. And detention after class today," Professor Mather said as he turned back to the board.

Pierricoeur fumed murderously.

In the subsequent hour, Turais was engaged in a tense hour-long lecture. Despite the interesting content, Turais was completely distracted by Pierricoeur's every movement and by the end, he was just exhausted of it all.

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"Urgh... I had enough of Pierricoeur for the entire term," Turais moaned as he fell backwards onto his bed after the first day of classes ended.

Turais belatedly realized that he had practically spent the entire day in Pierriceour's joyless companionship as they also shared the Slytherin-Ravenclaw Charms class and the subsequent Magical Theory class (although he was able to sit with Alex for both classes).

"I had to sit beside Pierricoeur for Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. It was awkward, to say the least."

Alex gave Turais a sympathetic look.

"That stinks, mate," he said. "I'm sorry for not being able to keep a spot for you in Arithmancy. Summerbee just took the spot because she didn't want to sit directly in front of the
"It's alright," Turais said. "Pierricoeur wasn't that bad, but his snide comments just rubbed me the wrong way - constantly."

"That's Pierricoeur on his best behaviour," Alex said dryly.

"I don't know how to survive the entire year next to him..." Turais groaned.

"Just pretend he isn't there and mind your own business."

"I guess... But his mouth is going to get him in trouble. Mark my words -"

Suddenly, there was loud shout and some laughter coming from the common room. Turias leaped up and exited the dormitory only to be immediately confronted by a bullying situation.

"Hey, listen to this, everyone!" one of the taller first-years laughed as he waved a piece of paper in his hand and out of reach from a struggling black-haired boy.

"What is happening here?" Turais' deadly cold tone permeated around the room. Everyone stopped in their tracks as Turais strolled over in between Severus and the offending boy.

Travers, a second year, stood up from the couches and said, "Black, they were just playing -"

"I shall remind you once again, Mr Travers, that I am Mr Black or Heir Black to you," Turais said coolly. "Also, this is not - as you put it - playing around. This is a blatant act of bullying and it will not be tolerated in this school."

Turais turned to the offending boy and asked, "What is this that you have in your hand, Mr Runcorn?"


"Is this letter yours?"

"No."

"Did the owner give it to you willingly?"

"No."

"Then you have no business in having this letter in your possession," Turais snapped as he plucked the letter from the boy's unresisting hand.

"Does this letter belong to Mr Snape?" Turais asked.

"Yes... it's mine," Severus said meekly. Turais returned the letter at once.

Turais turned his attention to the rest of the room. "You may not understand my rules, but they are common sense rules that should not require me to teach you. But yet, here we are.

"I know that all of you are thinking that this behaviour is acceptable because Mr Snape here is a half-blood. However, your actions tonight have just proven to me that superior blood status says absolutely nothing about your superiority as an upstanding human being.

"I cannot believe that I have to repeat myself every year. Behave like proper, courteous
human beings is my sole requirement from all of you. That means no bullying, no violence, no name-calling, being respectful to one another. This is not a request. This is a command," Turais said sharply. "Tell everyone who is absent about what I just said.

"If I see another incident, it will be extremely unpleasant for all of us. Take care," Turais finished with a mild threat as he accompanied Severus back to his room.

"Severus, if you are ever in need of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me," Turais said. "Your blood status does not bother me in any way and I wish to see you flourish and become successful in whatever you pursue. Do you understand?"

"Thank you," Severus said softly as he clutched the letter to his chest tightly.

Turais eyed the boy carefully before asking, "So why did you misrepresent the events during the Sorting?"

Severus froze. "W...what do you mean?"

"Either confess or deny the claim, Severus. There is no use in feigning ignorance since I confronted James today," Turais said, "Why did you neglect to say you were the one who insulted James first?"

Severus looked up at Turais in shock. "I... I... I didn't know you were actually going to talk to him..."

"But that is not a valid reason to lie about this," Turais said.

"I'm s...sorry, Turais," Severus whispered guiltily. "I... just... I didn't mean to shove him. He was just such a prat about Lily and I couldn't control myself..."

"That's okay. We all have bad days," Turais said. "As long as you recognize that you were wrong and you sincerely apologize for it, you deserve a second chance."

"You want me to apologize to Potter again?" Severus asked.

"Yes," Turais said. "For insulting him. But he should apologize to you for the same reason as well, if only I can convince him to..."

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September 4, 1971 (Saturday)

In what turned out to be a pleasant surprise, there was no explosive encounters from the Black family yet. Sirius was still sitting with his Gryffindor friends after the second night with seemingly no repercussions. However, Turais really should have known it was only the calm before the storm.

"So... your first orientation session with the Wizengamot Parliamentarian," Jonty said with interest as he read Slughorn's note that was passed on to him at the beginning of lunch. For the next four Saturdays, Turais would have to spend most of his day learning the ropes of Wizengamot procedures in preparation for his actual time in the Wizengamot come October. "My father has
much to say about his character."

"Oh..." Turais said. "Do tell."

"Mildly put... my father thinks he is a sanctimonious and condescending nutter that should be
locked up in a museum and placed alongside the displays of Bodrog the Bore and Drehkirt the
Drab..." Jonty hummed, "... imagine him saying that with more colourful language."

"Well, there is only one way to find out," Turais said as he heaved himself from the table.
"I'll see you back in the common room."

Just as he was about to exit the Great Hall, a Hufflepuff boy ran past him and yelled at the top
of his lungs.

"The Headmaster, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Slughorn just went to the school
gates by the viaduct!"

Everyone in the Hall perked up in interest.

"Mr Fascino!" Professor Sprout said, "There is no need to shout at the top of your lungs
about such a thing. They might just be enjoying a morning stroll."

"But Professor," Fascino continued. "Lord Black and many Ministry personnels are here as
well. There's the Department Head of Magical Education and the Department Head of Magical
Law Enforcement."

"What? Is this a national emergency?" Sprout muttered to herself. "Oh dear... please don't tell
me the Minister is here as well."

"No, Professor."

"Good... good..." Sprout muttered, although her expression said it was anything but that.

Excited murmurs erupted everywhere as they started to search everywhere for the Black
brothers. Turais, however, snapped his head immediately towards Sirius at once. He was also
looking at him grim with realization and fear.

Turais tilted his head towards the Great Hall and Sirius nodded. He stood up, unaffected by
whether James was telling him, as he past all the Gryffindors who were looking at with concern
and pity. Meanwhile, some of Slytherins were looking at Turais gleefully as though this was his
comeuppance. Michael shot Turais a worried look as he walked by but Turias merely smiled.

Once the brothers reconvened outside the doors to the Great Hall, Turais took Sirius'
trembling hands into his and held them still.

"I'm here, always," Turais said softly.

Sirius nodded erratically as his chest rose and fell from the heavy, laboured breathing.

"Ah, I see the news of your arrival has been circulated already," Dumbledore said good-
naturedly as he walked past the threshold into the Entrance Hall. Beside him were Arcturus, Orion,
Mr Tofty (which Turais recognized as the OWL examiner whom he performed the Patronus to),
and Michael's father. Along with the Hogwarts professor were visible behind them, they were in
various states of discomfort while the students made less-than-subtle attempts to eavesdrop as they
huddled around the Great Hall doors.
"Why do you pretend to be so pleasantly surprised?" Arcturus snarled. He was positively smoldering in rage. "One might presume this is your exact purpose for refusing access through your Floo."

"I assure you this is all in accordance to protocol and -" Dumbledore stopped talking when there was a small but clear 'hem, hem.'

Turais suddenly felt a spasm on the back of his right hand. He looked down in search for something when he realized it was unblemished. Feeling slightly stupid, he looked up and gasped in alarm. There was a lady of small stature squeezed her way between the towering men to the front. She was dressed from head to toe in a revolting shade of pink that merely aggravated the fake, simpering smile on her hideous toad-like features.

A rush of hatred thrummed throughout Turais' body.

"Yes, Ms Umbridge?" Dumbledore asked.

"Why are you here?" Turais growled at the same time.

"Turais," Arcturus said warningly. "Ms Umbridge is the Head of Improper Use of Magic Office and she is here to argue Sirius' case on his behalf."

"Oh, poor Mr Black is merely distressed by our intrusion," Umbridge said sweetly with her high-pitched voice. "I am not the least offended by his reaction, Lord Black. Instead, I think we all ought to be offended by the Headmaster's actions."

"Headmaster," Umbridge turned her attack on Dumbledore, "We all have become unwitting actors in your play that dramatized a small, insignificant incident into something wildly out of proportion. No one, let alone the gifted youngs of the illustrious Black family, should be subjected to the mental trauma from this unseemly display. You are setting a terrible example for suggesting that all discord should be exposed to public scrutiny and unnecessary rumours."

Umbridge sighed as she shook her head, "But this just goes to show how vitally important a Headmaster's management of this historical school has on the nurturing of our young and their gifts. In contrast, a Headmaster's mismanagement and erroneous decisions will poison our most valuable and most vulnerable minds... such as placing blind faith in a old, battered Hat to decide a boy's fate during the most impressionable period of his life. If that isn't a blatant misuse of magic, then I don't know what else fits the definition. Headmaster, I do sincerely hope that you take note on what legacy you leave behind."

"Thank you for your enlightening speech, Ms Umbridge," Dumbledore said with a bow. "We shall talk more in my office."

Turais moved to walk with them when Slughorn stopped him and said, "Turais, did you forget you have a meeting with the Wizengamot Parliamentarian?"

"I think this matter is of greater importance," Turais said as Sirius clutched his hands tighter.

"Turais," Arcturus said. "Go. There is nothing you can add to the discussion."

His look allowed no further argument as Turais nodded.

"Hey, Sirius," Turais said. "Everything will be fine."

Sirius looked at him pleadingly with his wide, watery eyes and before he was broke contact
with him and followed Professor Slughorn down into the dungeons under the watchful gaze of the entire party.

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Turais sprinted all the way from his meeting to the Slytherin common room. He slammed the door to his dormitory open and asked hurriedly, "What happened? Is Siri here or is he still in Gryffindor?"

"Calm down, Turais," Jonty said.

"How can I calm down?!" Turais said worriedly. "I've been stuck with Mr Flack for the entire day with no news regarding my brother and you tell me I should stay calm?! Is he still in Gryffindor?"

Jonty and Alex shared a look and shook their heads with a sigh.

"WHAT?!" Turais shouted. "Oh no, Siri is going to hate it here. He hates the cold, damp, green, silver, lake - everything about this place - I can transfigure his bed easily enough - his robes as well - environmental Spells and -" Turais looked up at the translucent dome that observed the lake " - I think I can read up on transfiguring the ceiling into something that shows the sky I guess - might be difficult but should be doable..."

He then heard snickers coming from his two friends that turned into full-on uninhibited laughter.

"What? Talk to me! Tell me something!"

That just made them laugh harder as they clutched their stomachs and wheezed.

"Did you see your brother on your way back?" Jonty said in between gasps of air.

"NO! That's why I'm losing my mind," Turais said.

"Well... why didn't you see him even if it is after curfew?" Jonty asked.

That was true...

"Oh... OH!" Everything suddenly made sense. Turais gasped out loud, "Sirius is still in Gryffindor! I can't believe I didn't connect the dots."

"No, you didn't," Alex said as he wiped a tear with his finger. "I loved this frazzled side of you."

"Word," Jonty said as he cleared his throat.

"Well, I'm going to head to bed now so I can see Sirius early tomorrow at the Gryffindor tower and congratulate him!" Turais said excitedly as he rummaged for his pyjamas. "This is so exciting."

"I'm sure it is," Jonty drawled. "Most exciting."
Early in the morning, Turais climbed up near the entrance of the Gryffindor common room just as an irritated voice was shouting blearily.

"It is half-past eight in the morning! On a Sunday! Why can't you boys be like normal first-years and sleep in!"

Then, Turais saw James and Sirius muttering intensely as they walked past him.

" - Remus wouldn't do that, he looked ill so he should be at the Hospital Wing - "

'Remus? What's happened to Remus?' Turais thought.

"Hey Siri," Turais called out as the two Gryffindors stricken and froze. James glared at Turais with suspicion. “Hello James."

"Turais... hi..." Sirius said nervously.

"What do you want?" James asked with clear hostility. Turais had a feeling it had something to do with their recent confrontation.

"Did something happen?" Turais asked Sirius.

"Well... I mean..." Sirius started to say, but he was immediately interrupted by James.

"There's nothing!" James said loudly as he shot a menacing glare at Sirius, whose eyes widened. "Nothing at all, isn't that right, Sirius?"

When Sirius failed to respond, still looking completely bewildered, James punched him in the arm and repeated again, more dangerously, "Isn't that right, Sirius?"

"Uh..." Sirius was glancing between Turais and James, "...yeah... that sounds about right -" Turais glared at his brother intensely and Sirius whimpered, "- Remus went missing since yesterday lunch. He wasn't in bed last night."

'Full moon. Lycanthrope. Remus.'

Turais wanted to slap himself for forgetting that it was full moon last night. But there was just so much happening recently.

Then, he registered that James socked Sirius in the shoulder while Sirius was staring at the floor guiltily. James hissed, "Sirius! You're going to get Remus into trouble! Your brother is a Slytherin and he’s on greaseball’s side."

"But Turais always helps me," Sirius argued, then he turned to look at Turais. "You are helping Remus too, right?"

"Of course," Turais said while James muttered something angrily under his breath. "So you two were heading to the Hospital Wing?" Sirius nodded. "Let's go there together then."
When they reached the Hospital Wing, they found that it was void of anyone named Remus. Madam Pomfrey was also nowhere to be seen.

However, there was a little boy sleeping soundly on the bed closest to the door. Half of his face, including his eye was covered by bandage.

"Who managed to get hurt five days into the school term?" Turais mused. He noticed that James was fidgeting uncomfortably beside him. "What's up with you, James?"

"N...no! Nothing!" James said brightly. "I'm just glad Remus is not hurt." Turais narrowed his eyes at the boy as he quickly changed the topic. "If Remus is not here, then where would he be?" James asked as he questioned Turais in return. "Y...you are not going to rat him out, are you?"

"Of course he's not," Sirius huffed in Turais' defense. "My brother is not a snitch, unlike stupid Reggie."

"Okay... I'm just making sure," James said with uncertainty as he looked at Turias suspiciously.

"Listen, James," Turais said. “I know you are still mad about yesterday, but I’m not on your side or Severus’ side. I just want you two to make up with each other. It’s no fun to have an enemy.”

"Speak for yourself, Turais," James said as his eyes flashed dangerously. “I’m happy to find the perfect test subject.” The look then left him as he turned towards Turais. “I’m just going to say this one last time. I’m not apologizing to him. Either stop trying to make me apologize or we are no longer friends.”

Turais’ blood chilled at the insinuation that James was willing to break off all relations with him. He was just frozen as the shock radiated throughout his body and numbed mind.

"James!" exclaimed Sirius. “Turais is my brother!”

"And he’s a Slytherin," returned James steely. “So what is it going to be, Turais?”

Turais gaped. He didn’t expect himself to be placed in such a predicament. But James issued his ultimatum... Well, clearly James did not respond well to more forceful coercion.

"Fine... I promise," Turais lied and James grinned victoriously.

"I knew you would come around!" James said happily as all the previous coldness dissipated at once.

"So where should we go check first?" James asked Turais while Sirius frowned beside his friend.

"Uh... let’s check the library first..." Turais said as he ignored Sirius’ strange frown.

Turais, of course, knew that Remus and Madam Pomfrey were most likely at the Shrieking Shack. But he decided the best course of action was to let Sirius and James' curiosity burn out naturally under his watch lest they get themselves into any trouble.

They wandered around the castle and the castle grounds, even the edge of the Forbidden Forest under James' insistence. But Remus was nowhere to be found.
Finally, they decided to return to the Great Hall for lunch. And on their way, they came face-to-face with the elusive boy they were searching for the entire morning.

"Remus!" The boy jumped at the sound and turned towards them. "Where were you?!" James dashed up and clutched the boy's shoulder. "Sirius and I stayed up the entire night waiting for you! We were walking all over the castle trying to find you!"

The pale boy's eyes widened as he looked at the three of them. "You... you waited for me? But why?"

"What do you mean why?" Sirius asked, confused. "Of course we were. Because we were worried about you."

"Oh..." Remus said softly. Then, he nodded to himself as though something suddenly made sense. "Don't worry, I won't lose Gryffindor any house points."

"Are you deliberately thick?" James asked as his hands gripped the boy's shoulder tighter, wrinkling his robes. "We don't care about the bloody house points. We are worried about you, wanker. You were looking pale since yesterday afternoon and we thought you were sick or lying unconscious dying somewhere."

"Oh... OHH!" Remus' eyes widened comically. Then, he flushed red. "I'm fine... I was just as the Hospital Wing where Madam Pomfrey was tending to me all night long."

"But we were just at the Hospital Wing a few hours ago," James said. "It was empty."

"Well..." Remus' eyes darted around. "I was dismissed just before you visited then..."

"When did you leave? It was ten in the morning when we came," Sirius interjected. Turais rose his eyebrow at the blatant lie.

"I left at around nine-thirty," Remus said. "I guess you just missed me."

"Oh... I misspoke," Sirius said. "I meant to say we were at the Hospital Wing at nine... not ten."

Remus paled further when he realized he was caught out in a lie.

"Hey Sirius, let off a little," Turais stepped in. "Remus still looks a bit peaky. He must have misread the clock when it was eight-thirty. I do that occasionally."

Sirius' eyes narrowed at the words suspiciously but did not comment further. Remus looked visibly relieved at the out Turais provided. "Yeah... my furry brain... I'm stupid for misreading clocks, sorry for making all of you worry about me. You didn't have to..."

"The most important thing is that we found Remus and that he is safe," Turais said calmly as the boys continued to stare at Remus. "I'm hungry, why don't we go for lunch?"

"Yeah, I'm famished," Remus said eagerly.

Surely, the two boys dropped the topic and Remus' shoulder slumped in relief as they started to head towards the Great Hall. Before, they entered. Turais pulled Remus aside.

"If you want to tell me anything, you know I'm always here to listen, right?" Turais said softly. "Anything at all."
What was intended to be reassuring seemed to have an opposite effect on Remus as the blood drained from his face.

"I... thank you, Turais..." Remus said stutteringly. "I... should go... I will see you... around."

***

September 9, 1971 (Thursday)

"What are you doing?" Gerald hissed as Turais focused on maneuvering the tea leaves into the right configuration. "First, you vanished the paper of my observations. Now, you're changing the tea leaves?!

Turais ignored his friend as he finished up. Then, he raised his hand and caught the Professor's attention.

"How may I offer guidance?" she said.

"Professor, can you interpret this cup?" Turais asked innocently.

"Mr Macmillan should have been able to answer that," the Professor said, but she took the cup regardless. Gerald glared at Turais with crossed arms. Turais mouthed an apology as Trelawney rotated the cup and frowned.

"I've never seen such a combination of symbols before..." she muttered to herself. "All of them strongly points towards a unifying observation for long-term effects. This is highly unusual for tasseomancy, which is known for its variability and a mixture of insights into both the near and far futures. I would expect this sort of result from a tarot reading."

"Are you certain this is what you saw in the cup after drinking the tea?" Trelawney asked Turais. Turais didn't expect her to be so much more competent than her successor.

"Yes," Turais lied while Gerald huffed. "What do you suggest I do given the dire prediction? I interpreted it as a world engulfed in flames by a previously unknown malignant force."

"That's exactly my point, Mr Black," Trelawney said. "A tea cup reading should not build such a precise picture. I'm afraid there is something wrong with this cup and I shall discard it."

"But can't you at least try to offer some suggestions?" Turais asked. "I'm terribly concerned."

"It is ill-advised and frankly irresponsible if I offer any insight on a potentially faulty cup, Mr Black," Trelawney said firmly. "The last thing I shall do is perpetuate fear when none exists."

"Serves you right," Gerald muttered as Trelawney left with his cup at hand.

"Well... did you ever think I was going to let anyone know you predicted that I would fail on an assignment?" Turais covered up with act with a lie. "Of course I had to vanish your predictions."

Gerald looked at Turais hard for a moment before he slumped. "You're right... I must have interpreted it incorrectly..."

Turais patted him on the shoulder calmly. "I guess you don't have the gift after all."
"Oh, sod off," Gerald said irritably. "Stop making fun of that."

Turais laughed.

After Divination class, Turais was heading back to the main part of the castle when he saw Lily standing by the dark, narrow corridor near the storage. When she saw Turais, she immediately walked up to him.

"Hey, Turais," Lily said.

"Hi, Lily."

"So... I heard from Severus that you want Potter and him to apologize to each other."

Turais totally forgot Severus and Lily were close friends. And close friends talked. "Uh, yes. Yes, I do."

"Great," Lily said with a mischievous glint in her sparkling eyes. "I'll make it happen."

"I'm completely on board. What can I do to help?" Turais said immediately.

"Oh... nothing," Lily answered mysteriously. "Just promise me to never set foot in the Gryffindor common room until I say so."

"Okay, I promise," Turais said. "I need to teach that brat a lesson."

"Glad we are on the same page. And it goes without saying. This is a secret between the two of us," Lily said with a dramatic flick of her auburn hair. "I have a reputation to uphold."

Turais grinned when, suddenly, there was a loud crash beside a closed door as they jumped in shock. Seconds later, a dusty Pierricoeur tumbled out, coughing.

"Stupid boxes -" he muttered just before he spotted the them. He froze for a split second before he composed himself. " - What are you two staring at, huh?!"

"Not everything is about you, Pierricoeur," Turais snapped.

"Sound advice for yourself," Pierricoeur retorted as he shoved at Turais while he walked past him."

"I thought you are always nice to everyone," Lily commented.

"Not around him, I'm not," Turais sighed.

"Don't worry. He was a prat," Lily said consolingly. "You did the right thing and served his stinky attitude right back at him."

"Like you with James?" Turais arched an eyebrow.

"He's insufferable," Lily sighed with another dramatic flick of hair. "Everyone thinks he's soo amazing but I am not a single bit impressed -"

The clock tower struck ten as Turais suddenly realized he was late for class.

"Shoot! I have to run, bye!" Turais said as he ran off.
Chapter End Notes

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 42: A Two-Pronged Menace, is on schedule to be released in two weeks. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-05-01
Hey everyone,

New update. I hope you will enjoy this!

To reiterate, I will be moving towards a biweekly update cycle (once every two weeks) for the rest of summer.

Stay safe!

- ravenclawblues 2020-05-14

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER 42

A TWO-PRONGED MENACE

______________________________

- Kaiden Potter -

September 1, 1971 (Wednesday)
Royston Idlewind, the former Australian Chaser most notably for his winning performance in the 1966 Quidditch World Cup final, has been elected to the highest office of the ICWQC. In his first address, he had outlined his ambition to overhaul the international governing body of Quidditch by hinting at introducing crowd control measures. However, one of his disparaging comments when asked about his opinion on the Seeker position made headlines across the world.

Besides his temper, Idlewind was notorious for his many feuds against all the Seekers he has worked with. A notable example was his refusal to let his fellow teammate and Seeker, Nick Simmons, to hold the Quidditch Cup with him after their final match win, which ran contrary to Quidditch convention. Anonymous sources close to him have often revealed that Idlewind made it his personal goal to win every match without the Snitch catch to highlight the irrelevance of said position. However, Idlewind had never publicly confirmed that particular statement...

***

September 24, 1971 (Friday)

What Lily meant by her "plan" became slightly more apparent and also slightly more muddying later in the month.

"Hey Severus," Turais said when he found Severus waiting outside his dormitory one day.

"Lily told me to tell you that the plan is ready," Severus said quickly. "She also told me to tell you that you can go to where she told you to never go next Monday after class. And make sure to not go to where she told you to never go especially if Potter tells you to go."

"Uh..." Turais said, befuddled, "What did you just say?"

"Lily told me to -"

"Okay - stop," Turais said. "Please say it in the simplest terms."

Severus looked really frustrated for a moment before he beckoned Turais down and whispered into his ear, "Lily said you should head up to the Gryffindor common room next Monday after class. But do not go up there for any reason whatsoever before that time, especially, do not listen to Potter."

Turais was confused, but he trusted Lily to know what she was doing.

***
September 25, 1971 (Saturday)

It was the end of the Slytherin trials after a quick round against the sole challenger for his Seeker position by the reserve Seeker - Emma Blishwick.

The team was largely intact from last year and there was only a single change in the roster. One of the Chasers, Cyrus Montague, graduated last year and was replaced by a sixth-year named Samuel Riley. The all-male Slytherin Quidditch House team was completed.

"Congratulations on defending your position, Black," Michael announced with a small, private smile.

"Thank you, cap," Turais said with a grin.

"I had a feeling my participation was merely to contrast your brilliance," Emma said with a heavy pant.

"Well... also to legitimize my selection," Turais teased. "It never looks good to win unopposed."

Emma shoved at Turais playfully as Michael announced the end of the trials. They were vacating the pitch as the incoming Ravenclaw team started to enter the pitch to conduct their own trials.

"Not the worst team around these parts, Wilkins," the newly-minted Ravenclaw captain and beater, Finn Lorenzo, shouted out. "Bet you can force the nonagenarians into a tie."

He walked up with a hand up, gesturing for a handshake. Wilkins merely arched a brow and looked at the boy wordlessly.

"What? No friendly handshake?" Lorenzo barked out a laugh as he looked around him as though he was expecting an audience. He tutted. "Manners, Wilkins."

In the blink of an eye, Wilkins shot his hand out and grabbed the Ravenclaw's hand and squeezed it tightly. Lorenzo let out a single hiss of pain before he clenched his jaw and returned the favour with equal force.

"I appreciate a man of few words," Lorenzo gritted out. "I wonder what you would say when we win the Cup this year?"

"You're entitled to your opinion, but your opinion is wrong," Wilkins said with a low voice. His expression was unflinching.

"I guess we will find out, won't we?"

"Don't start something you can't finish."

"Oh, I will finish. Just with you eating twigs."

"Make sure your Seeker catches the Snitch properly this time instead of having it delivered to him on a silver platter."

"Oh, don't worry about that. Martin received the boot the second I received this pin."
"Then you might just end up avoiding last place this year."

They continued to stare at each other with their hands connected. Their breaths became labored, their jaws tightly clenched, and their hands trapped in each other's unyielding grip.

"Boys," Blishwick said with a shake of her head before she motioned Turais to leave the pitch with her.

Spotting his ecstatic brother waving at him from the Gryffindor section, Turais parted ways with her and walked over to the Gryffindor section. Sirius pounced on him and gave him a big hug.

"Congratulations, Turais! You were brilliant!" Sirius said. "I knew you were going to make it!"

"Likewise. It was so lopsided it wasn't even funny," Kaiden said as he put down his Omnioculars and flashed him a grin from the row in front of them. "I was tempted to throw a *Confundus* at you just to make it more competitive but I then decided against it."

"That's right," Sirius huffed. "If you want me to try out for the team next year, you better not try anything on Turais."

"I am trying something on Turais," Kaiden said airily. "That's why I want you on the team next year. So he will be all distracted by you instead of the Snitch."

Sirius gasped, "You're evil!"

Kaiden shrugged. "It's my final year next year and I will graduate with the Quidditch Cup in my hands."

His eyes burnt with passion.

"Even if Michael wants that Cup as much as you do, if not more?" Turais asked.

The intensity of Kaiden's gaze tapered off in an instant. Then, his cheeks glowed red in anger, or embarrassment (Turais couldn't really tell), before whipping around and getting reacquainted with his notes. Turais turned his attention to James, who was trying to engage in a conversation with Lily sitting two rows behind them.

"What are you reading, Evans?" James shouted.

Lily didn't even bat an eyelid at the call and merely turned to the second page of the book. Her friend nudged Lily on the shoulder multiple times to no avail. Finally, she shot James an apologetic look. But James wasn't paying attention anymore and turned away with a dejected frown.

“What’s up with James and Lily?” Turais asked his brother.

“Lily has been giving James the cold shoulder since two weeks ago,” Sirius whispered back.

“Don’t speak nonsense, Sirius. She is not giving me the cold shoulder. She is just so taken aback by my popularity that she doesn’t want to look too eager to befriend me. She’s clever like that.”

“Right... I must have misheard her when she said she doesn’t want anything to do with you,” Sirius said dryly.
“She doesn’t mean that. Who doesn’t want to be friends with me,” James said dismissively. “We just started off on the wrong foot and I was terribly misunderstood.”

“I swear Lily said the exact same thing when you claimed she really wanted to be ‘chums’ with you,” Sirius drawled.

“That just shows how similarly we think, Sirius,” James said excitedly. “Don’t you see?”

“I don’t know what you see. But my eyes and ears told me that she won’t talk to you until you’ve apologized to Severus -”

“That’s where you are wrong, Sirius.” James huffed indignantly. “I’m definitely not apologizing to him. Because I will win the -”

“James!” Kaiden called out warningly.

“What?!”

Kaiden pointed at Turais as James’ confusion turned into excitement.

“That’s right! Turais,” James tugged on Turais’ robe and whispered. "Can you come up to the common room tomorrow? Next Sunday works as well."

"James! You can't do that!” Kaiden protested.

"Turais, what do you say?" James asked, ignoring his cousin. "I think I heard a yes."

"You cheater," Kaiden pointed at James, who was sticking out his tongue tauntingly. "Fine! If you want to play dirty... Turais, come today, or any Saturday of your choice. I'll give you a Galleon -"

"No, you're not," MacGregor, who was sitting beside Kaiden, chimed in as well. "Fridays are known to be the best visit-your-brother-in-a-different-House days, Black."

"Uh... are they?" Turais felt like he was missing something.

"Of course!" MacGregor said. "I also have treacle tarts -"

"I will find your treacle tarts and destroy them all," James challenged.

"How about you, Siri? Do you have a preference?"

Everyone stopped arguing and stared at Sirius intensely, who fidgeted. "I... I... don't have a preference..." He then turned to James and smacked him on the shoulder. "You haven't congratulated Turais yet!"

"Good job making the team, Turais," James said beside Sirius. "It's not like being a Chaser, but I guess it's something. Back to your visit to the Gryffindor common room -"

"What do you mean by 'not like being a Chaser'? Being a Seeker is awesome," Sirius egged his friend on deliberately.

"We had this conversation already, Sirius. I mean... is a Seeker really playing Quidditch?" James asked as he lifted an index finger. "One, Seekers sit around the entire match doing nothing until that one moment of necessity." He raised a second finger. "Two, the object of Seeking is to play the least amount of Quidditch." A third finger. "Three, Seekers play such a different game
compared to the rest of the team that they always have their own separate training sessions in the League teams. So back to -"

"So does this mean you support Royston Idlewind's proposal to eliminate the Seeker position?" Sirius gasped.

"Of course not!" James scoffed. "I told you already. I don't like the Seeker position, but that doesn't mean I want to change it. That babbling fool is clearly mad! Next thing you know, he's going to suggest teams can remove the Keeper for an extra Chaser!" James shook his head. "We are doomed with that man as Director of ICWQC. It must have been all the Bludger hits he's taken in the head over the years..."

Just as Turais was about to ask where Remus was, Kaiden turned around and shushed them down.

"Chaps, let's keep the volume down. I need to concentrate on the Ravenclaw Chaser trials. Also, come up the tower today -"

The Ravenclaw captain flew up near the stands with his blonde hair flapping in the air.

"This is the Ravenclaw Quidditch trials," Lorenzo announced loudly with his wand pointed at his throat. "Today will be a relatively short affair as we have only three openings to fill - two Chasers and one Seeker. The Chaser trials begin now."

As the Chaser trials unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that two particular players, Anna Vidal and George Crawley, would be the two likely selected. Crawley, in particular, was a natural left-hand thrower and a prized commodity.

"Darn. We'll have to work on forcing him right. Also plan for Beater drills down the left lane," Kaiden murmured into MacGregor's ears, who nodded as he scribbled down notes. "He's not showing any tendency to throw with his right at all."

"But that might be because he is focusing on passing his trials right now. His actual right-hand capability is still unknown," Turais reasoned.

Kaiden nodded as he dialed the Omnioculars on replay once more as he focused on Crawley. "Better safe than sorry. Add drills for inverted winger tactics as well."

"They will definitely try touch line cross-ins from both flanks."

Kaiden wrinkled his nose in thought. "Then let's run 1v2 defensive Chaser drills on stopping crosses particularly from the right."

"They might centre their attacks with a Porskoff Pass by sneaking him beneath the fray and sending him the Quaffle with a dead drop near the 12-yard line."

"We will work on forcing him offside... Good ideas today, Ewan."

"Uh... it's Black, not me," MacGregor said. Kaiden looked away from his Omnioculars and saw Turais' face beside him.

"Oh! No wonder... I was just wondering what possessed you," Kaiden said. "Instead of waffling, you were actually making sense."

"Oh, bugger off," MacGregor growled as the stands cheered. Apparently, the Chasers match
was finished with Vidal and Crawley being selected.

"Can you watch for a while?" Kaiden handed MacGregor the Omnioculars. "My arms are sore."

Just as MacGregor reached for it, Turais noticed a girl with chestnut brown hair and ponytail soaring through the air on a Nimbus 1701. Turais snatched the Omnioculars from Kaiden's grip and placed them on his eyes. "I'll do it."

"Hey! Kaiden asked me -"

"Kay, you don't mind, right?" Turais asked as he dialed the magnification and trained it at the four potential Seekers hovering in the air with Lorenzo. Most importantly, there was Catherine clinging onto the captain's every word with a determined glint in her eyes. Turais was immensely grateful that she ultimately decided to try out for the position.

"Sure," Kaiden said as he stretched his arms widely, occasionally blocking his view. "You offer better advice than this fool anyway."

Then, there was the familiar whistle. Disregarding the other male contenders, Turais followed Catherine as she streaked off into the distance after the golden target against one other boy. Apparently, Lorenzo was conducting the Seeker trials as one-on-one elimination competitions.

"Kaiden!" MacGregor hissed. "He's with the Slytherins."

"And everything he said before was valid," Kaiden answered with a loud yawn. "Calm down -"

"Who needs to calm down?" Michael's deep voice said calmly from his left as there was a loud thud followed by a hiss of pain in front of him. Somehow, the Gryffindor captain was out of his seat and sprawled on the floor. "Are you alright, Kaiden?"

"I'm perfectly fine!" Kaiden said brightly. He was focused sharply at his seat and refused Michael's helping hand. Then, he quickly combed his hair with his fingers and patted down his robes. "What are you doing over here, Carmickey?"

"I just wanted to retrieve my Seeker who seemed to have lost his way back to the Slytherin section," Michael said as he glared. Turais waved sheepishly.

"He's helping me at the moment," Kaiden said. "Rais, get back to work."

Turais returned to see Catherine executing a few elegant spins as she gained speed on her competitor while he tried to ignore the argument.

"He's my Seeker!"

"Well, he volunteered to be my strategist for the hour."

"What? He's my strategist!" There were a few flashes of green and red as Turais saw the girl clamp her hand around the Snitch from right under the other boy's nose. She smiled radiantly while the other boy sulked.

"Hey - give my notes back! They are team secrets."

"You steal glances at my Quidditch notes all the time -"
"No, I don't!"

Another whistle as the second pair battled it out.

"Then why do you always look at my direction when we make training plans together?"

Kaiden's breath hitched. "N...no, no I d...don't!"

"You are a terrible liar, Kaiden."

"Just give them back, Michael," Kaiden hissed quietly.

There was silent tug-of-war occurring right beside him, but Turais forced himself to be fascinated by the two Ravenclaw boys clawing at each other's limbs for a slight advantage.

'Great leg pull by the boy on the right. OH! Amazing kick in the face.'

"What is this? There's a scribbled-over doodle of a heart -"

He saw a flurry of red robes and black trousers in his Omnioculars.

Turais snapped his gaze to the stairs beside him and saw Kaiden's entire body pressed onto Michael's. Michael's hands were outstretched skyward and holding a few pages of notes that were slightly out of Kaiden's reach. The students around them looked on at the two Quidditch captains with amusement.

"Give it back!" Kaiden roared.

"Why are you so nervous? Ohhh... does Kaiden finally have a crush?" Michael smirked down at Kaiden, whose frantic expression was mere inches away from the other's teasing one.

Turais immediately turned back to the Omnioculars.

'Oh... Reeeeaaally great elbow in the face.'

"I hate you for growing three inches taller this summer," Kaiden gritted out as he clawed at the notes again, valiantly but uselessly.

'And world-class hair pulling. But maybe focus more on the Snitch... ah, there we go! Terrible job - the both of you.'

The battered couple returned to the captain, one victorious and the other defeated.

"This is karma for making fun of my height all these years." Michael's voice said.

"It really is."

"What do you mean?"

"I... nothing - come on! Stop reading it!"

There was a third whistle as the winners of the previous two rounds were now flying head-to-head behind the golden ball. The two players shot off as they circled the perimeter of the pitch at great speed. However Catherine had a clear advantage over the other boy. Inch by inch, the girl closed in on the snitch while the boy fell back further and further.
"There's a 'CW' inside the heart," Michael commented.

Turais looked up at once and felt his heart drop to his stomach in fear. He saw a similar reaction in Kaiden as he froze and looked as if his worst nightmare came true. Michael scrunched up his nose as he scrutinized Kaiden carefully. Kaiden looked back at Michael helplessly like a sad, kicked Crup at the verge of tears.

Suddenly, Michael shoved the notes back at Kaiden's chest and sighed, "Here are your precious notes. Catherine Westermont is everyone's Quidditch crush. And there I was thinking it was some earth-shattering secret..."

"What?" Kaiden asked in confusion before realizing the situation. "Yeah..." he said breathlessly as his fingers tightened around the papers and caused them to crumple. "...Sorry to disappoint... I... I actually need to use the loo...." Kaiden fumbled onto his feet unsteadily. "I'll be right back..."

Kaiden fled the scene as Turais released a breath he didn't know he was holding. As he turned back to the Omnioculars, he saw Gwenyth Orpington darting across the stands after Kaiden and wondered whether he should run after him as well. But then, there was a loud, collective sound of disapproval coming from the stands. Turais looked into his Omnioculars to see Catherine's fingers nearly touching the golden ball. But suddenly, she jolted backwards. Apparently, the other boy grabbed the twigs of her broom and was dragging her backwards while advancing himself.

"THAT'S A FOUL!" Turais stood up and shouted angrily. He was joined by several other people voicing the same concern. But there was no whistle indicating a pause.

Catherine faltered slightly as the other boy claimed a narrow lead in the pursuit. However, Turais could see the fierce determination in her expression as she rejoined the fray and steadily made up the distance. The other boy seemingly swiped at the Snitch and hit Catherine's face instead. She narrowly ducked under the swing but her hair band came loose in the process. A simmering curtain of hair expanded and fluttered in the strong winds behind her, glistening warmly in the golden morning sun.

However, Turais knew better than to see that as an honest mistake. The Snitch was still wildly out of reach for the boy. He was deliberately sabotaging his opponent.

"THAT SCUMBAG BETTER PRAY THAT I DON'T SEE HIM!"

The girl continued to chase after the elusive Snitch as she regained the lead. The boy, on the other hand, now resorted to a similar tactic with his previous opponent and rammed his side into hers repeatedly. Turais could see Catherine's superior concentration as she clenched her jaw and took the hits without wavering the slightest. The boy swung out to slam against her again as she suddenly pulled up. Without a target to absorb the force, he twirled out of control and crashed into a nearby tower. Then, he plummeted towards the ground.

Just as Turais thought the boy would surely hit the ground, a figure swooped in above him and caught the hood of his robe. The boy dangled like a rag doll as his downward motion stopped. Then, he was let down gently onto the pitch ground as the other person kicked off in pursuit of the snitch once more.

The final whistle that indicated the end of the trial was sounded, which left a contested result without an outright win. Now, Lorenzo would likely be determining the winner of this match.

"BOLLOCKS!" Turais huffed as he took his Omnioculars off. He took out his wand and
jabbed it on the side of his throat, slightly painfully due to his angered haste. "Complete bollocks, Lorenzo! You should have blown the whistle ten fouls before. What were you even thinking?! Trying to murder your best shot at the Cup?! Or are you in cahoots with that spherical pillock lying pathetically on the pitch?!"

"It's none of your business, Black!" Lorenzo shouted back.

"It is my business. Because if you don't want me to kick both your arse and his off your brooms during our match, don't choose him as Seeker! Cup and detention be damned!"

Lorenzo made Turais a rude gesture as he flew off to meet his two Seekers on the pitch ground.

"Looks like someone needs to calm down more than I -" Turais glared at MacGregor as he shut up immediately.

"Uh... are you feeling alright?" Michael, who was now sitting beside him, asked. He sounded slightly taken aback.

"Fantastic," Turais snapped as he sat down in a huff. As his anger abated, he started to realize he was getting a lot of stare. Michael and Sirius were ogling him as if he was an extraterrestrial being while James looked at him admiringly. "Cut the stares."

"Sorry," Michael said. "You just... don't get riled up easily."

"It was just... that boy was playing so unfairly that -"

Lorenzo reappeared in front of them as he addressed the stands once again. "After careful consideration -"

"Better consider some more if you're going to choose that manky maggot!" Turais shouted. "I still have the playback recording in this Omnioculars."

Lorenzo's eyes widened before he shot him a loathing glare.

"After careful consideration, I have determined the new Seeker for the Ravenclaw team to be... Catherine Shafiq."

Turais and Lorenzo connected gazes for one final time before the captain flew off.

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Turais was jolted from his thought when Michael clasped his hand around his shoulder.

"Turias, have you seen Kaiden?"

"Who?" Turais asked.

"Kaiden," Michael repeated. "He said he went to the loo but I couldn’t find him there - anywhere, in fact."

"Oh..." Turais said distractedly. His thoughts were still lingering on the Ravenclaw Seeker
Michael nodded worriedly as he dashed ahead towards the castle with his broom at hand.

"What got you so unsettled?" Sirius asked.

"I... I just realized that it might've looked like I was pressuring Lorenzo to choose one player over the other."

"But you were right," Sirius said. "We all saw how the Burton was committing all those fouls."

"Black!" someone called behind him. "Black! Turais!"

Turais turned around to find Catherine running up to him. Her hair was flowing free down her back and shoulders, he noted absently.

"Oh... hi..."

"Hey," Catherine said. "Uh... so, about the trial -"

"I'm so terribly sorry for putting you on the spot," Turais apologized quickly. "I promise I was not trying to help you win by pressuring Lorenzo. You would have caught the Snitch ten times over if he didn’t do all those despicable acts. You deserved the win."

"Oh... I didn't think you acted improperly at all," she said. "In fact, I wanted to thank you for speaking up. I was quite fed up by all the missed foul calls as well."

"It was nice of you to save him," Turais said. "It was his own fault, quite frankly. And you would have had a legitimate win over him if you just went for the Snitch. Instead, you had to settle for this contested result with me running unnecessary interference..."

"Don't think that," Catherine placed a hand on Turais' shoulder and the warmth almost caused him to shudder. Her eyes were so, so clear and so, so blue. "I'm glad you spoke up." She glanced around and whispered into his ear, "I overheard Burton and Lorenzo arguing in the changing room. Apparently, Burton promised to buy Lorenzo a new broom if he helped him win the Seeker position -"

"What?!" Turais gasped. "You must tell Flitwick!"

"There's nothing except for my anecdotal evidence. And he ultimately didn't get the position," Catherine sighed. "But I'm guessing that if you didn't speak up about the Omnioculars playback, Lorenzo would have tried to force his way. I'm just glad you were watching me at the time."

Turais flushed at the thought that his actions were falsely recognized as a happy coincidence.

"I'm just happy you're not mad at me."

"Of course I'm not mad at you," Catherine chuckled. "But you might be when I beat you come February."

"Oh, bring it on," Turais said with a challenging stare which was returned with equal measure. Turais felt his heart doing a funny lurch, but he decidedly ignored it.
"BLACK!"

Turais almost fell off his chair when he realized that Yvette Tripe, a sixth-year, was looming over him.

"What is the matter?" Turais asked.

"One of your brother's lanky Gryffindor sidekicks was trying to follow me back to the Slytherin common room," Tripe said. "Luckily I thwarted his plan, but he said he was looking for you."

"Thank you for notifying me," Turais said as he snapped his textbook shut and ran out.

"Napier is currently with him by the Grindylow picture!" she called out after him.

"Evelyn," Turais said a bit breathlessly from the quick jog. The Slytherin prefect and the bespectacled first-year were both standing below a large canvas depicting multiple Grindylows sliding in between the swaying kelp stalks amidst an ocean of blue. "Thank you so much for watching over James for me." At the sight of him, James thrummed excited.

"Anytime, Turais," Evelyn flashed a grin. He turned back to James and said warningly, "No more tailing any Slytherins back to the common room. Not all Prefects are like me who would let you off with a verbal warning. Next time, House points will be deducted."

Once Evelyn headed off, Turais pulled James into a nearby classroom.

"What are you doing here? Did something bad happen? Are you in trouble?" Turais asked urgently.

"No..." James said as he played with his sleeves. "I'm here because Sirius... he... he is lying in bed."

"What happened?" Turais asked as he clutched James tightly.

"I... I don't know..." James said as something shifted in his eyes. "We were eating lunch and... and he felt ill. I think you should go see him."

"Why is he not in the Hospital Wing?!" Turais asked as he led James out of the room and headed towards the Gryffindor tower in a hurry.

There was a sudden hiss as Turais looked at the Grindylow portrait only to find it void of any creatures... except for an enormous scale body that was extended beyond the width of the picture wriggling by, seemingly without end.

"Uh... we didn't think it was too bad..." James said as Turais snapped his attention back to the boy who was scratching his neck.

"And somehow telling me would do the trick?" Turais exclaimed incredulously. "I'm not a Healer, James."
"You know... they say emotional support is important..."

"That is not more important than immediate Healing intervention, James. We are heading straight to the Hospital Wing after retrieving Sirius," Turais grumbled as they climbed up the Grand Staircase up to the Fat Lady portrait. "I can't claim to understand your thought process!"

"Ah, young Slytherin, I guess there is no point to conceal the fact that I guard the entrance to the Gryffindor common room, but you will never charm your way past my defens-"

"Capricorn," James said.

"My, my. Patience is a virt -"

"Capricorn," James repeated nervously.

" - What do you take me for? A doorkeeper? -"

"Sorry to break it to you, lady," James said. "But you are exactly that. Just do your job and open up. Capricorn!"

"Your manners are absolutely horrid," the Fat Lady admonished as her portrait swung open. "Please learn from Mr Slytherin here - wait a moment..."

Out of the portrait hole revealed an extremely agitated Lily and a sleep-wrinkled Sirius.

"I honestly don't understand why you just go along with everything Potter says like his words are gospels -" Lily looked up and saw a smirking James with a largely confused Turais. "- TURAIS! Why are you here?"

"Sirius!" Turais clutched his brother tightly and examined him closely. "Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm fine," Sirius said, confused. "What is happening?"

"Cough up, Evans!" James said, his hand waving in a beckoning fashion.

Lily spluttered for a moment before composing herself and slapping James' hand away. "No, Potter. We said 'Gryffindor common room'. This is not the common room. Turais needs to pass through the portrait hole for it to count."

"Fine," James said as he walked behind Turais and pushed him forward. "Turais, be nice and take one teeny step -"

Lily physically blocked the portrait hole by gripping either edge with her outstretched arms and legs and tried to communicate with him through her expression. She gritted out, "Turais, remember?"

Turais stopped himself quickly, twirled around, and walked away.

"Turais!" James shouted frustrated. "Come on!"

"Are you sure you're not ill in any way, Siri?" Turais asked as he evaded James' capture.

"Yes," Sirius nodded.

"Okay, I'll be back tomorrow!" Turais shouted as he fled down the stairs.
"Don't be back tomorrow! Or any Monday!" James screamed.

***

**September 27, 1971 (Monday)**

"Ah, you're the nice Slytherin boy," the Fat Lady said as he approached. "I'm thankful that you did not go into the common room yesterday. You have preserved my perfect record of not letting anyone without a password set foot."

"You're welcome," Turais said. "I will continue to preserve your record. Please swing open. Capricorn."

"What?"

"I gave you the password, milady. Capricorn."

"I don't know how you came across the password but you are clearly not a Gryffindor so I shall not let you enter - why must someone exit right now..."

Lily was standing at the entrance of the portrait hole as it was revealed. When she saw Turais, she shouted ecstatically, "Turais, you're here! Quick, come into the common room!"

"Please tell me you have good news," Turais muttered. "I'm in desperate need of good news especially after a full day of classes with sodding Pierricoeur."

"Stop muttering to yourself and standing there like a loon. Do you want James to apologize to Severus or not?!!" Lily took Turais' hand and pulled him through the portrait hole.

"Okay, okay. I'm coming in," Turais grumbled.

"Yes, you are," Lily said.

Suddenly, he felt as though he was transported through time back to the first time he set foot in the Gryffindor common room. Turais captured the familiar red and gold tapestries hanging around the circular room full of squashy armchairs and writing tables. The fireplace flickered warmly in the centre as students of various years lounging lazily in the mild Saturday morning light. Some of the members looked at Turais confusedly for a few moments before their eyes widened and nudged their friends.

Lily shouted out to the entire common room, "Everyone! Today is Monday and Turais Black showed up in the Gryffindor common room."

The doors on the second floor opened up as students of various ages clamoured to see the sight for themselves. Most students groaned while a selected few cheered. Turais was at a loss as to what was happening.

"What day is it?" one of the older students shouted.

"Monday!" another person shouted out as he pulled out a long scroll. "Whoever bet on Monday won!"
"Darn it, I bet on Sunday!" a girl near him whined. "Why didn't you show up yesterday?!"

"I'm sorry?" Turais said with uncertainty.

"Don't be, because I'm not," Lily grinned as she whispered into Turais' ears while the rest of the House was in an uproar. "I originally meant for this to be a private bet with James, but some sixth-year overheard and made it into something much bigger."

"Oh... I see," Turais said weakly. He didn't know there was a House-wide betting pool on his appearance in the Gryffindor common room. But honestly, he shouldn't have expected any less from them. "Congratulations... I guess."

"I was not in it for the Galleons," Lily said dismissively. "I'm just happy of the fact that Potter must apologize to Severus for all the terrible things he said."

"But how is this a fool-proof plan?" Turais asked questioningly.

"If there is one thing Potter cannot stand, it would be someone questioning his ability," Lily sighed happily. "I just had to rile him up a little and dare him into betting against me."

"What were you two betting on?"

"If I won, he would have to apologize to Severus under my supervision. If he won, I would have to stop the silent treatment and call him by his first name," Lily said airily. "I was actually expecting him to come up with something worse, Potter was somehow really fixated on the idea of being on first-name basis with all the first-years - except for Slytherins, that is."

"And let me guess. You are the only hold-out who refused?"

"Yup," Lily sighed with content. "I don't understand what he wants from me, but I gave up trying to understand him."

Then, she saw a familiar face and waved her over. "Marlene, come and wait here for Potter to realize what happened. Let's watch that smug grin he has wiped off his face. Hopefully, this will knock him down a peg or two."

"I don't understand why you are so adamant to dislike James, Lily," Marlene said. "I find him quite funny and charming."

"Don't make it sound like I'm the unreasonable one here," Lily huffed. "I don't dislike Potter. There is just nothing to like."

"Hmmm..." Marlene sounded unconvinced.

"What is happening?" James' voice shouted before Turais saw the boy make his way to the front of the crowd. James looked up at Turais and his mouth hung open. "Wait? Why are you here, Turais?!" Suddenly, James groaned as he fell into an armchair. "I bet two Galleons for you to show up on a Sunday!"

Lily crossed her arms, walked over to James, and kicked him hard on the right leg. James yelped as Lily continued to stare unsympathetically.

"You lost your bet against me, Potter," Lily said as she aimed at James' leg again. This time, James pulled his legs up and wrapped his arms around them defensively. "That means you owe Severus an apology for what you said on the train and during Sorting."
James groaned. "You must have cheated! This wasn't fair!"

"You were the one who lied about Sirius being sick to get Turais up here," Lily returned. "That was a horrible thing to do and you know it."

"I... I..." James' eyes darted towards Turais guiltily. "I didn't mean to!"

"That's your biggest problem, Potter. You never mean to hurt anyone but, in fact, you do! First, Severus. Then, Turais -"

"Okay, okay!" James interrupted. "You just want me to apologize to greaseball. There's no need to drag everyone into this."

"But Potter, this is not just about Severus, it is about you being mean -"

"I said I will apologize to greaseball. What else do you want from me?" James said angrily.

"You still don't get it, do you?" Lily huffed.

"There's nothing to 'get'."

"You are hopeless, Potter," Lily shook her head. "Meet me at the Entrance Hall during lunch tomorrow and you will apologize to Severus."

"What if I don't?"

"Then... then I will never, ever talk to you again. Also, if you try anything remotely shifty, I'll never talk to you either," Lily said firmly. "Marlene, let's go."

Marlene looked back as she was dragged away. "James, please excuse her -"

"Marlene!"

The portrait hole opened behind him as Turais saw Remus climbing through. When he noticed Turais' presence, his books fell out of his arms in a clatter. as he turned around and fled.

Turais couldn't help but be worried at Remus' horrified expression.

"What happened between you and Remus?" Turais asked James, who was still brooding.

"What about him?"

"It just seems I haven't seen him in quite a while. Did you notice something strange -"

"NO!" James said immediately. "No. There is nothing out of the ordinary. We are getting along great!" He gave Turais a suspiciously bright smile.

"If I find you lying. I will place you under a Tracking Spell," Turais threatened.

"Tracking...?" James frowned for a moment before he grinned mischievously. "I need to... do something..."

James immediately darted back towards his dormitory.
Turais was spying on three first-years behind a column. However, he couldn't believe his eyes.

He frantically patted Alex on the shoulder to get his attention.

"What is it, Turais?" Alex hissed below him, crouching behind the same column.

"Are my eyes deceiving me or are James and Severus actually apologizing to each other?"

In the middle of the Entrance Hall, the three first-years were engaged in a civil conversation and no fists or wands were drawn. Severus just tipped his head down once muttering something and reciprocated.

"No, it looks like they are apologizing to each other."

"Is this actually happening?" Turais asked as he looked on with wonder. James was nodding at something Lily said. Then, he handed over a tiny box to Severus, who received it carefully.

"Uh, yes?" Alex said confusedly. "Why do you look like something earth-shattering has occurred?"

"Because that is exactly what's happening," Turais said reverently.

***

"What are you reading, Evans?"

"You've asked me that question for the one hundredth time this month, Potter," Lily said with her eyes still glued to her book.

James looked surprised that Lily answered. But that lasted for exactly one second before his expression turned smug, "I knew you cared about me."

"You know it was an expression, right? I didn't actually count the number of times you asked the question."

"If you say so."

"I did say so."

"You haven't answered my question yet. What are you reading?"

"Why do you keep asking me this question?"

"Because you still haven't answered me."

Lily sighed, "It's something called a book, Potter. Heard of it before?"

"Fiction or non-fiction?"
"Those are generally the two main types, yes."

"So are you reading non-fiction?"

"I've answered your first question. Now go bug someone else."

The Black brothers were eavesdropping from a few feet down the Gryffindor table and observing James' delighted expression. "He looks really happy considering he was just forced to apologize to Severus just a few minutes ago," Turais commented quietly.

"Those are the most words Lily has spoken to him since the beginning of term."

"But she isn't exactly... friendly."

Sirius shrugged. "He has lowered his expectations substantially. I bet he would go mad if she just smiled at him."

"I don't understand how this relationship works," Turais said.

"Me neither. James, for some reason, really wants Lily to like him."

"I don't think she's impressed with what she sees though," Turais said as Lily thumped James on the head with her book. James merely rubbed his head and smirked cheekily. Lily stood up in a huff and walked off.

"That didn't go well," Sirius muttered under his breath as James returned with a smile on his face.

"That went extremely well," James declared brightly as he plopped back beside Sirius. "We had a twenty-line dialogue. I knew I'd get through to her."

"Congratulations, mate... what an achievement..." Sirius drawled.

"It is," James said dreamily as he took a sip of pumpkin juice from Sirius' cup. "I knew she cared about me."

"And you don't?" Turais asked.

"Well... just a smidgen," James said he refilled the cup. "In order to be the most popular first-year, one does need to be popular with everyone within his own House. That's all."

"And why do you want to be the most popular student?" Turais asked.

"Would you rather be unpopular?" James questioned.

"No, but -"

"Exactly. People just happened to like me, who am I to deny them of my popularity?" James asked. Then, he smirked at Turais, "Unless... do you feel threatened, by any chance?"

"Not at all," Turais said as he valiantly suppressed an eyeroll.

James hummed meaningfully while Sirius gave Turais a mischievous look and tilted his head at James. With a sing-song voice, Sirius asked, "James, did you say it was twenty or twenty-one lines of dialogue?"
"Well... let's count... first, I asked her what she was reading - so that's line one - then..."

Sirius and Turais exchanged knowing glances and a secretive smile while James recited the entire conversation perfectly.

It was twenty lines.

***

"The pudding was a-maz-ing!" Jonty declared as he placed his hands on his stomach while they traveled down the corridor towards the Slytherin common room.

"I wouldn't know because you finished my portion as well," Alex sniped.

"Aw... don't be such a downer," Jonty said as he swung his arm around Alex.

"Stop making me your armrest whenever you get food-coma," Alex said as he tried to shove the boy off of him. But the boy clung on tightly as Alex gave up.

Turais laughed as he suddenly spotted a floating elbow beside one of the silver armours when they were a turn away from the entrance.

"Oh, I just remembered that I forgot my textbook in the study room," Turais said as the elbow disappeared.

"We can get it tomorrow," Jonty said. "The common room is right up ahead and I want to go to bed."

"You two go ahead," Turais said. "I will just double-back. It will be quick."

"Are you sure you don't want us to come along?" Alex asked.

"I'm fine," Turais said.

Alex looked unhappy but he nodded reluctantly. Once the two boys disappeared around the corner, Turais pretended to turn around and walk back while he seized the air beside him. He felt his hand caressing some fabric and he tugged it off, revealing a shocked James.

"Good evening, Turais," James said brightly as Turais crossed his arms.

"What are you doing here, James?"

"Taking a night stroll?" James offered.

"Under a Cloak of Invisibility and near the Slytherin common room?" Turais frowned.

James puffed up his chest at the mention and said confidently, "That's right! I figured out where your common room is and it's still September. Ha!"

"Do you know the password though?"

"No, but I will find out," James said proudly as he snatched back the Cloak of Invisibility.
"The best part is that the dim-wit greaseball didn't even know he told the location of his house."

"What do you mean -" Something suddenly clicked in Turais' mind as he narrowed his eyes. "- Don't tell me - James... what was in that box you gave him?!"

James cowered at Turais' tone, "It was a tie-clip!"

"And?"

"And nothing!"

"James!" Turais roared.

"Uhm... there might have been additional features -"

"What additional features?" Turais asked dangerously.

"Uh... possibly an audio Monitoring Spell and maybe a Tracking Spell as well. But they stopped working a few turns back. I had to trail after some other Slytherin to reach here..."

Turais closed his eyes and breathed in several times. The idea that James would sincerely apologize to Severus was, of course, too appealing to be true. Why was he so naïve to think that it could happen? And, of course, James would take the opportunity to discover where the Slytherin common room was. What was he expecting?

But Turais couldn't help but be impressed that James had managed to charm an object with those spells. And at the same time, he knew he couldn't condone the boy's behaviour.

He felt torn.

"James, I want you to apologize to Severus," Turais said.

Silence.

"James?" Turais opened his eyes and realized that he was facing a stationary suit of armour. Turais whipped his head around and found himself alone in the hallway intersection.

"JAMES! COME BACK HERE, YOU BRAT! DON'T LET ME GET MY HANDS ON YOU OR YOU'LL GET IT!"

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A fuming Turais returned to the common room when Severus intercepted him and brought him into a hidden alcove.

"I just wanted to say thank you, Turais," the first-year said.

"For what?"

"For... everything you've done... saving my mother's letter from the bullies... getting Potter to apologize to me... allowing Lily to continue being friends with me..."
"Hold on," Turais said. "I can claim a bit of credit for the first two things you mentioned. But I didn't do anything for the third item."

Severus shifted uncomfortably. "Well... you never told me I couldn't be friends with her."

"Why would I do that?"

"Because she is a mud- Muggleborn? And a Gryffindor?"

Turais burst out in laughter. "Oh... I really don't care about those things. My best friend is a half-blood and I am good friends with Jane Stahl, the third-year Gryffindor who happens to be a Muggleborn."

Severus closed his eyes and breathed in deeply once before he started, "Well... Malfoy told exactly everything opposite of that. Do you remember asking me what he called us into a meeting for on the first night of school? He told me he saw my 'potential' after my outburst against Potter in front of the school. He said my mother was hoodwinked by my Muggle father ... and was defiled... and that the only way to avenge her was to make those unrepentant Muggles and the Muggle-loving purebloods pay for their crimes." Turais listened quietly as Severus continued, "He also told me that Potter was the best example of a pretentious, arrogant Light family pureblood that represents the ultimate threat to our society. He also told me to stop being friends with Lily... because she was unworthy of my friendship."

"So what do you think," Turais asked softly. "Do you believe in what he is saying?"

"I... I don't know," Severus whispered. "I know that I love my mother and I hate my father. I used to think I hate Potter. But I never agreed with him about Lily. She's too... she's..." Severus left the sentence unfinished.

"So you agree with Malfoy on the first point -" Severus nodded, " - but you are unsure about the second point -" Severus nodded, " - and you disagree with the third point." Severus shook his head fervently. "And you are confused if you should listen to Malfoy?" Severus nodded.

"Potter... isn't all bad..." Severus said hesitantly as he lifted his tie out to show a gold tie-clip. "He was actually quite nice to me when he apologized... Lily insisted I should wear it as a show of good-will."

Turais felt panic stirring within him as he dreaded the thought of Severus finding out James' true intention of the gift.

"That's a beautiful tie-clip," Turais asked with a controlled tone. "Can I take a closer look?"

Severus took it off and handed it to Turais. Inside his palm, Turais scanned the object for any latent Monitoring or Tracking Charms, but they were all permanently disarmed upon passing the wards on the Slytherin common room for the first time. Relieved, Turais handed the tie-clip back.

"That's really nice of him," Turais lied. "So you don't think James is what Malfoy made him out to be?"

"I know I made some mistakes just as he did..." Severus said. "But he is definitely not evil and I don't think I hate him anymore."

"That's great," Turais said with a strained voice. "So do you know what I think? I think that your father might be a very mean Muggle to you. But not all Muggles are mean. Have you met Lily's parents?" Severus nodded. "Are they nice to you?" Severus thought for a moment before
"But her sister is mean."

"Petunia? Yeah, she is mean," Turais said with a heavy sigh. "So two good Muggles and two bad Muggles. I'd say that means not all Muggles are bad. Do you agree?" Severus nodded. "Well, then you disagree with Malfoy on two items and are unsure about one item."

"So I should not listen to Malfoy then," Severus concluded.

"It would make a lot of sense that you think that," Turais said carefully. "So what will you do?"

"I... I will not listen to Malfoy then," Severus said.

"And does this solve your problem?"

"Yes..." Severus said. "Thank you, Turais."

"Any time," Turais smiled.

Severus was heading towards the door when he turned around and walked back towards him. He looked Turais directly in the eyes for the first time as he fidgeted his arms, as if he was deciding to initiate a hug, handshake, or nothing at all. Ultimately, he did not act and averted his gaze to the floor once more. Then, he mumbled something Turais couldn't catch.

"What did you say, Severus?"

"Can you sign my copy of The Most Important Potions Discovery Across the Ages?"

Turais laughed.

"Of course."

On the surface, he was glad that Severus’ opinion on James had shifted slightly. But internally, he winced at the ticking time bomb that was most likely to come back and haunt him in the future.

Chapter End Notes

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 43: The Lone Wolf, is on schedule to be released in two weeks. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-05-14
Hey everybody,

I have deliberately slowed down the plot progression in the last few chapters to focus more on exploring the dynamics between Turais and the new first-years. I think it is important to establish these early on so you meet my version of their characters and how their relationship deviate (or not) from the original timeline. But don't worry, I haven't forgotten about the plot!

- ravenclawblues 2020-05-29

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**CHAPTER 43**

**THE LONE WOLF**

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*October 2, 1971 (Saturday)*

After arriving at Slughorn's office, Slughorn announced that they were accessing the Floo to reach the Ministry. On the other end of the Floo network, Turais appeared in the Floo concourse. Beside the Floo gate where Turais appeared was the elderly Mr Flack with several Ministry guards, which Turais suspected was present because of him. The area was relatively quiet today as it was not a workday, however, there were still plenty of people striding to and fro purposefully as they went to their destinations. Above him, clusters of purple memos soared through the air.

"There are currently 77 seats in the Wizengamot, 61 of which are family seats that are passed down the generations and represented by the Lords of their family while 4 of them are tied to the offices of Minister of Magic, Under-Secretary, Department Head of Magical Law Enforcement, and Head of Hogwarts. The remaining 12 seats are seats that were once held by families that no longer have representation due to the lack of a male extant line. As one of the attempts to democratize the government in the late 19th century, the Wizengamot decided to transition these seats into openly elected seats rather than eliminating them outright. Therefore, during every Ministerial election, those 12 seats would be up for election by the populace and allow for greater representation.

"I hope you both have finished reading the assigned text as you will be required to understand all the procedural rules by heart," Mr Flack' said. "This is particularly important for the two of you as you will one day take up the mantle of your respective Lords and engage directly with Wizengamot affairs.

"The British Youth Representative is a position intended to provide a voice for under-aged wizards and witches in the chamber. It is your responsibility to reach out to your peers, collect their
opinions and concerns, and raise those concerns in the chamber. However, as you are not full members of the Wizengamot, neither of you have the power to vote, the power to introduce legislation and amendments, nor the power to sit on committees or courts. However, you do have the right to speak on the floor during debates.

"Do not overlook this privilege," Mr Flack gazed at the both of them sternly. "If used properly, you can sway the minds of thousands and improve our society. Do not abuse this privilege. If used improperly, you can cause drastic changes to the livelihoods of many.

"So you have successfully completed your orientation. And in just a few minutes, you will be attending your first session," Mr Flack announced as they started to make their way to the lifts. "However, this is not a regular Wizengamot debate session that occurs. It is the first Bill Appropriations Committee meeting of this year's session. What does that mean and why is it important, Mr Black?"

"The Wizengamot is currently on recess until the week after Halloween. This means that no legislation is proposed, voted, or passed during this time. However, the Bill Appropriation Committee traditionally begins approximately one month prior to the opening of the Wizengamot due to its role to prepare and present Bills for the Wizengamot to consider once it reconvenes. This Committee's functions also include creating subcommittees to further investigate and shape Bills, and modifying standing procedural rules. Due to its ability to control the legislative calendar and what Bills get considered, it is widely recognized as the gate-keeper for the Wizengamot and the second-most influential body behind the Wizengamot itself. What is important this year is that there is an election for the Chair. This position only comes up for election every three years, therefore, the eventual winner will have great influence in shaping the politics of the Wizengamot for years to come.

"The outgoing Chair is Lord Fawley while the Deputy Chair is Lord Travers," Turais continued. "The main task for the first meeting of the Bill Appropriations Committee meeting is to announce the nomination of all interested members of Wizengamot show their intent to run for the position as well as securing nominations from their peers.

"Very good, Mr Black," Mr Flack said as they slowly approached the smaller chamber that was numbered three. "What bills the Wizengamot gets to consider and vote on very much depends on this committee's approval. And in this polarized environment, the chair often casts the tie-breaking vote."

When they reached the end of the hall, Mr Flack halted them outside the door as he whispered, "The meeting has already started. Please keep silent."

Mr Flack tapped his wand on the door handle. The door swung open and they entered into the large, spacious chamber. Turais realized they were directly beneath the Chief Warlock's seat, which was squarely in the centre of the chamber. However, in the case of the Bill Appropriations Committee meeting, Lord Hector Fawley currently occupies the seat.

The black, marble column stood majestically around the chamber with the gentle flickering flames from the torches casting imposing shadows across the chamber floors. The far side of the chamber was empty, but on the near side, there were elegant, crimson seats lined on the three tiers of the balcony where almost every Lord and member who occupying their rightful seats. Above their heads were two magnificent, crystal chandeliers that hung from the arched ceiling above, casting a warm glow over the chamber.

Around him, Parliamentarian clerks were busily sorting various documents as paper flew around and sorted themselves into different folders. A Self-Write quill was writing with eye-
blurring movement across a roll of seemingly never-ending parchment and recording every single word uttered in the chamber.

To his left were the Dark and Grey families. Malfoy and his allies occupied the farthest half of the left wing while Arcturus occupied the section closer to the middle. Both Lords were seated in the front row surrounded by their closest allies and advisers. To his right was the Light families. Lord Fawley sat in the centre of the front row alongside a young boy who looked jarring out of place among a sea of aging and greying men. It was the new Lord Arkenstone - Noel Arkenstone. Turais looked as the boy sat in disinterest. Turais turned to find Fleamont sitting at the fringes of the right wing and directly next to the Chief Warlock chair. Fleamont caught his gaze and gave him a playful wink.

"... nomination period ends today," Lord Fawley's voice announced loud and clear. "To reiterate the rules, only members of Wizengamot occupying family seats nominate their peers for the position of Chair and Deputy Chair. However, members of Wizengamot occupying both family seats and elected, open seats are allowed to run for the positions. The Minister of Magic, Under-Secretary, Department Head of Magical Law Enforcement, and Head of Hogwarts are not allowed to partake in this committee's election. Finally, each nominee must secure the nomination of two of their peers and each member may only nominate one member in the election. The nominated member must accept the nomination for it to be valid. The member who gains the most votes, or a plurality, will win this election. Yes, Lord Shacklebolt."

The Lord stood up from the right side of the chamber and said, "I nominate you, Lord Hector Fawley, as the Chair."

Another Lord beside him stood up and said loudly, "I second the nomination."

The entire right section cheered rancorously as the left of the chamber remained extremely quiet. Arcturus, who was sitting in the front row on the left, was listening intently as the Lord beside him muttered into his ears.

"Thank you, thank you," Lord Fawley said happily as the cheering faded. "I will gladly accept the nomination. Any others?"

After Arcturus nodded, the man immediately stood up and said, "I nominate Lord Montague as the Chair this session." Another Lord from the same slice of the chamber stood up and seconded the nomination as well.

Abraxas Malfoy fielded his own candidate - himself - in a clear split with the Black alliance. A fourth nominee came in the form of Tiberius McLaggen after two members nominated him as well.

"Shall I remind all Lords and members that Honourable Junior Under-Secretary McLaggen is only representing Under-Secretary Quagmore's office. He is not allowed to partake in this election," Lord Fawley said.

"Lord Fawley," McLaggen said with a smile as he pulled out a letter and handed it over to the Chair, "I am officially the proxy of my uncle's family seat of McLaggen. Therefore, I have secured the rights to be nominated."

Lord Fawley inspected the parchment and handed it off to one of the Parliamentarian clerks. One of the ladies performed some Authentication Spell on the parchment and nodded at the older man. "The parliamentarians confirmed that the proxy order by the current Lord McLaggen is valid. Therefore, Mr McLaggen has gained full representation in the Wizengamot chamber as the proxy
"Thank you," McLaggen said with a smile.

"Are there any more nominations - yes, Lord Potter."

Fleamont, stood up and gestured at a relatively young man, possibly in his early thirties, beside him. The man had his nose buried in his notes. He adjusted his spectacles and peered down at the parchment in his hands as a Self-Write Quill moved across the page.

"I believe the chamber should recognize its shortcomings. Since we had the first elected member of Wizengamot in 1805, we have never nominated a duly elected representative of the public to this powerful position. Given the political and social turmoil, I believe this is the perfect time to support one of our fellow twelve members who actually represent the less privileged of our society and provide them with a more influential role in our stagnate politics. Therefore, it is my privilege to nominate the Honourable gentleman Mr Harold Minchum representing the open seat of West Country," Fleamont said.

"What?" At the call of his name, Minchum stood up hastily as the scrolls on his lap fell onto the floor. Flustered, the man gathered all the scrolls and placed them onto his seat before he started. "What, yes?"

"I just said I will nominate you, Mr Minchum," Fleamont repeated. The man looked shocked. "I think you will be an excellent choice."

'Harold Minchum? The Harold Minchum?' Turais thought. Despite the man's relatively young age and unpolished fashion, Turais discovered he was looking at the future Minister for Magic and successor of Eugenia Jenkins.

"Is there anyone who wishes to second the nomination?" Lord Fawley asked as he eyed around the chamber. "Anyone?" Still, there were no hands. "Unfortunately, it seems -"

"I second his nomination," McLaggen said as he stood up. Minchum's jaw dropped as the entire chamber was equally shocked by the turn of events. Even Lord Fawley couldn't hide his surprise with a mystified look.

"Tiber- I mean - Mr McLaggen," Lord Fawley hissed, but his voice was still magically amplified around the chamber, "- you are nominated to become Chair. Why are you nominating another -"

"Is this disallowed under the standing procedures?" McLaggen asked.

"Well - no -"

"Then I shall nominate him," McLaggen said. "The more, the merrier. Wouldn't you agree, Lord Fawley?"

"I - well..." Lord Fawley cleared his throat as he started again. "Do you accept the nomination, Mr Minchum?"

"Of course!" Minchum said quickly.

"Well then... If there are no more nominations, I will motion for the closing of the nomination period."
The entire chamber murmured their consent.

"Well then, we have finalized our five candidates: Lord Fawley - myself - Lord Malfoy, Honourable Mr McLaggen, Honourable Mr Minchum, and Lord Montague. As I am partaking in this election, I shall formally recuse myself from the election process and allow my Deputy Chair, Lord Travers, to assume my duties for the duration of the election. Lord Travers, please."

Lord Fawley stepped down from the chair as Lord Travers ascended.

"I will set the date of the election to be on October 11th," Lord Travers announced. "If there are no further business, this meeting is adjourned."

The entire chamber muttered their consent as they rose from their chairs and started to leave.

Mr Flack, Turais, and Lucius Malfoy also exited the Visitors' Gallery as they re-emerged in the slowly-crowding hallways.

"This election seems to be more highly contested compared to the previous years'," Mr Flack commented. "I'm sure you -"

"Doctoring the minds of our youth, aren't you, Mr Flack?" Arcturus' voice sounded. The trio turned around to see Turais' grandfather walking down the red-carpeted hallway towards them.

"Lord Black," Mr Flack said as he tipped his head slightly in acknowledgment of the Lord, "Your words suggest their minds are diseased, which I'm sure was not your intentions."

"I did not suggest that," Arcturus said sternly. "You have faulty comprehension."

"Perhaps, but I would argue that your speeches are incomprehensible."

"I'm sure you do," Arcturus' voice dripped with sarcasm, which Mr Flack ignored.

"As you can see, Lord Black, I am currently leading a tour for your grandson and Mr Malfoy to observe the Bill Appropriations Committee meeting."

"And I came here to see my grandson."

"Lord Black," Malfoy muttered.

"Heir Malfoy," Arcturus responded coolly.

"I will continue on the tour with Mr Malfoy then -"

"Arcturus," a man Turais immediately recognized as Abraxas Malfoy said as he strode up towards them. He ignored Turais and glanced towards the elderly gentleman, "Mr Flack, I will take over this little orientation of yours. I'm sure the caucus meeting will be much more exciting than... the records room?"

Mr Flack gave off an amused chuckle. "Considering that you are such an infrequent visitor, I would like to extend an invitation to you both to join us. I'm sure it will be quite the novel experience."

Abraxas scoffed, "Your power does not extend beyond the chamber. Your job is finished, so leave us."

Mr Flack bowed respectfully at the two Lords, "As you wish, Lord Malfoy. Good day to you
Once the man walked off into the distance, Abraxas turned to face Arcturus.

"I would like to talk to you about the nomination from the Dark families."

"I have nominated my candidate, Abraxas," Arcturus said curtly. "You nominated yours."

"You are splintering our votes. If we ally together on this vote, we will have your 23 votes and my 14 votes. This is 37 out of 73 available votes, which is a clear majority. If we don't ally together, Fawley would win with the back of the Light families with his 24 votes."

"I'm not worried by the slightest," Arcturus said. "Our time as allies have passed. When there is another time when our goals align once again, we shall talk again."

"Indeed," Abraxas gritted out. "How I wonder what you would sound like right now if your precious Heir succumbed to the poison."

"When did you start dabbling with the mysticism of hypotheticals, Abraxas?" Arcturus said.

"A dose of reality then," Abraxas glanced down at Turais with a sneer, acknowledging his presence for the first time. "A Gryffindor Heir would make you so much prouder, Arcturus. Much better than this kitten here posing as a snake."

"Which shows the intelligence of certain snakes might be overstated," Turais responded with a smile as the younger Malfoy's grip on his cane tightened.

"You -!" Abraxas shushed his son before he could blurted out any enraged syllables.

"What do I always tell you, Lucius? We should always show our respect for our opponents, no matter how worthy or unworthy they are."

"Yes, father," Malfoy smirked as they turned around and left.

"Are you no longer cooperating with Malfoy?" Turais asked as they observed the Malfoys walking away.

"No," Arcturus said. "But he must now cooperate with us. The composition of the Wizengamot majority has changed and his alliance is not part of it. That's why he is fielding himself as the candidate. He knows he cannot lose this election, or else, his power will fall into oblivion."

"And how are we in the majority without their votes?" Turais asked in confusion. "The Light alliance still has the other half of all votes."

"You still have much to learn about politics, Turais. Not everything is what it seems. You will understand everything in due time. Furthermore, there are many political enemies who would like to cause harm to our family and diminish our political power. You must stay vigilant while you are travelling between the Ministry and Hogwarts, seeing that you are considerably less risk-averse than I prefer. Make sure you have the amulet that your father gave you on all times. Do you have it on right now?"

"Yes, grandfather," Turais said as he pulled out the amulet from under his robe.

"Commissioned by one of our most famous ancestors, Perseus I, this amulet is one-of-a-kind all."
that will provide you from most curses and certain potions, such as Amortentia and Veritaserum," Arcturus explained. "As with all Black family heirlooms, once you place this on your body, no one can remove this from you by force or by theft. The amulet provides protection against potions that affect the mind by enhancing your mental barrier. It means that you are also better-protected from Legilimency attacks. This will be most useful to protect you during your travel in between the Wizengamot and Hogwarts, when you are most vulnerable."

Turais nodded as he placed the amulet around his neck and placed it beneath his robes.

"Thank you, grandfather. I have another request. I would like your help on drafting a bill that will eventually provide subsidy to the Wolfsbane Potion once it's approved -"

"Turais, stop being so fixated on your passion project," Arcturus said. "No one wants to re-open the conversation on werewolf legislation, let alone spend gold to support a program that benefits werewolves only. Focus on something else."

"But grandfather, this is a social justice issue. The werewolves are being so unfairly treated. They are desperately in need of our aid. We should not continue to alienate them and treat them as second-class citizens!"

Arcturus looked behind him and dragged Turais into a nearby deserted hallway, "I agree that they are being treated unfairly. But the world isn't fair. If you were not born magical, you would be living in the Muggle world. If you were born a girl and not a boy, you would not stand to inherit anything. If you or Malfoy were not the Heirs of powerful pureblood families, you would not be in this chamber while you are still in school. You are Heir Presumptive Black, and with it comes a lot of privileges and responsibilities. You must conduct yourself befitting that of your station and not be a 'social justice' fighter," Arcturus said.

"But grandfather, I should be using my privileges to address the injustice in society!"

"That's not your role," Arcturus responded. "You should be advocating for a return to a more structured society where social roles are adhered to and not overstepped. You should be fighting against the Light families' push for more and more concession from the Dark families to give up their identity and their heritage in their blind crusade for the elusive and unattainable utopia of equality. You should be -"

"But that's not who I am!"

"No, it's clearly not. But that's what you ought to be," Arcturus said sternly. "You cannot be so reckless in the Wizengamot as you have been in Hogwarts. Every word you say here has ramifications far beyond your imagination."

"But that is precisely why we should use this valuable platform to push for the betterment of society," Turais argued. "Imagine all the good we could do for the world if we just said something."

"Good? What good? Good for who?" Arcturus retorted. "You expend political capital for everything you do here, Turais. And unless you gain back an equal or more amount of capital for your actions, you are not doing any good for your family. Advocating for werewolves will only diminish your standing."

"But you were never against me for researching into the Wolfsbane Potion."

"There is a great difference between your research and your advocacy. Your research into the
Wolfsbane Potion gives you influence, fame, and power. However, your advocacy will bring you what exactly? Appreciation? Gratitude? Goodwill? Or a friendly pat on the shoulder? What do those things do for you, or for the family?"

"We can't put a value on all things!" Turais gasped.

"Yes, we can. And we must," Arcturus replied simply. "Now, you shall never speak of your fascination of werewolves in front of me again. Come now, you must meet the rest of our allies."

Arcturus led down the busy hallway to the other end. However, they were halted in their journey by Fleamont.

"Hello, Turais. It is always exciting to see new members joining our midst," Fleamont said kindly.

"It is nice to see you too, Fleamont," Turais said with a genuine, pleased smile. Fleamont responded in kind before he turned his attention to Arcturus.

"Arcturus," Fleamont said. "Judging by the results of today, I can recognize that you are planning something."

"How perceptive," Arcturus drawled.

"Now, now. Don't be short with me, Arcturus. I merely here to voice my concern that you will be caught in another trap before you can trigger one of your own."

"I'm touched by your concern, Fleamont. But I dare say I know Abraxas better than you do."

"Indeed," Fleamont said, "Regardless, I'm here to say that I'm glad to see you moving away from Abraxas. But I merely worry that his obstruction would only worsen from this point forth."

"I am aware of all the obstructive tools at Malfoy's disposal. I can wait him out," Arcturus said. "In fact, you are creating an obstruction of your own. Why did you nominate Harold Minchum?"

"You heard my speech, Arcturus. I just believe it is long due for an elected representative to take on a larger role in shaping legislation that affect their lives in so many ways. I just never expected it to be seconded, and by McLaggen, no less."

"Is this your contribution to social justice? " Arcturus said coolly as he turned his gaze onto Turais. Turais held his gaze and tried not to flinch or cower.

"Why yes it is! You surprise me, Arcturus. We all should be using our privileges to address the injustice in society," Fleamont said cheerfully. "You should try that sometime. Not everything is about personal gains."

Arcturus narrowed his eyes at Turais momentarily before saying, "I'm afraid this delightful conversation must be cut short, Fleamont."

"To meet with your caucus, I suppose?"

"Indeed," Arcturus said. "If you can excuse us."

With a powerful grip, Arcturus forcefully walked Turais for the rest of the journey through a windy lift ride. Once they reached the level, there was a well-dressed man who greeted them with
a deep bow.

Arcturus was already shrugging off his outer cloak as the man quickly helped with the task. "Turais, give Roberts your cloak."

Turais nodded and took it off quickly.

Eyeing the framed, gold placard on the wall that said 'Erichthonios Club', they walked through the doorway that led to a vestibule flanked with polished columns, framed art pieces, and busts on marbled pedestals for statues. Then, they entered a lavishly decorated room where Turais felt he had ventured further back in time. He observed the small dining tables surrounded by armchairs occupied by men with round bellies and rosy noses. Each table had a crystal decanter with different spirits and liquor sat alongside plates of bite-sized food. It looked exactly one of the exclusive gentlemen's club that Turais imagined were popular in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps that was exactly what this place was. Another exclusive club.

'Another Group of Seven,' Turais supplied. 'But friendly.'

Garnering a few silent nods - of approval or mere acknowledgement, Turais didn't know - they ventured to the fall end of the hall through yet another set of doors. Once Turais entered the room, he immediately recognized several men from previous balls clustered in the middle of the floor chatting amiably with flutes of champagne in their hands.

"Ah, Arcturus," Lord Sewlyn greeted them when Turais suddenly realized they were in the centre of attention. "I see that you have finally retrieved your grandson from Mr Flack."

"It seems you were suggesting that old stooge dare obstruct a Lord from interacting with his own family - Heir, no less," Lord Montague said gruffly.

"Does his behaviour within the chamber not serve as whispers of his action outside of it?"

"You pay too much attention to whispers than spoken words, but I suppose there is merit in that statement."

"But enough about that man," Lord Sewlyn turned to smile at Turais directly. "You are the wonderful subject of today's meeting, Turais. Don't you agree?"

"I am very good at standing and being looked at," Turais said with good-nature. It was then that he noted another middle-aged man, similar to Orion's age but markedly younger than the rest of the Lords, chuckling bemusedly.

"I thought I felt an unwelcomed presence," Jonty's father said as he walked up, mouth twitching, "Is young Mr Turais trying to draw the attention from me?"

There was a familiar aura of energy and excitement that exuded from his proper composure just like his son, quite contrary to the dull atmosphere around him.

"Lord Steward, there is enough attention for both of us," said Turais.

"Quite so," the man's eyes twinkled. "Arcturus, you must let me lead the introductions. I have no desire for Turais' high spirits to be eroded by banal repetition of facts."

"A rendition of your biased anecdotes, you mean," Arcturus replied dryly.
"Only the most favourable opinion for those in discussion, I assure you," Lord Steward said. "Come now, Turais."

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It was almost a full twelve hours by the time Turais returned to the dormitory after leaving it that morning.

"So... how was today?" Jonty asked as Turais collapsed onto his four-poster bed bonelessly. Alex and Jonty climbed onto his bed and crossed their legs in anticipation. "Did you meet my father? Did you meet Alex's cousin?"

"Today was interesting, but the debate was mostly dull," Turais said as he placed his pillow against the headboard and sat up with a groan. "And I did not have the chance to speak with Lord Fawley. But I did speak with your father during the caucus meeting. He is lively as always."

"So did he say anything during the debate?" Jonty asked.

"He submitted several queries and points of order," Turais replied as a conceited Jonty slapped him on the arm.

"Look at you, using big words such as 'query' and 'points of order'," Jonty grinned. "Here's a Lord Black in the making."

Jonty punched him on the arm excitedly again. Turais hissed as he rubbed the spot gingerly. "Stop hitting me. This is going to bruise."

"I can't," Jonty grinned. "I best hit you all I can before you actually start to Lord me around."

Turais rolled his eyes. "You speak as though you aren't becoming a Lord in the near future."

"That's true, but you're Lord Black. You're an advanced-level, top-tier Lord, unlike us lowly Lords," Jonty said. "Actually, Alex will be a Lord as well! The three of us will be there together forever!"

"What did I do to deserve this terrible fate?" Turais mocked horror as Jonty hit Turais again. "Hey, that one might have actually bruised me."

"Are you sure I will be made Lord?" Alex asked quietly.

"Of course you are, silly," Jonty said. "The current Lord Fawley is a bachelor and without child. The seat will eventually be passed onto your father and then to you. It's your birthright and no one can steal that from you."

Alex nodded.

"What else is there?" Jonty asked.

"Nothing much... unless you are interested in the Goblin banking system or the standardization of cauldron thickness or souring relationships with the French..." Turais said as both Jonty and Alex wrinkled their noses in disgust, "...Wait, actually there is something interesting, I have been granted permission to leave Hogwarts to attend Wizengamot sessions."
"What?!" Jonty and Alex shouted.

"That is wicked," Jonty gasped. "You get to skip classes and also leave Hogwarts whenever? I should've applied if I knew about this. No wonder everyone kept this position a secret..."

"Well... not at any time," Turais said. "I only have permission to go to the Ministry if there is a session. I also have to check-in at the Ministry within five minutes of my departure from Slughorn's Floo and remain there the entire time. I also cannot skip classes to attend them. So it's less exciting than you are making it sound."

"But still..." Jonty squealed. "I'll pay you to bring back snacks and goodies from the Ministry. I am already having an intense craving for Cockroach Clusters since I ran out of them last week. I was about to buy them off Summerbee but she upped the price in the face of my desperation, that bin-

"Jonty," Turais warned, "Language."

"Sorry," Jonty said quickly as they fell silent for a moment.

"How about Homework Club?" Alex asked. "We are supposed to start next week but I don't think you will have time to run it. It is physically impossible for you unless you can turn back time."

Turais' jovial spirits sank at the mention of a Time-Turner which he did not have.

"Are you two able to run it without me?" Turais asked.

"Of course!" Alex said as Jonty looked at Alex in shock. "Jonty and I will manage."

Suddenly, Jonty perked up and slapped Alex's arm. "Summerbee. Cockroach Clusters. YOU!"

"Are you still harping on about your sweets?" Alex moaned. "Just buy them from her and call it a day."

"Nonono," Jonty grinned. "Summerbee has her eyes on you. We must take advantage of that!"

Alex flushed red. "W...what do you mean she has her eyes on me?"

"Don't be thick, Alex," Jonty said. "She clearly fancies you. So, can you just tell her in passing that you like Cockroach Clusters?"

"But I don't like them," Alex said, confused, as Jonty moaned in frustration.

"I know that, Alex. But I like them," Jonty said.

"So?"

"Are you really that thick?! She fancies you! If you mention that you like Cockroach Clusters, she will offer them to you for free. Then, you can give them to me!" Jonty shouted as realization dawned on Alex's face.

"Oh. Well then, I'm going to offer them at a Galleon each if I get them," Alex said.

"What?" Now, Jonty was the one that looked confused.
"I will give you the Cockroach Clusters for a Galleon each," Alex said with a smirk. "I really should take advantage of your intense craving instead."

Jonty shoved at Alex while the other boy laughed.

"Actually, you know what?!" Jonty exclaimed. "Turais, did you see the notice board?"

Turais shook his head as Jonty jumped up and down.

"It's Hogsmeade weekend a month from now! I will get a sack full of sweets in Hogsmeade then! Ha!"

"But can you last a month though?" Alex questioned as Jonty fell onto the bed in a groan.

"That's so true... I want them now."

Turais grinned.

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October 3, 1971 (Sunday)

"Are you reading the papers again?" James asked Lily as Turais walked over to the Gryffindor table.

"Well..." Lily set The Daily Prophet down beside her glass of juice and folded it neatly. She then pointed at the date, "You see this, Potter? It's the date. It is different every day. And as it happens, so is the news." Her gaze flitted up to the incoming Slytherin and said brightly, "Good morning, Turais!"

"Good morning, Lily," Turais smiled as he sat down on the bench across from them. "Would you excuse us for a moment? I have something urgent I would like to talk to them in private."

"Of course," Lily said quickly. "I am just about finished anyway. I need to meet up with Severus," She shot James a glare as if warning him to object. "Goodbye, Sirius, Turais."

"Bye, Evans!" James shouted out as Lily walked off, but the girl didn't respond. James looked crestfallen as he grumbled, "She never says goodbye to me..."

At the same time, Turais noticed that young Peter Pettigrew was sitting just a couple feet away from them and staring at his plate strangely. Ignoring him for now, Turais returned his gaze back on James, "I'm still not finished being mad at you, young man. You better not try anything on Severus if you don't want me to snitch on you to Lily about the tie-clip incident."

James froze mid-slurp before he choked on his drink. He wiped his mouth hastily as Sirius asked curiously, "What tie-clip? And what does it have to do with Severus?"

"Nothing!" James said immediately.

"I have done you a favour by not revealing your foul intentions to both Severus and Lily. So do I get a promise or not?" Turais asked.
James hesitated. "Unless he does something to me first -"

Turais motioned to stand. "I will chase after Lily right now -"

"Fine, already!" James shouted as he reached over the table and grabbed onto Turais' forearm. "I promise!"

Satisfied, Turais sat back down.

"Wait a minute... you, Lily, Severus, tie-clip..." Sirius' eyes widened. "Does this have anything to do with you finding out -" Sirius pressed down his voice, "- about you finding out the Slytherin common room location?"

"Maybe?" James squeaked.

"Honestly, James," Sirius huffed. "You could have just asked me."

"You knew where the Slytherin common room is and you never told me?!" James asked incredulously.

"You never asked me," Sirius said as he popped a bite into his mouth.

"Well, because I didn't know you knew!" James said hotly as he groaned into his hands. "Look what you made me do! And I had to sodding apologize to the git -"

"You pretended to apologize," Turais pointed out.

"Same thing to him," James said dismissively.

"I will argue with you later," Turais said firmly. "But I have something more urgent to ask. What is happening between you two and Remus?"

Feeling a constant stare, Turais turned to look down the table and saw Peter's beady eyes hastily turning back to his breakfast.

"Don't mind Pete," James said. "He might seem like a creep but he’s just shy and means no harm."

"Okay, but back to you and Remus, what happened exactly?"

Sirius and James shared a secretive look as they engaged in a wordless conversation that Turais didn't understand... well, he knew that they were hiding something... that's clear. But what information were they hiding exactly, Turais needed to find out.

"Finished talking telepathically and ready to share?" Turais asked impatiently.

"Well... well -" Sirius' eyes darted between the warning glares of James and Turais before he ultimately blurted out, "- Remus has not been sleeping in his bed since at least last week."

James groaned, "Sirius! Why can't you lie to your brother for once. Just once!"

"You can trust him, James," Sirius said encouragingly. "Turais keeps all my secrets!"

"I swear on my magic that -"

"I know, I know..." James waved Turais' oath down. "I just don't want to talk behind his back
to other people outside our house... he's our friend."

"But Turais is the most brilliant person on this planet," Sirius argued. "He can definitely help us, James!"

Turais felt something warm and tingly inside his heart when he heard the words from his brother's mouth.

"Is he more brilliant than Dumbledore?" James asked skeptically.

Sirius hesitated for a brief moment before steeling his resolve and nodded affirmatively. Turais thought his heart was about to burst in happiness.

"Okay, fine!" James said. He then turned to Turais and looked questioningly, "Uh, Turais... why are you looking at Sirius like that?"

Turais realized he must have looked dopey, so he quickly cleared his throat and adjusted his posture. "No...Nothing! I was just gathering wool because you were taking so long."

"Yeah... whatever," James rolled his eyes. He nudged Sirius and said, "Do you want to tell your brother what happened?"

Sirius nodded as he delved into his story.

"So... I woke up in the middle of the night to use the loo one night last week... and I realized that Remus' bed was empty. I was worried that he sneaked out of the common room again but it turns out that he was sleeping on the couches of the common room. Before dawn broke, Remus returned to his bed and pretended to wake up with the rest of us.

"So, James and I thought he suffered from sleepwalking, so we read up on the counter-spell. The next night, we pretended to fall asleep and saw Remus sneak out of bed to sleep in the common room again. James cast the spell on him and nothing happened," Sirius continued. "We think Remus is deliberately sleeping on the couches at night."

"Also," James continued, "Remus has not been sitting with us in class or talking to us since the first weekend. I mean... there must be something off with his mind to willing partner up with greaseball!"

"Uh..." Sirius said. "He's pretty good at Potions, James. I don't blame Remus -" James shot a warning glare at Sirius and he fell silent.

"I don't know why he is avoiding us..." James said.

"Do you think we should tell Professor McGonagall?" Sirius asked.

"NO!" James exclaimed. "We just talked about this. No getting Remus into trouble!"

"Not wanting to get someone into trouble is not a good reason for not telling the Professor about problems," Turais warned. "We are not telling her this time because we are confident that we have a good handle on the situation."

"Well... I am always confident," James said proudly. Turais sighed.

"Okay... let me think..." Turais said, "Remus might be a bit overwhelmed by the attention coming from the two of you right now. Why don't you keep an eye on him but give him some
space. Let him open up to you when he feels more comfortable. Meanwhile, I will try to talk to him to see if there is something off."

"Why would he feel uncomfortable around us?" James asked.

"Well... not everyone is outgoing like you, James," Turais said cautiously. "Some people take more time to warm up to others and your shining personality might be scaring him a little."

James scoffed. "That makes absolutely no sense."

"Why don't you let me try and approach him first?" Turais asked. "I think he trusts me."

"Fine, we can try your way," James said.

"I told you Turais can help," Sirius said proudly. James looked as if he clearly did not share the same amount of confidence as his friend.

***

October 4, 1971 (Monday)

After his last class, Turais decided to wait at the base of the staircase leading to the Hospital Wing to offer some support to Remus.

Soon after, a pale and sickly Remus walked slowly towards his position.

"Remus," Turais said as the boy froze like a startled prey.

"Remus, please stop avoiding us," Turais said as he slowly inched towards the boy. "We want to help you with whatever is bothering you."

"W...what do you want from me?" Remus whispered. He looked as though he was on the verge of tears. "I have already steered clear from all of you. WHY WON'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?!"

"Remus," Turais said exasperatedly. He couldn't tell Remus he knew he was a werewolf because that would just exacerbate the situation. "You don't need to avoid us. In fact, I want you to bother us about your... troubles."

"A...about m...my troub...bles?" Remus asked shakily, his eyes shifting nervously sideways.

"Yes, anything," Turais said. "We are all worried sick. If there is anything that is bothering you, no matter how big or small -"

"There's... there's n...nothing," Remus said as he turned to walk up the stairs, then he caught his foot on a step and sprawled. Turais immediately ran up to help him up, but Remus pulled away as soon as Turais touched him as if Turais' hands scalded him. "I'm okay, you s...should leave."

"Remus..." Turais said as Remus scrambled onto his feet and ran the remainder of the way to the Hospital Wing.
"Turais, Remus is missing again," Sirius said after he dragged Turais out of the Great Hall during dinner.

"Don't worry about it," Turais lied. "I overheard Professor McGonagall that his mother fell ill."

"Oh no!" Sirius exclaimed in mortification. "Is she alright? She's not badly injured or anything, right?"

"I'm sure she is fine," Turais said placatingly.

"No wonder Remus looked all pale and sickly..." Sirius' eyes widened in realization. "... he must be so worried..."

"I think you definitely not ask him about this when he comes back," Turais said. "It's going to be a touchy subject for him."

"Of course, of course... James and I will also find some way to cheer him up." Turais could see the boy's mind was already running wild with ideas.

"I don't think that's a good idea..." Turais blanched.

"Okay... no cheering Remus up then," Sirius pouted.

***

October 5, 1971 (Tuesday)

Turais was currently engaged in an intense, and frustrating, hand-signaling conversation with Sirius across the Great Hall. He could see that James looked on bemusedly.

"Why don't you walk over there and talk to him directly instead of conducting this undignified flaying of limbs?" Jonty asked as he munched noisily on the chicken drumsticks.

"Why don't you stop this undignified table etiquette of eating and talking at the same time?" Turais retorted.

"Hey, I am a growing boy and I need all the food in order to grow taller and bigger," Jonty said as he patted on his stomach, clearly offended. But then he continued to chomp on the lasagna in front of him. "Oh... here he comes, finally."

Sirius clearly gave up and decided to walk over to Turais and talk face-to-face instead. His eyes darted up and down the table cautiously, but when he realized that no one was about to jump out and leer at him, he quickly walked up to Turais.

"Hey Turais, do you happen to know anything about healing wounds?" Sirius whispered. "I noticed that Remus has a gash on his back."
'So Remus was back on speaking terms with Sirius and James then,' Turais thought happily.

"Oh... was that why you were doing the broken arm motion?" Jonty snorted beside him unhelpfully.

"I have a more potent Dittany with a slightly different composition that he might find useful."

Sirius nodded quickly. "Thank you, Turais. Can I meet you at the Great Hall during dinner?"

"I'll just give it to you in a half-hour," Turais said. "Meet you at the portrait hole?"

Sirius nodded before he headed back to the Gryffindor table.

"So... when were you planning to tell us that you know where the Gryffindor common room is located?" Jonty said sarcastically.

"I don't know what you mean?" Turais said. "There's a tower that is literally called 'Gryffindor Tower'."

"Haha, very funny, Turais." Jonty dropped a drumstick and wiped his hand on a napkin before he poked a finger at Turais' chest. "Speak."

"Brothers' Code," Turais cited as he motioned the sealing of his lips.

"Urgh," Jonty said as he turned back to his food. Then he suddenly shivered violently, "I think I'm allergic to something... that's right, your disgustingly soppy behaviours."

***

Turais rummaged his trunk and found the vial that was labelled Dittany Decoction. He popped out the cork and took a whiff of powdered silver, dittany, ginger, and aconite. Confirming that it was the brew specifically for werewolf wounds that Turais requested from Damocles in preparation for Remus, Turais quickly made his way to the Gryffindor common room.

But before he reached the landing, he saw Sirius and James staying around the corner.

"The Fat Lady is throwing a bit of a tantrum," Sirius said. "We best not provoke her with the sight of you."

Turais nodded and he pulled out the vial. He handed it to Sirius and said, "Tell Remus to use this sparingly - at most twice a day - and only externally. Once he applies it to his wounds, he should start to feel a soothing sensation within seconds. Understood?"

Sirius nodded as he took the vial carefully and tugged it safely into his robes.

"What's that you have there?" James asked, peeking curiously.

"Just some Dittany for Remus," Turais said.

"Honestly, I think he needs something more than that," James quipped. "That boy looked ghastly pale, as though he was mauled by some foul creature..." Suddenly, his mouth dropped as his eyes sparkled. He slapped Sirius on the arm and said animatedly, "...You don't reckon he snuck
into the Forbidden Forest by himself last night... and last month as well, the sly bastard. The old folks were right when they said be wary of the quiet ones..."

Sirius blinked at James owlishly as Turais responded warily, "I hardly think that's the case, James. Remember that you can be expelled for entering the forest without supervision. Besides, there are a lot of dangerous creatures in the forest. I'm sure Remus has more sense than that to venture into it at all."

James hummed in consideration. "No matter. I will coax the secret out of him one day or another. I happen to be quite persuasive."

Turais grimaced. "Well, don’t try to coax anything out of your bedridden fellows as a general rule. Also, when are going to apologize to Severus -"

"Bye!" James interrupted as he dragged Sirius after him forcefully.

"Bye, Turais," Sirius said, waving enthusiastically as they went out of sight.

***

October 6, 1971 (Wednesday)

"Hey, Turais," Sirius whispered after he walked over to the Slytherin table. However, he realized where he was and scanned his surroundings nervously. However, no one even batted an eyelash at the presence of the Gryffindor now, and if anyone were to have an opinion on this, they made sure to at least keep it out of Turais' earshot.

Sirius walked up to his brother and asked, "Um... can I borrow Turais for a moment?"

"Of course," Turais said as he stood up.

"Make sure you return him in one piece," Jonty called after them as they walked out of the Great Hall and found a more private location.

"The Dittany worked wonderfully. Remus' gash healed up very nicely," Sirius said.

"That's great," Turais smiled. "I'm glad to hear that Remus is not resisting against your kindness any more."

"Well... I'm not so sure about that... " Sirius frowned as he looked down at his feet. "He was unconscious for the most part when I applied the Dittany."

"What do you mean?" Turais frowned.

"Are you sure his mother did not... hurt him or something?" Sirius asked nervously and his eyes looked haunted. "Because he was exhausted and failed to wake up for class the second day in a row... and his wound... did she beat him up like mother once did to us?"

"Oh... Sirius," Turais hugged Sirius as he tried to get that look off of his face. "Of course not, Remus' mother is not like that, I'm sure."

Sirius nodded shakily.
"So did Remus like the Dittany? It should not sting like the other kinds."

"Uh... I'm not sure..."

"What do you mean, Sirius?" Turais asked, confused.

"I knew he would kick up a fuss if I gave him the Dittany when he was awake, so James and I secretly applied it while he was still asleep..."

"Sirius!" Turais scolded. "You should never give anyone potions when they are not consenting!"

Sirius winced at the tone. "Well... I know now for next time. Sorry, Turais. But I'm not sorry for doing it because his wound healed nicely when we checked this morning. But then he was all weird about it..."

"Explain what you mean by weird."

"I showed him the Dittany you gave me. He took a sniff of it and looked completely spooked... then he yelled at me to mind my own business before drawing the curtains in my face."

So Remus still felt uncomfortable with his friends noticing his wounds. That was to be expected, Turais supposed, especially when he was used to hiding his condition from everyone. But Turais had not anticipated that reaction at all, perhaps something more serious was happening to Remus...

"I would strongly suggest that you give him so personal space for now," Turais said.

"I don't think James understands the concept of personal space though," Sirius said.

"Try to rein him in for me, won't you?" Turais said.

"I'll try..." Sirius gave a helpless shrug. "But you know how James is, he's quite protective once he decides someone deserves his attention. And I think he decided that Remus is one of them."

***

October 7, 1971 (Thursday)

"Madam Jocasta, I was wondering if you have the most recent books on Ministry subsidies and werewolf legislation?" Turais asked the school librarian. If Arcturus was not going to help him, then he would have to do it himself.

Furthermore, it was a pretense to venture to the library to see whether Remus was holing up among the stacks.

"What is the purpose?"

"I wish to look up precedents on Ministry funding for essential Potions."

"That's a very specific query, Mr Black. I'm afraid the school library's collection will not be
as impressive as its counterpart in the Wizengamot," she said.

"Since Wizengamot session has not officially started, I cannot visit their records room. Whatever you have will suffice for now," Turais said.

Madam Jocasta nodded understandingly. "Please wait here for a moment, Mr Black."

While Turais waited, he noticed a familiar figure walking past him. It was Remus.

"These are all the books we have on Ministry subsidies and werewolf legislation," Madam Jocasta said as she placed three books on the desk. "Please return them within three weeks. If you want to consult more material, I would highly recommend that you find some way to access the Wizengamot's records room."

"Thank you so much," Turais said. Once the process was completed, he walked towards where the elusive Remus headed moments ago.

"Hey, Remus," Turais whispered as he sat across from the solitary figure.

The boy looked up at Turais in shock.

"Remus," Turais whispered as he pulled out the chair beside the boy and sat down.

The boy dropped his quill with a clatter.

"T...Turais," Remus gasped. He then turned around to survey his surroundings as though he was in search of an escape. Unfortunately, it seemed like Turais was blocking his only escape. Stutteringly, Remus asked, "W...Why are y...you here?"

"To find you, of course," Turais whispered back.

"Me? Why me?" Remus sounded extremely frightened.

"Let's speak elsewhere. I do not want to provoke Madame Jocasta's ire," Turais said. Remus gulped but he followed suit.

They found an equally secluded area that overlooked the Black Lake. While Turais sat, he noticed that Remus remained standing.

"D..did you t...tell the Headmast...ter?" Remus asked with a scared expression, his voice and body were trembling violently.

"What?" Turais was mystified by the question. "I didn't speak to the Headmaster yet this year."

“How did you find out about my... condition?”

Startled, Turais looked up Remus in surprise and found himself at a loss of words. "What do you mean?"

"Why did you lie to Sirius and James that I was visiting my sick mother?" Remus said haltingly. He rummaged his robes, pulled out Turais' vial, and laid the container down on the floor between them with his shaky hands. “Was this vial a test?”

As Turais stood there in shock, Remus continued, "T...This vial does not only contain dittany and other common Healing ingredients, b...but there is also p...powdered silver and ac...conite.
Aconite mixed with dittany is normally a toxic combination, except for... certain conditions. I only discovered it after Sirius applied it... Were you suspicious of me?"

Turais realized this was a severe oversight on his part. Of course Remus would be familiar with the potion ingredients that were closely related to his condition.

However, when he looked up, he was taken aback by Remus' devastated expression. Tears started to well up in Remus' eyes, then they flowed freely down his cheeks. Turais laid a hand on Remus and the boy lurched away from his grasp violently. The boy then fell on his knees as he assumed a kneeling position and started to plead.

"I'm sorry for hiding my condition, Turais. I know I'm dangerous..." Remus said frantically. "I tried to push your brother and James away, I swear... But he and James are relentless - no, it's not their fault. I just didn't try hard enough to push them away, it's all my fault."

Turais was bewildered and he froze in his spot. Remus' eyes grew wild as reached out and grabbed Turais' sleeve desperately. Then he realized what he did and let go immediately, as if he was horrified with what he just did. "I'm so sorry, Turais. I can get sorted into a different house - no - I don't even need to be in any house - I can sleep in the corridors - I can even sleep outside the castle - I will steer clear of you and Sirius -"

Turais grabbed Remus' flailing limbs firmly and stilled the hysterical boy.

"Remus, please listen to me -"

Remus continued to speak feverishly, "Just please don't get me expelled - I beg of you, Turais - I will do anything you say - anything -"

"REMUS!" Turais used his Heir Black voice as the boy whimpered. His beseeching eyes continued to stare at Turais.

"Remus," Turais started again, his tone was gentle. "I'm not going to tell the Headmaster. You are not going to get expelled. Do you hear me?"

"I - yes - what?" Remus said, shocked.

"Remus, I don't care about your condition. You need to understand that your condition is no reason for you to isolate yourself from Sirius or James, right? You are not dangerous twenty nine out of the thirty days. You know that once the potion becomes readily available, the number twenty nine will become the number thirty," Turais said softly. "There is no reason why you should disallow yourself from making friends, Remus, or find your dream job, or -"

Turais stopped as he watched Remus' face crumpled once again. This time, when Turais guided the boy into his side, he did not resist. In his embrace, Remus cried cathartically while clutching onto Turais' arm tightly.

"I'm so sorry for acting like this, Turais. I don't know why I thought you were going to get me expelled..." Remus hiccuped as Turais handed him a handkerchief. Remus dabbed his eyes with it as he spoke, "T...Thank you, Turais. Thank you. Thank you..."

They sat in silence for a long while as Remus calmed himself down.

"You are the first person to ever treat me like a normal person... I love my ma and pa for raising me, but they were always afraid for me, my future... it gets sad and tiring, Turais," Remus sniffed. "They always told me that life was going to be difficult and different. But you... you are the
only person who ever told me that I can lead a normal life..."

"Of course you can," Turais smiled kindly. Tears were starting to sting the back of his eyes as well. "There is no reason not to."

"Is it really that simple?"

"It won't be easy... but it is definitely easier if you have friends to support you," Turais said.

"So you are okay with me becoming friends with Sirius?" Remus asked timidly.

"Of course!" Turais said. "That's why I introduced you to him on the train."

"Oh... and do you think I should tell them about my condition?"

"Only if you're ready," Turais said softly. "There's no rush."

Remus nodded as he held onto Turais' arm tighter.

Chapter End Notes

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 44: Echoes of Future Past, is on schedule to be released in two weeks. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-05-29
A week passed since the last committee meeting as Turais filed into the historical space with his grandfather, Lord Steward, and Lord Montague.

"Xavier, my man!" Lord Ogden, a jolly man who resembled a real-life father Christmas with his impressive beard and rounded belly, strolled over to Jonty's father and clasped that man's shoulder excitedly. "Good day to you both, Arcturus, Carlisle," he greeted the two men before turning back to Lord Steward, "I have excellent news!"

"Your latest small-batch brews are ready for sampling?"

"What else could it be?" Ogden laughed. "This is definitely a gold label batch, if I can say so myself. Saturday evening at my Manor. The regular dozen of us plus young Mr Tiberius. Here’s the invitation." The man handed out three invitations to the Lords.

"Won't dream of missing the event of the year. Anything you would like me to bring?"

"You know Hector always insists on bringing his signature charcuterie and cheese board," the men looked at Lord Fawley and Fleamont conversing in the distance, "And Fleamont has his fish brine -"

"Urgh, that dish is truly horrible," Steward grimaced. "Does this acquired taste come with old age?"

Ogden barked out a laugh. "Might I remind you that you are talking to man with the most sought-after invitation -"

"I do apologize," Steward grinned. "I will offer my private stock of pâté and foie gras as a peace offering."

"And an order of at least ten crates," the man added.

"I'll buy everything that you are willing to part with," Steward promised as Ogden laughed again.

Soon enough, they entered the chamber as the meeting started.

"Before the election of the Chair, I would like to ask whether there are any motions to be
Groans erupted around the chamber as the elderly man stood up shakily. He must be Flint's grandfather.

"I... thank... the Chair... for..." Lord Flint droned on emotionlessly as Turais strained to hear his words. It was remarkably that even with the *Sonorous* charm his voice remained so quiet. When he was finally finished, it was an hour later and half the chamber was put to sleep.

"Any other motion? Yes, Lord Avery."

The second Lord talked with a much quicker pace but no more comprehensibly. After two minutes, Turais totally lost track of what he was talking about.

"Yes, Lord Fawley."

"Lord Travers, why are you not starting the election proceedings?"

"The standing procedure states that all members with motions must be allowed to speak," Lord Travers argued.

"But none of their speeches are of substance," Lord Fawley argued. "Perhaps you should shorten the allotted time to speak."

"Lord Fawley, I never took you as a man who would silence their political opponents unnecessarily. This chamber is for the purpose of deliberation, and deliberate we must. I will not impose any time restrictions. Yes, Lord Sykes -"

It was then that Turais understood what was happening. Lord Travers was part of Malfoy's alliance. Every single Lord he was calling upon were part of Malfoy's alliance as a cacophony of angry shouts started to occur.

Malfoy was filibustering. He must have known that he would not win the election, therefore, he was resorting to hijacking the election by not allowing it to occur.

"How dare you!"

"For shame!"

"You are obstructing the election process -"

"ORDER!" Lord Travers roared. "Lord Sykes..."

The chamber quickly descended into chaos and the meeting was forced to abort soon after. A follow-up meeting was arranged two weeks from today when Turais expected for the fight to continue then.

Turais was packing up his belongings while he saw a large pile of scrolls and parchments spill down the stairs beside where he sat.

"Mr Minchum," one of the clerks said as she stood up, "Do you need a hand?"

"Oh, no... That... is not necessary," the man heaved as he struggled to pull out his wand with his right hand while preventing his other armful of scrolls from falling as well.

Turais could not resist but cast a wandless spell as the fallen objects rearranged themselves as
they flew back into the arms of Minchum.

"Oh... thank you very much, Ms Spinnet," Minchum said happily.

"It wasn't me," Spinnet grinned as she turned towards Turais, who was trying to pack up the reminder of his items nonchalantly.

"You're joking," Minchum muttered as he climbed down the stairs carefully and in front of the boy. "Heir Black, please don't tell me you just performed intentional underage magic in a roomful of government officials under non-extenuating circumstances."

"Then I won't tell you I performed intentional underage magic in a roomful of government officials under non-extenuating circumstances," Turais said before he realized what he was saying. Then he winced at the thought that he just gave some cheek to the future Minister. Just as he looked up and was about to apologize, he saw Minchum's shock turn into amusement.

"Are you aware that I was an Auror?" Minchum asked.

"With 'was' being the most important word of the sentence," Turais said.

"Indeed," Minchum grinned as he adjusted his grip on the numerous documents he was carrying. "I would shake your hand and welcome you but..."

"That's completely understandable," Turais said quickly. "Do you require some help carrying those?"

"No, no," Minchum protested. Then, his eyes sparkled mischievously and said, "I don't want someone to help by showing off their flashy wandless magic and finding himself three levels down in the Ministry holding cells."

"That'd be a terrible misuse of holding cell space," Turais said as Minchum chuckled. Then, McLaggen's voice rang loudly in the chamber.

"Turais!"

Turais looked towards the sound to see a smiling man breaking off from a stream of incoming Lords and approaching him. He winced and he saw Minchum mirror his expression.

"Oh no... here comes Tiberius..." Minchum said as his eyes darted at the incoming figure.

"Do you two have some kind of history?" asked Turais.

"You can say that," Minchum said, shifting the weight of the scrolls in his arms, "His uncle, Lord McLaggen, is the one who encouraged me to run for office and helped me with my election campaign."

"Ah... so you have to play nice with him then."

"You can say that as well," Minchum grimaced slightly before the man reached them. "Tiberius, congratulations on your nomination."

"Yours as well, Harold," McLaggen said with a companionable pat on the shoulder. "I hope you weren't too surprised.

"I was stunned, but thank you for the support regardless."
"That's what my uncle would have wanted," McLaggen's eyes then darted to him. In a chirpy tone, he said, "Turais! It is so wonderful to see you here again." Turais gasped as the man seized his hand painfully and pumped it up and down vigorously. "Remember when I met you at the Symposium and how I said you would have no trouble obtaining the position, I guess I am proven correct... as always," the man's smile was all gleaming white teeth. From the corner of his eyes, newspaper correspondents were seated in the public gallery and using Self-Writing quills to frantically sketch Turais' presence in the Wizengamot on his first day. "If you have any questions or guidance, do not hesitate to correspond with me." Then, in a staged whisper, he leaned in and said, "I know Mr Flack is a bit of a doozy."

"Ah... for now -" Turais yanked his abused hand from McLaggen's grip, "- let us keep it as Heir Black and Mr McLaggen, shall we?"

There was an awkward pause before McLaggen barked out a hearty laugh. Then, Minchum cleared his throat and said, "Tiberius, please do excuse me. I have some letters from my constituents I need to respond to..."

"Please don't stay on my account," McLaggen said sympathetically.

"I'll see you both around," Minchum said before he headed off in the other direction.

"Poor man," McLaggen said. "Works too hard..."

"Mr McLaggen -"

"At your service, Heir Black," Minchum grinned as he did a flourishing bow.

Fed up by the theatrics, Turais gritted out lowly, "If you were truly at my service, Mr McLaggen, I would request that the Potions Association respond to our inquiry into the approval of the Wolfs-"

McLaggen tutted as he brushed some minuscule specks of lints off the shoulder of his purple robe. "Mr Black, don't try to pull rank on me. This is not the Slytherin common room."

"I am no less aware of my surroundings than you with your frivolous showmanship," Turais replied.

McLaggen brushed some minuscule specks of lints off the shoulder of his purple robe, "You see, I am merely a low-ranking official on the board. I am really in no position to help you."

"I don't believe that for a second."

"Believe what you may, Turais," McLaggen turned to face Turais with a smirk. "Let me tell you what I believe. I believe that Lord Black does not have any influence in the Potions Association. I believe that you need my aid in expediting your case. And I believe you are asking me for that help."

"And if I were to, hypothetically, ask you for that help. What do you have to offer?"

McLaggen tutted again as he placed both hands on the younger boy's shoulder, pretending to straighten his robe. "Mr Black, knowledge is always bartered, not freely given..." McLaggen leaned in and whispered into his ear, "... Not even for Heir Black."

"I would demand you stop harassing my heir, Junior Under-Secretary," Arcturus' voice drawled as he appeared behind the official. "Especially when he has never mentioned you to be a
friend of his."

McLaggen released Turais immediately. His smirk morphed into a brilliant smile as he turned towards the older Black. "Lord Black, it is so good to see you!" the man said brightly. "I have somewhat of an interesting proposition for you. Would you be available for a private chat later today?"

"Please communicate with my legislative director, Mr McLaggen," Arcturus said coolly.

"As you wish. But if I were you, Lord Black, I would take care not to ignore this meeting," McLaggen said airily. "We have yet to sit down for a chat properly and I do wish to start this relationship on a positive note. Ah - I seem to have spotted Lord Ogden. Please excuse me."

Arcturus’ eyes narrowed at the man who was now trekking across the chamber towards a small group of Grey family Lords where Lord Steward was talking animatedly with his peers.

"Be careful with him, Turais," Arcturus muttered. "The McLaggen boy does not only have great political aspiration, but he has a brilliant mind and a web of powerful connections to match it. Do not engage with him until I can find some leverage."

"Don’t worry, grandfather," Turais said. "I recognize his kind."

Arcturus nodded. "Remember, do not trust anyone within these chamber walls except for me."

"Yes, grandfather."

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Taking the opportunity to visit the records room for his work on the Wolfsbane legislation, Turais passed through the heavy, mahogany doors into the records room. There, he found himself on the balcony overlooking an enormous library hundred upon hundred rows of shelves that stretched several stories high. Stacks of books were also piled up in various spiral towers that threatened to reach the nave vaults that formed the ceiling. Collectively, they built a magnificent portrait that resembled a city skyline in the backdrop.

When he descended to the bottom of the staircase, he felt as if he was in a deep gorge where the corridors were the narrow valleys and the book shelves were the steep rocky cliffs. Once he reached the bottom, the light provided above filtered down into a distant glow while the towering shelves formed long, menacing shadows on the floor. As though the atmospheric charms responded to the geography of the room, Turais felt the air was cooler and damper, as though he found himself in the Final task of the Triwizard Tournament once again...

He suddenly wished he had brought a thicker outer robe.

His eyes slowly adjusted to the dimly-lit surroundings as he looked around. He was feeling complete loss at how to begin his search when he heard footsteps on the spiral staircase where he just came.

"Heir Black," Harold Minchum sounded surprised as he greeted Turais. There was a lantern in his hand that provided a ring of light that chased away the darkness. "Why are you still here?"
"Mr Minchum," Turais replied with a relieved smile. "I'm taking the opportunity of an aborted meeting to look up some reading materials. I'm afraid I found the material in the Hogwarts library... lacking."

"The Wizengamot Records Room does not only contain the historical records of the Wizengamot, but it also has the largest collection of magical books in Europe. I would not begin to compare those two," Minchum smiled.

"Well, I have learnt from my mistake," Turais gestured to the expansive room. "However, I'm afraid I don't know how or where to begin."

"Let's see if I can aid with the process..." Minchum said. "Usually the librarians are here to help, but it is after hours now unfortunately."

Minchum pointed out the dark, empty section to his left. On the front desk, there was a sign that said "Closed. We will return at eight o'clock on Monday."

"Is that why the place is so dim and drafty as well?" Turais asked.

Minchum chuckled. "No... that's just poor design. I have been complaining for years to improve the Weather-Modifying Charms and give this place more warmth and light. If this place must look like a bloody labyrinth that housed the Minotaur, they might as well make it feel less dreary and terrifying. But alas, my complaints were to no avail. I might have to look up how to fix them myself when my desperation peaks."

"I'm beginning to understand why not many people visit here. I wouldn't willingly spend time here either."

"Yet here you are," Minchum said. "What are you searching for?"

"Literature on New Potions Applications, potions regulations, Ministry subsidies, and the likes."

Minchum hummed thoughtfully as he tapped his chin. "I know the way to the general vicinity of the Potions section. But for your information, you can use the handy 'Point me' spell."

Minchum pulled out his wand and pointed at the floor of the hallway in front of them. "Point me to the Potions section."

A burst of yellow light emitted from his wand and contacted the floor. Instead of dissipating, the light seemed to have burrowed itself under the translucent tile and started to move forward, leaving a faint trail in its wake.

Turais and Minchum followed the trail as they walked further into the maze of shelves until they reached a section where all the tiles were glowing yellow.

"Here is the literature that pertains to Potions," Minchum declared. "You can do a more specific search now, such as 'Point me to New Potions Applications'."

Another burst of light erupted from his wand. This time the colour was green as the shelves that pertained to the secondary requirement were now glowed green.

"Thank you, Mr Minchum," Turais said.

"I'll leave you to it," Minchum said. "I will be just down the hall in the Goblin Economy.
section. Shout if you need any help."

"I will, and thank you," Turais said.

***

October 21, 1971 (Thursday)

"An 'Acceptable'?!" Pierricoeur chortled as he saw Turais' graded assignment for Arithmancy. "Oh, how the mighty Black has fallen."

Turais gave Pierricoeur a strained smile as a response as he continued to pack his bag.

"At this rate, I will have to adjust your projection from failing an assignment before term ends to failing an assignment before Christmas," Pierricoeur said.

"I'm glad my grade is such a source of amusement for you," Turais said.

"Well, you can always ask me for help," Pierricoeur said airily.

"I would if I thought you are genuinely offering it."

"You might be an idiot in Arithmancy, but you are more definitely less of an idiot on interpreting intentions."

***

Turais glanced over to Pierricoeur's "Acceptable" grade on his Study of Ancient Runes essay when he realized the boy caught his wandering gaze.

"What?!"

"I didn't say anything," Turais said defensively.

"Your look said all there is to say!"

"I am quite busy and I frankly don't have the time of day to deal with your wild oscillation between arrogance and inferiority."

"What are you implying?"

"I'm implying that you should take up yoga or meditation," Turais snapped as he walked out of the classroom. What he did not notice was the trailing eyes of Professor Mather that were observing the pair of hostile students.

***
October 25, 1971 (Monday)

After another explosive row with Pierricoeur during the Study of Ancient Runes class, Turais was left fuming as he packed his bag.

“Mr Black,” Professor Mather’s voice called out. Turais found that the room was empty except for the Professor and himself. He must have been lost in his thoughts again. “If you are free, please join me for a cup of tea.”

“Uh...” Turais checked his watch. It was lunch time. "... yes, Professor."

Turais followed the Professor to the second-floor office and settled into a comfortable armchair. Mather levitated a metal tin and a tea set from a cupboard.

“To what do I owe the pleasure, Professor?”

“I have recently discovered a unique tea mixture from China and I thought you would be interested. Care to try it?” Mather asked good-naturedly as he tapped the kettle with his wand to boil the water.

“Why not?” Turais said as he settled into his chair more comfortably.

“This is from a Muggle tea farm, I hope you don’t find it objectionable?” Turais was surprised at the notion.

“No, Professor. That does not concern me.”

‘Was this about Pierricoeur?’ Turais thought.

“I thought as much. Your reputation does precede you, Mr Black.”

Turais looked at the Professor as he poured the tea into two thin china cups. He handed Turais one and he thanked him.

“I do apologize for any interruptions Pierricoeur and I may have caused in your previous classes.” Turais took a sniff at the tea and smelt the strong whiff of green tea leaves. It seemed slightly acrid to him. "Also, I don't dislike him because of his blood status. We just have our… disagreements."

“We are here for tea, not because of your conflict with Mr Pierricoeur. I am also quite aware who the instigator is. Never apologize if it is unwarranted, Mr Black,” Mather said as he took a sip and sunk comfortably into his armchair. “But if you leave that tea untouched for any longer, you’ll have something else to apologize for.”

Abashed, Turais drank from his tea, but upon tasting the brew at the tip of his tongue. His face twisted into a grimace and choked into the cup.

“I’m afraid the tea is over-steeped, Professor,” Turais coughed as he placed the tea on the side table. “It has gone terribly bitter.”

“Has it?” Mather asked casually before he took another sip. “I find it to be steeped perfectly.”

“Then, perhaps, it is not to my taste.”
“Perhaps so, or perhaps not,” Mather said enigmatically. “But either way, you are too quick to decide on the matter.”

Turais eyed the professor in puzzlement. Mather merely gestured the tea cup for Turais to take another sip. “Why don’t you give it another chance? But this time, savour it.”

Looking at the tea with slight apprehension, Turais braved the challenge and brought the cup to his mouth once more. After a moment of hesitation, he willed himself to endure the bitter sting and urge to expel the.

To his utter surprise, the tea turned sweet as if he was drinking the finest honey.

“Oh,” Turais couldn’t help but exclaimed.

“‘Hui gan’ is the term used for this lingering finish,” Mather supplied as he poured himself a second cup, “It is only found in tea leaves of the highest quality.”

“Returning sweetness,” Turais smiled into his cup as he took a second sip. His appreciation for the tea rose as the refreshing bitterness was slowly replaced by another round of nectared pleasantness.

“Tea leaves often have complexly layered aroma and taste. Without proper understanding, brief impressions can often be deceiving. Of course, if the quality is indeed poor, then all points are moot. I assure you with good authority that this tea is quite fine, but you will have to discover the merits of others on your own.”

Turais glanced up at the man and wondered what else he knew about Pierricoeur.

“Do you believe the metaphor is apt, Professor?”

“A metaphor, you say?” Mather wrinkled his eyebrow as he raised his cup. “This is just tea, Mr Black.”

“Of course, Professor. My apologies,” Turais said amiably as a ghost of a smile flitted across the older man’s face.

***

Jonty whistled as he read the headline today. It was titled "Malfoy's Alliance Calls for Fawley's Withdrawal to Overcome Deadlock."

"Blimey, they are really committed to mutual destruction at this point," Jonty commented.

"I don't understand how this is allowed in the first place," Alex said. "This is clearly obstruction of justice. See how my cousin recused himself to ensure the integrity of the election? But now, his Deputy Chair is blatantly oppressing one candidate in favour of another."

"You need to change your understanding of politics, Alex. The procedural rules only provide a general outline of how things work and leaves much to the interpretation to the members," Jonty explained. "For example, the rule may state that 'members must have a sufficient amount of time to express their opinions'. But what exactly is sufficient? Ten minutes? An hour? Indefinite? And
depending what the Chair's personal politics are, they may favour certain interpretations that benefits his allies. In this particular case, Travers is clearly working in coordination with Malfoy to obstruct the election process in order to force the committee to vote for Malfoy."

"But that doesn't sound fair at all."

"It's not, and everyone knows it. That's why this fight over the Chair is so important. When the rules aren't clear, it is up to the Chair to decide what is appropriate. Therefore, although you may have a strong case that Travers' actions are morally incorrect, he is technically not doing anything wrong because there are no rules disallowing his actions."

"Can't they do something about it? Like disallow this misconduct?"

"They can," Turais said. "But the changing of the procedural rules happens in the Wizengamot, which will not reconvene until November. Even then, it will take a long time to go through all the legislative process to change the rules. It's not a viable remedy for the current emergency."

"But regardless, I'm jealous that you get to see all this in real time and first-hand," Jonty said. "It must be so exciting!"

"More like a headache," Turais grimaced.

***

A record number of reporters showed up in the Visitors' Gallery to capture the increasingly volatile fight over the election of the Bill Appropriations Committee chair. The Wizengamot lived up to their expectation.

"How dare you suggest the withdrawal of a candidate in order to remove the blockade that you imposed?!" one Lord cried. "This is blatant injustice!"

"If Lord Blumenthal wishes to accuse me of any wrongdoing, please cite which procedural rule I have violated," Lord Travers said calmly. "If you cannot procure the evidence, then please keep your silence."

"You are merely hijacking this election! The Light families only have one candidate. You are basically forcing us to give up power."

"Do not speak out of turn, Lord Smith," Lord Travers said. "I have the authority to evict you from the rest of today's proceedings if you continue to misbehave."

"How ironic that you scold me of misbehaviour when you -"

"Lord Smith, you are evicted from the chamber!" Lord Travers shouted as the Ministry guards walked down the stairs from the doors and surrounded the man who continued to shout indignantly until he was out of sight.

Fleamont stood after he was called upon. Despite addressing Travers, he was looking directly at Malfoy when he spoke. "Lord Travers, why must you continue this mutual destruction? You do understand that this course of action does not help achieve your goal to have your favoured
candidate elected."

"I appreciate your concern, Lord Potter. But I maintain that I have the right to not move for the election until I deem it to be appropriate. Yes, the Honourable gentleman Mr Minchum."

"I have a suggestion. If you merely want Lord Fawley to withdraw from the election, can you dismiss the election and restart the election process beginning with the nominations."

"Yes, Lord Malfoy."

"I do not agree with this course of action. I think it is terribly unfair to my candidacy since I have spent so much time, effort, and resources on this bid," Abraxas said to a chorus of "boo"s from the right side of the chamber. He merely smirked at the noise. "The election process can only be restarted with the agreement of all current candidates as well as the Chairs' approval -"

"You are conspiring with the Deputy Chair!"

"You didn't even spend a Knut, don't lie!"

"Lord Withers! You are evicted from the chamber for accusing another member of lying!"

"You are despicable!"

"I motion for the meeting to be adjourned due to unruly behaviour by a majority of the chamber!" Malfoy shouted.

"Motion accepted," Travers said to another wave of outrage. "The next meeting will be set two weeks from today -"

"Make the meeting tomorrow!"

"Don't drag the process out! The Wizengamot opens next week!"

"ORDER! I am permitted under the procedural rules to decide the time of the next meeting as long as it is within two weeks," Travers announced. "November 8th will be the next -"

The chamber descended into chaos once again.

***

It was the end of another aborted meeting for the election of the Chair as Turais found himself in the Ministry reading room labouring through countless reference texts while his draft stayed pitifully blank.

"You are really passionate about the Wolfsbane Potion, aren't you?" Minchum said as he placed several scrolls and books on the table.

"What makes you think that?" Turais said. He gestured to the dozens of books stacked beside him. The spines of the books read *Aconite and Its Furry Counterpart, Hairy Snout, Human Heart...* Fair enough.

"Those books and the fact that you are spending a school day in the Wizengamot Reading
Room,” Minchum said. "I must admit you are the only other soul besides me who've willingly spent time here in your spare time."

"I can't be the only person crafting legislation," Turais smiled. "You are clearly over-exaggerating, Mr Minchum."

"Perhaps," Minchum acquiesced. "But I do mean it as a praise for your dedication. What are you trying to do?"

"Well... I want to sculpt a piece of legislation that will help subsidize the cost of the Wolfsbane Potion when it is available to the public," Turais explained. "But realized, belatedly, that I must finish the first draft of my bill if I wish to present it by the opening of Wizengamot sittings."

"Why don't you ask Lord Black for advice?"

Turais hesitated. "My grandfather does not necessarily care much about this particular passion project of mine. I rather involve him to the smallest extent until I have something presentable."

"I see..." Minchum pulled out a piece of parchment and a quill as he asked, "What is wrong with the current legislation of werewolves?"

"I think the current Ministry stances on werewolves are wrong and unfortunate. The Werewolf Registry calls for our most vulnerable, most marginalized members to expose themselves to more scrutiny and restrictions. That is a misguided effort and only serves to further alienate them from society if it is not repealed."

"How does it affect the werewolf population?"

"I believe we should do our best to provide the potion once it is formally approved. The cost of the ingredients and the highly specialized brewing process will make access immensely difficult for most, let alone one of our most marginalized communities. The Ministry has already made it very difficult for them to obtain permanent work and they are discriminated against on every front. I think it is unfair to also place the financial burden on them."

"How do you aim to implement your program if you do receive the Ministry subsidy?"

"Hmmmm... I think it would be best if we could create a centralized dispensary of the Wolfsbane Potion where people can buy the Potion anonymously and at the lowest rates possible," Turais replied. "Anonymity is non-negotiable as this will ensure no one is accidentally outed and that everyone who needs the potion will be able to access it without fear. And we will offer the potion at its base ingredient cost or less, depending on Ministry subsidy or however we shall manage to fund the price difference. My wish is, of course, to ultimately provide the potion at no cost."

"Given your insistence on anonymity, some might question how you might prevent people from taking advantage of the anonymity and, say, stockpiling on your cheap potions and selling them, for example?" Minchum challenged.

"That is a possibility..." Turais said slowly as he considered the matter. "However, the Wolfsbane potion must be made fresh and consumed within the week. That would limit the possibility of stockpiling the potion."

"How about reselling your potions to werewolves for profit?"
"In theory, there is no way to stop that. But if the price for the Wolfsbane Potion is low enough, there is little incentive for anyone to resell it to werewolves in need of it. They can order it directly from us."

"How about reselling your potions to others for profit?"

"Well... the Wolfsbane Potion has no known applications for baseline humans. It is only useful for werewolves as the toxicity is too high for baseline humans to consume. Therefore, there is limited value in reselling it."

"How about extracting out components of the potions - such as Essence of aconite - for reselling?"

"That would be very extensive and costly potioneering, and the extracted amount would not nearly cover the cost of extracting it in the first place. You might as well buy the equivalent amount of Essence of aconite because it would be cheaper that way."

"How do you ensure that no underaged children accidentally or deliberately send in an owl order for the potion?"

"We can place an age-restriction charm on the delivery container to ensure that only those of age can access the potion. Once an adult receives it, it is up to the adult to ensure that the potion is stored properly and out of reach from minors, just like any other potion."

"How much subsidy are you asking for?"

"I am hoping it would be around the range of one Galleon per patient per full moon."

"And that includes all seven doses that one is required to drink leading up to the full moon?"

"That is correct."

"Well," Minchum sighed as he set down his quill. He slid the word-covered parchment and slid it across to Turais. "Congratulations, you have just drafted your first bill ever."

"What?!" Turais exclaimed as he picked up the parchment and read it. It was basically everything he said but written in a precise and formal manner with several spaces that were left blank in between sentences.

"You have basically outlined the implementation criteria that ensures the subsidy would not be wasted or misused. All you have to do now is to find the corresponding sections of the law that pertains to subsidies and refer to them," Minchum said. "That is what the blanks are for. And also a title for the bill, of course."

"Wow... thank you, Mr Minchum," Turais said gratefully.

"This is just a first draft," Minchum said. "You will have to revise it multiple times before it is remotely presentable. I didn't do much."

"You're joking," Turais gasped. "You've done so much. I wouldn't have figured this out in a million years, Mr Minchum! You have no idea how much time I have wasted on this for the past two weeks!"

Minchum laughed. "I've just been doing this too many times that this is second nature. But I'm glad it is of use to you, Mr Black."
"Well, if the Chair is ever going to be elected. Then this brainchild of mine might go somewhere."

"I think it is quite a shame," Minchum said as he looked up from his work. "Malfoy is clearly trying to frustrate everyone into submission and that will never work. But I'm just worried it will not be resolved by the time Wizengamot actually returns to session from recess. We are already behind in our preparation even if we elect the Chair this Friday. There is so many pieces of good legislation - such as increasing funding for St Mungo's Hospital, strengthening air traffic regulations for broom safety, establishing sanctuaries for endangered magical creatures - they are all waiting to be voted on but we need a functional committee for anything to be passed onto the Wizengamot."

"I didn't truly appreciate the impact of this election."

"Not many do. But this is just bureaucracy at its finest," Minchum grimaced. "Sometimes I just wish someone could just blast through all these restraints and get something done. The public is frustrated by the Ministry's incapability and, now, the Wizengamot is descending into a gridlock... It will not take much for the society to be torn apart, let alone with the unsolved cases of Muggle deaths and high-profile murders. People are frustrated and I don’t blame them. I'm frustrated as well..."

"But checks and balances are important to ensure no one ever abuses the system," Turais said. "Procedure, although tedious, is the only way that can ensure long-term stability of any governing organization. It ensures that no one can game the system for their own purposes."

"We have an institutionalist here, don't we?" Minchum grinned. "I agree with you, for the record. But it is just depressing to see nothing getting done while I'm sitting behind a desk. At least when I was an Auror, I was running about during field operations chasing down Dark wizards. Even if we came back empty-handed, I felt like I was doing something."

Turais resonated deeply with that feeling. "I totally understand. Politics is quite infuriating. I always try to tell myself I am doing meaningful work behind the desk, but... but it just doesn't feel the same as working in the front lines and actively pursuing your goal."

"You are so mature for your age," Minchum chuckled. "But I'm glad I supported your bid for the Youth Representative. I can see it was the right decision."

"You were on the selection panel?" Turais asked.

"Indeed I am. Some of my peers - I will not name any names - were concerned about your age, but I know for a fact that age does not equal experience. One may gain more experience after living through a war than another who lived a perfectly long, stable life without ever facing any adversity. I believe your reputation and your achievements speak to your character and I was able to convince them. And I am glad to be proven right by the amount of initiative you are showing with this Wolfsbane Potions funding bill. Meanwhile, I cannot say the same for Heir Malfoy."

"Thank you for your kind words," Turais said. "I am trying my best."

"Sometimes, that is all you can do. Look at me, I'm just doing my due diligence to draft legislation while hoping that the situation will resolve itself. This is the best I can do with the power I have."

"Why do you sound so removed from the situation, Mr Minchum?" Turais asked. "You have a personal stake in this election. You are one of the nominees."
Minchum smiled sadly, "I'm only nominated by fluke. While I understand Fleamont's good intentions, Tiberius' support came as a complete surprise. I wouldn't have been nominated otherwise."

"Don't discount yourself so soon. I've heard the other eleven elected representatives pledged to support your bid for Chair."

Minchum smiled sadly, "But that is all the support I have. Even including Lord Potter's vote, we only consist of 13 votes in the 73 available votes. Compare this to the 23 votes Montague has from the Black alliance; 14 for Malfoy; and the rest of the votes for Fawley so that is... 23 votes. I simply have no chance. Even if, in some off-chance that they do not prefer any of the nominees, Tiberius would likely be their next best choice since he is so well-connected."

"Your bloc has 13 votes, depending on who you vote for, you can at least be the king maker," Turais said. "The other alliance must court your votes to ensure a victory."

"That's why I'm surprised that your grandfather and Malfoy did not ally together to win outright," Minchum said. "Although it could all be a ruse as far as I know. But back to your point. There is no one we want to vote for. If we vote for Fawley, the oppression of Dark families will continue. If we vote for Montague or Malfoy, they will be the minority in the full 77-member Wizengamot. Nothing will get accomplished either way... A person with moderate politics is what we need in this polarized chamber, yet this person is the least likely to be supported. That's why I expressed my frustration with all these restraints earlier on."

“I'm starting to see your point,” Turais said thoughtfully.

"Well, I'm glad you are more open-minded than the rest of the Wizengamot combined. No one is allowing themselves to be persuaded by the other even if their argument is clearly superior. It is truly tragic."

"I didn't say I agree with your point of removing those restraints," Turais warned airily. "I'm merely sympathizing with your frustration."

"Well then, I take back all my compliments then."

"I'm keeping the compliments," Turais huffed jokingly as the older man laughed.

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November 1, 1971 (Monday)

Turais arrived at the Arithmancy classroom at the last possible second as usual. And as he was sitting down, Pierricoeur spoke.

"Hello, Black," Pierricoeur said calmly.

Calmly. And an initiating friendly contact?

That was what caused Turais to pause in shock. Pierricoeur looked up questioningly as Turais gathered enough of his wit to respond.
“Hello, Pierricoeur,” Turais said in confusion.

Something was different today. Pleasantly different. It has been a week since Turais’ conversation with Professor Mather. Did Mather also have a conversation with Pierricoeur?

Before he could ponder more on the intriguing subject, Professor Vector entered the classroom and started the lecture. Once again, Turais was utterly confused with the course content and failed to absorb any of the material taught.

When the hour was nearly up, Professor Vector started to walk around returning their graded assignments.

"Class, I have graded your assignments from last week -" Turais winced as he saw his mark. There was a big, ugly "P" at the top corner of his page. This was the first time he failed anything as Turais Black. " - most of you have done poorly, but that was to be expected since you are unfamiliar with the mathematical nature of this course. However, I do expect you to do better next time."

Just as Turais was about to hide his paper, he realized that Pierricoeur was casting a sidelong glance directly at the damning sign. Turais steeled himself up with an incoming rude comment... but there was none.

Relieved and not wanting to experience Pierricoeur's change of heart, Turais quickly packed his bag. He heard Pierricoeur curse under his breath and Turais immediately darted off, not even registering that the boy was fidgeting more than usual. Just as he thought he was in the clear, he heard Pierricoeur catch up to him from behind.

"Black," Pierricoeur called out just as Turais turned around with a grimace. "Black... if you need any help with Arithmancy, you know where to find me."

Shocked, Turais turned to properly face the boy only to be met with a genuine look of concern and panic.

"I...I'm... thank you, Pierricoeur. That's kind of you."

"Well, you are going to help me with the Study of Ancient Runes," Pierricoeur flushed as he high-tailed out of the classroom.

Turais was in such shock that he almost forgot he had Study of Ancient Runes on the other side of the castle as well. Turais immediately dashed out towards his next class.

Once he reached the classroom, he found Pierricoeur seated at his spot before Turais as usual.

"How do you always get here so quickly?" Turais asked as he sat down.

"Why are you acting so chummy with me?" Pierricoeur spat back. Hostility from him was back on in full force.

Turais was confused. "W..What... I... you -"

"Y...yo...ou y...you w...what?" Pierricoeur mocked him with glee. "Stop it, whatever you're trying to do."

Turais had to resist the terribly tempting urge to punch the expression off his face clean. He
breathed several times to calm himself. Then, he distracted himself with the small, wooden box that was sitting on his desk. It resembled a tiny chest... however, Turais noticed that there was a very faint blue glow around it. Upon a closer look, Turais could see the light was able emitted from millions of individual runic alphabets that were encircling around the wood.

"Woah, why is this glowing?"

Turais pulled out his wand and started to prod one particularly concentrated bundle of runes when it suddenly sprung apart and unraveled. Suddenly, the blue light started to dim as Turais quickly stuffed away his wand, pretending nothing had happened. He looked over to Pierricoeur's box, which was still glowing blue. He turned to the other tables and saw that theirs were also surrounded by a similar blue haze. Only his box was now muted without colour.

"Why is my box not glowing?" Turais muttered to himself.

"What are you chuntering about -" Pierricoeur snapped as the office door slammed open.

Professor Mather strolled down the spiral stairs and addressed the class with his timorous and clipped voice.

“After learning the basics of translating different types of runes and drawing runic diagrams for the past two months, we will start to talk about the importance of runes and its relation with magic,” the stern, aging man with greying hair loomed over Turias in front of a blackboard filled with indecipherable runic scripts and diagrams. His yellow eyes scanned the classroom occupied by two dozens Ravenclaws, a dozen Slytherins, and a handful of Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors.

“So now, who can tell me why runes are important?” Turais shot his hand up. “Yes, Mr Black.”

“As mentioned in class before, runes describes a collection of ancient European non-Latin languages that were used in the past for communication as well as magical activities. On a communication level, runic alphabets were used by both magical and non-magical people and could be translated word-for-word into any modern language. However, on a magical level, they have a completely different purpose. For example, algiz ( ), represents a sledge or elk and has a phonetic sound of the ‘y’ in ‘fly’. However, our magical ancestors also used it to represent the rune for protection.

“In addition, due to the difference in the history of magical development, proto-Germanic and Scandinavian magical communities in the Middle Ages often described magic based on its components rather than using a singular phrase, such as an incantation or spell. They observed and identified the properties of performed magic, and each property was assigned to a runic alphabet. For example, if they observed purely protective properties from a certain ritual, they classified it as algiz. Again, as the rune for protection. Incidentally, we have since discovered that the observations they made actually denoted the foundations of magic itself as all spells and charms, if broken down into their fundamental magical components, are formed by runes,” Turias said succinctly.

“That is correct. Not only are runes the languages of a bygone era, they are used to describe how magic works. Ten points to Slytherin. Who else…” the professor looked around the room but no one had their hands up except for Turais. “... Mr Black.”

“It is the different runic components and its unique combination and interaction that derives the spell’s functionality,” Turais spoke confidently, “For example, the Shield Charm - Protego - is arranged in a secondary cis- octagram with eihwaz ( ), the rune for defense, as nodes and algiz ( ), the rune for protection, as points.
“Runes are especially powerful if they are further anchored and embedded into larger tertiary or quaternary arrangements. For example, a tetrahedron of four Shield Charms is the most basic definition of a protection ward. In addition to enhancing its powers, these arrangements also greatly increase the stability of the working magic. Hence, many magical objects such as protection amulets or Time-Turners, which are heavily embedded with many layers of runes, are extremely powerful and long-lasting. However, if miscast, there could be equally disastrous consequences.”

Professor Mather looked at the boy approvingly. Satisfied, Turais turned towards Pierricoeur and smirked. “Excellent, Mr Black. Wards are one of the most prominent examples of the importance of runes. If manipulated and utilized properly, runic drawing is a very powerful and useful tool. However, keep in mind that each rune does not solely denote one meaning. In different combinations and arrangements, their meanings and interpretations will vary. This is particularly important for recognizing curses. Take another ten points for Slytherin.

"Ward-Architect is a highly distinguished and specialized profession for those of you interested in Warding -" Mather looked at Turais when he said the sentence. "Another great example of the importance of runes occurs in curses - not curses as in the Unforgivable Curses or blood curses, but cursed objects. Yes, while runes are commonly associated with protection, people commonly overlook their roles in curses. This is also despite the fact that there is an entire profession of Curse-Breaking that heavily depends on the in-depth knowledge of the organization of runes.

"Curses cast on objects are - in most ways - exactly identical to warding an object. The major differences between the two are the intent of the caster, the effects of the magic, and the types of runes used. While wards aim to protect contents inside the container by resisting any form of invasion, curses aim to protect the contents by incapacitating the invader. Wards are passive; curses are active. Wards use the regular runic form, curses tend to have a mixture of the regular and reverse - or merkstave - form. As both have their strengths and weaknesses, most valuable objects have a combination of both that complements their defense.

"We will be learning about Curse-breaking later in the term, but first, let's start with warding," Mather said as he returned to his desk. "In front of every one of you, there is a small wooden box. I have cast the most basic protective ward on it. For the remainder of class, please try to open it. And remember what the first thing you should always do before you start?"

"Runa Revelio!" The entire class chanted.

"Good," Mather said. "And what is the most important rule to anything related to warding?"

"Patience," the room chanted again.

"Begin then," Mather said.

Turais observed around him as everyone started to prod and jab their boxes. Some tried to use brunt force and pry it open with their fingers, to no avail. He turned his attention back to his task and cast the spell, however, nothing happened.

"Runa Revelio," Turais muttered again. "Runa Revelio."

"What is the problem, Mr Black?" Mather strolled up to him.

"What should happen when I cast the Revealing Spell?" Turais asked. "I don't see anything."

"Well..." the man picked up the box and easily opened it. "... that is simply because the
warding has been disarmed already. Good work, Mr Black."

Turais could hear angry muttering beside him.

"Pierricoeur, try looking for the bundle -"

"Stop talking to me, Black."

"What is your issue?"

"My issue is you, just shut up!" Pierricoeur scowled as he jabbed the box with his wand. "Stupid warding."

As the rest of the class slowly managed to disarm the box, only Pierricoeur remained with his task unfinished.

"Stop abusing your box, Mr Pierricoeur," Mather stepped in to save the warded box away from the boy as the bell signaled the end of class. "Remember, clear your mind. Be patient and focus."

"That's not the only quality you lack," Turais muttered under his breath as he tucked away his Spellman's Syllabary.

"What did you say?" Pierricoeur said harshly.

"You heard me, Pierricoeur," Turais returned. "Unless you lack comprehension skills as well."

"You're the one who lacks comprehension," Pierricoeur said. "I told you to stop talking to me yet you continue to do so. Your voice annoys me-"

"Mr Pierricoeur," the Professor suddenly appeared in front of them and placed their assignments on their desks. Turais realized that the Professor had observed the entire exchange. “Stay behind for a moment. I would like to speak with you regarding your assignment.”

“Of course, Professor,” Pierricoeur said as he flipped his assignment over. However, Turais got a glimpse at the "D" on Pierricoeur's sheet that was in stark contrast to the "O" on his paper.

Suddenly, it dawned upon Turais about Pierricoeur's oddity. He was struggling with Study of Ancient Runes and excelled in Arithmancy while Turais was the exact opposite. Pierricoeur was trying to get Turais to tutoring him and offering his service in return... by way of his off-putting way with language.

Turais eyed as the Professor went out of earshot. He calmed himself down and steadied his voice again. "Pierricoeur, I -"

"What?" Pierricoeur snapped as he threw his quill and paper into his bag angrily.

"Pierricoeur, I don't know what your issue is right now, but I'm willing to take you up on your offer -"

Pierricoeur looked up at Turais in complete confusion. "What in bloody Hell are you talking about?"

Pierricoeur's attitude was really grinding on his nerves. Turais forced himself to breath and calm down but somehow, this was the last straw. He turned to the boy and jabbed his finger at
Pierricoeur while he engaged with Pierricoeur head-on for the first time.

"Listen to me carefully, Pierricoeur," Turais snapped. "Do not mistake my kindness for weakness. I don't need you to thank me for ensuring your brother's safety in Slytherin, which - I would like to remind you - is all because of your piss-poor attitude and filthy mouth. But I would rather appreciate that you stop antagonizing me at every turn. Also, pull the damn stick out of your arse. The world thanks you in advance."

Turais glared at the Ravenclaw piercingly. Pierricoeur looked stunned at Turais' outburst as he stumbled backwards into his chair.

"Great," Turais huffed, "Now that you have shut up and are hopefully listening, I am offering to tutor you in Study of Ancient Runes."

Pierricoeur stared at Turais in shock.

"You would do that?" Pierricoeur asked incredulously, all hostility suspended.

"Yes," Turais said, regret already gnawing at his consciousness.

"I -" Pierricoeur looked like he was about to argue before he snapped his jaws shut. After a few tense moments, he said, "Thank you, let's meet up this Sunday at ten in the library if that suits you."

Turais nodded. "I should be free then."

“Mr Pierricoeur,” Professor Mather called out again as Pierricoeur hurried to the front.

***

"Did you know it’s Hogsmeade weekend in five days?" Jonty announced excitedly as he flopped down onto his seat at the Slytherin table for lunch.

"Oh no!" Alex said sarcastically. "It's not as if you didn't remind us twice every day for the past two weeks."

Jonty threw a pea at Alex in retaliation.

"I totally forgot!" Turais gasped as he looked up from his Spellman’s Syllabary. He just promised to have a tutoring session with Pierricoeur. It would be disrespectful and frankly ill-advised to break such a fragile truce between the two of them. "I need to catch up on school work. I'm afraid I can only head up after noon."

"Oh no," Jonty groaned, "Is there no way you can maybe finish everything beforehand? You're brilliant!"

"Afraid not," Turais sighed. "The electives are seriously putting a strain on my workload, especially Arithmancy. I don't understand a thing about the number charts and I'm sure I failed the assignment on Friday."

"I'm sorry that Professor Vector gives each person a unique problem so we can't help... but honestly, I'm just scraping by in that class so I'm in no position to help. But maybe someone can,"
Alex suggested. Turais looked at Alex, who was currently looking at Pierricoeur at the Ravenclaw table.

"You're not actually serious," Jonty gagged. "Turais will most definitely not ask that git for any help. And in the slightest chance he does, Pierricoeur would surely laugh at his face, make him beg, thoroughly embarrass him, then leave without providing any help. I seriously question your sanity after this statement, Alex."

"Actually, he offered to tutor me after Arithmancy class this morning..." Turais revealed.

"WHAT?!!" Jonty shouted as though Turais grew a second head.

"Mr Steward!" Professor Flitwick shouted across the Hall. "Calm yourself!"

Jonty raised his hand and waved an apology before he snapped his attention to Pierricoeur, then to Turais, then back again. "Actually?"

"Yeah... I was surprised as well..." Turais said.

Alex shrugged. "Pierricoeur seems to be in a better mood ever since Aigel managed to make some friends... well, a friend at least."

They looked over to Aigel, who was chatting animatedly with a fellow yearmate, a half-blood called Winston Moonshine. He noticed that the third-years were looking his way and he waved at them happily.

"Ahem..." Turais felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see Pierricoeur standing awkwardly as he stared down at his feet.

"What are you doing here?" Jonty asked harshly. "Haven't terrorized Turais enough in class and looking for a fifth helping?"

"Jonty," Turais waved the boy down. "What do you want, Pierricoeur?"

"Black, I... I'm here to apologize to you for today..." Pierricoeur said quietly.

"Is that all you've got to apologize for?" Jonty sneered.

"... and for the last two years..."

"So you think one simple apology can excuse what you've done for all this time?!" Jonty said.

Pierricoeur was at a loss as he wrung his arms helplessly.

"That's enough, Jonty," Turais sighed. "There's too much strife and too little healing. We might as well start here..."

"But Turais!" Jonty hissed.

"I've made up my mind," Turais said. "Listen Pierricoeur, I will forgive you -" Jonty groaned loudly, " - but I will not forget what you've done. We may never be friends but we might as well not be enemies."

Pierricoeur nodded. "I understand... and also, about the tutoring session on Sunday... I was wondering if we can reschedule it for the next weekend because I just realized it is Hogsmeade..."
weekend -"

"Yes! That's perfectly fine," Jonty interrupted. "And if that's all, you can leave now."

Pierricoeur looked between the three of them one final time and walked away. Turais watched as the boy walked near his brother, who jolted up and gave him a big hug, before he walked back to his usual spot on the Ravenclaw table.

"I don't understand you, Turais. Forgive Pierricoeur... What are you, a saint?" Jonty said as he kicked Alex under the table. "Tell him you agree, you dolt!"

"Yeah..." Alex said. "... how do you forgive someone so easily?"

Turais sighed as he looked down at his Ancient Runes homework again. "Being angry with someone is no fun. If Pierricoeur is willing to take that first step, I am willing to give him a chance..." Jonty shook his head in frustration, "... And I really need the help in Arithmancy considering that I failed the last assignment."

"WHAT?!" Jonty shouted even louder this time as he stood up in shock.

"One point from Slytherin, Mr Steward!" Professor Flitwick shouted.

Jonty waved sheepishly before turning to Turais with a scowl. He then socked Turais in the arm and said, "You just lost me a Galleon, mate!"

"What do you mean?"

"Gerald and I had a bet last week. He said he read your teacup and saw that you would fail an assignment," Steward hissed.

"You two bet on stuff I do?" Turais said, slightly put-off by the bizarre idea.

"Well..." Jonty scratched the nape of his hair. "It was a strange bet but I called him on his bluff because I never imagined that you would fail anything!"

"I'm gladdened by your confidence in me," Turais said dryly.

"Not anymore, I'm not," Jonty said. "You owe me a Galleon's worth of Cockroach Clusters."

"No, I do not."

"Yes, you do."

"By the way, the two of you are going to be breaking some school rules tomorrow," Turais said nonchalantly as Jonty choked on a gulp of pumpkin juice.

"Did you just say that in the middle of the Great Hall?" Jonty said with a hushed whisper.

"Yup," Turais grinned, popping the "p" at the end for extra emphasis.

"And why, exactly?" Alex asked.

"You'll see tomorrow night," Turais said mysteriously.

"It's bad enough that we are doing something shifty," Jonty moaned. "And why does it need to be at night of all times?"
"It's precisely because it is at night that we are breaking the school rules," Turais explained.

"Oh, OOHHHH!" Jonty gasped as he looked over to the Gryffindor table at Sirius.

"Mr Steward! Do not make me give you detention!"

Chapter End Notes

I wonder what Turais is planning to do...

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 45: A Very Sirius Birthday, is on schedule to be released in two weeks. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-06-13
A Very Sirius Birthday

CHAPTER 45
A VERY SIRIUS BIRTHDAY

November 1, 1971 (Monday)

GRAND HEIST AT FLAMEL'S HOME?

by Sclandora Gosp

French Aurors have been seen entering the residency of the famed recluse, Nicolas Flamel, at an unusual frequency in the past several weeks. According to FlamelWatch, a community-led organization that tracks the alchemist’s activity, the spike in Auror and magical activity around the Flamel residency has captured their interest. Readers may know that Flamel is the creator of the Philosopher's Stone, a wondrous substance that can transform scrap metal into gold and produce the Elixir of Life. It is rumoured that the Stone is kept at his home, therefore, it is possible that the Stone has been stolen.

Of course, the Stone has been reportedly stolen several times throughout the millennium. However, Nicolas Flamel never confirmed those stories. Perhaps this was just a false alarm, but I don't believe that is the case. However, since Nicolas Flamel possesses the knowledge to create the substance, I doubt he would be too concerned about its theft.

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November 2, 1971 (Tuesday)

Three Gryffindor students were strolling up to the Great Hall from the dungeons as a fourth one was red-faced and running quickly behind them, trying to keep up.

" - good thinking on the powdered Bicorn horn, Sirius! Rookwood and his lackeys got pasted!"

"Couldn't do it without Remus though."

"Yeah, how did you realize that Slughorn mislabeled the ingredients, Remus?! They were all white powder, white powder, and white powder!"
"It... just didn't smell right, Peter," Remus said with slight discomfort. "I can't explain it."

"Sensitive little nose, our Rems has. But good work sneaking to the other side of the room, Pete. You being little paid off."

"Thanks!"

Eyeing an opportunity, Turais pointed his wand at his target inconspicuously.

"Diffindo," Turais hissed as Remus' bag split open with items spilling all over the floor.

"Rems," James sighed as he knelt down to pick up the inkwell and a notebook. "You really should let Sirius and I buy you a new bag."

"I can ask Turais to buy you the best one they have in Hogsmeade," Sirius said. "I saw on one of the catalogs about a silver-reinforced bag-"

"No silver-!" Remus said quickly. "-reinforced bag..." Under his friend's questioning gazes, Remus lowered his eyes and muttered, "I'll just read up on how to mend it later..."

"Hey," Turais revealed himself from the shadows. "Why don't you three run up ahead to get lunch? I will help Remus fix his bag."

James looked like he was about to argue when Sirius spoke, "Yeah, James. Turais knows way more magic than we do. Let's get food first. I'm starving."

"But -"

Sirius interrupted, "I'll tell Lily about -"

"Okay, fine!" James allowed himself to be pushed away. "You two can't hold this over me forever."

Sirius gave Turais a wink before they entered the Great Hall while Peter followed suit. How could he not love Sirius with all of his heart? Once they were left alone, Turais whispered to Remus, "I will be planning a surprise party for Sirius tonight. Can you open the portrait hole for me at around midnight?"

"It's a full moon tonight..." Remus said dejectedly. "I'm sorry my... uh, condition disrupted your plans."

"Don't apologize, Remus," Turais said quickly, chiding himself internally for not remembering such an important date. He clutched Remus’ shoulders, stared into his eyes, and said sincerely, "Remember, you should never apologize for your condition. Never, ever, think this is your fault."

"But Sirius has his best friend and you," Remus said, "He wouldn't mind if I'm missing -"

"Sirius would very much want you to be there to celebrate with him. I'm sure he considers you as one of his best friends too. I will just turn this surprise midnight celebration into something more... conventional tomorrow," Turais said and cast a Reparo. "Here you go, good as new."

"You shouldn't change your plans just for me..." said Remus softly as he slung his bag over his head.

"Well, I pride myself in being far more accommodating than the lunar calendar," Turais said
with an encouraging smile. "Your only job is to focus on getting better tomorrow, alright?"

After extracting a promise from Remus, Turais headed back to where Jonty and Alex were sitting. It was then he noted several Slytherin first-years plastered with bright orange paste for burn wounds. And one of them was Severus, who entered the Great Hall with a large swath of paste covering his right side of his face. His robes also had tiny holes in them that revealed the pearly white dress shirt beneath.

Turais waved him over and asked, “Severus, are you alright? What happened?”

“Madam Pomfrey said it’s just a light scalding,” Severus said, wincing as the burn wound stretched from his action. "As for what happened. A fight broke out during Potions.”

“Between you and James?” Turais asked immediately.

“Why do you always assume it has something to do with me and him specifically?” Severus asked. "It was that one - well - two times. And we apologized to each other for it already."

Turais winced. “I'm sorry if I sounded accusatory.”

“You're not completely wrong though,” Severus admitted. “It had something to do with Potter alright. But it was between him and Rookwood. Rookwood called... called Lily a mud... - you know which word it is - and Potter punched him right in the nose - in front of Professor Slughorn, no less. Then, my cauldron exploded and the potion rained on most of the students on the Slytherin side.”

Turais recalled the conversation he overheard in the Entrance Hall and turned to look at the four boys sitting at the Gryffindor table. They all looked mightily smug, James in particular.

“So, who was caught?”

"If you mean who've received punishments, then only Rookwood and Potter received detention for fighting.” There was an audible snort from the Gryffindor table when Turais saw the four boys bent over in uncontrollable laughter and pointing at the incoming Rookwood. The Slytherin boy looked like he wore a hideous orange facial mask. Severus let off an unimpressed huff as Turais barely stifled a laugh of his own, “How old are they? Six? Honestly, Potter likes to think he’s so clever for pulling off a blinder. But if it wasn’t for me, that bumbling, pig-squeak sidekick of his would never have been able to sneak anything into my cauldron. Also, who is thick enough to leave the incriminating evidence on their own desks? Apparently, Potter is. If it wasn’t for me vanishing that empty bottle of powdered Bicorn horns before Slughorn saw it, anyone with a shred of Potions knowledge and common sense would have linked it to the explosion. Potter is just fool-hardy and... frankly... stupid. I just hope his attitude doesn't rub off on your brother, that'd be a shame.”

“So you knew about the explosion beforehand?” Turais asked and Severus nodded. “Then why didn't you...” Turais gestured at Severus’ battered appearance.

“Step out of harm’s way and be the only Slytherin that was not splashed? That will not be suspicious at all,” Severus said sarcastically. “Let alone the fact that every Slytherin will hate me for not taking some damage. Potter might be stupid, but I’m not.”

"Right... Anyway, thank you for the information. I hope your wound heals quickly," Turais said. "I have some Dittany you can use-"

"Thank you for the offer, but I'll pass," Severus said. "I don't need more attention on me."
This will heal on its own just fine.”

Once the boy left, Turais buried his face into his hands and heaved a sigh.

“I heard anecdotally that James Potter is quite the character,” Jonty mused. "He’s already somewhat of a leader among the first-years. But he is very different from his cousin. They are both popular but the older one is steadfast while the younger one is... excitable. So... Like father, like son? My father told me that Lord Potter was quite the prankster as well.”

“What does that say about me...” Turais moaned into his hands.

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing... That's old news. Tell me something I don’t already know,” Turais groaned.

“Well... I guess we found a person who’s a greater trouble-niffler than you?” Jonty offered as Turais banged his head on the table. Repeatedly.

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November 3, 1971 (Wednesday)

Turais was currently in the kitchen as the house elves were preparing enough food for a small, lavish birthday party when the door creaked open once more.

"Turais! How did you know about the kitchen?"

He turned around to see a gobsmacked James stepping in.

"How did you know about this place?" Turais asked.

"Hey, I asked you first!"

"And you're going to answer first."

"That's not fair."

"I don't care."

James huffed. "Fine. My dad told me. There, your turn."

'Well, the Marauders' Map did. But close enough,' Turais thought.

"My dad told me as well."

James narrowed his eyes suspiciously, but then he was distracted by the variety of food assembled.

"Are these the food for Sirius' birthday?!" James gasped incredulously.

"Of course! Is that why you are here?"
The first-year nodded as his jaws remained slack. "I was planning on sneaking in some sandwiches and a dessert or two. I was not planning on bringing up an entire feast!"

"Well, there is something called maintaining a good relation with house-elves and planning ahead of time. I told them about what I wanted for today two weeks ago and they delivered spectacularly.

"Wicked!" James shouted as he wandered towards a gelatinous mass that was quivering and bouncing on a plate that was carried on the head of an incoming house-elf. It was green with coconut flakes on top that resembled a translucent snow hill. James looked as though he was about to poke it and Turais slapped his hand away.

"No touching," Turais said.

James pouted.

"I also asked them to help decorate the dormitory, so -"

"Pete is currently distracting Sirius with his fictitious crushes. However, I bet a few are not that fictitious," James smirked. "You told me not to let Sirius anywhere near our room until Remus comes back from his very sudden and very suspicious visit to his mother's for the second time in a month."

"I did not say that last part," Turais frowned.

"Well no, but isn't it a teeny bit strange to you that he's missing all the time?" James inquired. "I know Remus trusts you and goes to you for a lot of things, seeing you somehow managed to get him to act normally again. But has he not told you anything at all?"

"Not things that I've not already been aware of," Turais mentally patted himself on the back for that answer.

"I mean, I would understand if he was just trying to skive classes, but then he studies twice as hard compared to the rest of us. And there's him looking all pale and sickly every time he 'visits his mother'. Your brother reckons he is being abused but I just think he is lying about something. But then I don't understand why exactly he is lying."

"Maybe he doesn't want others to pry into his private matters? There are secrets for a reason, James."

"Well, I tell my friends everything. What’s the point of having friends if you are not going to be open with them?"

"You don’t tell everyone about your Invisibility Cloak, do you?" Turais pointed out.

James opened his mouth to argue, but his mouth hung comedically when he couldn’t come up with a response.

"Well... that’s different." James said lamely.

"I know you mean well, James," Turais said. "But please try to consider the other person’s situation. Promise?"

"You sound just like Evans," James pouted.
“If you want her to like you, maybe you should listen to what she says then,” Turais suggested.

“But she has some really bad ideas,” James complained. “Just the other day, she got mad at me for punching Rookwood. I mean, he called her a ‘mudblood’ for Merlin’s sake! I only managed to get three good punches... lucky bastard... if only I can get at him some other way...”

Turais could see the gears turning in James’ mind and he quickly interrupted, "That reminds me, don't you have detention today?"

"I do! Well, I mean I just did!" James said excitedly, successfully distracted from his train of thought. "But it was with Dumbledore -"

"Dumbledore?!" Turais exclaimed. Wasn’t a fight too trivial for the Headmaster to get involved?

"Yup! He called me up to his office and asked me a few questions before letting me go,” James said. "I like him. He is very understanding."

"I'm sure he is," Turais said blandly. "What did he ask you?"

"Just a bit of this and a bit of that," James said distractedly as his fingers inched dangerously close to an enticing pile of bonbons. Turais grabbed James' wrist and the boy let out a sigh of frustration. "Please just let me have one, Turais."

"Only if you answer the question properly."

James rolled his eyes. "He just asked me about my family tree. Do you want a play-by-play of all the questions?"

"That would be preferable."

He sighed dramatically before starting, "He asked me if I was named after some famous ancestor in the family. I said I was the first James in the family. He then asked if the Potters lived in Godric's Hollow throughout history and I replied that was the case, at least for the most-senior male line of our family. Finally, he asked who was the oldest ancestor of our family and I said probably Linfred of Stinchcombe or 'The Potterer.' But no one really knows for sure anyway. And that was it."

"Don't you find it strange that he asked about your family history?"

James shrugged as he wrung his hand free and popped a sweet into his mouth. "I don't mind answering a few questions if it means I get out of detention."

Turais frowned.

***

One of the first-year boys' dormitories had undergone a magical transformation. The walls, ceiling, and beds were hung with garland wreaths of evergreens and flowers that formed perfect groves. The berries gleamed and glistened with a sparkling sheen that reflected back the light of the
setting sun like fairy lights. Streamers were curled perfectly as they dangled down from the ceiling. In the middle of the room was a long table that hosted turkeys, sausages, plum puddings, mince-pies, pastries, juices, Butterbeer bottles, and a tower of assorted candies. Most importantly, there was a large Quaffle cake that sat on the end of the table with eleven candles atop and the words: 'Happy birthday, Sirius!' written on it. Finishing off the elaborate decorations was the small mountain of presents of various shapes and sizes that heaped by the door.

"I hope Siri likes this," Turais said worriedly as he adjusted the floating banner slightly towards the left. "Does this look better?"

"I assure you that your brother will not care whether the banner is an inch further left or right," Alex said exasperatedly.

"Just let him fuss over it," said Jonty as he bounced on one of the beds. "Oh - these beds are springier than ours."

There was a knock on the door as everyone froze. But then, Remus poked his head through the gap.

"Rems, you made it!" James said excitedly as he dragged the boy into the room and slapped the door shut. "You look a bit pale. But how's your mom doing?"

"She's... she's doing much better," Remus said as he continued to goggle at the food and decorations. James’ sarcasm clearly evaded him. "This is amazing, Turais."

"Is it?" Turais grinned happily.

Remus nodded wordlessly when there was another knock on the door. But this time, it was to a particular set of rhythms.

"Pete is back," James hissed as Turais drew the blinds shut, plunging the room into a twilight darkness.

The door creaked open as light from the hallway split in. Sirius' silhouette entered the room cautiously as a chorus of party horns blared out. Turais opened the blinds once again as they all shouted, "Happy birthday, Sirius!"

The birthday boy stood gobsmacked at the doorway as his large, round eyes absorbed the scene in front of him.

"Is this all... for me?" Sirius gasped.

"Of course!" Turais said as he walked towards his brother with the levitated Quaffle cake in front of him with the candles ablaze. "Happy birthday, Siri."

"Thank you, Turais!" Sirius squealed as they hugged. "I thought you forgot all about it..."

"I'll never forget your birthday."


"Sops! Can we start eating yet? This pudding is telling me to eat it already!"

***
The widely anticipated Hogmeade Weekend had finally arrived the day before the Gryffindor-Slytherin match. After a brutal training schedule for the past week, Turais groaned at the prospect of missing Hogsmeade when Michael announced that he had somehow secured the pitch this morning.

Just as Turais thought his Hogsmeade plans were obliterated, Michael reversed his decision last-minute.

"I still cannot believe Wilkins cancelled Quidditch practice," Jonty said as he wrapped himself in a woolly scarf over his large outer cloak.

"Me neither," Turais said. "Especially when the Gryffindor-Slytherin match is tomorrow. But I'll not look at the gift horse in its mouth."

"Well, let's go then!"

The three of them trekked along the trail towards Hogsmeade with their peers in the biting cold like a waddle of penguins. Amidst the excited and occasionally boisterous conversations, they arrived at the picturesque village composed of little thatched cottages and shops.

"Where should we head up to first?" Turais asked.

"Tomes and Scrolls?" Alex offered as he pointed at the store ahead.

"Give over. Are you an old geezer?" Jonty asked incredulously. "Is this a quiet Sunday village fête when the elderly tombola is cancelled last-minute?"

"How about the Magic Neep?"

"We can't grow plants in the common room, Alex," Jonty sighed. "There's not enough sunlight."

"Well, Devil's Snare doesn't require sunlight."

"Are you going to get a cutting of one and place it by your bedside table so it can strangle you in your sleep then?" Jonty asked.

"Okay, okay," Alex said. "I was just making a point about the sunlight comment..."

"And I was also just making a point about how strange it is you want to visit a plant store -"  

"Let's go for a butterbeer at the Three Broomsticks then," Turais said, eager to get out of the chilly autumn winds.

"Now that is something I can get behind," Jonty said immediately.

They crossed the road and entered the warm and smoky inn that was packed with patrons.

"I'll get the drinks," Jonty said as he pulled off his scarf. He looked like he was in search of someone. "You two find a table."

Turais and Alex made their way through the narrow space between tables and, with a stroke of luck, found a vacant table at the very back of the room just across from a series of private rooms.
"- I'll be back with your orders very soon," the barmaid's voice sounded beside them. Turais turned to see a young Rosmerta exiting one of the rooms while leaving it half-opened. Through the half-opened door, Turais recognized the girl he had a brief encounter with.

Turais patted on Alex's arm urgently and pointed them out. "That's Michael and Lavinia Swire, isn't it?"

"It is!" Alex exclaimed. "What is she doing here? Isn't she supposed to be in France? Wandering a bit too far north, don't you reckon?"

"I'm not sure..." Turais said as he continued to peek at the couple. Lavinia looked shy as she dipped her blushing face downwards, only casting the occasional glances at the polite but stiff figure across from her. Her adoration for the boy was plainly written on her face. One must be blind to not recognize it.

"Three butterbeers - " Jonty announced as Turais snapped his gaze towards the boy, " - what are you looking at - ah - I see you have spotted Wilkins!"

Jonty was brimming with excitement as he climbed onto his stool and leaned in as though he was about to reveal the best gossip ever.

"I just heard from Rosmerta that Wilkins is on a date with the youngest Swire daughter. She swears they are in a courtship. But I swear the girl must be a goner for Wilkins to travel all this way just to see him for several hours when she studies in Beauxbatons!! Beauxbatons!"

Jonty was scanning their faces. But his face fell when it did not elicit the reaction he was expecting.

"Why are you not the least bit surprised?" Jonty asked.

"Well..." Turais and Alex shared a look. "We saw Michael and Lavinia's families together when we were shopping in Diagon Alley -"

"And you two decided that it was not worth mentioning to your best friend? " Jonty hissed angrily.

"I mean... they weren't in a courtship then... and even if they were, a courtship is really only their families' own business," Turais said.

"It's only their families' own business, " Jonty mocked Turais' tone and groaned dramatically. "Why am I stuck with you two oblivious fools? This is going to be the talk of the town!" Jonty huffed as he sat on his chair, "Now I don't feel like sharing the second piece of gossip."

"Come on, Jonty," Turais said. "Don't be so spiteful."

"In case you forgot, I am a Slytherin pureblood. Spite is my middle name," Jonty huffed as he crossed his arms in an act of defiance.

"Fine. Be the spoilsport that you are," Turais smirked as he savoured his hot tankard of foamy butterbeer. "You can't resist telling us anyway."

Jonty glared at Turais for a long minute before he dropped his stance.

"Fine! You win," Jonty snapped as he took a gulp of the butterbeer in front of him. "Merlin
knows I hate it when you're right. So... Rosmerta told me that the villagers have heard screams and shouts from an abandoned shack nearby since the beginning of this summer. But in the most recent haunting, there has also been howling. They called Dumbledore in to investigate and he said the shack is possessed by some violent spirits. But I don't understand why he didn't do something about it. It's so close to the school and it could be dangerous."

"The Shrieking Shack!" Turais thought.

"But why did Dumbledore not do anything?" Alex mused. Then, he gasped, "Maybe it's something that even he can't banish?""

"What? Dumbledore's the most powerful wizard in all of Britain!" Jonty said as he paled. "If he can't banish that thing, I'm not messing with it."

"Heyo, Steward!" someone shouted behind Turais. Jonty looked over his shoulder and waved the person over.

It was Kaiden. Turais' eyes darted towards the open door where Michael and Lavinia were. He aimed his wand discreetly at the door as it closed with a click just as Kaiden walked past it.

"Hey, Rais. Nice to see you here," he said and placed a large paper bag on the table.

"What do you have there?" Jonty asked as he peered inside. But Kaiden was quicker to scrunch the bag closed.

"Nothing for you," Kaiden declared as Jonty's shoulders drooped. "I bought these for Michael."

"Come on. He won't find one tiny piece missing from this large bag -"

"Update me on the latest, Steward," Kaiden interrupted.

Jonty sighed as he quickly told him about the Shrieking Shack.

"Where is it?" Kaiden asked immediately.

"It's in the moor just beyond the little wooded area at the far end of the village. Only thing within miles, you can't miss it."

"Okay, I will definitely check it out with my friends next time."

"What?" Jonty teased. "Too scared to go alone?"

Kaiden tutted. "I hear a chicken clucking."

"Cheers to that, Potter," Jonty said and took a sip. "I'm not sticking my neck out for something remotely dangerous. Didn't someone just lose an eye playing Granny's Footsteps with the Whomping Willow?"

"Almost lost his eye," Kaiden grimaced. "And it's a first-year in our House, Davey Gudgeon. He was dared into doing it by my younger cousin in what? - the first weekend."

'Why, James? Why?!' Turais groaned internally. So he was the boy who was lying in the Hospital Wing when they were looking for Remus back in the first weekend of September.

"Lacking wit, getting hit," Jonty shrugged.
"Is there more?"

"Nuh uh, you know how this works, Potter."

"I could have gotten the haunted shack story from anyone here," Kaiden said crossly. "That was not worth a trade."

They engaged in a silent staring contest for a moment before Jonty yielded. "Fine... it was worth a try. However, you probably already know about the other piece of juicy gossip though."

Kaiden frowned, "What do you mean? I just arrived and I haven't a chance to speak with anyone yet."

Suddenly, Turais recognized trouble and quickly cast a Silencing Charm at Jonty under the table. The boy's mouth opened to respond only for him to speak wordlessly in confusion.

Kaiden turned his attention to Turais, the corners of his eyes were crinkling in confusion. "Rais? Why did you silence Steward -"

From the corner of his eyes, he saw young Madam Rosmerta strutting in their direction with a tray of drinks. She was returning with Michael's orders.

"Mr Wilkins," Kaiden's head immediately snapped towards the barmaid's voice and spotted Michael through the opening. "Here's your order. A mulled mead and a red currant rum."

"Michael?" Kaiden muttered to himself as he walked over. "Michael! Why are you here? I thought you were busy with - " He halted and observed Michael's guilty expression and Lavinia's surprised one. " - oh - Have I met you before, miss?"

All the blood drained from Michael's face completely, rendering him pale with sickness and worry. He looked between the two helplessly while the tall and willowy figure stood up. Lavinia Swire was dressed in her baby-blue silk dress, stylized matching cape, and black lace-up shoes, which shone in stark contrast against the mundane black and brown of her surroundings. Her cape fluttered gently as she glided gracefully towards them with an air of grace and effortless composure and extended her hand to the shell-shocked boy.

"No, I'm afraid we haven't. You must be Kaiden," Kaiden took Lavinia's hand shakily while his terrified eyes were still trained on Michael. "I've heard so much about you from Michael. I'm Lavinia, Michael's -"

"Friend," Michael immediately said. "Friend."

Lavinia flushed pink. "Ah... yes, we are still getting acquainted. But we hope to become something more official soon..." Lavinia let go of Kaiden's hand to loop her arm around Michael's despondent one and gazed up at him adoringly.

Kaiden's gaze swam frantically between the two when a sudden horrifying realization dawned upon him. His lips trembled and said stutteringly, "Oh... I... I see. I... I've heard m...many pleasant things about you from Michael as... as well."

"Please do join us for a drink while you're here, Kaiden," Lavinia said kindly. "Does mead suit your taste -"

"I...I'm not of age yet," Kaiden ran a hand through his hair, eyes wide in panicked search for the exit.
"How about Butter-"

Kaiden took a half step backwards. Then another. His face was screwed up in a pained expression. "Please excuse m...me, Lavinia. I'm not feeling too well -" He bumped into an empty chair behind him and stumbled slightly. "Enjoy your date, Michael, I...I'll..." Then, he darted towards the exit as Turais chased after him.

"Kaiden," Turais shouted as the Gryffindor walked quickly down the middle of the High Street. "Kaiden, stop. Please!"

But the boy heeded no attention to his words as he continued to stumble down the busy road and into multiple disgruntled students. Turais trailed the boy until they reached the outskirts of the town surrounded by the decrepit warehouses just beyond Hog's Head Inn. The rusty tinge of brown, the sickly-green blotches of mildew, subliminal stench of urine, and decomposing wood surrounded them as Kaiden tumbled onto the ground.

"Kaiden -"

"I'm fine," Kaiden gasped with his face turned away from Turais. "Go away."

"Kaiden," Turais whispered as he reached for the older boy's trembling shoulder.

"I'm happy for him. I really am. He... he's in a c...courtship," Kaiden whispered as he shrugged off the contact weakly. But then, the fight seemed to have left him completely as Turais gathered the now-unresistant boy in his arms. Suddenly, a wretched, choked noise escaped from his throat. Sobs then started to spill from his mouth as he grasped at Turais' robes desperately and pressed his face into it.

"H...He's in a courtship," Kaiden said thickly in between hiccups, "I can see she l...loves him very much. They're going to be married."

Kaiden's voice shattered on that final word and Turais hugged the boy tightly without a word.

"I knew this would happen... but why does it still hurt so much?" Kaiden cried before he descended into a heartbreaking whimper.

Turais continued to hold on as the older boy burrowed himself into the fabrics and cried his heart out, soaking their robes with tears. Turais did not know how long he sat there, by little by little, Kaiden's sobs broke into soft hiccoughs until he was calm enough to pull away and wipe at his face.

"I... I shouldn't ruin your... your first Hogsmeade weekend," Kaiden sniffed. "I've already ruined Michael and L... Lavinia's date. They must have wanted the relationship to stay away from the public's eye and now I... I..." Turais couldn't help but detect the forcefulness of the last two words.

"Don't say that," Turais said. "You didn't ruin anything. Michael decided to go to the Three Broomsticks for a date on Hogsmeade weekend when half the school is in this tiny village. It was not your fault if his courtship was known by the entire school."

"Did you know about this before today?" Kaiden asked suddenly.

"I..." Turais hesitated as he braced himself for an outburst, "Yes..."

But the expected outburst didn't come. Instead, Kaiden merely shook his head. "I only outed
Michael's date to everyone in Hogwarts by making a scene," Kaiden said deprecatingly. "My mom was right. Michael deserves someone better than me - someone who actually knows how to treat him properly..."

"Kaiden -"

"No... I should have known... I should have been more tactful..."

"Kaiden, Michael's the one who hid this information from his best friend - you ," Turais said. "You can't blame yourself for your reaction."

"No, he didn't lie to me," Kaiden said softly. "He just wanted some privacy and I ruined everything for acting the way I did."

"Kaiden -"

"Turais," the Gryffindor raised his hand to silence him. "I... thank you... for coming after me... but I need some time to think... alone -"

There was a loud bang, similar to that of a car backfiring, that reverberated as the two boys snapped their gaze towards the noise. Afterward, everything settled back into an eerie silence.

"W... What was that?" Kaiden said in a worried hush.

"I don't know..." Turais whispered back as he palmed his wand.

There was a series of urgent footsteps approaching their position as Turais clamoured in front of Kaiden. Seconds later, there were several muffled shouts as a group of Aurors appearing from the same spot.

"Father?" Kaiden gasped as Charlus looked at them in surprise.

"Kaiden? Turais? What are you doing here?!" Charlus shouted. He turned around and muttered something to his subordinates. A pair of them immediately started to scan the perimeter with spells while the other pair investigated the nearby structures. Then, the Deputy Head Auror ran over, clutched Kaiden's shoulders, and ran his eyes all over his son. "Are you injured? Does anything hurt?"

Kaiden shook his head. "How about you, Turais?"

"I'm fine."

"Did you see anyone running in this direction? They may have a strange tatt-"

"We didn’t see anyone,” Kaiden said.

Charlus let out a sigh of relief.

"Who were you looking for?" asked Kaiden.

"Just some... suspicious folks," Charlus said with a reassuring smile. "No one particularly dangerous, but I'm glad you two weren't involved regardless. Now, let me finish up and I will escort you back to Hogwarts. I would like to talk to Dumbledore anyway."

The two boys nodded.
"ACKKKK!" Screams erupted in the distance just as Turais fetched his Nimbus 1700.

"What happened?" Turais demanded as he entered the common room. At the same time, several squirming, writhing boys tumbled down the stairs with unsteady footsteps. Turais recognized them as first-years sharing the same dormitory. "Can someone tell me what happened?"

"This!" Rookwood snarled as he swept back his hair to reveal a large, angry patch of red skin on one cheek. Similar blotches were seen peeking from under the sleeves and trousers.

"That looks like an allergic reaction," someone offered.

"Thanks for the enlightenment!" the boy shouted back.

"Did you come into contact with -"

"Do we look like dimwits to you?! Of course we did not touch anything," Rookwood snapped. "Come on, we need to find Slughorn to get us something for this!"

The five boys continued scratching at their backs and limbs as they filed out.

"I wonder what happened?" Alex said as the rest of the Slytherins buzzed with excitement as to what exactly happened to them. But Turais had a good idea who was - or were - the culprits.

Turais entered the Great Hall hoping to have a chat with Sirius and James, but his attention was diverted almost immediately to the glaring absence of both Quidditch captains. Turais feared it was because of what happened in Hogsmeade. And his fear was confirmed as he caught whispers of the rumours that involved "Wilkins", "Potter", and "a pretty Beauxbaton girl".

"I spun a false rumour around the entire situation already - which I never do. I also told Rosmerta to not tell anyone about Wilkins and Swire. ," Jonty gasped indignantly. "She swore on her magic and I even gave her a ten Galleons tip for it!"

"It might not be because of Rosmerta," Turais said. "There were a lot of eyes on Kaiden crashing through the streets of Hogsmeade. I'm sure they can piece the two things together... but I'm going to head down to the pitch right now," Turais said as he turned to leave.

"But you didn't even have breakfast yet!" Alex shouted behind him.

A cluster of footsteps sounded as Cornfoot appeared in his periphery while he reached the misty haze that enveloped the grounds. The rest of the Slytherin team, except Michael, were all present.
"Do you know where Wilkins is?" Cornfoot asked.

"No clue -"

"BLACK!" Someone shrieked from behind as they jumped. Gwenyth Orpington was shoving her way past other Quidditch players angrily. "WHERE IS THAT USELESS KNOBHEAD WILKINS?!"

All the boys winced in pain at their abused eardrums.

"We are wondering about the same -"

"Spare me the lies, Black!" Gwen shrieked. "Do you know where that completely-undeserving-piece-of-blithering-tool-so-dense-that-light-bends-around-him is?"

"Orpington," Cornfoot braved the heaving girl who looked quite similar to a brooding Hungarian Horntail mother. "We really don't know."

Gwen's eyes searched the boy's face and then Turais'. "I better not find you covering for your beloved captain or I will tear you to shreds with my teeth," Gwen threatened. "BLACK OR NOT, BE DAMNED!"

"Do you reckon it has something to do with Potter?" Harper asked as they watched the girl headed back to the castle.

"Haven't you heard?" Pyrites said. "Potter and Wilkins' date - that Swire girl - had an argument at the Three Broomsticks. Potter must have said something terribly rude since Swire slapped Potter across the face and he ran away in tears."

"No, that isn't what I heard," said Riley, the new Chaser said. "Potter and Wilkins had a falling out because they both liked the Swire girl since they met at a Ministry function two summers ago. Pity she went to Beauxbatons or else I might have a chance with her."

"Stuff it, Riley," Gibbon snided. "Between you, Wilkins, and Potter, she won't even bat an eyelash at you."

"Speak for yourself!" Riley huffed. "I'm good-looking!"

"Okay, team. Who's better looking, Riley or a toa-"

"The toad," Pyrites said without sparing a thought while the rest of the group laughed.

When they reached the changing room, Turais pulled out his wand to unlock the door when he realized it was already opened. Confused, he entered to find Michael shrugging on his Quidditch robes. The captain merely glanced at the bewildered team before continuing with his routine. His eyes were bloodshot, clearly from a lack of sleep.

"Uh... did you sleep in here last night, cap?" Cornfoot asked hesitantly as he eyed the transfigured pillow and the pile of spare Quidditch robes.

Michael grunted once, which Turais assumed it meant yes. The team shared a discrete and concerned look with each other.

"If you're just going to stand there, why don't you go out to the pitch and warm-up?"

His voice was low and dangerous.
"Right away, cap," Turais quickly said as he ushered everyone to the other side of the room and out the door. Before he could exit, however, Cornfoot blocked him.

"Talk to him," Cornfoot whispered and thumbed towards the captain. Turais nodded as Cornfoot mounted his broom and flew off.

"Hey Michael, did you know someone played a prank on the first-years?" Turais hedged.

Michael charmed the spare robes back into the storage room wordlessly. Through the thin wooden walls, he could hear the footsteps of eager students arriving for the match.

"Where have you been last night?"

The captain retrieved his broom from his locker.

"Kaiden wasn't at breakfast this morning," Turais said quietly as he walked up. Michael's actions stilled as Turais continued. "Why aren't you asking me about what happened to Kaiden yesterday when I chased after him?"

No answer.

"Why haven't you told Kaiden about Lavinia yet?" Turais asked, his voice grew louder as he became angrier. "What were you thinking, Michael? I don't approve of this shady business in the first place but you are begging for trouble if you're having a clandestine rendezvous with your intended in Hogsmeade during Hogsmeade weekend when half the school is all crammed into one tiny village!

"Why is this even a secret?!" Turais was shouting now. "Kaiden's your best friend! He's going to be your best man in the wedding! I'd think he would be the first person you told about this. I'd think he would want to be told. Do you know how upset he was yesterday?! That was the worst way for him to find out and it was all your fault!"

Turais breathed heavily as the captain closed his eyes. The chattering and footsteps outside were growing noisier and louder.

"Why, Michael? Why?" Turais asked "Say something. Please!"

"I didn't want him to know," the other boy whispered into his locker. "I didn't want Kaiden to know."

"Why?"

"I... " Michael seemed sad. "I just didn't want things to change between us."

Turais' anger ebbed. He said softly, "How would things change? He's still your best friend and you're his."

"But... but it's just going to be different, Turais," Michael said with frustration, "You don't understand, Turais."

"Then help me understand."

"I... I don't want it to be like when Kaiden was dating Catherine. We didn't do everything together anymore, we didn't tell each other everything anymore. It was rubbish."

"That is an inevitable part of growing up, Michael," Turais thought back to his experience
with Ron and Hermione, recalling them like they were memories of a different person. "You will both have your own families. While you may stay close, it will never be the same as when you were in Hogwarts. Both of you will put your family before each other -"

"But I don't want that to happen to us."

Turais paused. "So you will never marry and have a family then? What if Kaiden wants a family of his own? Are you going to stop him from having that just so nothing ever changes?"

There was silence in the locker room as voices and cheers surrounded them in all directions. The match was about to start.

"I... Of course Kaiden deserves to have a family! He deserves someone he loves and someone who...loves him in return. He deserves everything he wants in this world."

'He deserves everything good in the world,' Turais remembered Kaiden saying when they were in Paris.

Suddenly, the boy in front of him seemed so incredibly small, as if invisible iron shackles of society, family, and loyalty were weighing down on him, imprisoning him, suffocating him...

Just then, the Slytherin team clambered noisily back into the changing room. Michael cleared his throat as he retrieved his Beater's Bat and slammed the locker shut.

"I wanted you to calm him down, not make him depressed," Cornfoot hissed into his ear angrily.

Turais gave the Beater a helpless shrug before they lined up for Michael's pre-game speech.

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"Pyrites steals the Quaffle from Potter - the Gryffindor captain is not playing so hot today, is he?" Hawthorne's voice echoed throughout the packed stands. "Passes to Riley - then to Harper - back to Riley - SLYTHERIN SCORES! And Wilkins motions for a time-out!"

Turais watched as Michael flew over to his fellow Beater.

"As a quick recap, the Slytherins, with 300 points, are currently leading with a healthy margin of 200 points, against the Gryffindors, which has 100."

Michael muttered something in his partner's ear, who immediately turned and frowned at the decidedly less energetic Kaiden. Then, Cornfoot turned back to Michael and started to gesticulate angrily.

"Cornfoot seems to be in a disagreement with the captain. I wonder what it is about," Hawthorne observed. He mimicked a voice of a high-pitched diva, "Captain, we are winning by 200 points already. Can I take a quick snooze by the stands?" Then, he cleared his voice noisily and pressed on his throat, "Ahem! We need to win by 900 points at least - ahem! SHUT UP, KAI DEN!"

Kaiden looked startled and nearly dropped the Quaffle that the Gryffindor Keeper, Walters,
passed. Michael sent a venomous look at Hawthorne as well. But the impersonation was well-received by the crowd as they started a wave of laughter.

The whistle sounded once again to resume the game.

"Potter - who has yet to score a single goal today - passes to MacGregor - Bludger by Cornfoot and Quaffle back to Harper - to Pyrites - then Riley - misses pass and Findley gains possession - Bludger by Wilkins - manages to pass to MacGregor - throws to Potter - who misses by mile - Pyrites recovers it for Team Slytherin - Potter flies to intercept -"

As Turais watched the action, something gold sparkled as he immediately flew towards it.

"Black spotted the Snitch - Bludgers from the Gryffindor side aimed at him - Fields is hot on his tail -"

Turais barrel-rolled over the first one. It flew harmlessly overhead as he oriented himself once again only to see he was on a head-on collision course with two Chasers, Pyrites and Kaiden. They were currently locked in a struggle for the Quaffle.

Pyrites and Turais' gazes met for a split second, widening at the sight of danger, as they took evasive action. The Snitch dove as Turais followed while Pyrites pulled up.

Turais closed his fingers on the Snitch just as a sickening crack sounded above. Turais looked up to see an escaping Bludger, a horrified Slytherin chaser, and an empty broom floating idly. Screams erupted all around him accompanied by his own racing heart.

There was a fluttering of robes and Turais immediately sped down towards the falling boy. Turais pushed for his broom to go faster but the pitch ground was rapidly approaching. In a desperate lunge, Turais pushed himself off the broom and grabbed for Kaiden's arm.

"Carpe Retractum!" Kaiden's arm jerked towards him and Turais gripped it tightly. Green filled up his vision entirely. "Arresto Momentum!"

There was a violent series of lurches as all the air was squeezed out of his lungs. Turais opened his eyes to see the tip of his dangling robe, like Kaiden's slack left shoulder and arm, grazing the tips of the luscious grass. The invisible cushion dissipated as they were slowly lowered to the ground.

"KAIDEN!" Michael shouted as he jumped off his broom and tumbled onto the ground messily. He climbed back onto his feet with his arms, shoved Turais aside, and stumbled beside the unconscious boy. "Kaiden," the Slytherin captain whispered his name again, fear clearly evident in his quaking voice, as his shaking hands brushed back some of the blood-matted hair to reveal an ugly wound on his scalp that was oozing blood.

"We need to get him to the Hospital Wing!" Michael shouted while Mister Williams cast a diagnostic charm on the Gryffindor. "Now!"

"Mr Potter merely has a mild concussion," the Flying instructor announced.

"Merely has a concussion! "Michael bellowed angrily, glaring daggers into the man. "He could have permanent brain damage -"

His tirade was cut short, however, by a soft groan. Michael immediately stopped talking and took Kaiden's hand, squeezing it lightly.
"Kaiden?" Michael asked, very softly. "I'm here, don't worry."

Kaiden made a noise of discomfort and looked as though he was trying to open his eyes, but then he burrowed his face into Michael's robes and drifted out of consciousness once again.

Knowing Madame Pomfrey and her visitation rules, Turais opted to wait in the common room for Kaiden's condition.

He returned to the common room to find the carpet covered with bushels of purple flowers on stems. Confused, he looked up to see Malfoy staring at him as if he was gauging his reaction.

Turais took the bait and said out loud, "Whoever made this mess better clean it up as well."

Malfoy turned to Rookwood, who was standing beside him with a smirk on his face, and said, "I'm surprised by the result of your little experiment, Augustus. It just occurred to me that Black might not be a cat lover after all."

The first-years snickered as Rookwood responded indulgently, "Lucius, Black definitely fooled me."

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Malfoy said. "You must listen to your mighty Leader and pick up all the catnip."

"Should I send it over to the Hospital Wing so the injured kitten has something to look forward to?"

"He's spoilt with the doting attention from his owners already. Perhaps next time?"

"Of course, Lucius."

Rookwood leered as Malfoy vanished the plants around Turais' feet. Turais ignored them as he settled into the sofa positioned towards the entrance and waited. After a long while, Michael finally returned from the Hospital Wing. His expression was pinched and his body was taunted with tension.

Turais stood up and asked immediately, "How is Kaiden doing?"

"He's fine," Michael said stoically. Without another word, he walked away.

Turais frowned at the boy's departing figure.

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November 15, 1971 (Monday)

Kaiden remained in the Hospital Wing for an entire week, which was an unusually long stay for a minor concussion. But something more unusual happened when Turais was Kaiden outside of the Hospital Wing for the first time since the match.

Turais was eating breakfast with Alex when he saw Michael leaving the Great Hall just as Kaiden was strolling in with Gwen by his side. The boys did not notice each other and they almost collided.
Michael stared at Kaiden for a brief moment, then flitted his gaze towards Gwen, before walking past them without a word. Kaiden merely looked at Michael's departing figure. However, there was a noticeable sense of suppressed longing in his gaze. Once Michael went out of view, Kaiden's energy sagged immediately as he dragged himself to the end of the Gryffindor table.

"Do you see what I see?" Alex whispered urgently.

"Yeah... that was really strange..."

Jonty burst through the doorway, almost tripping due to his haste, and slid into the seat beside Turais. A group of Slytherins immediately circled them, preying on the latest gossip.

"You need to hear this before you leave," Jonty breathed out as he addressed the group with a low voice. "Potter... is dating Orpington."

Turais spat out his tea and shouted, "WHAT?!" while the rest of the group descended into hushed discussion. Turais looked at Kaiden's direction only to find him moving his food in his plate aimlessly as Gwen gave him a fierce side-stare.

"Are you sure?" Turais asked Jonty.

"What do you mean 'Am I sure'?" Jonty said defensively. "Of course I'm sure!"

"Well, did you... uh... confirm with them?"

Jonty gave Turais an unimpressed look. "Listen, Turais. I know you don't put stock in gossips, but I never lie about things..."

"Then, what on Earth is Kaiden doing then? They don't look like they are in love! Did Kaiden just give up on Michael?! What happened between them and -'

There was a tap on his shoulder when Turais looked up to see Gerald's puzzled expression.

"Why are you still daydreaming? We have Divination in ten minutes."

"Right..." Turais said as he collected his bag.

Turais was in a daze for the entire class as he thought back at what he was told. Then, after half an hour, Professor Trelawney handed back their graded dream journals and announced a surprisingly early end of class.

As Turais stood up to leave, the Professor called out, "Mr Black, can you stay behind for a moment?"

"Yes, Professor?" Turais said as he headed back to the centre of the classroom.

"Please take a seat," she said, gesturing at the pouffe in front of him. Turais obliged.

"Mr Black," Trelawney said across the small, circular table. "I would like to talk briefly about your assignment."

Turais cocked his head in confusion. He received an Outstanding grade for his meticulously
written assignment aimed at eliciting a response from the Professor. But unfortunately, she did not seem to pick up on that fact -

"Now, now. Don't act surprised, Mr Black. We both know this was your intention," she said. "The dreams that you have provided seemed normal at a passing glance. However, if one were to read closely, elements and images were placed in a deliberate and intricate fashion. And most importantly of all, all the dreams pointed towards a unifying question. Instead of a series of naturally-occurring dreams, these were well-researched and meticulously synthesized prompts."

"I..." Turais considered his words, "I... do have a question that I would like to find the answer to in this class. But I do apologize for my dishonesty."

"Don't apologize. It was an interesting read," she said dismissively. "It was the most effort I've seen anyone put into my assignment and I was secretly pleased. However, is this why you remained in this class despite your obvious disinterest?"

Turais nodded.

"I have expected this much," Trelawney stood up and walked across the incense-filled room to one of the large cabinets. "Please don't look so surprised, Mr Black. Prior to my decision to speak with you today, I have had conversations with my colleagues and they all provided glowing reviews of your behaviour and academic integrity. However, I have not seen any indication of that in my class..."

She returned to the table with a crystal ball and holder and placed them in the centre of the table.

"I've heard that tarot readings are far more precise," Turais commented. "Can we do that instead of crystal gazing?"

Trelawney looked at him for a long, hard moment. Then, she said sternly, "Mr Black, tarot reading is no trivial matter, unlike what many wizards and Muggles falsely believe it to be. It is not a parlour trick that one does for fun."

Chimes shimmered softly as the jewelries bounced off each other while her arms moved. After setting up, she resumed a sedentary position and closed her eyes. She breathed in and out steadily for several minutes before she asked airily.

"Mr Black, train your thought onto your question but do not utter it," Trelawney said as Turais spoke the question that weighed in his mind.

'Who is Prometheus?'

The Professor reached her arms out, eyes remaining closed, as she moved them over the crystal ball in a circular motion. Then, she had a distressed noise as she retracted her arms.

"This is a question beyond my Sight..." she whispered. Turais felt his frustration flare as his disappointment grew. "... the name you seek is still wildly in motion... in use and in disuse... vague... hard to gra- gra-sp-

The Professor choked on the last word as she began to shake violently. Throwing herself on the table, her arms swung like a possessed rag-doll and swept the crystal ball off the table, smashing it into millions of tiny shards. Turais instinctively leaped out of his chair and palmed his wand.
She suddenly became frighteningly still. Then, her head slowly tilted upwards as her hairs parted sideways to reveal only the whites of her rolled-up eyes. White froth collected at the corner of his lips as her mouth widened to speak. But no sound escaped her mouth.

In the deadly stillness, the muted ticking of the clock above the fireplace was the only evidence that the world remains in motion.

'You tread dangerously,' the deep voice reverberated deep within him uncomfortably. Turais immediately reached his hand up to press on his sternum, but that failed to stop the vibration. He felt as if his entire body was being pulled in all directions, threatening to tear his body into millions of pieces. 'This is not your domain. Do not seek guidance through divination nor aid through time. This is your final warning.'

"Who are you?" Turais gasped out heavily as he clutched his head, desperately clinging on to his sanity.

'What is meant to be known will be known; what is meant to be hidden must remain hidden.'

Suddenly, the hold on him vanished in an instant. Turais panted heavily as he inspected himself. There was no sign of his supernatural event. His lingering shock was the only proof of what he experienced.

'What on Earth just happened?'

Chapter End Notes

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 46: Ten of Swords, is on schedule to be released in two weeks. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-06-27
There have been murmurs that the very heart of our government - the Wizengamot, itself - is under siege. A devious plot to eliminate certain candidates from the election of the Chair for the Bill Appropriations Committee to aid the election of another is currently under way as the Wizengamot continues to be paralyzed by in-fighting. We have reached out to the Auror Offices for a statement and have not received one as of the time of publication...

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November 28, 1971 (Sunday)

Turais was walking past the Black Lake towards Hogsmeade alone. He observed how the russet appearance of the forest had been replaced by a thin sheen of crystalline white. Turais breathed out a puff of air and watched as it slowly faded into the golden rays above. The frigid air was sharp like needles as they burrowed into every crevice and space, plundering every inch of exposed skin until red wastelands remained. Turais tucked his thick outer cloak around himself closer.

Perhaps the change of season also served as a pathetic fallacy to the worsening relationship between Michael and Kaiden. And just like the biting cold, their display was getting unbearable.

Since that fiasco during last Hogsmeade weekend, Michael and Kaiden had not been on speaking terms. Turais was willing to bet that Gwen's "brilliant" plan was also in motion. However, he had not been able to focus on their predicament at all, for there was a much more pressing matter at hand.
November 15, 1971 (Monday)

Two weeks ago...

Turais edged backwards as the woman pushed herself onto her feet. She shook her head slightly, as if she was in a slight daze. Then, her eyes landed on the shards of crystal that surrounded her. "Oh my!" Trelawney gasped, "Did I do this?"

She looked up at Turais, bug-eyed, as Turais gave a trembling nod.

"I am so sorry, Mr Black," Trelawney reached forward, but Turais shrunk from the contact. "But I just exp-"

"No worries!" Turais said with false brightness as he inched towards the trapdoor.

"Wait!" Trelawney commanded as she rummaged her cupboard "I had just experienced a vision -"

"NO!" Turais covered his ears. He just wanted to get out of here quickly. "You don't need to tell me."

"I must warn you! I saw a figure..." Trelawney continued as she found a pack of cards with strange images and symbols , "...yes... a man... in a dark hallway... I see carpets... a large room... columns... crimson chairs... many of them... arranged... I see the back of a large chair-" Turais' eyes widened as he understood the implications. "- on one of the lecterns I saw a four-card tarot spread -"

Trelawney quickly pulled out four cards and lined them up in a row. Turais edged closer while she rambled on, "Situation - Upright Ten of Swords; Problem - Upright Moon; Advice - reversed Emperor; Solution - reversed Death. This is a classical spread that looks into your near future, Mr Black.

"I thought tarot readings were sacred -"

"They are. Tarot readings must only be granted with a true pair between a gifted and the seeker. It rips apart the very fabrics of time and offers the gifted a glimpse of an actual future. It is a very, very powerful divination... and also very, very dangerous. No one - absolutely no one - ever dismisses the visions granted by a tarot reading. Acceptance is the only way... and I... and..."

Intense conflict wrote themselves across her face. After a moment of deliberation, she said in a hushed whisper, "And especially not when I serve as the medium... I... have done one reading many moons ago and it pointed towards three events that serve as major inflection points for our future. Two have already been fulfilled, and the final one will undoubtedly come to fruition.

"I agree with Mr Macmillian. Death surrounds you, clothes you, are within you... I don't understand my observations but those are the indisputable facts. Therefore, despite my urges, I never dared to conduct a reading for you in fear of what we shall discover together," Trelawney said with a small voice. "Knowledge is not just a gift. It is also a curse and a burden."

Turais found himself with a loss of words.
"W...what changed?"

"Alas, despite my best efforts, I was unable to stop the higher powers from bestowing me this terrifying beauty of a vision. I dare not ignore the tarot spread that was bestowed in a prophetic vision. And clearly..." Trelawney looked at him sincerely, "...it was meant for you to know as well since there must always be two: a gifted and a seeker, a seer and a listener, me... and you."

There was a heavy silence hanging over them as the fire cackled lowly beside them.

Trelawney finally turned her attention to the table and tapped on the leftmost card. "Your situation card is an upright Ten of Swords. Look at the ten swords embedded in the person, it suggests you may soon experience a series of painful yet inevitable ending that comes out of the blue and rocks your world, both physically and psychologically. You will never expect it."

"Your problem card is an upright Moon, which indicates a time of uncertainty and illusion when nothing is what it seems. The Moon also represents your fears and illusions. You might be projecting fear into your present and your future based on your past experiences. You may have a painful memory that caused emotional distress, and now, these emotions are making a reappearance due to your situation, and you may find yourself under their influence on a conscious or subconscious level. You must be mindful when making snap decisions because you may later realize you only have half the information you needed. However, you must rely on your intuition to see beyond what is in front of you. Yes, it is self-contradicting advice, which is why this is such a dangerous, dangerous card in combination with the Ten of Swords.

"Your advice card is a reversed Emperor, which means you must assess your relationship with control, power, and authority. The reversed position suggests an abuse of power around you. I fear what I saw in the vision was about the Wizengamot, which means whatever problem that will plague you originates from the Wizengamot. You must investigate the sources of those powers in order to solve your predicament.

"Finally, your solution is the reversed Death."
"Does it mean someone will die?" Turais asked. "I've heard plenty of death predictions and I don't think they are ever true..."

"Normally, the Death card simply means transformation, the end of a cycle and beginning of another, the present that bridges the past and the future. In reverse, it shows that you will have a very difficult time letting go of what would happen and not make the changes you need for the future. However, in this particular combination..." Trelawney said solemnly as she waved her arm over the spread, "It means that death is highly likely. You will be surrounded by many deaths... This is your near future. It is unavoidable."

"So what should I do?" Turais asked, slightly unnerved by the knowledge.

"There are three major arcana cards - The Moon, The Emperor, and Death - which means your problem, advice, and solution are more important that the situation itself, which is only a minor arcana. The spread suggests that whatever is to happen, which are many as indicated by the swords, is inevitable. You must prepare yourself and brace for the challenges ahead. I'm sorry, my dear, but that is all the information I can provide."

Shaken by Trelawney's possessed state just moments ago, Turais headed to a secluded spot to gather his thoughts...

Or so he planned when talon-like fingers came out of seemingly nowhere and forcibly jerked him into another unused classroom. In front of him was none other than Kaiden's best friend, Gwynyth Orpington. Her eyes locked onto him like an eagle-eyed predator and said, "We have a problem."

"Do we?" Turais rubbed his face tiredly. "Gwen, I don't mean to be rude, but I have something imp-

"Is Kaiden worth one minute of your precious time?"

Her voice was unyielding.

Turais looked up at her unimpressed expression and sighed, "What is it?"

"Kaiden asked me to be his girlfriend."

"I've heard."

"But Kaiden is so hung up on Michael that you don't understand why he would make such an idiotic move."

There was a long pause as Turais expected Gwen to continue. But she just stared at him curiously before she nodded thoughtfully, "So it seems like you do know about this boy's dumb crush." Turais wanted to point out the fallacy of her argument but he did not have the energy to fight it. Noting Turais' silence as confirmation, Gwen continued, "Anyway, I need your help to get those two together and I-

"Gwen," Turais sighed tiredly. "I really do not want to interfere with other people's love life."

"I'm not doing it for fun. Please tell me you notice how much they care for each other. They are clearly in love with each other! Kaiden is being an idiot while Michael is waddling some repressed Slytherin pureblood nonsense. Are you honestly just going to sit here and watch them pine over each other for eternity? What we need is a plan -"
Turais interrupted, "Gwen, I have encouraged Kaiden to confess his feelings to Michael, but I will not attempt to embarrass him or Michael by putting them in awkward encounters. Relationships are messy and romantic relationships are messier yet. They will have to figure it out on their own and in their own time."

"But they will share their first kiss when they are the same age as Dumbledore at this rate!" Gwen exclaimed. "Now, listen. I've thought this through. All we need is for Mr Wanker to acknowledge his feelings for Mr Pathetic. So I -"

"Gwen, Michael's feelings are still unknown at this stage," Turais said firmly. "Also, his family is ultra-conservative from what Kaiden has described to me and from my talk with him. The issue is clearly more deep-rooted and more nuanced. There is a whole slew of problems that we might not truly understand brewing beneath the surface." Turais walked towards the exit and added softly, "I know you mean well, Gwen, and I agree that Kaiden is unnecessarily complicating his own life. But there is a genuine chance that you could make matters worse if you intervened..."

"You are just making excuses," Gwen growled as she placed an arm across the doorway to block his path.

Clearly the girl did not take no for an answer. Turais sighed as he ducked beneath her arm and walked out. "I'm sorry, I really need to leave."

"I thought you were different!" he could hear her shout. "I was wrong about you!"

Turais continued on his way without a backward glance.

He reached the long, scenic walkway on the fifth floor that overlooked the expanses of the school grounds. The dark, murky waters of the Black Lake reflected its surroundings impeccably under the hazy, morning sun. Suddenly, there was a sudden gust of wind that passed through the space. The bendy trees shuffled noisily as ripples formed on the glassy surface of the lake.

"Death," the boy greeted.

'Young master, I sense you have questions.'

"Who, or what, gave me a warning against using divination and time?"

Death remained silent.

"Death?" Turais asked forcefully.

'I do not have an answer to that question for I do not know the answer.'

"Do you really not know or are you hiding the answer from me?" Turais challenged.

'There are many things in the universe that I know, but there are things that even I do not understand. Fate is one. Time is another. They are simply not within my domain.'

"Domain!" Turais seized on the word. "You both used the word 'domain'. What does it mean?"

'It means that within my jurisdiction, I have complete control over my own matters. However, beyond that, I have neither knowledge nor power over them. Perhaps your attempt to use divination has trespassed into another's territory and they were cautioning your
Turais hummed thoughtfully.

"So there are other entities similar to you?"

A sense of affirmation confirmed his suspicion.

Turais supposed that divination was now out of question.

"And how do I contact them?"

'You don't.'
huh?"

"Quidditch practice," Turais grimaced.

"Oh, poor you," Catherine said sympathetically. "Is Michael still in his foul temper streak?"

"Yes."

"He really should stop taking out his frustration on the team. You are not his personal punching bag."

"Try telling him that for me," Turais snorted. "How about you?"

"You're going to tease me for it."

"Now, I have to know," Turais said. "Were you in - Merlin-forbid - group study session?"

Catherine glared at him wordlessly and Turais barked out a laugh.

"So it was a group study session?" Turais gasped in between breaths. "On a Sunday morning? And on Hogsmeade Weekend?"

"Are you done laughing yet?" she said, sounding slightly miffed.

Turais fought down his urge to laugh valiantly and nodded.

"I was roped into it, for the record," she said.

"Of course you were," Turais said teasingly.

"I'm telling the truth!" Catherine huffed as she shoved at Turais' shoulder gently. "Oh, jeez. Stop laughing, would you?"

"I... I promise," Turais gave her a mock salute while his lips twisted.

Catherine gave Turais a warning glare before she allowed herself a small smile.

"Anyway, where are you headed?" Turais asked. "There isn't much time."

"Well, I'm only making one stop," Catherine smiled as she saw Turais' questioning look. She whispered, "I heard about the haunted shack near Hogsmeade and I'm checking it out."

"By yourself?" Turais asked. "Aren't you scared?"

"Why? Don't think I can protect myself from some urban myths?" Catherine said and crossed her arms defiantly, as though challenging Turais to argue against her.

"Oh, that was not my intention," Turais said hurriedly.

Catherine's frown turned into an amused snort. "I'm just messing around - ack! -" she hopped on the spot and rubbed her arm gingerly. "What was that for?!"

Turais gave her his most innocent look. "What?"

"That Stinging Hex," Catherine said as she smacked him on the shoulder again. "Don't 'what' me, I knew you did it."
"Oh, that," Turais said cheekily. "I was just testing to see if you could properly defend yourself from some urban myths. But with what I just saw? I'd say, unlikely," Turais returned. Catherine looked mightily offended before her gasp turned into a hearty laugh.

"You are infuriating!" Catherine smacked him on the shoulder.

"Turais Infuriating Black. - Turais said with a deep bow, "- at your service..."

"Oh, shut up!" Catherine exclaimed as she gave Turais a shove that caused him to stumble slightly. "You cheeky little brat. So... are you interested in joining me?"

"Need the company to boost your confidence?" Turais asked.

"No, I just thought you needed it," Catherine returned. "Since apparently all Ravenclaws are swotty, all Slytherins must be scaredy-cats."

Turais allowed this illogical argument to slide as they continued to chat amiably. In what seemed like an instant, they arrived at the vantage point that overlooked the moor and the Shrieking Shack. Interestingly enough, Turais did not remember encountering anyone, students or locals, on their way. But perhaps he was just not paying attention.

The Shrieking Shack was clearly not as popular when it was actively “haunting” the locals. Soon enough, he found himself looking out over the moor. In the far hazy distance stood the shadow of a crooked and slightly leaning structure. It was also the temporary sanctuary of Remus Lupin once every full moon... for now...

"I don't understand what is the big fuss about the shack," Catherine commented. “All my friends were scared to come here with me.”

"It's haunted," Turais replied simply.

"Sure. But there's nothing scary about a haunted place as long as you don't disturb it," Catherine said.

"No, there's not."

"I mean, I find the real world much scarier. This shack is just minding its own business... maybe screaming in frustration once in a while, if the rumours are to be believed. But it hasn't harmed anyone."

"That's very true. The darkness of man's heart is worse than the most disturbed spirit. When has a ghost ever hurt us unprovoked? A man, however, can do terrible, terrible things to many without reason..." Turais turned to see Catherine looking out into the distance. Her expression looked heavy. "Have something weighing on your mind?"

"Who doesn’t these days?" Catherine sighed. "I just want this year to be over and for the next one to start..."

"What makes you think that next year would bring better news?" Turais asked.

"I don't," Catherine said. "But we must look forward, don't we? We can't change the past, but we can change the present and the future."

Turais looked beside him and saw the determined and strong person that the girl represented. Admiration filled his mind. Perhaps, there was something else as well, but that did not matter.
"Cheers to that," Turais said as Catherine smiled.

"Do we have time for one quick stop for Butterbeer?" Catherine asked.

Turais suddenly realized he had no paid attention to the time at all. After a quick glance at his watch, he gasped, "It's half-past three!"

"Are you sure?!" Catherine asked incredulously as she sidled up to Turais and looked for confirmation. "Curfew is in a half-hour!" Just as Turais was entertaining the idea of sneaking back to Hogwarts using the secret path in the Honeydukes' cellar, Catherine said, "I know a shortcut that should only take us twenty minutes."

"You do?"

"Yes," Catherine said. "Follow me."

He followed her to the outskirt of Hogsmeade. But rather than going through the village, she led him down a less-traveled path on the right.

Amongst the heavy snow-decorated foliage, he found himself walking down an avenue of giant sequoias that stood silently in the near distance with its mere existence whispering in a soft-toned voice about patience and endurance.

"I've never noticed this before," Turais gasped.

"Well, I found out about this once when I was running late," Catherine said.

As they strolled through, it was as if they entered an archaic primaeval space from a bygone era. The forest glade looked like a still portrait painted in umber-brown and muted green. Huge roots spread-eagled the ground, twisting like the great backs of sea dinosaurs. The leaves were thick and lush, forming an arch of fairytale-wreath overhead.

"It is stunning," Catherine said breathlessly. "I can never get tired of looking at this."

Turais turned his gaze to the girl and saw her face glow effortlessly under the honeyed sheen from the filtered afternoon sun. There was a singular thought that occupied his mind: Which was more stunning, the environment or -

Their gazes connected as Turais felt lost in the dazzling blues eyes...

But then he tore his gaze away forcefully, reminding himself of how all of this was problematic and inappropriate, at best (even if his hormones bore part of the blame). He was a mentally thirty-odd years old man in a biologically thirteen years old body, and neither was appropriate for any relationship with a seventeen-year-old beyond a strictly platonic one. Instead, he focused on listening to the crystalline snow that crunched melodiously behind his boots, hoping that the cold could somehow quell the rebellious heat on his cheeks.

Perhaps sensing the change of mood, they walked the rest of the path in silence until they finally reached the boundary of Hogwarts. There, Professor McGonagall was standing guard as a half-dozen students waited to be admitted.

"Ms Shafiq, Mr Black - the two students I'd never thought would be late," McGonagall commented as she tapped her wand on her clipboard. "I'll let you both off with a warning. Next time, do not leave for Hogsmeade if you cannot return on time."
The two students shared a secret grin before murmuring their apologies and thanks.

"I didn't get to say this before but I'm sorry about the escaped criminals," Catherine said once the Professor was out of earshot. "I heard about your instrumental role in capturing them in the first place. Now, you are inconvenienced due to our mistakes. I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, Catherine," Turais said. "Please don't apologize."

"I can't help but feel responsible since my father's the Head Auror."

"It is what it is. We just have to apprehend them. Just as you said before, we must look forward. Don't we?" Turais gave her an encouraging smile. She smiled back. "How is the progress on that front?"

Catherine's smile disappeared as she shot him another apologetic look. "Nothing, I'm afraid. I know it will sound like an excuse, but the Auror Office seemed to not have a single clue about how it all happened. There's not a shred of evidence found at the site of the attack... well... most of it probably sank to the bottom of the North Sea, if I'm perfectly honest. It's terrible especially when your safety is on the line."

Creases marred Catherine's smooth, pale forehead as she looked sullen.

"I also heard about your run-in with the criminals near the warehouses," Catherine continued, "There's just too much bad news plaguing you."

"Well, I have an amulet from my grandfather that should protect me from most things," Turais said.

"Do you reckon that's enough?" Catherine asked, her frown persisting.

Turais nudged her and said, "Well, I was with you and nothing bad happened. See, you're Auror material!"

Catherine flashed him a rueful smile before descending back into a frown. "I don't know enough magic to protect you from those kinds of danger yet..."

Just as he was wondering how he could cheer her up, a silly plan came to his mind as he started shedding his outer cloak as Catherine's eyes widened. "What are you doing, Turais?!"

"I'm freezing out here without an outer cloak," Turais said as he pretended to shiver. "Protect me from this very, very dangerous cold!"

Catherine gaped at him for a split second before she tilted her head back and let out a laugh, causing puffs of white smoke to fill the air.

"You are a menace, Turais," Catherine said as Turais was genuinely starting to feel a bit cold. "Put your cloak back on!"

Catherine suddenly attacked his cloak but Turais was a tad quicker and evaded capture. "I'm going to catch a deadly flu, Catherine. You don't want to pull a Kaiden and make me mad, would you?"

"Oh I see how it is, I'm making you mad instead of the other way around," Catherine said as she wiped out her wand. "Fine, fine. Here's your spell."
Turais was readying himself for a comfortable blanket of warm air when he was rudely zapped by a nasty Stinging Hex squarely on the chest. Turais yelped as Catherine smirked triumphantly.

"Hey, you were supposed to cast a Warming charm!"

"I said 'a spell.' I didn't specify what spell. And first lesson of Auror Training 101: Never let anyone point their wand at you without any defense," Catherine tutted as she stored her wand back in her arm holster. "Also, this is classic revenge."

"Fine, fine, you win," Turais shrugged his outer cloak back on. Catherine cast a shared Warming Charm as they continued to trudge along the empty path; both with a small smile on their face.

And soon, too soon perhaps, they reached the end of their shared journey.

"Well... that was fun," Catherine said softly as she raised her hand for a shake. With a wink, she added, "And thanks for making me lose McGonagall’s favour."

"Likewise," Turais grinned as he shook her hand firmly. "It was fun."

"Well... I guess I will see you around then," Catherine said as she started to walk away backwards, waving. Then, she rounded the corner and disappeared from view.

"Bye..." Turais sighed out loud before he caught himself. He looked around in panic only to realize that no one heard him, fortunately.

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November 29, 1971 (Monday)

"Another day of school is over!" Turais gasped as he grinned at Alex. Just as he turned to look at the boy, he suddenly felt a lurch in his stomach as his vision darkened. His books clattered on the floor as he gripped the wall to steady himself. His heart was pounding in his ears, muffling Jonty and Alex's worried voices. However, the delicate tinkering of gears slowly filled his sense of hearing... Images of the Ministry, the Wizengamot chamber, cries, and shouts filled his senses when suddenly... everything cleared up again as he heard himself panting heavily.

Turais was not sure what that episode was, but one thing was for certain, it felt similar to the one he experienced during Trelawney's vision.

Alex crouched down and asked worriedly, "What happened, Turais?"

"I don't know..." Turais gulped. He turned to look at Alex only to feel another wave of nausea sweep over him. It was a mixture of dread, sadness, darkness...

It felt like... death...

Alex reached for him but Turais avoided the physical contact, fearing of the effect it would bring him.

"I... I need to leave..." Turais muttered as he quickly gathered his fallen items and darted back
to his dormitory.

Turais was flipping through the Wizengamot timetable on his table when Jonty burst through the door, "What was that, Turais?"

"I think... something terrible is going to happen in the Wizengamot," Turais said as he flipped to the correct page and scanned down the itinerary. The morning was filled with various Wizengamot committee meetings; the afternoon had a three-hour debate session followed by the usual Bill Appropriations Committee meeting that occurred at four.

"What do you mean?" Turais could hear Alex ask.

"I can't explain it, I... I just do. I'm heading off," Turais said as he immediately darted to Slughorn's office to Floo to the Ministry. Traveling down the tunnel to the Parliamentarian clerk section where he saw Malfoy.

Of course, when there was something terrible that was about to happen, the Malfoys would be present.

"Nice of you to join us, Turais," he greeted.

"Nice to see you here for the first time in - what? - a month?" Turais countered absentmindedly as he searched the chamber for his potential source of his terrible omen.

Malfoy glared at him before turning his attention elsewhere. Turais looked around the chamber and was surprised to see McLaggen present in all his green robe glory. Today was surely a day of rare attendees.

He turned his attention to the other Chair nominees. Mr Minchum, as per his usual self, had his spectacles on and his nose buried deep in a heavy tome in front of him. Lord Fawley, the vocal leader of the Light alliance sitting on the right, was currently talking animatedly with his peers. Lord Montague, Arcturus’ nominee for their alliance, was nodding his head as he listened to his neighbour. Finally, he observed Lord Malfoy conversing with Lord Travers, presumably hatching another nefarious scheme to frustrate their political opponents.

He saw a greatly divided chamber, but nothing was out of the ordinary.

A clerk made her way to Lord Travers, who waved her off. He made his way back to the seat in the centre of the chamber and started the meeting. Turais immediately focused his attention on Fleamont, hoping that nothing terrible was about to befall him.

"Lord Travers, please initiate the election process," one of the Lords said.

"Request considered and denied," Lord Travers said lazily.

"You must be the one behind the death threats!" another person shouted as he pointed an accusing finger at Lord Malfoy.

"I will say this one last time," Lord Malfoy said as he stood up. "I am not behind the death threats. I do not know of them and these rumours are unconfirmed. Please refrain from spread falsehoods inside this chamber."

The chamber descended into chaos as Lord Travers barely contained the rage. "Yes, Lord Fawley. The floor is yours."
"Lord Travers, I sincerely hope you will repent from the weeks of obstruction that you have conducted until today. It has severely undermined the authority and image of the Wizengamot in the eyes of the public. Our people want a functioning government, not a crippled one. Furthermore, the imminent passage of the amendment on the election rules for the Bill Appropriations Meeting enjoys the support of all members in this chamber except for a small renegade minority," Lord Fawley said to loud boos from the left. "I wish the Lords in the chamber would... would disregard the boisterous and ineffective ch... chuntering from the opposite side of the chamber and..."

"And... and..." Lord Fawley cleared his throat noisily and reached for his flask, taking several big gulps as if to purge his mouth of some weird taste, "...and this is... is..." His voice turned breathier as he reached for the glass again. But this time, he fumbled and the flask tipped onto the carpeted floor. The man stumbled, his breath became laboured, and his face started to flush with redness and beads of sweat.

"Maybe you should take a seat, Lord Fawley," Lord Travers said coolly while the Malfoy section jeered.

Then, Fawley made a choked sound and reached for his throat in a desperate attempt to tear off his tie just as his neighbours jumped up with horror in their faces. There were shouts as Lords started to congregate into the front bench while Fawley fell backwards into his seat and out of sight. Everyone stood up in confusion.

"ORDER! ORRRRDER!" Lord Travers shouted in an attempt to be heard. "Everyone must remain seated!"

However, his warning drowned in the sea of growing chaos as people started to shout for water, help, and aid. Turais jumped over the table, pushed his way through the throng of Lords, and found the Lord convulsing against the ground. His eyes were wide with terror as tears and spit streamed messily down his cheek. Turais knelt down in front of him as the man clawed and gripped at his robe desperately.

"He's going into anaphylactic shock!" Turais shouted as he trained his wand on the man's robes and started to cut the clothing loose. "Is he allergic to something?"

"Y...yes," someone said above him. "Alihotsy -"

"Accio Suprarenal Extract of Sheep!" Turais shouted. But nothing flew into his palm. He tried again to no avail.

"He should have a Suprarenal Extract of Sheep on him!" Turais rummaged Fawley's robes as the man choked in every draw of oxygen greedily but also with increasing difficulty. His lips were steadily turning blue. "Everyone start looking! Give it to me now or he will die!" Turais turned back to Fawley and patted on his steely grip that was still holding onto his robe tightly. He said calmly, "Lord Fawley, you will be alright..."

There was a mad flurry of activity around Turais as people poured out the contents in bags, robes, and any possession. Meanwhile, Turais continued to monitor the man's fading breath. His eyes were now rolled up and showing only the whites of his eyes. "I need it now!"

"Here," someone handed him a flask. Turais took it and pulled the cork to sniff the content. Then he wedged open the unconscious man's mouth and tipped the flask only to see that nothing was being poured out.

"There's nothing in here!" Turais shouted as he turned around and observed the scared faces.
It was then that he realized that Fawley's grip on his robe had slackened. Turais breathed in deeply as he turned to face the still figure lying on the floor.

Hector Fawley was dead.

Chapter End Notes

*Suprarenal Extract of Sheep = Epinephrine (Epi-Pen)
Fun fact, most epinephrine used in pharmaceutical products are harvested from sheep.

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

The next chapter, Chapter 47: The Blood Moon Ascends, is on schedule to be released in two weeks. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-07-11
November 29, 1971 (Monday)

Everything became a blur afterwards as Turais was puppeteered by the Wizengamot guards to the Auror Offices. Then, he was trapped in a windowless room with a pair of Aurors and an army of lawyers as he faced a grueling statement-recording session that seemed like an interrogation at points.

After what seemed like an eternity surrounded by stony faces, stale air, and paper cups filled with cold tea, Turais was finally released from his confinement. As Turais walked by the entrance to the office, it triggered a cascade of flashing lightbulbs from the preying reporters looking for the latest scoop. He reached the waiting room where a group of Lords from both Light and Dark families sitting in the waiting room. However, Lords associated with Malfoy's alliance were noticeably absent.

"Our candidate of choice was murdered. They must restart the election process."

"We agree. However, this matter is not for you or I to decide," Turais could hear Xavier Steward say. "That power lies with Lord Travers."

"This is preposterous."

"It would be prudent to remind ourselves who were the culprits," Lord Steward said coolly. "You eliminated all the checks on the Chair's power in committees because you held the positions and wanted to eliminate all opposition. Now, you find yourself on the opposing side, surrounded by useless tools broken by your year-old decrees. This bitter fruit bore from the seeds of arrogance and utter lack of foresight that you had sown. It would not have been possible for our government to be held hostage by one person otherwise."

Turais could feel like anger flare up up at the political talk. A man just died! Right in front of his eyes! And all everyone seemed to care about was that stupid election.

"This talk is not conducive with formulating a solution to the current situation," Fleamont
"What do you propose we do? Talk? All we have been doing for the past month was talk. I believe we have done enough talking."

"Turais?"

He turned around and saw Orion's tired appearance. He also observed the exact moment when the dark clouds lifted from his face and lit up in happiness and relief.

"They didn't treat you poorly, did they?" Orion said as he knelt down and held his cheeks.

"They won't dare," Turais smiled tiredly and gestured at the stern-looking men and women behind him. "Especially not with them in the room."

"That's what they were paid to do," Arcturus' stern voice said. It seemed Orion's call had notified the Lords of his presence as they watched on with unrestrained interest. "And they better deliver their services as promised."

"Of course, Lord Black," one of the barristers said. "Your son was invited here to help with the investigation. The Aurors have no grounds to detain or mistreat him. However, there was potential that your Heir was placed under unnecessary stress prior to our arrival. We can look further into the case to see whether they had violated any."

"Lord Black, your grandson is free to leave." Charlus said as he approached the crowd. "And please rest assured that we did not mistreat your Heir in any way."

"That remains to be seen," Arcturus said coldly. He addressed the barrister once more, "You have my permission. Do not leave any stones un-turned."

"That is unnecessary."

"You have determined that an intrusive probing of my Heir's involvement was necessary. Now it is up to us to determine whether the pursuit of that course of action was warranted," Arcturus said. "We need a private room for discussion."

Charlus flitted his eyes towards Turais, who tried to send an apology through his expression.

"That is a reasonable demand that is well within my client's rights," the lawyer said curtly. "Especially after hours of."

"It was only two hours."

"Hence, I used the plural form of 'hour', Deputy Head Auror."

Charlus blinked at her words for a moment before letting out an exasperated sigh. "Follow me."

Once the door closed behind the three Blacks, Arcturus thundered.

"When there is a fire, you run away from it, not towards it!"

The objects around the room seemingly quaked under his wrath, but a Turais stood his ground.

"What if you were trapped in the fire?!" Turais countered. Then, he gestured at Orion, who
instinctively shrunk his shoulders a little. "Or how about father?!"

Arcturus' nostrils flared as he crowded Turais' space. "Even if the entire family are trapped in that inferno, you keep yourself safe. You are the Heir and our family's future. None of this matters if there's no one to safeguard our legacy. Now, go back to Hogwarts and stay there."

"But -"

"I'm sure Turais understands the severity of this situation," Orion interrupted as he gave Turais a silencing stare. "He will stay far away from here until the case resolved."

"Perhaps even beyond that," Arcturus said. "This situation is becoming more complicated than I imagined. Although I cannot deny the fact that Hector's passing will lift our chances in the Chair election."

The embers of Turais' annoyance flared up once again. But the sudden pressure on his shoulder from Orion's hand suppressed it.

"Turais must be tired after this. Let me see him back to Hogwarts first."

Arcturus looked at Turais sternly, "Stay out of trouble. I don't need to see our family's name splattered across the front pages."

He wanted to argue more when Orion's fingers dug into Turais' shoulder warningly.

"Yes, grandfather," Turais gritted out.

***

After returning to Hogwarts, Turais immediately turned into an empty classroom. After locking the door and casting all the Privacy charms in his repertoire, he seated himself in the middle of the room. Closing his eyes, he concentrated on his magical core and reached for the Hallow.

Something small dropped into the palm of Turais' hand. With a singular focus of the target in his mind, he turned the stone thrice in his hand.

Holding his breath, he creaked his eyes opened.

There was figure of a man, glowing pale in an ethereal blue, with his back turned against him. He was translucent, yet substantial; phantasmic, but tangible. Turais' bated breath filled the silence as Lord Fawley turned around and faced him. He was wearing the same attire that Turais clutched at desperately when the wearer was breathing his final breath. Fortunately, there were no signs of the pain and distress on the man's face.

"So you have summoned me here, Heir Black," Lord Fawley said.

"I need to know the truth about your death," Turais said bluntly. "Is your lethal allergic reaction to alihotsy commonly known?"

The older man nodded.
"Do you know how you possibly came into contact with alihotsy?"

"I've wondered about this myself. My reaction to alihotsy is almost instantaneous, so I must have first consumed it during the committee meeting. The only food I ingested was my tea, so perhaps alihotsy was laced in it."

"But the flavour is quite intense even in small quantities."

"I tend to make a strong brew that could potentially mask the taste, however unlikely."

Turais frowned. There should be a better explanation. "Who prepared your tea?"

"I prepared it myself in my office just before the meeting using my personal tea mix," Lord Fawley said. "Investigate that and the tea-making utensils used, although I'm sure the Aurors are on the task. If no results turned up from them, I haven't a single clue."

"Who are your political enemies?"

"Well, they are quite obvious," Fawley said. "The Malfoy alliance for one, and the Black alliance to a lesser extent. However, we have all worked alongside one another for a better half of the century so there is a sense of collegiality and respect we have for one another despite our differences. Also, if they wanted to get rid of me, why have they not done that before or when I was Chair? I refuse to believe that any of them were involved."

"I think people are much worse than you would like to believe;" Turais said darkly. "Nonetheless, the timing of your murder is an interesting point. They could've done it before, so why now?"

This was another part of the puzzle Turais needed to solve before long. Was this part of the growing mystery that Trelawney warned him about?

"How about your personal bottle of Suprarenal Extract of Sheep?" Turais finally asked the burning question. "It was empty. It must have been tampered with."

Lord Fawley sighed, "I pondered on this for a long while as well. I check its content every morning. After that, it is on me at all times, in my robe, wherever I go. It never leaves my sight and I don't let anyone touch it. Frankly, I am at a loss as to how it could be compromised."

"I tried to summon it. We searched for it. When we finally found it, it was empty," Turais pressed on urgently. "These two events cannot be mere coincidences or accidents. Someone was deliberately plotting for your demise. If you have anything, anything, you can think of. Please let me know."

The man waved his translucent arms. "I don't have any more information to offer. I am as blindsided by it as you all are, well, except for the culprit, I suppose. I'm sorry."

Turais sighed in defeat.

"No, I should be the one who apologizes. I was the one who had a premonition. I was the one who knew something was amiss. But I was unable to save you. I..." Turais' breath hitched, "...I'm sorry I was too late."

"This is not your fault. And I'm not afraid of death," Lord Fawley said calmly. "I've lived a long, fulfilling life. I have few family members, so it was perhaps a blessing that I was surrounded by all of my friends and colleagues at my time of passing."
Turais' fists clenched and the stone dug painfully into his flesh.

"However, I do have one regret," he sighed. "I wished I had known my cousins better. Howard and I were never close, but his son... Alexander... I wish I had made the effort to know him better. I've never visited him and now I can never do it."

"Alex doesn't know about your... death yet," Turais said with a small voice. "I don't even know how I should broach the subject. I don't even know what his reaction would be. Family has always been a sensitive topic to him. I fear this might break his spirit in some way."

"You are good friends with him?"

"My best," Turais said with a small sniff.

"I know I have no right to ask, but I beg you to do what I failed to do and support him through these darkest hours."

"Of course. I would have done so regardless."

Lord Fawley smiled. "Thank you, he is very fortunate to have a friend like you."

Turais nodded numbly.

"I have a final request," the older man said, his eyes hopefully. "May I be with you when you break the news to him? I... I just want to see him... hear his voice... for the first and last time... even if he cannot see or hear me. I want to be there for him for at least this one time."

Turais nodded.

"Thank you."

***

Turais returned to a common room that was empty except for two boys sitting in front of the fireplace. Jonty and Alex, in their pyjamas and thin sleeping robes, were dozing off on the couches by the fireplace with their heads lolled slightly on their sides.

Turais watched quietly as the warm glow flickered gently on Alex's serene expression. And his heart started to throb. He was about to ruin that boy's night, and possibly many more in the near future.

Perhaps sensing the intruder, Jonty's eyes blinked open. Rubbing his eyes, he noticed Turias and alerted Alex, who started awake. Alex jolted up and broke into relieved smile. But Turais quickly averted his gaze, unable to face the impending devastation that would destroy that innocent smile.

"Turais," Alex said. "How was today?"

Turais found himself unable to talk. Suddenly, the horror of witnessing Hector Fawley's death paled in comparison to what he was experiencing this moment.

He swallowed thickly.
Amidst the silence, Jonty asked with a hint of uncertainty and fear, "Did everything go well? There was no funny... business at the Wizengamot, right...?"

"Alex, can you come with me?" Turais said quietly. "There is... something I need to tell you... something that you should hear from me first... in private."

Jonty furrowed his brows in confusion. Then, the moment of sudden realization as he shot Alex a horrified look. He gasped loudly, eyes wide with horror and shock, and covered his mouth with both hands to stifle his buried scream.

Meanwhile, Alex just stood there silently with his eyes closed. He looked serene, but in an unnerving and chilling way.

"Jonty," Turais said hastily. "I promise to explain later, but can you let me speak to Alex in private, please?"

Jonty nodded and he stumbled backwards while his eyes darted quickly between him and Alex. With the click from the closed door, Turais approached Alex carefully, afraid that any sudden movement would startle him. It was then he noticed Alex's hands were clamped into tight fists as nails dug into his palms.

"Alex," Turais whispered as he placed a hand on his forearm gently. Alex opened his eyes and took in a shuddering breath. Wordlessly, Turais guided the boy onto the couch as they sat down.

"What is it, Turais?" His face was taunt with determination, but Turais could see the cracked facade of his false bravado. "Spit it out."

"Alex... your cousin, Lord Hector Fawley, he... he's -"

"He's dead, isn't he?" Alex whispered as he looked down at his tightly-knit fingers. The knuckles were white with tension. At the heavy silence in response, Alex closed his eyes again. Then, he nodded to himself as his body started to thrum. Turais reached his arm around Alex but it was brushed away. "I'm okay, Turais. I'm okay. I really am."

"Alex... you don't need to..."

"I'm fine," Alex snapped as he stood up. "You don't need to coddle me."

"Alex, I -" "I barely know him, Turais!" Alex shouted, his eyes flashing with tears. "I've never met him in person. He's more a stranger to me than... than... family."

The pained whisper on the final word made Turais speechless.

Alex breathed heavily before he continued with a strained voice, "I hate to say this, but his death is really the same as any other nameless stranger in my life."

"Alex -" Turais reached out for the boy. But Alex put up a hand to stop his advance.

"I'm alright," Alex said with his face turned away. "I... I just need a moment... to... to collect my thoughts."

"But Alex -"
However, the boy ignored him and darted towards the entrance of the common room with an arm across his face.

The dormitory door opened once more as Jonty reappeared. "Aren't you going to chase after him?"

"I don't know if I should give him some space or..."

"Of course not!" Jonty said incredulously. "He needs someone with him right now!"

Turais nodded and ran after Alex, but then he realized that Jonty was not behind him. Instead, he was rooted by the couches with a sadness in his eyes.

"Aren't you coming?"

"No," Jonty said softly. "I think you should go alone."

"What do you mean?"

"He... well, you two are closer than he is with me -"

"Jonty..."

"That's just a fact," Jonty shrugged at Turias' meager protest. "I don't want him to feel uncomfortable..." Then, he took off his outer robe and handed it to Turais, "It's cold out. Stay out of trouble and please make sure he's safe."

"I will," Turais said. "And... thank you."

Jonty gave Turais a sad smile before saying, "Go."

***

Turais tailed Alex and watched him wander aimlessly in the dark hallways. Finally, they made their way to the top of the Astronomy Tower. On the circular platform that overlooked the school grounds, he saw Alex huddled by one of the stone columns under the moonless skies. Turais summoned Lord Fawley as he appeared in front of his cousin. However, Alex was unable to see his deceased cousin as he appeared in front of his cousin. However, Alex was unable to see his deceased cousin and continued to sit motionlessly.

"Alex?" Turais whispered. "It's me, Turais."

There was no response. Turais made his approach slowly, afraid of startling the boy.

"Alex, please talk to me."

"I'm fine, Turais. Go back."

Turais reached the boy and covered his thin silk pyjamas with the outer cloak he carried. "You're going to freeze and get sick."

The boy didn't respond except for the tiny tug of the cloak over his shoulder. Turais elected to sit down beside the boy as Lord Fawley approached Alex slowly and knelt beside him. He
reached for his hair, trying to caress it, but his hand passed through without the slightest touch. Lord Fawley looked down at his hand and shook his head sorrowfully.

"I don't want to talk about it," Alex muttered as Turais turned his attention back to the boy.

"We don't have to talk about anything. I'm just here to keep you company," Turais said softly as they settled into a loaded silence.

After a long while, just as Turais thought Alex had fallen asleep, he heard the boy croak out, "Have you ever... ever lost someone before?"

"I..." Turais hesitated. "I... Yes. Yes, I have."

Alex nodded as if it confirmed something he already knew. "So that's why you can see the Thestrals pulling the carriages."

Turais thought he hid that fact about himself quite carefully. But clearly, it did not escape Alex's attention.

"You can see them too?"

Alex nodded slightly. "I thought I was the only one who could see them. Until, that one time, I saw you ducking your head under its wings while Jonty got smacked right on the face."

Turais cracked a grin as he recalled the look of utter confusion on the boy's face as he sat in a puddle of mud.

Alex asked again, "Is that also why you always a bit blue around Halloween? I... I... never mind -"

Turais was surprised by the question.

"I... I had many things happen to me that day... some great - like winning my first Quidditch match - some downright terrifying - like facing a troll as a child... That's why I'm a bit of edge when Halloween rolls around every year..."

"Oh... I see..." Alex whispered. Somehow, Turais thought Alex sounded disappointed at his answer.

Turais risked a question and asked, "Is that... that... why are you always a bit blue around this time of year as well?"

Alex tensed up at the question.

"I'm sorry," Turais said quickly as dread filled his mind. "That was a stupid question. I'm sorry if I overstepped my boundaries-"

As Turais was rambling on, Alex turned around and looked at him in the eye. A tight, brave smile was etched across his face, "Since you shared, it's only fair that I shared as well."

"You don't have to -"

Alex merely closed his eyes and shook his head gently. Inhaling a shaky breath, Alex said, "On this day, five years ago, m... my m... mother and b... brother died."

Turais felt his jaw slack as Lord Fawley's eyes widened in horror as well. Those words were
nothing like what he was expecting to hear.

"I'm... I'm so sorry, Alex - I didn't mean to -"

"Stop, Turais," Alex opened his eyes and Turais could see the tears rolling around, threatening to spill. "Don't be... You didn't force me to share." He took another shuddering breath as he continued shakily, "Do you remember how I had a panic attack when Kaiden was almost hit by the police car?"

Turais nodded, not daring to speak.

"It was... It was because they died in a car accident. A drunk driver rammed his truck into the side of our car," Alex said as tears started to leak from his eyes, "The side my mother and brother were on... while I... my magic somehow teleported me out of the car and onto the sidewalk..."

Tears were streaming down Alex's face now as Turais shuffled close to the boy and let him lean onto his shoulder.

"I watched as the car exploded... They died in front of my eyes... and I did nothing... " Alex said thickly. "No, I saved myself and abandoned them... Why did I save myself?!

"Why did they leave me behind...?"

Alex sobbed into Turais' robe as he continued to mutter incoherently. Alex's cries stabbed into Turais' heart like icy swords. He recalled the visceral pain he felt when he saw the corpses of Remus, Tonks, Fred, Dobby... He recalled his childhood wondering what it would be like to have known his parents... And now he imagined how much worse that pain was for Alex - for a seven-year-old boy to learn to love his family only for him to lose them in a tragic accident and then to only discover that he might have been able to save them if only he knew how to...

"It's not your fault," Turais said, holding the shaking boy tightly. "It's your accidental magic. You had no control over it."

"But I should have!" The words ripped coarsely from Alex's throat. "I'm a wizard. I should be able to stop the truck... or I should have died trying! I should be able to save their lives! Why is all my family dying and leaving me behind? I just want them with me. I just want them to be safe... and maybe have dinner with me... or play games with me... why can't I have that?!"

Turais had no answer. After so many years, these were still the same questions that haunted his dreams. Why did he have to suffer through all the pain and agony? He just wanted to be an ordinary boy, with a family he loved that loved him back...

And that pain and agony he felt for people he barely knew was almost unbearable at times, he could not imagine what it would be for someone like Alex, who knew his family for years before one irreversible mistake tore his life apart...

"Some days... Some days I just wish that I never knew I had magic," Alex said in garbled words that were mixed with tears, "If I didn't have magic, I might not have survived the car crash... then I would be with my family somewhere up there and not be so alone..."

Turais wrapped his arms around Alex ever tighter in a useless attempt to shield the boy from the cruelty and heartbreaks of the past.

Lord Fawley was standing over them with his face twisted into a pained, grieving expression. His hand was covering his mouth as his entire body thrummed.
"You're not alone, Alex."

"But it always felt like this," Alex sniffed as he wiped his nose. "A...After the...accident, they placed me in an o...orphanage. It was horrible...horrible...but a day later, some Ministry officials showed up and told me...for the first time...that I was a w...wizard...and that I had a father. And that he had custody of me. I...I didn't even know who my father was or that I had a father. Mother never mentioned him and I've never met him so I always thought he was dead. I didn't even know I was a wizard until then," Alex laughed bitterly.

"But when they took me to Fawley Manor, there he was. He was kind. He took care of me. I asked him why he never looked for us and he...he said he never knew about us...and just as I thought...or I hoped...that maybe I will have a home again...but then...then he became ill, became distant...his thoughts started to go askew and now, I barely see him." Alex looked at Turais with devastation in his eyes, "Am I a curse? Why does everyone die around me...First, my mother and brother. Now, my cousin. My father will be next..."

"That's not true. You're not a curse. You're a gift. A gift, do you understand? And you're not alone, Alex," Turais whispered into Alex's ears repeatedly. "You're never alone."

Alex shuddered in his arms as another wave of tears and cries overwhelmed the distraught boy. After many minutes, Alex's tears ran dry and his hiccups subsided. The trio, two boys and an apparition, fell silent for a long, long while under the cloudless, starry heavens.

"Olivia and Ashleigh," Alex breathed.

Turais looked at the boy with a question on his face.

"Olivia," he repeated. "That was my mother's name. Ashleigh, that was my brother's."

"They are beautiful names," Turais said.

Alex smiled sadly, "I think so too." But then, his face crumpled again, "I really miss them..."

"I understand..." Turais said, tears threatening to fall down his cheeks as well. "...more than you might think. But you know what...they will always be with you..." Turais patted his chest, "...in here."

"It doesn't feel that way most days..."

"It's hard," Turais acknowledged. "Some days, you feel your heart is being stabbed by a thousand swords. Other days, you can almost forget it. But then, there are days when the pain comes back as if no time has ever passed."

Alex nodded at the answer. "But...how...how do you manage?"

Turais smiled, reminding himself of Ron and Hermione and Hagrid and Ginny and all his friends. "That is what friends are for. They might not be related to you by blood, but with mutual care, support...and unconditional love...they can be as much of a family to you as your true family."

"Really?" Alex asked hopefully.

"Of course," Turais said encouragingly. "You know you can always turn to me. I'll always be here for you."
"I know."

They fell into a companionable silence as the stars twinkled above their heads.

Hours later, when Alex finally succumbed to exhaustion and fell into a fitful sleep on his shoulder, Lord Fawley said, "I feel so guilty that I was never there for him. No one should ever experience this kind of pain, let alone a child... Please take care of him for me, as I should have but never did. Can you?"

"I will," Turais promised.

"Thank you," Lord Fawley said softly. With a final nod, he vanished into nothingness just as the morning sun started to peek above the horizon.

***

"Charlus, watch out!"

A flash of green light.

"NOOOO!"

"Kaiden!"

A final scream for help.

"Alex! Jonty!"

Two boys clawing at the hands that choked their necks.

"Nonononono..."

A man cradling a boy with the familiar wavy, black hair within his arms. The little hand hanging limping as blood trickled down his pearly wrist.

He whipped around. Horrifying images seared into his retina.

Then, he was falling.

"Always too late, Harry Potter -"

Darkness.

***

November 30, 1971 (Tuesday)
Turais startled awake to the cold, crisp air of the Scottish winter morning. The cocoon of Warming Spell had dissipated just minutes before and frost was already inching its icy tendrils towards him. He scooted up with his back against the wall, feeling the crick in his neck from his terrible posture. Then, he turned to check on Alex only to find the boy looking up at him sleepily.

"Morning," Alex said, tugging his outer cloak a little closer to his own body.

"Morning."

"Nightmare?"

"It's nothing," Turais said with a tight smile. He turned away to rubbed his face tiredly.

"I'm... I'm sorry..."

"No, it's not your fault I had a nightmare."

"But -"

"No buts," Turais said. "Just promise me to not close yourself off. I'm always here to lend an ear, alright?"

Alex's eyes turned a bit misty again as he nodded.

"Come on then," Turais knocked his shoulder into the boy's, "Let's head back to the common room. We don't want McGonagall to suffer a heart attack when she sees you roaming the hallways in your pyjamas."

That put a little smile from Alex.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

Turais sighed, "I don't deserve the thanks, Alex. I was there and I couldn't save him and I - I'm so sorry I can't do more -"

"No, I'm sure you did all you could. And I'm... I'm just grateful you weren't injured trying to help him," Alex said. "I just... want to thank you for being my friend."

"You don't have to thank me for that..."

Alex shook his head softly.

"Do you remember what happened exactly two years ago?"

Turais frowned as he scoured his mind. Was this an important anniversary for something? However, he drew a blank and shook his head. "I'm not sure..."

"That's alright," Alex said gently. "Two years ago on this day, you said that I was your best friend -" Turais looked towards Alex in shock. "November 29 has always been the darkest day of my life... but that day... that one day was one of my brightest... thanks to you..."

"The best thing that has ever happened to me since... since their death was becoming friends with you," Alex whispered fervently. "Thank you."
Words failed him as he decided the only appropriate response was a sincere acceptance of the gratitude. "Thank you for being with me through the thick and thin as well."

Then, Alex whispered something that Turais barely caught. "And... and can you promise to leave me if you are ever endangered by me?"

“What do you mean?”

“I might be cursed -”

"Oh, stop this nonsense," Turais scolded as he jumped forward to tickle the boy. A scream of laughter ripped from the boy's throat as Turais found his mark. “Believe me. There is no curse beneath the sun that will kill people by association. If there is one, there would be none of us left!”

“You can’t say that,” Alex mumbled. “You don’t know that for sure...”

“I’m saying that right this moment. And I will repeat it until you believe it,” Turais said firmly. Seeing Alex’s persistent frown, Turais changed tacks. “Hey, you told me in first-year that I will go on to achieve greatness because of my wand. And my aspirations for greatness is properly massive. Therefore, I’m less than a fraction of the way to my goal and there is no way I will die anytime soon. Does that make sense?”

Alex pondered for a moment before nodding bravely, tears were glistening in his eyes under the sunlight, as he hugged Turais tightly.

"Silly boy," Turais said as he returned the hug.

But Trelawney’s prediction continued to haunt him.

"Maybe I will be the one who endangers all of you instead,” Turais thought.

Chapter End Notes

I planned out Alex’s background story since I first started this story. Hopefully, you understand Alex’s reaction to certain events in the past better with this new information.

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

Edit: The next chapter, Chapter 48, is on schedule to be released on Aug 28. Sorry for the late notice and thank you for the support. Until then!

- ravenclawblues 2020-07-26
Hey everybody,

Sorry for going MIA for the past month. Although time seems to stand still during the pandemic, life still goes on. I was extremely busy finishing up my work and moving (yes, during a pandemic) to start a new chapter of my life.

I will aim to update every two weeks and I will affirm my promise not to abandon this story.

With all this out of the way, I hope you enjoy the update! And once again, thank you for your patience and continual support.

- ravenclawblues 2020-08-31

November 30, 1971 (Tuesday)

Turais and Alex crept their way through the quiet, slumbering castle back into the depths of the Slytherin dungeons. When they were a few turns away from the common room, they were met with approaching sounds of quick footsteps.

"-can you be rational about this?" a girl spoke angrily.

"I am rational! That's why I need to figure this out!" the other voice, a boy, shouted with agitation.

"Will you calm down?! You are picking a fight over nothing -"

"Oh yeah? We'll see about that."

"How do you know where the common room is and how are you going to get in?"

"Watch me, I- There you are! "

The pair appeared into view when Turais realized it was Catherine and another Ravenclaw boy, judging by their ties. The boy pointed his finger at Turais, his face contorted with anger, as Catherine was trying to pull him back by his forearm.
Staring down at the accusatory finger, Turais was completely baffled by the display of hostility.

"Uh... how might I help you?"

The boy snorted.

"How might you help me?" the boy repeated mockingly. "By not trying it on with my girlfriend!"

The roar in his voice caused Alex to shrink back. But Turais stood his ground as Catherine grabbed the boy's forearm again. Turais' eyes flitted towards Catherine, who shot him an apologetic look, before he focused back on the stranger.

"I did no such thing," Turais said coolly.

"Of course you won't admit it," the boy said sarcastically. He turned towards Catherine and said accusingly, "Then why did Anthony tell me you left the group study session? And Susan saw you and this boy walking back from Hogsmeade last Saturday?"

"You were keeping tabs on me, Barnaby?!" Catherine gasped indignantly.

"So what?" Barnaby flung his arm out of her grasp roughly. "If I didn't, I wouldn't have known you were putting it out behind my back."

"How dare you accuse me of that?!" Catherine coloured in fury while Turais did the same, except in embarrassment. "Don't attack my integrity because of your own insecurity!"

"This boy had his eyes on you ever since the Ravenclaw trials! Everyone knows that!"

"Who's everyone?!"

"Malfoy and the whole lot!" Barnaby said.

"So you trusted a random person but not me?"

"Are you denying any of this?!"

Turais looked at Alex, who watched on in confusion. There was something shady happening... perhaps some false rumours? That seemed to be a Malfoy specialty.

Then, a sudden motion from the corner of his eyes caught his attention. Turais whipped around, wand-ready, when he saw the boy's hand on his wand. However, it was only half-way out of its sheath when he stilled unnaturally.

"Barnaby, don't do it," Catherine warned.

"What is the meaning of this?!" the boy spat.

"This means -" Catherine’s wand that was trained on the boy's back poked an inch further into his robe, "- that we are through, Barnaby," she said with steely calmness. "And that you should put your wand away and leave."

"What's going on here?!" Kaiden appeared with both arms cross his chest and his wand in one hand. "Dueling in the hallways at the break of dawn?"
"Oh perfect!" the boy spat. "What a jolly crowd!"

He stuffed his wand away, turned around, and slapped Catherine's wand arm away. With a final dangerous gaze at Catherine and Turais, he walked towards Kaiden. As he passed the Gryffindor Prefect, he paused and patted him on the shoulder, "You made the right choice, mate. I don't know how you held on for so long. She's not worth it, not even with her looks."

Kaiden tensed at the words but the Ravenclaw walked off, leaving everyone in a stunned silence.

"He's a tosser," Kaiden said.

"He is."

Scratching the nape of his hair, Kaiden waved his hand at their general vicinity and said, "Well... you're a Prefect so I can't take any points away. And -" Kaiden eyed Alex's pyjama bottoms and slippers, " - and I'll pretend I didn't see this because it's far too early for me to be giving out detention. Just... just don't do this again... alright?"

"Thank you, Kaiden," Catherine said as she placed her wand away. "I thought you took the morning patrol shift in the towers."

"I switched with Napier recently," Kaiden said as he cast subtle glances down the hallway. "I... I actually enjoy it in the morning -" His entire body froze up as he focused on a faraway target.

Turais turned his head and saw Michael appear in the next corridor. He was in an all-white, form-fitting outfit comprised off a Henley shirt, shorts, and plimsolls. For two seconds, the light panting and the rhythmic steps filled the silence as he jogged past them without noticing their presence.

Once Michael was out of sight, all the tension fled his body. He turned around, cleared his throat, and continued as if nothing happened, "I just enjoy the... the silence and the empty corridors."

Catherine furrowed her brows but didn't comment.

"You lot stay out of trouble. I'll be watching," Kaiden said half-heartedly before disappearing around the corner.

An awkward silence befell the trio as they eyed each other. Just as Turais was wondering what he should say, Alex spoke up, "I will just head to the common room first."

"Are you really fine?" Turais asked worriedly.

"Look at her. She clearly wants to talk to you," Alex hissed into his ear. Upon seeing Turais' hesitation, Alex added, "She broke up with her boyfriend in part due to you. You owe her this talk at least."

Turais looked at Catherine and finally noticed the ambivalent expression. He nodded.

"I'm sorry about you and... uhh... Barnaby," Turais said vaguely once Alex was out of earshot.
"You beat me to the apology," Catherine said with a small chuckle. "I'm terribly sorry you were dragged into my relationship drama. And please don't be burdened by what he said. Things were not working out between us for a while."

"I seem to attract trouble at every corner," Turais said. "I could very well be the one at blame here."

He tried to smile, but he couldn't seem to find the strength to do so as the smile turned into somewhat of a grimace.

"I don't want to take up any more of your time. But I just wanted to make sure I apologized for his indefensible behaviour and let you know you are not to be blamed for anything," Catherine said.

"I appreciate it," Turais said awkwardly. "Well, bye then."

"Bye," Catherine said softly as they walked in opposite directions.

Turais turned into the hallway where Kaiden went and caught up with the boy.

"Kay, I just wanted to chat with you."

Kaiden froze in his step and whipped his head around. Nervously, he asked, "About what?"

"I was just wondering if you will be going to Hogsmeade in December," Turais asked.

Kaiden relaxed upon hearing the question. "Oh... probably not this time. Why?"

In truth, Turais was worried that Kaiden would be in danger, especially in light of Lord Fawley. So hearing that Kaiden had no intention of leaving Hogwarts put his mind more at ease.

"Oh, nothing. If you were, I just thought I would like to tag along. You know, we've never gone to Hogsmeade together."

"Maybe we should plan for that trip after Christmas," Kaiden said with a weak smile.

"Great," Turais said. Then, he veered into another topic, "You can tell me to mind my own business... but what happened when Michael visited you in the Hospital Wing that day? And what about Gwen being your girlfriend?"

The Gryffindor's shoulders turned stiff for a long moment. Turais could see the battle raging in his dancing pupils before his entire body slumped, "...When I was barely conscious and drugged to the gills, I might have confessed my feelings to him."

"Oh."

That was all Turais managed to say. From what he had observed, it could only mean one thing. Michael rejected him.

"Yeah... I don't know what I said exactly, but Gwen told me she saw Michael storm past her... and the distance he kept from me for the past week... it can only be because I confessed..." Kaiden said bitterly. "I told Gwen to be my pretend girlfriend so the next time Michael visited, I could lie and say that I mistaken him for her. Then... then, maybe we could still be friends... But he never visited or talked to me again..."

This was a hot mess.
"I think you should get Michael alone and talk everything through. He has not been himself lately, ever since you two stopped talking. I hate to see you two suffering and agonizing because of a misunderstanding."

"I know... I just... I just thought he needed some space..."

"I understand. Please... consider what I said."

"I will. But I can't promise anything more."

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Turais returned to the common room to see Malfoy sitting by the fireplace. Given the time, he was clearly waiting for someone to arrive.

"I'm sorry to have spoiled your surprise," Turais said as he walked closer.

"It was a pity," Malfoy said. "You will have to imagine the disappointment painted on my face when I saw Fawley walked through those doors by himself."

"I have to say you exceeded my expectation, however," Turais commented breezily, "I never thought a Malfoy would stick around for the aftermath, especially when a plan didn't resolve in your favour."

"I suppose that's an astute observation," Malfoy said, lifting up his cane and examining the glistening, silver handle. Then, his eyes bore into Turais' and said, "Indeed, I rarely do so. But I value a worthy opponent. Unlike the bumbling Nott, or the prideful Yaxley, or the rest of my flock of easily influenced followers, you are an interesting challenge. You actually beat me at my own game, and I respect that.

"You also know how to play the long game. I can see how you are cultivating the lower years to follow your lead and removing them from my sphere of influence. But two can play this game, and I know that in order for my family to regain control, we will have to remove the critical piece... and that is you and your perfect reputation. I will continue to impede your advances, stop your progress, and undermine your influence. Treat the gullible Barnaby Witchester as an exhibit. More is on the way."

"You do understand that while we may never be allies again, we do not have to be enemies," Turais said.

Malfoy chuckled, "I once, naively, thought that was the case too. But I've since realized one thing. There is only room for either one of us. And in order for my family to rise, yours must fall. And I will make sure that your family becomes a footnote in history."

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December 5, 1971 (Sunday)
Over the past week, the Fawley family became the sole topic of conversation amongst the students, particularly the Slytherins. While most of the attention was still on the death of Lord Hector Fawley, the week saw the rise of other peripheral topics. Those included the ascension of Howard Fawley to the family seat in the Wizengamot, Alex's supposed ascension to the rank of Heir Fawley, and the general mystery surrounding the election of chair.

"Will your father be present in the chamber for his swearing in today?"

"Is your father with us or against us? If he is not, tell him to stay out of sight."

Alex struggled with the increasing scrutiny on top of the emotional trauma that accompanied the recent tragedy. Despite Turais' best efforts, Alex withdrew at an alarming rate, barely speaking more than a few words every day.

And of course, Malfoy didn't hold back his obvious lack of empathy on the matter.

"Lord Fawley really should have seen it coming," he said suddenly as most of the students were relaxing in the common room. The room fell silent as they observed the showdown from the sidelines. "As my grandmother always said. This is his comeuppance."

"For what exactly?" Turais challenged. "Having a different opinion than yours?"

"That's criminal enough in my view," Malfoy said. "But Merlin forbid, that's still not his worst crime. He failed his most important duty to safeguard and extend his pure bloodline. Instead, -" Malfoy whipped out his staff and pointed at Alex accusingly, "- the House of Fawley will be passed onto tainted blood."

"You do understand that this case is treated as a homicide and your family is most suspicious under these circumstances," Turais said. "It would be wise for you to just shut up."

"I will not be lectured by someone who fails to recognize the truth that is staring him in the face," Malfoy returned. "You are also wrong, as per usual, since we are not involved with his death in any way. One way or another, our name will be cleared because they will not be a shred of evidence that points towards us. However, I would certainly like to meet with the person who was behind all this. They have done Wizarding Britain a great service."

"How dare you glorify this heinous crime! How dare you utter those blasphemous words!" Turais said, struggling to keep his anger at bay. "No one should ever be rewarded or praised for taking the life of another-"

Alex grabbed Turais' shoulder and said softly, "Malfoy, you will not cross us if I were you."

"And why is that?" Malfoy said.

"There are a lot of dangerous people in the world desperate for gold," Alex said. "And I just happened to inherit a large pile of it from my dead cousin. It would be wise for you to be more cautious with your words.

There was a chill that swept across the room. Malfoy blinked.

"Did you... just threaten me?"

Alex ignored Malfoy and nudged Turais' arm, "Let's leave."

Stunned, Turais allowed himself to be led back into their room. Jonty came in a second later
and asked, "What the heck was that about?"

"I'm just sick and tired of Malfoy pretending he is better than everyone else," Alex rubbed his eyes tiredly.

"What about the... threat?"

"What about it?"

"Did you mean -"

"How much did you inherit from your cousin?!" Jonty blurted out. Turais glared at the boy for his lack of tact, but the boy protested with a loud "What?! It's a serious question!"

"It's a generous figure," Alex admitted softly, staring at his fingers. "Enough that I don't know what to do with it..."

"Is it enough to hire an assassin?" Jonty asked hopefully.

"Jonty!" Turais scolded as he slapped the boy on the head. Then, he turned back and eyed Alex carefully, "You weren't serious about the threat, right?"

Alex looked between the two boys and scoffed, "Of course not. Clearly he won't back off unless he thinks he's in danger, I just hope what I said was enough for him to leave us alone. You know, it's high time for him to be in the hot seat after everything he's done to us."

Turais furrowed his brows in concern when the door opened again as their roommate, Flint, entered the room.

"I'm... I'm s... sorry to hear about your cousin, truly, even if you don't believe me."

"I'm fine," Alex said stiffly. Even though their yearmates had been less antagonistic towards them ever since Turais' poisoning, they were not pals.

Flint eyed Turais briefly before continuing, "I just want you to know that we... or most of us... are on your side. What Malfoy said was clearly out of line."

Alex eyed Flint for a long moment before softening his defense. "Thank you, Flint."

Flint nodded awkwardly before shuffling back out the door.

"By the way, you should consider investing your gold if they are just sitting in your vault," Turais said.

"I don't know anything about investment."

"How about investing in my father's new business?" Jonty said excitedly. "He is always looking for investors."

"I don't even know what your father's new business is."

"It's a Portkey vacation business," Jonty explained quickly. "He bought properties and islands around the world - completely private - so if you want a weekend getaway in exotic locations, owl him. At least that's what he tells people all the time."

"Uh... I will think about it..."
"Of course, of course. But do consider it well. We can become business partners once I inherit it!"

"Okay, calm down," Turais said before turning to Alex. "If you want a second opinion, I can give you a few recommendations as well."

"I'd like that. Thank you," Alex said with a small smile.

"Actually... Speaking of gold, would you happen to agree on paying for our drinks for next Hogsmeade weekend?" Jonty asked sheepishly. "I might have overspent my allowance this month."

"Jonty!"

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December 6, 1971 (Monday)

Turais was never any good at following instructions, particularly Arcturus'.

Therefore, here he was at the Ministry, lurking by the entrance to the Wizengamot. Because Arcturus and his allies were in the chamber and the wards on this floor that disallowed anything but the simplest, harmless spells, Turais never planned to enter the chamber. Instead, he opted to observe the usual suspects from afar.

There was, however, one peculiarity. Ten minutes before the session was about to begin, Tiberius McLaggen, in his flashy green suit, took a left turn into the Records Room rather than entering the main chamber like the rest.

Dogged by his own suspicion, Turais stalked McLaggen and saw he entered the Records Room. Once he reached the main floor, however, McLaggen had already disappeared within the numerous stacks. Searching around, he ended up in the Potions section and found Minchum there already. The crouching man tapped his wand on several books. They flew out of the stacks and placed themselves on the cart beside the man.

"Mr Minchum," Turais greeted as the man looked up in surprise.

"Mr Black, nice to see you. I didn't expect to see you here today."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, I just thought Lord Black would have made his grandson stay at Hogwarts, especially given what had happened. Mr Malfoy is definitely keeping his distance."

"What my grandfather doesn't know won't hurt him."

Minchum arched a singular brow and didn't comment on that. "Are you searching for a book here for the Wolfsbane legislation again?"

"Yeah," Turais lied as he looked around. "Did you see Mr McLaggen around?"

Minchum wrinkled his brows and shook his head, "Why would he be here?"
"I thought I saw him enter the Records Room before me," Turais smiled nonchalantly. "By the way, the session is about to start in ten minutes. Why are you still here?"

The man drew back his sleeve and gasped at the time. "Dear me, I lost track of time. I'm glad I ran into you, Mr Black." But then, he released a heavy sigh, "Frankly, I don’t even know if it is worth going to meeting only to see it aborted minutes later. Maybe I should just focus on my readings."

"In either case, can I help you find all the books you need."

"No, no. I only have one book left," Minchum said as he hastened his scan on the book spines.

"What are you looking for?"

"Oh, just some books on alchemy."

"On the Philosopher's Stone?" Turais asked as he glanced up to one section of the shelf that was glaringly empty. "It seems that they have been quite popular recently due to the rumoured theft."

Minchum laughed. "I admit I do have a fascination for the most legendary alchemical substance in the entire world, but that's not what I'm looking for specifically... Although they are related tangentially..." Turais glanced at the cover of the top book, which read *Wildfyre - Fiery Fascination and Uncontrollably Wild*. Below the title was an image of neon-green flames engulfing a medieval city.

"What is Wildfyre?" Turais asked curiously.

"Wildfyre is a highly volatile alchemical material identifiable by the distinctive green hue in liquid form. However, the flames look just like normal fire and not green, as depicted falsely on this book," Minchum said. "When ignited, it can explode with tremendous force. The resulting fire burns so hot that water cannot extinguish it. Basically, it is the alchemical version of Fiendfyre."

"I have never heard about this before," Turais said, fascinated.

"And no one should," Minchum said grimly. "As I have just told you, it is a very dangerous substance if placed in the wrong hands. Therefore, the Ministry has destroyed all of the substance and banned all knowledge on creating the substance. All but one."

Turais was afraid to ask, "Which one?"

Minchum said darkly, "Did you know that the Philosopher's Stone can be used to create this substance?"

"So you're suggesting that whoever stole the Philosopher's Stone might plan to use it to make Wildfyre?!" Turais said in alarm. "But why would someone do that? Isn't the Elixir of Life much more useful?"

"You are correct. However, Master Flamel had made it clear over the centuries that he memorized the recipe for the Elixir of Life without having it written down. The recipe for Wildfyre is much easier to procure on that front," Minchum explained. "In addition, the last time there was a rumoured theft of the Philosopher's Stone was in 1666 -" Turais gasped in recognition. as Minchum nodded, "- which coincided with the Great Fire of London in 1666. Although most favoured the theory that it was caused by a Welsh Green locked in the basement of a bakery, I
suspect it was because of the production of Wildfyre using the Stone. But all of this is only my suspicion, so do take it with a grain of salt."

Turais hummed thoughtfully, "What are the characteristics of this Wildfyre?"

"Well, Wildfyre is not only identifiable by its characteristic green colour, it is also extremely sulphuric and provides a sharp, distinct smell that is instantly recognizable for those who've encountered it before. Even the strongest Blocking Charms can only reduce its scent into a repugnant urine-bathed alleyway, which is quite noticeable..." Minchum sighed. "But Wildfyre has not been seen for three centuries so I could be overly suspicious. In addition, there are so many alleyways that stink of urine that the Aurors would be busy investigating false claims of Wildfyre everywhere."

"It's not like they have anything better to do these days," Turais teased as he opened up the book. There were formulas, diagrams, and symbols that Turais could not understand. "Do you even understand any of this?"

"Probably not all," Minchum admitted. "But I should understand most of it since I'm the Wizengamot representative to the Potions Association."

"You are part of the Potions Association?!" Turais gasped.

"Yes?"

"No wonder you were so knowledgeable with Potions," Turais said. "Why did you not say anything?!"

Minchum frowned at the accusation. "Uh... I thought you knew and you never asked."

"That's fine. I was wondering if you can update me on the Wolfsbane Potion application."

"There's really nothing to update you on," Minchum said apologetically.

"But why?" Turais asked. "Is there something I can do -"

"There's nothing you can do. The Chair of the Potions Association is Lord Yaxley's nephew - " Turais winced, "- You can probably guess why he is determined to slow-walk your application to the greatest extent. I'm sorry but there is nothing I can do to help."

"I didn't realize..." Turais said. "Do you know if Tiberius McLaggen is friendly with him?"

"You know how well-connected McLaggen is, but I don't think he's more friendly with him than average... Actually," Minchum remembered suddenly, "I think I saw the two of them having some sort of verbal altercation... you can ask Mr Flack to confirm the news. You still have orientation sessions with him, do you not?"

"No, those ended a month ago, but I can ask him about it. Thank you for the information."

"You're welcome," Minchum said apologetically. "Sorry, I couldn't be much help."

"On the contrary, you have been most helpful."

Minchum's eyes glanced over Turais and prompted him to turn around. At the end of the aisle stood McLaggen, who looked as though he had been observing them for a while in broad view.

"So the rumour that Heir Black is a bookworm is true," McLaggen said as he walked towards
them. "Harold, you are here as well, per usual."

"Tiberius," Minchum greeted.

"Mr McLaggen," Turais said coldly.

McLaggen tutted. "I come as a bearer of gift, Tur... Heir Black -" McLaggen picked up one of the books from the cart and flipped through it casually. "I believe there is some information that may be of interest to you -"

"What do you want in return?" Turais interrupted.

McLaggen closed the book with a snap. He placed the book back on the cart and smiled at Turais approvingly. "Good to see you're learning, Turais. Well, this information has already been paid for by Lord Black in kind."

"My grandfather did not mention a deal pertaining to my situation," Turais returned. He did not trust a word from that man’s mouth. "I also know for a fact that you do not have the solution that I seek."

McLaggen's gaze hardened as it flitted towards Minchum. "Harold, my dear friend, this is not how things work around here. You are setting a dangerous precedent."

"What I do with my information is my own business. And it isn't proper to deceive our more innocent members," Minchum said icily as McLaggen stared back menacingly. But all of a sudden, McLaggen’s scowl turned into a smile like the brilliant sun after a brief thunderstorm.

"Of course, Harold," McLaggen said gracefully. "You are more experienced than me. I should very well be learning from your expertise. I dare not dawdle here any further lest I overstay my welcome."

With a toss of his flamboyant, green robes, McLaggen strolled down the aisle and out of sight. Turais wanted to trail him.

"It was nice talking to you, Mr Minchum," Turais said. "I think I will head off now."

"But didn't you say you needed to look for something?"

"Oh, right," Turais said as he paused and started to search for a random book on the nearest bookshelf. "I almost forgot. Poor memory."

"Wait until you're my age," Minchum chuckled.

"Mr Minchum, there is no need for you to stay. I am just looking for one item."

"Oh, it's no bother," Minchum said. "I enjoy the company, if you don't mind me intruding."

"I don't mind at all," Turais said with a strained smile.

After pretending to have found his desired material, they wheeled the book-filled cart back to the reading room and settled in their usual spots. McLaggen was nowhere in sight.

"I think I will have enough reading material until the end of this month," Minchum commented as he transferred one stack of books on Wildfyre onto the table.

"You must be a quick reader," Turais said. "This will last me until the end of this year."
Minchum chuckled. As he turned to take another stack, Turais spotted a small torn piece of parchment fluttering down onto the floor.

"You dropped something," Turais said as he picked up the parchment. He flipped over the blank side and found a short message.

Turais froze.

"Did I?" Minchum asked. Turais frowned as he looked up at Minchum, who looked slightly concerned. He wordlessly handed the slip to the older man, whose expression darkened as well. "I trust that this is not a tasteless prank on your part."

"I'm afraid not," Turais said.

Minchum nodded, "I think it is time to involve the Aurors."

"What do you mean?" Turais asked. Then, he gasped, "This is not the first time it has happened, is it?"

Minchum shook his head as he pocketed the note that read, "You will soon become the next Lord Fawley."

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The deputy Head Auror's demeanour was grim as they relayed the entire situation with complete detail and precision. After a moment of silence, Charlus turned on his swivel chair to face Turais and Minchum once again, "Thank you for your help today. I just have a few more clarifying questions."

He pulled out a second slip of parchment and placed it beside their own. It read: "Drop out or drop dead." Compared side-by-side, they were clearly the same type of inconspicuous black ink and typography.

"So you received this first slip two weeks ago, Harold?"

"Yes, I was packing up my belongings in the Wizengamot chamber and found it amongst my many scrolls," Minchum said. "I thought it was a petty prank by one of the other Lords and ignored it."

"And the second slip of parchment fell out from the pile of books that you were carrying today."

"Yes."

"No one besides you two and Mr McLaggen touched these books since they were removed from the Records Room shelf?"

"That is correct. Mr Black and I were together the entire time," Minchum said. "There is usually no one in the Records Room and we didn't see anyone besides Tiberius."

"This note must be planted after your retrieval of the books and before Turais picked it up from the floor. Mr McLaggen is the key."
"Not necessarily, Charlus," Minchum said. "Remember how I fielded the theory of Wildfyre this morning in relation to the Philosopher's Stone?"

Charlus frowned. "You are not suggesting any of the Aurors to be implicated in this, are you?"

"That is still more likely than Tiberius being the culprit in all this," Minchum said. "I may not like Tiberius, but while he may toe the line from time to time, he would never commit such a callous crime. I just will not believe that is the case unless I see concrete evidence."

The two men gazed at each other wordlessly.

Turais braved the tension, "Let's entertain that thought for a moment. If what Mr Minchum said was true, then there is a possibility that someone planted the slip amongst the books on Wildfyre for Mr Minchum to discover."

"And Harold's studious nature is common knowledge, so it is highly likely that he would seek out the books in the Records Room immediately," Charlus finished.

"Charlus, you don't think that anyone is going to such lengths to win the election for chair, is it?"

"I can't say for sure, Harold, but it seems highly likely at this point," Charlus said.

"But I'm not the favourite to win the election for the Chair of the Bill Appropriations Committee," Minchum reasoned. "If the culprit was to threaten someone, his target should be Lord Montague, Lord Malfoy, or even Tiberius."

"Indeed," Charlus grimaced. "But you are not the only victim..." Turais' eyes snapped up, "... Lord Montague reported an identical threat. And he received his first note two weeks ago and a second one today, just like you."

Turais' mind swirled. This political battle just took a turn from bad to worse.

"Wait, you did not mention Lord Malfoy's name," Turais said. "Did he not receive the notes?"

"He did not report an incident yet," Charlus corrected.

"Of course. And are the Aurors inclined to believe he and his allies are behind this?"

"He is the likeliest suspect based on these evidence, but we must fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen," Turais warned.

"Are you suggesting otherwise?" Minchum asked Turais.

"The election of chair was a highly publicized affair due to Lord Malfoy's obstruction on the normal proceedings of the election with the aid of Lord Travers for months. Why would he commit this crime now?"

"He is frustrated by the lack of results of his obstruction," Minchum offered. "Wizengamot is now open. In a few weeks, we can amend the standing orders and circumvent Lord Travers' veto."

"Sure, but this -" Turais tapped his index finger on the bagged evidence, " - This is an offense that can land the culprit and their associates with a one-way ticket to Azkaban. I have a hard time believing that Lord Malfoy would risk this punishment even for the Minister for Magic position,"
"let alone the committee chair."

"I agree," Charlus said. "Lord Malfoy is too self-preserving to commit this crime himself or use his allies. He would not risk being remotely linked to it."

"But if it is not Malfoy, then who could it be?" Minchum asked.

"I..." Turais faltered. He wanted to say McLaggen, or Voldemort, or someone else other than Malfoy, but he had no proof. "...I don't know."

"That means Lord Malfoy remains the likeliest suspect, although I agree that we need to keep an open mind. If being in the Wizengamot taught me anything, it was that people are never what they seem to be," Minchum said.

The three fell into a troubled silence.

"I'm sorry to bring this up, but... is it possible to keep me off the record?" Turais asked. "I don't want my family to know I've involved with yet another criminal investigation."

Charlus sighed and said, "I'll see to it, but I don't want to see you here again."

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"Let's head for a cup of tea together," Minchum said as headed out.

"You shouldn't miss the meeting."

"If the last few weeks told us anything, the meeting ended soon after it started."

Turais agreed reluctantly. They took a silent elevator ride up to the main floor of the Ministry and into a small café. The man insisted on buying the drinks so Turais settled into a tiny table. He looked out at the bustling foot traffic beside him that was separated by a waist-high metal fence.

Minchum returned with two levitating tea sets and a plate of scones.

"Rooibos tea," Minchum said as he handed Turais his cup. Gentle wisps of steam rose from the cup and surrounded him with a smoky, vanilla scent that lifted his tension off his shoulders. "It's my personal favourite. Excellent choice for a late afternoon or evening tea."

"Thank you."

"A scone?"

"I'm fine," Turais politely declined as Minchum placed the offering onto his own plate.

"Aren't you worried about the death threats?"

"Of course I am, but I am also a former Auror. I'd like to think I can take care of my own safety," Minchum said before taking a sip. "Besides, I know that many Lords have requested additional protection since the murder of Lord Fawley, so I would rather the resources be used for those who require them. How goes your potions legislation?"
"I'm finished. But what use is there if the Wizengamot is not open for business? Even if the
Wizengamot is open, I cannot propose the bill since I am only a Youth Representative. I still need
to find someone who would sponsor it on my behalf. It just seems so futile..."

Minchum hummed and they fell silent for long time, immersed in the background noise by
the Atrium - the busiest district in Wizarding Britain.

"Well... I can offer to revise and take up your bill proposal if you don't mind..." Minchum said
carefully. Turais just stared as the man shifted uncomfortably. He said quickly, "I only dared to
suggest that since I have some knowledge of it. You are going to be credited for it, of course. And
you don't need to agree to it -"

"No!" Turais replied immediately. "You misunderstand me. I'm just shocked that you would
offer to do that. I'd love for you to help me with it. Thank you."

Minchum gave off a shy smile as he hid behind his teacup.

Suddenly, there were two wizards with wet hair and robes, clearly drenched, approaching
past them. Minchum perked up and called out, "Cattermole, where's the fire?"

"Bloody Atmospheric charms on level ten, that's what! Someone placed a delayed Raining
Charm that sabotaged ours. I don't understand why anyone would play such a prank," the man
exclaimed. "There's another call from level five. Bloody menace."

"Level ten as in the Wizengamot?" Minchum asked in surprise.

"I know! There was a lot of wet and angry Lords," Cattermole grumbled. "Anyhow, see you
around!"

"Poor fella is likely going to be demoted after a gaff like this," Minchum commented as the
two men darted off to another set of elevators and disappeared into the constant flow of the crowd.

"Why is that? As he said, the saboteur should be held responsible."

"But the likelihood of them uncovering the culprit is minimal. Besides, you know how
vengeful most of those old men are. They are embarrassed and they want someone to pay this
mistake at once. He is the Head of the Magical Maintenance Department. He is the logical person
to take the fall," Minchum surmised. Turais felt his pent-up frustration edging ever so closely to
the limits of his control. "They are going to banish him to the netherworld if they could. It's just the
reality of such matters."

"But it shouldn't be reality," Turais pointed out. "It ought not to be. This government is an
oligarchy - an aristocracy, at best, where a roomful of out-of-touch, elitist men squabble over
power and small changes in vast family fortunes while the rest of society is left behind to fend for
themselves. This system is ripened for a culture of corruption and nepotism where no real change
can occur. The Wizengamot is currently hijacked by a small group of extremists that does not
reflect the will of the populace. The Ministry, as well meaning as the Light families are, go about
tackling these inequalities using the wrong methods. This is one of many reasons why we are
sinking deeper and deeper into a class war, a blood purity war, a never-ending vicious cycle. Even
my own grandfather -"

Turais caught himself before he went off a tirade against his own family. But judging by the
looks that he was receiving from neighbouring tables, he might have shouted the last few words.
Turais muttered a quick apology. "Sorry for the volume there. I did not mean to off-load my
grievances onto you."

Minchum considered Turais for a few more moments, calmly drinking his tea, before speaking. "You sound as if you are not from one of the most prestigious ruling families in Wizarding Britain, Mr Black."

The emphasis on the last word rung painfully in his chest, like a iron-cast shackles that chained his body and locked him in "rightful" place in society. And everyone he meets seemed to constant remind him of this fact. Especially at the Ministry, where everyone seemed to recognize him and cast expectant glances towards him, he left suffocated and...

Powerless.

"I know the situation tries our patience, Mr Black, but you must not let these setbacks discourage you."

Turais stood up abruptly. He tried to control his voice into a polite and respectful tone with a tight smile, "Thank you for the tea, Mr Minchum. I should be heading my way."

"Mr Black," Minchum said hurriedly, "I met no disrespect."

"And I took no offense with your words, Mr Minchum. How can one possibly take offence when you are merely speaking the truth?"

As Turais turned to leave the table, the commanding green of McLaggen's robes caught his attention.

"Hello, Harold!" the man said with his normal, painted cheeriness as he leaned over the fence and looked at the duo. There were five Aurors surrounding the man, facing outwards in a protective circle as the pedestrians avoided the obstruction. "And hello to you too, Turais!"

Then, McLaggen glanced around the tiny shop before settling on Minchum, "The Auror Offices just assigned me these people. But where are yours?"

"I declined."

McLaggen clicked his tongue disapprovingly. In a solemn tone, he said, "Death threats are not something to be ignored, Harold. You are a former Auror, you should know better. The enemy may pounce at any moment and you must be able to fight for your own safety."

"I'm more worried about threats that I cannot duel against," Minchum replied.

"Very well. And please do not give me the chance to say 'I told you so'," McLaggen said before his entire demeanour changed into a cheerful disposition. "And aren't you are getting awfully chummy with my dear friend, Turais."

"Mr Minchum and I are casual acquaintances."

"Good enough acquaintances to get him away from the Wizengamot chamber. Lord knows how many times I have encouraged him to step away from that cursed place only to be faced with a cold, hard rejection."

"Mr Minchum was just kind enough to offer his company," Turais said to the impeccably dressed man, who reached for a blueberry scone and examined it.
"And he offered, out of his own volition, to have a cup of tea with you," McLaggen sounded incredulous. He tore a piece of the food and popped it into his mouth. While nibbling at the food, he continued. "Colour me surprised... and jealous. This man shows much interest in you. I daresay he must have some nefarious designs on you."

That soured the conversation immediately as Minchum's expression darkened. "Others might mistaken your unique brand of sarcasm, Tiberius."

"Oops," McLaggen covered his mouth with his long, dainty fingers. He looked at Turais and said, "That was my mistake, Turais. Please do not misunderstand me, I was merely jesting -" 

McLaggen suddenly dropped the scone as his hands clutched around his throat. His eyes were bulging wide with terror as he collapsed onto the ground.

"Tiberius!" Minchum shouted as he jumped over the fence and knelt beside the man. Meanwhile, Turais cast a charm over the plate of scones.

"The scones are poisoned!"

"He is poisoned!"

The two shouted out at once. Turais whipped around and shouted at anyone nearby, "DOES ANYONE HERE HAVE A BEZOAR?!"

Everyone around them was stilled with fright and staring at him hollowly. This man, no matter how obnoxious, was not going to die before him. He would not allow another avoidable death occur -

"I have one."

Turais turned to see Minchum dropping a small, brown object in between the seizing man's bluing lips and muttering, "Depulso."

McLaggen's eyes rolled backwards as his breathing stopped. After a few torturous seconds, his chest began to rise and fall once again. This time, his laboured breath had smoothed out as well. Everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Minchum fell back and leaned his back on the metal fence as the absurdity of the situation finally hit him. "What... what just happened?"

"I... I don't know..."

"If you or I just took one bite of that..." Minchum's voice trailed off at the insinuation. Turais looked back at the plate of poisoned scones and felt a cold tremour travel down his spine.

He shivered involuntarily.

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"Lord Malfoy must pay for this treachery!" Orion said as he slammed his hand on the table, ratting all the items atop it. The Aurors managed to keep their composure with only their slightly-widened eyes as an indication of surprise. Meanwhile, Arcturus sat at the corner of the room,
ruminating quietly.

"Now, Orion," Charlus said calmly as he guided the man back into his chair, "Do you happen to have any evidence supporting your accusation?" Orion scowled wordlessly as Charlus sighed, "If not, we will get started on this case. We will get to the bottom of this -"

"Like how you did with capturing the murderers who tried to poison my son?"

The piece of parchment in Charlus' hand crumpled noisily in the frigid silence.

"I will come back in just a moment with the paperback for your son's statement."

Once the two Aurors left the room, Arcturus spoke again, "Orion, please see to it that our Deputy Head Auror doesn't muddle up the paperwork like everything else this Office seems to do."

Orion looked at Turais before saying, "But father -"

"Now."

At the deadly tone, Orion cast a worried glance at Turais before doing as instructed.

After the door clicked shut, Arcturus spoke again in a calm voice that seemingly plunged the room into an icy, Arctic wasteland. It was easily one of the most terrifying moments that Turais had ever experienced.

"I know you are defiant in nature, Turais, but never in my wildest dream did I expect you to return when a Lord was murdered in cold blood."

"I'm sorry," Turais muttered, hoping that he was able to salvage something from this wreckage.

"I will personally write to the Headmaster suspending your travel privilege-" Turais snapped his gaze up to meet Arcturus' steely grey ones. "- to the Wizengamot until I deem appropriate -"

"But grandfather -"

"You will stay at Hogwarts and stay out of this until we can incriminate Malfoy for his crimes -"

"You don't understand -" Turais shouted quickly. "- The case is not as simple as it seems, there's more to -"

"And what do you know about investigating? Are you an Auror?" Arcturus interrupted harshly.

"I -"

"You will obey my orders -"

"Grandfather -"

"I have spoken," Arcturus shouted thunderously as Turais' voice turned mute despite the movement of his lips. Silencio. "I have a task for you, and if you prove to be successful, perhaps we shall negotiate better terms for your freedom."

Turais released himself from the spell, but he continued to glare at Arcturus angrily.
However, the older man was not deterred by his show of hostility.

"Howard Fawley had not appeared to take the late Lord Fawley's seat," Arcturus said. "The Fawley Manor has proven to be a challenge for my normal means of investigation. However, no fortress is impregnable. This is where your friendship with the Alexander boy is useful. I need you to find out whether he is a friend or foe."

"Alex is still reeling from the loss of his cousin, I don't think it is appropriate to ask -"

Arcturus cut him off sternly, "This is a matter of great importance. If his father proves to be an ally, it would be a vote for us and a vote against the Light families. If he has said anything, such as his health, his political ambitions, or his character, you will find out and tell us."

Turais was likely the only person Alex ever entrusted with those secrets.

"He did not reveal anything that pertains to anything political," Turais lied.

Arcturus bored his gaze into him and he weathered it.

"This is not the time to put your friendship with him first. There is a time for everything, and the time for grieving is not now. He and you must both understand that. Hector Fawley is dead. That is an undisputed fact of the past already. We can only manage this situation as it has been dealt to us and plan for the future."

Turais looked away defiantly.

"Turais," Arcturus said dangerously, "I did not deny your close friendship with him because we need to convert the Fawley vote to our side in the long-term. But seeing that you are joining his side instead, I do question my original decision..."

Turais looked at his grandfather in surprise and disgust. He did not realize his friendship with Alex was all part of a "plan" that Arcturus had been developing since he entered Hogwarts.

"How about my friendship with the Gryffindors - Kaiden, Alice, Jane?" Turais said bitingly. "What about them? Are they part of your plan as well?!"

"I do not owe you an explanation -"

"I must know."

Arcturus glared at Turais for the interruption before continuing, "Potter is simple. Fleamont is one of the rare swing votes in the Wizengamot. He also influences the Sayre vote heavily. I can see their distaste for the current politics played by the Light family -"

"Alice?"

"The Smiths are another swing vote. They also have important ties with several other families. Perhaps an alliance through marriage -"

"Alice and I?!"

"Not you," Arcturus said. "Perhaps an arranged marriage between her and Sirius -"

"How about Jane?"

"Her parents appear to have deep pockets, and they had made significant donations to our
charity ever since your heroic rescue in your first year -"

"Stop," Turais said as his panicked mind whirled. He genuinely thought that his grandfather had learnt to see his point of view. But it seems as though it was all only his wishful thinking. He looked up at Arcturus undisturbed, motionless expression as if he did not just flip Turais' world on its head completely.

He needed to leave. He needed to go somewhere. Anywhere but here.

"I'm going back to Hogwarts," Turais gasped as he reached for the doorknob and pulled. Stumbling through the office, he made his way to the Floo gates at the back of the Office where Aurors left for field operations.

"Turais, where are you going?!" He could hear Orion shout behind him. But he ignored it and walked faster instead.

Ducking his head into the fireplace, Turais called out his destination. Soon, he was enveloped in a swirl of green flames and away from the Ministry.

Lost in his thoughts, he did not notice Charlus' suspicious gaze that lingered at the empty fireplace he escaped from.

Chapter End Notes

As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed.

- ravenclawblues 2020-08-31

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