**Certain Powers**

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**Summary**

Toby Williams is attending Hogwarts and he's about to bring with him fairy tales even the Wizarding World didn't think existed.

**Notes**

Because let’s be honest here, if Sarah was thrust into the Harry Potter world, she’ll take it over. And I want to see it happen.
Albus Dumbledore has been the headmaster of Hogwarts for many, many years and have had the duty of informing non-magical parents about their very magical children for even more. But never, in all his years had he ever met someone who took in the news as calmly as Sarah Williams was currently doing. Except for Miss Granger but Miss Granger was an entire different monster altogether (he had a feeling she was the only muggleborn child who actually had expected his appearance).

“I’m a wizard,” Tobias Williams repeated for the fourth time since Albus’ announcement.

To his right, Mr. And Mrs. Williams were both sitting in a state of shock, unable to fully comprehend the situation despite having more than an hour to do so. This was fine; this was expected. It usually takes a couple hours, sometimes, even days before muggles can fully understand and believe that their child had magical abilities. What wasn’t normal, however, was Sarah William’s reaction, or more specifically, the lack thereof.

The young woman in question was currently looking over the paperwork that he had brought over with a familiar disinterest he usually witnessed only in wizarding parents. He took the moment to simply observe her rather abnormal behavior, watching the way her brows furrow in concentration as she read over the list of school supplies.

“Oh look, Toby,” she said. “You can bring a pet.”

“Really?” the young boy squealed, leaning over to read the list. His eyes lit up immediately, “An owl! I want an owl! Oh, may I have an owl? Oh please, Sarah! Please?”

She laughed softly and flashed a smile in Toby’s direction. “You’ll have to ask dad and Irene once they recover,” she said, glancing up at her parents. Her tone was amused and Albus had to prevent himself from expressing his surprise. If he didn’t know better, he would have suspected that Miss Williams already knew of the existence of magic and this was simply a review for her. Perhaps she was acquainted with a witch or wizard? “So, about these school supplies,” Sarah said, turning towards him. “Where would we get them?”

“Ah,” Albus murmured softly, recovering from his own confusion. For a moment, he felt as if the tables were turned; her being a witch and him being the muggle parent being told the existence of magic for the first time. “Of course. Everything you may wish to purchase, including all school supplies can be found in Diagon Alley. My deputy headmistress, Professor Minerva McGonagall will guide you through your first time. We’ll just need to set up a time to meet before term starts.”

Sarah looked over the letter again. “Would this Saturday be good?” she asked. “Dad and Irene both have days off.”

“But Sarah,” Toby interrupted. “You’ll come too, right?”

“Of course, Toby.” She sent him a mock scowl. “I did take the entire summer off for you if you recall.”

“This Saturday is fine,” Albus said with a careful nod. It felt strange making decisions with an elder sister, no matter how good of a guardian she was when her parents were sitting right there. “Expect Professor McGonagall around noon?”

She smiled. “That’s fine.”
Albus glanced at her parents, glad to see that they were looking less shocked and slightly more confused. However, it appeared that they had no problem having their daughter handle everything. Not that Albus could blame them of course, since Sarah Williams was doing a fine job handling everything on her own.

“What about the currency?” Sarah asked.

He blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

“Currency,” she repeated. “Unless your world uses pounds too.”

“Ah, you’re quite right.” He smiled, “We have three different coins: knuts, sickles, and galleons. I am unsure of the exact exchange rate right now but there are about five British pounds in a galleon. Professor McGonagall can go into more detail this weekend. Most helpful in case you wish to open up an account at our Gringotts Wizarding Bank for young Mr. Williams.”

She nodded and opened her mouth to say something, only to pause. Her gaze flickered to a spot on the ground next to his chair as if distracted. He followed her gaze but did not see anything out of the ordinary. Clearing his throat, Albus said, “Miss Williams?”

Frowning slightly, Sarah snapped her attention back to the aged wizard and forced a smile. “Is there something else we should know before we allow Toby to attend your school?” she asked, her tone carefully polite.

Toby looked horrified at the possibilities of Sarah not wanting him to attend a magical school. “Sarah!” he protested.

“Hush, Toby,” she chided softly, patting him on his knee in a comforting manner.

Albus watched, unsure what he was supposed to think when Toby pouted but leaned back against his chair, lips pressed together tightly to keep himself from talking. His parents remained silent, taking their time to review the papers Sarah had already looked at. Albus wondered at their odd family dynamic.

“What exactly do you mean, Miss Williams?” Albus asked, feeling a tingle in the back of his spine. There was something about this woman... “Do you have a more specific question in mind?”

Sarah narrowed her eyes and Dumbledore had a feeling that his gentle, grandfatherly demeanor would not work to his advantage. She leaned back, form stiffening and straightening as she did so. Her green eyes darkened and the small, gentle smile that played across her lips disappeared in a flash. Albus had suspected before but he had a feeling that Sarah Williams was more than a little protective over her younger brother. Older siblings usually are, he knew, but there was something about her protectiveness that sent the small, fine hair at the back of his neck standing up.

“Professor Dumbledore,” she said slowly, her tone clipped and cold. “My family and I are at a disadvantage as we are completely unfamiliar with your world. For all we know, we could be sending Toby to a world on the brink of war. You might as well just tell me to sign him up for his execution.”

Albus flinched visibly; he had expected something, of course, but he hadn’t expected her to hit it spot on. “Well,” he began slowly, wondering how he should go about answering the question. “You are right, we are at the brink of war. However—”

“War?” Rober sputtered. “You’re at war and you expect me to send my son to your school?”
Albus raised a wrinkled hand. “I assure you,” he said firmly, eyeing Mr. Williams with calm eyes. “Hogwarts and its staff is more than capable of protecting the students within it. The castle itself has hundreds of years of protective barriers and charms. In fact, Hogwarts is considered to be the safest place in the wizarding world right now; many parents send their children to Howarts just to keep them safe.”

Irene narrowed her eyes. “But not safer than our world, right?”

Albus hid a smile. Despite having been shocked into silence for a little more than an hour since his appearance; the two parents obviously took the safety of their child extremely seriously. “If you were a wizard family living in a muggle—non-magical—world, then yes, I would recommend you to keep young Mr. Williams here. However, because you are muggles, I strongly urge you to allow him to attend Hogwarts. There may have been hints of it before but once Mr. Williams turns eleven, his magic will began presenting itself more and more with or without proper training and guidance.” He turned his gaze towards Miss Williams who was staring at her favorite spot on the ground once again.

As if sensing his stare, she looked up, a slight frown tugging her lips. “So, you’re telling me that Hogwarts had never been in the center of whatever conflict you guys are in?”

There it was again. That tingle. It struck Albus odd that Sarah had not only manage to hit every point he did not want to bring up but also managed to ask her questions in ways that made him think she was making statements instead. Her tone dared him to lie. He had a feeling that she knew more about the wizarding world than she let on. “That’s not exactly true,” he admitted slowly. “A couple years ago a basilisk was released within our school and managed to petrify... certain students.” He then added quickly, “However, I assure you the basilisk has since been killed and the students fully recovered.”

“A basilisk?” Irene asked, alarmed. “What is that?”

“Students were being petrified?” Robert exclaimed, shocked.

“Oh man,” Toby muttered. Sarah would definitely not let him attend the school now.

“A basilisk is a reptile—in our case, it was a snake—with a... rather lethal gaze.” He watched as both Mr. and Mrs. Williams pale. “Again,” he said as firmly and gently as possible. “I must emphasize the fact that non of our students were killed; only petrified.” He chose not to mention Myrtle.

Usually, Albus would not press so hard to convince parents to allow their child to attend Hogwarts. However, Tobias Williams was a muggleborn and with the rise of Voldemort and the obvious decline of new muggleborn students, Albus feared that if this trend continued, the Ministry of Magic would take it upon themselves to ban muggleborns from the magical world “for their safety”. And even if that was true, Albus knew how hard it was to retract a law once it has been implanted.

Robert rolled his eyes. “Only petrified,” he repeated mockingly.

“Which is mostly due to luck, right?” Sarah asked, looking at Albus with steady eyes. “It just means that none of them looked directly in the basilisk’s eyes; like through a mirror or something.”

Albus blinked slowly. “That’s... correct...”

Despite the situation, Irene gave a somewhat-fond roll of her eyes. “Sarah always had an interest in fairy tales and mythology. I daresay she knows just as much as you do.”

For reasons he did not understand, Albus didn’t doubt it.
“Sarah knows magic,” Toby confirmed.

Albus smiled warmly, hoping to ease the uncertainty and tension in the air. “I can see that. I’ve never met a muggle quiet like Miss Williams.”

While both parents relaxed slightly due to his joking tone, Albus could tell that Sarah was not as convinced as he would have liked. Her gaze flickered from him to the ground and back again. Lips pursing, Sarah asked, “You said that the basilisk attacked certain students. Exactly what kind of certain students are we talking about?”

Alarmed, Albus felt himself stiffen. Her questions—her too-specific questions—was no mere coincidence. He extended the familiar aura of his magic around him, feeling for something—anything—that could be out of place. Nothing. For a moment, Albus considered lying to her, just to see her reaction but he had a feeling that if he did, it would guarantee not seeing Mr. Williams in the upcoming term. “Muggleborns,” he admitted wearily. “The students attacked were all muggleborns.”

Sarah leaned further back against her seat as if relaxing. Albus knew better though, he thought she looked somewhat like a serpent, posing to strike. “Am I correct to assume that this... war of yours has something to do with prejudice against muggleborns?”

Not at all, Albus wanted to say but knew that wasn’t true. Voldemort himself may not care about one’s blood status—after all, he was more concerned with trying to kill Harry Potter—but his followers were a complete different story.

Seeing that Albus was not going to answer Sarah’s question anytime soon, Toby immediately assumed the worst. “Oh man, oh man,” he muttered. He really wasn’t going to be allowed to attend now.

“Which means,” Sarah continued ruthlessly. “That Toby would be more endangered in your extremely safe school than the average student.”

Albus thinned his lips. “Miss Williams, I understand your concern. I have no doubt in my mind that Mr. Williams will experience prejudice while at Hogwarts. However, I also believe that will be the extend of it. Despite the nature of our war, as long as he remains within the walls of Hogwarts, his life will be in no danger.” As long as he stayed away from Harry Potter, of course; the poor boy has the unfortunate luck on endangering everyone he interacts with. Fortunately for Albus, however, Harry was currently going into his fifth year and would have little to no interaction with young Tobias Williams.

“You gave us a lot to think about, Professor,” Robert said slowly. “But I would like to discuss this further with my wife and daughter before making any final decisions.”

“Understandable,” Albus nodded.

“And...” Robert said hesitantly. “And if it’s not too much trouble, we would still like to go to... ah, Diagonally, if only to check it out.”

Albus beamed. “Of course.”

“Then we’ll give you our final decision then,” Irene said finally.

“Excellent.”
“Oh man,” Sarah groaned tiredly, slowly making her way up the stairs. Thankfully, the rest of the meeting went rather well, her family had spent the two hours afterwards asking questions, attempting to understand Toby’s new world. Unless it was about their war and the lack of safety of their school, the professor was more than happy than to answer all their questions. Sarah shook her head, wondering why he wanted so badly to recruit Toby. It certainly couldn’t have been his desires for Toby’s safety. Slowly, she made her way into the privacy of her old room before closing and locking the door behind her as quietly as possible. Turning around, she was not surprised to see that her bed was already occupied.

“Thank you, Squeak, Romby, Gip; you guys are the best.”

“No problem, Lady!” the three goblins happily chirped at the same time.

She sat down at the edge of her bed and poked the nearest goblin who fell over and giggled. She scratched him underneath his chin fondly. “You guys can’t read minds, can you?”

Romby and Squeak giggled as if she had just made the funniest joke.

“Course not, Lady,” Gip answered when Romby pushed him out of the way so Sarah could scratch under his chin. “We just know about magical humans, that’s all. That magic human wanted to lie to Lady.”

Romby tsked. “We’re not going to let that happen.”

“Course not,” Squeak confirmed, ears twitching.

“Thank you,” Sarah said, feeling warm and happy. “So you guys are familiar with this... magical world?”

“Yes!” they confirmed.

Sarah frowned. “Do you guys think it’s safe for Toby to attend?” she asked slowly.

“Lady?” Gip asked.

She swallowed hard, feeling slightly light-headed with confusion. “I mean, since Toby is a wizard; it’s obviously better for him to attend... Hogwarts. But if he’s going to be in danger at some boarding school I can’t even access... I don’t know.” Obviously she wouldn’t be the one making the final decision but she had a feeling that after today, both her father and stepmother would be turning to her for confirmation.

“Little Toby needs to learn human magic,” Gip said.

Romby nodded in agreement. “Uncontrollable magic means lots of explosion,” he elaborated.

“Lady is worried?” Squeak asked.

She smiled wearily. “Yea, I guess I am.”

The three goblins fell silent, exchanging uncomfortable glances with one another. Having never having the need to offer comfort of any sort, they were unsure how to proceed.

Sarah looked down at the three goblins thoughtfully, gaze going from one to the other as a idea took hold and grew. “Guys...” she began slowly, unsure how they would react to her idea. “Do you think
you could... follow Toby to Hogwarts and keep an eye on him? Protect him in case anything happens?” Unless Professor Dumbledore’s “protective barriers and charms” kept goblins out for whatever reason.

“We can do that!” Gip announced.

“Really?” Sarah asked excitedly. “That’s great! I thought you guys may not want to.”

“Oh no,” Romby said, shaking his head. “Kingy says we have to listen to Lady.” Sarah paused at the mention of the Goblin King before freezing altogether, needing to take a minute to completely comprehend the sentence. “The... Goblin King told you guys to listen to me?” she asked slowly, requiring confirmation.

They nodded.

“I—uh—why?” she stammered, unsure what to think.

Romby giggled, “Because Kingy is going to make Lady his—”

Squeak shoved a bony elbow into Romby’s stomach. “We’re not supposed to say yet!” he reminded, horrified, the idea of getting bogged tickling the edges of his thoughts.

“Say what?” Sarah asked, suspiciously eyeing the goblins who were looking everywhere but at her. “Guys,” she said, her tone promising punishment for disobedience.

“Sorry, Lady,” Romby said quickly. “We got to go!” And then, without any further warning, the three of them disappeared, leaving Sarah to stare stupidly at her empty bed.

She sat there for a minute, half-hoping that they would come back before huffing in annoyance when it was obvious they would not be returning anytime soon. She sighed and made her way towards her vanity; figuring that while she may not get anything out of the goblins, Hoggle would be more than happy to tell her. Sitting down, Sarah reached out and pressed her fingertips against the cool glass.

“Hoggle,” she murmured softly, watching the mirror ripple with magic.

As the image in her mirror settled, Sarah could make out the clearing image of a very familiar dwarf. “Hoggle!” she greeted happily, promptly forgetting the real reason why she had called him in the first place.

“Sarah!” he greeted back. “You back at your old place, eh.” he observed, peering over her shoulder.

“For the summer,” she admitted. “Toby threw a fit about not seeing me so I’m staying for a while.” She sighed happily, finally feeling completely at ease since the professor’s appearance hours before. “You will not believe what happened to me today.”

Hoggle raised his bushy eyebrows. “A good thing?”

“I hope so,” Sarah replied with a slight frown. She waved off the dark thoughts with a flick of her hand. “Anyway, apparently wizards and witches exist!”

“You mean human wizards ‘n witches?”

She faltered. “Well... yes.” Were there other kinds? Goblin wizards and witches, perhaps? “So anyway,” she continued. “Some old wizard came by to tell us that Toby’s a wizard and that there a school he should attend. Hogwarts, apparently; it’s a school meant for magic.” She paused and added, “Human magic.”
Hoggle gaped. “Your brother’s a wizard?”

“Yup,” Sarah declared proudly, beaming. Truth to be told, she was a bit envious of her brother but ultimately decided that she had experienced enough magic to last her a lifetime. She’ll just observe from afar, thank you very much. “Dad and Irene still aren’t completely sure if they want him attending Hogwarts since there’s some sort of war going on or something but we’ll be going to some magical mall Saturday. You know, check out the magical world and maybe do some shopping.” She took a breath to continue but paused when she noticed the frown tugging at the dwarf’s rough features. “Hoggle?” she asked worriedly. “Is something wrong?”

“Nothing!” he denied immediately.

Sarah raised her eyebrows.

“Nothing,” Hoggle repeated, this time calmer. “It’s just that... well, we don’t hear good things about human magic-users much here in the Underground.”

She leaned forward. “Really? Why’s that?”

“Well I don’t know much,” the dwarf admitted. “But the Underground monarchs don’t really get along with them.”

“Monarchs?”

“Ya know,” Hoggle explained hesitantly. “Like the Elvin King to the north of us, or the Dragon Emperor to the South. And there’s also the Faerie Lord to the far north. And, of course the Gob—Jareth.” He coughed. “Jareth.”

Sarah’s eyebrows shot upwards in surprise. This was her first time hearing that the Underground had other monarchs besides the Goblin King. Despite her continued contact with residents of the Underground, she knew little about their world. “Why don’t they get along?”

Hoggle shuffled in his spot uncomfortably, flushing an angry-looking red. “I don’t know the entire story,” he reminded her. “Jareth would know more.”

She nodded in understanding, waiting for him to continue.

When it was clear that Sarah was not going to comment, Hoggle huffed in exasperation. “Apparently, a real long time ago, besides the monarchs, we all lived Aboveground. But we didn’t really get along with humans and there was a whole bunch of conflict. Anyway, it led up to some war.” He paused, frowning in thought. “We were more powerful, ‘course, but we were eventually overwhelmed by the sheer number of them humans.” Hoggle shrugged, “So we lost and many of our kinds were forced into slavery and whatnot.”

Sarah gasped. “Slavery?!”

“There ain’t no slaves now,” he grunted. “At least I don’t think so, anyway. There was another war about that or something.”

“And then what happened?” Sarah pressed.

Hoggle shrugged again. “Nuthin’ much. Most of us moved Underground but for those that stayed, humans usually look down at them and stuff. No equal treatment or anything.”

“That’s horrible,” Sarah breathed. “Why didn’t the Underground Kings and Queens do anything?”
The dwarf frowned and scratched the back of his head, thinking. “’cause they’re not forced to live Aboveground and the monarchs want nuthin’ to do with humans. Humans have a way of blaming everything on someone else. That and they like to take advantage of us.” His eyes widened in horror as he realized what he had just said. “Not that you’re like that, Sarah! Definitely not!”

Sarah smiled, “I know what you meant.”

“Nowadays,” Hoggle continued. “Humans don’t even know about the existence of the Underworld or our monarchs. We keep quiet about it ’cause we don’t want another war.”

“Of course not,” she said with an understanding nod. “Don’t worry, you’re secret is safe with me!”

“Right,” Hoggle said, shuffling again. “But, um... that’s just what I know. I’m sure Jareth would know more.”

Sarah raised her eyebrows, almost mockingly. “I certainly hope so,” she said. Despite what she knew of his personality, he had to have some good points if he was a king. Unless, of course, his only job as a king was grabbing wished away children. “Is there anything else about the wizarding world that you think I should know? Squeak, Romby, and Gip were extremely helpful but... I think I scared them away for a while.”

Hoggle frowned, “I dunno. What I know is from other goblins but I don’t know how accurate that is.” He pursed his lips. “Jareth probably knows more.”

Sarah sighed, resting her chin in her palm. “I guess I have to wait until Saturday then.”

“Yea,” Hoggle agreed. “That’s a much better idea.”
Jareth balanced the crystal orb on the top of his gloved knuckles for a moment before rolling it down his fingertips and spinning it into his palm in a familiar, fluid motion. He looked up as Higgins—or whatever the dwarf’s name was—waddled back into the throne room. “Well?” he demanded, banishing the crystal and sitting up. He flicked a goblin away from his armrest without a glance.

“Well what?” Hoggle huffed.

Even with a stray chicken feather in his hair, Jareth managed to pull off the dangerous-and-murderous look. “How is she?”

“Fine,” the dwarf answered. “Her brother’s a wizard.”

“A what?”

“A wizard. He’s got human magic now.”

Jareth blinked and stared for a moment. “Oh,” he finally muttered, leaning back against his seat. “Is that all?” Humming thoughtfully, Jareth tapped his favorite riding crop against his boot. “He would have made a better goblin, such a pity. What else did you talk about?” he asked, turning his attention back towards the dwarf who looked as if he wanted to be anywhere else but here.

Hoggle shrugged.

“Dwarf,” Jareth said with a cold voice. “I hear the bog smells utterly delightful this time of the year.”

He shuddered. “Nothing much. She wanted to know more about human magic, that’s all.”

That was not what the Goblin King wanted to hear. He tapped an impatient finger against the armrest of his throne. “Did she ask about me?”

Hoggle hesitated. If he says yes, no doubt Jareth was going to find out very quickly that he was being lied too and he’ll be bogged. On the other hand, if he decided to be honest and say no... Well, Jareth was not above punishing bearers of bad news so he’ll most likely still be bogged. “Uh... w-well...” he trailed off, continuing as soft as possible, “no, not really.” Not at all, actually.

Jareth glared, eyes flashing dangerously. “Did you or did you not tell her my name when I explicitly told you to?” Every since she had banished him from her life with a single sentence ten years ago with words ripped from a book that he wrote, he hadn’t even been able to spy on her with his crystals, much less contact her. If he knew she was going to use those exact words and actually meant it, he would have never inserted them into the book.

The irony.

“I did!” Hoggle squealed; him being bogged seemed more and more likely with each passing minute.

Jareth huffed. Why hadn’t Sarah called him? Or at the very least said his name? It was all he needed. Jareth waved his hand with a dramatic sigh, dismissing the quivering dwarf. “Slip my name into a conversation somewhere again, maybe she forgot it.” He wouldn’t be surprised if she had; his name was rather exotic, after all. And those names were the hardest to remember. It was either that or Sarah was being her usual stubborn self. The possibility of her forgetting or not caring about him was too horrifying to think about.
Hoggle grunted as he made his way out of the throne room; he did not want to spend another minute with the infuriating king. “If I keep slipping your stupid name into our conversations, she’s going to think I’m in love with you or something,” he grumbled under his breath.

“Oh, precious thing,” Jareth groaned mournfully from behind him. “What have you reduced me to?”

“Hi! I’m Toby and I am so excited!”

Minerva smiled. “Yes, I can see that,” she observed amusingly.

“Are you a witch?”

“I am,” she confirmed.

He opened his mouth to fire off another question but his mother quickly intervened. “I am so sorry about this,” Irene said, pulling Toby back. “He’s not usually this mouthy.” She turned and glared down at her son before Minerva could assure her that she was used to such reactions. “Toby, behave!”

“But mom!”

“Don’t make me sic Sarah on you!”

Toby scowled but relented. “That’s not fair,” he grumbled.

Minerva raised her eyebrows in amusement. “Sarah is your sister, right?” she asked, remembering Albus’ description of the family. *A typical, happy muggle family,* he had described to her before adding, *quite normal. Except for Sarah Williams, their eldest daughter. She’s an odd one. Do keep an eye on her, will you?* Looking up, she caught sight of a young woman ran towards them, her long brown hair trailing behind her.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry!” Sarah spluttered out, slightly out of breath. “I was at the library and I—”

“—lost track of time, as usual,” Toby finished with a roll of his eyes.

Sarah graced him with a mocking glare before noticing the unfamiliar witch standing behind him. Magical, her senses whispered to her. “I am so sorry,” Sarah said embarrassed, “I’m Sarah.”


“You guys weren’t waiting long, I hope?”

“Of course not,” Minerva assured. “If you’re all ready?”

The family nodded in confirmation, some more excited than the rest.

“Through here then,” Minerva said, motioning towards the seemly broken-down pub across the street.

Robert raised his eyebrows. “That’s not... very impressive.”

“Oh course not,” Toby scowled. “It’s hidden, dad.”
“Indeed it is, Mr. Williams,” Minerva said approvingly as she lead the muggle family across the street. “Despite its exterior glamour, the pub itself isn’t as run down as it seems.” She pulled the door open and waved her free hand.

“Oh, wow,” Irene breathed as she looked around.

Subtle hints of magic could be seen inside the pub and Minerva allowed the muggle family to take in the new sights with a smile on her face. In the far corner, someone was pouring sugar into his tea with only a flick of his fingers. Watching their faces light up at the sight made her insanely proud of being a witch.

“How interesting,” Sarah muttered. She could feel the magic tingling in the air around her; magic different than the one she was used to but magic nonetheless. She extended her hand out slightly, feeling a strong pulse of magic in the air and followed it with slow but confident steps.

“I am surprised, Miss Williams,” Minerva said as lightly and nonchalantly as she could. Word play and manipulation was more of Albus’ thing. “You seem to know exactly where you’re going.”

Sarah turned towards the witch, eyes wide and innocent.

“That’s because Sarah knows magic,” Toby said, repeating a phrase he mentioned to Hogwarts’ headmaster only days before. Behind him, his parents exchanged thoughtful glances before turning their attention to their daughter.

Sarah simply smiled and gave her brother’s hair a fond ruffle. “I only know what I’ve read from books, Toby.”

Clearing her throat, Minerva lead them to the back of the pub before stepping in front of a brick wall. “Since you have yet to make your decision, I thought I would show you our world first. If you wish to purchase anything, we will have to stop by Gringotts to get your currency exchanged.” She paused. “However, if you do happen to make up your minds in our favor, I would be more than happy to help you set up the basics.”

“Thank you,” Irene said. “That means a lot to us.”

Minerva nodded and slipped her wand out of its hidden holster. She turned around, tapping specific bricks in a familiar pattern with her wand. Behind her, Toby was gibbering excitedly as the portal between the two worlds began to open while his mother attempted to calm him down. She chanced a glance at Sarah and saw a familiar look of awe and surprise. Despite her odd manner and Albus’ insistence that the young girl was hiding something, it was obvious that her familiarity with the wizarding world was not it.

“Welcome to Diagon Alley,” Minerva said.

“Oh man,” Toby breathed, starting at the wonderful chaos of the wizarding world. “Sarah, you have got to convince mom and dad to let me attend.”

“No problem, kiddo,” Sarah breathed, obviously distracted. “I stand behind you.”

“Really?” Toby squealed.

“Sarah?” Irene asked.

Blinking and pulling herself away from the view, Sarah turned back towards her parents and flashed them a warm smile. “I’m sure Toby will be fine,” she assured them. “It’s definitely a good idea for
him to be with other wizards. Besides,” she said, turning back to face Diagon Alley, “how can you say no to this?”

“Yes!” Toby exclaimed happily.

Minerva raised an eyebrow and pursed her lips in an attempt to keep any amusement she felt from showing. The Williams has one of the strangest family dynamic she had ever seen.

“We did think it was better for him to attend,” Robert admitted slowly. “I just didn’t think you were going to think so as well. At least so quickly.” After all, Sarah was nothing if not extremely protective of Toby. At times, he thought she was even more so than Irene was and that was saying a lot.

“He’ll be fine,” Sarah said firmly, eyes flickering to a spot on the ground. “Toby’s protected.”

Minerva raised her other eyebrow.

“Can we explore?” Toby asked excitedly.

“That’s what we’re here for, kid,” his sister replied, amused.

“Knowing the both of you, we should definitely get some money exchanged first,” Irene said with an amused shake of her head.

Minerva smiled, “This way then.” She lead them away from Leaky Cauldron’s gateway. “May I safely assume that Mr. Williams will be attending Hogwarts this coming term?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Robert confirmed. “Since Sarah’s okay with it.”

Minerva cleared her throat, eyes flickering ahead towards the young woman in question. She was currently walking hand-in-hand with her younger brother. Both of them were obviously excited with the new sights, pointing things out to each other they found amusing. “You seem to place great importance in Miss Williams’ opinion.”

The two parents were silent for a moment and Minerva feared that she may have made a wrong comment. Just as she was about to apologize for intruding their privacy, Irene said, “Well, it’s just that Sarah has always loved magic. When she was younger, there were times we were afraid that she may rather live her fantasies rather than reality.”

“But as Toby always says,” Robert added. “Sarah know magic.”

Irene nodded in agreement. “Anything and everything about magic, really; fairy tales, mythologies, supernatural, Sarah knows them all.”

“But surely her fondness of fictional tales does not make you believe she is an expert in the real thing?” Minerva asked.

“Of course not,” Irene answered quickly. She frowned. “After we found out about your world... we’ve been thinking... about... well, maybe Sarah really knows magic. There has been incidences in the past that... that do not really make sense unless it’s magic.”

Minerva’s eyebrows show upwards at the revelation. Miss Williams was no witch, of this she was certain but she had to admit that even without Albus telling her of the oddity that was Miss Williams, Minerva would still know there was something odd about the young girl. “Incidences?”
“Little things,” Robert assured. Minerva could tell Irene and Robert already had a long conversation about their daughter after Albus’ departure. Apparently, they seriously thought their daughter was somehow involved with the wizarding world. She may not be a witch herself but perhaps she was closely acquainted with one. Maybe a wizard boyfriend?

“One time, Toby accidentally broke a vase,” Irene said. “Not completely shattered it or anything... just a crack down the length of it.” She sighed at the memory. “It was my favorite vase, you see; a gift from my late father so I was a bit upset. I may have been a bit harsh with Toby afterwards,” she admitted. “Whenever Toby’s upset, he always calls Sarah. Sarah came as soon as she heard about our... disagreement and stayed the night. Anyway, I woke up the next day with the vase sitting in its usual spot looking absolutely perfect, as if it was never broken.” She tugged a loose strand of her hair, brows furrowing as she replayed the incident in her head. “I asked about it but Sarah just said that she went out and bought a similar-looking one.”

“That would make sense,” Minerva replied with a nod.

Irene shook her head. “No, that’s impossible. My father made the vase, you see. It was originally a commissioned work but he had to remake it because he accidentally left an imprint of his thumb on the underside of it. Sarah didn’t—still doesn’t—know that.”

Minerva blinked at the implications. “That is...” she said slowly, “rather odd.” But how true it was, she wasn’t sure. Human memories were fickle things, after all; there were too many variables. It didn’t, however, change the fact that there was more to Miss Williams than the young girl let on.

“There’s more stories like that now that we think about it,” Robert said. “And honestly, after that Headmaster left, we wanted to ask Sarah about it but...” he trailed off.

“Since Sarah didn’t come talk to us even after we found out about the existence of magic, we didn’t think it was a good idea,” Irene elaborated. “Sarah’s stubborn.”


“I see,” Minerva murmured, needed to take a moment to register what she had just been told and wondered how she was going to report it back to Albus. *You’re absolutely correct,* she imagined herself explaining. *Sarah Williams is odd. So odd, in fact, even her family thinks so.* Shaking herself from her thoughts, Minerva looked up ahead and called out, “Ah, Mr. and Miss Williams.” The siblings paused and turned around. She smiled and motioned towards the large marble building in front. “This is Gringotts,” she introduced, nodding politely at the two goblins stationed outside of it.

“Ooh, nice,” Toby said.

Minerva cleared her throat. “Since young Mr. Williams will be attending Hogwarts, you can open up an account for him. As his legal parent, you will be able to limit the amount of money he can withdraw and his account can later be directly linked to his wand.” She glanced at the young wizard. “I can explain more about that later.”

“It’s so big,” Sarah breathed.

Minerva glanced at the siblings again. For a brief moment she completely forgot that Miss Williams was well into her twenties. Sarah Williams looked young, really young; if she didn’t know better, she would have mistaken the young woman for a student.

“Well,” Irene said slowly. “It doesn’t hurt to open up an account. Especially if there’s an emergency
of some sort, right?”

Minerva nodded. “Yes. However, I assure you that Mr. Williams will be provided with any necessities during his stay in Hogwarts. First and second year students rarely have any need to use their own funds.” At Robert’s confused look, Minerva added, “Third year students and above are given the opportunity to go to Hogsmeade—a small village near Hogwarts—they can spend money there.”

Irene turned towards her husband. “What do you think?” she asked softly.

“Are we going to go in?” Toby asked, pulling his sister towards his parents.

Robert shrugged. “We might as well open one now. This is Toby’s world now; even if he doesn’t need it now, he’ll need it in the future.”

“I’m getting a bank account?” the young wizard asked.

Minerva forced herself not to react. Rarely does she ever encounter muggle families so quick to accept the fact that their child’s world was no longer with their own. Forget young Sarah, the entire family was odd.

“Yes,” Irene answered, looking down at her son. “But you have to be responsible with it, all right?”

“I will!” Toby said with a firm nod.

Sarah laughed. “That’s great. Because maybe you can buy me... books,” she trailed off slightly as a sign across the street caught her attention. “Is that a bookstore? Ooh, that’s a bookstore.” Her hand slipped out of her brothers and she took two steps towards the store. She hesitated for a moment and then turned. “Meet me there?” she asked hopefully. “You guys can get some money exchanged and then... lend some to me?”

Robert rolled his eyes. “Go ahead.”

“Thank you!” Sarah said excitedly before excitedly pushing through the thick crowd as she made her way towards *Flourish and Blotts Bookseller*.

“And she’s gone,” Irene murmured.

“It’s books,” Toby answered. “*Magical* books.”

“I guess it’s just us, then,” Robert said, turning back towards Minerva.

“Well then,” the witch said slowly. “Please follow me and I will help you with the process.” With that said, she led them up the steps to Gringotts, nodding again to the guards stationed outside. From the corner of her eyes, she could see Toby staring at the goblins, taking in their obviously particular appearance. At least he wasn’t gawking, Minerva thought warily.


Despite the rush outside Diagon Alley, the inside of Gringotts was actually fairly quiet, but that was usually the case no matter how many people were in there. “Minerva McGonagall,” she announced, stepping in front of a tall desk. “I would like to help a muggleborn family open up their first account for their son.”

The goblin looked up briefly before turning his attention to his paperwork.
Next to her, Irene frowned but Minerva quickly placed a hand on the mother’s shoulder and shook her head. Goblins were proud creatures and they definitely did not like to be rushed. Mrs. Williams did not have had the misfortune of dealing with Gringott goblins before and did not know that said goblins would get to you when they wanted to. On good days, rushing them would get you ignored for a while longer but if you were really unlucky, kicked out.

After another minute or so, the goblin finally looked up from his writing. His beady eyes taking in the family in front of him before his gaze landed on Toby’s small form. “Name?” he asked.

“Toby,” the young wizard answered, licking his suddenly dried lips. Despite his excitement about the wizarding world, it was obvious that the goblin’s attitude was not part of the positive experience he was hoping for. “Tobias, I mean.”

The goblin didn’t appear to care for the quivering boy. “Surname?”


At that, the goblin paused and Minerva watched with astonishment as he began paling rapidly. Licking his lips, the goblin placed his quill down slowly with a trembling hand. How odd, Minerva thought. She had never seen goblins looking so nervous before. As a matter of fact, she didn’t even think it was possible for them to feel such an emotion. Minerva had long suspected they could do business with the Dark Lord himself without batting an eyelash.

“And does Mister Tobias Williams,” the goblin said, clearing his throat uncomfortably, “have a sister?”

Sister? thought Minerva.

“Sarah?” Toby asked, confused. “Sarah’s at the bookstore, right now. But she’s not going to be opening an account.”

“Of course, of course,” the goblin murmured, beady eyes glancing around. “I beg your pardon, Mister Williams. Excuse me for a moment.” He hopped out of his seat without waiting for a response and made his way to Gringott’s head goblin and pulled his attention away from the head goblin’s own client.

“Are they usually like this?” Robert asked, confused.

“No,” Minerva muttered, staring after the goblin curiously. “Not at all.”

Unfortunately, the goblins were speaking in a language she could not understand but she could see them clearly. The two goblins whispered furiously to one another before pausing to look over in their direction. Their eyes, Minerva noticed, was completely trained on Toby. But it wasn’t Toby specifically that they were concerned about, she reminded herself. While they may have certainly reacted to the young wizard’s name, it was Sarah Williams they had asked about. She pursed her names in thought; there really was something odd about the girl. But what could it be that had goblins, of all things reacting to it?

Finally, the head goblin made his way towards them, taking the place of their previous teller. “I apologize for the trouble, Mister Williams. I am Nornok, current head of Gringotts. I understand that you wish to open an account?”

“Um... y-yes,” Toby stuttered.

“Is there a problem?” Minvera asked, looking around discreetly. All around her, various goblins
were not-so-subtly glancing in their direction. It was seriously putting her on edge.

Nornok’s eyes flickered in her direction for only a brief moment but it was enough for her to realize that his unusual courteous attitude towards Toby Williams will not be extended to her. “No, no problem at all,” he answered, although it appeared to be directed more towards Toby than Minerva. He climbed into the seat and cleared his throat. “Now, shall we begin?” Toby glanced at his parents who nodded discreetly.

“U-um, okay,” he said, uncomfortably before adding, “please.”

Nornok nodded and scribbling something on the parchment. He cleared his throat and pulled out a key. “Until further notice, your vault number is one hundred and six.” He leaned over the desk and handed Toby his key, which Toby accepted with a shy nod of thanks.

“What do you mean until further notice?” Minerva asked, confused. This was the first time she had heard such a statement.

Nornok frowned. “It is as I said,” he answered without really answering the question at all. He turned back towards Toby, “When you are ready to upgrade your vault, please let me know.”

Upgrade your vault? Minerva mouthed, confused. Was that even possible? The only ever time she knew one’s vault could be updated was when they had too much money and treasure for their previous vaults.

“What do you mean, upgrade his vault?” Robert asked. “What are the benefits of upgrading?”

Nornok looked up, glancing at Toby again. “You will know when the time comes,” he promised. “Now, Mister Williams, will you be linking your wand to your vault with us now or later?”

Toby blinked. “Eh? Oh, um, later. I haven’t got my wand yet.” He looked up at his mother for a moment before turning back towards the goblin. “But we can exchange currency now, right?”

“And we’ll also like to deposit some money into the... vault,” Irene added.

“Of course,” Nornok agreed, nodding.

Minerva allowed everything to continue on, feeling slightly displaced from the entire situation. What in the world was going on? Unfortunately, she was the only one realizing the extent of the oddity of the goblins’ behavior. While Toby and his family may found the goblin’s behavior odd, they couldn’t understand the magnitude of the oddity without being familiar with goblins.

"Squeak!" Sarah hissed, attempting to keep her voice down. “Put that book back!”

The small goblin giggled, placing it on the ground just in time as a unsuspecting wizard stepped onto what was previously a smooth, uninterrupted ground. He immediately slipped on the book, his arms and legs flailing as he landing on his back.

“Oh my god,” Sarah whispered in horror, ducking behind a shelf lest he think she had something to do with it.

Squeak appeared in a bookshelf next to her, giggling madly and holding his stomach.

“Squeak!” she whispered furiously.
“It’s okay, Lady,” Squeak said, reaching out and petting her cheek. “No broken bones.”

“That’s besides the point,” Sarah scolded.

He shrugged and turned around. Picking up an extremely small book, he began to place it into his mouth before Sarah stopped him. “Aw,” he muttered mournfully.

“No,” Sarah said. “No eating books.”

“Then can I have Lady’s other ear jewelry?”

“My other—” Both her hands immediately dropped everything they were holding and flew up to her ears. “Squeak!” she exclaimed, feeling only her right earring. “Where is it?”

Ear twitching, Squeak giggled. “Sorry, Lady. I ate it.”

Sarah felt her eyebrow twitch in annoyance. “You ate my earring?”

Rubbing his stomach, the small goblin gave a blissful sigh. “Was delicious,” he confirmed. “Very shiny.”

Feeling all the fight leave her body, Sarah groaned. “Do you know how expensive they were?” she muttered tiredly.

“Expensive,” Squeak asked, eyes wide and ears twitching worriedly.

Staring down at the goblin’s small, trembling body, Sarah felt her heart soften. “Never mind,” she sighed, giving Squeak a light pet on his head.

Pointy ears twitching again, Squeak looked up hopefully. “Lady won’t bog Squeak?”

“I won’t,” she confirmed, straightening up. “Just don’t eat my earrings again.” She narrowed her eyes. “Or anything else, for the matter. Unless it’s food.”

“Unless it’s food,” Squeak repeated. “Got it, Lady.”

“Good,” Sarah said, looking around to make sure that she wasn’t being watched. Normal people already found her weird when they see her talk to what they think is the air. She didn’t need the wizarding people thinking the same thing. “All right, let’s get out of here,” she told the small goblin, who easily jumped onto her shoulder. “I got some books I want to buy but I can’t do that without magic money.”

“We’re going to Gringotts?” Squeak asked.

“If that’s the bank, yeah,” Sarah confirmed. “Unless they completely forgot about me.” She made her way out of the bookstore and was pleasantly surprised to see her family and the professor making their way towards her. “Oh, you guys are done?”

“Yep,” Toby told her cheerfully.

“We’re not going to Gringotts?” Squeak asked mournfully.

Sarah ignored the small goblin, unable to speak to someone no one else could see. “You have the money?”

“Let’s go buy Toby’s things first,” Irene said. “Then we’ll buy your books.”
“Oh man,” Sarah muttered.

Robert patted her on the shoulder, prompting Squeak to squeal and scramble onto her other shoulder in order to avoid his hand. “Don’t worry, Sarah, we got enough money for you.”

“Yea, I want to get my wand.” Toby said, chattering excitedly. “And I got my own vault now, which I’m going to link to my wand later.” He gave his sister a sly look. “You can give me money and I’ll buy you books. Plus delivery fees, of course.”

“Of course,” Sarah replied dryly, rolling her eyes.

“Oh!” Toby exclaimed, remembering. “They asked about you, Sarah.”

Minerva turned, carefully watching Sarah’s reaction but the young woman either didn’t care much or was a much better actress than she expected. “Hm?” the young woman asked. “Who asked about me?”

“The bank tellers,” Toby answered. “They—well, I don’t know what they are but they’re not human.”

Sarah turned and looked at the goblins stationed outside the bank. “Huh. That’s strange,” she commented as they continued their way through Diagon Alley.

Squeak giggled.

“So what did they ask?”

Toby shrugged. “I don’t really remember.”

Irene rolled her eyes, “I think they were asking about your name.”

“Well,” Sarah said, almost in an uncaring manner. “I am the older sibling. Maybe they thought I was a witch and already had an account.” She laughed, “It’s too bad the magic gene skipped me.”

“In that case, they probably wanted to make you and Toby share accounts,” Irene said with a nod. Minerva, on the other hand, knew this was most definitely not the case.

“I’m surprise you’re not a witch,” Toby muttered. “Out of the two of us, you should have been the magical one.”

“I’m glad I’m not a witch,” Sarah immediately responded with such firmness, Minerva and her parents glanced in her direction. “I’m more than happy sitting in the sideline and watching.”

“But Sarah,” Toby said. “You love fairy tales.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “But that doesn’t mean I actually want to live in one.”

“I remember when you wanted to,” Robert commented softly. Despite worrying about whether or not his daughter would ever get her head out of the clouds all those years ago, he had to admit he missed the old Sarah. When she was younger, she had no problem finding the magic in everything. Back then, she could make everything so much more exciting than it really was.

“Yes,” she agreed again. “But that was a long time ago.”

Minerva raised her eyebrows, curious.
“So,” Sarah exclaimed brightly, obviously wanting a change in subject. “What were those bank tellers anyway? I didn’t know you guys employed... non-humans.”

*Many of our kinds were forced into slavery,* Hoggle had said.

“We don’t usually,” Minerva admitted. “They’re goblins; there’s a rather long history—”

Sarah tripped. “*Goblins?!!*”

On her shoulder Squeak began laughing; his laughter gaining volume with every passing second. Sarah watched in horror from the corner of his eyes as the small goblin lost his balance, rolled off her shoulder, and onto the ground. Thankfully, Squeak continued to laugh, proving himself to be completely unharmed.
I didn’t think I was ever going to finish this chapter but all your amazing, beautiful reviews motivated me to do so. Thank you!

Rest in Peace, David Bowie.

“And what in the world is wrong with you?” Jareth asked. He tapped his riding crop against his leather boot as he looked down at his dejected subject. Something must be seriously bothering the small goblin since he was not joining his fellow idiots in another round of “kick the chicken.”

“Squeak was bad,” the goblin replied glumly. He rubbed his stomach and sighed.

Jareth raised a delicate eyebrow. “Indeed? What did you do this time?” And did it require him getting bogged? Ever since the last incident involving Sarah’s missing undergarments, freshly-hatched chicken eggs, and a mysterious fire, he wasn’t sure if his bog had enough room for another goblin.

Despite his limited intelligence, even Squeak was smart enough to know upsetting Lady meant upsetting Kingy. And Kingy had a temper. “Um... Um...”

Jareth’s other eyebrow rose up and joined the first.

“Squeak ate Lady’s earring!” the goblin cried out.

Jareth blinked slowly. “Didn’t you already—ah, I’m guessing you have a matching pair in your stomach right now.”

The goblin nodded glumly before elaborating, “It was very shiny and delicious but Lady said earring was... earring was...” He paused, thinking. Jareth was almost concern about him bursting a blood vessel from trying so hard. “I forgot.”

“Is that all?” Jareth asked, leaning back against his throne.

“Yes,” Squeak nodded. “But Lady is sad now.”

Jareth was pretty sure Sarah was more frustrated than sad but looking down at the depressed goblin, he decided it would be best not to mention it. Oh precious, he thought. The things I do for you. He curled his fingers into a loose fist, gathering his magic in his hand and when he finally uncurled his fingers, the intensity of his magic solidified into a crystal. Jareth tossed it high into the air and watched with a sharp eye as it landed back into his hand as a small bag, filled with a handful of small precious stones.

“Here,” he said, tossing it at the goblin. “Bring this to Lady.”

Squeak peered into the bag and gasped. “Oooh, shiny!”
“Don’t eat it,” Jareth said with a narrowed eyes. Squeak had a history of eating everything that shined and glittered. It wouldn’t usually be a problem since young goblins could digest just about anything, but Jareth was in no mood to soothe the goblin once he realized he had just eaten Sarah’s gift.

“I got it, Kingy!” Squeak exclaimed, disappearing on the spot.

Jareth leaned back again and groaned. He certainly hoped so. Producing another crystal, he peered into its foggy depths and sighed. *Come on, precious,* he thought. *Just say my name.*

**Say my name.**

Sarah woke up with a gasp that had nothing to do with the voice in her fast-fading dream.

“Wake up, Sarah!” Toby said, emphasizing each word with a jump. Despite the excitement, Toby was careful enough to avoid Sarah’s ribs, and instead, directed all his weight onto her lower abdomen.

“Toby,” she managed to gasp. “You’re getting way too heavy for this!”

He only wrinkled his nose in response. “I’m going to Hogwarts today so you can’t sleep in! You promised you would come with us to the train station, remember?”

“Yes, yes,” Sarah groaned. She took a peek at the clock on her end table and scowled. She had at least another hour and a half before she actually needed to wake up. And even then she would have more than enough time to get ready. “Now get off of me, I need to get ready.”

Toby jumped off immediately, obviously too excited to keep still in one place for long. “Great! I’ll go wake up mom and dad!”

“Wait,” Sarah called out after him. “They’re not awake yet?” But it was too late, Toby was already out the door and down the hall. She stared at the empty doorway for a moment before sighing, pulling herself out of the comforts of her blankets.

After a moment of silence, Sarah heard a faint, “What the?” followed by a louder, “Wake up!” and shook her head in amusement.

She closed her bedroom door and after a second of mental debate, locked it for good measure because an excited Toby was an unpredictable Toby. “All right,” she told herself, rubbing her eyes with the heel of her hands in an attempt to rub the lingering sleepiness away. “Gip? Romby? Squeak?” she called out, voice quiet but firm.

The three small goblins immediately appeared on her bed, though Gip looked as if he had just been crying. Sarah blinked at the goblin’s expression and tilted her head in question. “Gip? Are you okay?” In her experience, goblins were rarely ever sad and it was strange seeing one so obviously crestfallen.

“Gip is not Gip,” he answer pitifully. “Kingy changed Gip’s name to Yip-yap.”

Sarah blinked slowly. “Wait, what?”

“Kingy says I do nothing but yip and yap so now I should be known as Yip-yap.” He sniffled.

Sarah stared for another moment before sighing, pinching the bridge of her nose in annoyance.
“Well, that’s just stupid,” she replied, reaching out to pat Gip in a comforting manner. “If it makes you feel any better, I’ll change your name back to Gip.”

Gip’s impossibly large eyes grew even larger. “Lady can do that?” he asked in awe before turning towards his fellow goblins. “Can Lady do that?” he repeated.

Squeak shrugged. “Lady’s Lady. Lady can bog us.”

Romby nodded and clapped in excitement. “Yip-yap is now Gip again!”

The small goblin beamed.

“Okay,” Sarah said slowly, allowing them a minute to celebrate. “Now that we have that over with... Do you remember what today is?”

They looked at each other in horror. “Lady’s birthday?” Squeak finally asked, wondering if he should go back to Kingy and ask for another pouch of fine jewels. He’s familiar with Lady’s expression whenever she receives gifts from them (who in turn, gets them from Kingy); shocked and awed. But happy. Until she turned suspicious but that part was always easily pushed from his memories.

“No,” Sarah said. “Toby’s going to Hogwarts.”

The three goblins oohed at the same time.

“And do you remember what we talked about?”

They nodded excitedly.

Sarah wasn’t actually convinced. “What are the rules?” she asked them.

“Protect Lady’s brother from danger,” supplied Romby.

“Keep out of sight,” added Gip.

“From everyone,” reminded Sarah. “Including Toby.”

The three goblins nodded in understanding.

“We can have fun though, right, Lady?” Squeak asked, turning large eyes towards her.

Sarah eyed the goblin back warily, their definition of fun usually meant someone was going to get hurt, humiliated, bogged, or some sort of combination of the three. She still remembered that one incident when Moby, another goblin, had brought back her bras—or more specifically, what was left of it—while muttering something about chicken eggs and a fireball. “Not too much fun,” she finally answered and wondered if that was the right thing to say when three identical grins widened in delight.

“You got it, Lady!” Romby said with a surprisingly good-looking salute. He was practically purring in delight.

Sarah nodded but she wasn’t sure she liked the idea of the three goblins heading off to Hogwarts together and causing some sort of mayhem in their wake. They had the ability to become invisible to anyone they don’t want spotting them and Sarah did not want to be the person who accidentally destroyed the Wizarding World simply because she wanted to keep her brother safe. One goblin was bad enough but three together meant they would be edging each other to do more and more daring
Sarah could recall an incident when they were still living in America in which Mr. Morison, their neighbor, woke up in the middle of a nearby lake, floating on top of a rapidly sinking mattress. In the goblins’ defense though, he had never been very nice to the Williams so she thought it was rather amusing until Mr. Morison came back from work one day only to find his entire house missing.

Sarah knew they could take things away magically—like wished-away children, for instance—but she wasn’t aware they could do the same thing to two-story houses. “Yummy,” was all they told her when she asked them what had happened before she ultimately decided that it was better not to know.

She never brought up the incident again.

“Okay!” Sarah finally exclaimed, clapping her hands together. “Just remember to stay safe; I don’t want you guys getting hurt.” They looked at each other for a moment before giggling in amusement; them getting hurt should be the least of her worries. She pursed her lips and glared suspiciously, wondering what horrors they plan to unleash on the Wizarding World before deciding that she didn’t really want to know that either.

“Lady?”

Sarah looked down, blinking. “Yes, Squeak?” The small goblin held up a small pouch, blinking large, unusually innocent-looking eyes at her. “Gift for Lady.” He beamed, blinking almost shyly. “Sorry for eating all your earrings, Lady.”

“Aww, Squeak,” Sarah cooed, taking the pouch. “That’s so sweet of you.”

He flushed an odd looking green. “Thanks, Lady.”

“Just don’t eat any more of my jewelry,” Sarah told him. “You’re going to give yourself a stomachache or something.”

Squeak shook his head. “Nah, Kingy says we have very strong stomach... juices... We can eat anything. And Kingy also said that if I regurg—regurg—er... throw up Lady’s shiny stones again, they come back extra shiny!”

Sarah blinked, paused, and looked down at the pouch in her hands, the goblin’s words taking a moment to register. And when they finally did, her gaze snapped up in alarm as she stared at Squeak in horror.

“You might have to look closely,’ she says,” Sarah grumbled as yet another Englishman bumped into her. She grunted in acknowledgment when he apologized but continued muttering under her breath. “I thought the Wizarding World was supposed to be some sort of top secret hush-hush. Who the hell sticks the entrance to their secret world in the middle of London’s busiest train station, anyway?” She glanced around, skimming the platform numbers overhead and wrinkled her nose in distaste. “And what kind of platform is platform nine and three-quarters, anyway?”

“Sarah, stop grumbling under your breath and help us look for this stupid platform,” Robert scolded.

“You would think they would send someone to escort us first time around,” Irene added. “This is the third time someone stepped on my shoe.”

“Well,” Robert said. “This is platform ten and platform nine was back there but I definitely did not
see some platform nine and three-quarters.” He groaned and rubbed his eyes. “Toby, do your magic senses see anything?”

Toby, who had been making odd clicking noises at his new owl, looked up in alarm. “What?” he asked, startled, his father’s words taking a few seconds to register. He looked around but saw nothing out of the ordinary. “Um, what am I supposed to be looking for?” he felt his stomach flutter when his father groaned and turned. “Sarah?” he tried worryingly.

If all else fails, Sarah’s the one to go to.

But she was distracted, staring off into the distance with narrowed eyes. Was she just seeing things or were people running through that brick pillar? “Oh, you have got to be kidding me,” she grumbled. “Really?”

“Sarah?”

“What are we looking at?” Robert finally asked, tone blank.

“Can’t you see it, Dad? It’s right there!” Toby tried again.

Robert squinted, concentrating hard but still seeing nothing out of the ordinary. And then:

“Urgh!” Robert choked, watching as one red-head ran through the brick wall. “We’re not going to have to do that, are we? Are we?”

Toby scowled. “Yes, you are!” The thought of his family leaving him to run through brick walls by himself made his stomach churn.

It can’t be that much different than running through mirrors, Sarah thought encouragingly. Not that she had actually visited the Underground since her first time there (she wasn’t risking the chance of accidentally running into the Goblin King, thank you very much) but she had seen her friends come
and go multiple times without getting hurt.

“It’ll be like Alice in Wonderland,” Irene tried, eyeing the wall distastefully as they maneuvered their way through the sea of people.

“No,” Robert responded flatly. “It’ll be a concussion, that’s what it’ll be.” He shuddered. “Do you think it’ll work on... us? What happens if it only works on magical people, like Toby?”

And leave me by myself?” Toby asked, stomach muscles tightening. “I hope not!”

The family of redheads had long gone, leaving the Williams to fend for themselves. No one responded, they were all too busy staring at the brick pillar.

One brick.

Two brick.

“So,” Robert tried innocently. “Who wants to go first?”

Seeing that neither parent nor younger brother was going to risk public humiliation and a possible trip to the emergency room, Sarah bravely stepped forward. “I deserve a big Christmas present for this,” she muttered, steeling herself in case everything goes wrong.

Then:

Wait a minute! Sarah thought. Do I need to run into it? Can’t I just... step through? Hoggle does it all the time! And Lugo too! If Lugo can step through portals, anyone can.”

Jaw set, Sarah stalked forward with confidence she didn’t feel. What little confidence she did have faltered just when the brick pillar loomed close enough and she squeezed her eyes shut. Magic don’t fail me now, she thought when the sounds of the busy train station faded with her next step, the familiar tingle of magic creeping its way down her spine.

Another deep breath.

Another step.

And without warning, she was suddenly bombarded with the noise and sensation of the train station. For a moment, Sarah thought she didn’t make it through the brick pillar because she was clearly still at the station. But of course she was. She was at a station, a magical one, apparently, judging by the flying owns and bursts of magical colored sparks from sticks—Wands, Sarah reminded herself.

“Well, Toto,” Sarah muttered, feeling very much like she had just stepped into a Halloween costume shop. “I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

Just as she remembered her family members on the other side of the pillar, Sarah was unceremoniously pushed forward from behind. She squeaked, arms flailing around wily as she attempted to catch her balance.

“How the hell did you do that?” Toby asked, reaching out to catch her—and possibly go down with her—just as Sarah felt herself getting yanked backwards.


“Is this it?” Irene asked just as her and Robert stepped out into the magical nine and three-quarters
They looked around for a moment, taking in the rush of a new school year—magical or not, they were all the same—if they thought the train platform was busy before, it was nothing to the current one. If parents weren’t busy making sure their children had everything, then they were running, running after lost pets that had somehow escaped from the confines of their cages. All around them school children were chattering, meeting old friends they hadn’t seen all summer.

“Well, kid,” Sarah said, reaching out to lay a comforting hand on his head. “This is it.”

“Well,” Toby squeaked, his voice unusually soft. Either that or that platform was a lot louder than she thought.

“You have everything, right?” Irene asked, looking around worryingly. “Just text—I mean—send... letters... if you need something.” She eyed Toby’s new owl warily. It looked rather put out to be confined in a small cage and glared in response. “And don’t forget to feel Hel, it looks like it wants to eat me.”

Toby nodded absentmindedly, still looking around with wide eyes.

“And I expect a letter a week from you, young man. Just because you’re going to school in some magical castle somewhere I can’t go, doesn’t mean I’m not your mother,” Irene continued.

“Okay, mom...”

Sarah blinked at her brother’s softly-spoken words and turned to look at him. For a moment, she thought he was still busy taking in the sight but quickly noticed his slightly shaking fingers. Ah, she thought before kneeling down. “Toby?” she asked, reaching out to grab his arms and spin him around so he was facing her. “Toby, what’s wrong?”

It was the obvious worry in her voice that finally broke through the mental dam he didn’t even know he had constructed during the past few weeks after first finding out he was a wizard. He realized—for the first time that he wasn’t just going to be stepping into a whole different world. He was going to be living in it and his beloved family—his sister. His Sarah!—wasn’t going to be with him.

“Do I have to go?” he asked quietly, feeling the familiar stinging behind his eyes. He barely noticed his parents exchanging glances behind his sister.

“Oh, Toby,” Sarah breathed, pulling him into her arms and hugging him tightly.

He inhaled deeply, breathing in the comfort of Sarah’s familiar scent despite feeling the embarrassment of needing it despite him being twelve already! He swore he heard amused snickering behind him but was sure it was only his imagination. “I don’t want to go!” he finally confessed, unable to keep the tears from leaking out. The excitement he had felt about the Wizarding world had faded, leaving a terrifying, nervous feeling in its wake.

“Yes, you do,” Sarah said, pushing him away so she was holding him out at arm’s length again. “You know you do; you’re just nervous right now.

“I wish you could come with me,” Toby said.

Sarah smiled and reached over to wipe Toby’s tears away. “You’re going to be fine, Toby. Remember when we first moved here to London? You didn’t like it one bit.”
“That’s different,” he mumbled. “You came with me.”

“Don’t think we’re abandoning you just because we’re not there physically, sweetie,” Irene added. “You can always write to us and if some sort of emergency comes up, I’m sure the professors there will let us come see you.” She smiled, leaning down slightly so she could brush Toby’s hair away from his eyes. “Besides, you’re coming back during your Holiday Break, remember?”

Toby wrinkled his nose. “That’s four months away.”

Sarah leveled him with an amused glance. “Toby, you’ll be learning magic. Those four months will pass in an instant.”

“I guess...”

He didn’t sound convinced and the three adults exchanged worried glances. “Won’t you at least give it a try?” Robert asked a bit awkwardly; he was never good in these kinds of situations despite them being his children. He blamed Sarah for that; she used to throw the worst kind of temper tantrums. It’s amazing she turned out as well as she did.

“If you don’t like it, we can always think of something else,” Irene added. “Maybe get private tutoring for your magic. But you should give it a try first.”

Toby looked up then, happy that there were alternatives. “Okay, he finally agreed. “But if I send a letter, you guys have to come and get me! Promise?” He looked up at his sister.


And that was when Toby knew everything was going to be all right. Sarah held true to all her promises, even the very little ones that even Toby didn’t expect her to actually remember and keep. He smiled, glancing over his shoulder at the rapidly emptying station as the students began boarding the train. “I’ll be okay?”

“You’re going to be fine,” Sarah said, ruffling his hair once more. “You’re going to make tons of friends and have a great time. You’re an amazing person, you know? You have a special power.”

“I do?”

“Of course you do,” Sarah said, sounding insulted that he thought otherwise. “You have a gift for healing; you make people feel better just by touching them. Remember Mrs. Watson?”

“Yea,” he mumbled, looking over his shoulder again. “I remember.” He swallowed hard. “I’m leaving now, then?”

“Yes,” Sarah answered. “Write to me as soon as you can and tell me all about your new school.”

“Okay,” he agreed, hugging her again.

His parents leaned down and joined the hug-fest. They held on tightly for a couple seconds. Toby could feel his mother shaking, not wanting to cry in front of him. “Be careful,” she whispered.

“I will.”

Toby nodded and stepped back, staring at them for another second before turning around and making his way towards the train. He sniffed, wiping away the last of his tears and took another deep breath, trying to ease his nervousness.
“Do you think I might have spoiled him a bit too much?” Sarah asked quietly. She smiled and waved when Toby hesitated, looking over his shoulder at them. Unlike Sarah who had always been independent, Toby had been mothered by both his mother and sister so his lack of individualism was unsurprising.

“Definitely,” Robert immediately replied. “He’s going to end up a spoiled brat like you if this keeps up.”

Sarah winced at the reminder and then winced again as another kid accidentally bumped into Toby, making him stumble.

“Oh,” Irene breathed. “Poor Toby, he’s so nervous.”

“Sorry,” the student immediately apologized, his embarrassment making his voice loud enough that even Sarah heard it from the other side of the station. She watched Toby smile and nod in acknowledgment and it probably would have been the end of that particular situation if Romby hadn’t decided to do the job that Sarah had requested of him:

—protect Toby.

—stay out of sight.

—have fun.

Sarah watched in horror as Romby swarmed around the student’s feet, unseen and unnoticed, and nipped at delicate ankles. He went down like a lead ball.

“Damn it,” she hissed under her breath. “I’m going to have to talk to him about that.”

Ten minutes later, the train had already left the station and was steadily making his way to Hogwarts but Toby was still walking up and down the aisle trying to find an empty compartment. He supposed he could enter an occupied one and introduce himself but it seemed like everyone already knew each other. Even his fellow first years but he supposed he shouldn’t have been surprised. Professor Dumbledore had mentioned that the Wizarding World was a small place and everyone more or less knew one another.

I’m regretting this already, he thought, hoping that he wouldn’t be spending the entire train ride trying to find a seat.

He sighed, dragging his luggage along behind him and continued on only to bump into an older student who was just leaving his compartment.

“Oof,” Toby cried out, falling backwards. He winced at the pain shoot up his body and looked up. An older student sneered back down at him. “Watch where you’re going,” he snapped.

“Sorry,” Toby mumbled, rubbing his sore elbow. Behind him, Hel was screeching with fury at the startling movement, trying to turn upright within the confines of her small cage. Toby scrambled to fix her; he had a feeling Hel would hold grudges. His own fault, probably; he was the one who named her, after all.

“Hey Anderson, the trolley here yet?” someone asked from inside the compartment.
The student—Anderson ignored his friend and squinted down at Toby. “Wait, aren’t you the kid who was crying earlier?”

Toby pursed his lips. He guessed he didn’t imagine the snickering earlier. “My name’s Toby.”

“Toby, huh?” the older student asked, snickering. “Like ‘Teary Toby?’”

Toby stared at him. Then blinked. “That’s really unique,” he finally said. “You must be really proud of yourself.”

First years were usually nervous creatures and it was clear from the Anderson’s expression that he was well and truly taken back from Toby’s oddly confident and sarcastic comeback. It sounded even stranger in his young, unbroken voice. Of course, Toby felt no where near as confident as he sounded but Sarah had always told him it was better to stand up for yourself than allow someone to push you around.

His response was a mere reflex. But judging by the darkening expression on Anderson’s face, he was going to pay for it.

“Why you little—”

“Bullying first years, Anderson?” a new voice cut in.

Toby immediately felt himself tense up; the voice said it in such a familiar no-nonsense, bossy tone, he thought it was his mother for an instant. He turned around, finding himself face to face with a girl—another student, clearly—with wild, frizzy hair that surrounded her like some sort of halo.

“Wasn’t doing anything,” Anderson mumbled, inching backwards. He was obviously intimidated by the girl. He faltered a step, tripping over nothing but somehow managed to catch himself in time before scrambling back into his compartment.

“Don’t think I won’t take points off Ravenclaw!” Granger hollered just as the compartment door slid shut. She huffed in annoyance, glaring at the closed door with such intensity, Toby was surprised it didn’t melt down right then and there. Toby did not want to ever be on the other side of that glare.

Hel chose that moment to hoot, directing her attention from the door to him. He immediately tensed but her gaze softened. “Hello, are you all right?”

He flushed. “I’m fine,” he mumbled. “Thanks.”

She only smiled in response but knelt down to help him pick up his fallen luggage. “I’m Hermione Granger,” she introduced, holding out a hand. He grasped it—firmly, he could hear his father’s voice reminding him—and shook it. “I’m a fifth year prefect, so if you run into any more trouble, just let me know.” He looked down, noting his clothes. “You’re a first year, aren’t you?”

Toby nodded back, shyly. “Tobias Williams. You can call me Toby though.” He bit his lower lip, rolling it between his teeth. “Is it that obvious?”

“Well, you haven’t been sorted yet.” She gave his plain uniform a pointed glance.

Ah, Toby thought. That’s right, the Hogwarts houses. He had completely forgotten about those, something about a lizard, a monkey, a cat, and a bird if he remembered correctly. Professor Dumbledore had recommended him to read Hogwarts: A History but he had skipped the chapters about the houses. Honestly, he had been more interested in learning about the classes he would be taking. And the ghosts! There were ghosts in Hogwarts, apparently!
“I take it you can’t find a compartment?” Hermione asked kindly. Toby had a feeling she knew exactly how nervous he was, perhaps she had gone through the same thing years ago. “Would you like to sit with me? If you don’t mind sitting with my friends, that is.”

His eyes grew wide. “Really?” he breathed. “You don’t mind?”

She grinned. “I don’t if you don’t.”

He shook his his, excitedly, happy that he wouldn’t be spending the entire train ride walking up and down the aisle. Together, they picked up his remaining luggage and she lead him further down the aisle. “You must be nervous.”

He only nodded in response.

Hermione smiled, voice softening. “I remember my first year here. I was as nervous as you, maybe even more so. I read Hogwarts: A History at least five times before the first day of classes. Have you read the book?” she asked, looking at him. “I could lend you my copy if you want.”

“I have one,” Toby replied, smiling. “Thank you, though. Professor Dumbledore recommended it when he visited.”

Her eyebrows shot up, surprised. “Professor Dumbledore did?” She hesitated. “Are you... are you muggle-born?”

It took a moment for Toby to remember what that meant. “Muggleborn as in both my parents being... non-magical humans?”

“That’s right.”

“Then yea, I guess I am,” Toby agreed.

Hermione pursed her lips and for a moment Toby thought she disapproved. Didn’t Professor Dumbledore say something about a conflict with muggleborns? “Well,” she said, her voice cheerful. “Just remember that you can go to any prefect or professor if you run into trouble.” She stopped in front of a compartment and smiled at him, “Here we are!”

“Hey, Mione,” a loud voice immediately sounded. “Tell Harry that Cedric wasn’t—”

“I brought someone with me,” she interrupted, strolling in.

Still nervous, Toby slowly poked his head in, halting all conversation. He swallowed hard. “Hi,” he greeted nervously. “I’m Toby.” He twisted his hands, wondering if he did the right thing, following the frizzy-haired prefect. They didn’t look very happy to see him, it looked like he had interrupted a very important conversation.

One of the two redheads—the one that just spoke—rolled his eyes. “Starting your prefect duties already, Mione?”

Even without turning towards her, he knew Hermione was scowling. She took Hel’s cage from him and carefully placed it onto the seat. “That’s Ronald,” she introduced. “You can ignore him. And these two are Ginny and Harry.”

“Nice to meet you,” Toby managed to squeak out.

Dark eyebrows shot upwards as if his greeting was somehow unusual. “Hey,” the boy—Harry—
greeted back with a small smile of his own. “Are you... are you muggleborn?”

It was Toby’s turn to be surprised. “Is that obvious?” he asked, eyes darting to Hermione.

“No!” Harry immediately responded. “Not at all.” Smile widening, he pat the empty seat next to him. “Would you like to sit?”

Toby nodded distractedly, suddenly distracted by a beautiful she-owl, sitting in a cage on top of the large window ledge. She eyed Hel’s much larger form with distaste, making a soft chirping noise before turning around to present her audience with her tail feathers.

“This is Hedwig,” Harry introduced and Toby slid into the seat next to him.

“She’s beautiful,” Toby breathed, starting at the white snow owl in awe. He flashed a hesitant grin at the dark-haired boy and turned to his own owl. “This is Hel; it’s short for Helreginn.”

“Helreginn?” Hermione repeated with a startled squeak. She gave him another look over, as if actually seeing him for the first time. “You named your owl Helreginn?”

Toby flushed. It was a lot funnier when Sarah was the one stunned. Now it was just embarrassing. “Well, it was either that or Enyo but I like Norse mythology a lot better.”

She blinked. “Why not Eir, Nanna, Frigg, or something?”

Toby’s eyes lit up at Hermione’s obvious knowledge of Norse mythology. He could feel himself relaxing just the slightest since first stepping onto the train. “You know what they’re talking about?” he heard Ron and ask Harry, his voice a soft whisper.

“Nope,” was the quiet response.

“It really started as a joke,” Toby elaborated, grinning sheepishly. “My sister, Sarah, looked like she was going to have a heart attack when she heard the names I picked out. I thought it was kind of funny because mom and dad didn’t know where it came from.” He shrugged. “I was going to change it later but I didn’t know that once you give an owl a name, it won’t answer to anything else. Besides,” he continued, looking up. “Helreginn fits, don’t you think?”

Hermione turned to look at the right side of the owl’s face which was slightly scarred and disfigured —most likely due to an accident of sorts. Thankfully, the owl’s thick feathers covered up most of the disfiguration but it was still easily spotted. “Yes,” she agreed, smiling. “It does.”

“Anyway,” Ronald said, after a moment of silence. “You reckon we’ll finally get a good DADA professor this year? No more Death Ea—”

Hermione glared, effectively shutting him up.

The conversation died down then, no one knew what sort of subjects they could bring up with an innocent, muggleborn first year in the compartment. Harry Potter’s fame was out of the question, so was Voldemort, and certainly Cedric Diggory. And if Toby wasn’t distracted by the beautiful countryside scenery going by, he probably would have noticed. He was, fortunately, blissfully unaware and felt himself relax even further.

From the corner of his eyes, he noticed Anderson walking by the compartment, only to trip just as he passed by. Toby immediately turned to stare in surprise, wincing in sympathy as Anderson disappeared from view.
Ouch, he thought. Was it just him or were people tripping around him more often recently?

Chapter End Notes

For those unfamiliar with mythology: In Norse mythology Helreginn is known as the “Ruler of Hel”. Not much is actually known about Helreginn but there is a very strong possibility that Helreginn is just another name for Hel who is most commonly known as the goddess of the underworld, the dead, and death itself. It is said that Hel’s face is split in two in which one half is that of a beautiful woman, and the other, the face of a rotting corpse. Toby also mentioned Enyo, who is the Greek goddess of war and destruction. According to some texts, Enyo was even worst than Ares (the god of war), since she lives to see nothing but destroying cities and enjoying pain and suffering.

Hermione mentioned Eir, Nanna, and Frigg, all of which are also Norse goddesses. Eir is the goddess of health, healing, and medicine, Nanna, the goddess of peace and happiness, and Frigg, the goddess of motherhood and marriage.

Toby’s Helreginn was actually based off of my friend’s owl. She does wildlife rehabilitation (or something like that), so she gets to take care of some really unique animals. Her owl was actually named Toby—believe it or not—and it’s a great gray owl which is one of the world’s largest owl... even though a lot of its size is due to it’s thick layer of feathers.
Sparks

Chapter Notes

I extended the end of the previous chapter, so those who read it immediately upon its publication may want to go back and read it. I added and changed some of the dialogue which foreshadows future events. This is what happens when I type a chapter without my original notes, guys. I miss everything important.

Also, this has been (sort of) mentioned before in the first chapter (during Dumbledore's inner monologue) but since I've gotten a few questions about it, I apologize for not making this clear enough. This fic takes place during Harry's fifth year. With Umbridge. Yeah. That woman.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sarah,

Can you believe that even with all this magic, their best form of long-distance communication is through letters? Carried by owls (speaking of owls, I think I accidentally adopted a new one. He just showed up one morning and refused to leave me alone since. Sometimes, he even follows me to my dorm)! Anyway, I know you're probably really angry at me for not writing to you sooner but I didn't know where to start. There are so many things I want to tell you. You would have loved it here, Sarah, I wish you could have come with me too.

Except for Professor Umbridge. You probably wouldn't like her. The class itself isn't too bad (she teaches Defense Against the Dark Arts), just a lot of reading and essays but she reminds me of Mrs. Golding back in Upper Nyack. She has the same sugar-sweet, candy cane voice even though she's not as pretty. You guys definitely wouldn't get along, she'll probably want to pinch your cheeks too. Ha!

Anyway, I was sorted into Hufflepuff—that's the one with the yellow and black colors. And I think our mascot is a skunk or something. I thought it was a monkey at first but it looks like a skunk. I think, if you were attending Hogwarts, you would be a Ravenclaw—because you're so smart and everything—even though mom always says you look better in green. But that's Slytherin and you don't like snakes—

"Sarah Williams?"

Sarah looked up from her brother's letter at the smiling face of the barista. "Yes, that's me," she answered, reaching up and wrapping a hand around the warm cup. "Thank you." She glanced out the window, wondering if she should take her coffee to go but shuddered upon seeing the strong wind blowing someone's hat off their head. I don't think I'll ever get used to London weather, she thought. It didn't matter how long she had lived here, she would forever miss the ninety-degree plus weathers during the summer (and Fahrenheit! She missed telling weather in Fahrenheit). If it wasn't her desire to remain close to her family, she would have moved back a long time ago.

Sliding into an empty seat, Sarah placed her coffee on the tabletop out in front of her and turned her attention back to Toby's letter, frowning. Everyone had always warned her about babying Toby too
much but they also teased her about her not knowing what to do with her life in the future once Toby grew out of it. And she knew he would. Mommy's boy, daddy's girl, they were all the same; all children grew up. But this...

This letter...

"I wish you could have come with me too."

And:

"You probably wouldn't like her."

And, again:

"I think, if you were attending Hogwarts, you would be a Ravenclaw..."

It stayed like that throughout the entire letter. Every other paragraph had Toby pointing out things that she would like. Every other sentence had some sort of implication of his desire for her to be there. With him. In a magical world that she wanted no part in. She didn't want magic in her life again. She didn't want to live in a world where fairy tales didn't exist for it did more harm than good. She almost lost Toby to magic—to fairy tales—for crying out loud. And yet...

Yet...

She couldn't let it go completely. Sarah didn't think she would ever be able to let it go completely. For as long as she could remember, she had always believed in magic. And for a short period when she was fifteen, she had lived it. She had lived in a world where doorknockers talked and magical, smelly bogs were used as punishments. She had lived in a world where dreams became reality and reality was only as limited as one's imagination. And as much as Sarah wanted to leave all that behind her, she knew she couldn't let go of her friends—of Hoggle, and Lugo and Sir Didymus, and the ever loyal Ambrosious. And her goblins.

(Oh! Her goblins.)

Her sweet, darling, headache-inducing goblins. As frustrating as they could get, they kept her from feeling lonely in the very logical, very real world she never felt she belonged in. They kept her safe and happy and loved and Sarah didn't think—no, Sarah knew—she would never be able to let them go.

And she wanted Toby to love magic as much as she does. Underneath all the joy she felt whenever she visited her younger brother, she had felt just the slightest bit guilty. Goblins—invisible to his eye—swarmed and laughed and giggled and played around him without him even suspecting and Sarah always felt like she was keeping a bit part of herself a secret from him.

—but if he attended Hogwarts—

—if he began incorporating magic into his life—

—and learn to love it then Sarah hope to be able to introduce her goblins to him one day. But what could she do if Toby still kept himself at arm's length from the Wizarding World? While she was flattered that he thought about her, how could he love a world, he also wanted her to be a part of?

_Or he could be homesick_, Sarah thought to herself. _cheerfully. Everyone gets homesick their first year._ She took a sip of her coffee and winced, coughing a bit from her still too-hot drink.
"Need a napkin?" a voice asked, accented and smooth. It sent just the slightest tingle down her spine, barely noticeable as she was distracted by trying not to choke.

Sarah looked up, a hand held over her mouth. "Yes," she said, grabbing it with her free hand. "Thank you."

Her acceptance of his offered napkin must have come off as some sort of welcoming of his presence for he immediately slid into the seat directly across from her. She tensed up, glaring over her—his—napkin and prayed her too smooth and unsmiling expression was enough of a hint that his presence was not desired.

"My name's Cahan," he introduced.

Sarah had to hold back a scowl. Deebie, a rather small, female goblin who had been hiding in her hair, poked her head out and giggled. She scrambled over to her shoulder, down her arm, and hopped onto the table. Sarah glared, hoping to stop her from doing whatever it was she planned on doing. "That's great," she muttered, looking back down at Toby's letter, hoping he would get the message and go away.

Her father was always telling her she needed to be more patient—she needed to be kinder. But nothing good ever comes out of that, she thought. Look where she was now!

He flashed her a smile but didn't move.

Sarah did scowl then, making Deebie ooh and clap her clawed hands in excitement (as long as it wasn't directed towards them, the goblins absolutely loved her temper). She supposed it was a rather charming smile; and if Sarah didn't know any better, she would have thought he had some sort of supernatural charm about him. She half-expected glitter. "I'm busy, please leave me alone." Her tone was flat and unamused—as if it wasn't already before—but it didn't get any flatter or less amused than this.

"I'm just trying to be nice," he said, eyebrows furrowing. "I thought you looked rather lonely. He looked just the slightest bit confused as if he had never gotten turned down before. Considering his smooth blond hair, bright green eyes, and perfect complexion, it could actually be the case. Unfortunately, Sarah was a cruel and unforgiving woman—or so she's been told—and it mattered little to her.

She sighed and leaned back, adjusting her stance until everything about it screamed at him to leave her alone. Only an idiot could have missed it. "I don't care for kindness," she told him, stuffing Toby's letter back into her over-sized purse. "Since you're not going to leave, I will." Then, without waiting for a response or reaction, she got up from her seat and walked away into the cold, leaving behind a giggling Deebie and a wide-eyed Cahan.

(Deebie could do whatever she wanted with Cahan for all she cared. That included throwing him into a lake. Or an active volcano.)

"Well," Cahan said slowly. He tapped his fingers against the abandoned table in a rhythmic pattern. "That was rather unexpected; what a cruel woman."

Deebie continued to laugh.

Cahan flattened his lips and looked down at the small goblin, glaring. His fingers stilled and he curled them into a tight fist. "Knock it off, would you?" he hissed, giving her a none too gentle poke.
"Are you going to name it?"

Toby frowned. "Him. Adrian, it's a him." At least he was fairly certain it was. The last time he picked up the barn owl in an attempt to check, he had been half-pecked to death. He hadn't made an attempt since. He turned towards his friend. "Besides, he's not mine; I can't just name him."

Aiden rolled his eyes. "He might as well be, I don't see him going to anyone else." Ignoring the owl's furious stare, he looked around the Great Hall with a confused frown. "Where do you think he comes from, anyway? Not the owlry, I don't think, or he would have traveled in with the rest." A thought suddenly struck him, making him hesitate and he slowly turned back towards the own, this time, taking careful note of its—his—stare. "You don't think he's wild, do you?"

"He's too used to humans to be wild," Toby answered, reaching out to stroke the barn owl's smooth, feathered head.

He allowed Toby two strokes before pecking his hand away.

"I can't tell if he likes or hates you," Kathie said, across from Toby. She inched her breakfast away from the barn owl, as if scared he would peck her hand if it accidentally strayed too close. Toby smiled, amused and opened his mouth to answer, only to be distracted by the hotting of various owls as the morning post came. He was not particularly fond of this part of their usual morning routine and was still getting used to dodging flying owls, dropped packages, and extended, arm-waving hands. Thankfully, Hel's large form stood out despite the vast parliament of owls. More than one student watched as she gracefully glided through the air, circled once, before landing onto the tabletop near Toby, effectively shoving several smaller owls out of her way.

"Be nice," Toby scolded her, reaching over to untie his two letters—one from his parents and another from his sister. He placed the letters from his parents down in favor of his sister's—he could always read it later—when he felt the slight tingling of his right ear. Toby paused, feeling neck muscles tensing. He looked up and around, trying to find what was causing his sudden apprehension.

And there—

Sitting at the Slytherin table, a pale, silver-blond student was glaring at him like had wronged him in some way. Toby blinked, confused and looked over his shoulder, wondering if it was possible that someone behind him was being glared at. No such luck.

Adrian, who must had noticed the tenseness in Toby's form, looked up from his own mail and gave him a curious glance. "What's wrong?"

"Do you know who that is?" Toby asked, his voice a soft whisper even though he knew the angrily-looking blond wouldn't be able to hear him. "And why he's glaring at me like that?"

Adrian followed the line of Toby's nervous gaze. "Oh," he said, voice also dropping. "That's Malfoy. Draco Malfoy. He's as rich as they get."

Toby wasn't sure if that was supposed to mean something to him. Throughout the past few weeks, he had found out that Harry Potter was supposed to mean something but besides him being a fifth year he sometimes sees whenever he seeks out Hermione's advice, there wasn't anything too special about him that Toby could see. "I don't know him," Toby told Adrian. "Why do you think he's glaring at me?"

"Hel, probably."

Toby blinked and then turned to face him. "Hel," he repeated, wondering if he had misheard. "My
Adrian nodded and voice dropping even lower, he told Toby, "Before Hel, Malfoy's eagle owl was the biggest owl here. Malfoys don't like being second best." He shrugged. "I wouldn't be surprised if he gets a new owl soon."

Toby blinked again.

*Of all the stupid*—

"Owls?" he squealed, his voice high-pitched with disbelief. "He's comparing owls? *Really*?"

Adrian shrugged again as if it was some sort of common and expected occurrence. "I told you, Malfoys don't like being second best."

"That's so... so... stupid," he hissed, reaching over and gently wrapping his hands around Hel. "It's only by one or two inches anyway. Besides, look at her! Half her size is feathers, anyway."

Adrian looked amused but Toby couldn't blame him. He probably would also have been amused by the entire situation if he wasn't the one being glared at. "Anyway, just watch yourself around Malfoy."

"Why?" Toby asked. "Because he'll tell his owl to peck me to death? That's so immature!" How old was the blond, anyway? Fifteen? Did he know he was comparing *owls* with an *eleven-year-old*?

It was the disbelieving, exasperated tone in Toby's voice that made Adrian hesitate. "No," he said slowly, dragging out the word. "It's because you're Muggleborn... Malfoy isn't a big fan of Muggleborns. Rumors have it that he called Granger a... a..." He shuddered. "Never mind."

Toby perked up at the familiar name. "Granger? *Hermione* Granger?" He distantly remembered Professor Dumbledore talking about something with Muggleborn-related conflicts and such. "Called her a what?"

Adrian only shook his head. "No," he said firmly, looking quite ill. "I can't say it." He chanced a glance at Malfoy for a brief second before turning back towards Toby. "Anyway, just be careful around him. I hear he's wicked with hexes."

Toby frowned. "You don't think he'll actually *hurt* anyone, do you?"

The older student hesitated. "Just be careful," he finally responded.

It did not escape Toby that Adrian had not answered his question. He looked over at Malfoy again only to jerk backwards in surprise when the pie in front of the pale boy exploded, covering him and four people in its vicinity with apple bits. Toby immediately dropped his gaze, ripping open his letter from Sarah open; the last thing he wanted was to make an enemy out of a fifth year student.

*Just keep reading, just keep reading*, he told himself, eyes skimming through the letter's contents.

"Did you do that?" hissed Adrian.

"*No!*" Toby hissed back. "That definitely wasn't me!" He continued reading, praying the burning stare he felt on top of his head wasn't from Malfoy.

As he read through Sarah's letter, Toby felt himself beginning to relax. Even his sister's imaginary voice was enough to make him forget all about Malfoy and his issues with owl sizes. He wised—not
for the first time—that he could share this magical world with her. Despite her misgivings, despite her verbal lack of desire to live in a fairy tale, Toby just knew she would have loved it here.

"Adrian?" he asked distractedly, moving Sarah's letter out of reach of the approaching barn owl.

"Are you going to Hogsmeade this weekend?"

Adrian looked up again. "Yes I am. Why? Do you need anything?"

Toby beamed. "If I give you money, do you think you can help me buy a couple of books? Any subject, really."

"Your sister again?" a nearby Ellis asked knowingly. The only other person that read as many books as Sarah was Hermione. With her brown hair—despite its fuzziness, and the lighter shade—and kind personality it was no wonder why Toby liked her so much. His somewhat friendship with the Gryffindor Princess was a well known fact in his Hufflepuff circle. They mostly ask him about Harry Potter but Toby wasn't really friends with the older, dark-haired boy.

"Well," Toby began, not noticing his friends' amusement. "Sarah loves magic but she's a Mu—" he cut himself off, pursing his lips, and then tried again. "She doesn't have magic. She's also a fantasy author so books from your Wizarding World could be used as inspiration."

"Why do you say 'our' world?" Adrian asked, frowning. "It's your world now too, you know?"

Toby paused, blinking. He never even noticed the unintentional implication of his wording before now that it had been brought up, it made perfect sense to him. "It doesn't really feel like my world," he answered with a nonchalant shrug.

Adrian exchanged glances with Ellis and Kathie but as the oldest one in the group, they silently motioned for him to bring the subject up. They were all thinking the same thing. "Just don't let people like Malfoy hear you say that," he finally told Toby.

Not noticing the seriousness in Adrian's voice, Toby only wrinkled his nose in distaste. He was slightly distracted feeding Hel some of his toast and when he tried the same thing with the male owl (who was still hanging around), he only bristled and turned away as if he was too good for it.

"People like Malfoy?" he repeated. "Who else is like him?"

"Well," Ellis began, "the lot he hangs out with, for one. And Umbridge, probably. She's from the Ministry so she hides it pretty well but you can tell."

Toby looked up in alarm then. A professor? "Hides what?"

Obviously afraid that they'll be overheard and punished, Kathie leaned in. "Her dislike for Muggleborns," she whispered in a low voice. "And non-humans. She doesn't like Professor Flitwick at all; you can tell by the way she speaks to him. He's half-goblin, you know."

"I hear she uses blood quills in her detention," Adrian added.

Kathie and Ellis immediately gasped. "No!"

"I thought they were illegal?" added Kathie.

Toby blinked. "What are blood quills?" he asked in confusion.

His three friends shuddered at the mention. "They're quills that uses the writer's blood as ink," Adrian told him. "You can probably imagine the pain." He sighed and shook his head. "Anyway, they're not exactly illegal; just looked down upon. They're actually pretty popular in Durmstrang."
Ellis nodded, nervously picking apart his half-abandoned breakfast. "Just be thankful you're not Harry Potter. I hear she's a complete nightmare to him." He side-glanced towards Toby. "I know you're friends with him—or at least with Hermione Granger—but be careful. You don't want Umbridge thinking you guys are good mates or anything."

Another Hufflepuff—who had obviously been eavesdropping—snorted in amusement. "You can't really blame her," he told them in a condescending tone. "He's sprouting all that nonsense about You-Know-Who coming back."

Toby most certainly did not know who but from the suddenly tense atmosphere, he decided it would be a lot better not to ask. He nibbled on the edge of his toast and wondered if he would ever be able to know all he needed to know about the Wizarding World. Not that he really cared, he suddenly realized. While he certainly liked learning magic, he couldn't see himself incorporating it into his life. Why would he want to charm his entire room clean if he could clean it together with his family all while using the broom handle as a microphone and throwing each other soapy towels? Why would he want to charm leftover meals warm if he could get his mother to toss a couple of them into a pan and remake it into something else entirely?

Magic was new, magic was fun but what was the point of incorporating it into his life if it took away everything he loved?

"No, not really," Hermione told him. "Actually, I never felt that way about the Muggle World. It was only when Professor Dumbledore came to me did I feel like I finally had somewhere to belong."

Toby frowned, tightening his grip around his Transfiguration textbook he was holding closer to his chest as they strolled down the corridor. "But you're Muggleborn; even after reading Hogwarts: A History ten times, everything must have still felt... weird to you. You never felt like... like... some sort of... I dunno... outsider?"

Hermione frowned, her steps slowing down just the slightest. While she may not have gone through the same thing, as a fellow Muggleborn, Hermione probably understood his insecurities. She looked over at Toby, pursing her lips in thought.

"Is it because I'm American?" Toby asked.

She laughed then. "No," Hermione assured him. "Just because I immediately felt at home here, doesn't mean it'll happen to you too. Obviously it didn't. Sometimes, it'll take a while and you've only been here a month. Besides," she said, voice softening. "With recent events, even I don't feel like I belong sometimes; I'm still adjusting."

Toby wasn't all that convinced. "I guess..." he said slowly. The Wizarding World was cool and all but it seemed more like some sort of extended vacation rather than a new aspect of his life. He couldn't actually see himself being part of it but he had a feeling that if Sarah was in his place, she wouldn't have this problem. He wondered why, that between the two of them, he was the one with the magical abilities.

—Sarah who used to read him bedtime stories filled with dragons and fairies and magic—

—Sarah who used to dress up in pretty costumes with a smile that would light up the room—

—Sarah who had impossible dreams—
—Sarah who had the ability to pour life into her words—

Sarah had nothing at all.

Sarah should have been the one attending Hogwarts, he realized, feeling a sickening twist deep in his stomach. Why wasn't Sarah a witch? She would have been like Hermione, feeling—knowing—that she belonged here. I took this from her, Toby thought, sudden panic making him think illogically. Sarah wasn't a witch because he was a wizard. If only he—

"Toby?"

His head snapped up, Hermione's voice ripping him away from his thoughts. "Huh?" he asked. "Sorry, I didn't hear that. What did you say?"

She frowned. "Are you all right?"

He nodded, inhaling deeply in hopes of pushing his thoughts into the depths of his mind. Trying to distract himself, Toby looked around and realized that they were walking through a very familiar—and yet, also highly dreaded—corridor. "Where are you going?" he asked her. "This isn't the way to Gryffindor Tower."

"It's not," Hermione confirmed. "I'm heading down to Professor Snape's classroom. I usually help brew some medical potions for Madam Promfrey during this time. Would you like to join me?"

Toby stared at her in horror, earlier thoughts about Sarah and magic immediately abandoned. "Professor Snape?" he repeated, his voice an unintentional whisper. "Um..." he looked around and cleared his throat awkwardly. "No. No thank you. I think," he hesitated, cleared his throat, and tried again. "I think I should probably head back to my dorms."

Hermione laughed. "All right," she agreed. She pointed down a dark hall. "If you follow this hallway and go down the first flight of stairs you see, it should take you directly to Hufflepuff Basement."

"Thank you," he said with a relieved sigh. "See you later then."

"Of course."

He moved to follow her instructions, swallowing hard as he took in the darkened halls. He suddenly wished that he had chosen a cat—or even a toad—instead of an owl for a pet. He needed something to hold. Preferably fluffy.

"Toby?"

He turned. "Yeah?"

Hermione smiled. "Just give it some time, okay?"

Toby nodded, gracing the older Gryffindor with a hesitant smile. "Okay," he agreed.

The trip back to Hufflepuff Basement was half power walk, half full out sprinting. By the time he reached the entrance, he decided that he was never, ever, ever going to be walking around the castle so close to curfew ever again. They might as well make the school into a haunted house; they even had the ghosts for it! And it wasn't even until Toby saw the familiar door to his dormitory did he finally breathed a sigh of relief.
He would be sleeping alone tonight—his two roommates liked to attend the weekly Hufflepuff sleepover down in the common room—but that was all right. While he didn't usually like to be alone, he didn't mind sleeping by himself here since he would be surrounded by familiar blankets, pillows, and pictures (all of them from home) and had readings and essays to occupy himself with. Inhaling deeply, Toby opened the door to his dorm, only to immediately freeze in the doorway upon noticing his room was already occupied.

And not by humans either.

Toby stared and for a brief second, he wondered if he entered the wrong room. He watched with wide eyes as three... three... odd creature-looking things shrieking with happy laughter as the bounced around on his bed.

He blinked.

Then blinked again.

They were small creatures—and quite ugly too!—no higher than his knee and apparently, had already made themselves at home on his bed. "Weee!" they cried, jumping over, on top, and underneath each other. "Again!"

"Um," he said.

They immediately froze, form bristling with shock before spinning around to face him.

He swallowed hard. "Uh... hi?" he greeted hesitantly, holding up his hands to show he meant them no harm.

"Uh-oh," one said. "Lady is not going to be happy."

Toby blinked again. Then squinted. Was one of them wearing girl's underwear on its head?

"Nope," another agreed.

"Lady's going to bog us," the third added.

"Yup," the second one agreed again.

Toby shifted his weight onto his other foot, hands still held high in the air, growing more and more uncomfortable in his spot. Maybe he should have just closed the door and pretended he never saw anything. "What are you?" he asked and then hastily corrected himself, "I mean, who are you?"

They looked at each other then back up towards him. "We're house elves," one answered. The other two looked at each other and laughed.

"Yup!" the smallest one agreed. "We help clean."

"You do?" Toby asked, obviously not convinced.

"Yes!" one chirped, bouncing. "We're making your bed!"

It sounded so proud of itself, Toby didn't have the heart to tell it that he had already made his bed this morning. In fact, the only reason it was currently so messy was because they were currently used it as a trampoline. He settled on clearing his throat awkwardly.

"Are you coming to bed?" one asked. Then waved its hands excitedly. "Come, come! We'll read you
a bedtime story!" "Uh, no... no thank you," Toby said slowly, feeling quite out of depth. "I'm just going to..." he looked around awkwardly.

"Sleep!" the house elf commanded. "I want to read Toby a bedtime story."

"Bedtime story!" the other sang. They were obviously very excited.

Toby wasn't even going to ask how they knew his name.

Watching them jump around, squealing with happiness, Toby couldn't help but think that they weren't really as ugly as he had first thought they were. Actually, now that he looked at them more carefully, they were really quite cute.

"Please?" one begged, turning large, bulging eyes in his direction. "I'll read Lady's story!

"Okay, okay," Toby finally agreed, breaking out into a full smile when they threw their hands into the air and cheered. "Let me just get ready for bed first, okay?" They didn't answer him. Instead, they watched carefully, large eyes never missing a thing as he made his way around the room, picking up various necessities. He watched them from the corner of his eyes, wondering what he had gotten himself involved in this time. Feeling their stare on his back, he decided to change in the bathroom. No matter how cute they were, their too-large, bulging eyes was seriously putting him off.

A few minutes later, Toby found himself back in his room ready for bed. They fussed about around him, leading him towards the comfort of his bed. One of them had taken it upon itself to fluff out his pillow and shake out his blanket before helping Toby settle down into it. For a moment, Toby felt like a child again. And that he was back home preparing to sleep while Sarah pulled out her favorite collection of fairy tales. On occasions, he remembered that she would read him some of her original works. That was before she became a published author; it was extra special back then.

One of the house elves cleared its throat, summoning a small red book out of thin air. "Okie dokie," it said. "Ready?"

"All ready!" another answered and settled itself down next to Toby's head. It reached over to stroke his head, its touch surprisingly comforting.

The third had already started snoring.

The biggest house elf cleared its throat again. "Chapter one. The white owl," it read. "Nobody saw the owl, white in the moonlight, black against the stars, nobody heard him as he glided over on silent wings of velvet. The owl saw and heard everything."

It was a bit odd, Toby finally decided, being tucked into bed by creatures ugly enough to stare in nightmares—and they were probably starred in his years ago. Sarah had a way with storytelling, she could bring just about anything to life. But these particular creatures were kind, he could tell. Toby had a feeling they were used to children. Bedtime stories and soothing hands, he thought, remembering Sarah.

"He settled in a tree, his claw hooked on a branch, and he stared at the girl in the glade below. The wind moaned, rocking the branch, scudding low clouds across the evening sky," the house elf continued. "It lifted the hair of the girl. The owl was watching her, with his round, dark eyes.

The other house elf—the one that wasn't sleeping—giggled. With the soothing, storytelling tone of one house elf, the soft snores of another, and the little huffs of muffled laughter from a third, Toby felt himself beginning to relax despite the oddity of the situation. It was a bit odd, he realized, feeling almost at home for the first time since he had first left his family behind at Platform Nine and Three-
This kind of feeling—the feeling of home—would never be able to be replicated. The Wizarding World didn't feel like his and despite what Hermione had said, he doubt it would ever be.

Definitely not without Sarah, anyway, Toby thought glumly. He liked fairy tales, he liked stories about dragons and fairies and magic. Maybe not as much as Sarah obviously did but he liked it well enough. But when Sarah—and only Sarah—was the one telling him the stories, they Toby found himself loving it. He found himself wanting to live in a world with tea-drinking worms and finger-biting fairies.

And Sarah used to want this too, he remembered.

His parents always teased Sarah about her lazy Sundays and how she hated baby-sitting him because she wanted to go play dress up in the park and act out plays. Sarah used to dream of living in a world of magic but she gave that up so she could take care of him.

And now...

And now...

"But Sarah," Toby remembered saying. "You love fairy tales."

"Yes," she had agreed. "But that doesn't mean I actually want to live in one."

But she did. Toby knew she did. All those years ago. And Toby couldn't help but think that he may have somehow taken her dreams away from. Because now he was living her dream and she was left with nothing at all.

"Give me the child," Lady said," the house elf read, not noticing the dark turn Toby's thought had taken. "In a voice that was low, but firm with the courage her quest needed. She halted, her hands held out. "Give me the child," she repeated."

If Sarah couldn't be a witch, she could have been an actress. Like her mother. But Toby had taken that away from her too.

"Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered..."

Instead of joining her high school's drama club, instead of attending the acting classes she had always wanted to take, Sarah had been forced to babysit him. Sarah had given up so much for him and now she was an author simply because it was the closest thing she could get to her original dreams.

"...I have fought my way here to the castle beyond the Goblin City..."

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Toby realized that he was only thinking these things because he was homesick. He missed Sarah and her soothing presence, he missed his fathers laugh and his mother's cooking. But even so...

Even so...

"...to take back the child you have stolen..."

That didn't mean it wasn't true. Just because he missed home didn't mean he wasn't the reason why Sarah had abandoned her dreams.

"For my will is as strong as yours... and my kingdom as great..."
The house elf stroking his hair was nearly vibrating with excitement, pulling Toby out of his depressing thoughts. He turned to look at it, brows furrowing in concern.

"My will is as strong as yours." Lady spoke with more intensity now. "And my kingdom as great—"

As if unable to contain itself any longer, the house elf exploded from his seat on Toby's pillow with glee, startling its fellow house elf out from its slumber. It shot up into the air and happily bellowed out, "You have no power over me!"

Chapter End Notes

The story one of the goblins were readings are direct quotes from the beginning of the Labyrinth novel, written by A.C.H. Smith.

Again, I want to thank everyone who reviewed, it really means a lot to me. I've been having a really bad week and your reviews are one of the few things I look forward to.
Toby hit the seat with an audible *plop* and felt the sting deep in his bones. “Ouch,” he muttered halfheartedly and sighed, cradling his head in his arms and groaned. His eyelids were already closing but Toby wasn’t here to sleep. At least, he wasn’t *supposed* to, anyway. Once a week, on Saturday, him and a group of friends would head over to the library to study and do homework together. But what he wouldn’t give for a comfortable pillow right now.

“What’s wrong with you?” Kathie asked worriedly. She ran her fingers through the fine strands of his hair before coming to rest on his forehead, taking his temperature.

Toby groaned, head pounding at the reminder. “House elves,” he managed.

Kathie looked around but everyone else just shrugged. “What?” she finally asked.

“They insisted on reading bedtime stories to me last night,” he elaborated, squeezing his eyes shut against the harsh light. It wasn’t doing much to help ease his headache. “Then they just wouldn’t stop.” First was the girl and the maze. Then something about chickens and some lady’s bras. Which turned out to not be fireproof. And almost as if the night just *wouldn’t* end, they continued on with a guy on a mattress, floating on top of some lake.

Ellis frowned. “Huh,” he said. “Unless they’re cleaning, I didn’t think they get out of the kitchen much.”

Toby’s head immediately snapped up. “Kitchen? They *cook*?” he almost shouted but managed to lower it into a strangled hiss. He remembered one of the house elves in particular—Gip, if he was remembering correctly—had been wearing *underwear* on top of his head.

“Yeah,” Kathie confirmed. “They make all our meals.” She shifted her gaze upwards in thought and remembrance, tapping a lone finger against her cheek. “We have a couple house elves back home but they never *read* me bedtime stories. Neither do the house elves here, actually.” She paused. “Not that I really want them to, though.” She looked at Toby. “They don’t exactly speak properly, do they?”

He blinked, having no idea what she meant. They sounded perfectly fine to him last night. Except for all the *bogging* business, he wasn’t really sure what that was about and was too busy trying to sleep to ask them to elaborate. “They spoke just fine,” he finally answered, and then sleepily pulled out a blank roll of parchment from his bag. *Pencil*, he thought. *I need a pencil*. Shoving his hand back into his bag, he felt around for his writing instrument only to pause when he felt the soft feathers of a quill. *Or a quill*, Toby thought with a sigh.

He dipped his plain quill into Kathie’s open-for-sharing ink jar and then carefully wrote out *Defense Against the Dark Arts* on top of his blank parchment. He paused, blinked, and then added his name. Then the date. Around him, his group of friends were talking in low whispers, their soft voices lulling him back to sleep. At the same time, those same whispers were reminding him that he still had a whole lot of work to finish over the weekend. Shaking himself awake, Toby turned his attention back to his paper. He blinked lazily and scribbled a few key points he knew he wanted to include in his essay. Toby didn’t usually write a rough draft—or even an outline—but seeing that he was halfasleep, he knew it would be a good idea this time around.
As he continued going back and forth between falling asleep and jerking himself awake to write down more important bullet points, Toby found himself zoning into Adrian’s angry muttering further down the table where he sat with the older students. It was strange what he found himself concentrating on in his half-asleep state. The older students’ intense dislike of Professor Umbridge and her teaching style was no real secret, although Toby couldn’t really see why. He supposed DADA was one of those classes that should require a more practical aspect but it didn’t seem all that different from his History of Magic class.

Must be the ‘Muggle’ in me talking, he thought. Before Hogwarts, none of his classes had a practical aspect to it. Besides Physical Education, of course, but that made sense. And labs, but those classes were for the older students and he hadn’t had a chance to take it before finding out he was a wizard. Professor Umbridge’s lecture-style classes reminded him of home but if the older students were more used to a hands-on experience when it came to DADA, Toby could understand why they didn’t like her.

(Although, from what he heard, DADA hadn’t had a professor stay on for longer than a year. He wasn’t sure how anyone got used to any particular style).

“Toby?”

He blinked and looked up. “Hmm?”

Kathie tilted her head in concern. “I said, we’re going outside for a breather before lunch. Want to join us?”

He shook his head and yawned. “Nah, I want to finish up the rough draft to my DADA essay, at least.”

“Should I leave my inkwell with you?” she asked, eyeing the paper. The last few sentences were faded and splotchy as he had forgotten to dip his quill.

He stared down at his paper. Where’s a pencil when I need one? he wondered and shook his head, both to answer Kathie’s question and to wake himself up. “No,” he told her. “It’s all right. I need to do some reading before I can really continue my essay anyway.”

She nodded and Toby could hear the sounds of his friends packing up their books and other study materials as he reached back down into his bag to pull out his DADA text. It was a thin little thing, unlike all his other textbooks, which were all well over five hundred pages long. His DADA book was thin and practical, even if the words were swarming together right now.

Without the low whispers and soft noises from his friends, Toby felt his lids grow heavier and heavier until he sighed and gave in. He rested his head on his textbook (which, unfortunately, didn’t make a good pillow) and thought, Just a couple minutes. I’ll rest my eyes for just a couple minutes.

He fell asleep almost instantly.

He dreamed of his father’s aftershave, his mother’s cologne, and the smell of Sarah’s house, which, for some reason, usually smelled of chickens. And not cooked ones either. Toby felt like he could almost reach out and grab a hold of his father’s—

“Mister Williams!”

He was immediately startled awake by the screeching hiss of Madam Pince. He didn’t even know such a sound was possible. The angry librarian slammed her hands onto the tabletop and leaned down towards him, effectively wiping away any lingering sleepiness from him. “Um—” he began.
“How dare you?” she hissed, leaning closer still until Toby could feel her breath on his face. He thought about all the people that had been tripping around him recently (no matter how graceful they were known to be) and prayed that Madam Pince did not meet the same fate. “Falling asleep in my library! Drooling on my books!” she ranted.

Toby looked down and saw that he had, indeed, drooled a bit on the DADA textbook. He wondered if it was worth his life to point out that it was his book that he had drooled on. She whipped out her wand and for a single, horrifying moment, Toby thought she was going to hex him. But she only jabbed it at the book, clearing away his drool stain with a nonverbal cleaning charm. He cleared his throat in a hopeful manner. “Um, actually—” he tried again.

“Out!” Madam Pince screeched. “Get out!”

He didn’t need to be told twice.

Shoving everything into his bag—including his textbook, thank you very much—Toby power walked away from the furious librarian. He could appreciate her obvious love for books—really! He could! His sister was an author, for crying out loud—but sometimes, he felt she took it a bit too far. Weren’t librarians supposed to be helpful? It’s a bit hard to actually be helpful if you’re going to scare away everyone that needs help. Toby couldn’t understand Professor Dumbledore’s hiring process; Madam Pince hated the students, Professor Snape hated everyone, and everyone hated Professor Umbridge, it seemed like. He was sure there were more but Toby wasn’t familiar with all the professors nor their subjects. Oh. And there was Professor Bins. Who was a ghost. Which he thought was rather interesting when he first stepped foot into his classroom but the dead professor was such a bore, History of Magic was more like nap time.

Behind him, Toby thought he heard a familiar-sounding giggle for a moment but it was very quickly replaced by Madam Pince’s surprised yelp. He turned around just in time to see her trip into a nearby bookshelf and watched in horror as various shelves came down onto her. He thought about going over to help out but thought better of it upon hearing her furious shrieks; she was so angry, she was breaking her own “Silence in the library!” rule.

He was not about to stay another second.

Once outside, Toby breathed a sigh of relief and leaned against the cool, stone wall, groaning. If he had been sleepy before, he certainly wasn’t now! Nothing like an angry woman getting your adrenaline going.

“Toby?”

He jumped and turned, but upon seeing Hermione’s familiar brown eyes felt himself relax. “Hi,” he mumbled. Although he hadn’t seen her, she was probably in the library and had saw the whole thing. He could feel his ears burning with embarrassment.

“Are you all right?” she asked kindly.

Rubbing his eyes with the heel of his palms, he groaned again. “I’m fine,” he told her. “I just didn’t sleep much last night, that’s all.”

“Well, it’s Saturday,” Hermione reminded him. “You can work on whatever you have to work on tomorrow.”

He frowned. “I don’t think I’ll have the time. I have readings for Potions and papers for Transfiguration, Charms, and DADA I still have to finish.” Not to mention the letter to his parents he
still had to write.

Hermione smiled and Toby had a feeling that she thought him as a kindred spirit or something like that. He really hoped that wasn’t the case. Unlike Hermione, he didn’t particularly like to study. “Come on,” she said instead, “let’s get you some Awakening Potion.”

Although it was the first time he had heard of such a thing, he had a pretty good idea what it was meant for. “They have that at the nurse’s—I mean—infirmary?”

She shook her head. “Not exactly, but Professor Snape has some.”

Toby blanched.

Toby looked at the phial of translucent blue-green liquid, holding it up to the light for a better view. He could hear a faint buzzing noise that he was sure had everything to do with the Wideye Potion and not because something was actually buzzing. It was his own fault, really; Professor Snape told him five drops but he had just been so tired, he took seven for good measure. And now he couldn’t get rid of the annoying buzzing noise.

It occurred to Toby that he could probably venture back to the dungeons and ask for some sort of antidote but the last thing he wanted was to more or less tell the professor that he hadn’t taken his directions as gospel. Professor Snape would be furious; he was touchy like that.

Looking back at the phial in his hand, Toby wondered if he could bring some home to Sarah. Despite taking more than it was recommended, the potion worked wonders; he felt more awake now than he would have even after a good night’s worth of sleep. It would do well for his sister’s temper whenever deadlines are near. Tea and coffee just aren’t cutting it any longer.

Toby rounded the corner just in time to crash into an unsuspecting warm body and fell down with a startled cry, books and parchment paper spilling out of his schoolbag. The potion phial flew out of his hand and Toby watched in an almost slow-motion type of horror as it hit the ground. Only to fly back up and bounce away a couple times before coming to rest. “Oh, he breathed in relief.

“Unbreakable charms,” he remembered.

“Sorry!” a voice said, reminding Toby that he hadn’t fallen on the floor for no reason. A dark blur flew across his vision as Harry Potter knelt down and began gathering his fallen books and potion phial. “Are you all right?”

Scrambling up to his knees, Toby immediately began helping Harry gather his scattered materials. “Yes! Sorry about that! I was a bit distracted. I wasn’t really watching where I was going.” And: Maybe I should have taken ten drops, he thought. It was barely even midday and he was already looking forward for it to be over.

Harry smiled at him. “It’s fine,” he said kindly. “I was distracted too.”

Toby nodded again, feeling himself relax which was a bit surprising since he hadn’t known he was that tense in the first place. While he was familiar with Hermione, Harry himself was a bit of a mystery. Despite never actively seeking it out, it was hard to avoid the rumors and gossip surrounding the older boy. Toby had tried his hardest not to pay attention but it was hard to unhear what he had already heard about Harry Potter. He was Hermione’s friend—one of Hermione’s best friends if he was observing correctly—and she didn’t seem like the kind of person that would befriend a traitor and liar.
A flash of red caught his eye and Toby looked down where Harry’s hands were helping him stack his scattered parchment papers. His eyes widened. “You’re bleeding!” he gasped. It didn’t seem like a typical wound either, he could just make out the words, *I must not tell*— before Harry snatched his hand away and turned it palms up, words out of sight.

“It’s nothing! Don’t worry about it.”

But Toby wasn’t having any of it. Dropping what paper he had gathered, Toby reached out and snatched Harry’s hand, pulling it over towards him and turned it over.

*I must not tell* lies.

Thin, red words scratched on top of fading pink scars. Same words, similar scars and he knew they must have been scratched on over and over and over again. And they were still bleeding, he noticed. Swallowing hard, Toby bit his lower lip worryingly. Blood quills, he realized, feeling his stomach churn. Knowing that there was a magical pen out there that used the writer’s blood as ink was one thing. *Seeing* it, however, was an entirely different matter altogether.

Harry waited as patiently as he could while Toby observed the fresh, still bleeding wounds. He didn’t particularly want a first year seeing something like this but if it helped keep Toby quiet around Umbridge—especially considering the fact that he’s a Muggleborn—Harry was more than happy to comply. A slight tingle ran through his hand as Toby ran nervous fingers across his knuckles, careful to avoid the actual wounds themselves.

“This is horrible,” Toby choked out. “Why would anyone do something like this?”

Harry stayed silent even though he had a pretty good idea why. Umbridge was a selfish toad, and there really wasn’t much else to it. He could think of a good, long list of other people who would have loved to do something similar—and maybe even far worst—to him. Not that he would mention it to the younger boy in front of him though. Not only would Hermione kill him, Harry remembered how magical he thought Hogwarts was in his first year and didn’t want to shatter that illusion for Toby.

It took a moment for Harry to realize that the tingling sensation in his hand had nothing to do with the wounds from the blood quill and his arm jerked unconsciously in response.

“Wait,” Toby said, tightening his hold on Harry’s hand, thinking he was trying to pull away. He turned towards his bag and used his free hand to rummage through it. “Your friend, Hermione, gave me this amazing salve a while ago when this owl bit me. She said she made it herself, let me see if I can find it.”

But Harry was barely listening. He was too busy staring at his hand, the tingling sensation was now centering around his wounds and he watched as the scratched letters began healing right in front of his very eyes. His earlier scars had already disappeared.

“How did you... How did you do that?” Harry asked, staring at Toby in a sort of awe.

“Me?” Toby gaped. “No, I don’t think that was me!” He quickly shook his head in denial. If he could heal with a simple touch, there would be no need for Hermione’s salve. Or that stupid purple
cast he had three years ago when he accidentally fell off the swings.

Harry opened his mouth to respond but before he could get a single word out, he was interrupted by a cool, glee-filled voice. “Well, well, well, Potter,” the voice sneered from behind Harry. “Look who I just caught out conspiring.”

Toby looked up and felt his shoulders droop at the sight. Oh great, he thought, remembering the older blond’s name. Malfoy. Just what he needed. But a small hope flared up inside him; Malfoy had called out Harry’s name. He had barely even noticed him; maybe the older blond wouldn’t even recognize him without Hel.

Upon hearing the voice, Harry immediately dropped everything he had helped pick up mere seconds ago and stood up, and at the same time, spinning around to face the newcomer. Wow, Toby thought, watching with wide eyes. What reflexes! He had heard rumors that Harry was physically fit—he was a member of Gryffindor’s... football on broomsticks... team... thing, after all—but this was the first time seeing him in action.

(He was in the infirmary with the flu during Gryffindor’s first football on broomsticks match).

(And then promptly missed the second when he got lost in some weird never before seen corner of the castle).

Following Harry’s lead, Toby placed his books back onto the ground in a neat pile and stood up. Slowly. Carefully. The last thing he wanted, was Malfoy’s attention directed towards him.

“Malfoy!” Harry growled out, expression darkening.

The blond sneered. “Five points for attitude, Potter.” Harry gaped. “You can’t take points from Gryffindor!” “Not if you’re part of Umbridge’s new Inquisitorial Squad,” Malfoy replied, smirking. “Which I’m part of,” he added necessarily. “So, yes. I can take points off Gryffindor.”

Toby blinked. “That’s hardly fair,” he muttered, mostly to himself. He had completely forgotten that the Slytherin was a prefect. What an awful abuse of position.

Unfortunately, the abandoned corridor did nothing to help cover up Toby’s soft whisper and both older students heard him. Steel gray eyes immediately turned towards him and Toby shrunk backwards despite himself. Stand up for yourself! Sarah’s voice urged him. It’s better than just letting someone push you around. But as much as he wanted to do that—as much as he wanted to listen to his sister and make her proud—it was kind of hard to do with that sort of glare directed towards him. Verbal confrontations were easy but that glare indicated the older blond was looking for the more physical kind. He shuffled to the side, instead, hoping to use Harry’s larger body to hide behind.

“Another Mudblood, Potter?” Malfoy asked, his voice oozing with distaste and Harry immediately tensed at his words. “You always seem to—” And then, suddenly, almost like he was shoved from behind, Malfoy jerked forward, stumbled, and then fell to the ground. His chin smacked hard against the stone with a sickening crack. Malfoy gave off a startled yelp and Toby watched in horror as blood sprayed out of his mouth.

Harry jumped in shock and together, both he and Toby watched with wide eyes as Malfoy groaned in pain. Toby used to be an active kid. Honestly. But he had tripped down the stairs once and although it hadn’t been anything serious, his mother’s words when she scolded him had scarred him for life.
“Just be glad you didn’t bite off your tongue, Tobias!”

Toby didn’t think that was actually possible but judging by the amount of blood currently dripping out of Malfoy’s mouth, he sincerely hoped the older boy’s tongue remained intact. He took a couple hesitant steps forward and knelt down. “Salve?” he offered carefully, picking up the abandoned container he had meant to use on Harry earlier.

“Keep your dirty remedies to yourself, Mudblood!” Malfoy spat, knocking his hand away before struggling to stand up. Toby watched as the salve cracked against the hard floor and sighed. He guessed there was no *Unbreakable Charm* on that particular container then.

Malfoy finally managed to push himself onto his feet but was apparently still very dizzy. His knees buckled underneath him and he dangerous swayed in his spot, tipping forward. For a second, Toby was afraid the blond was going to fall on top of him but Harry managed to lurch forward just in time, keeping him steady.

“Potter! Get your hands—”

“Shut up!” Harry immediately responded before turning his attention towards Toby. “Toby, I’m going to bring this idi—” He cleared his throat and tried again. “—Malfoy to the hospital wing. Do you think you can clean this up by yourself?”

Toby nodded.

He watched with wide eyes as the two fifth years stumbled their way further down the corridors. They obviously didn’t get along. Both of them were trying to make their way to the hospital wing without actually touching each other. Since Malfoy was probably seeing double or something equally as worrying, his resistance to Harry’s reluctantly helping hand was making the process twice as hard and long.

*He should have just taken the salve,* Toby thought, looking down to pick up his things again. He blinked, brows furrowing as he stared at the neat pile of his schoolbooks and parchment papers. Toby could have sworn Harry had scattered them all over the floor when Malfoy first appeared.

And the blood, he noticed, staring at the floor in awe. Malfoy’s blood, which had been sprayed all across the floor had completely disappeared, as if absorbed by the very castle itself. *This place is so cool!*

Shaking his head, he stuffed everything back into his bag and swung it over his shoulder as he got up. *I should probably write to mom and dad first,* he said to himself as he began making his way back to Hufflepuff Basement. *And I should probably get another salve from Hermione.*

He paused at the thought, Malfoy’s cold voice suddenly seeping back.

“Keep your dirty remedies to yourself, Mudblood!”

Toby pulled his lower lip into his mouth and rolled it between his teeth. The word didn’t actually mean anything to him but it obviously meant something to Harry. He remembered Harry’s stiff form and Toby probably wouldn’t have thought anything of it except—

“It’s because you’re Muggleborn... Malfoy isn’t a big fan of Muggleborns.”

Did it make a difference whether someone had magical parents or not? Was it because Malfoy felt that Toby—and other Muggleborns—shouldn’t have magic? *Can’t disagree with you there,* he thought. Although, if anyone should have magic, it should be Sarah. Her stories would put the entire
Wizarding World to shame.

But still...

“Another Mudblood, Potter?”

He spun around, and instead of heading back to his dorm, made his way back towards Professor Snape’s classroom. Upon reaching the large—and intimidating—double doors to the Potion’s classroom, Toby hesitated and swallowed hard. He had only been gone a couple minutes and since he hadn’t encountered Hermione anywhere in the halls, it meant she was still in there.

He hoped.

Knocking timidly, but unsure if he would have heard anyone telling him to enter through the thick doors anyway, Toby opened it and poked his head in.

“Mister Williams,” Professor Snape drawled. “I could have sworn you just left.”

“Sorry, sir,” he mumbled, spotting Hermione looking up from a simmering cauldron with no small amount of relief. But first things first... He looked back at Professor Snape and twisted his lips upwards in his best innocent smile. Puppy eyes included. “I was wondering if I could ask Hermione a question?”

Professor Snape scowled but didn’t say anything, Seeing that he wasn’t being kicked out, Toby smiled gratefully and stepped into the cool dungeon classroom.

“What’s wrong, Toby?” Hermione asked, concerned. Toby’s lips eased into a real smile. She reminded him of Sarah with her obvious concern but knew that it was most likely due to her prefect status. Unlike Malfoy. He shuddered at the reminder but hoped that him and Harry made it to the hospital wing by now. “It’s nothing serious,” he answered, reassuring her. “I just have a question, that’s all.”

Hermione raised her eyebrows, waiting patiently.

Then, looking straight into whiskey-brown eyes, he asked, “Hermione, what’s a Mudblood?”

Chapter End Notes

I don’t know if you guys can tell, but I am still in the progress of actually introducing you to this fic and its upcoming conflict. The fact that I’m attempting to combine two different worlds into one makes this process even harder. That being said, I know a lot of you are excited for Sarah and Jareth to make their appearances in the Wizarding World (and in each other’s lives) but please be patient with me!
Sorry for the long wait but it’s been a stressful couple of months for me and unfortunately, it will continue to be so for a while. But your reviews are what keeps me going so thank you for continuing to support me.

She woke up in a dead land.

Bare branches of brown-gray trees swayed in the cool wind and Sarah watched as its flickering shadows played across the uneven ground of dirt and dead vegetation. She sat up slowly and looked around, taking in the howl of the wind but nothing else. There were no chirping of crickets, call of crows, or anything that indicated life; it really was a dead land.

Sarah stood up slowly and carefully before looking around again, her green eyes taking in every detail of the dead forest. The view reminded her strangely of winter but without its snow-white beauty and holiday cheer. A sense of dread washed through her and Sarah pressed a hand into her chest, trying to calm her pounding heart. There was something wrong with this place. Something very, very wrong.

_Breathe_, she told herself.

Breathe.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Slow and steady.

_Breathe._

Taking another deep breath, and another, Sarah straightened up and place her free hand on a nearby tree to further steady herself. She blinked. The tree bark was warm underneath her touch and it took a moment for her to realize that it wasn’t the tree bark that was heating up but her own hand if its unnatural glow was anything to go by. Sarah watched with wide eyes as she brown-gray bark began to flush with a healthy color.

“Oh!” she gasped, looking down at her feet. Thin wisps of green grass grew before her very eyes, curling around her bare feet and tickling her legs. She giggled at the sensation and took a step, watching life burst forth from the dead earth as naked skin touched the cool dirt.

The wind howled again and threw both her hair and virgin-white dress up and around her, whipping it against her form. Surprisingly, she didn’t feel cold despite her lack of appropriate clothing and the dark gray skies overhead. It was a rather depressing sight; monochrome colors, gray skies, and a dead forest but Sarah didn’t mind. Instead, she laughed out loud and spun around into the dead, gray forest.
A step.

A leap.

A burst of life.

Her skin tingled as if the very air was made up of magic. Invisible, electrifying sparks danced up and down her arms which were held up and away from her body as she twirled around in the forest. Sarah felt a giddy sort of happiness thrumming throughout her body and it made her feel 

*fifteen* again —she wanted to sing, she wanted to dance, she wanted to *dream* again. Nimble feet followed through an elaborated series of steps from an ancient dance she didn’t know she knew.

Life was blooming underneath her very touch and despite knowing this was a dream, Sarah never wanted it to kind. *This* was what she wanted to do. As an author, she had been told many times that she had the ability to breathe life into her words. But what was that compared to actually breathing life into the world around her? The foggy haze of the dream seemed to increase with each passing second so Sarah closed her eyes and moved again.

A step.

A leap.

The dance of life.

It was only when she heard the chirping of a group of songbirds did Sarah finally come to a stop, her body freezing and reality rushing into her like an unwanted surprise. Breathing hard, Sarah took a moment to look around, taking in her handiwork. And despite knowing that it was her doing, she could not help but be surprised.

What was once a dead wasteland was now bursting with life. Branches bore full, lush leaves which swayed in the gentle breeze; contrasting against the earlier howling wind. All around her, she could hear the sounds of life: critters, birds, and even small rodents. After a moment, she realized that not only could she hear them, she could *feel* them. She could feel the squirrels chasing each other through the branches, the worms digging their way deeper into the earth; Sarah could feel life itself and it *terrified* her.

Toes digging into the soft green grass and hands clutching tight against her chest, Sarah forced herself to take a deep, calming breath.

**Breathe.**

**Inhale.**

**Exhale.**

Slow and steady.

Still breathing deeply and slowly, Sarah looked up again and saw a brief flash of multi-colored shimmer before her vision swarmed. And she could feel herself fading, fading, fading. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she was reminded of shattering crystal dreams and the subtle taste of peaches.

*Say my name, precious,* a voice whispered. *Say my name.*

Sarah woke up with a gasp; wide terrified eyes darting around until she took in the familiarity of her room. With an angry groan, she threw her arms up above her and stretched. “Why can’t you just
leave me alone?” she asked. It was mainly a rhetorical question to herself but wouldn’t be surprised if the Goblin King could also hear it. “And I was having such a good dream too!” she whined. But while she could still remember the green of the forest and the blue of the sky, details of her dreams were fading fast and Sarah wanted nothing to do but to go back to bed and lose herself into the haze of her dreamworld.

The sudden, loud sound of shattering plates made her eyes snap open again. Sarah sat up on her bed with another groan. “Goblins!” she hollered, hearing panicked gibbering and loud squeals in response. With an annoyed grumble, she kicked at her blankets, trying to untangle them from her legs only to find herself rolling off the bed with a startled squeak.

By the time Sarah finally managed to pick herself off the ground and go through her morning rituals, Sarah was half-worried about the state of her kitchen. Even so, it was a good thing her companions were goblins; despite them breaking everything, they had the ability to fix it all with a snap of their fingers. At least that’s what Sarah’s hoping was going on instead of stealing lookalikes from other people.

“Morning,” she greeted as she cautiously stepped into her kitchen, sharp eyes taking in their too-wide grins and her missing plates. She sighed. “Whatever you guys broke, I want it fixed by tomorrow morning. I have to entertain my manager for dinner tomorrow.” He told her he wanted to bond but that really just meant he was going to be hounding her about the latest chapter for her upcoming novel. Again.

“You got it, Lady!” they replied swiftly. Sarah pulled out a carton of milk and checked over the expiration date, nose wrinkling slightly. She poured herself a glass and eyed the goblins for a moment, noticing for the first time that there was an unfamiliar face in the group. “Why, hello there,” she greeted, shoving the carton back into the refrigerator. “What’s your name?”

The small goblin batted its eyelashes and grinned. “Hi! I’m new! I don’t have a name yet.”

She blinked. “Okay... um... will... will, er, Kingy give you a name soon?”

The goblin shrugged, not the least bit worried. “Kingy says I can choose my name!”

She realized just then that it was the first time she really wondered how her goblin friends acquired their names in the first place. With names like Boop, Pop, and Dumdum, she wondered if the Goblin King was running out of names for his subjects. Instead of voicing her thoughts, however, she just went along with it, and nodded as if it was the most natural thing in the world. “Of course, what would you like to be called then?”

Eyeing the plate of cookies Sarah had left out overnight, which were suspiciously missing a few pieces, the small goblin squealed, “Cookie!”

She blinked again. “Cookie,” she repeated in a faint voice. “You want to be called Cookie?”

It nodded happily.

“Why Cookie?” she asked, half afraid of the answer.

“Because cookies are tasty,” it replied as if it was obvious.

“Okay,” she said slowly. “Just don’t... just don’t try to eat yourself, all right?” Normally, it wasn’t something anyone would be concerned with but judging by the way the small goblin had what appeared to be a bite mark on its arm, Sarah thought it was better to be safe than sorry.
It actually looked dejected at her words. “Okay, Lady.”

Sarah stared for another moment before finally nodding. Right, she thought. I should make myself breakfast now. As she turned around, a movement caught her eye and she looked up only to yelp in alarm.

“Damn it,” Sarah swore, eyeing the large she-owl perched just outside her window warily. She still couldn’t get over the fact that her brother—her young, innocent Toby—had bought the ugliest most vicious-looking owl she had ever seen. Even after she had attempted to sway his attention towards some cute kittens. Instead, Toby had taken one look at the large, frightening she-owl and fell in love. Even the professor accompanying them was slightly hesitant.

“Hello, Hel,” Sarah greeted as she pushed open the window. She reached out and untied Toby’s letter from the owl’s foot, carefully minding the she-owl’s long, sharp claws. “Would you like to come in?” she asked.

Helreginn made an odd squawking sound and hopped towards her.

“Wait, wait, wait!” Sarah cried out. “I’ll open the door for you!”

She was promptly ignored by the she-owl. Thankfully, Helreginn’s size was mostly made up of feathers and the she-owl was able to successfully squeeze itself through the small opening.

“Aw crap,” Sarah grumbled, placing Toby’s letter down onto the table and spitting out a stray feather. “You got feathers everywhere,” she scolded the uncaring owl. “Again.” Out of the corner of her eyes, she could see a goblin reach out, snatching a feather out of the air and stuffing it into her mouth.

“Tasty,” the goblin sighed happily, eyeing the large owl.

Helreginn stared back. And if the goblins didn’t know better—which they didn’t—they were pretty sure the she-owl just licked her beak. Squealing, the goblins jumped off Sarah’s dining table, making a mad dash towards the safety of the young woman’s closet.

“Guys?” Sarah called out, amused.

“Gotta run, Lady,” they reported. “Goblins are not food!”

Sarah stared at Helreginn for a moment before shaking her head in amusement. “I can’t believe you managed to scare them away,” she murmured, pulling out couple clumps of raw pork she had defrosted late last night. Helreginn immediately nipped at the clumps of meat, also managing to catch her fingers when they got in the way. “Ouch!” Sarah cried out, looking up and glaring but Helreginn was too busy swallowing the pork to care.

With a sigh, Sarah rinsed her hands and took a seat at her small dining table. She wiggled slightly in her seat, making herself comfortable before turning her attention back towards Toby’s letter.

Sarah, it began.

You really need to stop reading so fast! I think Adrian is actually running out of books to buy for you. Did you know that there are rules about buying magical books for people without magic? Like, I’m not allowed to send you any books that can talk, scream, spit fire, or eat people. That sort of thing. I can only buy you books that can passed off as “fictional” books to other non-magical people—Muggles, I keep forgetting; I don’t think I’ll ever get used to Wizarding words.
Sarah smiled, barely noticing Helreginn poking her too-big head into the much smaller bowl of defrosted pork. Pushing the bowl further away from the she-owl, Sarah closed her eyes and tried to picture the world Toby had painted for her with his words. From her previous and only visit to the Wizarding World, Sarah had already experienced the books Toby was talking about but skimming through the rest of the letter, even her vivid imagination paled in comparison to the world Toby was currently living in.

_Magic,_ she thought, feeling something that could very possibly be envy twist deep in her gut.

Despite her firm belief that she really had seen enough magic to last her a lifetime, Sarah couldn’t help but find herself wishing that she could see the things in Toby’s letter in person. Moving portraits, talking books, and disappearing doors. While genuinely happy for Toby, Sarah knew her whole heart wasn’t in it. And Toby deserved more than half-hearted well wishes. _Magic,_ she thought again and wondered at infinite possibilities.

“Cookie!” a high-pitched voice squealed out, interrupting Sarah’s thoughts. “Lady says no eating yourself!” Then, louder: “Lady! Help!”

Sarah sighed. _What the hell am I thinking?_ she wondered. _I can barely handle a handful of goblins, let alone an entire world of magic._

“What’s a Mudblood?”

The tense silence following his question had Toby wishing he had chosen to head back to his dormitory rather than let his curiosity get the better of him. Sarah had always told him his mouth would get him in trouble one day; he just didn’t expect it to happen in the presence of the world’s most terrifying professor. Toby had never seen Professor Snape’s back so rigid before and he thought he had already seen him at his worst when one of his classmates almost killed everyone after misreading instructions; black eyes blazing, low voice hissing, spittle flying, Toby didn’t think worse was possible.

He stiffened, preparing himself for worse anyway.

Thankfully, however, it was Hermione who spoke up. “Where did you hear that word?”

Toby swallowed hard, mentally wrecking his brain for an explanation. “Uh, well, never mind,” he finally said only to immediately wince at how pathetic he sounded. Eyes darting around nervously, he tried again. “Anyway, do you have more of that salve you made?”


And with that, she spun around and made her way towards one of the storage rooms, effectively leaving him alone with Professor Snape. Who was _still_ staring at him through narrowed eyes. Toby swallowed again and rocked back onto his heels, looking everywhere but in his professor’s direction. He could feel the fine hair on his arms standing up and could only lick his lips nervously in response. _I really should have just left for the dorms!_

“What happened to the other one I gave you?” Hermione asked as she walked back out, a small container of salve in her hands.

Toby paused, considering telling her a plant ate it. It would be plausible, he thought, after all, all the plants in _Herbology_ seemed to want to eat him. Even ones that aren’t carnivorous. “I tripped,” he
answered instead, seeing that Hermione seemed to be friends with all the professors. Including ones as terrifying as Professor Snape. The last thing he needed was her talking to Professor Sprout and finding out his lies. “And it... broke.”

Hermione gave him a look. “You trip a lot, don’t you?” she asked.

And it was true. Toby was pretty clumsy, but who could blame him? Staircases move at Hogwarts! Besides, it wasn’t as if he actually tripped or anything, he just stumbled a lot. So far, he actually hadn’t ever fallen on his face. Not like Malfoy had, anyway. Toby winced at the memory and then paused. He had joked about it earlier but people do seem to always be tripping around him, don’t they?

“Toby?”

He startled and looked up. “Yeah?”

“Where did you hear that word?” Hermione asked again.

Toby twitched. Professor Snape was extremely tense, knuckles white from gripping his stirring rod so tightly. He licked his lips, wondering if Hermione had noticed and if so, did she realize she was practically signing his death warrant?

Hermione cleared her throat. “Did someone... did someone call you that, Toby?”

“No!” Toby automatically denied; the last thing he needed was Malfoy hating him for other reasons than just his owl. “I read it in a book somewhere.”

Hermione raised her eyebrows and gave him a flat look. “Toby...”

Realizing that Hermione knew he was lying, Toby pulled out his final trick. “I only heard it in passing,” he corrected. “And I just got curious. But no one called me it. Really!” He stared up at her with wide eyes, blinking them rapidly. Thankfully, the confused, almost fearful light in them made Hermione believe him. Mostly. He was more than a little thankful that Hermione wasn’t Sarah—no matter how much he might have wished so—or she would have seen through his act in an instant.

“Fine,” Hermione finally allowed, deflating, but still looking troubled.

“Is it really that bad of a word?” Toby asked before he could stop himself, curiosity once again getting the best of him.

Professor Snape tensed up again. Toby hadn’t even realized the professor had managed to relax in the first place.

“It’s a derogatory term for Muggleborns,” Hermione told him. “Because of recent... issues right now, you’ll probably hear it more often but don’t let it get to you.”

Toby nodded, distractedly, his father’s voice echoed through his mind.

“Am I correct to assume that this... war of yours has something to do with prejudice against Muggleborns?”

He had been so excited when he first found out he was a wizard, he hadn’t even realized the implication of what it would mean—or Sarah’s questions. There was a war against Muggleborns. Against Mudbloods. Toby grimaced; no wonder his sister had been hesitant in allowing him to come to Hogwarts. Especially when people like Draco Malfoy attended the school and still held onto the
belief that Muggleborns were lesser people.

Toby supposed they were. After all, it was hard not to be inferior if you were simply told you had magic, then taken around to buy necessities before finally being abandoned in the school as if you should already know everything about the Wizarding world. Shouldn’t there be some sort of cultural explanation class for Muggleborns or something? After all, when his family had first visited London, they attended a culture class and learned what not to do in the country. Just because something was okay back in the States didn’t mean it would be received similarly in London.

“Absolutely disrespectful!” his father had said once, watching an American couple break what appeared to be every single what-not-to-do rule they had learned. “This is why it should be mandatory to take culture classes whenever you travel somewhere. Or you’ll just end up looking like a bumbling idiot.”

Toby supposed he looked like quite the bumbling idiot in Malfoy’s eyes.

And now there was a war because people like Malfoy didn’t like disrespectful, bumbling idiots and people like Toby probably didn’t know any better. But Sarah let him attend anyway, Toby suddenly realized with a start. Sarah had left the original meeting with Professor Dumbledore ready to refuse to let Toby attend Hogwarts. Then she walked back down the same day with a changed mind. Toby knew Sarah was extremely protective of him. Why would she let him go into a world on the brink of war? Why would she—

“He’ll be fine,” Sarah had told their father. “Toby’s protected.”

She—

“Sarah always had an interest in fairy tales and mythology. I daresay she knows just as much as you do.”

She—

Sarah knows magic,” Toby remembered himself saying.

And it was true. From elves to faeries to sprites, Sarah knew them all. She knew the stories, she wrote the stories, and sometimes, her storytelling was so realistic, Toby wondered if she lived the stories in her dreams at night. As unfamiliar and out-of-place he felt in the Wizarding World, there was a familiarity about it Toby knew could only come from Sarah’s storytelling. She had already eased him into the world of magic long before anyone even realized he was a wizard.

Distantly, Toby noted that Hermione was still talking. “Toby,” she said, “if anyone ever calls you a Mudblood, you can tell me or a professor, all right?”

But Toby wasn’t really listening. He was distracted; he was at the brink of discovering something. Sarah who had always loved magic. Sarah who hadn’t been the least bit surprised when a strange man in strange clothing came and announced he was a wizard. “Oh, it’s fine,” Toby said, his words hesitant with distraction. “I didn’t grow up here so the word doesn’t really mean anything to me.”

Hermione blinked, surprised. But pleasantly so.

Toby, on the other hand, was still distracted with thoughts of Sarah. He knew that Sarah wasn’t a witch, that much was obvious. And she knew magic, that much was also obvious. But was it possible that Sarah did more than just know magic? He had noticed the stares and had heard the whispers. From her youthful looks to her vivid imagination to her sometimes odd commentary, Sarah was usually the subject of talk wherever she went.
“Don’t mess with that kid,” his old classmates would whisper. “Or you’ll be messing with his sister and she’s not the forgiving type. I hear she can make people disappear.”

Or:

“She’s twenty-five, I hear! She either went under the knife or sold her soul to the devil.”

And even one of the reviews of her novel: “Sarah William’s novels are so realistic, one sometimes find themselves wondering whether or not she’s actually a faerie queen in disguise. Her words opens a portal to a world she had obviously lived in before…”

Was there any truth to them?

“Toby?”

He startled again, head snapping up and eyes refocusing. “Sorry?” he said. “I was just thinking.”

Hermione gave him a strange look.

“He’ll be fine,” Sarah’s words continuing to haunt him. “Toby’s protected.”

Protected.

Sarah had said that he was protected. She allowed him to attend despite her initial refusal because he was protected. By what? By whom? By Sarah? But how?

“Anyway,” he said, turning his attention back towards Hermione. “Thank you for the salve. I’ll take extra care of this one, I promise.” And before Hermione could respond, before she could bring up the Mudblood subject again, Toby spun around, making his way towards the door, his mind continued to swarm with possibilities.

Sarah.

Hermione watched him leave with a soft sigh. From his unusually quiet and distracted demeanor, she wondered if he was really okay with the word. She remembered the first time she had been called a Mudblood; despite also not growing up in the Wizarding World, the insult had hurt her as deeply as any physical wound.

With a shake of her head, she turned back around. “Sorry about that, professor,” she said.

Professor Snape gave a sharp, curt nod, fists clenching and relaxing repetitively for a moment. She noticed that he seemed to be thinking about something, but whatever it was didn’t seem as important as teaching her necessary Potions for the Order. Hermione watched as he inhaled deeply, dark eyes flashing for a moment before he lifted his head to face her. “Shall we continue on with the Wolfsbane?” he asked.

Hermione smiled and nodded enthusiastically, thoughts of Toby and memories of Mudblood fading with the possibility of new knowledge.
Fields of Gold

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hoggle was seriously considering throwing himself into the bog just to put himself out of misery. Jareth—King Jareth, he reminded himself—was throwing yet another temper tantrum. He remembered a time when he used to be afraid of Jareth. He remembered a time when the mere mention of the Goblin King struck fear into his very heart. He remembered the shuddering, the cold sweats, the nightmares.

When did that all change?

What the hell happened?

Sarah, he thought. Sarah happened.

“It’s been months since she had been reintroduced to magic,” Jareth ranted, kicking another goblin. Hoggle watched with half-lidded eyes as the little twits giggled and lined up, waiting for their own turn to be kicked. He wondered if he should remind the angry king that magic had never actually left Sarah in the first place. After all, besides the numerous goblins following her around, she made sure to contact her other friends of the Labyrinth at least once a week. “And her magic has been getting stronger and stronger!” Jareth continued. “I can feel it! Why hasn’t she said my name?” He spun around, “Hippins!”

Hoggle looked up, “Yes?” he asked, trying to keep the boredom out of his voice. Just because Jareth no longer scared him, didn’t mean he wanted to be named Prince of the Bog of Eternal Stench or anything like that. All he wanted to do was go out and spray some faeries.

“When was the last time you talked to her?”

Hoggle felt himself pale. “Er...” he mumbled something.

Mismatch eyes narrowed dangerously. “What was that?”

“‘tis morning...” Hoggle admitted.

“Exactly!” the Goblin King cried out. “And you slipped my name into the conversation, yes?”

This time, unable to help himself, Hoggle rolled his eyes. “’course I did.” It wasn’t like he could forget; Jareth had taken it upon himself to remind Hoggle his every waking moment. If he had to listen to the Goblin King say, “Remember to slip my name in there!” one more time, he really was going to throw himself into the bog and name himself Prince of the Bog of Eternal Stench.

Jareth growled, the sound vibrating throughout the throne room, his powers amplifying its effects and making the very earth tremble with it. Hoggle had been very impressed and terrified the first time Jareth did it. And the second. And even the fifth, actually. But it got kind of boring after number seven. “Then. Why. Hasn’t. She. Called. My. Name?” Jareth ranted, emphasizing each word with a kick, sending goblins sailing out the window, one right after the other.

Hoggle sighed.

Suddenly, as if someone had flipped a switch, all the anger and frustration left Jareth’s body, leaving
him looking depressed instead. He threw himself onto his throne and sighed. “Even Little Jareth is kinder to me,” he grumbled, summoning his favorite riding crop into his hand with a half-hearted flick.

“Little Jareth?” Hoggle repeated, confused. Then: “At least call him by his actual name!”

“Even if he does only try and feed me toast,” Jareth continued, sniffing at the reminder. He was easily ignoring Hoggle as he does with all his goblins most of the time. “How undignifying. I bet he gets that cruelty from his sister.” He sighed again, gazing sadly out his window, barely noticing a small goblin trying to climb back through it.

It was Hoggle’s turn to sigh but he managed to swallow it back. *Here we go again,* he thought. After the tantrum usually came the pout.

Jareth opened his free hand, summoning his crystals and absentmindedly twirling them around skilled fingers. In the distance, he could see the beginnings of greenery where there had been the dead Faeries’ Rainbow Forest before. *Like the touch of spring after a long winter,* he thought, thin lips twitching upwards. *Summer is coming back for the faeries.* Maybe now, they would leave the edge of his Labyrinth alone and Hoggle would be around more often to listen to him talk. He perked up at the idea.

“Kingy!” a goblin called, bouncing into the throne room. “King-King Pointy Ears is here!”

Jareth waved a distracted hand, the small speck of greenery still holding most of his attention. “Bog him,” he dismissed.

“What’s a Mudblood?”

If there was a word Severus could live without ever hearing again, that would be the one.

Even before the incident, he had never been fond of the word. He had seen what it did to Muggleborns; seeing their expression, watching the hurt dull their eyes, practically feeling their trembles, Severus had always found that he could somewhat relate even though the word doesn’t apply to him.

Severus sighed and squeezed his eyes shut, feeling the beginnings of a migraine. He had always know Harry Potter’s arrival to Hogwarts would bring unwanted chaos into his otherwise scheduled lifestyle. He just didn’t think it was going to get worse and worse with each passing year. Considering how bad Potter’s fifth year already was despite the fact that it just began, Severus couldn’t imagine what his sixth and seventh year would bring. But to be fair, he admitted that Potter himself wasn’t quite the headache Umbridge was—even if her presence in Hogwarts was mostly Potter’s fault.

With another sigh, he pulled himself out of his thoughts and left the safety of his chambers before making his way towards the Great Hall for breakfast. His heavy black cloak billowed faithfully behind him with his every step, and the few early-rising students parted for him. Inwardly smirking at the sight, Severus relished in his reputation. For as long as he could remember, he had always been the feared and hated professor at Hogwarts—it had been necessary when he first started out; Severus had been only a couple years older than his oldest students, after all. His reputation had made his students fear him—made them hate him—but at a distance.

Ah, he thought. How he wished Potter would share that same ideal.
With an annoyed grunt now that his thoughts were dominated by Potter again, Severus strolled into the Great Hall and made his way to his usual seat. He caught sight of familiar twinkling blue eyes and wondered where Flitwick was; he needed someone to sit between him and Albus. Severus wasn’t sure he had the patience to deal with Albus so early in the morning. Especially not with Williams’ question still echoing in his mind.

“What’s a Mudblood?”

He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to will the image of large green eyes and flaming red hair away but it was no use. He relived the incident every night and remembered it like it was yesterday; he could still feel her shock, her hurt, her hate. Like all other Muggleborns, Lily never liked that word, he knew. But Lily was different, Lily was special.

But not.
Not as different—not as special—as Tobias Williams, apparently.

His eyes opened in a slow, almost lazy manner and he scanned the Hufflepuff table, somehow not surprised to see Williams already up despite the early hour. The First Year was currently fighting over a piece of bacon with an angry-looking barn owl. “Stop it!” the First Year was saying, judging by the shapes his mouth was forming. “That’s too greasy for you! You’re going to get an upset stomach!”

“What’s a Mudblood?” Severus remembered.

But also:

“Oh, it’s fine. I didn’t grow up here so the word doesn’t really mean anything to me.”

Tobias Williams was an enigma. Before yesterday, Severus never really noticed Williams. Besides the obnoxiously large and rather rude she-owl he often hears Draco complain about, there wasn’t anything particularly interesting about the young First Year. Quiet and polite, the boy did his homework, his readings, and was quick to follow instructions so he had never incurred Severus’ wrath—and therefore, his attention.

To Severus’ knowledge, Hogwarts and the Wizarding World tend to be the first place Muggleborns would finally feel like they belonged to. After years of unexplained bursts of magic and the feeling of “not fitting in,” the knowledge of magic and wizards and Hogwarts was almost like coming home. Then, for them to suddenly find out that “home” was full of prejudice ideals and derogatory words like Mudblood, it was like waking up from a blissful dream.

He remembered Lily.

“Oh, it’s fine,” Williams’ young voice continuing to echo in his mind. “I didn’t grow up here so the word doesn’t really mean anything to me.”

It sounded almost like words from a wise man; a good ideal to live by; but Severus knew how unrealistic it was to say something and then to actually mean it. It was easy to say you didn’t care but it was harder to really not let the word affect you. He had personally witnessed what the word Mudblood could do to even the more powerful, independent wizards and witches, Lily only being one of them. But Williams—

Tobias Williams—

“I didn’t grow up here so the word doesn’t really mean anything to me.”
It would if you cared, Severus thought, still staring at the first year. He had a feeling that Williams’ indifference to the word has less to do with him growing up in the Muggle world and more to do with the fact that the Wizarding World was not the First Year’s home. Which was rather strange because people tend to find feelings of home in familiarity, or the feeling of finally fitting in somewhere.

“Severus!” Albus suddenly greeted, his voice bright and cheerful, pulling him from his thoughts. Severus watched from the corner of his eyes as the Headmaster slipped into Flitwick’s usual seat and surpassed a wince. “How does it go with Miss Granger?” Albus asked in a hushed voice.

Severus frowned at him, still slightly distracted by thoughts of Tobias Williams. Miss Granger wasn’t exactly a name he wanted to hear first thing in the morning. Like Mister Weasley, it was usually associated with Mister Potter and that was definitely a name he would rather not hear. At all. It was bad enough the wretched boy had already occupied his thoughts earlier. “Perfectly fine, as well as you know,” he answered instead, filling his mug with strong black coffee. “I instructed her about the Wolfsbane yesterday.”

Albus nodded. “Good, good.” He leaned in and voice dropping even lower, asked, “And do you believe she will be able to brew it alone if you are ever... indisposed?”

Considering that Miss Granger was known as the brightest witch her age since her first year, Severus thought the question was rather pointless. He answered anyway, if only to get Albus off his back. “I will test her next month,” he said, scowling. The evening “advanced tutoring” sessions were seriously taking a toll on his mental health. As if seeing her three times a week for class wasn’t enough, Severus now found himself having to put up with even more questions during their evening sessions.

“I do not doubt her capabilities,” he said, nodding again. “She is, after all, quite bright.”

“Indeed,” Severus drawled.

He looked up from his breakfast then and immediately notice Potter and Granger walking into the Great Hall together, their heads ducked down towards one another, whispering. No doubt they were conspiring again, he thought and wondered where the third member of their trio was. His eyes narrowed when they both looked up, Granger’s lips moving rapidly as she said something to Potter. Despite all his skills, Severus found that he still couldn’t read Granger’s lips; she spoke too fast for him, apparently.

Following their gaze, he was only slightly surprised when he saw that they were not conspiring like he had first thought. Instead, their attention was completely captured by the young First Year he had been thinking of only moments before. Tobias Williams.

“What’s a Mudblood?”

Severus breathed out slowly through his nose, willing his stomach to stop heaving at the mere remembrance of the word. No doubt Granger wanted to confront the First Year about yesterday. Williams had lied to protect the identity of his verbal attacker for reasons Severus did not understand, but Granger was no fool. He turned his gaze and watched as Williams attempted to feed the barn owl bits of his toast.

“I should warn you, Headmaster,” Severus said slowly, eyes never leaving the blond boy, “that Mister Williams visited Miss Granger in my classroom last night.” He kept his voice low, not wanting to catch someone else’s attention. “He brought up a... startling question.”
Albus startled, jerking so suddenly in his seat that Severus tore his gaze away from Williams and towards the aged Headmaster instead. “Mister Williams?” Albus repeated. “Tobias Williams? Visited Miss Granger? Why?”

Severus gave him an odd look and Albus knew why. It was no secret between the two of them that Albus didn’t usually concern himself with other students. Not like this, anyway. And certainly not with anyone other than Harry Potter. But instead on commenting on Albus’ reaction, Severus nodded towards the Gryffindor duo. “Like Mister Williams, Miss Granger is a Muggleborn. He came to question her about a...” He trailed off and swallowed hard, remembering bright green eyes. “...particular word.” Usually Severus wouldn’t bring up such an incident to the Headmaster but with Voldemort’s return and Umbridge’s increasing power, it seemed like the right thing to do.

Albus turned and watched with rising horror as Harry and Hermione began making their way towards Toby. The young First Year’s eyes darted around, looking strangely guilty before nodding and getting up from his seat to follow them out the Great Hall.

“As long as he remains within the walls of Hogwarts, his life will be in no danger,” he had told young Miss Williams. But that would only be the case if he was not acquainted with Harry. And here Albus had thought he wouldn’t need to worry about Toby ever interacting with Harry.

Oh dear, Albus thought. Miss Williams will not be happy.

Hermione rubbed the lingering traces of sleep from her eyes as she made her way down to the Common Room. Shoving a mass lock of fuzzy hair away from her face, she suddenly noticed for the first time that Harry was sitting in one of the couches, running nimble fingers over his knuckles. “Harry?”

He looked up at the sound of her voice. “Oh, morning, Hermione! Ready to go to breakfast?”

She looked around the Common Room but spotted no telltale red hair. “Where’s Ron?” she asked.

“Still sleeping.”

Hermione nodded slowly before she remembered. Snapping her head down to look at Harry’s hand, she hissed, “Harry! Did you have detention with Professor Umbridge again? Let me see it!”

“I’m fine,” he said, but showed her his hand anyway as they both made their way out into the halls.

Looking at her friends pale knuckles, Hermione was happy to see that the only marks on them were old, extremely faded scars from previous detentions. She sighed with relief and reached into her robes to pull out a container of salve. “Here, I created this,” she told him, pressing it into his hand. “It counteracts the Blood Quill’s anti-healing charms.” She sighed again, this time, unhappily. “Unfortunately, it’s not perfected yet. It can’t heal completely but I’ll consult Professor Snape on that.”

Harry nodded, lips quirking upwards into a smile as he stuffed the container into the pockets of his robes. “Thanks,” he murmured.

Hermione frowned, noticing his distraction. “Harry, what’s wrong?”

His smile widened at her question, feeling the familiar feeling of giddiness at Hermione’s obvious worry for him. Being physically almost a year older than him, Hermione had always been the older
sibling figure Harry never had. And since she was obviously years ahead of him in mental maturity, she was almost also like a parent figure. It felt nice to be worried over for once. Giving himself a mental shake, he brought his thoughts back to Hermione’s question. “You know the kid we met in the train?” he asked her. “Toby Williams?”

Hermione blinked slowly. “What about him?”

“I bumped into him last night after my detention with Umbridge.” Hermione frowned again. “What did she make you do?” she asked.

“What lines like usual,” Harry confessed in a low whisper.

Hermione blinked rapidly as she glanced down at his hand, confused.

“Is it possible to heal someone wandlessly,” Harry asked. Then, remembering Toby’s confused and innocent expression, he tried again, “Or to heal someone without meaning to?” He thought back to his own experience with unintentional magic. Even before he found out he was a wizard, things didn’t happen for no reason. Every magical burst from him was because he wanted it; he wanted his hair to grow back, he wanted to escape his old bullies, and while Harry didn’t think Toby wished him harm or anything, he doubted the younger boy thought about healing him.

Quickly realizing that Toby’s meeting with Harry last night had to do with his lack of wounds from Umbridge’s Blood Quills, Hermione said, “Tell me what happened.”

So Harry told her everything because if anyone could make sense of what happened yesterday, it was Hermione. He told her how they had bumped into each other, about Toby's horrified expression when he first noticed the wounds Harry had initially tried hiding from him. He told her how Toby’s touch had sent unfamiliar tingles throughout his hand and before he knew it, the words he had etched into his own skin had healed right before his eyes even as Toby reached for Hermione’s healing salve. And then, in a much quiet voice, Harry told her about Malfoy’s appearance.

Hermione pursed her lips. “Did he call Toby a...”

Harry nodded, watching Hermione’s expression carefully. When Hermione had first been called a Mudblood their second year, she had been so heartbroken despite not initially realizing the meaning behind the word. And now, with Umbridge’s increasing power in Hogwarts, Purebloods like Malfoy were becoming more and more obvious in their prejudice. Not even three months into the school year and Harry had already heard three hisses of “Mudblood” directed towards his fuzzy-haired friend.

She was silent for a moment, thinking about the young, innocent, homesick First Year and wondered why he was trying to protect someone like Draco Malfoy. “Healing magic is similar to Dark Magic,” Hermione said smartly, turning her attention back to the initial question at hand. “You have to mean it. Not to mention, it requires a great deal of magic, concentration, and understanding. I doubt a First Year could do it wandlessly.”

Harry’s brows furrowed and he opened his mouth to speak but Hermione continued on before he could utter a single word. “But Toby is also a Muggleborn.”

“What difference does that make?” Harry asked, still frowning as they rounded a corner into another corridor.

Hermione hummed softly, gathering her thoughts. “Generally,” she began slowly, “Muggleborns have a much easier time learning wandless, nonverbal magic. Wizarding children have parents who
understand and are able to stop bursts of unintentional magic. But since Muggleborns don’t have that, it tends to be easier for us to accomplish wandless, nonverbal magic because we’re already so used to it.”

Harry nodded, that made a lot of sense.

“So I guess it’s entirely possible for Toby to accidentally heal you,” Hermione continued but she wasn’t unsure. While she knew that statistically, Muggleborns tend to master wandless, nonverbal magic faster and easier, she wasn’t sure that was the case with the current situation. Blood Quills were such a big deal because they had anti-healing charms on it. For Toby—a First Year, Muggleborn or not—to bypass that entirely without even realizing it... that was an entirely different situation all together.

She breathed out slowly as they entered the Great Hall, giving herself a mental head shake. “Malfoy didn’t do anything else to Toby, did he?” she asked softly, leaning towards Harry. “He did come to see me for another healing salve last night.”

Harry shook his head. “No, I think that’s just because he broke his original one.” He paused, thinking back to the incident last night before snickering. “If anything, I thought he was the one that did something to Malfoy.”

“What?” Hermione exclaimed, eyes scanning over the Hufflepuff Table to find Toby attempting to feed an owl a piece of toast.

Harry laughed quietly and followed her gaze. “Malfoy tripped, fell right on his face,” he reminded her. “For a second, I really thought Toby was the one who tripped him. Malfoy had just insulted him, after all and he isn’t particularly clumsy.” He shook his head, still staring at Toby. “But then I saw Toby’s expression; the kid was horrified.”

They both stared at the blond First Year for a moment. “Do you think we should talk to Toby?” Hermione asked. “Warn him about Malfoy, I mean; he really isn’t the kind of person a First Year should make him an enemy out of. I mean, I hear Malfoy already doesn’t like Hel.”

Harry blinked, “Who?”

“Hel,” she repeated. “Helreginn. Toby’s owl.”

“What?”

Hermione shook her head. “Never mind,” she said, reaching down to clasp Harry’s hand in her own before pulling him with her towards Toby’s direction. “Come on.”

They navigated their way through their fellow early morning risers before stopping in front of Toby and a couple of his First Year friends. Harry had to fight to urge to shuffle behind Hermione when he noticed the looks of awe on their faces. It’s been a while since someone looked at him like that; after the entire Cedric and “Voldemort is back!” incident, people tend to glare hatefully or look at him with suspicion.

“Hey Toby,” Hermione greeted.

Toby’s head snapped up, facial muscles twisting in horror as he recognized them. He pulled away from the owl and leaned back into his seat before fully tilting his head up to look at them. “Hello Hermione,” he muttered. “Harry.” No doubt he realized that Harry must have told Hermione about yesterday’s incident, which completely contradicted the story he had told her.
“Do you think we can talk privately for a moment?” Hermione asked lightly.

He swallowed hard, eyes darting from Hermione to Harry and back again. “Sure,” he hesitantly answered. As Toby got up from his seat, his eyes darted back to his friends but they only stared up at him in a sort of awe that most definitely wasn’t helpful. He gave a mental sigh and followed the two older students out the Great Hall. “I’m not in trouble, am I?” he asked.

Hermione smiled. “No, of course not,” she assured him and then glanced at Harry for a quick moment. “But Harry did tell me that you met Malfoy last night. Did you ever meet him before that?”

Toby thought back to the owl incident. “No, not really.”

The two Gryffindors exchanged glances. Not only had Hermione heard rumors about Malfoy’s hatred for Toby’s she-owl but she knew that Toby had lied about the Mudblood incident. She didn’t know if Toby was actually trying to protect the Slytherin or if he just didn’t want to cause unnecessary drama but she felt the need to warn him anyway. “Toby,” she said in a low, serious voice. “I want you to be able to come to me if someone treats you unkindly.” She swallowed hard. “And if anyone ever calls you a... Mudblood again, I want you to let me know.” Because words don’t always stay words, she knew.

“Especially if it’s Malfoy,” Harry said, nodding in agreement.

Hermione immediately jabbed him in the side with a sharp elbow.

“I’m fine!” Toby blurted. “Honest!” He had, of course, heard rumors about Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy’s rivalry and he had even seen hints of it himself just last night. The last thing he wanted to do was to give them another reason to fight. “Is that all?” he asked, obviously uncomfortable with the topic.

“One more thing,” Harry said, speaking up again. He cleared his throat when Toby looked up at him, blinking large, innocent eyes. “Before Hogwarts... Before Hogwarts, have you ever had any... unintentional bursts of magic?”

Toby blinked in surprise at the sudden change in topic but relaxed all the same, happy that they were no longer talking about Draco Malfoy and Mudbloods and the lies he had told Hermione. “Not really,” he answered. “Not that I can really remember, anyway.” He pursed his lips thoughtfully, thinking back. “After Professor Dumbledore explained everything, my parents did say that I used to cause things to shatter or fall when I was a baby. But they thought it was due to earthquakes or something back then.” He shrugged. “Sometimes, I’ll wake up with chicken feathers all over my room. Does that count?”

Hermione laughed. “What about healing?” she asked instead. “Have you ever gotten hurt and it healed really fast? Or maybe someone else? A parent or a close friend?”

Toby shook his head, wondering where this conversation was going. “Not, not—” He froze suddenly. “Sarah got hurt once.”

“Sarah?” Harry asked.

“My sister,” he elaborated. “My sister, Sarah.”

“What happened?” Hermione asked.

“She got into a bad car accident a couple years ago,” Toby answered, shuddering at the memory. “We got a call from the hospital. She lost a lot of blood and even with the transfusion, they weren’t
sure she was going to make it. But she woke up within a couple days perfectly fine, even the bruises she had had faded.”

“Toby...” Hermione breathed, exchanging glances with Harry.

He looked up.

Hermione swallowed. “Um... did you ever think that you were the one that healed her?” she asked. “Even accidentally?”

“No,” Toby answered slowly. “Why would I think that?”

“Well, you’re a wizard,” she explained. “And Muggleborns are known to have a lot of accidental bursts of magic.” If Toby had some sort of affinity with healing magic then Hermione could only imagine what he could do when he intentionally heal someone. She had done studies on different types of magic a year ago and healing magic—White magic—is considered one of the hardest types of magic to master. For someone to have an affinity for it...

But Toby frowned.

Because—

Remembering—

“Sarah knows magic.”

“It wasn’t me,” he said, shaking his head, mind continuing to whirl at the implications.

“How can you tell?” Harry asked.

Toby looked up again, his eyes wide. “I wasn’t there when it happened.” he told them. “We had already moved to London then but Sarah was in America for her book tour. By the time we got the phone call and flew back to America, Sarah was already out of the hospital.”

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you to everyone who reviews this story despite its spontaneous updates; they are what continues to fuel my motivation. The introduction arc is finally almost over, just two more chapters.
“Can we please meet at a coffee shop next time?”

Daniel Barrett—her ever-annoying manager—squinted at her for a moment, then looked down at her untouched mug of coffee. “Have you always been this picky?” he demanded. Sarah was a dream client, or so he had been told. Her previous manager assured him that she was sweet, polite, dedicated, and always turned her drafts in on time. Obviously he had been lied to. Not that Sarah wasn’t sweet or polite or even dedicated—she had her own charms—but she never turned in her drafts on time. Ever. If it wasn’t late, it means it had been forgotten altogether.

Sarah pursed her lips. “It’s lukewarm,” she mumbled, watching Deebie chew on the laces of Daniel’s very expensive dress shoes without caring. Normally, she would scold the small goblin, but she wasn’t particularly feeling very kind today. This early in the morning. After being offered lukewarm coffee.

“Are you still not used to London’s weather? How long have you been living here?”

She wrinkled her nose in annoyance. “I thought we were here to talk about my novel, not my inability to get used to cold weather.” She huffed and took a tentative sip from her mug, only to shudder when the liquid touched her tongue. “Or lukewarm coffee,” she grumbled. “Either be cold or be hot.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Daniel agreed, addressing her former comment as he pulled out a couple files and laid them out in front of Sarah. “Here’s the first draft for the contract from you new publisher. I already read through it but I think you should too. If there’s anything you want to add, just jot it down and we’ll bring it up during out meeting next week.”

Sarah’s head snapped up. “We have a meeting next week?”

He narrowed his eyes. “Yes, Sarah. Friday at six. At Del Lune. Remember?”

She shook her head.

Daniel groaned. “You’re lucky you’re earning me good money,” he muttered with a half-hearted sigh. “Anyway, please remember to bring your ID if you want to drink. We really don’t need a repeat of last time.”

Sarah scowled, her eyes darkening at the memory. “I’m twenty-five,” she snapped, bristling in anger. “I shouldn’t need to bring my ID anymore!”

Daniel only rolled his eyes in response. “You look like you’re sixteen.” Then, at her unhappy glare, he reached out and patted her on the head as if she was a child. “It’s all right. It’s a good thing; everyone wants to look younger these days.”

“You know,” Sarah grumbled, feeling like she was making the same complaint over and over again. No doubt this wasn’t the first time Daniel has heard it. “There’s a distinction between looking young and looking too young.” Having her youthful appearance complimented was flattering, needing to pull out her ID every time she did something was not. She took another sip of her coffee and blinked in surprise; was it just her or did her annoyance somehow heated up her coffee?
“Yeah, yeah,” Danielt muttered, waving off her comment dismissively as he checked his watch. “Anyway,” that’s pretty much it for today; I have to bounce. Another meeting with a potential publisher just for you, darling. Take the draft home, give it a look-over, and text me if you have any questions.”

Sarah nodded in understanding.

“And don’t forget your ID for Friday. I’m not bailing you out again.”

She looked up and glared but Daniel only flashed her a quick, innocent grin before leaning down to kiss her on the cheek. Deebie jumped off of Daniel’s unsuspecting shoulder and burrowed her way into Sarah’s hair. “See you then,” she mumbled as he left the office in a flurry, probably running late again.

With a soft sigh, Sarah stretched, pushing her chest out and arching her arms high above her head. Once she heard the familiar sounds of cracking joints, she relaxed and began packing up her things. She stuffed the draft into her large purse and dumped out the rest of her lukewarm coffee in a nearby sink before finally leaving the office. After making sure the door was locked behind her, Sarah huddled into her jacket, took a deep breath, and stepped out into the outside world in the direction of her favorite coffee shop.

“So cold,” she grumbled but she was not to be deterred. Sarah had woken up that morning craving good coffee and the cup of brown liquid she had in Daniel’s office only served to increase her craving. A particularly vicious wind blew past—and practically through—her and Sarah had to slouch and huddle further into her over-sized scarf to prevent her nose from getting frostbite and falling off or something equally as horrifying.

*At least it’s not snowing,* she thought.

Even though Sarah much preferred a white Christmas, she wasn’t about to go wishing for something she was only going to end up regretting. She had learned *that* particular lesson years ago, thank you very much. Speaking of Christmas, Sarah wondered what sort of present she should get Toby. Ever since she had been making her own money, Sarah had brought it upon herself to spoil her younger brother in ways her parents never did for her. Toby always loved her presents the most but what to get someone who was currently living in a world full of magic? A world full of moving portraits, disappearing doors, and talking mirrors?

Normal presents just weren’t going to cut it anymore, she realized mournfully.

Sarah hummed and brightened up at her next thought. “Maybe I should ask the goblins to bring something from the Underworld?” she wondered aloud, her hot breath insulated by her thick scarf and warming her half her face momentarily. She paused. Then: “No, definitely not.”

By the time Sarah finally made it to the coffee shop, she still had no idea what to get her brother. Realizing that her nose was now bright red thanks to the cold, cutting wind, she decided that she’ll mull over the idea over a nice, hot cup of coffee. Coffee always fueled her creativity, there was no reason why it wouldn’t help her decide what presents to get her brother.

She sighed happily upon opening the door, the sweet aroma of coffee washing over her like a warm, summer breeze. And for a brief moment, she remembered flashes of color and sounds of giggles and whispered promises from her dream last night. And possible in dreams before last night too. But the moment passed when the barista greeted her with a bright smile.

It took only five minutes for Sarah to get her coffee and find a nice, isolated seat in a lonely corner.
but by that time, she was already in a much happier mood than she was in earlier that morning. She hummed happily, ready to spend the rest of her day in the warm, good-smelling coffee shop. And despite leaving her laptop at home, Sarah remembered to pack her handy notebook where she could jolt down ideas for Toby’s present and perhaps even get started on her next chapter. She was sure if Daniel hadn’t already been running late to his next meeting, he would have hounded for the next—

“Hello,” a smooth voice interrupted, pulling her from her thoughts. “We meet again.”

*And there goes my happy day,* a voice in the back of Sarah’s head grumbled. She looked up, taking in the young, handsome blond smiling down at her. She squinted. “I’m sorry,” she said, voice flat, “have we met before?” She hoped he wasn’t a fan because she was in no mood to deal with anyone at the moment. But she would for fans and even if he was one, Sarah had long since mastered brightening up facial features and faking genuine-looking smiles. She knew all about the Duchenne smile.

For a moment, the blond one stared at her blankly, as if in disbelief and Deebie poked her small head out of Sarah’s hair and started laughing. Sarah wanted to push the small goblin back into her nesting area—or whatever Deebie thought it was—but she also didn’t want to give the illusion that she was fixing her hair *right after* his greeting as if she was flirting with him. Sarah settled on an unimpressed scowl instead.

“I’m Cahan, remember?” he said, flashing another bright smile that she swore had the barista across them sighing happily. “We met before in this same coffee shop.” His smile widened until it was all sparkling teeth and glittering eyes.

Sarah blinked slowly, she most definitely did not remember but she was never good with faces and names anyway. “Okay,” she agreed instead. “It’s nice to meet you again.” And with that said, she turned her attention back to her coffee, hoping that he would get the hint.

Cahan blinked. Then he slid his gaze from Sarah to the small goblin who was still laughing at him. It stuck out a long, forked tongue and blew raspberries. Pressing his mouth tightly together in anger, Cahan took a moment to calm himself. After a moment, he turned his attention back to Sarah, cleared his throat, and tried again. “So... Sarah, I was thinking—”

When the young woman turned to look at him, he turned up his charm even more until it was practically oozing out of his skin. He could smell it in the air and was sure even the goblin wasn’t immune at this point. Not that he wanted a goblin lusting after him or anything. Ew.

“I’m not interested,” Sarah interrupted, surprising him more than he cared to admit. Cahan blinked, wondering what was it about this particular human that made her immune to his magic. From the corner of his eyes, he noticed the coffee shop barrista swooning and Sarah must have noticed it too, because she turned and stared at the poor girl for a moment before redirecting her gaze back towards him. Her brows were furrowed as she stared at him with aSuspicious gleam in her eye. *Oops,* Cahan thought, swallowing hard and looking away, pretending not to notice. *Too much.* Mentally shaking himself from his thoughts, he took another deep breath and turned back towards Sarah—

—only to find that she had already gotten up from her seat and was walking away from him without so much as a backward glance. Deebie, that ever-annoying toad demon was peering out from her hair and pointing and laughing.

He scowled. *Careful,* Cahan thought. *You’re going to end up pissing yourself and then who’s going to protect you from the Lady’s wrath?* Certainly not him. With a sigh, Cahan decided that enough was enough and he should really head back now. So he looked around the coffee shop, allowing his magic to flow out from within him. Within seconds, the entire coffee shop was filled with the
electrifying sparks of his magic and it curled and waved and seeped into the skin of the shop’s occupants. They whispered and prodded and tugged at memories until his very existence had been erased from this world and no one noticed even as he disappeared from the busy coffee shop.

Cahan immediately reappeared in a familiar greeting room. The white marble-like walls pulsed and glowed at his sudden return, soaking up his magic thirstily even though he hadn’t been away all that long. Around him, his faithful servants dropped down into graceful curtsies and Cahan needed a moment to soak it all in. He needed beauty and perfect to erase the hell-demon’s ugly figure from his memory.

“Your majesty,” Mahilgo, his head servant, greeted. “You have returned.”

Cahan smiled because she was beautiful. All silver-white hair, dark skin, and clear silver eyes, she was perfection personified and the hell-demon’s twisted body, clawed fingers, and forked tongue was becoming but a distant memory. “Yes, yes,” he sighed happily. “Any news?”

Eyes darting away from his gaze, Mahilgo bit her lower lip and frowned. Her pointed ears twitched slightly as she gathered her thoughts, wondering how to phrase it for him. “It’s Her Majesty,” she murmured regretfully.

Cahan froze. “What’s wrong with my wife?”

“Appledore Falls is no more,” she answered, voice soft. “I’m afraid Her Majesty did not take it well.”

Cahan felt his heart stutter. And so it begins, he thought, making his way to a nearby window and gazing out into the distance. The beauty of his lands, the green of the forest, the blue of the skies, even the warmth of the air seemed to mock him. His lands were beautiful, his lands were perfect, his lands were alive but like everything else in this damned world, it wouldn’t last. He briefly wondered if this was what humans felt like with their measly single-century lives. And sometimes, he thought, not even that. Death was coming—has been coming—and even with all the power he had, there wasn’t a thing he could do about it.

With another long sigh, he turned back towards Mahilgo. “Set up an audience with the King of Dreams for me.” Then, tone darkening at the memories, he added, “I really don’t want a repetition of last time.” He was never—never, ever, ever—going to show up in front of him again without warning. Ever.

“The King of Dreams?” Mahilgo repeated, her usually musical voice currently a high-pitched squeak. “The Nightwalker?” She had never met the Nightwalker in person before but she had heard the stories. Everyone had. And she was pretty sure His Majesty did too or he would be the one requesting an audience with the Nightwalker himself. Mahilgo didn’t know what happened last time and she didn’t think she wanted to.

The Nightwalker, she thought again, shuddering. They said he was the brother of the Shadowwalker—of Death himself! “

Even Death is afraid of him,” rumors whispered. Pale, rotting skin, dead, white hair, fangs and claws and all. They said that he was the reason why their world was dying, that he was the reason why magic itself was disappearing. Rumors had it that the Nightwalker had an army of soul-sucking creatures that obeyed his every command. That his own brother served him. After all, why else was the rest of their magical world withering and dying while the Nightwalker’s lands were prospering.

Cahan stared. “The very one,” he confirmed, then frowned. “Oh, don’t give me that look! He’s not
that frightening.” But Mahilgo didn’t look convinced. “He’s actually quite pathetic. Honestly!”

Toby stared at his tiny practice doll. Which was on fire.

Placing his wand down, Toby let his head drop onto the table with a loud thud. His practice doll was burning away but he couldn’t bring himself to care. This was his fourth practice doll and he didn’t think it could get any worst. The first one had drowned, the second one had completely vanished, and the third one ran away screaming. He didn’t even know they had mouths; they weren’t even human-shaped.

He squinted at the pile of ashes and wondered where he went wrong. Toby knew he understood the wand movement and was pretty sure he was pronouncing the incantation correctly but the Knockback Jinx just wasn’t working. He didn’t really understand before but he now had a feeling he knew why the older students didn’t like Umbridge all that much. Toby wasn’t sure why Umbridge had so much against them practicing spells in the classroom but it really wasn’t helping him.

Brushing away what used to be his fourth practice doll today, Toby turned his attention towards his DADA textbook and flipped back to the section outlining the Knockback jinx again. Maybe he had missed the phonetic pronunciation.

“Hey,” a voice interrupted. “You’re Tobias Williams, aren’t you?”

“Yes?” Toby sort-of answered, looking up. He frowned. “I’m sorry, I don’t think I know you?”

The Gryffindor snorted. “You wouldn’t,” he told Toby. “I’m not part of Potter’s inner circle.”

Toby blinked, more than a little confused. “What?”

“The only reason anyone knows who you are is because you’ve been hanging out with Potter a lot recently,” the Gryffindor pointed out.

He most certainly had not been, Toby thought. While it was true, he saw him more often than before and that they greeted one another whenever they passed by each other in the halls but that was pretty much the extent of it. “Okay...” he responded hesitantly, unsure what the guy was trying to say.

“I’m just trying to warn you!” he exclaimed, leaning down closer towards Toby. “If you don’t want to die, you need to stay away from Harry Potter!”

Toby gaped, his mind going blank. “What?” he asked. “Harry’s not—Harry wouldn’t—Harry won’t kill me!”

The Gryffindor snorted. “That’s what you think but you’re only a first year. Plus you’re Muggleborn so you probably haven’t heard what happened last year.”

Toby had heard the whispers, of course, but he was never one to pay attention to rumors so he couldn’t really say what it was about. Something about a gravedigger and someone whose name everyone apparently keeps forgetting. He honestly didn’t care. “What happened?” he asked, despite himself.

“Cedric Diggory.”

Well, at least I got the digger part right, Toby thought but knew that was probably very rude to say
out loud. Instead, he asked, “Who’s that?”

The Gryffindor grinned, all too happy to spread gossip, and sat down. With caution Toby didn’t think was serious at all, the Gryffindor looked around to make sure they weren’t being overheard. “Last year,” he began, the excitement in his voice barely being concealed, “Hogwarts hosted the Triwizarding Tournament. It’s a sort of competition that both Potter and Cedric Diggory, a Hufflepuff participated in.” He leaned even closer, making Toby feel just the slightest bit uncomfortable. “Honestly, Potter wasn’t even supposed to participate. He was too young, you know. But it was all part of his plan.”

“His plan?” Toby repeated.

He grinned. “Yeah, that’s right. His plan.”

Toby wondered if the Gryffindor was being stupid on purpose. Or was those one of those suspense thing he didn’t really see the point of. “What plan?” he asked instead because his father had warned him about not being as blunt and rude as Sarah. Not that he thought his sister was ever blunt and rude.

“His plan to kill Cedric, of course.”

Toby felt his stomach drop. “What?” he demanded loudly, catching the attention of the few other students sharing the general study room.

“And it worked,” the older student continued, “Because during the last test, both Potter and Cedric went into the maze for the last task but only Potter came out alive.” Toby opened his mouth to interrupt but the Gryffindor beat him to it. “If that’s not bad enough, he blamed Cedric’s death on You-Know-Who who had been dead for years. Potter killed him himself, you know?” He paused then, taking delight in the way Toby’s expression was twisting up in horror. “Obviously that means Potter killed Cedric because he wanted to win. He’s probably planning to be the next Dark Lord.”

“Dark what?” Toby demanded, feeling as if this was all a very big joke. “That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard!”

“It’s your head,” the Gryffindor said, shrugging, obviously disappointed that Toby wasn’t reacting the way he wanted him to. “But as a Muggleborn, you should really stay away from him. He’s only keeping up appearances. All the recent upheaval is probably—”

Toby slammed his book shut and stood up. “You’re done talking,” he snapped. “Because I’m definitely done listening to you.” But the annoying Gryffindor didn’t seem to care, not even when Toby began packing up his things and stuffing them angrily into his bag. “Potter has brainwashed you, hasn’t he? He—”

Toby was already walking away at this point but he wasn’t the least bit surprised when the Gryffindor yelped in alarm as she slipped in his seat and whacked his head on the table as he fell. He had long since accepted that people tended to find themselves tripping, slipping, and falling after they had wronged or upset him in some way. He suspected that may had something to do with Sarah’s “He’s protected.” but wasn’t sure how that was possible.

Feeling unusually angry, Toby found himself stomping his way down the familiar path towards the dungeons. He could hear the Gryffindor’s words repeating themselves over and over again in his mind. Despite what everyone else believed, he could hear the Gryffindor’s words repeating themselves over and over again in his mind. Despite what everyone else believed, he didn’t actually talk all that much with Harry, at least not without Hermione around. But he knew that the older, dark-haired Gryffindor enough to know that he wouldn’t kill anyone. Especially Muggleborns, he thought. His best friend was one for crying
Of all the stupid things to say, he mentally grumbled, making a sharp turn around a dimly-lit corner. He wasn’t even sure why he was so angry. The Gryffindor must have thought he was some sort of idiot, believing that Toby would believe those lies. But then, Toby realized suddenly, if he had been anyone else, he might have. Especially considering the fact that he didn’t really care to learn more about the Wizarding World. Definitely time to change that, he thought, stopping and staring at the familiar sight of two large double doors—once frightening and forbidding—for a moment before shoving his way into the dark classroom without knocking.

“—make no mistake,” Professor Snape was saying, voice lower and tone darker than anything Toby had heard from him before. “He is planning something. Potter must be—” He cut himself off and looked up, scowling when his gaze landed on Toby’s smaller form. “Mister Williams,” he said. It wasn’t a greeting. “You again. My classroom is not a place of sanctuary.”

Quite the opposite, most of the time; Toby didn’t know why he was complaining. He blushed anyway. “Yes sir,” he said, nodding. “Sorry sir.” Despite his words, he walked in, quietly closing the door behind him.

“Is something wrong?” Hermione asked worryingly. Since the mudblood incident a couple weeks ago, Toby had been in the Potions Classroom five other times during her advance tutoring sessions, each time with a question or problem.

Toby looked up and had a feeling that his question was more of a “What’s a mudblood?” type of question rather than a “Is Herbology and botanical medicine the same thing?” question. He chewed the thought over in his mind but decided that he had enough of knowing the Wizarding World and not actually knowing it. He was going to be living here for the next seven or so years. He had to understand it. Or at the very least, he thought, the basics.

“What happened to Cedric Diggory last year?” he asked. Both Hermione and Professor Snape looked up and froze, forms stiff and unyielding. Toby sighed inwardly. It really was a “What’s a mudblood?” question.

“Who told you about him?” Hermione asked. While the topic of Cedric Diggory wasn’t taboo like the word mudblood was, it also wasn’t talked about openly. Besides, Hermione knew Toby mostly hung out with his fellow first years; it really wasn’t the type of conversation she imagined they would have.

He shrugged. “I heard his name going around a lot,” he answered and it wasn’t a lie.

“Toby...”

But he shook his head. “It’s no one important,” he told her. Honestly, there really wasn’t a point in telling them who had told him. Besides not knowing the older Gryffindor’s name, there wasn’t anything Hermione, Harry, and their friends could do about it anyway. It would only cause more of a rift within the Gryffindor House. Even Toby, who didn’t like listening to the rumor mill noticed the red and gold house was practically split in half; with one half siding with Harry and surrounding him like a protective circle against the second half that hated him for reasons Toby did not understand. But it probably had to do with Cedric Diggory and He-Whose-Name-People-Keep-Forgetting.

Hermione sighed again. She exchanged quick glances with Professor Snape before placing her stirring rod down, allowing her current potion to simmer. “Do you know about the Triwizarding Tournament?” she finally tried.
“It’s a sort of competition,” Toby answered. “Harry and Cedric Diggory were chosen last year.”

Hermione nodded. “That’s right,” she confirmed. “But before I get into that, you have to know about Harry Potter.”

Toby blinked at the emphasis and it took him a moment to figure out the reasoning behind the distinction. He thought about his sister. About Sarah. Sarah was funny and kind but she was also downright whiny and childish on her bad days. Sarah Williams on the other hand was a genius wordsmith, practical, talented, and writing perfection personified. Harry, Toby thought, had a good heart. He was also brave and talented and loyal.

He wondered what kind of person Harry Potter was.

“Almost two decades ago,” Hermione began. “There was a Dark Wizard who led a powerful group of followers that terrorized the Wizarding World. During that time, there was a lot of killings, kidnappings, and torture. It was a war and people were afraid.”

Toby stared, Hermione’s voice had taken a familiar lecturing-type of tone and Toby briefly thought that Hermione would make a good professor in the future. Catching movement from the corner of his eyes, Toby redirected his gaze towards Professor Snape and noticed that the dark-haired professor gripping onto his stirring rod so tightly, his knuckles were white. Almost two decades, he remembered and then realized that Snape must have lived through it, must have fought in it.

“Anyway,” Hermione continued. “The Dark Wizard—he’s mostly known as You-Know-Who or He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Name—” Toby blinked in response, then squinted suspiciously. “—tried to kill Harry when he was only a baby. But it didn’t work, obviously. Instead, the spell rebounded off of Harry, which gave him the scar you see on his forehead, and struck You-Know-Who himself.”

She paused and swallowed hard because for them, this was where everything began. This part was no longer just stories. Harry lived it. She lived it. “But the truth is... the truth is, You-Know-Who is still alive—the only thing that had really died that night was his body—and last year during the Triwizarding Tournament, he managed to get his body back.” She sighed. “He managed to whisk Harry away from Hogwarts with a Portkey but Cedric accidentally got caught up in the mess and followed along.”

Hermione shut her eyes then, trying to will away the memories of Harry’s return, of his cries and his screams. “And when Harry returned... Cedric... Cedric was already dead. Harry tried telling everyone what happened, about how You-Know-Who was back and how he was the one that killed Cedric but neither the Ministry of Magic nor the majority of the Wizarding population believes him.”

She gave him a small, sad smile then and Toby, remembering, “But as a Muggleborn, you should really stay away from him.” he realized what mudblood had to do with all of this. Because the Wizarding World was on the brink of war, he remembered. Professor Dumbledore had confirmed it himself. A war that had to do with prejudice against Muggleborns so even if You-Know-Who wasn’t back, his ideals, the reasoning for the war, prejudice itself was still alive and prospering.

“Is that why mudblood is such a bad word?” he asked. “Because of the war?”

Hermione tilted her head, thinking. Next to her, Snape had stiffened up even further and while she didn’t notice, Toby most certainly did. He wondered if Snape was a Muggleborn. He definitely didn’t like the word, Toby thought. He had noticed it a couple weeks ago when he first approach Hermione about mudbloods but he didn’t realize the extent of it until now.

“Not really,” she answered, not noticing Toby’s distraction. “Even long before the Wizarding War,
there has always been a separation between those born of parents with magic and those born of parents without. But the word had been used as an insult for the longest time, and the continuing use of it only serves to reiterate the distinction.”

Toby hummed, taking a moment to digest all the new information he was given. He realized then that he probably should have done this ages ago. Because now, everything was starting to make sense, from the whispers, to the insults, and even to the looks he sometimes receives from Draco Malfoy and his group of friends. The older blond’s dislike for him was completely due to his owl, Toby realized. But if there was one thing he didn’t understand...

“About that You-Know-Who guy...” Toby began, sincerely hoping that his question wouldn’t be another “What’s a mudblood?” type of question. “Does anyone even know his name?” Because Toby knew of wars. He had learned them with Sarah when she did research for her books. He learned about the American Civil War, both World Wars, and even minor skirmishes scattered throughout history. They all had some sort of famous general or leader and they all had names attached to faces. He wondered why the Wizarding World wasn’t the same.

“Oh, no! We know his name,” Hermione assured him, realizing the direction his thoughts were taking. Being a Muggleborn herself—being a rather studious Muggleborn—she had knowledge of both sides of the world. Like Toby, she had thought phrases like “You-Know-Who” and “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Name” was downright pathetic but she wanted to fit into the Wizarding World so she played along until she didn’t know anything else. “It’s just that... sometimes... sometimes... words have power. Names have power.” Her gaze flickered to the professor standing next to her for a brief second before returning back to Toby.

He blinked slowly. Words have power, he thought.

He knew this.

Somewhere, in the back of his mind, he imagined invisible hands grasping at fading memories. A flash of mismatch eyes, of glittering fanged smiles, of forgotten promises, and so much more.

“I wish...” the whispers echoed, the voice sounding like Sarah’s voice. “I wish...”

But it wasn’t the soft, soothing tone he was used to. No. Instead, it sounded harsh and teary and desperate.

“I wish...”

“You don’t have to worry though,” Hermione said, her voice snapping him out of his trance-like state. “Hogwarts is safe. The Ministry of Magic is trying to protect everyone in their own way.” She side-eyed Professor Snape, who seemed to be lost in his own thoughts. Somehow, the glance told Toby everything and he had no doubt that Hermione had just lied to him. But she turned and smiled reassuringly at him. “Besides—”

She froze, tensing up.

“Hermione?” he asked worriedly.

Ignoring him, Hermione dug into the robe and pulled out a galleon attached to a thin, gold chain around her neck. She turned it over in her hand and paled.

“What’s wrong?” Snape demanded, noticing the change at once.
Something serious must really be wrong with Hermione, Toby thought, because he didn’t think the Professor had been paying either of them any attention. Besides the occasionally tensing of muscles whenever the word mudblood was mentioned, Snape’s attention appeared to be completely captured by his potion.

“It’s Harry,” Hermione said, jerking her head up. “There’s something wrong with Harry.”

Toby watched with wide eyes as they immediately jumped into action. Professor Snape whipped out his wand with such speed, it seemed like he had it in his hand the entire time. He cast stasis charms over both potion cauldrons while Hermione pulled out her own wand and aimed it at the floor in front of her. She had to mutter the incantation of a spell Toby didn’t quite catch under her breath a couple times before a foggy, silver-colored figure burst out.

“Get Professor Dumbledore,” Hermione told the silver otter. “There’s something wrong with Harry. Seventh floor. Across from the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy.”

Mere milliseconds after the otter flew away, Professor Snape was out the door, Hermione hot on his heels. Toby blinked once. Twice. Then followed. He noticed a box labeled Infirmary and grabbed a couple bottles from it on his way out.

“Who’s with him?” Professor Snape asked as they hurried through the corridors. “Who sent you the message?”

“Ron,” Hermione answered. “Ginny and the twins are probably there too.” She glanced down at her galleon and quickened her steps. Toby, who was silently trailing after them, had obviously been forgotten. Not that he really minded at the moment. In fact, he wasn’t even sure he should of followed them but he was rather worried about Harry. Especially after learning about Harry Potter.

When they finally reached their destination, Professor Snape immediately pushed the lingering students out of his way and dropped down next to a screaming harry. “What’s wrong with him?” he asked even as he pulled out his wand and began chanting incantation after incantation under his breath.

“It’s his scar,” Ron Weasley answered, voice hesitant despite the severity of the situation. “He said his scar was hurting.”

Besides him, Toby noticed only one other familiar face: Ginny Weasley. But next to her, there were two even older red-haired Gryffindors that must have been the Weasley twins. And a blonde Ravenclaw he did not know the name of. Everyone was looking at Harry worryingly. He wondered if this was Harry’s “inner circle.”

“I already called for Professor Dumbledore,” Hermione said, also kneeling down besides Harry but across from Snape. She winced when Harry shouted out in pain again.

Snape swore softly, body twisting and hand shooting out towards Toby to grab a bottle, surprising him. Being one of his students, Toby knew Snape was rather observant but he didn’t think Snape had realize he had grabbed a few potions when they ran out. He watched with wide eyes as Hermione—who appeared to be completely in sync with Snape—tilted Harry’s head back as the Potions Professor dumped the contents of the bottle into his mouth, muffling his cries. His free hand went to Harry’s throat and massaged it, urging him to swallow.

The Potion seemed to work somewhat as Harry’s lips twitched and fluttered. For a moment, Toby thought all was well except Harry’s eyes suddenly snapped open and he found himself staring straight into green eyes that glowed with an unnatural red light. Almost as if as one, everyone around
him gasped in shock and took a step back. Harry’s body gave an involuntary spasm as Professor Snape grabbed another bottle. Mouth falling open, Harry took in a deep, shuddering breath and screamed.

Toby flinched, wanting very much to cover his ears. Harry’s scream echoed around the deserted corridor, magnifying it, and made everything seem so much worse than it really should be. He felt like he was in some kind of horror movie, the kind that he never watched but could still hear through the door whenever his parents had a craving.

“Blimey,” someone whispered.

Hermione looked up—facial expression pinched—looking to Professor Snape for instruction when she caught sight of Toby. “Toby!” she cried out, making him jump and drop a few bottles. “Toby, come over here!” She held out a hand and Toby rushed to obey her without exactly knowing why. Hermione immediately grabbed his hand and yanked him towards her when he was within arm’s reach, making the last few remaining potions tumble to the floor. Thankfully, they must have some sort of unbreakable charm on them, he noted in the back of his mind.

Hermione pressed Toby’s smaller hands to Harry’s cheek and everyone else—including Toby himself—watched in astonishment as Harry immediately quieted at his touch. Harry sighed deeply, obviously much more at ease despite that his half-lidded eyes were still glowing with that unnatural red.

“Toby has some sort of affinity with healing magic,” Hermione explained to Professor Snape as he stared at the young blond in alarm, eyes darting from him to Hermione and back again.

Toby blinked in surprise at the comment even as the sound of multiple rushing footsteps echoing across the corridor reached them. Hermione and Harry had told him he may have something like that but he never really knew what that mean. Until now, at least.

“Oh no,” Hermione muttered tensely when she turned around to face their oncoming audience.

Harry groaned. He muttered something under his breath but it was lost in the noisy onslaught as Professor Umbridge barreled her way towards them, Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall directly behind her.

“What is this?” Umbridge demanded, face flushed. “What is going on? What are you up to?”

It was a rather odd choice of questions considering the situation but whatever point Toby wanted to bring up got caught in his throat when Umbridge stopped a couple steps away from them. Her chest was heaving and her facial muscles was twisted into such an horrifying expression that Toby wanted to scurry backwards towards safety. But he knew that the only thing between Harry and extreme pain was his touch, so he steeled his will and remained in his spot. Already, the unusual red glow in Harry’s eyes were slowly receding. The dark-haired boy blinked slowly, eyes staring but not exactly seeing.

“Oh my way!,” Umbridge screeched, pushing Ginny away with such force that one of her brother had to reach out and steady her. “Out of my way! What’s wrong with Mister Potter?”

Toby didn’t think Umbridge really cared what was wrong with Harry but he kept silent.

“That’s what we’re currently trying to figure out,” Professor Snape hissed out, glaring.

“P-Please,” Harry managed to groan out, his voice a low, pained whisper. “It’s Mr. Weasley. Please.”
Ron surged forward. “My dad? What about my dad?” he demanded, ignoring both side glares from Snape and Umbridge. Dumbledore held up a hand. “Let’s all remain calm and give Mister Potter a moment to breathe.” He glanced at Toby curiously but no one had time to explain to the headmaster that he had some sort of affinity with healing magic that he didn’t understand himself.

Harry blinked again, his eyes slowly focusing on the world around him. He concentrated on the tingles that seemed to transfer from Toby’s skin and onto his own before licking his lips and trying again. “It’s Mr. Weasley,” he tried again, staring at Dumbledore. “He’s been attacked by Voldemort.”

The name must have really meant something because everyone gasped. And if Toby thought Umbridge was angry before, it was nothing compared to her now. Facial muscles twisting up even further, she looked more demon than human and her skin tone was turning an astonishing shade of purple. “What is this nonsense?” she demanded, her voice an angry hiss. “What lies are your sprouting now?”

“Dolores, please!” Professor Dumbledore said. He sounded perfectly calm and controlled despite the situation. Briefly, Toby wondered if there was anything in the world that got to the aged headmaster. Then he remembered the odd, twitchy, almost fearfulness he had when he first met the headmaster. When Sarah was asking him questions about wars and basilisk and all of that.

Sarah, he thought. Of course it would be Sarah.

“Harry?” Hermione asked. “What about Mr. Weasley?”

Harry groaned again and Toby pressed his palms harder into Harry’s clammy skin. “I had a vision,” he gasped out. “Just go check on him. Please!”

After a moment’s pause—while Umbridge was getting angrier and angrier—Professor McGonagall exchanged glances with Professor Dumbledore. They stared at one another, communicating silently before McGonagall nodded and turned towards the group of redheads. “Weasleys,” she said. “We’ll use Professor Dumbledore’s office for communication. Come with me.”

“But—”

“Harry’ll be fine, Ron,” the blonde Ravenclaw said, speaking up for the first time. “You should really go check up on your dad. I would hate for anything to happen to my father.” She paused. “Besides, we have professors here with us now.”

Although worried for Harry, the Weasleys were obviously more worried for their father. So with one last glance at their fallen friend, they followed the Transfiguration Professor away, their footsteps growing softer and softer with each passing second.

Unhappy that she was being ignored, Umbridge took another step towards Harry until he was almost on top of him. “As High Inquisitor of Hogwarts, I demand to be told what’s going on. What sort of conspiracy is this?” The turned the full strength of her glare towards Toby, who was the youngest and probably easiest to intimidate. “And you! What are you doing? Get away from him!”

Toby’s eyes widened in alarm. “But Harry’s hurt!” he protested. “Hermione says—”

Umbridge waved her wand and Toby found himself thrown backwards. He crashed into the opposite wall with a sharp cry. There was a sickening crack that filled the air and pain exploded through his head. For a moment, his vision went completely black.

Immediately, several things happened at once:
“Dolores!” Dumbledore said, his tone alarmed.

“Toby!” Hermione shrieked.

Umbridge cried out as she stumbled backwards as if she had been pushed by an invisible hand but no one had been standing in front of her and no wand had been drawn in her direction.

And finally, the red that had disappeared from Harry’s eyes came back full force. Harry’s back immediately arched underneath Snape’s hold as pain shot through his spine. And now, without Toby’s healing-touch to keep it at bay, it came back tenfold and he screamed. The sound echoed across the corridor again. “Nagini,” he hissed, tone dark and voice pitched as if it didn’t really belong to him.

The sound made Toby sit up despite the stars dancing across his vision. “Stop it!” he cried, scrambling to his feet and throwing himself on top of Harry. He grabbed a hold of Harry’s tightly clenched fist, attempting to soothe him despite the throbbing pain coursing through his head. “You’re hurting him! Go away!”

Umbridge glared but Toby didn’t care. He just wanted Harry to stop scream. “Young man!” she said, raising her wand. The tip of her wand glowed with a threatening red of the beginnings of a nonverbal spell. “Watch you—” She froze suddenly. “Oh!” she cried, body shuddering as if hundreds of tiny bugs were crawling up and down her form. “What’s this? What—”

And just like that, she disappeared.

For a couple long seconds, everyone only stared at the spot Umbridge had occupied only moments before. Even Harry’s pained whimpering had completely stopped. Then it was over and Toby immediately burst into tears. “W-w-was that—” he stammered, voice high with distraught. “Did I do that?—I didn’t—”

Dumbledore leaned down next to him and placed a soothing hand on Toby’s back. “Calm down, Mister Williams,” he said, even though he was frowning in worry.

But Toby wasn’t about to calm down. He gasped and choked, suddenly not being able to get enough air into his lungs and continued crying. “I didn’t do it!” he said, magical sparks dancing across his skin at his emotional state. “I didn’t mean to! Why did Professor Umbridge—” He choked again.

“It’s all right,” Hermione said, going to him and reaching out to grab him gently by his shoulders. She was careful to make sure that Toby’s skin-to-skin contact with Harry was not broken. “Everything is all right,” she attempted to soothe. “We’ll figure it out.”

“S-Sarah,” Toby said, still crying and no longer listening. “I want Sarah! I want my sister.”

And immediately, in the seconds that followed his words, a tremble ran across them as if the entire castle was shaking. A loud crack filled and echoed through the corridors as the very air above them ripped open and a figure fell through.

“Son of a bitch!” Sarah Williams cried out just as she hit the ground.

Chapter End Notes

So, I lied. This is the end of the introduction arc. I don’t actually have any of the arcs.
planned out or anything but the “introduction arc” is finally, completely finished. The two different fantasy worlds have been combined and the greater conflict for this particular story has been hinted at (Did you catch them?) so we can finally move forward.

This chapter was actually supposed to be split in two, with the first half introducing Toby to Luna and the DA but I realized that Toby being in the DA isn’t required for the plot so I removed it altogether. This story has been a slow start—and my spontaneous updates aren’t helping—but I hope you continue to stick with me. Thank you so much for all the amazing reviews; I will try to reply to them from now on :D
Mystery Power

Chapter Notes

If you’re wondering how I got the chapter out so fast (fast for me, anyway), it’s because of you guys :D The response last chapter was amazing! So, thank you!

Well, Albus thought. Well then.

He wondered what he was supposed to think in this sort of situation. In all his years at Hogwarts, he had never seen anyone—no matter how powerful they were—bypass the ancient wards of the castle. And bypass them she did. As the headmaster of Hogwarts, he was connected to the wards and every now and then, he would feel a tug whenever someone tried something. From apparition attempts to forbidden summons to certain dark magic, he felt them all.

But with Miss Williams, there was nothing. There was of course, the shuddering of the castle itself but not only did everyone else feel that, it didn’t impact the wards. Albus watched with wide eyes as Miss Williams sat up, her youthful features twisted up in annoyance. “I am going to strangle you all,” she snarled out, green eyes flashing. “Just wait until I get my hands around your little—” she cut herself off, noticing for the first time since her sudden appearance that she had an audience.

Her pale green eyes swept across the corridor, seeing but not really registering. When they finally landed on him, Albus watched as the surprise flickered across her gaze for a moment. For a brief, brief moment. Then she recognized him and her expression shuttered, then hardened. Albus found himself suppressing a shudder because he had promised—promised—her that Toby would be safe at Hogwarts. And he knew that she knew that the only reason why they were suddenly in the presence of one another was because something had happened to Tobias Williams.

Never mind how she came into Hogwarts.

She twisted her gaze away from him, looking around, looking for—

“Sarah?”

Tobias’ voice was soft with disbelief and Albus had to tear his own gaze away from Sarah to Tobias because it wasn’t her, he realized. Sarah Williams may have been the one that was familiar with the Wizarding World before his arrival, Sarah Williams may be the one with secrets she didn’t want to share but Tobias Williams was the one that had summoned her. Tobias Williams was the one behind his sister bypassing all of Hogwarts’ ancient wards.

But—

But—

“Toby?”

But Sarah’s voice was more calm and controlled than Albus thought possible especially considering
her current situation. She was more worried for her brother than surprised at her sudden appearance and it was almost as if she had been through something like this before. There was just so many implications and possibilities and Albus felt as if his entire world was turning over because everything was happening at once and nothing—nothing—was making sense anymore.

Tobias, still frozen, stared at his sister for one heartbeat, and another, before bursting into action. With a half relieved, half confused cry, he scrambled onto his feet and launched himself into Sarah’s waiting arms. Still sobbing, he buried himself into the warmth of his sister’s embrace, mumbling incoherently.

“It’s all right, Toby,” Sarah said, stroking her brother’s hair soothingly, despite not knowing what was going on herself. “Everything’s going to be all right.” She tightened her other around Toby’s smaller, trembling form, and looked around, taking in her surroundings. When her green gaze fell on Albus again and then hardened until they were nothing but cold steel, he knew he really was in trouble then.

Everyone around was shifting uneasily, trying to make sense of what was happening. “Oh my,” Lovegood murmured, her soft, musical voice cutting through the silence like a knife. “I’ve never felt so much Fata magic in one place before.”

Sarah’s eyes flickered in her direction for a moment, as if curious, but she was otherwise ignored. It was Harry’s sudden groan of pain, however, that got Tobias to pull his face out of his sister’s tight embrace. He sniffled, wiped the remaining tears from his eyes and face before pulling away from Sarah in order to make his way towards Harry.

She made no move to stop him, allowing him to go but followed closely behind. “Toby,” she said, now that her brother had somewhat calmed down. “What happened?”

Kneeling down to clasp one of Harry’s hand into his own, Toby looked back up at his sister. “I don’t really know,” he answered truthfully. “Harry got hurt and Hermione said that I have some sort of affinity with healing magic so if I touch him, he won’t be in that much pain.” He swallowed hard, throat moving as he did so, the beginnings of his panic returning. “But then Professor U-Umbridge came out of nowhere and I j-just—I—I just wanted her to get away from Harry because he was screaming so loud—but Sarah—” He broke off, voice catching in his throat. “I told her to go away but I didn’t mean—I would never—she just disappeared!”

Knowing the fact that Tobias did not vanish Dolores on purpose did nothing to ease Albus’ nerves. He had never seen or even heard of unintentional bursts of magic quite like his before and was scared to think about what he could actually accomplish once he was trained. And what was even more disheartening was that he could not get a single reading on his sister’s thoughts throughout Tobias’ entire monologue. Albus prided himself in his ability to read people, even without desiring to, he sometimes gets a feeling of people’s inner emotions, no matter how hard they tried to hide it.

But with Sarah Williams, there was nothing at all. And Albus would have accused her of having no emotions but—

“It’s all right, I’m sure everything will be all right,” Sarah soothed, leaning down to cup her brother’s face in her balms. She brushed a kiss on his forehead and tilted her head down until her forehead was resting against his own. “Listen to me, Toby,” she told him softly, uncaring as to who was watching, who was listening, the only person that mattered to her right now was Tobias. “Professor Umbridge is a witch, isn’t she? She’ll be just fine.”

“But I made her go away!” Tobias sobbed quietly. “And—and when people are mean to me, they always end up getting hurt even though I don’t say anything.” His hand was trembling now, making
Harry’s own hand shake along with his, and although half-conscious, Albus could see Harry squeezing his hand in an attempt to soothe the young First Year. “But I told her to go away—I wanted her to—what happens if she’s—” he choked, unwilling to finish his sentence.

Sarah paused then, the look in her eyes shifting. And although Albus knew there was something significant about the shift, that Sarah had just come to some sort of realization, he didn’t understand what it could be. Had something like this happened before? Did she know where her brother had vanished Dolores? Or perhaps...

Perhaps...

“Your professor has been using magic her entire life,” Sarah told her brother, pulling back and sliding a hand upwards to brush his hair from his eyes. “So she’ll definitely be fine. That’s why you’re at Hogwarts, remember? You’re here to learn how to control your magic.”

“I guess,” Tobias mumbled, eyes darting around as if remembering their audience for the first time. He swallowed again and looked his sister in the eye, his gaze searching hers. “Did I... did I summon you here?” he asked, his voice a low whisper.

Sarah smiled. “Well,” she said. “I did say I would be here for you whenever you needed me. And you wanted me here, right?”

“Yes,” Tobias answered, still staring, eyes still searching for an answer Albus did not know the question to. “But did I summon you here?”

Albus blinked. Tobias’ words connecting broken, half-formed threads of thoughts together. Sarah Williams who seemed to know the existence of magic long before his arrival. Sarah Williams who was not surprise at her sudden appearance into some unknown place. Was it possible...? Perhaps...

Maybe...

Sarah paused, looking at her brother, her gaze questioning. “I don’t know,” she finally answered. “We’ll figure it out.” She straightened up then and redirected her green eyes onto Albus who could suddenly feel an itch on his chin. “But right now, I think I should have a word with the Headmaster.” Her voice was low and hard.

Albus swallowed. Ah, he thought. Oh dear.

“I...” Hermione Granger interrupted, speaking up for the first time since Sarah’s appearance. Her eyes darting between himself and Sarah as she continued, “Luna and I will bring Harry and Toby to the hospital wing for now.”

“Of course,” Albus agreed distractedly, never once moving his gaze away from Sarah’s. Her green eyes were hard and unyielding; Albus knew this wasn’t going to be an easy conversation. Sarah had already proven to be able to see through his lies and misdirection; his warm, grandfatherly persona was useless against her. And seeing that she was already familiar with magic in a way he did not completely understand, he had a feeling his status as “one of the most powerful wizards alive” would be nothing but a joke to her.

They stared at each other, waiting patiently as Hermione and Luna quietly worked together to summon a stretcher and lead their two male friends down the corridor and towards the hospital wing. It wasn’t until their soft footsteps had faded into the distance did Sarah finally speak up. Her voice was flat when she spoke, nothing like the soothing, warm, parental tone she had used when speaking
to her brother moments before. “What exactly happened?” she demanded, her gaze flashing furiously.

If this was any other situation, Severus would have thought it rather hilarious. He had never seen Albus so hesitant before. It was almost as if he was scared of the young girl.

“I thought this was a school,” Sarah Williams continued without giving them the chance to answer her previous question. “What kind of school employs professors that throw students into walls? You’re lucky Toby wasn’t really hurt!”

As one, Albus and Severus blinked in shock, exchange glances, then stared at her in alarm.

“Well?” Sarah demanded.

Severus was the first to recover. “How did you know that?” he asked, taking a step towards her. It was a rather threatening move on his part. Severus knew exactly how to manipulate his body and presence to make it seem so much bigger and more threatening than it really was.

But Sarah—in spite of her size and innocent, youthful face—was not to be intimidated. Instead, she turned her gaze to Severus, who saw that the pupils of her usually pale green eyes were so dilated with emotion, it was as if he was staring into bottomless, black pits. There was a shift in the air as Sarah narrowed her eyes into dangerous slits. “One of your professors slammed my brother into the wall and instead of explaining the situation to me, you’re trying to turn this onto me? As if this is somehow my fault?”

“Of course we do not mean it like that,” Albus interrupted, stepping up. He cleared his throat uncomfortably when Sarah turned her attention back towards him. He had hoped that she would keep her furious gaze on Severus. “We’re simply... curious, you see. You did arrive after that particular incident, after all.”

Sarah stared at him for a moment. Then: “Toby told me,” she finally answered.

Severus felt the muscle in his jaw twitch in disbelief. She was lying. Straight to their faces. As if she didn’t know they had been there the entire time!

“Is this really the time to be curious?” she asked.

“Of course not,” Albus answered. “I apologize. What Professor Umbridge did to young Tobias Williams is unforgivable and I have absolutely no excuses for her.” He paused, debating his next words for a moment before ultimately deciding it was worth the try. “Unfortunately, I arrived rather late to the scene so I am unsure of the exact situation myself.” Albus eased his expression and smiled at her. “Her disappearance and your... sudden appearance is rather startling. And the fact that you can actually see Hogwarts. We have wards—barriers—again such a thing, you understand? I’m afraid I must put our conversation on hold until I am sure the wards are still up and my school and all the students in it are still protected. Perhaps we can continue this another time?”

Sarah stared and raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “Arrive late to the scene, did you?” she asked, then scoffed, rolling her eyes. “Fine, we’ll talk later then.” She looked down the corridor in the direction her brother had gone in minutes before. “In the mean time, I’m going to go to the hospital wing to be with Toby.” She turned back to him and stared, eyes hard. “That’s not going to be a problem, is it?”

And although Albus thought that it was most certainly going to be a problem, he answered, “No, of course not.” If she could still see and be in Hogwarts just fine despite the wards, he doubted the other anti-Muggle wards would have any affect on her. And if they do, then that’s one less thing for him to
worry about.

Sarah nodded and turned to leave. “Arrive late to the scene, my foot,” they heard her mumble, heels clicking against the stone floor.

Sarah could still feel their curious, suspicious gaze on her even as she walked away. She kept her mouth in a thin, disapproving line and it wasn’t until she turned the corner, led by Romby, did she finally speak up. “Did you guys take away Toby’s professor?” she asked. Then thought, Oh god, I hope Toby doesn’t have to run the Labyrinth for her.

“’course we did,” Gip answered, shaking his head disapprovingly. “Professor is a mean woman.”

She faltered. “She’s not... she’s not with Kingy, is she?”

Squeak shook his head in the negative, trying to scramble onto Sarah’s shoulder but got bitten by a territorial Deebie every time he made it. “Adults can’t be wish-aways,” he told Sarah.

“So... where is she?” she asked hesitantly, almost afraid of the answer.

“The bog!” The goblins squealed happily.

Sarah froze. “The bog?” she repeated. “You guys bogged her?”

Jareth stared down at the tiny babe in his arms, humming thoughtfully under his breath. His ever-faithful goblins were gathered around him, unusually quiet but practically vibrating with excitement. “I have decided!” Jareth finally announced, voice booming throughout the throne room. His goblins scrambled to attention, waiting in anticipation. “I shall name him... Little Jareth XIV!”

The room immediately erupted into loud cheers and Jareth grinned at the positive attention even though he could see Hiddles or Hippens or Hickles or whatever rolling his eyes from his peripheral vision. With a shrug, he pushed the dwarf’s presence away from his mind.

“Isn’t there already a Little Kingy XIV?” one of his goblins asked another.

Jareth hoped not.

Feeling tiny hands pulling his trousers for attention, the blond fae blinked and looked down. “Yes?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“But Kingy!” Ripples the goblin said. “Baby’s a girl!”

Jareth blinked.

(“I shoulda be getting paid for this,” Higgens muttered.)

Jareth blinked again and then looked back down at the tiny female—female—babe in his arms. “Well then,” he muttered, his throne room falling silent once again. “In that case, you shall be Not Sarah!”

(“Why me?” groaned Hidget.)

There was a moment’s pause, then the throne room erupted into happy cheers once again. “Yay! Not Lady!” his goblins celebrated. Within seconds, the impromptu party was in full swing with goblins bouncing across the room, goblins chasing chickens, goblins drinking goblin ale, and of course, goblins getting flung through the air using one of Sarah’s brassieres as a slingshot. Instead of getting
scared at the sudden onslaught of noise, Not Sarah only squealed with delight, waving tiny arms in the air to join the party.

Chaos. It was complete chaos.

(“That’s it, I’m going home,” Hodwig said.)

“Kingy!” a goblin hollered, hopping into the room. “King-King Pointy Ears is here!”

Jareth looked up and watched a perfectly-tailored white boot shoot out from the entrance opening and kicked the goblin through the air. Delighted giggles followed the small goblin as she sailed right through the window. Immediately, the rest of his goblins froze, stared, and then dropped everything before swarming around the newcomer.

“How dare you?” Cahan scowled. “I am the Elven King!”

They didn’t care. “Me next, me next!” The goblins chanted. “Kick me!”

Adjusting Not Sarah comfortably onto his lap and supporting her with a single hand, Jareth brought up his free hand and waved it. “That’s enough,” he called out.

They quieted and turned towards him. “Aww... Kingy...” they groaned as one.

“Go outside and play with the chickens,” Jareth told them. He looked around. “And give Sarah her brasseries before before she notices they’re missing. Again.”

The goblins blinked, silent.

“Or I’ll bog the lot of you,” he snapped and they immediately jumped into action, screaming all the way. Jareth watched in satisfaction as they scrambled to obey his order, running over each other and an annoyed Cahan as they did so. The throne room was emptied within seconds. Jareth sighed and leaned back to relax. He pulled out a crystal, allow it to drop to the floor and the escaping glitter of magic cleaning everything it touched as it expanded throughout the throne room.

Cahan sniffed, insulted. “Turning human children into goblins,” he grumbled, brushing nonexistent dust from his shoulder. “I don’t know what you were thinking.”

Popping a spit bubble Not Sarah was blowing, Jareth shrugged and answered absentmindedly, “They’re helpful when I need them to be.” He paused, then looked up. “Actually, if my memories serve me correctly, didn’t you attempt the same thing? Turning human children into elves?”

Cahan shuddered at the memory. “Don’t remind me, it was a failed experiment. I cannot believe my magic created something so ugly.” Trying not to remember large bat-like ears and bulging eyes, he summoned a chair and sat down, making himself comfortable before turning his attention back to the older fae. It was then that he noticed the small infant Jareth was holding. “You have a runner.”

“Yes,” he confirmed. “A young mother. Nineteen years old.”

“And how is she doing?”

Jareth paused at the question. “Well enough,” he finally answered after a moment’s pause. “She’s been at it for eight hours but she has neither stopped nor slowed down.”

Cahan raised an eyebrow. “Well enough.” usually meant “Not good enough.” but if the runner cared and actually tried... or if Jareth was in a good mood... He sat forward at the reminder.
“Speaking of which,” he drawled. “I recently met your Champion.”

“Oh?” Jareth asked, unimpressed. “Which one?” His Labyrinth had a lot of champions. While he certainly had no problem with turning unwanted human children in goblins, he gave second changes —something Sarah should learn from him, now that he thought about it. Anyone that regretted their decision and worked to get back their wish-away usually got what they wanted. He was kind-hearted like that.

“The only one that matters, of course,” Cahan answered.

Jareth froze then. He looked up, staring Cahan in the eyes, his gaze bright. “Oh?” he said. “Whatever for?”

Cahan smirked. “Why, to charm myself into her bed, of course.”

For a moment, Jareth didn’t respond. Then he leaned back, carefully shifting the babe in his arms again and smirked. “Really?” he asked, amused. “And how exactly did that work out for you?”

Cahan sniffed, remembering. “Horrid,” he answered honestly. “She turned me down twice; I even used magic the second time!” Thinning his mouth, he huffed in annoyance, feeling awfully sorry for himself. “Not to mention, she did it in front of one of your ugly goblin creatures too! I’m surprised you haven’t heard of it.”

Jareth shrugged, careful to limit the amusement on his expression; Cahan was sensitive like that. “A couple of my goblins live with her,” he told the elf. “They only return if they need something.” Which usually meant repairman duty. Ah, Sarah. What have you reduced me to?

“I don’t understand what you see in her,” Cahan said, shaking his head. Sarah Williams was plain and mouthy, nothing like his wife who was all beauty, brains, and perfection. Perhaps Jareth’s eyesight was failing him. Although... considering his goblin subjects, perhaps he was blind all this time. It would certainly explain his fondness for his goblins, his bog—dear lords! His bog!—and, of course, his Champion.

Jareth smiled. “She is quite the cruel woman, isn’t she? Didn’t I tell you that before?” he asked, glancing down at Not Sarah who was grabbing onto thin locks of his hair and sticking it into her mouth.

Honestly, Cahan rather would not answered the question, lest Jareth find the need to tell him yet another story of his beloved Champion. That was how he got interested in her in the first place. Filled with stories of her intelligence, her beauty, and her cruelty, Cahan had sought her out only to find himself horribly, horribly disappointed. Sarah Williams lacked the intelligence, lacked the beauty, but at least her cruelty made up for everything. Resisting a sad shake of his head, Cahan took his time to observe his fellow fae, wondering how someone so powerful had fallen so low.

Cahan stared at the sight in front of him for a moment. The babe in his arms was rather cute, he thought, and was glad that the babe’s mother was actually working hard. He would hate for the babe to be turned into yet another ugly, twisted monstrosity. But then again... he paused and thought about Jareth’s Labyrinth. Growing, breathing, living. He wondered if turning human children into ugly, twisted monster elves would keep his lands alive.

“Do you fear Death?” Cahan asked suddenly.

“No,” Jareth answered. There was no hesitation in his voice but the question got him looking back up, gaze curious. “Why do you ask?”
Cahan swallowed. “Appledore Falls is no more.”

Jareth’s eyes widened. “Appledore Falls,” he repeated. “Isn’t—wasn’t—that where Isadora was born?”

Cahan nodded. “One of our more magical places.” He turned to look out the window, staring into the still growing, still breathing, still living vastness of Jareth’s Labyrinth. His own lands had been dying for a long time but Appledore Falls had withstood Death’s touch for so long. But now...

Now...

Once it’s all gone... once he becomes a king of nothing, Cahan himself would be no more. Jareth stared at Cahan silently, leaving him to his thoughts. Cahan had always been a flirtatious, fun-loving fae. While childish at times, he cared for his subjects—most of them, anyway—and worked hard to ensure the survival of his lands despite the changing times Above. But now he looked his very age and Jareth’s heart went out for him. “Come,” he finally said, standing up. “I want to show you something.”

The elf blinked but obeyed, getting up from his own seat and following Jareth towards the window. From there, he could hear the loud screaming and laughter from Jareth’s goblin subjects.

“There,” Jareth said, using a free hand to point at something. “Do you see it?”

Cahan followed the direction of his friend’s finger. He didn’t see anything unusual at first but then a vast area of green caught his eye. “Is that Rainbow Forest? I thought it had—” He snapped his head around to stare at Jareth. “How?” he demanded.

Jareth smiled. “Sarah, of course.”

Cahan stared. “Your Champion?”

The King of Dreams’ smile widened. “Yes, my Champion.” He stared at the growing greenery in the distance. Rainbow Forest, which had been dead before, was now coming alive again. Growing, breathing, living. “Sarah, one mere chit of a girl, has such a strong, unwavering belief in our world—our kind—that she is able to breathe life back to us.”

Cahan could feel himself gaping unattractively, mouth open, gaze disbelieving. “You—you—!” he stammered. “Have you been planning this the entire time?” he demanded. “I thought you sought to make her your queen!”

Jareth paused. “Well, there’s that too,” he admitted with a pout. “But that’s a bit hard to do right now since I’ve been banished from her presence.” He looked at Cahan seriously. “I’m trying to find my way around that.” Huffing in annoyance before clearing his throat, Jareth added, “Anyway, the presence of my goblins in her life and even Young Jareth’s own human magic cements and ensures the continuation of her belief. She’s protective of her friends here, she’s protective of my goblins; her belief is unshakable. As long as she is alive—as long as she continues to dream—our world will remain. She gives life faster than Death can take away.”

“But,” Cahan said slowly despite the hope sparking in his chest. “Death will not be happy.”

Jareth turned to look out the window again, gaze hardening. “No,” he agreed. “He will not be.”

You live. You die. That was how life worked. But for the longest time, the only beings that Death could not touch were the faes themselves. Gods in their own right, as long as human belief of the Underground were strong, the Underground monarchs and their lands and subjects would continue...
to bloom. Death hated that. After all, what was life without death? The Shadowwalker—whose kingdom was as vast as the lands his shadows could cover—could not touch the Underground. And for the longest time, such was the relationship between the Death and the Underground monarchs.

But then...

Then came the era of technological advancement, and the related weakening belief in their kind. It wasn’t until then did the Underground monarchs realize that even they were not immune to Death’s touch. As long as shadows exist Underground, they share their kingdom with the Shadowwalker. Human faith was their nourishment and without it, Death’s touch becomes a possibility, and immortality becomes nothing.

“If he finds out about her...”

“He won’t,” Jareth replied quietly. Firmly.

“But if he does...”

Jareth turned to look at him. “Then you must protect her. Until she lifts the banishment, my protection is limited.”

Cahan hummed. “I do not understand,” he said. “How can she breathe life into our world when even you cannot?”

Jareth tilted his head, softly rocking a tired Not Sarah to sleep. “I am only the King of Dreams,” he said quietly. “But no matter how many times or how I manipulate someone’s dream, it doesn’t matter in the end if they wake up not believing in them. Even with my ability to turn back time, disbelief is a contagious killer and it strikes faster than I am able to work.”

The King of Dream’s powers were unique, Cahan knew. For the longest time, Jareth was the only one with the ability to counteract the rapidly failing belief of their world. For the longest time, he had diligently worked alone but him and all the other Underground monarchs knew it was a losing battle. But now...

Now...

There’s a possibility—

There’s hope—

“But can a single girl keep our world away from Death? From the Shadowwalker himself?” Because no matter where you go, there will always be shadows. And if there are shadows, then Death can touch even the safest of all sanctuaries.

“She can,” Jareth answered firmly. “She must.”

Then:

“Besides,” Jareth continued, voice bright. “I’m sure she’ll call my name soon and lift the banishment. And then I’ll make her my queen.”

Cahan stared, feeling just the slightest bit sorry for him. He had, after all, met Sarah in person. Twice. “I’m sure,” he agreed instead.

“He must learn Occlumency, Severus,” Albus said. “You must be the one to teach him. He was
trying—and failing—to make sense of the day. Everything was happening all at once and Albus did not know where to begin. Mind whirling, he could feel the formation of half thoughts and questions before they vanished when new strands of thoughts took their place. Everything was a priority until nothing mattered more than the other and he just didn’t know where to begin.

—how strong was Voldemort’s connection with—

—did Tobias Williams really—

—just how much about their world did Sarah—

—Umbridge. Where was Dolores—

“Of course, headmaster,” Severus replied, scowling. “Anything for Potter.” Albus sighed, knowing that Severus was unhappy with the order but unable to do anything about it. His Potions Master was a strong Legilimens but he was an even stronger Occlumens, beyond even Albus himself. “His connection with Tom places him in even greater danger than before,” he said, trying to reason. “Thankfully Tom is still currently unaware of the connection. And if Harry learns Occlumency, he will never learn of it. How is Harry, anyway?”

“Alive when I left,” Severus assured him, which really wasn’t saying much. He was in and out of the hospital wing within five minutes. “But Mister Williams was with him; he refuses to leave Potter’s side.”

“Yes,” Albus said slowly, remembering. “Mister Williams... He is... very strange, indeed. His ability to heal, that is. Miss Granger was the one that told him of his affinity with healing magic, was she? I’ve never heard of such an affinity before.”

Severus closed his eyes. “It’s not the boy you need to concern yourself with.”

Albus blinked. “Oh?”


Albus blinked again and stared. Hard. “Miss Williams?” he questioned. He paused, thought about it, then nodded in agreement. “Yes, I see. I’ve always thought she was a bit strange. She was very accepting about everything I presented. I suspect she knows more about our world than she lets on.”

Albus shook his head. “But I’m more worried about Mister Williams and his ability to summon his sister. I wonder if it is his connection with his sister that gives him the ability. Or perhaps—” an even more frightening thought, “—he can summon anyone he wants.”

Severus snorted and if Albus was anyone else, he probably would have felt insulted. “Mister Williams,” he drawled, “is an innocent fool. He did not even realize his own healing abilities until Granger pointed them out. Him banishing Umbridge was a mistake. Him summoning his sister was a mistake. I’m beginning to think him being a wizard is a mistake.”

“Severus—”

The Potions Master held up a hand. “But Miss Williams. A mere Muggle? I think not. I have never come across Occlumency shields quite like hers before.”

Albus sputtered. “You—you—!” He coughed then took a deep breath to compose himself. He really shouldn’t have been surprised; Severus had always walked a gray line. But first things first: “I told you, I had thought she was rather strange when I first met her. Her family is originally from the States. Her name is not in The Book; I even went to Salem Institution to check their copy. Miss
Severus raised an eyebrow, knowing that Albus wasn’t really all that angry. “Albus,” he said, anyway. “In my line of work, I tend to hex first and ask questions later. Considering the fact that not only did she take suddenly appearing in an unknown location quite calmly, she knew exactly what happened to her brother before her appearance. We were both there. No one brought up Umbridge’s actions after her appearance.” They had been too shocked by Sarah’s sudden, unexpected arrival.

Albus sighed and rubbed his temples. Ah yes, another question and no answer. “And?” he asked.

“And what?”

“Severus, please,” Albus said, sighing again. “What did you see?”

There was a pause. “Nothing,” Severus finally answered.

Albus looked up.

“It was like not even performing Legilimency,” Severus elaborated. “I looked her in the eyes and simply kept looking. Nothing happened. I have never encountered or even heard of such shields before.” He paused, thinking. “It would be wise to keep an eye on her. As you know, I have a strong affinity with mind magic. The fact that I can master both Legilimency and Occlumency at my age is already quite the feat. Miss Williams is young—very young—even if she is a witch, she still shouldn’t be able to block me like that.”

“She’s not as young as you think,” Albus found himself mumbling even though it didn’t really matter.

Severus blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

“She’s twenty-five,” Albus said.

Severus stared but didn’t say anything but Albus knew the information was somehow significant to Severus. Wizards and witches tended to age much slower than Muggles, perhaps her youthful appearance was another clue that Miss Williams really wasn’t a Muggle.

Albus frowned; now wasn’t the time to think about Sarah Williams. Despite the fact that she was really, really giving him a headache, his first priority was Tobias Williams’ supposedly impossible vanishing and summoning abilities. “With what happened, I doubt Miss Williams will be leaving her brother’s side anytime soon. Thankfully, term ends in a week, but Dolores will not approve of Miss Williams’ presence. I cannot have this getting back to the Ministry; Tom will hear of it.” He hummed, thinking.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “If we can find her,” he scoffed. “Mister Williams was not exactly happy with her.”

*Ah yes,* Albus thought. There was that too. But instead, he said, “Tobias Williams is a good child. You saw his reaction, he did not mean her any serious harm.”

Severus narrowed his eyes, remembering Lily. “Just because you did not mean something does not mean the outcome will suddenly turn in your favor.”

Albus sighed, wanting to comfort but knowing that it was useless, Severus could not be comforted. It was too many years too late. “Severus,” he began, but even Albus didn’t know where his sentence was going. “I—”
Severus interrupted with a pained hiss, stiffening in his spot and clenching his left arm. He peeled back his sleeve with a frown. “The Dark Lord calls,” he said rather unnecessarily. Voldemort never called him during term without warning. Which meant— “He must have heard what happened.”

“Be careful,” Albus told him, raising his hands to drop the anti-apparition wards in his office.

Severus nodded distractedly as he pulled out his wand and pressed the tip to the Dark Mark. He wondered... from the moment he had knelt down in front of Potter to him and Albus leaving the corridors, he had been on high alert. He had made sure he knew where everyone was at all times and never once did he sense another presence. How did Voldemort learned of the incident? What did he learn? Tobias Williams’ affinity with healing magic? Umbridge’s disappearance? Sarah Williams—Suddenly, a more pressing thought came to mind:

Was there a traitor among their midst?

Weasleys, Granger, Williams, Lovegood...

Or perhaps Potter himself? The connection? Does the Dark Lord already know of it?

Then Severus felt the familiar tugging of his stomach and allowed himself to be carried away.

Chapter End Notes

So a couple of you managed to guess that the “King-King Pointy Ears” mentioned back in Chapter 7 was Cahan. And Jareth ordered him bogged which was why he told his servant to set up an audience in the previous chapter.

And that makes me so happy because that means I am giving just enough hints for some people to figure things out but not so much that everyone knows before “the big reveal.” I don’t know if you guys realize this but I absolutely love subtle hints to future reveals. I love reading stories and thinking, This was hinted at before! I should have known this. So this story has a lot of it.

Again, thank you all for your support and reviews <3
Toxin

Chapter Notes

One thing I enjoy most about world-building and writing character development is misdirection. That being said, when reading this story, please take care not to take a character’s words as fact. Every character has their perspective and bias and this influences what they say and what you, as the reader, is exposed to. For example, way back in chapter 4, Kathie (one of Toby’s friends) said that Flitwick was half-goblin which is simply not true in canon (I believe he only has goblin ancestry).

Misdirection in literature is only possible if the writer has a thorough understanding of the world they are writing. Unfortunately, in my case, that isn’t completely true. While I am familiar with both the Labyrinth and Harry Potter universe, I am more familiar with their fandoms and the various, amazing headcanons. So if—when—I do make a mistake that contradicts canon, please feel free to point it out to me. Sometimes it’s intentional but knowing me, it’s most likely not.

I would like to dedicate this chapter to two amazing people who bought me coffee! I hesitate to name you in case you would prefer not be publicly called out but let me know if that is not the case. You guys have no idea how much it means to me that you enjoy this story so much. Thank you!

Severus knelt down and grasped the end of the Dark Lord’s black robe to bring it up to his lips. “My lord,” he greeted, his voice calm and smooth despite the pounding of his heart. He allowed his Occlumency shields to wash over his mind like winter over a lake. He was Severus Snape, Death Eater, the Dark Lord’s spy.

“Rise, Severus,” Voldemort said, his voice a cool hiss.

Severus obeyed, feeling the chill of his mind slowly crept through his body. The Dark Lord’s will was his bond; he would not disobey. But he was a spy first, and he act as such; followers of the Dark Lord are not fools. He looked around slowly—almost lazily—and took in his surrozundings. A dead forest; bare branches, no wind, no life. Besides himself, a single cloaked figure stood behind the Dark Lord, surprising Severus. The Dark Lord did not particularly like people standing behind him, he trusted no one. Once satisfied, he turned back to Voldemort, noting the way Voldemort watched him, his red gaze firm.

“I just heard...” Voldemort began, “some rather interesting news.”

“My lord?”

Heard. Not felt. Severus knew what was coming. He almost wished the Dark Lord knew of his connection with Potter instead.

The Dark Lord continued to stare, unblinkingly. “A student at Hogwarts,” he said. “A first year Mudblood with a healing ability like no other.” Then, a cruel smile twisted the Dark Lord’s thin lips and Severus had to remind himself that he was Severus Snape, a Death Eater. “Furthermore,” he continued. “This same first year seems to hold the ability to banish and summon people from within
the wards of Hogwarts.”

Severus froze and wondered if the cloaked figure behind Voldemort was another one of his many spies, one stationed at Hogwarts. But who could it be? Surely not a student. *Weasleys, Granger, Williams, Lovegood,* he listed again. But it couldn’t be; Albus would have known if a student had left. A professor, then?

So many suspects...

But now was not the time. Taking one last deep breath, Severus allowed the chill of his *Occlumency* shield to completely take over his entire being; his mind, his body. He could not afford a single crack. Not now. Not with what the Dark Lord knew.

“Is this true?”

“Yes, my lord,” Severus admitted, bowing his head. “But how did you find out? The incident just happened. Dumbledore and I are still trying to make sense of it.”

Voldemort smiled again but did not answer Severus’ question, his thin lips stretched again and his white teeth glinted in the moonlight. The figure behind Voldemort shifted and Severus watched as Voldemort side-glanced in the figure’s general direction before returning towards him. “You are unhappy,” he noted, watching the way Severus’ wand hand clenched.

Severus paused, hesitating. “I confess,” he answered slowly. “I am disappointed. You have graced me with a duty, my lord. An *honor.* I should have been the first one to tell you what had happened. What use am I to you if my presence in Hogwarts is useless?”

Voldemort simply smiled again, pleased. “By remaining close to Dumbledore,” he said, his voice soothing and warm, reminding Severus of the time he actually *believed* in the Dark Lord. “You have done more than enough. As for spying... I have eyes and ears in many places; even the shadows work for me.” He laughed at that and Severus’ eyes flickered back to the cloaked figure behind Voldemort. Somewhere in the depth of his mind, he wondered if it was Draco Malfoy. He hoped not. “The duty that I have honored you with, continue with it. I have many spies but I only have one person that is close to Dumbledore.”

Laying a hand over his heart, Severus dipped his head again. “Yes, my lord.”

Seeing that *that* part of the conversation is over with, Voldemort waved him over and directed him towards an empty seat. “Come, sit.”

Severus obeyed, feeling the crunch of dead leaves underneath his boot as he stepped over. He did not look around again, Voldemort knew he was a spy, knew spies had their habits but too much would imply that Severus did not trust his Lord. But he did. Severus was a Death Eater and who else could he trust if not his lord. He took the seat across from Voldemort and waited.

“Tell me about the boy,” the Dark Lord said. “The Mudblood.”

Severus felt his shields falter. *Inhale.*

“Tobias Will—”


Severus dipped his head in acknowledgment. “Yes,” he confirmed.
Red eyes flickered in his direction. “That does not bother you?” he asked but Severus doubted he really cared.

Exhale. Nevertheless, it amazed Severs that the Dark Lord remembered. Then he realized that there probably was nothing the Dark Lord did not know about his followers and Severus wasn’t sure if that was awe-inspiring or downright frightening. “I’ve had many shares of my students named ‘Tobias’ over the years,” he answered. “The name means nothing to me.” He also had two Lilys, however; he couldn’t say the same thing about that name.

The Dark Lord hummed. “Continue; tell me about him.”

Inhale.

He nodded. “Insignificant, my lord,” Severus answered. “I am disappointed to say that I did not think much of him until today.” He tilted his head and brought a finger up to trace his lips, a familiar motion that soothed him. “I have no doubt in my mind that Dumbledore will want to harness his powers, all of them. Perhaps even ones that we are not familiar with yet.”

Voldemort nodded. “Yes,” he agreed, red eyes flickering to Severus once again. Severus was one of his more intelligent followers, calm in every situation, able to lie and manipulate his way through any problem, and even had the Occlumency shields to back him up. There are times when Voldemort found himself... wary of the Potions Master. Intelligence did not make for good followers. “Tell Dumbledore of our meeting. Tell him that I seek to possess the boy.”

Severus frowned and Voldemort could see that he had seen through his plans already. “Even if he knows this, Dumbledore will not lessen his watch on Potter,” he said carefully.

“No,” Voldemort agreed. “He probably wouldn’t.” But it didn’t really matter because right now Harry Potter was no longer his top priority. Especially not with the possibility of a new type of power even Albus Dumbledore did not understand. Voldemort closed his eyes and stroked the smooth surface of his armrest with a single finger, thinking.

The Mudblood’s affinity with healing magic, while rare was not completely unheard of; he could think of a number of historical figures that are said to have such an affinity. It was the Mudblood’s summoning and banishing powers that he cared about. Not to mention his ability to bypass the wards of Hogwarts. Voldemort felt a slow smile stretching across his lips as he thought about all the new possibilities and all he had to do was get his on the mudblood boy.

He paused then, suddenly remembering something.

Bypassing wards...

Queen Mab, if he was remembering correctly. A Dark Witch that had terrorized the Wizarding World for three centuries. The first and only one to impact it on an international level. Mad Mab “Wardbreaker” Myercough, everyone had called her. Beyond her terrifying rule, Queen Mab was known for her unique abilities to bypass any wards as if they didn’t exist. Did the Mudblood share her power? If so, did that mean he shared Queen mab’s other powers? He would need to do more research but it wouldn’t be easy.

Texts that even so much as mentioned the mad queen had been banned centuries ago as no one knew the secrets behind her ability to bypass wards. The Ministry of Magic was not sure whether it was something that was inherited or something that could be learned and no one wanted to take the chance.
“I wonder,” he murmured. “How far will Dumbledore go in order to protect this Mudblood? How much is he willing to sacrifice to harness the boy’s powers?”

Considering what Severus knew about the First Year—or rather, his sister—Severus doubted anyone would be harnessing Williams’ powers anytime soon. Sarah Williams was like a Muggleborn’s parent; redirecting charms, ancient wards, and everything else protecting the school was not going to keep them from their child. Except in this particular case, redirecting charms, ancient wards, and everything else did not seem to affect one Sarah Williams. And then, remembering how cautious Dumbledore was around her, Severus doubted there was anything that could keep her from protecting her brother.

“For now,” the Dark Lord continued, “keep a watch on the boy. No doubt he will become an important tool for me later on.”

Severus bowed his head. “Yes, my lord.”

“You’re dismissed,” Voldemort said with a distracted wave of his hand. “I trust you know what to tell Dumbledore.”

He gave a slow nod in response but a sudden shift caught his attention and his eyes immediately darted to the cloaked figure that was still standing behind the Dark Lord. For someone that hated when people were outside his immediate line of sight, Severus was surprised the Dark Lord still hadn’t acknowledge the figure. Knowing that he was delaying and that his lord would only tolerate so much of Severus’ natural paranoid curiosity, he stood up in a single, graceful movement before turning around and walking away.

“Interesting, isn’t he?” a familiar voice questioned; it was the last thing Severus heard right before he stepped out of the anti-apparition area the Dark Lord had charmed upon his arrival and disapparated.

It wasn’t the Dark Lord’s voice.

Severus appeared right before the large, looming gates of Hogwarts. He could breathe again. While he knew Dumbledore probably lowered the anti-apparition wards to his office, Severus needed time to shed the chill of his *Occlumency* shields.

*Inhale.*

He began a slow trek towards the castle, concentrating on his breathing while trying to place a face to the voice of the unknown figure. Low and soothing and familiar in an odd sort of way, Severus was sure it was neither a student nor any Death Eater from the Dark Lord’s inner circle. Which meant an acquaintance, but Severus didn’t have a lot of them and the thought that an owner of a show he may frequent or perhaps even a lower ranking Order member may be the unknown Death Eater was a rather frightening thought.

It was someone the Dark Lord trusted enough to allow him to sit in on his meeting with Severus, his spy. He had only ever allowed Bella such a privilege but Bella was special.

*Exhale.*

While Severus was no closer to putting a face to the voice by the time he finally reached the castle, he could, at the very least, feel the beginnings of warmth spreading throughout his body. *Occlumency* was a double-edged sword and it was getting harder and harder for Severus to drop his shields every time he used it. Usually, thoughts of Lily was enough to thaw the ice and remind him what it was like to feel but he was beginning to find out that sometimes, even Lily wasn’t enough.
Inhale.

Severus slipped his way through the shadows of the corridors as he made his way closer towards Dumbledore’s office. For a moment, he could have swore he felt someone watching him from within the darkness of the shadows but when he looked around, there was nothing out of the ordinary. Breathing out slowly, he wondered whether it was his paranoia or the lingering chill of his Occlumency shields getting to him before continuing on.

Breathe.

Dumbledore—Albus—did not look up when Severus walked through his office doors but did give a distracted nod in his general direction as a greeting. Scattered around were several books on location charms and summoning and banishing magic. Probably trying to find a way to locate Umbridge, Severus thought but didn’t really cared. That toad of a woman could go missing forever for all he cared.

“How did it go?” Albus finally asked after reading the passage.


Albus blinked, surprised. He had expected bad news but had thought it would be in the form of Voldemort learning of his connection with Harry. Not of young Tobias Williams; he had underestimated the number of spies Voldemort had at his disposal. He sighed. Miss Williams will definitely not be happy. He had a feeling that Miss Williams’ happiness would become a priority of his fairly quickly in the upcoming days. Especially if he wanted to study Mister Williams’ banishing and summoning abilities.

“I recommend that he is to be moved to headquarters as soon as term ends,” Severus continued, voice unusually flat. Lingering traces of his Occlumency shields was still coursing through his mind and he was currently balancing between an Order member and a Death Eater. “Or at the very least a safe house. And his family to be placed under protection.” He didn’t care how well Sarah Williams thinks she can protect her brother, she was nothing compared to the Dark Lord and his followers, himself included.

Albus was silent for another moment. “That’s impossible,” he finally said. “No doubt Sarah would want her brother to spend Christmas with their family.”

“But unless she wants her brother in the hands of the Dark Lord,” Severus drawled, unimpressed. “I suggest you tell her to rethink her decision immediately.”

But Albus fell silent again and Severus narrowed his eyes suspiciously in response. He could not understand why Albus was hesitating. He had more than enough connections and manpower to keep watch on a Muggle family. Immediately after the Dark Lord’s return, Albus had a number of families that were connected to Potter in even the smallest of ways watched. Now, watching the way Albus rubbed his fingers together thoughtfully, the reason suddenly hit Severus like a bludger to the gut.

He wanted this.

He wanted this.

Albus was willing to put the Williamses in danger in order to delve into Tobias Williams’ abilities. Possible even just to learn of Sarah Williams’ secrets.

“I will ask a couple members of the Order to look after the Williams,” Albus finally compromised. “But for now, he is quite safe in Hogwarts.”
Severus couldn’t help but stare. *Like how Potter was safe his first year*, Severus thought, feeling strangely as if history was repeating itself. *And his second. And his third.* But the problem with this line of action—or rather, *inaction*—was that Tobias Williams was not Harry Potter. Potter had been involved with the Dark Lord since that Halloween night all those years ago. And while the boy may not have realized it himself, Albus had him conditioned into fighting in the war since his first year.

Tobias Williams had no such history. He could only hope that Albus was not planning on conditioning the young First Year. And if he was, how in the world was he going to accomplish it behind his sister’s back. Which reminded him—

His sister...

That woman...

“I am going to strangle you all,” she had yelled out. Either she was used to being dropped on her back from such great heights or she was used to being summoned to unknown places and Severus was sure it was the latter. While Mister Williams’ unusual powers should certainly be looked into, Severus had a feeling that he was concentrating too much on the brother when he should be more concerned about the sister.

“Things on your end?” he asked instead, nodding at the scattered books.

Albus sighed in response, practically deflating right before Severus’ very eyes. It was an odd sight to witness and even a little disheartening; despite seeing the aged headmaster every day, displays of power, calmness, and wisdom almost made people forget just how *old* Albus really was.

“Well,” Albus began. “I’m no closer to locating Dolores since you left and a brief conversation with Mister Williams—” Before a suspicious Sarah Williams practically glared him out of the hospital wing. “—proved to be utterly unhelpful. All he knows is that he wanted her away from Harry, he told me he wasn’t thinking of any particular location.” He sighed again and rubbed the bridge of his nose, looking even more tired. “And Arthur... Arthur Weasley really was attacked by Nagini.”

Severus exhaled a slow breath. “How is he?”

“Alive,” Albus answered. “They got to him in time but... but he’s not recovering fast enough.”

Severus frowned. “What has the mediwizards at St. Mungo’s tried?” “Not much, I’m afraid. They say they’ve never seen venom quite like it before.”

*Obviously,* Severus thought with a mental sneer, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. It wasn’t like the Dark Lord kept a normal snake around as a pet. But even if Nagini *was* a normal snake, he was sure the mediwizards at St. Mungo’s wouldn’t be able to do much either. He should know, he taught half those dunderheads.

“I gave their notes and a sample of Arthur’s blood to Miss Granger. She’s in the lab right now, working through the notes and hopefully starting the base for an anti-venom.”

Severus startled. “Alone?”

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Albus looked up then. “Miss Granger is responsible,” he said with a hint of amusement in his tone. “Even you cannot deny that.” Eyes narrowing in annoyance, Severus huffed and whirled around to stop his way out of the office, not bothering to wait for a dismissal. Responsible his arse! As if Albus didn’t know she had been following Potter around like a loyal dog since her first year. Chasing after a stone she shouldn’t have even known existed, getting petrified by a basilisk, helping an escaped Azkaban prisoner... That was merely the *beginning* of her “responsible” Hogwarts career.
By the time Severus reached the dungeons, he had worked himself into such a fury that he had to pause outside his classroom doors for a moment in order to collect himself. He opened the large double doors with a wave of wandless magic and walked in.

Only to blink in confusion as he took in the empty classroom. It took another moment before he realized the implications and felt the familiar feelings of annoyance well up inside him in response.

_Alus!

Seeing that Granger wasn’t in his classroom like he had expected could only mean one thing: Albus had unwarded his private lab for her use. His private lab. Severus clenched his jaw; his private lab which were filled with expensive potions appliances. His private lab which led directly to his private storeroom that was filled with even more expensive, rare, and possibly some not-quite illegal potion ingredients.

Severus let out a slow breath and spun around to make his way towards the hidden entrance leading to his private lab. Dismantling his wards in quick, precise movements, Severus narrowed his eyes as the door shimmered into existence. With another wave of his hand, Severus opened the door with a loud crack as it hit the wall.

Granger, already used to his temper, did not so much as jump at his sudden, unexpected entrance. That fact annoyed him even more and he watched through narrowed eyes as she continued marking through her notes, her wild hair moving with her every motion.

“St. Mungo managed to break down Mr. Weasley’s blood and isolate Nagini’s venom,” she told him as he stepped further into his lab. “I wrote down what observations I could but I am unsure about what some of these compounds are.”

What annoyance he felt about her presence in his private lab was immediately forgotten as he grabbed the notes she had set aside for him. Now was not the time to be annoyed with Albus’ ever-present bias when it comes to his three Golden Gryffindors. Besides, if there was anyone Severus had to work with to help him come up with an anti-venom for Nagini’s venom, he was glad it was Granger. Granger had a talent of noticing _every single_ detail; a trait, he would have preferred her to leave behind when writing papers.

Severus paused as he came across an unexpected notation. “What’s this about a mongoose?” he asked as it was the only thing Granger had written down next to the section he was currently reading through.

She looked up and it was then that Severus noticed the dark bags underneath her eyes. She must have been working on this since he had left, he realized. It was no wonder she was tired.

“I was thinking specifically about mongoose blood, sir,” she answered, rubbing her eyes tiredly and managed to smudge ink across her cheek with the same movement. “Or even honey badger blood because of their—”

“—known immunity to snake venom,” Severus finished.

Granger nodded. “That and also that they’re mammals, which compared to other snakes with even stronger immunity, are much more closer related to us. I also ran some arithmancy calculations but there are too many unknown factors.”

Severus sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, thinking.

“But Nagini also isn’t a normal snake so I’m not even sure how helpful the blood can be,” continued
Granger. “And they’re not exactly potion ingredients so I doubt we can get any as quickly as we need them.”

“No,” Severus agreed. While they wouldn’t be able to use the mongoose or honey badger blood like Granger had suggested, her idea reminded Severus of something he had in his private storeroom that they could use. Placing the notes back onto the table, he made his way towards the storeroom and asked, “Have you gotten started on the base yet?”

“I have three on stasis,” she answered, not bothering to look up even as Severus shifted through his rarest potion ingredients. Granger was ruled by her curiosity but considering the situation, it wasn’t surprising that it was probably the last thing on her mind.

Plucking an almost forgotten vial from the shelf, Severus walked back into the main lab and placed it in front of Granger, startling her out of her concentration. “This is human blood,” he told her. “Break it down into its basic compounds and isolate anything that stands out.”

Granger reached out and took the small vial, turning it around in her hand with a curious glint in her eyes. Severus could practically feel the curiosity coursing through her but she stayed silent and he did not bother elaborating. There were things she was better off not knowing. “Yes sir,” she murmured in response instead and hopped off her stool to get to work.

As she worked on breaking down the blood, Severus moved to one of her bases and began preparing it for the addition of whatever compounds Severus had no doubt Granger would eventually find. He was surprised to find that the anti-venom base was nearly complete and was rather impressed despite himself, knowing that it was not taught in his class. They worked together silently; the scene almost a sort of reminiscence of their summer at Headquarters even though Severus knew they have dire consequences if they couldn’t get the potion perfectly right this time.

“How is Potter?” Severus asked after he was done completing one of Granger’s bases. All he needed now were the individual compounds and seeing Granger’s stiff shoulders, he knew he wouldn’t be able to get them anytime soon until she could relax enough to think rather than worry.

She paused in her mad scribbling but did not look up as he moved onto the second base. Severus knew that it was going to take more than one attempt to be successful... if at all. “He’s fine,” she answered.

Silence.

Severus waited.

She did not disappoint. “Sir...” she began hesitantly, her voice unusually small and almost insignificant-sounding. “Is Harry... is he connected to You-Know-Who?” It was Severus’ turn to pause but he was not surprised that she had figured it out. As much as Severus berated her on regurgitating whatever she read, he knew she was not incapable of original thought. “Perhaps,” he answered vaguely, knowing that Albus would not thank him for telling her. It was time to change the subject. “And Mister Williams?”

“Surprisingly well, sir,” she answered and Severus watched as the tension began to slowly ease from her stiff shoulders. “But that probably has to do with his sister being here. They spent a long time in that private room Professor Dumbledore gave her.”

Severus frowned and looked up from the cauldron. “Albus is allowing Miss—Ms.—Williams free reign?”
She nodded distractedly and began writing again. This time, Severus could tell she was making important connections rather than random notations. “Well,” she continued, pulling off multi-tasking like a master. Severus wasn’t surprised considering her choice of friends; she probably had it mastered at a young age. “He did tell us that we weren’t allowed to say anything about her... appariting into Hogwarts or that she’s a... a Muggle but yes, he did pretty much give her free reign.” She paused and looked up, catching his gaze over the desk. “Sir,” she began hesitantly as if unsure whether or not she should voice her thoughts out loud. “I... I don’t think she’s a Muggle.”

Severus narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Well,” she said, hesitating again. “When I first found out about Toby’s affinity with healing magic, I asked him about it. About any incidences of healing before Hogwarts, I mean.” She swallowed and licked her lips, Muggle pen twirling between skilled fingers. “And he told me that Sarah got into an accident a couple years ago. According to him, she had severe DAI but... but I don’t think he really knows what that means.”

Severus didn’t either but he wasn’t about to admit that.

Granger, who was obviously used to explaining everything Muggle to her friends, elaborated without being prompted to. “DAI or diffuse axonal injury is a type of traumatic brain injury. I don’t know the details of her case but my uncle also had severe DAI.” Her gaze met his again and Severus was taken back by how mature she looked at the moment. It almost felt like he was speaking to a complete stranger. “Ninety percent of victims with regular DAI either dies or ends up in comas. The ten percent that managed to wake up never fully recovers. But according to Toby, his sister was out of the hospital within the week. And he wasn’t even there at the time.”

“There are miracle cases,” Severus allowed, not believing the possibility even as the words left his mouth.

Granger nodded in agreement and waited. Seemingly finished, she gathered her notes and made her way towards him.

While Ms. Williams was unusual and it was obvious that she was keeping secrets, Severus knew he needed more information before he could make a judgment. “Otherwise,” Severus drawled, needing to downplay Ms. and Mister Williams’ significance lest Granger gets the idea of getting herself involved somehow. “You’re telling me that she shares her brother’s ability to heal. That she is a witch that had somehow hidden her status.”

Granger blinked, tilting her head curiously as she thought over his words while pulling out necessary ingredients. “Well, no. Maybe. I don’t know.” She groaned; it had certainly made sense in her head. But now that Professor Snape laid it all out, it sounded completely wrong. After all, even if Sarah Williams didn’t want other people knowing she was a witch, how would she know herself if her parents were Muggles?

“Besides Mister Williams’ healing abilities, are there other things about him that you find unusual?”

Granger blinked at the abrupt change in subject and stared at him for a moment, knowing that he was thinking about his banishing and summoning abilities. “No, sir,” she finally answered, brows furrowing as she thought. “Not before today, I mean. Outside necessary situations, Toby doesn’t actually do magic all that often. And I don’t think it has anything to do with his Muggle habits. If anything, I have a feeling that Toby isn’t actually all that fond of the Wizarding World.”

Severus nodded, he had suspected as such weeks ago. The two of them fell silent after that, busy concentrating on the anti-venom now that it was heading close to its critical stage. There would be no
more room for small talk, not that Severus actually viewed it as such. It was more of him gathering information by any means possible and Granger was actually the best person to get it from seeing that she was closely acquainted with the boy in question.

Hours later found the sun rising over the horizon in the lab’s charmed window. Severus swore angrily as the anti-venom began bubbling dangerously in its cauldron. He immediately pushed Granger, wrapping her smaller form within his protected cloak as he summoned a barrier with his opposite hand in case of an explosion. Thankfully, he was able to vanish their third, failed attempt of anti-venom away before it had the chance to explode. Pulling his cloak back towards him, Severus ground his teeth together in frustration and felt a familiar prickling sensation on the back of his neck. But when he looked up, Granger was staring at the empty cauldron, hair in disarray—more so than usual.

“Sir,” she said quietly, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. “Mr. Weasley... He’ll... He’ll be fine, won’t he?”

Severus stared at her. While he had certainly noticed, he hadn’t actually registered the amount of stress Granger must have been under. Her friends were gone, one currently recovering in the hospital wing after being possessed while the others were visiting their father who was attacked by the Dark Lord’s pet snake. Despite having a full day of classes and prefect duties, Granger was here. With him. Working diligently on an anti-venom even though she would have to attend classes in mere hours lest someone talks. The Dark Lord had proven himself to have ears everywhere; one could never be too careful.

Granger nodded. “If this doesn’t work, do you think we can ask Toby for help? I mean, if he’s able to stop Vol—You-Know-Who from possessing Harry and heal scratches from anti-healing blood quills... Even if he isn’t able to completely heal Mr. Weasley, he might at least be able to ease his pain or something.”

Severus hesitated but then nodded. “I will bring the possibility up with the Headmaster,” he promised but had a feeling Albus was probably already waiting for a similar opening. “In the meantime, while the last anti-venom may have failed, it was a close thing. I suspect I know what may have gone wrong, we will try again.”

“Yes sir,” Granger answered, smiling.

Sarah woke up naturally but her unfamiliar surroundings had her sitting up in one sudden movement, her heart pounding and eyes darting around in a panic before she remembered where she was. The dream was already beginning to fade even as she breathed out in relief and the pounding of her heart slowed. Waterfalls, Sarah thought distantly, she had been dreaming of a waterfall. She blinked up lazily at the ceiling, taking her time to fully registered how she had ended up in the middle of some magical school she apparently wasn’t supposed to see at all.

According to the headmaster, her sudden appearance into Hogwarts wasn’t supposed to be possible. And while Sarah knew he thought Toby was the one behind her sudden summoning, she had a feeling that it wasn’t the case. But neither was it her goblins’ doing, they had assured her when she asked but...

But—!

That could only mean...
That meant—

*But what no one knew is that the king of goblins had fallen in love with the girl, and he had given her certain powers...*

Sarah groaned, feeling the impending headache she got whenever she found herself wondering why she had goblins in her life. She doubted they followed everyone that ran the Labyrinth around and called them “Lady” but had long since decided to just be grateful for their company and her continued connection to the Underground. Now, however, it seemed like there was something else at play behind their presence in her life and Sarah wasn’t sure she wanted to know what it was.

“Ugh!” she groaned again, suddenly remembering something. “I have a meeting Friday and I’m currently stuck in the middle of a nonexistent world. Daniel is going to *kill* me.”

She pursed her lips, wondering what was going to happen now. It was obvious from Toby’s excitement the previous night that he was probably expecting her to *stay* with him in his magical world. And while Sarah was curious and maybe even a little excited herself, it was the *last* thing she wanted to do. She made a life for herself beyond her childhood dreams and she was going to *live* it, thank you very much. The sudden tingle that went through her body had Sarah sitting up with a start. She eyed her surroundings suspiciously, trying to shake off the the feeling of being watched when someone knocked on her door.

“Sarah, are you up?”

She breathed out a slow breath of relief, recognizing Toby’s voice. “Just woke up,” she called out. “Come in.”

Sarah watched in amusement as Toby—being unusually cautious—poked his head into her room and glanced around. Then, as if having reassured himself that his sister really was here, he broke out into a wide grin and cheerfully skipped into the room. “Do you want to go up and get breakfast with me?”

“Am I allowed to?” Sarah asked but knew she would probably follow him even if she wasn’t. Her stomach had a mind of its own, it seemed. Besides, she wasn’t going to blindly obey bastards that didn’t even have the decency to tell her what’s going on in a situation that had involved her baby brother!

Toby grinned. “I just asked,” he told her. “Professor Dumbledore said you could. We just have to keep quiet about how you came here and that you don’t have magic.” He paused, then corrected himself. “That you’re a Muggle.”

She smiled warily; she had a feeling that Dumbledore probably only agreed because she didn’t really give him much of a choice. She knew she could be intimidating when she wanted to be but in *his* case, the old headmaster was probably too distracted by yesterday’s events to put up much of an argument. “Sure,” she told Toby, not wanting to upset him. “Am I supposed to come up with a cover story or something?”

“Already got it,” Toby answered with another grin. He watched with bright eyes as she rolled herself out of bed and began preparing herself for the day. Despite knowing that she really was here, Toby couldn’t help but be afraid of suddenly waking up and finding out everything had only been a dream. Not that he minded *some* aspects of last night to actually be a dream. “You’re going to be... Jennifer Williams... A cousin that I never knew was a witch. You’re visiting me at Hogwarts because you want to become a teacher.”
Sarah paused and squinted at him. “Have you always been such a good liar?”

His grin widened. “I’m not lying. I’m storytelling!” Sarah laughed and reached out to ruffle his hair as she walked past him towards the connecting bathroom.

Toby waited silently for a moment, listening to her brush her teeth as he worked up the courage to ask a question that had been on the tip of his tongue since her appearance. “Sarah?”

“Yeah?” she called back, her voice slightly muffled by the sounds of running water.

He waited until she was finished and watched cautiously as she walked out of the bathroom, face slightly damp from washing. “Everyone thinks I was the one that summoned you,” he said hesitantly. It wasn’t a question because Toby knew better and it also wasn’t an accusation because he trusted his sister.

Sarah was silent for a moment but Toby noticed the slight tension strumming through her. “I know,” she murmured quietly, turning around to look at him. Toby had always been a lot smarter and more observant than people give him credit for. Not to mention, he could read her a lot better than anyone else could so she wasn’t surprised by his suspicions. “I’m sorry.”

He eyed her curiously. “They,” he continued. “They think I’m the one who made Professor Umbridge disappear too.”

Sarah nodded. “I’m sorry about that too.”

Toby stared. Then smiled. And then finally: “You’ll tell me one day, won’t you?” he asked.

“I will,” he promised, nodding again.

Not pressing the issue because he knows his sister better than anyone, Toby jumped off her bed, ready to head to breakfast. “Okay,” he agreed. “Are you ready?”

“Yup!” Sarah chirped. “Lead on!”

Toby took the long way to the Great Hall, wanting to show Sarah everything he had written to her about in his letters. He watched as Sarah took in everything excitedly; her bright eyes and easy smiles reminding him of the time the two of them explored Diagon Alley. He wondered for a brief moment whether or not Sarah wished that she lived here. Whether or not she wanted to take his place and be the one that was the magical one in their family attending Hogwarts.

But she can see Hogwarts, he remembered. Even though she wasn’t supposed to.

Then Toby found himself wondering whether or not Sarah had already been given the choice to live magic and decided not to.

“Come on,” he said, pulling her hand until they finally reached the Great Hall. Bright and lively, the hall was filled with students and teachers alike, all beginning their day with a healthy breakfast. “I’ll introduce you to my friends.”

Sarah met Dumbledore’s eyes over the sea of students and they stared at one another for a moment before Sarah finally broke eye contact. Despite what he told Toby, if he really did disapprove of her sitting down with his friends, she didn’t want to know but knew she would be able to meet him glare for glare if it came down to it. She skimmed the rest of the head table, noticing a couple more pair of eyes on her but ignored them too.
When they reached Toby’s usual seats, his surrounding seatmates took immediate notice of Sarah but waited politely for Toby to introduce her. “Morning, guys!” he greeted happily, the bubble of excitement that he had woke up with continuing to grow because this really, really wasn’t a dream. Sarah was here. *Really* here! With him! In Hogwarts! “This is S—Jennifer. She’s my cousin. I recently found out she’s a witch too so she’s visiting.”

His friends gave a slight gasp of surprise but otherwise, they took the news in stride. “It’s nice to meet you!” Kathie replied cheerfully, any friend of Toby’s was a friend of hers. “I’m Kathie!”

“I’m Ellis,” the boy sitting next to her offered.

Sarah smiled warmly, the names were familiar as Toby talked about his friends in his letters to her before. “It’s a pleasure to meet you two,” she replied sincerely.

Toby paused. “Where’s Adrian?” he asked, looking around for the missing Third Year.

“I’m here, I’m here!” Adrian huffed breathlessly as he ran up to them. “Sorry! I lost track of time in the library. Please tell me you saved me some bacon!” He dropped into his seat with an *umph* and then blinked when he noticed Sarah for the first time. “Oh. Uh... did I miss something?”

“Toby’s cousin is visiting,” Kathie supplied as she scooted over to make room.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Sarah greeted. “I’m Jennifer.”

Adrian blinked. “I didn’t know you had any wizarding relatives,” he blurted out and then immediately flushed. “Sorry. I mean, it’s really nice to meet you too! Toby talks a lot about you so— wait, did you say you were his cousin?”

Kathie rolled her eyes and shoved bacon onto Adrian’s plate. “Adrian,” she scolded. “Just eat. You really shouldn’t be interacting with people before eating breakfast.”

He flushed again but didn’t refute the comment. It was a well known fact among them that Adrian’s brain was directly linked to his stomach. “Sorry,” he mumbled again. “My mind is still a bit distracted by my DADA assignment.”

Sarah smiled but didn’t say anything.

“Are you still on the dark creatures unit?” Ellis asked curiously.

Adrian winced. “Yeah, I have a paper on house elves due tomorrow.”

Kathie frowned. “House elves aren’t dark creatures!”

Toby nodded silently in agreement. He met three of them himself and as obnoxious as they were, they were also playful and considerate... in their own way, at least. Next to him, Sarah mouthed the unfamiliar word, curiosity written across her entire feature.

Kathie must have noticed her confusion for she smiled at her. “Oops, I forgot you’re a Muggleborn like Toby. House elves are serving creatures.”

“Serving creatures?” Sarah repeated slowly, feeling her stomach twist.

Kathie nodded. “They tend to serve older wizarding families.”

Ellis eyed her in amusement before turning to Sarah. “What she means by that is the old, connected, and rich wizarding families. Which really is just powerful Pureblood families.” He nodded in
Kathie’s direction. “Kathie’s family has several. You really never met one before?” he asked and blinked when Sarah only shook her head.

Kathie squirmed uncomfortably in her seat, her flush thankfully unnoticeable due to her dark skin. “My family’s really not that significant,” she muttered. “They were gifts a while back from some distant cousin.”

“Gifts?” Sarah echoed, her voice a small, disbelieving hush. And suddenly, she remembered exactly why she would never want to live in Toby’s wizarding world despite the fact that she could even without magic. Her conversations with Hoggle all those months ago began replaying itself until nothing but “So we lost and many of our kinds were forced into slavery and whatnot.” continued to echo through her mind.

When Toby, feeling her change of mood, turned to look at her curiously, Sarah swallowed hard and forced herself to smooth out her expression. She nibbled on a sausage and wondered what she had gotten herself into. Perhaps it would be a good idea to contact Hoggle again and learn more about the Underground’s relationship with the human Wizarding world.

“Anyway,” Kathie continued, not noticing Sarah’s less than favorable feelings on the current subject. “If you want first hand information on house elves, I recommend you ask the ones serving Hogwarts.”

Adrian scowled. “I did,” he grumbled darkly. “That’s why I’m rewriting the stupid paper. House elves consider themselves part of the family they serve and my original paper centered around their relationship with us. But Umbridge doesn’t agree.”

“Of course she doesn’t,” Ellis said and then brightened. “Oh! You didn’t hear but apparently all DADA classes are canceled for the day. Umbridge is sick or something.”

Knowing that wasn’t true, Sarah glanced in Toby’s direction who was looking more than a little pale. As much as he was enjoying his sister’s presence in the school, he was still worried about Umbridge’s disappearance. She smiled at him. “It’s all right,” she murmured, petting his shoulder comfortingly. “Trust me.”

Toby nodded. He did. Implicitly.

“Are you okay?” Kathie asked worriedly. She winced upon realizing that they had been awfully rude to Toby’s cousin, talking away as usual without even trying to include the older woman into their conversation. But then again, Toby didn’t seem to be upset about that in particular. “Did something happen?”

Toby shook his head. “No, not really. Don’t worry about it.” He attempted a smile but it fell flat.

Adrian, Kathie, and Ellis exchanged worried glances but didn’t say anything. It was only when Kathie gave the older third-year a look, did he finally speak up. “Hey,” he called, grabbing a random topic. “Where’s your owl today?”

Toby blinked and looked around, suddenly realizing that the barn owl that had been visiting him every day for the past few weeks failed to show up. “I don’t know,” he said and a worried expression to his friends. “Has no one seen him?”

Kathie and Ellis shook their heads.

“Are you talking about Hel?” Sarah asked curiously.
Toby shook his head. “No, there’s another owl—a wild barn owl—that’s been visiting me everyday. I’m kind of worried he’s not here. Do you think something happened to him?”

Sarah’s eyebrows shot upwards. “A barn owl?” she repeated, not sure what to make of the information. While she doubted Toby’s barn owl was the Goblin King in disguise—after all, why would he want to visit Toby on a daily basis in his owl form?—she couldn’t help feel a little apprehensive. Sarah wondered if it was worth it to tell Toby exactly where she thinks he could stick the owl before giving herself a mental shake, knowing she was being overly dramatic. But who could blame her? Her life had taken an unwelcome turn over night.

“I’m going to head off to Charms early,” Toby announced as they neared the end of breakfast hour. “I want to show Jenn around some more. See you guys later.”

His friends nodded and waved. And Sarah, who was still distracted, could only manage a half-hearted smile as she followed her brother out the Great Hall. “I haven’t seen Toby this happy in a while,” Sarah heard Ellis whisper just before she got out of earshot. She smiled thinly to herself and wondered how she was supposed to ease her brother into self-dependency.

“Don’t worry about it,” Irene had assured her once when she brought the subject up. “He’ll grow up; they all do. I mean, you did, didn’t you? Besides, Toby’s off alone in his wizard world, isn’t he?”

Sarah laughed, catching the attention of the short man standing on top of the teacher’s desk. She had noticed his stare earlier when she first entered the Great Hall and hadn’t really thought anything of it. Now, however, his stare was making Sarah just the slightest bit uncomfortable and she wondered if visitors to Hogwarts was a rare thing. “I’ll be fine,” she said, turning her attention back to her brother. “I have a great sense of direction as well as you know.”

He wasn’t convinced. “I did tell you that the staircases move, right?”

“Yes,” she confirmed. “But don’t worry, I probably won’t be doing much exploring. I’m just going to head to the hospital wing to visit your friend. Harry, was it? I know you’re still worried.”


“Worrying is my job,” Sarah said fondly, reaching out to ruffle his hair before pulling him in for a hug. “I’ll be fine,” she repeated and with that said, she turned around to leave the classroom. A set of confused, but bright and curious set of eyes followed her as she went.

“All right, Deebie,” she muttered, her voice low. “It’s all up to you now.”

The small goblin crawled out of her hair and hopped down in front of her. Somehow it managed to lose its balance in midair and Sarah winced as she fell flat on her face and bounced a couple of times before coming to a rest. Deebie broke out into a happy giggle and jumped back up. “Okay, Lady,” she chirped as if nothing had happened. “This way.”

Sarah shook her head and wondered if all her goblin friends were made with diamond bones and rubber skin. She followed Deebie for such a long time, Sarah found herself beginning to wonder if Deebie got lost herself before finally coming across a familiar set of double doors. She opened it silently and was about to walk in before catching sight of two familiar professors from the previous
night. She hesitated.

“Drink this, Potter!” the rather intimidating, dark-haired professor from yesterday snapped. Even though Harry looked a lot better than Sarah last saw him, there was nothing kind nor gentle about the professor’s voice.

Well, Sarah thought. He’s definitely not in the health profession.

Harry glared, looking rather murderous for a patient but drank the oddly colored mud-green liquid anyway.

Sarah stepped back, closely the door as quietly as possible as an idea suddenly forming in her head. She looked around, confirming that she was alone in a deserted hallway. And Dumbledore was right there, in the hospital wing behind her, wasn’t he? It was the perfect moment.

“She squeak? Gip?” she whispered quietly and her two goblins appeared right in front of her. Romby had followed Toby into the Charms classroom as a faithful, invisible bodyguard and she didn’t want to pull him away.

“Lady called?” Squeak asked.

Sarah nodded. “That’s right. I want you guys to bring that professor back now. I think she’s been punished enough.” While her memories of the labyrinth were not as vivid as she would like, the smell of the bog was something she didn’t think she would ever forget.

The two goblins blinked and turned to look at each other, probably wondering why Sarah would ever want something that has been in the bog back. It was called The Bog of Eternal Stench for a reason. They shrugged. “You got it, Lady!”

Then, without warning, the air above them shuddered and opened, dropping a plump, wet and dirty pink-colored witch onto the ground in front of them.

“Yuck!” they cried as Sarah swallowed back a gag. The goblins, having been bogged enough times as punishment, didn’t want to stick around any longer. “All yours, Lady!” They disappeared.

Sarah wrinkled her nose and wiped the tears forming at the corner of her eyes away. Gods, she didn’t think it was possible but the scent was even worse than she remembered. Wrinkling her nose, Sarah took a deep breath to ready herself only to choke. “Eww,” she groaned before trying again. She took another deep breath, held it for a brief moment, and then screamed.
So, if anyone’s interested, I’m currently looking for one or two alpha / beta-readers for this story. I’m hoping to find someone to correct my grammar issues and maybe even point out possible plotline inconsistencies or something.

I wasn’t actually on planning to look for a beta because I tend to stress over a story if I actually have one; not want to keep them waiting I end up forcing myself into a schedule which just ends up draining the motivation and desire I have for writing the story. Because of this, I decided to keep this super casual. That means, if you’re my beta, there’s a possibility you will have to wait anywhere from a week to months for the next chapter. As readers of this story, you already know how spontaneous my updates are.

“IT doesn’t matter how many cleaning charms I use on her,” Pomfrey ranted, obviously at her wit’s end. “The smell is not going away. In fact, I swear it’s just getting worst! It’s even leaking out of my containment charms! Dolores needs to be isolated, Albus; she is stinking up my entire hospital wing.”

Sarah nodded in agreement, trying her best not to breathe. Harry, she had noticed, who had almost been completely recovered was not looking rather green. “Maybe you should try things the normal way and give her a bath?” she wondered. Despite its name, Sarah was positive there was a way to get ride of the bog’s stench. After all, her goblin companions returned to her smelling perfectly fine despite them whining about how they got bogged by their king.

They stared at her.

Sarah blinked. “Muggle. I mean the Muggle way.” She nodded in satisfaction and wondered if wizards took showers. They didn’t do everything with magic, did they? That’s a bit disturbing.

“We’ll place her in quarantine, then,” Dumbledore said with an almost tired sigh. He waved his hand, levitating Dolores from her hospital bed and floating her through what appeared to be a solid wall and into an usually sealed room of the hospital wing. He turned around and frowned, casting a couple cleaning and air-freshening charms but they didn’t seem to do all that much. “Did you see anything out of the ordinary when she appeared?” he finally asked, turning back to Sarah.

She blinked wide, innocent, green eyes at him. “No, I don’t think so. She sort of took me by surprise.”

Probably like how her appearance took them all by surprise, Severus thought.

Dumbledore hummed.
“If that’s all,” Sarah continued. “I would really like to return to my room now.” After all, her job here was done and she really didn’t want to remain another second in the hospital wing smelling fresh bog, thank you very much.

“Actually,” Dumbledore said. “I’ve been meaning to talk to you, Miss Williams. Now would be the best time, I think, since your brother will be in class for a while yet.”

She paused at that. “Really?” she asked, surprised, having believed that the headmaster would be avoiding her for a while yet. She guessed curiosity overrode everything else. “All right, then.”

After making sure Harry was not going to die from a lack of fresh air or something equally as pathetic, Dumbledore lead them out of the hospital wing and towards his office. Sarah followed closely, not wanting to get left behind; Deebie had disappeared the same time the other goblins did, chased away by the smell of the bog. The last thing Sarah needed was to get lost without her usual guide inside an enchanted castle that had moving staircases. She wondered briefly at the dark-haired professor trailing behind them. Was he Dumbledore’s right-hand man or something? Vice headmaster? Wait, wasn’t the lady professor from before that had showed them Diagon Alley his vice headmaster?

They stopped in front of a stone gargoyle and Sarah watched with large eyes as Dumbledore said what must have been a password before it leaped to the side, allowing them entrance. Strangely, it reminded her of the red and blue door guards back in the Labyrinth; annoying little buggers they were until she had stepped through one of the doors they were guarding and fell straight into theoubliette. It was only then did she realize how dangerous they were. Mentally shaking herself from her memories, Sarah blinked and followed the headmaster cautiously but was unable to stop herself from pausing to stare at the gargoyle.

It stared back.

Then winked.

Shuddering even though Sarah was sure she made that last part up, she turned her attention back to the winding staircase and moved to follow Dumbledore again.

“Well then,” the aged headmaster cheerfully said as he made himself comfortable behind his desk. The dark-haired professor took what appeared to be his usual position and stood behind Dumbledore, hidden slightly in the shadows and stared down at Sarah with dark eyes.

For a moment, Sarah was reminded of the time she got in trouble with Toby’s school principle because she had ordered her goblins to throw a local high schooler into a lake after finding out he had bullied her brother. She had no idea he was said principle’s son, otherwise she would have threw them both into the lake. They obviously weren’t able to prove it was her, but Sarah wasn’t used to getting in trouble with authority figures. Despite her outward calm, she had been downright nervous during the interrogation.

It was a good thing she had grown up since then.

“Yesterday,” Dumbledore began, his tone low and smooth, reflecting the seriousness of his next words. “Arthur Weasley, a father of your brother’s friend was bitten by a snake. While Severus here was able to come up with a working anti-venom, it can only do so much. The venom has been stalled but the damage has already been done.” He paused and interlocked his fingers together out in front of him. “I am hoping that you will allow Mister Williams to go to the Weasley’s house and see if his healing affinity can work on him.”
Sarah blinked slowly as if letting the severity of Albus’ words register for a moment. Despite her smooth expression, Severus could sense her annoyance. “This is your idea of a talk?” she asked, her voice low. “You’re asking me to allow Toby to god knows where so he can use some kind of healing magic he doesn’t even have completely control over? Healing magic that you apparently don’t even completely understand yet? Without,” she bit out, her voice rising in volume with her increasing annoyance and anger, “even having the decency to explain yesterday’s situation to me first?!”

Albus smiled. “I understand your hesitate, Miss—”

“The hell you do!” she snapped, glaring at him.

Albus shifted and faltered at her obvious anger. Sarah felt Deebie’s sudden appearance somewhere in her hair and immediately felt small, prickly claws running through her scalp in an attempt to calm her. She exhaled deeply. Of course Sarah knew exactly what had happened yesterday, her goblins had made sure of that. But Dumbledore was taking extremely great care to avoid the subject. He didn’t want her to know what happened. But why? Was it because he was afraid she would pull Toby out of Hogwarts? Was he in need of his healing abilities? Sarah breathed out slowly, sudden realization weighing down like a ball of steel in her stomach. Wasn’t the wizarding world on the brink of a civil war or something?

Manipulative old bastard, Sarah thought angrily. She wanted to stand up and start yelling but instead, she took another deep, calming breath to compose herself.

“You know,” she began with a bright smile. “I’m an author. I actually have this character just like you.” Manipulative. Scheming. Telling people only what he thinks they should know in order to further their own interests. What were Dumbledore’s interests, she wondered. She knew with magic and potions, the school already had its means of healing wounded students. So, why in the world did a headmaster of a school need Toby’s advance healing abilities?

“Oh?” Albus asked, hesitantly.

Sarah’s unamused stare did not falter. “Yes, and I killed him off in my third installment.”

Albus blinked.

Severus felt his lips twitched despite himself.

Sarah crossed her arms and leaned back into her chair. Her gaze hardened at the seriousness of her next words. “Toby is going no where except maybe home until you tell me exactly what happened. I want to know what’s going on and why you need him.”

Albus stared at her for a moment, then his own gaze hardened, abandoning his usual grandfatherly persona. He was now Albus Dumbledore, currently one of the most powerful wizards alive, the defeater of Grindelwald. Sarah shifted uncomfortably in her seat and Severus wondered if perhaps, she finally realized that she had bitten off more than she could chew. He watched as she swallowed and adjusted herself but she stared back steadily, refusing to back down.

She would have been sorted into Gryffindor, Severus thought disgustedly.

“Miss Williams,” Dumbledore said in a tone that told Severus his eyes weren’t twinkling. “You are not part of this world.”

Sarah smiled. All lips and no eyes. “And neither will Toby be if you keep this up.”
They stared at her. She was serious.

“All right,” Albus finally said with a deep sigh. “You have cornered me.”

Severus highly doubted that, he had a feeling that Albus already knew he wouldn’t be able to intimidate Ms. Williams into doing what he wants. The best he could do was make it so she thinks she’s in control of the situation.

Albus sighed almost dramatically as he leaned back in his chair, looking rather defeated. “As you know, your brother’s world is at the brink of war. I have done my best to ensure the students do not get involved but the Wizarding World is a small place; even if one is not directly involved, their parents, their friends, someone they know most likely is.”

Sarah frowned. “Are you involved in this... war?”

“No more so than anyone else,” Albus answered carefully. “The Dark Lord has been terrorizing the Wizarding World for more than two decades; for a world as small as ours, his presence is more terrifying than you realize.” He closed his eyes and breathed out slowly. “Fourteen years ago, he attacked Harry Potter but Harry managed to survive.” He paused for a moment, allowing Sarah to take everything in before continuing. “And because of this, Harry is a figure, an icon, an inspiration. Followers of the Dark Lord are working to get rid of Harry because of what he represents. It is very likely that he was... attacked yesterday.”

“Attacked?” Sarah asked, surprised. Her goblins hadn’t mentioned that. But then again, even her goblins didn’t know everything; they only know what they are able to observe. “How was he attacked? I thought Hogwarts was supposed to be safe?” Basilisks and escaped criminals aside, she had deemed Hogwarts safe enough for her brother to attend. Just as long as her goblins accompanied him, of course. And now she’s learning that the wizard behind all the conflict was targeting someone inside the school. Someone Toby’s friends with?

“You must understand,” Albus said, attempting to soothe her. “I have no desire to involve students—especially one as young as your brother—however, his healing abilities are an asset; I cannot deny that. I would rather involve a young student than allow people to die, especially if it could have been prevented.”

Sarah raised her eyebrows, wondering if he realized that he had practically told her he was more involved in this war than he had led her to believe earlier. “And this... this Arthur Weasley is involved in the war?”

“Of sorts,” Dumbledore allowed, wincing. “Unfortunately, he was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time.” And that much was true.

Sarah paused. Dumbledore, despite his attempts at manipulating her, seemed to have good intentions. And while she didn’t give a damn about his intentions if the safety of Toby was called into question, she could understand where he was coming from; she didn’t want anyone to die either. And Toby, being much more kind-hearted and sensitive than she was, would be completely heartbroken if he knew someone died when he could have prevented it. Especially if it was the father of one of his friends.

Not that he told her about any friend of his named Weasley, she thought suspiciously, narrowing her eyes. And Toby told her everything.

“Fine,” she finally allowed. “I’ll give you my permission. But only if I can go with Toby.” She didn’t care how many rules Dumbledore had to break in order to ensure that she could stay with her
brother. Sarah wasn’t about to let Toby heal someone who was most likely more than a little involved in the war by himself.

“That’s perfectly fine,” Dumbledore agreed, smiling. “I had expected such a condition, anyway.”

They fell silent after that, Sarah wondering if Dumbledore was going to further explain his plans for her brother but it was the dark-haired professor that spoke up next. “Ms. Williams, how did you recover from a diffuse axonal injury?”

Albus blinked, confused but did not say anything, believing that the Potions Master had a reason behind his question.

Sarah met Severus’ dark gaze warily. “Toby, probably,” she said, although her tone lacked any conviction.

Severus raised an eyebrow, gracing her with his usual “You dunderhead.” stare that had Sarah squirming in her seat, feeling like she was being scolded by her mother. “I doubt it,” he countered. “You were in America during that time, were you not? And your brother in Muggle London?”

Albus’ eyebrows shot upwards at this but he remained silent. He may not always agree with Severus’ methods of gathering information but even he could deny that one way or another, Severus always got what he wanted to know. And Sarah... Sarah was a mystery he wanted to solve as soon as possible so he could concentrate on more important things like Tobias Williams’ powers.

Toby, you little shit! Sarah thought, tensing. Her mouth thinned as she realized she probably wouldn’t be able to lie her way through this one. From their expressions, Sarah was pretty sure they suspected that she was the one that had healed herself. And while that simply wasn’t true, Sarah would rather they think that then know what really had happened.

“House elves are serving creatures,” Kathie had said. And her tone had been so matter-of-fact, Sarah was still cringing at the memory. She didn’t need Toby’s letters to know that Kathie was a good person. But that same good person was talking about the enslavement of an entire species of creatures—possibly Underground creatures—like it was a given fact. She might as well have said something along the lines of, “Oh, the sky is blue.”

“Then it wasn’t Toby,” Sarah said with a shrug. “But I don’t really remember what happened. My memory of the accident is still fuzzy.” As far as excuses went, hers was rather weak, but she smiled and looked the professor dead in the eyes anyway, daring him to contradict her.

Severus paused, bringing a finger up to his lips and tracing it. For a moment, Sarah felt herself faltering, fearing that he really was going to call her out on her obvious lie. But he didn’t. “Are you a witch, Ms. Williams?” he asked instead.

Albus blinked. Well, he thought distantly. Get straight to the point, why don’t you?

Eyebrows shooting upwards in surprise, it took a moment for Sarah to collect herself. “Definitely not,” she responded with a roll of her eyes.

“But you know magic,” Severus countered. “Even long before Albus had introduced Mister Williams to the Wizarding World.”

Sarah stared at him. She had suspected before but know she was fairly positive that this was a man she probably wouldn’t be able to lie to, even more so than the aged, experienced headmaster. However, this was the first time she felt that there was probably more to this man than just him being a professor. Like how there was more to Albus Dumbledore than his headmaster duties. But
observant or not, she wasn’t about to betray her goblins just because these people were curious. Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape may be good manipulators, but so was she.

She clenched her jaw and broke eye contact, glaring unseeingly at the desk in front of her before sighing. “Well,” she began. “I’m a novelist, I write fantasy novels for a living and despite the genre, I actually do a lot of research for my books. Mythology, legends, things like that.” She paused, eyelashes fluttering rapidly as if to emphasis her innocence. “Some of my research may have been more... hands-on than others. And I may have encountered a few... things.”

Albus’ eyebrows shot upwards.

Sarah looked at Severus. “But I’m not a witch. And I most certainly do not have—”

*But what no one knew is that the king of goblins had fallen in love with the girl, and he had given her certain powers...*

“—magic.”

She hoped. After all, everything that had happened, from her healing to her appearance into Hogwarts, they were done by her goblins, weren’t they?

But her goblins... *her* goblins were here. With *her*. They followed her around and called her *Lady*. Why?

Feeling rather nauseous because she *knew* she was on the brick of discovering something even though she would rather not think any further on the subject; Sarah wanted nothing more than to leave the suddenly too-bright office. “Can I leave now?” she asked, glancing up at a clock that seemed to show everything *but* time. “Toby has a long break before his third class and I promised to meet him before then.”

Albus smiled, less reluctant now that he had figured out the mystery behind Sarah Williams. “Of course, Miss Williams. I’m glad we’ve reached a level of understand. I do apologize for keeping you.”

Sarah stared at him for a moment, not too impressed with his quick change of attitude once he got what he wanted. He was like a kid throwing a temper tantrum’ she should know, she was that kid.

And while Albus remained oblivious to her thoughts, Severus could tell she didn’t particularly cared that they had “reached a level of understanding.” As she finally nodded and moved up from her seat, he noticed her hair rippling in the oddest way as if something was scurrying through it before disappearing down into her fashion scarf. He blinked and it was gone.

Sarah paused just as she reached the double doors and hesitated. “Right,” she said, turning back around to face them. “Since I’m not really hiding my knowledge about magic anymore, I feel like I should tell you something.”

They waited.

“I’m actually pretty attune to magic,” she admitted, even though she knew she was highly undermining her abilities. “And while I may not know much about the wards of this school, I can feel that there’s something wrong with them. There’s something... evil in this school.” She frowned, then corrected herself. “Well, evil probably isn’t the right word. Malicious, sort of,” she said, trying again. “Something that’s upsetting the natural balance of this castle’s environment. I can feel it lurking in the shadows.”
For reasons he cannot explain, Severus felt his stomach seize up at her words but next to him, Albus only smiled reassuringly. “Sarah,” he said, soothingly. “I can assure you that both you and your brother are quite safe in Hogwarts. Nothing can get in without my knowledge.”

Except for her apparently, Albus remembered but did not say out loud.

Sarah raised her eyebrows, managing to look even more unimpressed than before. She thought about her goblins—and could even hear Deebie giggling in amusement—but had a feeling that Albus was thinking about her own appearance. Perhaps he had felt that in the wards but she knew for certain he didn’t feel anything when it came to her goblins. “You really shouldn’t overestimate yourself,” Sarah advised. “It’s going to be your downfall.” After all, she had played this game before.

“So, the Labyrinth is a piece of cake, is it? Well let’s see how you deal with this little slice.”

Without waiting for a response, Sarah merely shook her head and left, closing the door quietly behind her. Severus stared at the closed doors, mind whirling as minuscule threads of thoughts began to piece together. Everything was slowly coming together now and Severus wasn’t sure he liked the direction it was hinting towards.

Even the shadows work for me, the Dark Lord had said.

Voldemort had never been one to talk in imagery so his words had stood out to Severus when he had first heard them. He didn’t know what to think of them but now...

Now...

“I can feel it lurking in the shadows.”

Certainly, it could have been a coincidence but Severus didn’t believe in coincidences and Sarah Williams was hiding much more than what she had revealed to them. Albus may have believed her but he was more concerned about Tobias Williams’ summoning and banishing powers than he was about anything else. It was quite obvious that he had gladly grabbed onto the pathetic explanation Ms. Williams had to offer. Severus, on the other hand, knew a fool when he saw one and Sarah Williams was no such fool.

She said she was a novelist; she spun words for a living. “I can feel it in the air,” or “I can feel its presence.” There were so many other ways she could have phrased that but she chose “shadows” for a reason.”

“Even the shadows work for me.”

Severus inhaled slowly. He knew dark magic and shadow magic was the darkest of all. But it was also forgotten magic—lost magic. Was it possible? Certainly he knew that the Dark Lord was much more intelligent than people usually give him credit for but could he have actually mastered the long forgotten magic of death?

“Severus?” Albus questioned, because he knew that look. Severus was onto something and whatever it was, he really, really didn’t like it. He merely shook his head. “It’s nothing,” he said, his voice a distracted whisper. At least he hoped it was nothing. He really wanted it to be nothing. “I... I need to do some research first.”

“Hogwarts!” Jareth cried.
Hoggle poked his head into the room. “What?!?” he snapped, trying to shake a baby goblin from chewing his shoe off.

“No, not you,” Jareth said, waving him away before turning back to Cahan to rant. “What the hell is Sarah doing at Hogwarts? That magic school. That _human_ magic school! The development of her magic is beginning to accelerate, isn’t it?” Forget Rainbow Forest, Appledore Falls was back and running the last time he checked, Sarah had already moved onto the Southern Falls. He gasped in horror at his next thought. “They don’t think she has _human_ magic, do they?”

Cahan only stared at him, slightly distracted as he wondered if Jareth had the pitiful—and rather ugly—dwarf answer to everything but his own name. He blinked. “I’m not exactly sure,” he answered slowly. “I told my imps to observe a bit more before reporting back to me. But you know how they are: they want to impress me so much, they come with information the second they hear them.” Which, of course, meant _incomplete_ information and _Cahan_ ends up being the one that has to deal with the consequences. He gave Jareth a funny look. “Couldn’t you have gone and checked it out yourself?”

Jareth immediately snarled at him in response, eyes flashing. “Since Sarah’s there right now, I most certainly _cannot_!” He had tried earlier only to find that the closer he flew to Hogwarts, the more nauseous he became. Thank goodness he knew what it meant before it was too late or he would have found himself stripped of all his magic.

_Ah_, Cahan thought, feeling rather sorry for himself for bringing the subject up. He had forgotten about the whole banishment thing.

Fortunately, before Jareth could go on another rant about being banished from his beloved Champion’s presence, the air in the throne room shimmered, making both faes sit up. As no one in their right minds would even think about appearing in Jareth’s throne room without warning (Cahan had learned that particular the hard way), it could only mean it was one of Cahan’s elves.

_Mahilgo_, if Cahan were to guess.

And then, after a particularly almost-violent shudder of the air, the dark-skinned she-elf appeared in front of them. Cahan felt his lips twitch upwards just the slightest bit as he took in how tightly Mahilgo’s hands were clasped in front of her. She was one of his more powerful elves and it amused him to see that Jareth’s presence had her so scared, she couldn’t appear in the room with her usual silent, unnoticeable approach. _Especially_ since he knew exactly how pathetic Jareth really was.

Still throwing temper tantrums because of his Champion.

“Your Majesty,” she greeted, eyes darting up to Jareth and Cahan couldn’t hold back a snicker as she visibly swallowed. “K-King of Dreams.”

Jareth stared at her for a moment, blinked, and then, deeming her presence unimportant, proceeded to ignore her. Pouting slightly now that he wouldn’t get his chance to rant, he swung a leg over the armrest of his chair and made himself comfortable.

“Mahilgo,” Cahan greeted distractedly, wrinkling his nose in distaste as he eyed the Goblin King. _This_ was the fae most of the residents of the Underground was afraid of? “Your sudden presence is rather unexpected. Is something wrong?” He sat up suddenly and narrowed his eyes. “Is it my wife?”

“Her Majesty is fine,” Mahilgo immediately soothed. She cleared her throat and fell back into her usual calm demeanor although Cahan could see her eyes darting fearfully up to Jareth’s still-pouting form every once in a while. “It’s an Above Elf, Your Majesty, she is requesting an immediate
audience with you.”

Immediate audience, Cahan thought. Must be important. But then he remembered and fell back into his chair, drooping with disappointment. He could almost understand Jareth’s desire to pout at the moment. Above elves, he mimicked in disgust. I swear, if I get incomplete information again... Instead, he turned back to Mahilgo. “All right,” he said, nodding his consent. “Summon her.”

She nodded slowly but made no move to summon the imp in question. Instead, her eyes darted up to Jareth once again. She took a deep, shuddering breath and addressed him carefully. “King of Dreams, if I may...” Her usual musical voice sounded squeaky in her fear.

Jareth startled, blinking rapidly in confusion for a moment before finally turning to look at Mahilgo. “What?” he asked. It was rather obvious he hadn’t been paying the least bit attention to the conversation. With a nonchalant shrug, he waved his hand in a distracted manner. “Tra-la-la,” he finally said which had both Cahan and Mahilgo squinting at him wondering what he meant by that.

It must be some version of approval, Cahan decided before shifting his gaze back to Mahilgo who had not moved. He raised an eyebrow, still waiting.

Nothing.

“Oh, goodness!” Cahan snapped, reaching out to grab an unsuspecting Jareth by one pointed ear. “There’s no reason for you to be so afraid, Mahilgo! I’m telling you, he’s quite pathetic! Look!”

Mahilgo looked. But it was obvious by her eyes, which were getting wider and wider by the second, that she didn’t believe her king. Which would have annoyed Cahan—because his word was law, thank you very much—except he currently too distracted by his pathetic excuse of a friend to feel anything else.

As if confirming Cahan’s thoughts, Jareth childishly swatted Cahan’s hand away with his riding crop. “Stop that!” he snapped. With an annoyed huff, he swung his legs back over the armrest to its rightful position, lounging in such a lazy manner, Cahan had to fight back a shudder. “Well?” he demanded, probably still pouting.

This is the King of Dreams, Cahan had to remind himself. The Nightwalker. The one fae that everyone is afraid of. The only one with the ability to go up against the Shadowwalker and live to tell the tale. He squinted, trying to combine two images of two vastly different men together. This was, he was disappointed to admit, the same fae that threw a temper tantrum whenever the subject of him being banished from his Champion’s presence was brought up.

“It’s an Above Elf,” Mahilgo repeated. “She is requesting an immediate audience with My Lord.”

Jareth blinked. “Did she really?” he asked. Above Elves were not exactly known for their forcefulness but then again he has never really seen them interact with anyone besides Cahan. “Must be urgent.”

Cahan rolled his eyes. “They always seem urgent,” he mumbled under his breath.

“King of Dreams,” Mahilgo continued, ignoring her own lord for a moment. “If I may...”

It was Jareth’s throne room, after all. Although, Cahan had a feeling Mahilgo would still ask him for permission even if they were occupying the his throne room.

“Yes, yes,” Jareth agreed, waving his hand again.
Mahilgo bowed, lowering her head in respect as she stepped back. The air in front of her shuddered as she did so and both Cahan and Jareth watched—rather disinterestedly—as an Above Elf appeared with a loud crack. The sound vibrated across the room and Cahan winced, wondering if the Above Elf was just that nervous or if she was just that weak.

Unsurprising, he thought. They weren’t true elves, anyway... She was a small, trembling thing, staring up at Cahan in awe with her large, bulging eyes. “Your Majesty!” she squealed and then promptly burst into overly dramatic tears that had Jareth staring at her in utter confusion.

“Is she...” he trailed off.

“Fine!” Cahan grumbled even as the Above Elf began pulling at her large ears, twisting them in her excitement.

“I is meeting His Majesty!” the Above Elf cried, sobbing in happiness. Her large bat-like ears flopped around as she blew her nose quite loudly into the dirty tea towel she was wearing. “Dippy not worthy,” she moaned. “Not worthy!”

Jareth blinked and then snorted in amusement. While he certainly complained about his goblins quite a lot, there was no contest between them and Cahan’s Above Elves. By nature, faes were mischievous beings; they delighted in the discomfort of others so he really wasn’t sure how Cahan’s magic managed to produce such pathetic, butt-kissing, starry-eyed creatures.

“Stop it.” Cahan snapped. “That’s enough, imp.”

Jareth rolled his eyes; Cahan didn’t like to call them “elves.”

Inhaling sharply, the elf did exactly as Cahan had ordered and stopped. Jareth suspected the poor thing had even stopped breathing just to obey her king.

“Just tell me the news,” Cahan continued, his tone tight with annoyance.

“Oh yes, Majesty! Yes! Of course! At once!” The small she-elf quivered. “Majesty be wanting news about the Lady and the Lady’s brother. Dippy now bringing news about the Lady!”

Jareth sat up at that. “You’re a Hogwart’s elf,” he realized. He could almost smack himself for not coming to that realization earlier. Cahan’s elves had manage to integrate themselves into the very root of the magical world Aboveground; it was the main reason why Jareth had enlisted his help after realizing Little Jareth had human magic. Faes, despite being as powerful as they are, are also ruled by a strict set of laws and limitations.

And the most damning of them all, of course, was that they cannot enter human dwellings without an invitation. Usually, Jareth didn’t have this problem as the simple action of dreaming was an invitation on its own. Unfortunately, the sheer number of magical humans that drank dream-blocking potions and erected wards and barriers preventing dream walking—honestly! But Cahan...

Now Cahan...

The human world welcomed his elves with open arms; they invited them into their homes, tempting them with promises of family and love, not knowing that upon doing so, they have also accepted their King. And while it never really mattered before, Jareth and Cahan often joked about the stupidity of the Wizarding World.

Abusing Underground creatures; using them for their own needs, to further their greed. And for what?
Unknowingly giving faes the ultimate power over their sad, little human world?

Pathetic.

“Yes, Kingy!” the elf said, responding to Jareth’s earlier statement. “Dippy serves Hogwarts! Dippy now reporting Lady now in Hogwarts!”

“Yes, yes,” Jareth said, drumming his fingers against his armrest impatiently. “I know that already. What I want to know is why she’s in Hogwarts.”

Ears flapping, the elf shrunk back into herself before answering. “Elves obey His Majesty,” she said, her voice dropping into a low whisper. “Elves keeps eyes on Lady’s brother. But Lady’s brother already has protection!”

“Squeak told me,” Jareth agreed. He sighed happily; Sarah ordering his goblins about. Just like a true queen.

Cahan poked him, snapping him out of his thoughts as the small elf continued, “But Lady’s brother got hurt and called for Lady.” She waves her hand dramatically into the air. “And Lady appears.”

Jareth and Cahan exchanged alarmed glances. “Toby was the one that summoned Sarah?” Jareth asked. “Not my goblins?”

Dippy shook her head. “Oh no! Lady summoned herself! Lady and Lady’s brother share powerful ancient link. If Lady’s brother calls, link knows! And Lady comes.”

“What ancient, powerful link?” Jareth demanded. “I didn’t sense anything when I was with him.” Actually, that wasn’t completely true. There were times when Jareth could sense just the slightest sliver of non-human magic radiating from the boy but he had thought that was just residue magic from his time Underground. Underground magic clings and it didn’t help since Jareth had fed him some Underground food during his hours here.

Not that he really wanted to, of course, but Little Jareth was a spoiled babe. He cried all the time; only singing and dancing had shut him up. But then he got hungry and even singing and dancing didn’t work. Jareth almost wanted to wish the child away himself and he would have too, if his Sarah wasn’t the runner then.

But now... ancient, powerful link...

Non-human magic...

If his magic was related to Sarah’s...

Sarah didn’t have human magic.

But neither did she have fae magic. At least not in the traditional sense.

“You’re the only one who had been in her presence recently,” Jareth said, turning towards Cahan. “Sarah doesn’t have fae magic.”

“Not fae magic as we know it,” Cahan agreed, nodding his head. “But her magic is still... developing —growing, more like—it certainly feels familiar. But I cannot place it.” He paused, thinking. “Still. She has the ability to breathe life, so I’m not particularly surprised that her brand of magic precedes our own.”
“Shadow magic!” the elf interrupted, her voice a high-pitched squeaked. She gasped in horror at her own audacity and then proceeded to smack her head on the ground as self-punishment.

“Stop that!” Cahan ordered, annoyance roughening his usually smooth tone. He exhaled sharply to calm himself. “What do you mean?”

“Recently, Hogwarts is not safe,” Dippy said, voice dropping, once again, into a low whisper as if she was afraid of being overheard. “Not to professors, not to students, not to elves! Witches and wizards not know but House Elves can feel it! We has fae magic and we can feel the dark shadows watching.” She crawled closer to them, her voice dropping even lower. “But when Lady appears,” she continued, raising her thin arms high above her head, “all shadows get chased away!”

“The shadows,” Cahan repeated after a moment, requiring time to actually take in this new revelation. “Are you absolutely certain?”

“Oh yes, Majesty,” she answered, bobbing her head. “We sense shadows in Hogwarts more and more. We House Elves be afraid something will happen and Hogwarts be closing.”

Jareth narrowed his eyes. The Shadowwalker watching Hogwarts?

“I think he has finally chosen a side.”

“What?” Jareth asked.

“Part of the Wizarding World has been in conflict for a while now. And if he’s watching one of the most illustrious school—the one school that is smack in the middle of this conflict—then I think he has chosen a side to help.” He looked at Jareth. “And that can only mean one thing.”

Jareth scowled. “He’s going to try and wipe them out.”

Before Sarah, the human Wizarding World was the Underground’s main source of nourishment especially in this modern era. Even if they didn’t particularly know of their existence, their knowledge of basic fae magic was enough to keep them going. But the Wizarding World has been dwindling down in numbers in the recent centuries. To destroy them would have destroyed the Underground...

...before Sarah.

But now... Sarah’s belief—Sarah’s lone belief—was enough to keep them going. Wiping out the Wizarding World would not hinder their comeback. It was, Jareth realize with a slight trickle of fear, even more important now than ever before that the Shadowwalker absolutely does not learn of Sarah’s existence. But if they were occupying the same building...

Jareth groaned, and pinched the bridge of his nose in annoyance. He wouldn’t be able to do anything about it, unfortunately, but Cahan...

Cahan had elves at the school. At the very least they could keep an eye on Sarah even if they didn’t stand a chance against the Shadowwalker if he chose to attack. Not that he could, Jareth mused. Directly, at least. While the Shadowwalker wasn’t a fae, he was similarly limited by a strict set of laws and couldn’t just go around killing whoever he wanted to. But that also meant someone from the Wizarding World had invited him, possibly on purpose but most likely by accident.

“Have the shadows noticed the Lady yet?” Jareth asked.

Dippy blinked. “Oh, no!” she exclaimed. “Lady’s presence chases shadows away. Lady comes,
shadow go!"

He groaned. "Oh, hell," he said, mind still thinking of Sarah and her safety. If Sarah chasing the Shadowwalker’s shadows away was anything like her banishment on him then there was no way the Shadowwalker hadn’t noticed.

“That doesn’t even make sense!” Cahan said. “She can’t just... banish Death.” He paused at his own thought for a moment before turning to stare at Jareth in an awe sort of confusion. “She’s not actually immune to death, is she?”

Jareth blinked again. “I don’t know,” he finally answered, returning Cahan’s confusion. “Is that actually possible?”

Where there is life, there must also be death.

Severus paused, single eyebrow raising in disbelief as he turned the cover of the thick book over to make sure he didn’t pick out some melodramatic novel by mistake.

Shadowland, the title read. And in much smaller calligraphy, The Book on the Shadowrealm, Shadow Magic, and Death Itself. Written by Fin Bheara.

Well, no such luck then. He sighed, rubbing the left side of his temple in order to prepare himself for the oncoming melodramatic prose. Honestly. He was here for facts and theories. Not literature. With a sharp huff, he made himself comfortable, flipped the thick book back open and began reading.

I. Death as an Entity

My name is Fin Bheara and I have been seeing Death for as long as I can remember.

I was a sickly child and would have died if not for the magical advantages of my father’s world and the scientific, technological advantages of my mother’s. But Death is not a fan of such advantages, you see; in her eyes—

Severus blinked. Her? From his experiences, death and destruction was almost always associated with males while life and creation with females. But then again, the author was claiming that he had
seen Death. Severus supposed that it was reason enough to switch everything up.

—in her eyes life is a cycle: you live, you die, the world moves on. To try and deny any aspect of this cycle is to deny balance and to deny balance is to destroy the very framework that holds our world together. And Death is one of the keepers of such a balance.

My parents’ attempts at keeping me alive only served to disrupt this balance, which in turn caught the attention of Death herself. I still remember that as a young boy, when it gets dark, when the shadows would begin to creep along the walls of my room, I could sometimes catch sight of her. Cloaked in the darkest of black with ashy-white complexion, the only color about her was the bright green of her sunken eyes. And later on, when I am at my sickest, these eyes will come to me and whisper sweet words into my ears, lulling me to sleep, to rest, and to never wake up. I learn fairly quickly to associate the color green—the color of summer leaves, of lush grass, of life—with her. With Death.

Dear readers, don’t let your human view of this world make assumptions about the greater powers that walk our earth with us. Have you ever wondered about the different colors behind the magic we are so proud of? Why healing spells are usually blue in color and protective spells white? Why harming spells red and general spells have no color at all? Tell me, dear readers, what is the one and only spell that is associated with the color green?

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the late update; I was stuck on this chapter like you wouldn’t believe. Trying to incorporate hints into this chapter that foreshadows future revelations without trying to make it too obvious is not as easy as it seems. So of course I had to throw in a couple red herrings which only managed to confuse me and that required me combing through my notes. Which isn’t exactly as organized as I like.

If you enjoy my work and would like to help me out, please consider buying me coffee

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!