Harry Potter and the Deck Master

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Summary

Sakura, age 11, was far from a normal little girl. Still, despite living in a household overrun with magical creations and strange occurrences, she did her best to live a quiet, normal life. But then why, oh why, does power have to be so good at attracting trouble? Just when she thought her life had settled down, a strange letter whisks her away on a totally new set of adventures.

When Harry Potter was 11, he discovered magic existed. When he was 12, he discovered that he was a parslemouth. When he was 13, he discovered he had a Godfather. When he was 14, he discovered he could see inside the Dark Lord’s mind. Now he is 15, having witnessed death, resurrection, betrayal, and the cusp of a war, what more could the world throw at him? ...Shoot, maybe he is crazy...
Notes on Culture and Characterization

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Notes on Culture and Characterization

This section is not a must-read, and indeed it may even bore some fans that do not care for such things, but for those fans who are interested, this is just a section where I explain the cultures and histories created for this story. The aim of this section is to explain many questions the general public has asked as well as to just share a world that took much thought and planning to build, that I fear may never be able to fit neatly into the storyline. This section should grow as more ideas come and details are let out into the writing, and sadly at the moment is mainly Card Captor Sakura-centric, so please, if you wish to read it, and then check back on it from time to time. Also, though all these highly thought out ideas are free to the public's use, some level of mention if you take something directly would be appreciate...

(December 2011) As it's been a few years since I started this, my writing and ideas have evolved somewhat as well, so I'm taking the time to expand on this and edit the sections to hopefully improve on what has been written here already. Also, seeing as CLAMP-verse has made it cannon that all stories that they write co-exist within the same multiverse, I shall be pulling facts from other CLAMP continuities to further explain my theories. Any and all contradictory statements, however, shall default to CCS as the primary source of cannon.

The Theory of Magic:

Sorcery: Alignments, and the Elements

The magic of sorcerers introduced to us in Card Captor Sakura works off the theory that magic has sources outside of one's own body which act as the drawing source of their power. Within the story, the sun and the moon were indicated as the primary sources for all magic in existence, though the title character, Sakura, drew her power from her own special star, indicating that there can be magic sources beyond the two primary ones. However, the manga also made rather clear that it was not common to have such a source of power. It is said that Clow Reed drew magic from both sun and moon equally, hence his immense power. It is also noted in the manga that since Yue uses moon magic he is unable to replenish his magic on his own, as it is merely a reflecting energy from the sun and so needs to eat a lot.

Seeing as CLAMP has an obsession for duality and balance, it can be assumed that sun magic has an equally crippling trait that has not yet been verified by cannon. However, given the nature of the source one might make an educated guess as to what that weakness may be. The sun is a source of nearly infinite energy, powering 99.9% of the life on our planet for the last 4 billion years. However, the level of energy the sun has is what makes it so dangerous. Taking this same idea into play, if a life form had such an infinite amount of energy coursing through their bodies, it would become physically impossible for their bodies to stay together. Molecules, charged with so much energy, would fly apart from each other and the person would cease to live.

That's not to say that humans go bursting apart like that, but it would be acceptable to assume that there would be problems in keeping their magic in check. Kero even said that Clow Reed could not cast small magic because of his immense power. So taking that into account, the definition can then be written that moon magic is more taxing but easier to control, and sun magic is less taxing to cast but harder to control.
Xiao Lang was yet another character from the series under the influence of the moon. He did not have the hunger problems that Yukito suffered from, indicating that it was likely exaggerated by some extent due to Yukito's Guardian status requiring more power. Xiao Lang, Sakura, and many others were drawn to Yukito because of the great force of moon magic coming from him, causing people to believe themselves in love with Yukito. Sakura's brother Touya, as well as the teacher Mizuki Kaho, were also the centre of many infatuations due to their strong magic—Kaho being a lunar attribute and Touya never being specified—though in both cases Xiao Lang has a strong dislike.

This leads to the evidence that magic can draw people does not mean that this drawing can not be fought and even reversed. Xiao Lang realized that Kaho was not a normal person, possibly even realized the class was being effected by her magic pull, and resisted her with a great deal of distrust. Yet once Xiao Lang came to understand Kaho was no threat to himself or those he cared for, his aggression towards her ended and while never entering the sate of “hanyaan” that Sakura does when around her, does appear to be polite and respectful towards her. Touya was merely a rival the whole way through, first for Yukito and later for Sakura, as well as a source of great pride bruises due to their initial meeting. This aggression directed towards him from Touya is shown to be reciprocated easily enough by Xiao Lang despite the strong magic. Whether this aggression is to do with magical aspects or if it is some sort of self defence in which you will react aggressively towards those who act aggressively towards you is yet to be decided on.

It is said that each of the Clow Cards were under either Yue or Cerberus. Light and Dark were the first under the Guardians, but the four top elements also were split between them as fire and earth under sun and water and wind under moon. As well, the fifth element of wood was placed under moon, and the commonly used sixth element from video games—which CLAMP is known to draw inspiration from—thunder was under the sun. From this, a pattern begins to emerge, but yet lets get back to that later. First, lets look at each of the four main elements and ponder on them for a bit.

Under sun is fire, noted by Kero as being an aggressive warrior card, it is generally associated in society as the element for passionate, emotional individuals. When left unchecked, it consumes the user in it's own flames and hurts loved ones as easily as enemies. And yet it is also the symbol of rebirth, of cleansing the impurities, and has long been used as a tool in healing as everything from sterilizing equipment to burning wounds shut to prevent the patient from bleeding to death.

The other under sun, the element earth, is generally viewed as strong and sturdy. The immovable mountains, the sheltering caves, and the nurturing source of food and medicines. People can be described as being rock heads, meaning them to be stubborn to the point of often being stupid, or to be like a boulder, capable of ploughing down all in their way. However, they are also the shield that guards and protects with an immovable strength.

So the sun seems to favour those who are passionate and determined, set in their ways and hard to change. Not bad traits when for the right purpose, but potentially dangerous when on the wrong subjects. Then again, that tends to be the case for most traits. Similarly, the moon has two prominent elements under it.

Water is generally viewed by the mass public as a healing, gentle, soothing element. A source of life and of vitality, as you are born from water and require water your whole life in order to live. And yet throughout history water has been seen as a force of destruction as well. From the ever prominent creation myths and flood myths from around the world, Noah's Arc being one of the most famous, to tidal waves, dangerous currents that pull you under in rivers, and many more. Water really is Moon's double-edged blade complementary to fire. It can look calm and serene like glass on the surface yet be a raging current just below. It is deep and mysterious, reflecting back what looks into it rather than showing it's true contents. It takes the easy path, yet can bring about great changes through time and
Wind as well can be described as everything from still and calm, to playful breezes, to raging hurricanes and tornadoes. As a fluid it has no shape to call it's own, instead conforming to whatever container holds it, and seeping through every crack it can find. As shown by science, once set in motion wind can take a while to loose momentum, and will easily curve it's path to manoeuvre past all obstacles it may come across.

So judging from these observations, the moon seems to be that of fluidity, a hidden current under an invisibly calm exterior, that which is nigh impossible to perceive. Illusionists hiding behind masks, taking the smoothest course but persistent enough that they could wear away any mountain given enough time. They are the sort to fit the mold prescribed to them and leak out of your grasp through the cracks as you try to hold ever tighter on to them. Possible negative side effects of such personalities are an inability to get to know the person behind the mask, as well as potentially indecisive sorts of people if they are too fluid and lack any direction in life.

Now, for wood and thunder there are special cases. Now, it may just be my western views on things, but Wood, to me, always seemed like it ought to be a Sun element, rather than a Moon one. Wood, or plant life, needs soil, sunlight, and warmth to grow. True it requires water and air the same as any other living thing, but those are not the first qualities thought of when thinking of plants. Similarly, thunder really ought to be a Moon element, as thunder comes from storms—wind and water—and has little to do with sunlight, earth, or fire. Indeed “it was a dark and stormy night...” is so famous an opening line that most North Americans will recognize it as being a cliche opening to a tale, even if they can't place where it originated from.

So why do wood and thunder belong where they do? If you look not at how they relate to sun and moon themselves but rather how they relate to the personality types listed for each, it becomes a bit easier to understand. Wood, the nurturing mother nature, is patient and adapting. It will bend and change form depending on the obstacles and restrictions placed on it. So in that way, it fits well with Moon's wind and water. However, it is also sturdy, strong, a source of shelter and support from the harsh world around us, and in that way it is much like Sun's earth.

Thunder, on the other hand, is bold, flashy, strait to the point and loud about getting there. It's a flash and a bang that illuminates the darkness, fast and hard and full of energy. In those ways, it is very similar to fire, only more streamlined and determined like the hard-headed earth. Yet like the moon elements, it can be redirected, it's momentum changed if given the right conductor to catch it's focus instead. So examining them in this light, it can be seen how Wood is the Moon element that bridges the gap and approaches the Sun, and Thunder is the Sun element that does the same approaching the values held by the Moon.

But beyond Sun, Moon, and Star, Clow Reed and Eriol both have been noted to possess “dark” magic. Everything from the calling of the original sealing staff to Eriol’s references at the end of the manga to the nature of dark magic as opposed to Sakura's light magic indicates that there is something more to the alignment of a sorcerer than merely sun or moon. Eriol explains that dark magic can not block other magic, hence his inability to halt the visions that he claimed Sakura would not suffer from due to her light nature. Though he stopped Syaoran's attempts to locate him, whether the art shown was the spell that Syaoran was casting, or Eriol's counter-spell is the reader's discretion.

The understanding that I have come to is that dark magic cannot block magic, only cast their own spells to attack the spell attacking them. And as always in CLAMP magic, if there is one, then there must be an equal and opposite opposing force. Taking that into consideration, the most logical return weakness for the opposing light magic would be a week offence and strong, natural, defence. So
what does this actually say about a character?

To answer this question, let us first examine two individuals who are not affected by the normal Moon and Sun. Eriol, as Clow was before him, is a perfect balance of moon and sun magic and so therefore is not prone to be affected by any one elemental personality trait over any other. So we can examine in him what it is to be dark magic without taking into account secondary effects. What it shows is a quiet, reserved individual that keeps out of the spotlight and acts something like a wallflower. Not that he does not act, merely that his actions are done in such a way that no attention is brought to himself. With no attention to himself, he brings on no hostility and therefore can get into position to attack without the need to defend. So, in that light, it can be said that dark magic favours the introverted individuals.

Light magic, to counter balance that statement, would then be the extraverts, and this is easily shown in Sakura's daily behaviour. Energetic, open, friendly, she deters the desire to attack through simply accepting and including everyone as friends. The centre of every group she's in, the natural star that will take over and run everything in your lives if you let her, whether it be in play or in fear she brings about the sense of endearment in others. This defensive means—avoiding confrontation through simply becoming an object of affection for the enemy—saves the need to attack. Naturally high defences can protect during the endearment stage, and act to avoid confrontational situations by dispelling negative feelings.

Cerberus and Ruby Moon are also both affiliated with light magic. They share this open, energetic nature that Sakura possesses, though still the differences of Sun and Moon can be seen. Kero is open and frank, he doesn't hold his opinion for anyone and if there is something he desires, he will pursue it without much thought of consequences. He is stubborn and determined, and will do what he pleases as loudly and jovially or aggressively as he so feels the situation calls for. Nakuru, on the other hand, while open and friendly, has shown on a number of occasions that the mask can be dropped in an instant to show a very different sort of person beneath. She is cunning and manipulative, using an open, friendly smile to get her into good graces with people and take her where she wishes to go, all without showing what her true feelings or motivations are.

Meanwhile, Yue and Spinel Sun are both quiet and reserved dark magic users and show as many variations in such as their counterparts. Yue keeps his true thoughts and feelings to himself, often saying one thing and yet doing another as proven with his declarations of never accepting Sakura to be his Mistress, and yet being completely devoted to her protection and happiness only a few chapters later. Even as Yukito, while he gives his polite smile to everyone, he avoids situations of being in the spot light and keeps his true thoughts and feelings bottled up inside, only showing the world the front of a polite wallflower. Spinel Sun, no matter how quiet, shows a stubborn streak that Yukito doesn't share. He refuses to acknowledge the nickname “Suppi” as being in any relation to himself, and quite openly states his thoughts and opinions on things in as few words as he can manage, and doesn't bend to Nakuru's whims anywhere near as readily as Yukito does.

So what does all of this actually have to say about Sorcery? Merely that every person born has a talent to be either offensive or defensive and that whichever they are will affect their outward behaviour. Furthermore, the source of their power, sun or moon, will also affect what sort of person they are and how they deal with the situations that they face. And as they become more in tuned to certain elements, their behaviour will mirror that element's aspects. This is because it takes a certain level of understanding of the forces that go into the elements in order to control them. Whether this understanding is innate or studied depends on the person, as some will naturally lean towards one element or another. Not that a person can not learn to harness the other elements—and for humans it is common to have some level of competence with each element—but rather that it takes a great deal of training to be able to bend your own natural perception of the world to fit a philosophy so different from your own in order to do so.
The Sorcerer's Tools

Sorcery uses a number of different mediums of different shapes, sizes, and styles. Here I will explain some of the most basic styles of mediums for easy reference and clarity. First off though, is the reason for using these tools. A Sorcerer's magic is pulled not from any item, but from the sorcerer themselves, and therefore is very taxing on the caster, in some instances even leading to death. The tools are used to focus and channel the magic into a more concise spell, enabling the caster to use their power more efficiently.

Magic circles are used by sorcerers in order to harness the usage of certain alignments or elements. Each sect of sorcery has its circle that they use in order to call on the energies of nature to aid in their casting. Though it is common to use a prominent circle, most sorcerers know at least fifty separate circle designs. Circles are best drawn on an active element, such as rock, sand, a tree, though they can also be drawn or carved into paper, fabric, personal possessions, etc. Circles are made up of symbols and runes which explain the magic's fundamental basics. Alignments, affiliations, aspects, attributes, and more are all revealed in the markings and placements of those markings.

The circle does not even have to be circular, merely a closed shape of any kind will do. This includes triangles, squares, pentagrams, and so forth. What is important is the unbroken chain of energy cycling through the circle like a current in an electrical wire. For an experienced sorcerer, they are capable of even creating their own unique circles in order to draw on the energies that they desire for their casting. By changing the placement and choice of runes or symbols, the caster can greatly effect magical output and effect of what the circle is used for.

Clow Reed was one such sorcerer, who went so far as to completely devise a new form of circle by combining Eastern and Western magic circles to create something more powerful, dangerous, and harder to control than anything either circle type could manage on it's own. It is due to this extreme difficulty to control hybridized magic circles that prevents them being made very often. The circle variations in existence at the moment all came from attempts to make previous hybridizations easier and safer to use; however, this fact is little known to the public and Clow Reed's hybrid circle has not yet been around long enough for many attempts at modification to have occurred.

Sakura's circle is a special case, it was a circle designed by Clow Reed, only activated when the spell kept inside the Moon Bell transformed the Sealing Staff into the new Star Staff, thus unlocking the new circle pattern activating the magic. Therefore, Sakura did not actually need to understand anything about the circles or the runes and kanji involved in drawing it. Clow Reed's main circle showed while using the Sealing Staff as that's the circle that the magic tools were engraved with, then when the engraving within the tool changed, so did the circle brought forth. She is merely activating a preexisting circle, though eventually in the future she will have the skill and ability to use her own magic to create the circle from nothingness.

Beyond just the circles, there are many other physical tools used in the channelling of magic. Though spells can be cast without them, these items are used to boost the spells power. In some instances, multiple items can be used to magnify the magic greatly. For Sakura, these items are namely her two staffs that she uses in the series, as well as the cards. Where Xiao Lang is concerned, he had his sword, his ofuda, and a third tool in his rashinban. He proved that the rashinban was used for more than just finding the cards, he also used it in his attempt to track Eriol through his coat, and when the Final Judgment was drawing near in the fifth volume, he pointed out that the rashinban was useless because there was too much magic interference around that it couldn't get a solid reading on any one thing.

Even the Guardians seem to have their own magic amplifiers, though not in the form of a staff or weapon like the children. They instead appear to use crystals, as each of them has gems on them in
their character designs. And in the anime, Spinel Sun channelled Eriol's power through the staff resonating with the gem in his forehead. It’s not impractical to assume that each of the Guardians channel their magic through their masters, especially with the reference made in the final battle between the four Guardians about the "difference in the master's strength".

Means of Teaching

Wizardry appears to be taught by and large in established schools organized into classes. Each class appears to be taught by a master of a style of wizardry, such as charms or transfiguration. There are also apparently classes which combine magic types, such as Defence Against the Dark Arts. Then there are classes that require special in-born talent, like Divination, in order to succeed at. And further, there are classes which appear as if magic is merely a benefit rather than a requirement, such as Potions, Care of Magical Creatures, Astronomy, Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, and more.

However, while the majority of the classes seem to be geared towards this “magic is merely beneficial” approach, the curriculum is such that you would not be able to graduate from a wizard's school without taking the mandatory courses that do require magic. In this way, they prevent the likes of squibs or muggle siblings of muggle borns from attending their schools.

Wizarding students begin their training once they have reached puberty and continue for a seven year stretch. If a child by the age of eleven has not shown magical potential as of yet by casting wandless magic, or stealing their parent's wand to play with, then they are dubbed a squib and that is that. It is uncertain what becomes of children who's magic appears after the start of the school year in there eleventh year, they may be able to go into some sort of special studies program, or they may be forced to learn from their parents at home if they're to learn anything at all.

It is proven that some children with potentially high magic levels take a long time to cast their first magic as Neville Longbottom, who eventually becomes one of the better duellists in the school, stated in the first book that he nearly didn't meet the deadline of casting magic. If his family had not began trying to force magic out of him and thus prompting that first spell, what would have been the fate of Neville who played such a substantial roll in the fall of Lord Voldemort?

The wizarding population also does not have any universities or post-school education mentioned within the books. Indeed, if memory serves it is even openly stated somewhere that there are no universities. And yet is it verified on several accounts that somewhere nearing half the spells possible are never learned by your average witch or wizard. To this, there are a few possible explanations. First is that to learn those spells one has to take certain NEWT level classes. Now this is acceptable and reasonable for assuming this, yet at the same time it is highly doubtful that this would account for half the spells out there.

Another explanation is that the fresh-from-school workforce undertakes a period of apprenticeship from a master in the trade they wish to make a career out of. In this apprenticeship, the witch or wizard would learn job-related spells that have been specialized over centuries for the purpose of the job. However this brings up a problem of the apprentice only learning the spells that the master feels is important to pass on and so spells would become forgotten in time.

This actually leads to the third possibility in which only a certain number of spells are in circulation at any one time. In this case, older families who have been accumulating texts for decades or even centuries would have a much greater array of knowledge at their disposal than the newer families who have only been part of the wizarding world for a decade or two. Some of their personal libraries may contain spells which were otherwise lost, forbidden, or merely out of the circle of print.

The most likely answer to the question of “what are those other half of the spells?” is some combination of all the above. As the children get older and begin specializing more and more, they
would learn spells of a certain field only. Out on the work force they then learn further choice spells
taught during their apprenticeship, and then finally given enough time, spells become forgotten to all
but the books they happen to be written in.

For Sorcerers, however, things appear to be quite different. By the age of ten, Xiao Lang had a wide
array of many different types of spells at his disposal. Now admittedly he is quite powerful and is
supposed to be someone great when he grows up, yet so was Draco Malfoy and he did not get
special training prior to entering school. So from this I will take some liberties as the details are not
well known.

Sorcery training likely begins as early as the caster is capable of conducting the spell work. As it is a
more specialized field based on a person's natural alignment, it is likely not taught in large numbers.
As working with the elements seems to require certain mentalities, it is likely that a large part of the
early studies is focused more on how to think like the elements than how to cast the spells
themselves. And in terms of shaping the thought processes, the earlier in life you begin the more
successful you will be.

Once the how of thinking has been established, then the study of the required symbols can begin.
This is likely very mathematically based and so would take an older mind to truly understand, yet
younger children can be taught to copy a picture or feed magic into an item without necessarily
understanding everything involved.

But having a master and apprentice system their whole lives would mean that the students would
need to change masters when they desire to learn a new subject. This would lead to each individual
likely changing masters several times over their lifetime, likely even well into adulthood. Each master
would teach them a preferred set of runes, incantations, and circles, and each student would then take
that which they were best at for their own magic casting. This phenomenon would lead to sects
preferring certain circles, but as long as the original meaning was not lost, the forgotten circles and
lesser-used circles could still be derived from the base and re-invented at any time they are required,
unlike the wizarding magic which once the incantation and wand movement is lost, the spell is lost.

Danger and its Effect on Magic Potential and Output

In the world of Wizardry, magic without a wand is quite possible. Every magical child in the world
casts wandless magic at some point in time or another in their life. The children who cast it more
regularly and freely are often looked upon as being more powerful than those who can not. Harry
Potter and Tom Riddle were two examples of children who used wandless magic in their youth. For
the case of Harry Potter, there are five mentioned instances where the wandless magic was used.

The first instance of Harry using wandless magic was when his aunt cut his hair poorly. His dread of
ridicule which tormented him all night, the shame and embarrassment, resulted in his hair growing
back by the next morning. The next instance mentioned is when he shrunk an ugly old sweater down
to hand-puppet size during a fight over whether or not he was going to wear it. The third mentioned
instance was his apparating in order to avoid being beaten up by his cousin. The fourth was Harry
vanishing the glass at the zoo when his cousin was being cruel once again. The last instance was
during summer break in Harry's third year when he blew up Vernon's sister like a balloon because
she was insulting Harry and his parents.

Now, Harry never made the connection between all of these events, but in each and every one of
them Harry was either in a perceived state of danger or extremely angry. Sometimes even both. And
in every one of these instances, something happened that resulted in him either getting out of the
situation he didn't want to be in, or something happening to punish the person who he was angry at.
Due to this, a pattern begins to arise that can be traced through the other two people within the books
who mentioned pre-wand spellwork.

Harry never made the connection between all the things that were happening, but there is plenty of evidence that indicates that Tom Riddle did. It was said that in his youth, that whenever Tom grew cross with someone, nasty things would happen to them or their possessions. Such as one boy who's rabbit got hung from the rafters the day after fighting with Tom. It's not hard to believe with the nature of people that once he discovered he had this power and what caused it, that he began triggering it purposefully to feel a sense of power over those around him. He did something odd to some students that he coaxed into a seaside cave that they were too scared to ever speak of again.

The third person who spoke at any length on what pre-Hogwarts spells they cast was Neville Longbottom. Unlike the other two, he was not a natural spell caster from an early age, and his stories recount how his family members attempted to force magic out of him. All through his childhood, his relatives did dangerous things to him, from pushing him off a pier and nearly drowning him to hanging him out of upper story windows by his ankles. His first successful spellwork was actually to save himself when he was accidentally dropped during one of these attempts.

Now that the facts have been stated, lets examine what wandless magic really does. All the cases above are indications of magic happening as self-preservation. Either the ability to flee, hide, protect, or retaliate. The fact that Neville's family was attempting to force magic out of him by doing such things to him on a regular basis supports my theory. The problem is that the magic is not only unpredictable, but requires a state of fight or flight to induce.

Because the fight or flight mechanism is a natural proses found in all higher-level animals based on spikes in adrenaline, it can be assumed that any activity that causes an adrenaline rush above a certain level would also cause wandless magic to happen. Further evidence was brought up by Dumbledore who stated in the sixth book that states of depression can sap a wizard's magic from them. Depression is brought on by a chemical imbalance in the brain, in which case adrenaline production would likely be harder to maintain at the heights spellwork requires.

The problem then arises on what if someone capable of casting magic just never happens to reach that level of adrenaline rush prior to the September of their eleventh year? Also, would it be possible to induce the state falsely by adrenaline injections? These are things that can never be proven, however much my scientific mind ponders the fact.

With the understanding of the adrenaline affect, there are further complications to face, however. In a school of emotional teenagers, how is it possible that there aren't magical accidents running wild? In none of Harry's heated arguments against Draco Malfoy has he ever accidentally cast wandless magic, nor during any of his multiple fights for his life upon Hogwarts school grounds. It can't be a state of him beginning to study magic making wandless magic no longer useable, because it was in between Harry's second and third year that he blew up his aunt.

The only logical answer I can think of is that Hogwarts, among all of it's other wards and enchantments designed to protect the student body, has some sort of spell on it that stops the students from casting such an unpredictable, emotionally based thing as wandless magic. Yet even still, even with the wand, whenever Harry has faced his toughest trials, his magic became far more powerful than otherwise. How else would he have managed a Patronus that could take out all those Dementors, or for three first-years to win against a Mountain Troll?

However, sorcery—which also seems to require some form of necessity—seems to mandate a certain level of concentration and can become weaker if you let your fears and emotions run away with you. Eriol instructed Xiao Lang at one instance in the manga and several times within the anime that if he wanted to become more powerful, he'd have to calm down and concentrate. Likewise, Xiao Lang's
first instructions to Sakura in many instances was to calm down and stop crying, that if she concentrated she’d find the solution and succeed.

Though concentration alone does not seem to be all that is needed, as often Sakura must face a moment in time in which the only way she can get through a situation is by pure determination. One explanation for this is that you require the determination in order to continue casting the magic, even when it is draining the body of it's energy. In order to gain that determination, often times the life of herself or of someone close to her was used as a catalyst for Sakura.

Whenever Sakura got into too much trouble, everyone--whether they had magic or not--seemed to always say "it's Sakura, so it'll be alright". And indeed, when she would say the line herself, her special "unbeatable spell" as it came to be known, it would give her the confidence in her self to keep going despite the dangers, and the spells would become more powerful than before. Now, that could just be because it cleared away her doubt and fears, allowing her to concentrate on her magic more completely, or it could have some other significance to the spell work that has yet to be determined.

So that is concentration to cast the complicated spellwork with a level head despite the situation going on around them, determination to continue casting regardless of the taxation upon themselves, and confidence to stand up to their fears and doubts and not become overwhelmed with the problem and thus unable to maintain concentration. That sated, it is obvious the conditions and mental state of the sorcerer while casting magic would be vastly different from those of wizards; however, in both cases the perceived danger is mandatory for pushing their power that little bit farther in order to cast the more powerful spells.

**Emotions and their Effect on Wizardry**

As mentioned above, Wizardry is based off of the fight-or-flight instinct. Without a wand, the caster must reach an emotional high, most often of fear or rage. It has been evidenced that some magic is more inclined to be cast on an emotional high then others. But as much as purpose of the magic goes, in several instances it's been proven that magic also requires specific emotions to cast effectively.

The Patronus, for example, is one of the most obvious spells requiring positive emotions. The very fact that one must find their happiest memory to harness is proof enough on this theory. Without the positive energy, the spell would fail to cause the effect required to protect the caster. The charm to banish Boggarts appears to be the same way; you must harness the feelings of joy and humour to chase away your fears.

While the Unforgivable Curses, it seems, require emotions of loathing and cruelty. Though the exact means in which they are used is uncertain, one can assume it is—like with the opposing positive emotions—used by focusing on an image or event in your past which causes the necessary seething you require.

It appears, for all sanity sake, that as much as Sorcery seems to be becoming in control of your emotions in order to become calm, Wizardry is becoming in control of your emotions to choose which extreme you wish to achieve. Very much opposing means of casting magic, though neither are completely beneficial or detrimental.

**Secondary Talents**

In both the world of sorcery and wizardry, there are some born with natural secondary magical abilities. While these abilities in wizards are all too rare, among sorcerers it appears as though secondary magical abilities are all too common. As it has been the repeated pattern above, we will begin once more with the wizards inheritable talents and then move on to the sorcerer’s afterwards.
I say that wizardry has inheritable traits because the evidence predominantly points to that conclusion. Brought up as a main plot point as early as the second book, yet foreshadowed even within the first, was the skill of parseltongue. Reputedly Salazar Slytherin's most famous ability, it is one shared regularly by all the Gaunt line who descended from him. Indeed, it went to the point that in all likelihood Voldemort's uncle could not speak even a word of English as he was shown in the books to not even attempt communication to the authorities in anything but.

The stigma shown within the British Isles towards parslemouths gives rise to the belief that it is likely that it is among the rarest of talents, and that those who can use it would likely keep it under wraps. However, just because this is the case within Great Briton, does not mean that elsewhere in the world parslemouths are treated so poorly or are so rare. It could have very easily have been a skill that started elsewhere in the world where it is common, and merely not inherited by many people within Europe.

The stigma states that parslemouths are evil persons dating back to the original inventor of the Basilisk who was a powerful dark wizard. It also most likely stems from the biblical stories of the snake in Genesis, as most of Europe have been Jewish/Christian for the last several hundred years. However, actually examining the facts would likely prove that this is merely population bias and that the likelihood of a parslemouth becoming a villain is no greater than that of any other person out there.

The other named skill is metamorphmagi, or the ability to change one's own appearance without the use of a wand or potion. This does not include transformation into other species or inanimate objects. The main practitioner of this skill is one Nymphadora Tonks, and while the skill seems to be hereditary as her son, Teddy Lupin, also had the skill, her mother, Andromida, nor any of her other relatives among the Blacks have any indication of having this skill.

That being said, it was either a recessive ability that Ted Tonks, Adromida Black, and Remus Lupin all were carriers for, or it was a dominant ability that evolved multiple times. Seeing as the first case is more likely, we shall say that the skill is probably pretty well distributed throughout the magical population in Great Briton due to three unrelated characters all being carriers of the gene.

Now, there are many ways that these magical traits could have made their way into the population, including being random mutation that lead to an enhancement in magic for certain individuals. While this is not wholly improbable, there are other possibilities as well, including one that the books themselves allude to on several occurrences. What I am referring to is the fact that many magical species such as giant, veela, and so forth, have demonstrated the ability to interbreed with humans and produce offspring that posses the magical traits of their non-human ancestors.

Now here I pose a theory on the origin of not only the extra traits that some magic users have proven themselves to possess, but an origin to all magic in humans to begin with. Picture, if you will, the state of the world pre-humanity, when the first homo sapiens were defining themselves as a species of their own. Genetics proves that there was likely extensive interbreeding between these early humans and other members of the homo genus, so why stop there?

Suppose occasionally that individuals of this early humanity bred with local magical beasts, thus resulting in offspring that had traits of their magical parent. With generation upon generation, these offspring breed among the non-magical humans, and come in contact with others of different ancestry. These different communities of humans-with-power would then blend into something that is neither one nor the other, eventually becoming the mishmash of magical abilities that humans are today.

But this process wouldn't just stop with the prehistoric humans, indeed in Harry's own circle of
experience there are three such half breeds with inherited traits recent enough in their bloodline to recognize the source for what it is. However, if one assumes that given time the origin would be forgotten in face of the ability it produces, especially if it is highly recessive, then they could come to the point where the ability gains a name of it's own rather than just being a “half breed trait”.

So here we have a plausible solution for not only the wizard's traits but also magic in general. However, sorcerers are a little different. As stated by Eriol in the story, where sorcerers come from is uncertain, merely that they have been around long enough to traverse the globe and have by some means made themselves a part of magic. As a result, their magic tends to be less genetic and more spiritually based.

Looking at it, there seems to be two main branches of secondary talents that sorcerers can have: divination and spiritual sight. For exceptionally powerful individuals, it seems possible to use both talents at the same time, though many individuals seem to have neither. Unlike with the wizarding traits, the abilities of the sorcerers seem to be such that they would not be born with them, a certain level of power would be required before they become viable, yet they have a predisposition to one power or the other all the same.

This observation would bring to mind the lunar and solar aspects that sorcery is based off of, the combination of which in different percentiles basically dictate personality and ease in casting different types of magic. With this theory in mind, one merely needs to examine individual persons exhibiting these abilities to determine the likelihood of each trait being related to each celestial body.

Now, due to the small number of individuals shown to possess these abilities within the cannon Card Captor Sakura universe, I will be taking this theory largely from the greater CLAMP-verse which includes such titles as Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicles, xxxHolic, Legal Drug, and X1999. They will, of course, defer to CCS in any subject that contradicts as this is a story built out of that world, but as fellow series made by the same artistic group who are known for convolutedly crossing over their own time lines, I feel it safe enough to take from others to fill in the blanks that Sakura's universe simply does not answer satisfactorily.

That being said, let us begin with the power of divination, or foresight. Seers of various types and powers have existed in a variety of CLAMP titles, and for ease of explanation I feel it best to begin with persons of other titles and then apply them to Card Captor Sakura cannon for comparable continuity. The list of cross-series seers I wish to draw attention to here are Ichihara Yuuko (Tsubasa and xxxHolic), Fei Wong Reed, and Tomoyo from Japan Country (Tsubasa), Hinoto, Kanoe, and Kuzuki Kakyou (X1999), and Kakei (Legal Drug).

Starting with the closest relation to our main title, Ichihara Yuuko is an old colleague of Clow Reed's and nearly as powerful. Her entire business functions around her ability to foresee what her customers need to gain their heart's desires and what they must give in return to make the payment sufficient. As the Witch of Dimensions, her official ceremonial robes are adorned with multiple references to the moon, indicating a highly strong probability that she has a lunar alignment.

Following Yuuко, one may examine the cameo appearance of the seer Tomoyo-hime of Japan Country. Much like Yuuko, Tomoyo-hime is adorned by a crescent moon theme, however unlike Yuuko, Tomoyo-hime shows no inclination for possessing an ability to see spirits. Hinoto and Kanoe, famed seer sisters in the X1999 series, are similarly associated with the moon, though in a more indirect fashion. Both sisters are highly associated with the night, a time when the moon is out and the sun is gone, and both have official artwork showing them with the moon hanging in the background.
Furthermore, Hinoto is strongly associated with water, which is known to be an element under the power of Yue. Likewise, Kuzuki Kakyou is strongly associated with the ocean and seagulls in flight, his dreamscape taking place in such a location. In Card Captor Sakura, The Fly is a card under Windy, which in turn is also a card under Yue. Furthermore, all of these characters, as well as Kakei the seer from the Legal Drug series, have personalities that when examined would put them under the moon aspect as detailed in the Alignments and Elements section above.

The only character that really contradicts this over-encompassing theme would be Fei Wong Reed. His personality is stubborn and unyielding, determined to a level that better identifies with the solar element earth than any of the more fluid elements of the moon. Not that those with a lunar aspect can not be stubborn or determined, as each human is made up of percentages of sun and moon elements to form unique wholes. However, that being said, the stronger percentage would make Fei Wong's aspect appear to be sun. Yet like Yuuko, he appears powerful enough in both aspects that he has the ability to use foresight and spiritual sense both.

So given the general CLAMP-verse theme, let us now examine how it relates to the cannon characters of Card Captor Sakura. The series itself presents three prominent seers, Eriol, Kaho, and Sakura herself. When Sakura began budding her new ability shortly into her adventures, Kero made note that the ability to view visions was a rare gift that only powerful sorcerers had. This gives a possible hint to why Syaoran wouldn't have the gift, despite the fact that he seems to be a lunar aspect as well. He is never expressed as being able to see ghosts or other spirits, only a general sixth sense to feel out presences that he and Kero both seem to think is a general skill that all magic users should be capable of doing.

So out of the three powerful enough to have the gift, the question that must then be asked is how well do each follow the lunar aspect theme. Eriol Hiiragizawa, the half reincarnation of Clow Reed, inherited his magic and therefore his aspects, which were cannonly known to be a perfect balance of sun and moon, thus making him so exceptionally powerful. As such, Eriol can not be defined as one category or the other and has proven to have abilities that land him in both fields of secondary magical talents.

Sakura, likewise, has an odd aspect, being that she draws her power from her own personal star and thus is neither sun nor moon. Yet if we step back on her and look not at the predominant aspect but rather the elements that she is most comfortable using, one can observe that her favoured magic is all the likes of Windy, Fly, and Jump, all of whom are under Yue, thus lunar magic. As such, it can be assumed that her celestial stacking is star-moon-sun, and as moon is still higher than sun, the first magic she began being able to do was divination.

And that leaves Kaho, a woman surrounded by the imagery of the moon to the point that Kero even mistook her for Yue's sealed form. Other connections include her apparent affinity to water, and that her magical tool was none other than the Moon Bell which Clow Reed embedded with lunar energy to enable Sakura to beat Yue with a lunar-based card. Even Kaho's last name, though the kanji are wrong, sounds like it would mean “water energy”. Yet in Kaho's introduction to Touya, she found him watching a spirit under a tree and spoke to him about it.

Now, if this was a show of Kaho's strength or if she simply assumed is unclear. Kaho is a seer, she taught Sakura water skrying and had many on-the-spot premonitions. She could have easily foreseen in some form the existence of Touya, given his power and importance intertwining with all that Kaho's destiny depended on. If that was the case, she could have simply foreseen that Touya had the gift he did and when coming upon him staring off into what seemed like space, sensed out that there was a presence there and figured he was looking at it.

Or perhaps as a miko, she had been called upon to do some sort of ceremony for the dead, or for a
local spirit, or whatever the presence was, and had been made to skry on it previously. In either case she would have gained knowledge of the entity without the ability to see anything present and would have merely noted that Touya was capable of seeing it. On the other hand, it could have been indication of her vast abilities placing her as one of only three others who had both skills. If that were the case, it would express her level of power far higher than most fans seem to assume, as the others who are known to have such a skill include Clow Reed, Eriol, Yuuko, and Fei Wong.

Now that I have thoroughly argued the point of divination being a lunar-based ability, allow me to now call upon CLAMP's infamous rule of duality and say that if divination is indeed an advanced lunar magic, then solar magic would need an equally advanced skill to compliment it. That being said, the other skill shown time and again throughout the series is the ability to see ghosts and other typically invisible things. Characters that I will be addressing here expressed to have this skill and aren't any of the mixtures already addressed above are Watanuki, and Kohane (xxxHolic), as well as the cannon Card Captor Sakura characters.

While X/Tokyo Babylon do involve senses that enable characters to interact with the spiritual realm, allowing them not only to see but also create spiritual beings, it seems to be a universal trait of people with powers in that universe. Every one of the characters with power, be them Dragon of Heaven or Earth, have shown themselves capable of bearing witness to entities such as Nekoi Yuzuriha's inugami, Inuki. As such, in that world it could be assumed that the ability is universal to those with spiritual powers regardless of what celestial aspects they attribute themselves to and therefore can be disregarded from the speculations.

The only two others who are prominently noted for the gift that aren't members of our cannon are Watanuki and Kohane. Kohane's gaining of the ability came from her being infused with one of Sakura-hime's scattered feathers. The presence of this feather greatly boosted the little girl's magical ability to the point that a power manifested. While initially speaking, Kohane doesn't seem like the typical image that one would associate with the bright power of the sun, however on a closer inspection she appears to merely be a Dark type of character, similar to Spinel Sun, rather than a Light type.

This observation stemmed from the fact that while Kohane did go along with her mother's desires to an extent, she was only a child and once she became old enough to stand on her own, she did so. Kohane has a very stubborn streak in her, she chooses her path and is unrelenting in the pursuit, despite everything that other people may do or say to her. Like with Fei Wong Reed, this is not the behaviour that a strong lunar elementalist would exhibit. While determination is mandatory for most magics, going to the extent that Kohane went to without yielding or changing tactics or even loosing who they are at their core shows a heavy level of the bull-headed attitude that solar types are defined by.

That being said, Watanuki is something of a strange case. According to story cannon, he is not a proper human, being a mere shadow of Li Tsubasa. Tsubasa's clone was strongly affiliated with fire, and by extent so too was Tsubasa. Fire is, of course, a sun element, and one that also suits Watanuki. Watanuki is impulsive and intense, he wears his heart on his sleeve and doesn't think through the consequences of an action before he takes it. He is stubborn about details far past the point in time where they become obsolete and is unwavering in his conviction long past the point in time where it becomes clear that his continued arguments have become invalidated. Just look at his insistent crush on Himawari even after he found out that her very presence put his life in danger, or his determination to declare Domeki his enemy well past the point where other people would consider them friends. He follows his emotions rather than his head, but is too stubborn to acknowledge when his emotions change against his will. These are very sun-like traits, indeed.

Now as far as Card Captor Sakura goes, the only two characters who solely have spiritual sight are
Touya and his mother. While not much is known about Nadeshiko, what is known is that she was rather impulsive, often acting before putting any real thought into her actions, and admittedly a bit of a klutz, but that's more or less irrelevant. The only thing to note about it is that she didn't seem to be the sort of person to learn from her mistakes, because despite her accident-prone nature, she never slowed down or really learned to think things through enough to correct the mistakes.

She also seemed to have a strong sense of determination, or at the very least was highly loyal, and preferred to make up her own mind. After all, she quit a family who obviously loved her dearly for the man she loved, and still sent them her Valentines chocolates despite her choosing to be disinherited. And like mother like son, Touya is also the fiercely independent yet loyal type. However, unlike his mother, Touya seems to be the sort to act as the steadfast protector, trying to take care of spirits despite his own welfare and chasing after his sister despite having given up his magic. Also unlike his mother, Touya seems to be more of a Dark Sun rather than her Light type.

On one final note before I leave off this section, I'd like to address the issue of Fujitaka, who gained a spiritual awareness with the gaining of half of Clow Reed's magic. I do believe that while this was the ability we were shown he possessed, that much like Clow Reed's other reincarnation, this will not be the only ability he will end up with. Indeed, he has always, even before gaining magic, had a seemingly uncanny insight on events, being at the right place at the right time or just knowing when things go wrong in regards to his children.

While his children and himself have always just taken these things as being result of him “just being dad”, indicating how well he knows his children and how good a father he is, it could also be taken as residuals of Clow Reed's absolute foresight. While nowhere near as powerful as Clow Reed's, or even Eriol's, due to his not having had magic to boost it's power, if my theory of Clow Reed breaking taboo is correct, it makes sense that Fujitaka would not be exempt of the punishment either. As a result, he is just uncannily good at guessing the right answer or preempting people, and his children who grew up knowing no other type of father would not ever think to question the how or why of the matter.

This wouldn't be the only strange thing about him that in hindsight would likely link him to Clow, either. His exquisite cooking ability seems to be a common trait between those in close relation to Clow, as well as his looks and general mannerisms. But if that is the case, then why was the first magic he was shown to possess his ability to see Nadeshiko? Because she was what he desired most.


Between the Harry Potter and CLAMP universes there seems to be one glaring discrepancy, namely the existence of spiritual beings. In the universe that Harry Potter takes place in, only witches and wizards are capable of choosing where they go after they die and are incapable of returning after they move on. There are no such things as gods, or spirits, or demons, or angels within the Harry Potter world, possibly to avoid the controversy over religious practices if such ideas were brought up.

However, CLAMP—including Card Captor Sakura—blatantly contradicts these statements and many of the unstated facts. While the only ghost or spirit that is actually interacted with in Card Captor Sakura was Sakura's dead mother, Nadeshiko, Touya stated that his mother had stopped appearing while he was in middle school (so at least 3 years before the start of the series). However, at the end of the first volume of the Card Captor Sakura manga, Nadeshiko reappears briefly with angel wings attached and says a line that indicates she's been somehow able to watch over the family in a way Touya couldn't sense. And this was not the only time she made a reappearance as during the White Day special and near the end of the manga series both she was shown to have come back for at least a visit to check up on her loved ones.
Further, when Touya came across the Mirror card the first time, he mistook her for a ghost and attempted to help her move on. He would not have done this if that wasn't something he had managed in the past, also the forest that Mirror took Touya to was said to be full of spirits meaning either Japan is riddled with a ridiculous amount of dead mages unwilling to move on by themselves, or the statement in Harry Potter about only mages having the ability to become spirits would have to be disregarded. Touya also stated that when they were younger, he would tell Sakura about nearby ghosts and spirits “everyday”. While some of these cases may be lies from a teasing older brother, it is likely that many of the cases were real. He also spoke of “evil” spirits that would cause Sakura to cry about if he told her they were there or not, and yet the Harry Potter books seem to make it out that ghosts are neither good nor evil, merely a continuation of the witch or wizard that made it.

Many of CLAMP’s other series also further support this view that normal people can become ghosts and that there is far more than the spirits of dead humans—or even dead magical humans—wandering the world in a way that normal people can’t see. Most prominent of these series being xxxHolic, which focuses on the adventures of a boy who is a convoluted descended from Clow Reed as he struggles to deal with his spiritual sight. As such, much of the basis for what constitutes as a sixth sense in this story will be taken off of the abilities described in xxxHolic to fill in the holes left unexplained in Card Captor Sakura.

Yet seeing as the views of what is and is not possible for after-death experiences is so drastically different between Harry Potter and CLAMP based universes, an explanation to clear up these discrepancies is needed. For this, I wish you to turn your attention to the section above in which I discuss the secondary talents of Sun and Moon aligned sorcerers. The arguments detailed there place spiritual sight as a solar talent exhibited by people of strong magical ability. I also wish to draw your attention to the statement that sorcerers are different than wizards in that they are a part of magic rather than merely a conductor of it as wizards are. This being said, sorcerers behave more like magical beasts as far as their powers are concerned than they do like humans.

Now, with these things in mind, please focus on a statement that Kero made in the manga in regards to Yue and why Yukito ate so much. He said that because Yue was moon magic, he did not create his own magic but instead had to absorb and convert it from an outside source. The fact that Kero makes this distinction indicates that his own sun-based magic does not follow those same rules, further supported by the fact that Sakura insists on several occasions that Kero does not actually need to eat. Now seeing as humans all have both sun and moon magic in them to different percentages makes sorcerers a slightly different story, but one can assume the general rule still holds.

Solar magic acts as it’s own generator, as opposed to lunar magic which acts as a sink. If this statement is considered true, then for the health and safety of the sorcerer producing all that energy, there must be an outlet for their magic or else they would eventually gain too much energy and explode. A similar example of energy breaking out was shown in Harry Potter via the case of Dumbledore’s little sister Ariana, who after a traumatic experience attempted to seal all her magic within herself until she would lose control of it. The easiest way that one could imagine to expel the excess magical energy would be that of a continual radiation of it like how the body expends heat, or like the drain within a bathtub.

Now, imagine if you will that with enough power being expelled, the waves of magic would become something like how sound waves become echolocation, or light waves become visible objects. The waves would be let off of the sorcerer, and be reflected by colliding with the aura extruded by the spiritual being. To someone who has strong solar magic, this extra energy would be a bad thing and would not be absorbed by them, leaving them instead to perceive the existence of said invisible object.

So then, if that is the scientific explanation for the secondary talent of sun aligned sorcerers, there
must be an explanation regarding the secondary talent of lunar magic as well. So, let us start off by looking back and examining the statement Kero made once more regarding the nature of Yue's lunar magic. He said that moon magic needed to be replenished from an outside source, absorbing and reflecting the magic rather than creating it. Also, please refer above to where I talk about the importance of intent and emotion in casting of spells. This idea indicates that something of those emotions would be projected when casting those types of spells.

Now allow me a moment to introduce an otherwise unrelated source that assisted in the formation of this theory. In the video game Xenoblade released by Monolith Soft for the Wii, the main character has the ability to see the future with the aid of a special magical sword, the Monado. The point that I'd like to pull attention to is the explanation that was given as to why these abilities exist. According to the game, the sword did not give the wielder the ability to truly see the future, but instead used the energy of the life essence found in all things to predict the most likely outcome to events and expressed those to the Seer instead.

Now, for a sorcerer who has a high percentage of lunar magic, they would be absorbing far more of their magic than they are producing for themselves. If we take the concept that everything in existence lets off some minor residual magic and the idea that Seers only See a prediction of the most likely outcome, one can start to put together how this talent works. The more powerful the Seer, the more they would have to absorb, giving them a clearer picture of the future, and thus letting them predict further ahead than weaker Seers. Then adding in the concepts of the different ways destiny or fate are put together, a very powerful Seer, such as Clow Reed, would be able to control the future by laying all the pieces in place far enough in advance that only one outcome would be made probable.

Also, the inability of a Seer to view the future of one more powerful than themselves would pertain to not having enough capacity to absorb “magic intent” from the person to be able to accurately predict what they would do. And the taboo about Seeing one's own future would be basically opening the pathways within one's self to absorb their own “magic intent”. If these pathways were unable to be closed off again afterwords, it would lead to a continual in-feed of personal future that nothing save death could stop.

So, one last thing to touch on in regards to the Harry Potter world: if the above concepts are true, then why would everybody with magic be able to see the ghosts of witches and wizards? Well, for starters I’d like to point out that it is unlikely that a non-magic user would bother going to haunt a magical location such as Hogwarts. Also, as CLAMP indicates, beings with magical existences extrude more of a presence than those without it. Thirdly, note that the only places where witches or wizards have ever been noted of seeing things that normal people can’t are in historical magical locations. In other words, places where magic has been in use for hundreds or even thousands of years.

Assuming magic leaves a residue behind, some sort of latent overlay of excess energy, over time these repeated spells would form a matrix of energy in which the spirits haunting those places would become noticeable to anyone powerful enough to sense them. Witches and wizards, who are merely conductors of the magical energy in the universe around them do not store a large enough quantity of magic within themselves to function as a source like solar-based sorcerers do, but in a magical location where the environment is acting as the source they would still have the potential to pick up on the presences just as lunar-based sorcerers would.

Gauging Power (*New* 15/11/2014)

Now, this is something that I have discussed a number of times with various people but never actually written a section on for the public. The issue that is being addressed is the apparent power
imbalance between the sorcerers and the wizards. First, before going any further I'd like to draw
attention to one prominent detail: wizards do not store magic within their bodies. They act as
conductors, using the magic naturally in the environment and channelling it to the task they desire.

They gauge the strength of a wizard by averaging the values of how much and how fast any
particular individual can gather the magic. However, because their bodies are not made to hold large
amounts of magical energy, wands were invented to gather the spell's magic within and ease the
stress on the caster. Due to the fact that they themselves do not store their own magical energy, not
only are they not in anywhere near the danger of exhausting their magical reserves, but they are also
not granted the extraordinarily long life times that sorcerers of equivalent power are benefit to.

So, wizards who only have a few decades longer lifespans than muggles do will grow old and die
even as the strongest wizard to have ever existed. Currently, that title is held by none other than
Merlin, a father of modern wizardry who even after so many centuries since his parting has remained
a name to be praised and respected. The four founders of Hogwarts were similarly exceptionally
powerful wizards and witches, though not up to Merlin's standards, were rather close to the power of
Morgana le Fay. Dumbledore, Grindelwald, Voldemort, McGonagall, Snape, the Marauders (minus
Peter), and Harry are all further noteworthy names of modern wizardry. Dumbledore is even reported
to be the strongest wizard of his age.

So then why is it that sorcery seems so much more powerful? Well, for starters CLAMP loves
making characters that are so absurdly over-the-top powerful, beautiful, and otherwise perfect that
they seem to Mary-Sue the universe. But putting that aside, we can also look at some of the things
that were actually mentioned. Let us start with the title of “Most Powerful Ever”, which is held in
wizarding terms by the long-diseased Merlin. In the CLAMP-verse, it is universally accepted that
that title was long in the possession of one Clow Reed.

The difference here between wizardry and sorcery is that for the sorcerers, their strongest ever stuck
around for around a millennium before deciding on his own to die and pass the torch to his
reincarnation, Eriol, who held the title unknown to the world until the moment his magic was split in
half. Now on that regard, CLAMP has provided it’s readers with the “one who will surpass” their
strongest ever: Kinomoto Sakura. However, Sakura is still only an eleven year old girl and is far
from in the full breath of her future powers. She is very powerful at the moment, yes, but her power
is currently growing and she has not yet reached the true crest that she one day will in the future.

That being said, Yuuko from xxxHOLiC has stated that Fei Wong Reed was the second most
powerful sorcerer in history after Clow Reed himself. Yuuko has been noted on several accounts of
being spectacularly powerful, Syaoran noted that Mizuki Kaho was worryingly powerful, and
Sakura during the first movie made note that Yelan was exceptionally powerful. That Syaoran was
sent alone at age ten to capture the Clow Cards despite having other such powerful people in the
family gives some indication of how strong he is, and one can assume therefore that just like him,
Yelan's other children must also be exceptional. Touya's magic as well, prior to him giving it up, was
enough to be able to save Yue's life when he was fading away. Also Nadeshiko, mother of Sakura
and Touya, was noted as being powerful enough to see spirits as regularly as Touya himself did.

So, now that we have some names, it's time to start gauging them and why. In my humble opinion,
Merlin and Clow Reed were about the same standing in magical power, with perhaps Clow Reed
becoming a little more powerful in the later reaches of his life. Morgana was said to have been
something of a rival to Merlin, despite being much younger than him, so one can therefore assume
she was about on par with Fei Wong's power. Now we come to the point of speculation.

Yuuko herself acknowledged that she was not as powerful as Fei Wong, though she is strong
enough to have cast several spells to send people to other worlds (a power that even other extremely
powerful sorcerers are noted as only being able to do once in their life) and create magical beings, though admittedly with the aid of Clow Reed. Yelan, for her part, was shown to have ripped a hole in a barrier Clow Reed created to stop a very powerful sorceress—that even he felt threatened enough by to imprison—from ever escaping again, even when Sakura's own attempts to break the barrier all just bounced off. And yes, Sakura had not even participated in the Final Judgement at that time, but the fact that the barrier was created by Clow Reed to stand up to any assault the imprisoned sorceress tried to use against it and not even her soul after death was able to free itself still says something about what kind of power Yelan possessed.

So, while I personally consider Yuuko to be more powerful than Yelan, I do not think that Yelan is so very much weaker as to make her someone that Yuuko would be able to deal with easily. I consider the main difference in their power to stem rather from the styles they were trained in, and from the fact that I consider Yuuko's powers to be moon-based while Yelan's to be sun-based. Then, weaker but still quite powerful in their own rights, the Hogwarts founders in no drastically distinct order that matters as far as this story is concerned.

The next step down on our gauge is that of Eriol and Fujitaka, tied at this place after Clow Reed's magic was split in half between them. Syaoran's older sisters are also right around this level, though definitely weaker than Eriol and Fujitaka. It is likely that the elder two siblings are more powerful than the twins simply due to the level of training they have undergone.

From there, a further step down gives us Kaho, powerful in her own right yet no where near the strongest to ever exist. I also place Dumbledore somewhere around this level, though where exactly he fits among the half-Clow Reed and Kaho's standings is still being debated. Rather close to this power level is also Touya, though due to him having never received any proper formal training, it's hard to determine if he is more or less powerful than Kaho.

I do think, however, that Nadeshiko was likely less powerful than Touya. She was likely around the sort of strength that Voldemort has, or perhaps even as weak as McGonagall's level. Grindlewald was also likely about the same level of magical power that McGonagall was, though maybe a little stronger. Basically, the two of them are in the class that is still considered powerful, but is a power that is not so very uncommon that you don't see a few every century, while Voldemort and everyone above him in power are more along the lines of powers that stand out above and beyond what could be considered “normal”.

Sirius and James are likely the next people on the list, with Remus and Snape being not very far behind. Harry, also, will be about their level in power once he fully comes into his own. All of them “strong”, but still well within the average perimeters, not making any one individual stand out above the rest, and would have likely all lived rather normal wizarding lives exempt from the history books if it were not for Harry's dealings with Voldemort.

Now do keep in mind that there are always situational dealings where luck, fate, and training dictate an individual to be more or less successful in any given instance. However, I feel relatively confident that despite this one can still agree to the rough placement on this scale of all the individuals listed. Further, if one were to examine the sorcerers on this list they would find a few key points to pay attention to: one, power is hereditary; and two, if it weren't for the extreme longevity granted by the sorcerers storing their magic within their own bodies, there would not be so many extreme powers co-existing at any one point in history.

So then one might ask, “But wait, where are Sakura and Syaoran in this list?!” Well, the answer to that is quite simple, they are still children who's magical power is increasing throughout their story. At the very start of Card Captor Sakura, at the point in time in which Sakura fist opened the Book of Clow and began her adventures, it can be assumed that her magic power was about the same as
Dumbledore's and her brother's. However, it can also be stated that she often denied and shied away from her power, so the vast majority of it was latent and she was completely untrained. This is a classic example of one who has power, but not skill.

Syaoran, on the other hand, at this point in time was very well trained, but was only somewhere between Voldemort and McGonagall in strength. Now, don't get me wrong, that is still an exceptional level of power for a 10-year-old to wield, and seeing as he actually has the skill to know how to use his power, that places him as being over-all better than Sakura at this point in time.

Now, from this point on, through their adventures the children gain in both power and skill, Sakura more so than Syaoran, until the time of the Final Judgement. At this point in time, Sakura's raw power is already higher than Kaho's but still a good deal weaker than Eriol's at half-strength, similar to how Syaoran's sisters are. This is why she had so much trouble against Eriol early on and was exhausting herself so often in changing the cards. Yet even still, she lacks any formal training, and gets through her fights more by luck and intuition than any actual skill. Syaoran, on the other hand, has only made it as far as Voldemort, or perhaps a little past him in power.

Over Eriol's series of tests, Sakura is being pushed to her limits repeatedly, which increases the speed of her growth, having her overcome the strength of Clow Reed at half power by the end of the manga series. Again, she has still not undergone training, only learning on a need-to-know basis as problems arise. As such, if they fought seriously, Eriol would still be able to take her out despite her being more powerful than him. Syaoran, for his part, was still in that gap between Nadeshiko and Voldemort's level of power, and the sort of power that Dumbledore, Kaho, Touya, and pre-CCS!Sakura had. Though while he is in that gap, he is continuing to inch ever closer to their power level, and is still exceptionally impressive amount of strength for an 11-year-old to wield.

As for the time between Eriol's magic being cut in the end of May, 1995, and the start of this story in August of the same year, both children have undergone their own training regiments. For Sakura it has been more a catching up with her training than a further advancement of power, though she has increased in that somewhat as well. For Syaoran, however, it was a far harsher regiment that succeeded in pushing his power that last little step into the power range of Dumbledore and Kaho.

The Power of Desire

In the CLAMP-verse, it is apparent and often even stated that the power of wishes and desires shape the world. The strongest wish has the greatest effect. This theme has shown up in everything from Magic Knight Rayearth, X1999, Clover, and Wish, until the more recent titles like xxxHolic, Tsubasa, Kobato and from what can be seen so far, Gate 7. Within the Card Captor Sakura world, up until recently the most powerful force was that of Clow Reed. As shown in Magic Knights Rayearth, the one with the greatest magic potential also is the one who's wish is heard the loudest.

Taking this into account, for the last several hundred years Clow Reed was the force that lead the world with his strong desires. While other people's desires still shaped the universe as well, Clow's immense power and his ability to foresee the future in so much more depth and so much further ahead than anyone else would basically enable him to manipulate the course of history to fit his benefits and desires. This being said, it's clear how many would believe that the future is set in stone and can not be avoided.

But thirty years prior to the start of the story, Clow Reed died, splitting his soul into two other beings, thus passing the torch of “strongest” off to Eriol. Now, while Eriol generally followed Clow's plan, it is clear by the ending of Card Captor Sakura that not everything Clow desired came to pass, meaning that somewhere in there things had been changed. What was that thing? And what will it lead to? These are some of the questions this story strives to examine.
Guardians Existence

Purpose in the Sorcerer's World

It is without question at this point that Sorcery and Wizardry are two very different magic styles. Sorcery requires, as discussed higher up, absolute concentration. In this state, Sorcerers are vulnerable, too focused on their spell work to be able to defend from an attack. It has also been brushed upon the idea that stronger magic needs stronger concentration, and a longer time to gather energy to cast said spells. This leaves the caster at quite a disadvantage when it comes to casting Sorcery in any form of combat. In such a state, they could easily be taken out by a physical blow, or by a slightly faster spell. And this is why Guardians were created.

Sometimes in history and varying religions they have been referred to as 'familiars', Guardians exist to defend their masters in their times of vulnerability, and to tend to them while they recuperate from a particularly complicated bit of spell work. It is impractical to assume that magic users could support a Guardian who is at full power all the time, especially when they are drained for power themselves, and so Guardians exist in two forms: their true form and their sealed form. Their sealed form is often small, having very little magical output, and therefore requiring very little magic from their masters. Since the power it requires to sustain a Guardian is great, few sorcerers have the power to do so on their own. But without a power source, Guardians would not be able to continue living, and so the immense magic put into them would be a waste. For that reason, Guardians have been given a special magic to allow them to bond with items that contain great power, such as the Sword of the Elements that Syaoran wields, or Kaho's Moon Bells, or several other special tools and items handed down within the magical families. Connecting oneself to the items like this does admittedly drain the magic power of the tool much faster than what would otherwise take place, but a bit of fancy spell work once a decade by a group of Sorcerers is a far better means to sustaining a Guardian than a continual drain of a single sorcerer's power, that would leave them exhausted and unable to do anything else with their magic.

Cultural Reactions and Relations to Guardians

By modern day, as rare as Guardians are, they are a rather well known concept, often owned by the older families and clans. To have a Guardian is a thing of prestige, an honour bestowed in ancient times that can still play a major and active role in the lives of the young sorcerers of today. Most of the Guardians appear in charts telling the name of the Guardian, the item it's connected to, and the family that owns the item. The Guardians are kept by the heads of each family line, often only one Guardian per family, though it is up to the whole family to ensure the Guardian does not disappear from starvation, just as it is up to the Guardian to protect everyone in the family they are bound to.

Since most Guardians have lived through several masters, they often build interrelationships among themselves with other Guardians from near-by sorcerer families. Often at large magical get-togethers they can be found interacting on the sidelines with their own types, sharing family histories from the last time they met the particular Guardian that they are speaking with. A similar aspect of their duties, in the homes of their masters they are expected to work to some extent as a history teacher, re-telling the children the family’s greatest achievements and sharing wisdom from previous generations.

Between the actual master and Guardian, however, there is something beyond just the basic living together. To ensure the loyalty of Guardians to their masters, the master was enabled the ability to control their Guardian with spells that only the ones the Guardian is bound to can cast. But for the Guardian to always know the state of distress for their masters, and therefore protect them from danger, Guardians will create a special spiritual bond to their masters. Guardians can tell the ups and downs and all the variations of their master’s moods, they can hear their master say their name,
wherever they are in correspondence, and often due to the bond, a Guardian will love their master, just because it is their master.

Guardians are traditionally formed in the shape of animals. They tend to be large enough to support a master's weight in their true forms, and small enough to fit in their master's hand in their sealed forms. As such, they tend to gain some minor attention in either guise. In true forms, they are impressive, massive, strangely mythological beasts of varying colour and design. In their sealed form, they tend to be miniature, and often simpler versions of themselves. Their unusual looks and ability to speak tends to draw attention to them, so in most cases of travel, they tend to stay hidden.

As they are shaped like animals, must do whatever their master commands, and are handed down much like heirlooms, as much as the sorcerers may love the Guardians, they are looked at as possessions rather then comrades. Like a favourite toy or a beloved pet, they lack no amount of affection, but are not given equality or looked at to have any real opinion of their own. They are a fancy trinket that will give their life for their owner; they are slaves and possessions, no matter how well they are loved.

Changing Hands: Gifts and Inheritance

As started already, Guardians have in history, outlived their masters time and again. This would tend to cause a problem, if it were not for the fact that Guardians are handed down the family line. Due to the situation, seeing as the previous master must die before the next one can be claimed, it often happens that it is not the child, or even the grandchild of the previous master that receives the Guardians next, but rather a great-grandchild. Though as always there are exceptions to this, it is merely the way that history has tended to go.

But there have also been cases in history where a great sorcerer will not have children of their own. In such instances, though not as common as the previous scenario, the master will choose a favourite student to entrust the Guardians with until someone new is chosen for their master. And on rare occasions, though it is looked at by the mass of the sorcery's society as highly rude, a master who has born children may still choose to hand down their guardians to a pupil instead. This course of action tends to bare the feeling of "none of my family are important enough to me" mixed with "my family is not worthy of this honour". Such things are so generally frowned upon that the student often feels obligated to marry into the family and return the Guardians that way.

The reason in which Guardians are viewed this way comes from ancient times, during the birth of the Guardian species. In ancient times, due to the strain of magic that was required to create Guardians, it became a customary sign of debt to a fellow sorcerer's family to bestow a Guardian when a sorcerer died in the saving of another sorcerer's life. It took several centuries, but eventually every one of the old families had a Guardian of their own.

In the few thousand years that followed, the magic to make Guardians was lost, though the meaning behind them remained due to the Guardian's outstanding memories. The families grew larger, split, and grew larger once again in an endless cycle that lead to the Guardians being handed into specific families only. Also over the centuries, some of the Guardians have died from starvation or attack. By present day, not only are Guardians unable to be replenished, the families that have them are select and few. Out of all the sorcerers out there, there are only one to two hundred Guardians to go around.

Though Clow Reed created his own Guardians, they were special to his own personal needs, and are not commonly placed in the selection of the list of normal Guardians. Instead, they have been given special recognition, along with his cards and several other things, as another of his wondrous inventions and creations. Jiao Yang and Chandra, however, were given to the Li Clan, and more
specifically to Syaoran, by “Clow Reed” in this formal ceremony from ancient times. They are the classical variety Guardian that the rest of the world has, and therefore are as controllable and as non-taxing as your run-of-the-mill Guardian who has been around for the last several millennia.

**The Special Creations**

As can be expected, wherever Clow Reed’s name is concerned, nothing is of the ordinary. It was during his time after he had abandoned both the Li Clan and the Reed Clan that he wondered the world, disgusted with humans that fate allowed him to stumble upon the ancient stone ruins describing the spells required to create Guardians. So, lonely and bitter to the world around him, Clow set about making his own friends. But, never one to follow directions, and far too cocky with his own ability, Clow decided he was going to change the spell. The first few attempts were powerful, yes, but very not Guardians. Some of these spells were later adapted into what would eventually be the creation of the Clow Cards. But finally, after several years of work and study, he succeeded in the birth of his own type of Guardians.

Some of the most notable changes that he made include the fact that there were two, twins who opposed and complimented each other. Another was that instead of making them from pure magic and then bonding them to an item, he created them from an item: an old magical journal of his that no matter how much one wrote in it, it would always have more pages that were blank. Also, the fact that he created the very first humanoid Guardian, though still as sexless as any other, gave more of a look at his views towards the human population around him. But what had to be the most notable thing about his new creations was that neither of them took on sealed forms. Indeed, the fact that he supported two unique Guardians in continual true form was what started the world's view of him becoming a god among men.

At the moment, the only thing I still have to add is that Spinel Sun and Ruby Moon were created in a sort of fused fashion between his first works and the original Guardians. They are basically his first type of Guardian with the exception of him not making them from an item, but rather in later years binding them to his Sun Staff.

**Clow Reed's Legacy**

**Clow's Bloodline**

Clow Reed, son of an English sorcerer and a woman from China's Li Clan. Though the greatest part of history says that Clow Reed was probably born some time during the 1600s, that is not necessarily the case. Due to the fact that China is connected to Europe by a large land bridge, and that there was quite probably travel along the Silk Road from the time that humans spread across the globe. But, for simplicity sake, I will not put any dates to his age, just that he was hundreds of years old. During his life, he quite conceivably had many wives and still many more children. Though the Li Clan boasts their blood relation to him, they most probably are not the only ones.

Yelan, last of her family line to bear the surname of 'Reed', was the product of one of these marriages that Clow had. In the case of her ancestor, he married a Chinese woman (whom I have named Ba Ying for anyone who happens to be interested) from the western coast of China. From that union came Yelan's dead father. A sweet girl, timid and mild by nature, yet naturally bearing a terrifying power. The true nature of her life story is being censored here due to the fact that it plays something of a role to the back story of future events that I do not wish to spoil for the audience. By the time she was fourteen, she was married off to her distant relative, the head of the Li Clan.

Though they knew nothing of each other at the time, their personalities proved compatible and they became one of those few lucky arranged marriages where the couple truly do fall in love. They had their first daughter ten months after their marriage, a second thirteen months after the first, and then a
full year and a half later she gave birth to twins. Four years passed before she gave birth once more to an heir, a son that the father named Xiao Lang after a legend in the area. Xiao Lang was still very small at the time of his father's death, which left Yelan heartbroken but determined. She held the title of Warlord, and she would do what she must to ensure the survival of the Clan, as well as the survival of her children.

From that day, when her husband died, onward, Yelan was determined to shape her children into strong warriors. She locked up her heart, and took on an outlook of tough love, forcing all of them, Xiao Lang especially, to grow up much faster than they would have otherwise. Fudie, who had been reared to be Clan heiress until her brother was born was rather more used to the treatment, but Xiefa, who had been lucky enough to avoid much of that harsher treatment, as well as just had a very motherly disposition to begin with, took it upon herself to play mother for her four siblings instead, now.

Xiao Lang showed potential for very powerful magic; therefore his training was intensified further in order for him to harness this ability. He was told repeatedly from several people that he was destined for greatness, that he would be the replacement for Clow Reed, to the point that he came to believe it. It was only when he came to meet Sakura that the idea that someone could be powerful outside of breeding even occurred to him, and then of course when that came to his mind, he began to doubt other things he had been taught. And worse, doubt himself.

Final Spell

Ever since the revelation of Horcruxes, all cross over writers of these two stories must ask themselves: is the spell that Clow Reed cast a Horcrux spell? Or perhaps a variation? My response for this is quite simply and completely no. The spell that Clow used was Sorcery, simple as that. He used his magic to artificially create two eleven year old boys, and then used his magic to put his soul into both. It was fundamentally a simple enough process, though it required mass amounts of magic to complete.

The true wonder, and what this section is to discuss, is what Clow chose to give each of the reincarnations and why. Let’s start out with the inheritance left to Fujitaka. Made from Clow's recessive, more British genes, he bore far less appearance to Clow than the other. But in face and abilities, he was every bit like Clow. He was not given magic, but was that because Clow could not split the magic, or because he would not? Kero said that he was awoken when someone with magic touched the Clow Book. Clow intended for Fujitaka to grow up and have Sakura who would become the new mistress of the Clow Cards. If Clow had given him magic, he would have stopped ageing like Eriol had and even if he didn't, he would have had magic and that would have awoken Yue and Cerberus at once. They would have seen the Clow Reed in Fujitaka and pronounced him the new Master, and nothing would have changed.

Clow also did not give Fujitaka any memory of being Clow. Why? I think it was because he didn't want to make Fujitaka suffer. He wanted Fujitaka to be the man he never could. To live the life of a normal person like he had always wanted to. He never fit in as a youth because of his family, he became even more ostracized by his outstanding powers. He became bitter, selfish, and at times childish. And then something happened to make him see that his way of living was wrong. And so he made Fujitaka everything that he wasn't: a person with no history who had no magic, and more compassion then most could ever feel.

What did Fujitaka choose for himself? He became fascinated with history, wanting to know the past and origins of things. Was this due to some sort of latent or erased memory of Clow’s life living in those times? Was this because he had never known who he was or where he came from? Who can say? It was most likely a mixture of things that compiled to lead to his life decisions.
As for Eriol, he was given Clow's looks, his power, and his mind. But was that his gift? Or maybe was he made as a side effect, somewhere to put everything because they couldn't be given to Fujitaka? Eriol proved to be the one doomed to make sure that all of Clow’s plans turned out. Stuck for three decades as a child, alone in the world, just waiting for his other half to have the wonderful family and gain the beloved Guardians and Cards. It's not surprising that Clow made it so that Fujitaka was immune to Eriol's magic in order to stop his murder in a childish fit of jealousy!

Knowing what sort of freak he was, not born from a woman's womb, but rather from the spell of a man who thought he had the right to twist the forces of nature and fate to his own liking. Not even able to get close to other people now that he lives, because his lack of change would be too much a give away to be able to know them for more then a year or so. He created his own Guardians, like Clow Reed before him, his own replacements to be his own family. His biggest wish, above all other things, was to not be the strongest or the best anymore. He didn't want to be one of a kind; he wanted to be as normal as he could manage.

Sakura's Original Magic

In the later chapters of the manga, while Sakura was changing the Clow Cards into Sakura Cards, the things everyone was saying about it brought up a lot of questioning in my mind. First, I will sate what I understood from the first. That while the Clow Cards were such, they drew their magic from Clow and so he could halt or even redirect them as he pleased. So to make the magic work, Sakura had to take the cards from Clow and make them into something beyond his control. That now that they had a new Mistress, like Yue the cards were draining the reserve magic and were starting to die. Well, then why would people call it Sakura's own special magic? The cards appearance hardly changes, and their abilities are copied perfectly, it's not even like they gained any new personality traits or anything. They are, for all tense and purposes, Clow's cards still, only drawing magic from Sakura instead. But during one of my bouts of deep thinking, it dawned on me that I was making a fundamental and, I'll admit, detrimental error in my pondering. I was forgetting that natural talent and mass power do not equal knowledge. To assume that anyone, especially a small child, could proficiently create anything without prior learning or instructions would be quite foolish, indeed.

Sakura, impressive heroine that she is, had no prior knowledge to anything involving magic before her tenth birthday. She didn't even know about the five Eastern Elements, as stated by her when she captured Earthy. Her only experience with how to work magic was through the Clow Cards, and with only Cerberus and Syaoran to be her teachers, neither showed much actual promptness to teach beyond what the situation at hand required. So in a lot of ways, she was wandering blind, figuring pretty well everything out for herself as she went along.

Is everyone following so far? So here’s how it worked out: Sakura, filled with vast amounts of magic, but fearing its existence within herself, comes across the Clow Book, and becomes the Card Captor. She learns all about her cards as she catches them, their strengths, their weaknesses, their personalities, everything. Each card, to her, is read with greater ease then a story book, and each card, to her, is a dear and important friend. Then, once she has all the cards, danger comes about and she must strengthen her bond to the cards and make them her own. The urgency of the danger makes it less dangerous for her, as it gives an actual need and requirement to boost the power of the card. Not knowing anything other than the cards, she leaves them as is and just feeds them her own magic instead. This also makes the transition easier, because it's not creating something new; it's only updating something old.

This, as it stands, leads to the next step, shown in the last episode of the anime and the idea of which is being used as a fundamental point in my story. Now that she knows how to create the cards, she knows everything about them, the only logical next step is to move away from the original blueprints
designed by Clow Reed and go on to draw up a few of her own. Namely, The Love, and in a way, The Hope.

**Time line**

Just to clear things up, some important events and their corresponding dates.

April, 1994: Sakura turns ten, also at some point within the first week Sakura goes into her father's study and finds the Clow Book. Windy is found within the next day or two and returns to the book of its own accord. Thus begins Sakura's adventures as a Card Captor.

July, 1994: Li Syaoran comes to Japan to find the Clow Cards (admittedly this did not happen until December in the manga, but I need to scrunch the time line a bit). At this point Sakura is in possession of Windy, Wood, Jump, Fly, Watery, Illusion, and Flower.

September 1, 1994: Harry, Ron, Hermione, and company enter their fourth year at Hogwarts.

Late Fall, 1994: Sakura captures the last card and goes through Yue's judgement (note that in the manga this would have most likely happened in winter of '95, but as said before I am trimming this down a bit)

Start of Third Trimester, 1995: Eriol joins Sakura's class (for those of you who don't know, school starts in Japan in spring, summer break signals the end of the first trimester, winter break signals the end of the second, and then spring break signals the end of the year. So this is somewhere around January, but I don't know the schooling system clearly enough to state for sure what the date would be. Also, the fact that they are in short-sleeved uniforms when Eriol arrives in the manga, means that it's probably the start of the second trimester of 96, but... that would have Sakura already 12 at this point and Hogwarts brings students in when they're 11.)

April 1, 1995: Sakura turns 11. Also right in this area, they move from the fourth grade into the fifth.

June, 1995: Sakura transforms the Light and Dark, she splits Eriol’s magic between himself and her father, allowing Eriol to age once more, and Eriol goes back to England with Kaho. Syaoran, who is in love with Sakura, decides to keep his feelings to himself because of his Mother's calling him to return to Hong Kong. Sakura is highly upset by this news and in a fit of emotion, creates an original card: The Love. Realizing her feelings, she makes Syaoran a bear, but is late getting to the bus stop and barely hands the bear over to Syaoran. (Being that in the manga, they went from short sleeves to long sleeves to winter coats, to short sleeves, and then finally are wearing long sleeves again at this point, she probably was having her final battle against Eriol in the mid to late fall, maybe even early winter, of '97 at this point, so that means she'd be 13... I don't think Clamp MEANT for her to be 13 at this point as that means she would have already been in middle school, I think they wanted her to be 11-12ish, so I'm sticking with her being 11.)

Late June, 1995: Harry and company end their fourth year at Hogwarts with the death of Cedric Diggory and the revival of Lord Voldemort.

Late July, 1995: Eriol contacts Sakura about one last card that Clow had made as a seal for the others to keep them calm after his death. He tells her he's been haunted by visions lately, and fears it might become active now that it's not sealing anything and she must go and locate this 20th card. She asks him for advice on how to beat it, and he tells her that it's looking for her strongest feeling, and that it will take that feeling as payment for capturing it. Sakura is upset by this, but when the Void takes even Yue and Cerberus from her, she is willing to do what she must to protect everyone else. What it takes from her is her new card, and fuses with it to form The Hope. (This event has a very important part to my story, but I won't give it away quite yet...)
August 14th, 1995: Sakura and Syaoran receive letters via owl requesting their attendance at Hogwarts.

So, Sakura's story with the cards takes place over 14 months, rather than the 3 ½ years from the manga, but it is essentially the same story, with all the same events, in pretty much the same order. The only main difference for the most of it is what uniform and clothes the kids are running around in. Some things like the white day chapter would just be bumped over to the proper date for White Day. Same with Valentine Day, and other such special holidays. But seeing as for the most part things like that aren't really set in stone in the manga, indeed few of them are even a part of the story line beyond just passing comment, I feel safe in compressing the events to make them able to fit.

One last side note before I send this off to whomever may read it; all subject matter is open for discussions and debate. Indeed, I enjoy hearing what people's own personal opinions are, and anything that can improve the quality of my writing is always most welcome.
Prelude: A Glance at Another Type of Life

Chapter Summary

Three different sources, three different sorcerers. Fate, once set in motion, can not be stopped. Eriol knows this all to well, therefore in order to protect those most precious to him, certain sacrifices must be made. But the first step in any game is to set up the playing pieces.

AN: After several years since the original postings, I have decided to go back and update the earlier chapters in order to fix the errors in grammar, spelling, and a few misunderstood facts. There may be the rare rewrite of a scene, but I'm trying to avoid such things because I want to preserve my growth as a writer. Therefore, the only scenes that will be altered will be ones I find redundant, or that I was never happy with in the initial telling of the story and feel I can make better now.

And further, I would like to note that for this story Syaoran/Shaoran will be referred to outside of Sakura's speech as Xiao Lang, which from what I have seen seems to be the most universally accepted way to write his original name in English. Because honestly speaking, “Syaoran” is merely the Japanese attempting to pronounce the Chinese name rather than his real name. So instead of writing the English approximation of the Japanese approximation of his Chinese name, for a story that will be taking place in Great Britain and written in English, I will just be using the English approximation of his Chinese name. Sakura, however, as a native Japanese speaker with a Japanese accent, will continue to refer to him by her best approximation of his name that she can manage.

This story is based off of the Card Captor Sakura manga with an altered ending (details of which can be read in the prequel story, “Birth of the Deck Master”) crossed over with Harry Potter. This story will be taking place during Harry's fifth year (Order of the Phoenix, for anyone who doesn't know) and will start off closely following the fifth book before derailing and heading into new territory. And once again, no, this is not a “saving Harry Potter” fic, if that is what you are looking to find, then by all means find it somewhere else.

Legend:

“English”
“Japanese”
“Chinese”

Thought or Written word

//Long distance communication (telephone, etc.)//

Prelude: A Glance at Another Type of Life

The television rattled on undisturbed, broadcasting it's late night movie. Some drama the name of which would fade from the ancient memory of Eriol Hiiragizawa not long after the credits rolled. But still he kept his eyes trained on the images of the imaginary people, doing his best to shut out the world beyond. It was a futile effort, but one that he strived for nonetheless in the way that everyone enjoying the mindless pursuit did.
Within the dark room, the only light illuminating the two occupants was the dull off-blue of the screen. Nakuru and Spinel had already been sent to bed, as they were young and needed their rest, but the ancient reincarnation wanted to take this chance to be alone with the woman who loved him. Absently stroking his thumb across one of Kaho's thighs from where his hand rested gently upon her knee, he enjoyed the small form of affection she returned by idly running her fingers through his hair.

It really wasn't fair, Eriol was tempted to complain, that for the last thirty years he had been stuck in the body of an eleven year old boy. If he had been allowed, as his counterpart Fujitaka had, to grow and age like a normal human after his creation by Clow Reed, he wouldn't have to hide his love from the world. Kaho wouldn't have to suffer, or fear imprisonment should they ever be caught, all because of an apparent age gap that wasn't even real.

Really, it wasn't like the beautiful woman had sought him out for the sake of being with a child. He had seen the confusion and fear in her eyes as she slowly found herself falling in love with the reincarnation of the god-like Clow Reed trapped in the form of a small child. He had watched her heart war with her mind over the feelings she could not help but develop, and had felt the threads of fate bind him to her just as deeply in return.

Having all the memories of being Clow Reed, who himself had lived hundreds of years of life, Eriol had recognized well the enamoured state of destiny. She was the one he was supposed to be with, and she loved him despite everything he was and wasn't. And that had made remaining a child any longer than he had to an unbearable burden.

So for her, he had set destiny in motion far sooner than he should. He pushed his little star of hope and light beyond her limits again and again, unnaturally fast for the growth of one still so small. He had done it all for the sake of time, so that the final spell could be undone and he could grow into a man that Kaho could love.

He had watched her for many long months that bled into years, fretting over a love that he returned. He had watched her, unable to tell her how adamantly he admired and loved her back until he had a future once more rather than that unchanging eternity. And she, wonderful, beautiful, amazing Kaho, had promised to wait for him once his time was returned to him. She loved him, despite everything, and was happy that her feelings were returned.

Yet he knew that there were prices to be paid. He had altered destiny, set things in motion that could now not be undone. He had done this to his little heiress out of a selfish need to make the woman he loved most in the world his. Feeling a need to reinstate that it was actually worth it, Eriol pushed himself up to his knees and wrapped his arms around Kaho, drowning the unsuspecting woman in an almost desperate kiss.

It took her only a moment to respond to the sudden burst of affection, bringing her hands up somewhat hesitantly to his small sides and held him there until the both broke apart once more for air. As she looked up at him searchingly after the kiss, asking of him a thousand silent questions, he was reminded for a moment how truly young she was in comparison to his own ancient soul. She was a woman in her mid twenties, still learning and growing despite her title of “adult” as all do during those years. He on the other hand, despite his looks, had existed in one form or another for nearly a millennium.

She did not understand yet as the older seers did the true workings of fate, nor the prices one must pay to alter how things occurred. He doubted that anyone besides himself and the creator of it all actually understood destiny the way he did, but he had in his foolish youth conducted a taboo and so was cursed with seeing everything forever and so had little other choice but to observe how fate was truly laid out. And so, with a heavy heart for what his selfish actions had caused for those he loved,
he informed Kaho, “I have a job for you...”

Li Yelan stood over the pair of sarcophagi that the esteemed Li Clan had been sent. What had her young son been up to that had lead to him getting such a present? And from her deceased grandfather, Clow Reed, no less? Yes, she was the last of a long list of descendents to bear his name, but had lost it when she married the head of the Clan, in hopes of producing a Card Captor.

And yet, although all five of her children were exceptional, not even her powerful young son could succeed in bringing back the Clow Cards. A failure that brought much shame to his otherwise noble and great name. “Mu qin (1)?” speaking of which...

“Yes, Xiao Lang?” Yelan asked, without even turning around.

Xiao Lang came around into her line of sight, now that he had been acknowledged, and bowed low at the waist as he presented her with an envelope addressed to him in curly green English writing. “I... I want to go, mother, to prove myself, somehow. I have lost face, and... something else while I was in Japan looking for the Cards. I wish to retrieve some of it back by following in Clow Reed’s footsteps and learning both styles of magic. Who knows, I may even be able to one day make my own set of Cards, much like the Card’s new Mistress changed the ones she had to fit her power...”

Taking the letter from the boy's hands, the Clan matriarch read it over quickly before returning her gaze to her eleven year old son. “Are you sure about this, Xiao Lang? You know your coronation would be taking place in the middle of their school year.”

“Yes, Mu qin,” he reassured, before adding in a whisper, “I don’t know what’s wrong with me, mother, but I'm just not happy here anymore...”

“Very well, pack your bags; someone shall arrange for your flight shortly so that you may purchase your supplies. Afterwards, you can stay there if you like, or come back here,” Yelan snapped authoritatively.

It was only after her son bowed and hurried out of the room that she let her head bow and shoulders slump. What could you have been up to indeed...?

1. I speak zero Chinese, and to my limited knowledge there are several different dialects of the language, many of which can't even understand each other. However, the online dictionary that I looked up said that this was a very formal and respectful way to address one's mother. I can only hope that it is correct, and if not, please feel free to inform me of my mistake.

Sakura, Tomoyo, and Kero lay sprawled on the living room floor of the Kinomoto household. They were made to lie on the floor because Touya and Yukito were snuggled on the couch. The five of them were going over Sakura's old tapes, looking for possible weak-spots or predictable patterns that she may be using to help her in her training. Their dad, Fujitaka, was in the other room making popcorn for his two children and their guests.

“Oh, oh, oh! Rewind that, will you, Daidouji?” Touya suddenly asked.

“Hmm? Oh, yes...” Tomoyo said, hitting the stop, rewind, and play.
As the scene, they were watching—the school sports day when she caught The Flower—came close to where it was before it was stopped, Yukito looked at his lover questioningly. “Was there something in her form you wanted to point out?” asked the ever sweet grey haired man. (1)

“No,” Touya responded in an almost bored voice, but the mirth was still evident as an undertone, “I just wanted to see the monster drop the baton on her head again…”

Sakura instantly sat up from where she had been using the winged cougar as a beanbag and turned to her brother with puffed up reddened cheeks. “I’m NOT a monster!” she cried, slapping her palms on the floor in frustration. “Yuki! Make him be nice!!”

Yukito seemed torn for a moment between the one he loved and the one he served. Finally, he bowed his head to the Card Mistress, and turned to Touya. “Either you be nice, or I’m going to have to remove you from the room for a little time out.”

“Is that a promise?” Touya teased, running his fingers through Yukito’s hair. Before Yukito could reply, Sakura turned and said, “Could you two take it into the other room or something? I’m trying to study this!”

Yukito and Touya got up to move to Touya’s room, and instantly Sakura and Tomoyo kidnapped the couch so have something other than Cerberus to lie on. But just as they plopped down, the phone rang and Touya lifted it to his hear. “Moshi moshi?” he asked into the receiver. // Uh, hi… is Kinomoto Sakura there? // asked a male voice on the other end.

“Who are you, and why do you want to talk to her?” Touya asked immediately.

“Who is it, Onii-chan?” Sakura asked her over-protective brother. His only reply was to wave her away. // Look, I don’t have time for this, could you just put her on, or tell me she’s not there, or that I have a wrong number or something? // the voice on the other end was tired and laden with a thick Chinese accent that spoke with rude words.

This fact made Touya’s brow contract. “Oi, Gaki, is that you?” complained Touya. “How many times have I told you to keep away from my sister!?”

“Syaoran-kun?? Ne, Onii-chan! Give it here!!” Sakura cried, suddenly at her brother’s side, hopping around to try and get a hold of the receiver. “Yuki! Help me!” She whined, and dutifully her Moon Guardian complied and snatched the receiver from her brother’s hands and handed it over to his young Mistress.

At Touya’s huff, Yukito shrugged and said, “I don’t have a choice. I have to obey my Mistress…”

Sakura ignored them completely, and brought the phone to her ear at once. “Moshi moshi? Syaoran-kun?”

// Sakura? Is that you? //

“Syaoran-kun! Oh, I’m so happy! I’ve missed you so much! Please tell me you’re coming back to visit soon. It’s just not the same not having you here with me…”

There was a pause, and when Xiao Lang spoke again, his voice was strained. // Yeah… I’ve missed you all, too… but, uh, no… I’m not coming back… in fact, I’m calling because I have some
bad news… //

“Syaoran-kun…? Wh-what is it? Are you in trouble? Do you need help? Is there anything I can do??” she was starting to panic, she didn’t like the tone of his voice, and she didn’t like the way he was talking. It made her uneasy.

He was quiet for a very long time, only the sound of his breathing let her know the line hadn’t been cut. //Sakura…// he started but then stopped and was quiet again for a moment more. // Kinomoto-san, I called to tell you… that I won’t be coming to visit any more… //

She felt like the ground had suddenly disappeared from under her feet. He-he had to be joking… right?? “Syaoran-kun…”

// Please, Sakura! Just-just listen, okay…? I’m… I’m going to be going away for a very long time… for years… I won’t be able to come and see you… //

It hurt to hear… but she wouldn’t cry over the phone, she wouldn’t lay that guilt on him. “Well, that’s okay, I guess. I mean, we still have e-e-mail and--”

// No Saku-Kinomoto-san, I’m not going to be around any computers or-- //

“Well, there’s the telephone!” she interrupted hurriedly, not wanting to hear what he had to say next. “Or-or letters!! We can keep in touch!”

// No, Kinomoto-san, we can’t…I’m… not going to be able… to talk to you any more… just… just forget about me, okay? //

“Syaoran-kun… iie…” she whispered into the receiver.

// I’m going to forget about you and it’s best that you do the same with me… I’ll be gone too long for you to hold on… just… goodbye, Sakura… I-I… oh forget it! // and with that the line clicked off.

Sakura stood unmoving, just holding onto the receiver with her eyes blanked out, for a long time after he hung up. She just couldn’t grasp it… Syaoran-kun… gone…? All my dreams of true love… gone…? Everything we went through… everything that we were to each other?? Does none of it really matter to him?? at the first of the beeping that the line made, Sakura threw the phone down and ran to her room to escape the eyes of her brother, friend, and guardians.

Almost as soon as the door slammed above them, Fujitaka came out with the bowl of popcorn and a letter. Glancing around he asked, “Where is Sakura-san?”

“She went upstairs. She seemed rather upset. Why do you want her?” Touya replied.

“Well, it’s just that I got this letter to a boarding school in the strangest of ways… from the beak of an owl… and it wants her to attend a wizarding school named Hogwarts…”

Technically speaking, none of the Guardians have genders. They are non-reproductive and so lack the reproductive organs that segregate them as “male” or “female”. They are not even asexual or hermaphrodites, they simply do not have a means of reproduction, sexual or otherwise. As such, the most proper term to use for them would be “it”, but that just sounds insulting according to English grammar and culture, and so I find it very hard to refer to them as such. For sake of ease, and to avoid just using their names repeatedly, I will instead refer to them by “he” (Yue/Yukito, Kero, and Spinel) and “she” (Ruby Moon/Nakuru) within this story.
Well, there you have it, folks! The prelude, in all its twisted glory. This story will be written through both the eyes of the HP characters and the CCS characters. Also, this story goes by the idea of the snowball effect, so even if it does start off nearly identical to the book in events, it will change more and more as I write… Well, that’s all I can really think of for now, so...

Shade and Sweet Water

Keysha
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

A hand delivered letter arrives for Dumbledore at Grimmauld Place and puts everybody in an uproar.

And here we have it, a re-write of the first chapter of Harry Potter and the Deck Master, which oddly enough technically takes place between the first and second scenes in the prelude. The “important job” Eriol was referring to was the delivering of the letter and would have taken place during the night of the 11th or early morning of the 12th, and the following scenes take place on the 14th. However, for simplicity and because the chapters were already named and posted as such, I decided to just leave this as chapter 1 and that as the prelude.

Chapter 1: Dumbledore’s Mission

It was Saturday, August 12, 1995, and Harry Potter was at his court hearing.

Sirius paced impatiently around the room. He hated to admit it, but part of him wanted Harry to be tried guilty so that they could stay together here. Lupin had been trying for most the morning to calm his irritable friend with little success, so when someone knocked on the door, he was relieved to have a momentary distraction.

That was, until he opened the door.

On the other side stood a woman. And not just any woman, but a beautiful woman. A woman that he had never laid eyes on before. A woman standing at the doorway to the Order of the Phoenix: a place that no one but members were supposed to be able to see. Apart from her technically not being rightfully there, she was very attractive, in her mid-twenties with long red-brown hair and brown eyes… wait, not brown, though at first one might think so, but they were really a strange greenish hazel…

Soft pink lips smiled over an eggshell face, and the oriental woman then spoke, “I have a letter here for Mr. Dumbledore, I would have sent it normally, but I do not have any owls. Please, could you give it to him?” and with that, she handed over a manila envelope and wandered back down the stairs.

Still not fully functioning at his total capacity after experiencing such a strange event, Lupin turned and wandered back down to the kitchen where Sirius awaited curiously. “Who was that at the door?”

“I donno…” Lupin replied truthfully.

“No, seriously, who was at the door?”

“I have no clue… some strange lady; I don’t have the slightest idea who she was, though. She just gave me this letter to give to Dumbledore and walked away…”

Sirius stared unbelieving at his best friend. “How did she see the door??” to which Lupin could only shrug. “Oh, f#$%…” Sirius grumbled. “NOW what’s going on?!” he collapsed to the table with a
huff.

“I’ll go contact everyone… something like this should be dealt with immediately…” Lupin said, turning to go.

“Something like what?” came Fred’s voice soon followed by the man himself.

“Nothing, Fred, go back up stairs.” Lupin said in a warning tone.

“But I’m hungry!” he wined, slipping easily around the thin man and over towards the pantry.

He was caught by the scruff of the neck by Sirius, who glared at the younger man. “I’ll bring you up something, then. But we’re in the middle of business. Get out.”

“What sort of business??” pushed Fred.

“OUT!!” Sirius finally barked at the teen, half chasing the young man out of the room. He then turned back to Lupin and chuckled. “Kids…”

“They remind me of you at that age…” Lupin commented, before going out of the room to call the others.

One could pretty safely say that that house had never been in more of an uproar than what this one letter had produced. After the initial complaints about the meeting being called in the middle of the day, when many had been at work or doing other things besides work for the Order, and had had quite a lot of trouble finding excuses to sneak away and come here. And after Sirius and Snape had had their little bickering match over whether or not Sirius was doing anything at all for the Order. And after all the greetings between members that had not seen each other in months or even years, they finally managed to get everyone calmed down enough to get out the story of what happened without major interruptions.

On the other hand, once the story had been told, things only got steadily worse. Now, there were twenty-some adults sitting in the room, arguing over whether or not they should open Dumbledore’s mail… At the moment, fathomless grey eyes were focusing on the letter, listening to the argument at hand.

“I say we should leave it, it has a dark magic to it!” Moody’s voice growled from somewhere behind Sirius’ head.

“Why do you say that? What’s it got on it?” Tonks challenged from somewhere to the left.

“No clue! It’s obviously evil! We should destroy it!” hollered the disfigured man.

“Oh, just cause you can’t see it, makes it evil?” sneered Tonks, though she was drowned out by another voice on the other side of the table.

“We can’t do that! It’s Dumbledore’s!” Molly shrieked.

Finally growing tired of the bickering, Sirius leaned forward and grabbed the letter, “Well, I for one want to know who wrote this so I know who knows where I live!” choosing to ignore Snape’s sneer about hiding, Sirius placed a nail under the wax seal.

Silently the Weasley children sat at the top of the stairs, never had they seen so many members of the
Order all in one place.

“What do you think’s going on…?” Ginny asked, staring at the door.

“I don’t know… they had a letter when I was down there, but they kicked me out before I could hear or see anything…” Fred replied to his little sister.

“Maybe… maybe something really bad has happened…” Ron said, putting his face in his hands.

“You think?” George asked in a ‘no duh’ sort of tone.

“Well, I mean… what if someone was killed or something?” Ron asked worriedly.

Silence fell around the group. Ginny laid her head on George’s knee for a moment before saying, “Maybe we’ve got it wrong… maybe something good has happened! Maybe they’ve got a lead or-or they could have found a way to stop You-Know-Who from getting to the weapon…” Ginny suggested, getting more hopeful by the word.

“Or maybe Harry’s lost the court case and they’ve all gathered around here to decide what to do about it…” Hermione supplied, coming up and joining the group of redheads.

“Hermione!! How could you say something like that!?!” Ron asked, appalled.

“Well, it’s a possibility, and we should keep our minds open to it. You have to have noticed how the Ministry is trying discredit Harry in every way that they--” she was cut off by a loud boom from in the kitchen. At once, the whole group of children were on their feet, hurrying to the kitchen door to check on what was wrong.

Ginny was the first there, she pushed her way through the imperturbable charm and grabbed the handle, shaking it wildly. Finally the pressure of the spell became too much and she was shot back into Ron and George, all of whom toppled to the ground in a heap of limbs.

“Sirius!!” Lupin cried, hurrying over to his dear friend’s side, where he lay smouldering on the other end of the room.

“Whoa!!” cried Tonks, eyes wide and mouth agape.

“Wh-what <cough!> happened?” Sirius asked, grabbing Lupin’s shoulder for support as he pulled himself to his feet.

“It looked like you were electrified,” admitted Snape with a snide grin at his long-time rival.

But the mood between the two was lessened at the sound of Tonks’ giggle. “Hehehe… come check this out! I think the letter’s insulting you!”

“What…?” Sirius replied in a disbelieving tone. The members of the Order all gathered around to see a message written on the back of the letter in a shimmering red ink.

*You shouldn't read other peoples mail, you know, it's rude…*

After a moment, the words faded away to nothingness. The baffled members of the Order looked among themselves for a second. “What now?” someone finally asked.

“Maybe a spell could get it open…?” Mundungus suggested.
“Moody, do you know any that might work?” Molly asked him. Moody nodded and pulled out his wand, tapping the letter and mumbling something. He put his wand back in his pocket, and when it became apparent that he wasn’t going to open the letter, Mundungus shook his head and reached forward to pull it open.

At once, fire jumped to his arm, burning its way up to his shoulder with a loud ‘whoosh’. One of the witches screamed, there was a large panic, and the fire was put out, leaving only minor burns on Mundungus’s arm. “What the hell!? What’d you do to it?!” the still smoking man cried in an outrage.

“I didn’t do anything. It wouldn’t let me cast the spell,” Moody admitted. The reply he got was a number of different ones:

Mundungus glared, “You could have told someone!”

Tonks looked horrified, “Didn’t let you?!”

Sirius looked highly concerned, “What could that mean?”

Lupin stared slack jawed, “That shouldn’t be possible…”

Snape looked mildly disturbed, “Preposterous.”

Molly became highly distracted at that moment because there was another knock at the door, “Oh, what now??”

A number of other people just stared in a shocked silence before a large group hurried up the stairs to quiet down the paintings and make sure that there wasn’t an attack on the other side of the door. On their way up, the kids were shunted up the stairs, ignoring the questions of what was going on, and a large group approached the door with wands at the ready.

“Oh! Oh my!” cried Arthur as he held up his hands, staring down his wife’s wand. “Am I in trouble for something? I didn’t forget the milk, did I?”

Molly rolled her eyes at her husband’s sense of humour. “Really, Arthur…”

“There’s trouble, we thought you may have been someone else…” Tonks said.

Sirius pushed through the throng of Order of the Phoenix members and pulled Harry into a hug. “Thank god you’re alright. I was so worried that something may have happened to you,” he mumbled through his godson’s hair.

“Who did you think I was?” Arthur asked the at-the-moment-blond.

“That’s the problem, we don’t know,” replied Tonks, getting a startled look from Arthur.

Lupin placed a hand on both Sirius and Harry’s shoulders while he spoke to Arthur, “There’s an emergency going on, have you seen Dumbledore?”

“Well, he was at the hearing, and helped Harry get off, but he left apart from us, so…” Arthur spoke as the whole lot hurried back down into the kitchen, leaving Harry and the other kids who were allowed to hurry down now that they knew who was on the other side of the door to lock up.

“What’s going on?” Harry asked as his friends gathered around him and the adults left.

“Donno mate… there was a knock on the door, then when Fred tried to slip down and see who was there, Sirius and Lupin were arguing about some letter or whatnot,” Ron started.
“Yeah, and then all these Order members showed up and hurried off down stairs not looking too happy!” Ginny interrupted.

“They said something about expecting someone else to be at the door, but not knowing who. What could be going on?” Harry informed the others.

“Who knows…” Hermione sighed.

“Looks like we got another mystery this year, eh mate?” Ron asked.

“What else is new…” Harry replied with a roll of his eyes.

“So… have you opened it yet?” Arthur asked as he eyed the letter, after having the situation explained to him.

“No…” admitted a female voice from somewhere behind all the other bodies.

“Well, the thing is…” Molly started, but was cut off by Arthur reaching forward and hooking a nail under the tab.

The sensation that he felt was unlike that of any other he had experienced. A sort of drowning almost, and great waves of confusion, where vision was hindered nearly useless and up and down were flipped. Voices rang in his ear but he couldn’t quite hear them, though finally the dizzy disorientation was starting to fade.

Fade to find Arthur Weasley sitting a good ten feet from where he was seconds before… sitting in Professor Severus Snape’s lap…

Snape was leaning back trying to distance himself from the elder Weasley who had just apparated into his lap. He looked at the red-head with all the offence that he felt at such a breach of his personal space. The older man grinned a stupid, apologetic smile to which Snape just curled his lip in distaste. Once the appropriate distance was achieved, Snape shifted in his chair and straitened his robes to achieve what little he could of his remaining dignity.

Tonks looked with wide eyes and a fighting smile just SCREAMING how much she wanted to laugh. “See, that’s the problem, it seems to do something different to each person who tries to open it.”

It was half past ten at night before Mrs. Weasley finally brought dinner up to the hungry children, and to all their curiosity they got no answers from the obviously nervous mother. She just sat down the plate of sandwiches and hurried back down the stairs, dodging the twin’s questions with relative ease. Little did they know that, for once, she was just as much in the dark as they were. For since that morning, in over twelve hours, they hadn’t figured out anything about the content of that letter.

They had given up trying to get into it some time ago, and most members of the Order had long since left, saying to contact them when they get the letter open. And though the hour grew ever later, Dumbledore was still nowhere to be found. Upon re-entering the kitchen, Molly found Lupin and Sirius glaring down the letter while Tonks attempted to take a nap, using her cousin’s lap as a pillow. Arthur had already fallen asleep in his chair and was even drooling slightly as his glasses barely hung to his nose.

They had all been draining both their minds and their magic for over twelve hours in an attempt to figure out how to get into this letter. Lupin rubbed his temples tiredly and asked. “So, so far, what
“Have we figured out?”

“That nothing works!” growled Tonks, sounding almost as dog-like as her cousin.

Sirius smiled down at the frankness of the girl. She would have fit in so well with them, had she only been a little older… “We know that any spell that we try has no effect, and all the times we attempt to open it, we have a spell cast on us in no predictable order…”

Tonks, realizing that they weren’t going to stop working for anything, decided that she would keep working too. She pushed herself up from her cousin’s lap and added her two cents worth to the conversation. “And that means we can’t prepare for them, because casting an anti-freeze and an anti-flame charm on the same thing cancels them both out, and there’s no such THING as an anti-lightning or anti-teleport charm…”

“Yeeees… who ever made this spell on this letter is either a certified genius or a complete lunatic,” Lupin said, shaking a hand through his lengthening hair, wondering mildly if he should cut it or let it continue to grow out.

“And that annoying message that keeps showing up… what was it again…?” Sirius asked, digging the heels of his palms into his eyes.

“I can’t believe you’ve forgot. We have been staring at it all day…! ‘You shouldn’t read other people’s mail, it’s rude’!” Tonks said with a roll of her momentarily brown eyes.

“You forgot the ‘you know’,” the canine-man replied tiredly.

Tonks playfully stuck her tongue out at him in reply. “Maybe… maybe it’s some sort of riddle…”

Tonks pondered, letting her chin rest on the table and looking down her nose at the offending parchment.

“Maybe it’s just telling us to mind our own business and not read other people’s mail!” Molly said testily as she cleaned the plates that had the sandwiches for the children on them. Lupin just rolled his eyes, Molly had been like this all evening, and he had a headache.

“Maybe if we ask it nicely, not be ‘rude’, you know?” Tonks offered.

“If one more person says ‘you know’… I’ll bite them… I really will…” growled Lupin irritably.

Tonks just winked at him in a teasing manner. “Where’s Dung?” she asked the room in general.

“I think he wandered off with some of the family silver…” supplied Sirius carelessly, drawing circles on the table with the back of his fork. “Why?”

“What, do you think I was going to try it?” Tonks asked disbelievingly.

Sirius shrugged, “How would you talk him into it?”

The younger cousin winked at the older one, “I am an Auror, after all, and he is a criminal…”

Sirius just smiled. 

Yep, she would have fit in very well…

Tonks suddenly got rather nervous and began changing her appearance out of natural discomfort. When the two older men looked at her questioningly, she replied with, “What are we going to tell Dumbledore…?”

“What do you mean…?” questioned Sirius.
“Are we really going to tell him that we were going through his mail…?” Tonks asked, looking around as if she expected him to jump out of a corner and accuse them or something.

The two ex-Gryffindors looked at each other. “Well… it’s not like we actually did get into it…” Lupin started nervously.

Tonks turned her attentions at once onto her cousin. “You were to first one to try and open it, you take the blame!”

“Me? No way!”

“It’s not like he can kick you out, it’s your house and you’re a wanted man!”

“That means I won’t be able to get—umpf!”

Lupin had finally just stood and put a hand over each of the cousin’s mouths. “Can I just finish my sentence…?” he demanded looking from one to the other. “Being that we haven’t succeeded in opening it, then let’s just keep it quiet that we tried, okay…?”

Molly turned on them at once. “No! No, no, no! Not a chance! What if it hurts Dumbledore too!!”

“You’re the one that kept yelling at us to leave it be,” Sirius complained. “I think Remus has a good idea, it’s not like we know what’s in it, or anything.”

“Yes! Very smart of you! You should have been Ravenclaw!” cheered Tonks, happy that she wouldn’t have to deal with a plausibly angry Dumbledore.

She soon got up to help Molly with the cleaning, even though she was more of a hindrance then a help, but Lupin took the full advantage of her stepping away. “I know that look… you’re trying to place that little girl you had to pry off to so you could come to meetings in the young woman that’s working so hard to help run this place…”

“Thirteen years… really has changed her. Yet, even back then we knew that if the Order was still around when she got older, she’d be in it…”

Lupin chuckled softly to himself, “And we still have to pry her off of her favourite cousin…”

Sirius hit Lupin playfully in the arm, “Shut up.”

Eleven o’clock came and went to find Tonks attempting to nap on Sirius’s lap again while he read from an old book they had tucked away in the library and Lupin nursing a goblet of butterbeer. The book wasn’t too interesting, just an old journal kept by one of the Black ancestors, but it was something to do. At half passed, Sirius closed the book and handed it to Lupin, who went and got another. Midnight, Tonks had finally fallen asleep in a position only she could manage to be comfortable in. A few dirty goblets littered the large cedar table, Arthur had finally been awoken by Molly, and the two had retired to bed. Sirius still read aloud, though quieter then before so not to disturb his little cousin, and Lupin was beginning to be lulled slightly by the calm and even voice of his childhood friend.

It was a quarter after midnight when the kitchen door opened. Sirius looked around; pausing in his reading and Lupin stood to greet the long awaited Dumbledore. At the shifting of Sirius’s body, Tonks stirred awake. While Lupin grabbed up the letter and hurried towards Dumbledore with it, Sirius helped the young woman into a full sitting position. She covered her mouth as she yawned and then rubbed her eye with the heel of her palm.
“Mnn? Wha-time is it?” she slurred in her sleepy state.

“Quarter after midnight,” Sirius informed her.

“Oh… good morning, then.”

“Morning…” he replied with minor amusement.

Meanwhile, Lupin was talking with Dumbledore. “Finally you got here! The whole place has been in an uproar for the whole day! This letter arrived—”

“Ah, yes, I was wondering when he would write again…” Dumbledore said, opening the letter without the slightest problem.

“—A woman brought it to the door!!” Lupin stressed.

“A red head? Medium height, oriental, rather attractive…?”

“You… know her??” Lupin, Sirius, and Tonks asked in unison.

“Oh, no, it says here that she’s Mr. Reed’s assistant, and not to be alarmed if she should deliver the letter herself, apparently she has trouble dealing with owls…” The three looked at each other, and then back at the old Headmaster in front of them.

“Um… Dumbledore…?” Sirius finally chose to venture. “Who is the letter from?”

“A very old correspondent of mine who’s judgement I hold very highly. Mr. Reed is a brilliant man, who even discovered a way to charm letters so that only the one it’s written to can open it. It’s a very good thing that you left it alone, otherwise who knows what may have happened…”

Tonks grasped her mouth with both hands to try and choke down the giggles, Dumbledore looked at her with raised eyebrows over the top of his half-moon glasses. “Mr. Weasley got teleported into Snape’s LAP!!” she squealed with mirth.

Dumbledore looked at Lupin and Sirius. They were about to go into a big long explanation about how they didn’t know that it was a friend of Dumbledore’s and that it could have been a threat or something along that lines that couldn’t wait until he got in over twelve hours later, when Dumbledore smiled and announced, “Really? I think I may have enjoyed seeing that…” and went back to reading.

Seeing as they had managed to avoid Dumbledore’s wrath so far, they decided to not push their luck as he sat and “humm”ed and “uhumm”ed his way through the last of the letter. But seeing as the readers have nothing to fear from a character in a story, the letter:

Dear Albus,

I’m sorry for not writing to you in the last while, and please, do not be alarmed if this letter is not delivered by an owl, my assistant (a lovely medium sized woman with long red-brown hair of oriental descent) tends to have problems with them. She has my full trust though, so whatever you may be up to, it’s safe with her. I heard that you have been having quite the problems with convincing people that this era’s Lord of Darkness is indeed returned, but do not lose hope, before this time next year, the world will know and you will have all the support from the Ministry that you could ever desire, and then some.

I dare say, even, that you may win this time. Though casualties are expected, as always in war, but
you have your enemy’s weapon in your hand and can afford a moment to laugh right now, for I fear that a moment is all that you may have left.

Yes, I suppose you knew when you received this letter from your companions that it would not bare purely good tidings. Unfortunately, those with power draw too much trouble to themselves to stay out of it for long. That is why I write to you, two young children I know of need to learn to control their chaotic powers. I know that foreign students are not usually permitted in Hogwarts, but it is European magic they need, and I know you well enough to know that you will provide them with all the help you are able to.

I am sorry to say that if they do not learn soon, then a great disaster will fall upon this world, worse than even what your Lord of Darkness could bestow. It is worth bending the rules in this one instance, it is one of the most important things I will ever ask you to do. I will keep in touch with both you and them, and the best of luck to you. Their mailing information is written on the back.

Take care,

Clow Reed

Albus Dumbledore looked at the letter a second time through, knowing that often essential keys to the future could be found in the writings of his long-time friend. The man’s perception and foresight was breathtaking. And yet, a ‘great disaster’ could mean any number of things. How could one prepare for something so vague?

Finally, with a last shake of his head he stood up. “Forgive me, Sirius, but I will be in need of your study. I must write a message at once,” and with that he walked out of the room.

This chapter really didn't have much of it's contents altered, just a few words here or there to lessen the repetitiveness, I finally found the name of that one spell (I can't believe I forgot to look that up before posting originally), and punctuation was corrected. As a whole, though, this is one of my favourite chapters that took absolutely no teeth-pulling to type so I consider it an example of what I had been truly capable of. Because whenever I force my way through a writer's block, the writing seems to be sub-par, at least from my personal stand-point. As for the characterizations of the different characters, the rough draft of this story was written before Half Blood Prince came out, and this chapter was initially written before I had a chance to read the book. Therefore, information about characters that came out in the last two books have no bearing on the personalities presented here. So if anything seems OOC in hindsight, do keep that fact in mind. And even to this day, I still prefer Tonks's characterization in the 5th book over that which she was shown to have in the 6th and 7th books. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this chapter and the future chapters of this story. Shade and Sweet Water.
Chapter 2: What Road is Mine

Chapter Summary

With questions facing Sakura and Xiao Lang that could change their lives forever, the two sorcerers take some time to prepare themselves for what is to come.

And here we are, back to the 14th and 15th of August. I was never a big fan of the way the Li sisters were portrayed in the first movie, they didn't act at all like the daughters of an important family line. They just kind of acted like a mass of dumb bimbos, and I seriously doubt with the intensity that Syaoran's training was shown to be, that his older sisters would be allowed to behave in such a manner. And so, while I kept the names and appearances of the Li family from the anime for simplicity's sake, their mannerisms will not necessarily coincide. In these first early chapters where Syaoran is shown interacting with them, the goal was to not only show who they are as characters in this story, but how their individual personalities helped shape Syaoran into the person he is.

Chapter 2: What Road is Mine

Owls... such a small bird could not carry something as cumbersome as a letter, half way around the world. And yet, as anyone in the wizarding community would tell you, there are wizards all across the planet. To many, they never think about the process that their letters take to get from one country to another, many don't even know anyone from farther away than an owl can fly, so they wouldn't care. But for those that do, and for those that wonder, let us take a minor detour and see what actually goes on in long distance correspondence.

It all starts out, naturally, with a letter. Let’s visit the writer of one now, a Professor Albus Dumbledore who writes to possible candidates for students overseas. When writing long distance letters, it is important to put on lots of information, because the bird that you start with isn’t going to be the bird that delivers the letter. After the directions, hand the letter to the owl, don’t worry about tying it on, unless you are far away from your closest Ministry of Magic headquarters. If so, just tie it loosely so that the owl doesn’t have to worry about holding on the whole time.

The owl takes off, soaring through the stars. It is truly magical, to fly, even though every bird and insect can do it, you must know that it is still a thing of magic to be so free. An owl isn’t the symbol of wisdom for nothing, they can be quite smart. It takes the letter to the Ministry, to a place made up of large crates painted orange with big signs above them all. This owl stops in two places, one is to drop a letter in the crate labelled ‘Japan’ and the other in the crate labelled ‘China – South Eastern’. There the letters sit, and sit, and sit, waiting for the next twelve o’clock to tick by.

When it finally hits noon, the letters are teleported, much like using a portkey, to the desired destination. Once the letter reaches the proper country, the addresses are read aloud to Ministry owls who take them to their appointed houses. Thus, the day after Albus Dumbledore wrote a letter to Sakura Kinomoto and Xiao Lang Li, they arrive at the appointed houses and are read by the family.

Fujitaka knocked on the door for the third time in a row. No one was answering. Finally, he sighed and turned the handle. He hated going into his children’s rooms uninvited, but this was important and Sakura was very upset. Yue had even been woken up by the emotional output of his daughter and
now paced incisively at the foot of the stairs.

“Sakura-san…?” he asked softly as he opened the door. Still getting no reply, he ventured to peak
his head in. At once, he located her; she was lying on her bed, eyes red from being cried dry, playing
with her black teddy bear. At the moment she was idly manoeuvring the arms so that it played peek-

a-boo at her. The deadness in the eyes and face of his usually overly emotional, lively daughter
scared Fujitaka. It reminded him of the look that had been on Touya’s face the day the boy had come
home from school and told his father that their mother was dead.

Though Fujitaka knew it already, he had been shocked when his son had informed him of it before
he had even called the school. Fujitaka remembered that day well, when Touya lost his faith in the
goodness of the world… when Touya lost his smile… As any father would, this was the last thing
that he wanted to happen to his little girl. So, he approached the situation with far more caution then
he had done when Touya had made that look. “Sakura-san… sweetie…? Would you like to talk
about something?”

Her face squeezed as if fighting tears, but the tears had long run out, it was a look of pure pain and
heartache. A look Fujitaka himself felt when his beautiful wife had died. Finally, Sakura just shook
her head ‘no’ and hugged the bear to her chest tightly.

“All right… Do you want me to send someone else up? Yue and Cerberus are very worried about
you… so are Daidouji-san and Touya-san…”

After a moment, more of silence Sakura bolted up into a sitting position and flung her arms around
her father’s neck. At once, he held her small frame in a protecting and loving hug. After a long time
of just sobbing dryly, she started to talk, at once saying the thing that came to her mind first. “Don’t I
mean anything to him?!? ” she wailed. “How could he… just forget me like that…?! Tell me to
forget him like that?!?”

Not really understanding what she was saying, but knowing that it was Xiao Lang on the phone
from what he had been told downstairs, he rubbed her back lovingly, trying his best to soothe his
heartbroken little girl. Rocking her carefully, he sung to her like he had when she was little.

It took nearly an hour, but Sakura had eventually calmed down enough for Fujitaka to talk to her
about the letter. “They extended the reply date until next week, so you don’t have to decide right
now…”

Sakura shivered once again from the large emotional outburst and all of the hormones it shot through
her body that had yet to fully wear off. She didn’t know if she wanted to go to this school or not.
And she was too tired to try to think about it. She gave a nod to show that she heard her father, and
he got up and left her with the letter that could change her life forever.

Sakura rubbed the sleep from her eyes; it was morning, or rather, closer to noon by where the
shadows on the floor were… Why had they left her to sleep in so late? Why did she feel so awful?
But a moment of pondering on the fact reminded her of the call the day before and the letter that still
lay on her bed that her father had brought up later. “If he can push me aside so easily, ” she told
herself determinedly, “then he can’t be as wonderful as I thought! I will get over him, and I will be
happy again! Just like with Yuki, he must just not be my real number one!”

With that new discovery, she pulled off her old clothes changed into new ones and put on a smile. “Yes, destiny says we were only made to be friends! I will not be mad, or upset, I will move on and
find my real number one!” picking up the letter written in green ink, and putting the black teddy
bear on the shelf with her other stuffed toys, she turned and skipped out of the room.
“Mistress,” was the first sound that greeted her. She blinked at Yue who got to his feet from across the hall.

“Ohayou, Yue…” she said a little confused.

“Orders, Mistress?” he asked, kneeling before her.

“How…? ‘Orders’? What?”

“Mistress is upset. How can I serve you?”

“Yue, have you been sitting there all night? You really shouldn’t worry yourself over me like that, I’m fine.”

“I was made to ensure the safety and comfort of the barer of the Cards…” he recited as if it were a script he was made to memorize, his silver eyes reflecting some of the confusion that his eggshell face refused to be marred with.

“Oh, Yue, for the last time, I don’t want you to be my servant, I want you to be my friend…” The confusion tinged concern did not clear from the Moon Guardian’s eyes, and so Sakura sighed and took his long delicate fingers between her own. “Come on, come down with me while I eat and I will talk with you and Kero-chan about this letter I got yesterday, alright?”

“If that is what you wish, Mistress…” he said, rising to his feet as she lead him away with a shake of her head in defeat.

“Somebody’s in trouble…” sang a female voice by the door.

Without even opening his eyes, Xiao Lang spoke to the blackness of the meditation room. “Well, you will be if you don’t go away and leave me alone…” he growled.

“Don’t make me laugh. You’re good for your age, I’ll admit, but you’ve got a long ways to go before you can over-power me, cub,” the voice taunted.

“Oh, just go away, Fudie,” Xiao Lang growled, throwing a scroll halfheartedly at her.

With a casual wave of her wrist, Fudie, oldest of the five Li children, halted the burning paper against a shield and watched it smoulder away into ashes in mid air. It illuminated her shoulder-length roan red hair and her deep cobalt eyes. “If that’s the best you can do, then no wonder you failed to bring back the Clow Cards, now hurry to the Council Room. Mu qin does not like to be kept waiting,” she jibed at him, crossing her arms and leaning against the wall to wait.

“M-Mu qin?” Xiao Lang stiffened at the very mention of her. Deciding it would be stupid to remain sitting where he was when his mother wanted him on nearly the other end of the large mansion, he sheathed his sword and ran out of the room. As he cleared the last corner and before he stepped through the doors, Xiao Lang paused to compose himself.

He entered the room with his head held high and his panting controlled, to find the clan’s leader sitting alone in the room. Noting to himself that this was apparently to be a private audience with his Clan Head, Xiao Lang walked within ten paces and bowed low to the woman who looked down at him more coldly than usual. “I am sorry to keep you waiting, Mu qin, Fudie would not say what she was sent for,” Xiao Lang informed, shunting some of the blame for his tardiness on to his sister.
She studied her son for a moment, knowing that he would not straiten until she acknowledged him. “Then you are not aware that the Li Clan’s new Guardians have hatched?”

The young heir stood slowly and nervously. Her voice was short and crisp, not one that would belong to a proud or impressed individual, and he felt a wave of dread wash over him as he straitened and looked her in the eye. “Mou…(1)” he said nervously, “I hadn’t…”

“There were… apparently some complications with them…” her voice sounded disappointed.

Shit, his mind supplied all on it’s own. The last thing he needed after the abysmal failure with the capturing of the Clow Cards was ‘complications’ surrounding that which was to be his saving grace. “‘Complications’? L-like what?”

Yelan looked at her son for a moment or two, before raising her voice to carry across the room. “You may come in now,” she informed whoever had been waiting beyond the doors.

It was a door to the side room usually reserved for council members to hold discussions on topics before coming to decisions that opened. Xiao Lang found himself holding his breath to see what sort of abnormality would be ushered in.

The first to enter was a large feline with magenta fur and translucent wings in four sets that continually changed colour as if they were oil playing over the surface of water. It appeared to be a butchered mix of a lynx and a puma with its tuff-tipped ears and long swooping tail and black rimmed mouth. While it didn't look anything like he had expected, something in Xiao Lang knew at once who this beast was.

Its blue eyes sparkled up at Xiao Lang as it opened its mouth and he heard the voice he knew he would come to know well, for the very first time. “Meet you nicely, Messy-Hair Big-Thing!”

Xiao Lang felt a lurch in his stomach area. The young, nondescript voice, spoke baby talk! Badly grammared baby talk at that! This was the last thing he needed, he was trying to make a good impression on the Elders, and he screwed up the spell that had been sent with the coffins enough to make a Guardian who talked BABY TALK!! Now, everything that his mother had said so far made perfect sense. The looks, the disappointment in her voice, everything. He was ruined…

The other figure to walk into the room made Xiao Lang feel physically sick with dread. It was only a toddler! It looked distinctly female with short hair the colour of yellow used in baby things held up in a ponytail atop its head, and powerful looking eyes, like fire burning behind amber. It took in the whole room as it moved cautiously with tender footfalls. It was dressed in yellow with golden trim and red jewels. Its clothing was reminiscent of battle costumes that Tomoyo had made for Sakura to mach him, yet she never wore. It seemed to calculate him for a moment before bowing politely. “It is an honour to meet you, Young Master Li.”

Xiao Lang blinked. It seemed that somehow all the intelligence of the pair of guardians was put into this little pointy-eared pixy-girl. She reminded Xiao Lang forcibly of both Yue and Spinel Sun with her calm collectedness. Yelan halted any further speculation on his behalf, though, by speaking up again, addressing the main issue. “These are the Li Clan’s new Guardians. I believe that you have already appointed names for them?”

“Yes, the spell said to. They’re Chandra,” Xiao Lang informed, gesturing to the large beastly Moon Guardian, “and Tai Yang,” he indicated the small Sun Guardian.

“You charged them, you cast the spell to finish their creation, they are supremely yours,
though their personalities are questionable.”

“I-I followed the spell, Mother, I--”

“Don’t give me excuses!” Yelan snapped, effectively clamping Xiao Lang’s mouth shut. Behind him, the Guardians charged their magic, ready to defend the one they instinctively knew to be Master should they need to. Yelan barely spared them a glance as she continued on her verbal barrage of her son as if the display were not happening at all. “You are the heir, such mistakes should not have happened!” Then, taking a deep calming breath, her voice softened. “It should not have happened, but now that it has, what are you going to tell the Elders?”

“I-I don’t know…”

“A poor answer, my son, now think! The Elders arrive in three hours to see the new Guardians; they expect creations of pride and power! How will you explain a mindless fur ball and an overly intelligent baby?” Yelan demanded.

It happened so oddly, he could feel his irritation rising as his mother insulted the Guardians who he though little more of himself, but he spoke in defence of them without even knowing that he opened his mouth. “Don’t say that about them!” He yelled at the woman who he respected more than any other.

Her black eyes widened in shock at being addressed in such a manner. “What did you just say to me?” Xiao Lang’s hands jumped to his mouth in shock. Never in his life had he yelled at his mother, he had never dared! Her eyes thinned at him and for a long moment he could see the internal struggle warring within her between proud and powerful clan leader and the need to ensure Xiao Lang’s own development into a leader of his own right. As she spoke again, voice cold and promising pain. “I am not sure what you learned while you were in Japan, Xiao Lang, but I will not take being spoken to like that from anyone lower than me!”

“I’m sorry, mother; I don’t know what came over me! I won’t do it again, I promise!” he pleaded, dropping to his knees to beg forgiveness of her.

“Get up. You are a God, my son, and you bow to no one,” she growled, obviously displeased with having to let him off. “There are more pressing matters to attend to, anyways. What are you to tell the Council of Elders? They are expecting greatness to rival Clow Reed! They are expecting--”

“I’m not Clow Reed, I am Li Xiao Lang…” the young heir muttered in distaste.

“Pardon me…?”

“My name is Li Xiao Lang, I am to lead this Clan before the year is up, and it is high time that this Clan steps out of Clow Reed’s shadow. I have met Yue and Cerberus, they are far from perfect themselves, so what does it matter that my Guardians aren’t either? He didn’t make his before he was over a hundred, I made mine at the age of eleven, one would say that that has something to do with my skill in comparison to his.”

Yelan then did something that Xiao Lang far from expected. She smiled at him. It was a mischievous yet proud smile, one that she had never let him see cross her features before this moment. “Yes, my son, I dare say that it does…” she said in a soft voice that he would almost call loving if it hadn’t
come from her. “Dismissed,” she said, back to her usual bark of orders. He bowed to her and left the room, his Guardians in toe.

Xiao Lang finally came to sit on the front steps of the mansion, letting Tai Yang sit beside him and Chandra to come and lay on the landing above. “What…just happened?”

“What does Master mean by the question? An insufficient amount of data to supply an accurate answer. Rephrase the question, please?”

Xiao Lang looked down at Tai Yang blankly for a moment, before finally figuring out what she was saying. “No, no, I was just talking to myself, I wasn’t asking you anything…”

Suddenly Xiao Lang felt something wet on the back of his neck run up to the top of his messy hair. When he turned around, he got a scratchy tongue slide across his cheek. “Master all busy-head, Chandra make better!” she said, and continued to lick Xiao Lang.

“Did Clow Reed ever go through anything like this?” complained Xiao Lang as he pulled his knees up under his chin.

(1) – According to the online dictionary I found, this is Cantonese for “no”.

“So, you may be going to a boarding school?” Rika asked, eyes fuzzed out so that she wasn’t really seeing what she was looking at.

“Yeah, maybe…” was Sakura’s gloomy reply.

“We’re going to miss you…” Naoko said, “if…if you do decide to go…”

“Oh, I’m going to miss all of you as well!” whimpered Sakura, getting up and throwing her arms around the necks of Naoko and Chiharu, who were sitting in front of her. Tomoyo and Rika quickly stood and joined the tearful group hug, while Yamazaki looked on.

They were sitting at a parlour where Sakura had requested they gather. Tomoyo already knew the contents of the letter, but Sakura had insisted on telling her other friends right away, sans magical details of course. So she had gathered the three girls to share the important news, and Yamazaki had followed his girlfriend because Sakura had said it was alright for him to come as well.

“You know…the thing about boarding schools is--” he began.

But Chiharu put a hand over his mouth. “Not now, Takashi!” she scolded.

He pulled her hand away and said, somewhat indignantly, “I was only going to say: the thing about boarding schools is that even if they are far away, you still have telephones, and e-mail, and letters, and such!”

The conversation with Xiao Lang popped into Sakura’s head. She had suggested to him the same three things, and he had told her to just forget he existed. She choked back a sob and forced a smile at them. “Yes, we will stay friends. Forever.”

“Hey, let’s take one last walk around town, just for old times’ sake. This may be the last time we’re all together like this, for a very long time,” Tomoyo said, sadly.

A volley of agreements came, and they all began to walk. But Sakura’s mind was plagued.
the spot where Syaoran-kun hugged me… and that over there is where Syaoran-kun told me he was leaving… and that there is where Syaoran-kun… the thoughts came and came and came. How, in the course of one year, had a boy that wasn’t even her number one love affected her world so much? How was it that she couldn’t even look at the street without remembering at least one thing that Xiao Lang had done or said there…

“Everyone…” she began unsurely. “Everyone, I have to go… I can’t stay here, I have to get away from all these painful memories. Maybe I won’t stay for the full seven years, but I have to get away, if only for now.”

Sad eyes looked on at the broken angel, and one by one they came and embraced her with promises that they understood and confessions renewed of missing her and loving her. Even Yamazaki gave her a hug, though they had never been as close as the girls had.

They began walking again, and as they did, Sakura passed herself from hand to hand, talking to each in turn. “I’m going to be waiting for you to write me that book of yours,” Sakura said, as she came up and gave Naoko’s hand a squeeze.

“Even though they’re ghost stories? I thought you didn’t like those…” Naoko said, confused.

“I-it doesn’t matter. You’re my friend, I want to read them!” Sakura told her.

“Really? You mean it?” Naoko asked, eyes lighting up.

“Of course. I’ll be expecting at least one chapter a month!” Sakura informed her. To this she got a hug, Naoko really was so insecure about her works that any insurance on a reader was an honour.

Sakura then passed herself to Rika. “I’m not going to be all alone, Yuki is coming with me. He’s going to be my translator in England,” she announced.

“Isn’t he the one that’s always eating?” Rika asked, running the name quickly through her head to match it with a face.

“Yes, though I wish I was as good a cook as you are, I’ll have to spend all my allowances just to buy him food to repay him!” Sakura said, covering her cheeks. “Would you… would you send me recipes on how to cook better? Then, over Christmas break, I can make you all a big dinner and show you all that I’ve learned!”

“I’ll look forward to tasting all the delicious foods that Sakura-chan makes!” Rika assured.

Then Sakura went to Tomoyo. “I think I’ll miss you the most of all my friends, because we are the closest. You’re like… the big sister I never had… just… younger.”

“I’m really going to miss you, too. I love you so much,” Tomoyo replied, turning her head to hide the tears.

“I love you too… Will you make clothes for me to wear on the weekends and nights?”

“Of course! And I’ll video tape everything, so you don’t miss anything! And will you take pictures of the clothes, and of England, and everything so that I can see what my cute Sakura-chan sees?” Tomoyo replied.

“Yes, I’ll send you all pictures of everything, so you’ll never miss out on any of my life!” They gave each other hugs, and Sakura walked on to Chiharu.
“It will be a little lonely not having your bright sunny smile with us on shopping trips any more,” Chiharu admitted.

Sakura gave a sigh, “I know, it's just... I need time to get over him and what he said…”

“That guy you like? Did he really reject you?” Chiharu asked concerned.

“No... not really... I made him a bear but I never got around to telling him how I feel. Still, he said I should forget him because he wouldn't be able to come back and see me for a very long time.”

“Poor Sakura-chan…”

“I know that for him to say such a thing, he must not feel the same way about me, but I…”

“But you really do love him, don't you? So, you can't just forget about him like that,” Chiharu finished for her, a sad and understanding smile gracing the pigtailed girl's lips.

“He really is... my number one person...” Sakura admitted, tears flowing from her eyes once more, despite her promise to herself to get over him.

Yamazaki took this moment to step up to his girlfriend and her tearful companion. Gently placing a comforting hand on her shoulder, he spoke, “You know, in Canada when you're away from your loved ones, you set your watch to keep it on their time zone, and at noon, you clap twice while you think of them. It helps to keep them all together there, even though the place is so big.”

“Really?” Sakura asked in her gullible way, “That's so nice…”

“Will you clap your hands for us?” Yamazaki asked her.

“Yes. And will you clap your hands for me?” Sakura asked back.

“Definitely! Without a doubt, we will!” Chiharu said, giving Sakura a hug.

“And we will clap for Syaoran-kun and Eriol-kun, too, because no matter what, we never will forget our friends, right?” Sakura asked, looking at each of them.

“Always!” agreed Rika.

“Hey, let's go get some ice cream!” Naoko said, dragging Sakura off with her. Rika and Tomoyo were soon at their sides.

Chiharu took a hold of Yamazaki’s hand. He smiled at her, “For once you didn’t hit me,” he said happily.

“That was a nice lie you told, it really helped Sakura-chan. I won’t hit you for something so sweet,” she told him.

“Would you clap for me, if I went away?”

“Every day.”

She looked on as he stood there, alone, in the middle of the field. He always seemed to be alone. The wind tore at his hair and clothing, causing him to stand at a weird angle that wasn’t quite considered upright. Her hair whipped up and danced in knots and her long dress billowed as she approached him. “You di(1)! ” she called, louder than normal, to get her voice above the torrent.
He turned at once and looked at her, taking a moment before he let himself smile. “Jie jie(2),” he acknowledged, “what are you doing out here?”

“Looking for you,” she told him as his concentration let out and the winds died down to a passive breeze. “I heard from Fudie that there were some difficulties with the Guardians. Do you want to talk about it?”

“How? What did she tell you?” Xiao Lang asked, sinking at once into a sitting position at her feet.

“Ho… e…? I don’t think I know that word…” Xiefa admitted. “What does it mean?”

Xiao Lang started. “I-I said that?” he asked. At the second Li child’s nod, Xiao Lang flopped back. “It doesn’t mean anything, it’s just something that I picked up while in Japan. Just an expression.”

Xiefa blinked down at the moody eleven-year-old, then smiled and sat down herself. “So, what’s her name?” she asked conversationally, as if it were a comment on the weather.

“Wh-what?! H-how did you know about her?!” Xiao Lang demanded, sitting upright and as red as the eyes that stared at him.

Wide, shocked eyes, for that matter. “Whoa… I-only meant it to be a joke…” then, she brought her hands up under her chin and smiled dreamily. “My little brother has had his first crush! How cute!!” She then turned her eyes on him, hungry, “so, what’s she like? What’s your type?”

Having realized his blunder far, far too late to change it, he just thanked the moon that it was Xiefa and not Feimei or one of the others that had found out. With Xiefa, it was okay to just blush and tell her he’d rather not talk about it, and though she would far from stop pestering him, she would at least take the hint that this wasn’t something he wished shared with the rest of the family, or worse, the Clan.

As he stuttered out his insistence to be left alone, Xiefa’s mind floated along how wonderful it was that he had gotten a crush. How cute it would have been to watch him fall in love, and how sad it was that she had missed it. She looked at him, trying to remember that he wasn’t the little kid that she had read stories to when they were both so much younger. “According to Clan Law, you’re almost a man… this Solstice… you will not be the baby of the family anymore, you will be the head, the leader…”

“I-I might not…” he started.

“You will, I know you will. It’s what you were born for, raised for. It is your destiny to run the Clan…” She told him, then pulled him to her and kissed his forehead. Pulling out a brush from her ever-present purse, she began to pull it through his hair like she had done to put him to sleep when he was a toddler. “But you’re going away, to become the best China—no, the world—has ever seen. I’m going to miss you, you only just got back to us, but you’re leaving again so soon… and for seven years… you’ll be a man when you come back from your training, by every sense. I’ll hardly even know you when I see you again.”

“I will miss you, too. Home, the people, the energies… Jie jie, take me to sit under the Zēng Zū Fù Chún(3)? Tell me the story, one last time? Because… even if I do come back, even for winter break, I wouldn’t be a boy anymore! I wouldn’t be allowed to lie in your lap and listen
to stories!"

“Alright,” She took his hand and walked with him to an old oak tree, nearly large enough to fit a suburban house within. They found themselves an obviously favourite sitting spot, worn out from years of use, and as Xiefa leaned back and started to talk, Xiao Lang made himself comfortable in her lap. “Zēng Zŭ Fu Chún is the oldest tree in all of China. It has resided on the family land for longer than the Clan’s history goes back. In fact, there have been many who have said that the Li Clan chose this spot because of the presence of the old oak making it holy.

“The legend that was handed down through the locals, and the family, says that long ago, when the world was still young, the Zēng Zŭ Fu Chún was planted by a tree cutter’s son named Suilong—who Fu qin(4) named you after—from a cutting of the original tree of life. Suilong was said to train under the branches, gaining him the wisdom of Nü-gua(5), and became a great warrior who protected these lands from opposing forces.

“Fu qin loved those stories, loved this tree. I know that you don’t remember him, you were hardly more than a baby, after all, when he died, but I know that he still sits within the branches of the Zēng Zŭ Fu Chún. While we’re under here, he can see us, and I know that he is very, very proud of his son.”

“I wish… that Fu qin was still alive. I-I don’t think I’m ready to lead. What if I do something wrong? What if I’m no good, and the Clan suffers because of it? I… I can’t be the leader that Mu qin is… I’m not ready for this, I’m not strong enough, I’m not wise enough…” Xiao Lang rambled all of his fears.

Xiefa brushed the hair out of his eyes and smiled at him. “It’s okay, you’ll have Mu qin to guide you, and the Elders, not to mention us… Even if you are in England, we can still write to each other. Wizards do have a mail system, after all.”

“Yeah…”

“So you can talk to us, and your little girlfriend in Japan…”

“Wh-what? No, she’s not my girlfriend! Besides, I’ll be gone for seven years, even if she did love me enough to be my girlfriend, how could I ever ask her to wait that long? It would be cruel to her. I can’t do it.”

“…You… really are in love with her, aren’t you?” Xiefa’s eyes looked on to her brooding brother with pained, tear-filled eyes.

“Huh?!… I... um… ... yes…”

Xiefa swept Xiao Lang into a hug, “Oh, my baby brother… my poor, poor baby brother…”

“It’s not like it’d ever turn out, anyway, the Elders will arrange my marriage for as soon as they can manage to,” he reminded her gloomily.

“Well, you know I still want to hear all about her, I want to know who managed to steal my You di’s steel-plated heart.”

“You di! There you are! Mu qin wants you, she said the Elders are here…” Feimei called as she
ran up to her two siblings.

“**We'll continue this conversation when I take you to London to get your school supplies!**” announced Xiefa as she pushed Xiao Lang to his feet and he set of running.

Having nothing better to do, Feimei walked over and helped pull Xiefa to her feet. “**What conversation? What were you talking about?**” asked the long haired girl.

“**Oh, nothing much, just stuff...**” was Xiefa’s vague reply as the two sisters wandered back to the house.

(1) – Little Brother, formal

(2) – Older Sister, informal

(3) – paternal great grandfather tree of heaven

(4) – father, formal

(5) – the Black Turtle, direction of south, and goddess of the earth, the maker of humans

Well, there you have it, several decisions made, several emotional moments, an introduction to two new characters, and a little depth put into several characters that usually are ignored personality-wise. This has been an attempt to show the differences in the way Sakura and Xiao Lang were raised, and how that has affected their over-all mind set in life.

This chapter, like the one before it, underwent very minimal alteration. The biggest change that you may notice is the names applied to various characters. While I will be going into deeper level of explanation for it in Xiao Lang’s side story (which will be published in the prequel Birth of the Deck Master and will detail Xiao Lang’s summer at home, his retrieving the Guardian Eggs, and the process of their creation) I have chosen to use the Chinese pronunciation of all the Li family names rather than the Japanese approximation of them. I got these pronunciations off of the CCS wiki page, but I am assuming they are correct. For those characters that had multiple alternate approximations of their names, I chose the one that closest matched the one used in Japanese as that is obviously the one the series creators intended the characters to have.

For the upcoming chapter, as promised when it first came out, I have split it into two chapters: 3A and 3B. 3A focuses only on the events taking place in China regarding the Elder’s reactions to the new Guardians and Xiao Lang’s getting ready to go to England. 3B likewise focuses on the events of Sakura's life as she gets ready for her own trip.

Shade and Sweet Water!
Chapter 3A: Chinese Connection

Chapter Summary

Xiao Lang knows the fate of his whole future rides on him managing to impress the Clan Elders before the coming solstice. Pride, duty, honour... after the abysmal failure that was his card capturing expedition, what will become of his trial at making a new set of Guardian Beasts?

Before I get into this chapter I would just like to take a moment to reflect and say how truly touched I am that though I was without internet for over a year, and therefore unable to update my story, I continued to receive reviews. One of the greatest honours a writer can receive is to have their work appreciated and read, even in their absence. And so, to everyone that took the time to read my works and hopefully to just as many who enjoyed them, I dedicate this chapter to you.

Yours Faithfully,
Key of the Game

Xiefa passed worriedly before the door, chewing her thumbnail as was a nervous habit she had never managed to break. They would have been gone by now if it hadn't been for the Guardians her brother had received as gifts from the great Clow Reed hatching. Such an honour, the first Guardians to be received by any family in nearly a thousand years, and from the great Clow Reed at that, they were sure to be more impressive than the average Guardians.

They had arrived over a month ago, not long after her little brother had returned from his prolonged stay in Japan. Along with the base eggs had come sarcophagi and step-by-step instructions on how to finish their incubation so that they could hatch. Everyone had been so very sure that this would greatly improve his standing with the Elders, even beyond where he stood before he had left to gather the Clow Cards, and would very well erase his failure from their minds.

But Fudie, the only one besides Xiao Lang and their mother to have seen the new Guardians, said that there had been some sort of mistake in the spell or something. She would not specify—it was not hers to say—but the idea that anything could have been amiss with them was enough to send Xiefa into a panic. Xiefa had once been described by an American Shaman to be like a mother bear, and after Xiefa had examined what a bear's behaviour was, she had to agree. And right now, the bear inside of her was fretting over her missing cub.

Feimei, who was on her way to see if anyone else wanted to go catch a movie, spotted Xiefa pacing and approached. "You're biting your nail... What's the matter?"

Xiefa turned sharply but relaxed when she spotted who it was. With a sigh that did little to relieve her, Xiefa confided in her youngest sister, "Xiao Lang is in there with the Elders right now.

They're examining the new Guardians..."

"Really?" Feimei asked, coming up and placing her ear against the door. Xiefa looked on in horrified wonder that anyone would have the gall to eavesdrop on the Elders. But as she stood, ever so curious and ever so nervous, Feimei began to describe what she was hearing in a whisper. "Mu qin is talking now. They must be just beginning..."
Xiefa looked around guiltily before stepping up and placing her own ear against the door as well. She told herself that it was to stop Feimei from talking so that they wouldn't get caught, but she knew that she was just overly curious herself.

Xiao Lang stood with his head bowed before the members of the Li Clan’s Council of Elders. Sour old faces of men and women stared down at him with harsh eyes. They were the best of the best in there day, now they had the honour of deciding the fate of the Clan. If Xiao Lang could not impress the Council of Elders before Solstice, he would be denied the ability to lead his Clan.

Only problem was that they were not a very easy group to impress.

Beside Xiao Lang stood Yelan, speaking proudly, for the Warlord never lowered her head to any. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Council of Elders, you have been summoned today to examine my son’s newest feat. At the age of eleven, a full one-hundred-and-twenty-nine years younger than Clow Reed, he has succeeded in creating Guardians!"

At their mention, the two guardians obediently stepped forward. They had previously been instructed very strictly not to make a sound unless asked a direct question from one of the Elders, and Xiao Lang had to fight the sick feeling he was getting at the thought of the Elders questioning Chandra. He would have to work very hard with her in the near future to correct her speech patterns as best as he could. Though going to Hogwarts would, indeed, make things more difficult. Though he knew little of the wizard's culture, he did understand enough to know that they were not used to animals that talked human languages.

"Though they are still not yet even a full day old and require much training, I feel confident that given time they will do this Clan proud as symbols of power and prestige!"

Though the eyes of the elders were bearing down upon them, burning into the nervous boy's bowed neck like sunlight through magnifying glass, his mother--last of the great War Lords of ancient times--spoke with no greater concern then she did when she was addressing one of her own children. Intimidated as he was, Xiao Lang swallowed the lump in his throat and straitened his posture.

Though he didn't lift his gaze from the floor, his determined change in stance caught everyone's eye, he was sure. Indeed, his mother stopped speaking, and even took a step back behind him, leaving him front and centre to continue talking to the Elders in her place.

Taking a deep breath to steady himself and praying to every god and deity he could think of, so not to make a fool of himself, Xiao Lang took a shaky step forward. "M-most honourable of Elders," he began, "how long has it been since... since Clow Reed left us?"

There was an almost annoyed shifting among his audience; he even heard one whisper to a neighbour that they didn't have time to give a child a history lesson.

Xiao Lang swallowed hard again, and then answered his own question as he continued. "It has been centuries since he stood as a member of our mighty Clan, and yet even today we cling to his shadow, unwilling--though not unable--to move beyond him."

There was a general murmur of consent at what the young heir said, and many sounds were made to indicate that he should continue.

"As you probably already know, I leave for England before the afternoon is up. The unexpected hatching of the new Guardians is my only reason for delay. But I do not go to
follow in the footsteps of Clow Reed; I go instead to gain knowledge and power for the betterment of my people.

"And though I am the heir, I am not the only one who betters this Clan. Each and every one of you were chosen to sit on this fine council for the great deeds you accomplished in your youth and the wisdom those experiences granted you help you in the shaping of our great era.

"Though some of you may see these Guardians as a test, and therefore a 'pass' or a 'fail', I ask you to please, look at it instead as yet another experience, and hopefully far from the last, that will one day help me to better our people as a whole so we can step out from the shadow of Clow Reed and into the light of a greater and more prosperous future."

He looked up at each face as he finished his little speech, not really sure where in there he had raised his eyes to meet theirs, but noting that none looked displeased with him doing so. He wanted so desperately to turn and see if his mother looked on disapprovingly, but he also knew that that would appear too weak, to go running to his mother for reassurance. So he set his jaw and did not move or speak again until the council had ceased its internal whisperings.

One woman who sat to the far right leaned forward to speak in a raspy, high-pitched voice. "You, humanoid, you are a Guardian under the symbol of the sun, are you not?"

Tai Yang bowed as she replied, "I am as you say, most honourable one."

"You are rather small to be a Guardian's true form, are you not?" the woman asked her once more.

"To judge ones power by the stature of age and appearance is a fault in many. The most powerful of sorcerers can store the magic required to reshape the landscape in a crystal that would fit in a ring."

After a moment of murmuring at the response they were given, another elder chose to ask, "Moon Guardian?"

"Yes?"

"What hidden knowledge did Clow Reed send within you?"

"Chandra is confused... Chandra doesn't know Clow Reed."

There was another flood of whispers, and a third elder stood to address the Guardians. "Is Clow Reed not the one who made you?"

Tai Yang and Chandra looked at each other for a second, before Chandra answered. "No."

Tai Yang, too, answered, in a more elaborate manner. "I believe you are mistaken, the one who made us is not Clow Reed; it is Li Xiao Lang. He is our Master and the one we answer to above all else."

"You are bound to no one else? Not in the slightest?"

"No. Our loyalties lay only with the Master and his family. Thus is the existence of all Guardians," Tai Yang pointed out, as if minorly annoyed at having to state the obvious.
And yet again, the Elders turned in on themselves and spoke in hushed tones. Though this time they seemed intent on taking longer, debating among themselves until their voices began to raise, only to quiet themselves down and continue on once more. For five, ten nerve wreaking minutes, Xiao Lang stood and watched them. The Guardians were generally disinterested, it was not a Guardian’s job or place to concern themselves with such things, and so they remained alert enough on the conversation to know if they were being addressed or if an order was given, but as no sense of magic was coming from any of the humans in the room, beyond that the Guardians cared little for the events unfolding before them.

Yelan, for her small part, was watching her son, his new Guardians, and the Elders all with the calculating eye of a strategist. Measuring and weighing every action and reaction of each person in the room to enable herself to keep one step ahead and maintain her composure. For, as any leader would tell you, the most important part is ensuring that you seem to always be in control of the situation.

Finally one old man whose white beard flowed down past his knees and fingernails that curled back on themselves spoke. "Very well, young lord. We, the Council of Elders for the Clan of Li, declare that the Guardians may bare the blessing and power of the Clan. We allow them to assume sealed form to the artifact: the Sword of the Elements."

And with that said, it was done. The Elders stood and filed out in no certain order until all that were left were Yelan, the two Guardians, and the petrified Xiao Lang. Yelan took a moment to smile knowingly at her youngest. It took nearly everything he had to speak up before the Council like that, and her pride in him for doing so was indeed abundant.

After letting herself have that one moment of parental pride, Yelan indicated her husband's heir with one of her rare compliments. "You did well, my son. Very diplomatic. Though the flattery was a new tactic for you, I doubt it will work again as well next time because of it. Did you pick that up in Japan?"

Xiao Lang swallowed for a third time that hour and turned to his mother, "I guess..." he replied. He didn't really know what else to say.

"Well, you have Guardians to seal and a plane to catch. One mustn't dawdle around all day."

Xiefa and Feimei jumped quickly away from the door when they heard the Elders preparing to leave. The nervousness in the both of them about having just been listening in created enough of an anxious air that the Elders paid them no mind as the girls hurried to show homage when they walked past. It was only when their mother came forth that they had to strive to act normally, for she knew her children inside and out.

"What was their answer, Mu qin?" Xiefa pressed before Feimei had a chance to say anything to give them away.

Yelan gave them both a stern, almost reprimanding look, making it clear she was aware they weren't behaving normally. But all the same she spoke quietly in her usual brisk tone. "Go and fetch your sisters so that you may all be introduced to the new Guardians at once."

Feimei bowed at once and hurried off down the hall, but Xiefa on the other hand, turned instead to the young heir. Jumping for joy, flung herself at once onto Xiao Lang and pulling him into a suffocating hug. "Oh, You di! You did it!!" she cheered, practically lifting him off his feet. He struggled in vain for a moment before managing to escape her grasp. He took a step away, straitened
his clothes hettily, and then broke into one of his unusual grins that truly showed just how ecstatic he really was by all of this.

Xiefa didn't even bother glancing behind him at the Guardians who stood silently and watched until Yelan ushered her two children out of the room and closed the door. "They are just ordinary Guardians..." Xiao Lang admitted as they all stood and waited for Feimei to return with the other two. "Nothing like what Yue and Cerberus are, but they will do fine for me. I'm just happy to have them."

"You always were one to prefer the simpler things," Xiefa observed.

Standing silently, Yelan watched her children communicate, letting her eyes fill with pride, rather than just radiate how proud she was. It was a rare and special thing to stand and look at ones children and know that if one was to die that very second, they could continue on perfectly fine without you. And nothing in this world could make her happier then that knowledge. As she looked at her son, she knew that his sisters would fill her every roll for him until he no longer needed it. This Clan would be just fine in their hands.

Feimei found Fudie still standing outside of another of the doors that lead into the Council room. She was nearly dancing with joy and actually beamed at her sister. "So, you were listing in too, huh?"

Fudie blinked at this before nodding with a blush. "He did it," was all she said.

"Mu qin wants us," Feimei informed without any care.

"Alright," Fudie acknowledged, nodding. They barely began to walk when Fudie spoke up "He's turning out to be a cunning little bastard, though. We really need to get him away from Xiefa, or else she'll have him so well trained that he can talk even us into doing things!"

"You think? He's still got a long way to go for that I think."

"I don't know..." She pondered. "He may be a runt and a little slow at times, but once he gets the concept of something, nothing stops him from achieving it."

Feimei rolled her eyes at that one, "That's for sure. I remember when he first discovered football(1), it took him three weeks to learn it, and no one could give him any pointers, either. He just went off onto the sidelines on his own and practised until he was perfect."

Fudie responded with a confirming noise. "It took him three weeks to learn to play, how long do you think it will really take him to master something that could affect the course of the Clan's welfare?"

Feimei had to admit that she was right, "But still, he never has been much of a thinker."

"Kind of like you, huh?" Fudie teased. To that she got a pout, but the response was dropped as Fanren just walked into view. "Hey, Mie mie! Mu qin wants us!"

"Alright..." Fanren replied, placing aside her manga and following her two other siblings back to where their mother awaited.

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(1) Football; what North America calls soccer. As part of the rest of the world, Hong Kong refers to
Five youths stood before their mother with expectant eyes. Silent and patient, they bore only an air of anxiousness that they didn't dare vocalize. Finally Yelan turned to them, and each straitened slightly in an attempt to maintain the dignity that she demanded of them. Her eyes landed on each in turn, before she spoke to them as a whole. "The Elders have acknowledged and accepted the existence of the new Guardians. I have gathered you here so you may meet them now."

As a uniform mass, the five youths bowed their respective appreciation at this. Yet as the doors were swung open, the three youngest daughters stretched their necks to get their first glimpse, as they had not had the privilege of meeting the Guardians beforehand.

Slowly, shyly, the first to enter the hall was Chandra, looking very much like a Guardian ought. Her large head was bowed slightly, and her huge feet making only a soft 'clack, clack' as her claws hit the tile floors. Her graceful beauty even made Xiao Lang forget for a moment about her defect. From the sisters, there were soft murmurs of awe and appreciation. Before it could get into anything more fangirly, however, the second Guardian exited. In the beginning, all anyone even saw of this one was a small fluff of yellow that made her ponytail. It was only once they laid eyes on this one was a small fluff of yellow that made her ponytail. It was only once they laid eyes on the toddler-like form that the girls began to coo in earnest.

“Awa, she's so cute,” Fanren was the first to comment, hearts practically reverberating in her eyes.

Yelan repressed a sigh at the relaxed mental state of her youngest two daughters who weren't even able to contain their impulses to be drawn to the strong concentration of source magic. Not that she didn't understand, there was definitely something... intoxicating about being in the presence of one who radiated on the same wavelength as the sun, just as she was sure the same was true for lunar practitioners and the Moon Guardian.

However, to have one's emotions swayed so easily by something that had nothing to do with the goodness of the person was a very dangerous thing indeed. Her children, as direct decedents of Clow Reed and heirs or future brides to heirs of such powerful clans should not fall for such elementary forces as this. She knew her twins had never been trained as strictly as her eldest two, nor her son, but they ought to be better than this.

The Clan needed an image of composure and strength from its head family. In these troubling times when the magicless world provided so many distractions for youth, leading to many otherwise bright and promising individuals never living up to their full potential, the Li Clan had to hold strong to the old ways of honour and discipline to ensure their power was not lost completely. She knew it was difficult on them, denying them play and innocence, but she also knew that that was the cut-throat sort of world they lived in.

Sorcerers of power did not grow old and die naturally, at least not for a very long time. Her grandfather had lived many hundreds of years looking like a man in his early thirties, and Yelan herself had all but stopped ageing when she was in her early twenties. She knew if no one succeeded in killing her, that she could potentially live a two or three centuries before she finally grew old enough to die of natural causes. Just because the younger generation were letting themselves become sloppy and distractable did not mean that her children were safe doing the same. They would face the giants of the magical community sooner or later, and it was her job to make sure they were ready.

But even still, Yelan found herself turning a blind eye as her eldest two daughters joined the twins in smothering her son's new Guardians in affection after their initial act failed to illicit any form of scolding from her. She didn't understand why, it was rather out of character with who she had been
since the death of her husband nearly ten years prior, but she let it go on a minute more all the same.

“That’s enough,” she commanded her children when she felt they had been silly long enough. “Er zi, you were granted permission by the Council to conduct the sealing ceremony. You should hurry and finish so you can be on your way.”

“Mu qin is right, You di, England is very far away,” Xiefa agreed, sobering up from where she had been playing with Chandra’s iridescent wings.

Without further ado, Xiao Lang lead his Guardians back to the channelling room, along with the entourage of his sisters and mother. The women of his family looked on with a mix of pride, eagerness, and curiosity to varying degrees as the young Li heir went through the motions described in the letter he had received from Clow Reed along with the eggs. Though, Xiao Lang was still rather sure that they were actually from Eriol rather than Clow himself.

After arranging everything as he was supposed to, Xiao Lang went to stand before the two patiently waiting figures and drew out his jian. “Unbound Guardians of Sun and Moon, I, Li Xiao Lang, call you to contract and bind you to this magical artifact, the Sword of the Elements.”

The swirl of magic was unmistakable and near instantaneous. It reminded Xiao Lang a little of the shape the Clow Cards had once taken when they were first being resealed by Sakura. That sort of half-formed swirling mist that was neither solid nor gaseous. The threads of mist were coming off, spreading loose from the main bodies and snaking their way over to latch on to the Sword of the Elements.

Xiao Lang began to speak again, “Guardians of Sun and Moon, Tai Yang and Chandra, under contract I command you, assume your sealed forms!” A wave of uncertainty hit the Clan heir and it took him a moment to realize it wasn’t his own, and that the Guardians were not changing. He remembered the letter saying something about how their existences would fit his desire, seeing as he was their Master and all, and that everything about them was up to him.

But, something felt wrong about just forcing his will on them like that, he had met Cerberus and Yue and knew that they both possessed unique personalities and thoughts, so surely his Guardians would be the same? To deny them their own free choice was making them no better than objects or slaves, and he didn’t want that. Sakura would hate him if he ever did something like that...

Chandra, at least, he had some idea of what she might look like in sealed form. Kero and Spinel had both looked similar to each other, and at some point it had just become that that was what a sealed beast Guardian should look like. No sooner had that confirmation fixated itself in his mind then the magenta beast wrapped itself in its wings like a cocoon and reformed into a small kitten-like shape. The largest difference in her form was that her colour had changed. She was still an unnatural reddish shade that no real cat would be, but she was no longer a magenta. Instead she had shifted closer to an orange, and with her posture sitting on the ground like that with her long tail wrapped around her four paws she looked rather reminiscent of an overly bright kitten. Her little head was cocked to one side, cerulean eyes still eerily intent on Xiao Lang’s form.

Tai Yang, however, remained waiting a sealed form. She was humanoid, and it just felt strange to him after knowing Yue and Ruby Moon that her sealed form be anything but a human disguise. However, there was the question of what she would look like. Nakuru was little more than Ruby Moon in human colours, her features and mannerisms all remained exactly the same. Yue on the other hand, looked almost nothing like Yukito, from his features to his hairstyle the only thing the two had in common was their height. So where in that spectrum should this little one fit?
He searched his mind for inspiration, getting only flashes of a desire at first. Or, maybe desire was too strong a word... a repulsion of the clingy girls who had squeezed at her and ruffled her mane, a longing to be close to Master, associated with him. He let her have her way, an image forming in his mind as it reshaped itself before his eyes. When the transformation was complete, she looked even more toddler-like than before. Her soft hair, still pulled into the ponytail, was only a few shades darker than his own hair and her eyes were thinner than his were at her age—accentuated further by her heavy eyelids—but the colour was almost an identical honey-over-amber to his own.

“She looks like our little sister,” Xiefa finally commented once the magic died back down, “or maybe daughter?”

Something about the statement caused Fanren to snicker, “Well, she kind of is, in a way...”

“Ugh, I'm too young to be an aunt,” Feimei complained, crossing her arms huffily.

“More that You di is a little young to be experiencing fatherhood, but still...” Xiefa paused to ponder something, “she looks so human, but the name Tai Yang definitely isn't one that a human would have.”

“Jie jie's right,” Feimei acknowledged. “She needs a new name. I think she looks like a Chan Feng!”

“Juan Lian,” Fudie offered.

“Hmmm... I'd say Jiao Yang would be a pretty name,” Fanren piped up. There was then a brief pause as everyone waited, then they all turned and looked at Xiefa. “Aren't you going to make any suggestions?”

“No, they're You di's Guardians, he should name them,” she responded casually.

Tai Yang, for her part, puffed up like a little blow fish and attached herself to Xiao Lang's side, “I am Master's Sun Guardian, Tai Yang!” she insisted stubbornly.

“Jiao Yang... that does sound kind of pretty...” Xiao Lang mumbled thoughtfully.

The little Sun Guardian looked up at him with a hurt sort of confusion in her eyes, “Does... Master... not want me anymore? It does not compute, please provide more input.”

“No, it's just... oh how to explain...” Xiao Lang pondered for a moment. “It's like Xiefa said, Tai Yang is a Guardian name, not a human one, and you're in a human form right now, so... Besides, all the other humanoid Guardians have taken human names for their sealed forms.”

“'All' the other humanoid Guardians?” Yelan questioned, eyeing her son suspiciously.

Xiao Lang paled at the realization of his slip-up and stuttered for an excuse, “I-I meant Yue and Yukito-san. They act so different from each other, it's hard to think of them as the same person. So, it's them as in both sides of him.”

It was clear by the looks on many of the faces looking at him that his attempt at covering up his slip of the tongue, but other than eyeing no body pushed it and Xiao Lang did not volunteer any further information either. Choosing to change subjects as subtly as he could manage instead, the young heir returned his attention to the small child-like form still attached at his side. “So... Jiao Yang it is,
“If that is what would make Master happy...” the newly dubbed humanoid Sun Guardian replied, though she still looked a little uneasy about the designation.

“Woohooo! I named the Sun Guardian!” Fanren cheered, throwing her arms up in the air in victory.

“Yes, yes,” Xiefa appeased, “Now that that's over with, shall we get ready to go?”

"You ready to go?" Xiefa asked as she poked her head in to Xiao Lang's room.

"I suppose," was his reply. He closed his suitcase and locked it and began to walk away, but stopped and returned for a pink winged teddy bear that had been left sitting by where his suitcase had just been.

Xiefa could not help but raise an eyebrow at her brother for even having such a thing, and when he caught sight of her look, he blushed and tossed it back on his bed. But he didn't even get to the door when he returned for it once again. He stood and held it, pondering something only he could know.

Finally Xiefa rolled her eyes "It belonged to your little girlfriend, didn't it?" she asked in a knowing tone. "Come on, just put it in your bag and lets get out side before any of the others come looking for you and see it."

Having an outside source give confirmation to those actions, Xiao Lang put the bear in the suitcase quickly and followed his sister out to the front door. "And she's not my girlfriend..." he grumbled before they reached earshot of the others.

Xiefa gave him a look as if to say 'yeah, sure, whatever', but changed the subject as they were nearing the others. "Are you not taking the Guardians with you?"

"No, mother thinks it would be for the best if they stayed here for this trip," Xiao Lang replied, happy to be on a less depressing subject then his failed love life. “Do... you really think it will be okay? Leaving them here, I mean...”

“Do you think you'll need their protection in London?” Xiefa asked.

“Well, no,” the youngest Li admitted, “it's just... they're... young. And they need me, and I--” he trailed off at his sister's curious stare. He knew the look, she was calculating him into her world view, and he knew that if she was giving him that look that meant he was displaying an unusual level of attachment to the two of them.

“I wonder if everyone with a Guardian is this attentive to them, or if You di is just being over-protective once again?” she mused aloud.

"Ah, finally! Let's go!" Feimei called as the missing two siblings walked up.

"Remind me again why you're all coming?” Xiao Lang complained, putting his hands on his hips.

"Shopping trip, duh!" Fanren pointed out as if he'd have to be stupid not to see it himself.

"For me to go to school..." he attempted to remind the lot of them.
"Well, you're obviously going to need something to wear while you're there!" Feimei pointed out.

"And there's no saying that back to school stores are the only ones that we necessarily will go to. If we by mistake walk into one or two others instead..." Fudie pointed out.

"Ugh! You girls are going to bankrupt this family..." Xiao Lang growled, putting his face in his hand. To this he got a general round of giggles, from Xiefa included, meaning that she had just as much of an intention to shop as the rest of them. "We may as well be going; we don't want to be getting in too late."

Having a privet jet really was a convenience, Xiao Lang noted as he looked out the window. The limo ride had been an annoyance. Xiefa wouldn't stop smiling slyly at him, Fudie had been going through a catalogue of stores on her laptop, planning out routes they could take for shopping, while Fanren and Feimei squealed about all the cute English boys they might or might not meet. Now that they were on the jet at least, they were arguing amongst themselves on which in-flight movie they should watch first.

It would take hours to get to England, Xiao Lang knew, and as he watched the jet roll off the ground and up towards the clouds he couldn't help but wonder what Sakura was doing. He blushed slightly against his will at the thought of her, and cursed himself quietly for not being able to get her out of his head. It wasn't like he'd ever be able to see her again... He was zapped back to reality when he felt someone sit in the seat next to him.

Looking over, he didn't even bother hiding the groan at seeing Xiefa sitting there smiling at him. "Well, now that they're all so nicely occupied, you owe me an explanation."

"No, I don't," Xiao Lang replied.

"Oh, come on, Xiao Lang! I promise I won't tell them about her, but at least get it off your chest with me!" Xiefa prodded onward.

"If I tell you, then will you leave me alone?!" he growled out testily.

Xiefa made a crossing motion over her heart with a finger. "I give you my word."

"I don't see what the big deal is, it's not like I'd be able to be on dates with her or anything..." Xiao Lang grumbled, trying to beat around the bush. "The Clan wouldn't approve of her, and I'm going to England..."

"Wouldn't... why? She's not one of those without any power, is she?" Xiefa asked, worriedly. If that was Xiao Lang's type...

"No!" he said, sounding properly offended that she would assume so. "She-she just doesn't have a Clan..."

"Oh, one of those sorts, huh?" Xiefa said, nodding to herself. "So, how did you come across this nobody?"

"She's not really a nobody..."

"But... you said she didn't have a Clan!"
"I know I did, but she's still not a nobody," Xiao Lang pointed out.

"Well," Xiefa started expectantly, "then who is she?"

"She's the Mistress of the Cards," Xiao Lang stated pointedly, but he wasn't looking at Xiefa and was very red in the face.

"Wh-what?!!" The news took Xiefa so much by surprise that she slipped right from the seat and hit the floor with a thud. Quickly pulling herself back up to sitting next to her brother, she continued in urgent whispers of a gossiping girl. "Are you crazy?! Do you have any idea how much face you lost because of that girl?!!"

"Ugh! Don't remind me!" Xiao Lang said, putting his hands over his ears and getting a look on his face like he was going to be sick.

"Wait, why would a girl with no family be strong enough to be a Card Captor?" Xiefa pondered.

"Her father is the reincarnation of Clow Reed," Xiao Lang explained.

"You're kidding!" but all it took was one look at her brother's face to know that he wasn't.

"Whoa... Well, if she really is Clow Reed's daughter, then it makes sense that she would be the one to carry on in his place. Therefore, you didn't really lose face because she was the one they were best suited for," Xiefa tried to cheer him up.

"Humph," was his only reply.

"...Well, also... if she marries into the Li Clan then we haven't really lost the cards..." Xiefa pointed out.

"Wh-what? Who would she be--" Xiao Lang started jealously, then saw the look on his sister's face and understood. "I-I couldn't-that is-we aren't-I haven't-I don't--"

Xiefa giggled at how easily she managed to tease him about this crush of his and threw her arms around his neck in a hug. "Awa! Xiao Lang is so cute!!"

“Hey! Cut it out!” the young boy protested, struggling in his laughing sister's teasing grasp.

Xiefa let him fight his way out of her hold and waited until the other sister's customary glances at the commotion grew bored and returned to the film they had chosen. “So, what's Clow Reed like? I mean, to meet him in person, he must be amazing.”

Xiao Lang's initial response was to shrug, “I didn't really get a chance to meet Kinomoto-san. He seemed really nice the few times I talked to him, surprisingly enough given how Hiiragizawa turned out. But I got called back to Hong Kong only days after we found out about him being a reincarnation, so I didn't really get a chance to examine him or anything...”

“Kinomoto-san would be Clow Reed, I take it? Who's Hiiragizawa?”

Xiao Lang fidgeted nervously for a moment, “You gotta not tell... I don’t think he wants the Clans knowing, and quite frankly I think we're better off without the likes of him.”
“Alright,” Xiefa agreed, “as long as it doesn't put the Clan in danger, I'll keep things to myself.”

“Okay,” Xiao Lang said, with a few deep breaths to steady his nerves and gather his thoughts, “so you know how I stayed longer in Japan because there was a strong, Clow-like presence that was messing with things?”

“Yeah,” Xiefa nodded.

“Well, that was because it was Clow Reed's presence. Or rather, his reincarnation's presence. It hadn't been danger, Hiiragizawa was just... testing Sakura, or training her, or something. At the end of the whole thing, he had Sakura split his magic between himself and Kinomoto-san, that's how we found out that Kinomoto-san was also a reincarnation of Clow Reed,” Xiao Lang explained, before crossing his arms over his chest and huffing like a small child. “It seems Kinomoto-san got all the goodness in Clow Reed, and Hiiragizawa got all the bastard!”

“Xiao Lang!” Xiefa exclaimed, aghast at her little brother's words towards one they had been raised to see as nearly a god.

“He deserves it!” was all the boy argued back with stubbornly.

Having not known the details behind her little brother's interactions with this reincarnation of Clow Reed, Xiefa bit her tongue doubtfully and chose to change the subject. “So what about the humanoid Guardians? You did use a plural reference to them earlier...”

Giving a sigh, Xiao Lang gave in. “Hiiragizawa made a pair of replacements for Yue and Cerberus. Their names are Ruby Moon and Spinel Sun, and Ruby Moon is in human form. Hiiragizawa is probably also the one who sent me the Guardian Eggs and instructions, which means that bastard is up to something else again. I'm sorry I lied earlier, but I couldn't talk about Ruby Moon without bringing up Hiiragizawa...”

“Xiao Lang, something as important as Clow Reed's reincarnations and new Guardians aren't something that should be kept from the Clan,” Xiefa scolded.

“Why? He's made it abundantly clear by hiding every trace of himself these last few decades that he doesn't want to be involved with Clan politics, and even before his death Clow Reed avoided Clan gatherings whenever he could manage! Just face it, he doesn't want us and quite frankly we're better off forgetting him and moving towards the future on our own!”

Displeased by the response, but unable to argue with incomplete knowledge, Xiefa dropped the subject and let silence fall between them.

It was late evening when the Li Clan's private jet set down on British asphalt. The five Li children filed out into the airport, images of regal grace and beauty that drew the eye despite the hectic atmosphere of the place.

"So," Feimei began, "where are we going to go?"

"A limo will be picking us up out front to take us to the Beaufort Hotel. We will go and find the stores tomorrow," Fudie stated, naturally taking the position of leader.

"Well, I hope they have the penthouse ready for us, I wish to relax for the rest of the night,"
Xiefa stated, stretching and shifting to get out the kinks from sitting so long on the jet ride there.

"As long as they have room enough for me to get a workout in before bed, I'll be happy," Xiao Lang stated, putting his hands behind his head in a bored sort of way.

"Just don't cut up any of the furniture, this time..."

"I wonder how their stereo system is," Fanren pondered.

"I want to go take a nice long soak in a hot bath," Feimei insisted.

As said, the limousine awaited the Li children out front. The ride to the hotel was largely uneventful, save for the whining and giggling that one often cannot avoid when putting four teenaged beauties together, especially when you leave them unsupervised. And though they failed to obtain the penthouse they had been hoping for, due to it being previously occupied, with little fussing and flashing of plastic they were soon settled in the next best thing.

As soon as the family set foot in the room, they were off in their own directions. Fanren had no trouble finding the CD player, Feimei instantly took off to examine the bath, Fudie spotted the magazines and made herself comfortable flipping through them, and Xiefa went to the phone to order up some food from room service. With a sigh, Xiao Lang dug into his pockets and pulled out a tip for the bellhop, before sending him away so that he could relax in peace. That idea was shot when Feimei gave a scream, though.

All four siblings rushed to see what was wrong, only to round the corner and find their sister examining the content of the salts box. Looking up to see the annoyed expressions of her family, she smiled at them bashfully before showing them her discovery. "Look at all these fragrances! With my privet collection I could make a masterpiece of aromatherapy! Do you think they sell these around here?"

Fudie smiled in an almost teasing way at her youngest sister. "Oh probably," she agreed.

Xiefa came over and looked at the collection of salts and oils herself, "Are you thinking of having some spa time?"

"Hmm," Feimei acknowledged, nodding. "Would you like to join me?" she asked her sisters in general.

"Alright," Fudie came in as well.

"I could use a nice relaxing rest," Fanren acknowledged. She then turned to Xiao Lang, "Can you go in my bag and put on one of the Zen CD's for me?"

He didn't even get a chance to answer when the door was closed in his face. He gave a sigh and went to do her bidding, figuring he may as well get in some meditation before they came out and started being noisy again. He had barely put the CD in and settled down before there was a knock on the door and he had to get up again to see who was pestering him. The room service jumped slightly at the black look the boy was giving them. They had seen their fair share of spoiled brats and grumpy company, but something in this kid's golden eyes said that he had more than just an attitude; he had the power to do something with his attitude!

"What do you want?" he demanded.
The two hotel workers looked at each other insecurely, before shaking it off. This was just a kid, what the hell could he do? "Room service. You ordered a meal?"

Rolling his eyes, Xiao Lang stepped aside and let them in. He recalled Xiefa doing so before going to join the others in the bath. "How much do I owe you...?" he asked tiredly, digging into his pocket once more for his wallet.

"It will be billed with the room," one of the workers informed politely.

Xiao Lang nodded, showing that he understood, and shoved his wallet back where he had pulled it from as he stepped up to the bathroom door and knocked. "**Xiefa! Food's here!**"

"**Oh good! Have them bring it in!**" Fanren called back.

"**Yes! We're starving!**" Xiefa insisted.

"**And can they send someone to wash our backs?**" whined Fudie.

Rolling his eyes, Xiao Lang turned to the two who brought the food. "They want it in there," he said, indicating the bathroom.

"They?" one of them asked nervously.

"Yeah, and they also want someone to be sent up to wash their backs," Xiao Lang confirmed, walking away and going back to meditating.

Insecurely, the people from room service did as they were told. Opening the door slowly, they entered to find the four sisters sitting around the bath as if it were a hot tub. Each was wrapped in a towel, and their fine silk dresses lay folded on the sink counter. "Well, hurry up!" Fudie insisted impatiently.

"And when will someone come to scrub our backs?" fumed Feimei.

"You can leave the pudding out for Xiao Lang. But I want the cherries over by me!" Xiefa insisted. The two workers eyed each other. No wonder that boy had been scowling. These girls were spoiled rotten! Not sure if they'd get fired for not obeying, seeing as these children had one of the most expensive suites there, they went ahead and placed the food out to the girl's request. On their way out they saw the boy sitting in the middle of a rolled out rug that had a fancy circular design. He opened an eye and watched them as they left but made no other move to acknowledge them.

In the bathroom, the girls sat and picked at the finger foods supplied for them. "You know," Fanren stated in a drawn out ho-hummish sort of way, "**even if You di does make it as the new Clan head, Mu qin will most likely stay on as figure-head.**"

"**We'll all be given advisory positions until he's really ready to lead on his own,**" Xiefa pointed out. "**It won't just be Mu qin.**"

"**But Xiao Lang is still so obedient to her, will anything even change?**" Fudie pointed out.

"I don't think Mu qin would push her authority on him once his leadership is made official. She does right now because she's the Clan leader, but she treats us the same way," Feimei observed.
"She pushes him ten times harder than she does us..." Fanren stated. "She lets us get away with almost anything."

"She treats him like she treated me before he was born," Fudie pointed out. "Hard and cold as ice to toughen him up so he can deal with the pressures of leading."

"I guess..." Fanren admitted, "It just doesn't seem fair that we get freedom and he's made to practically break his body in preparation for solstice. I mean, does You di even know the meaning of the term 'goofing off'?"

There was a moment of silence as each of the young women reflected on this statement. True, life had been hard for each of them, being brought to the point of bleeding before being allowed to rest, but unlike them who could go and play once they had done their work, their little brother seemed to just always be handed the next task to master. Even though the youngest of the girls were five years older than him, and they all were prone to tease him on occasion for not being able to keep up with them, it was more than just the Elder's expectations that continued to push him onwards until he could almost match skill with them.

But all the same, Xiefa smiled wistfully as she thought about his little crush that he had obtained over his rival. "I believe he has. He's gotten his taste of freedom, the ability to make decisions for himself, and I think even Mu qin is going to have a hell of a time forcing him to submit again."

"I'm almost scared to see what sort of power he's going to have once it awakens to a true development in the next few years," Fudie pointed out thoughtfully.

"Do you think he's going to be anything like Clow Reed?" Fanren pondered.

"Oh, no! He told the Elders he wants to drop Clow Reed and go his own way," Feimei said in a gossip like whisper.

"You were eves dropping on the Elder's examination?!" Fanren demanded, looking aghast at such an idea. The other two also looked on with minor surprise.

"Oh, and like none of you were?" Feimei accused, giving them all a pointed look.

Fanren looked to each of their older siblings in turn, neither was looking back and both were blushing in shame at being caught. "What?! Oooh... why doesn't anyone ever call me for these things?" and with that the second to last daughter began to sulk. The other three giggled out of nerves and once again the conversation veered to far more pointless subjects.

Well, there you have it. Part A of chapter 3 in all it's extended glory. Really the biggest alteration was the addition of the scene where Syaoran seals and names his Guardians. Initially Tai Yang wasn't dubbed Jiao Yang in her human form, nor obtained a sealed form, until a later moment in time (chapter seven, actually) but when I was writing this scene up it just seemed to flow better if both those parts were placed here with the binding of them to the Sword of the Elements takes place. So I have to go and rewrite that little section out of chapter 7 now before I can post it. Sorry for the further delay, but I figured things just made more sense this way around.

I also pulled the first part out of chapter 4, because I double checked my timeline and realized that the events of that day were misplaced. The three parts of Love War and Stores are probably going to get majorly revamped and hopefully compressed. That's one of the purposes of doing this rewrite is that those three chapters needed alteration. I'm dropping one idea thread that didn't pan out, perhaps
moving it to a much later segment if I don't decide to drop it completely from the timeline, and a scene that I added for that idea now no longer fits and would be better just removed completely, though I will miss some of the lines from it that I found to be cute. I can just move them to another time instead, though.

Now, for chapter 3B, it will be dealing with Sakura and her preparations to leave, as well as her friends plotting behind her back. I chose to designate her part of the story as B rather than A because hers takes place over two days and Syaoran's is only a day long.
Chapter 3B: Goodbye isn't Forever

Chapter Summary

Sakura's friends plot behind her back. Cerberus and Yue get at each other's throat. Touya tries to argue his universe right-side up. And Sakura has a very disturbing dream. Running away from problems never works, they just follow after you and get bigger the longer you try to put them off. So what will be the result of Sakura trying to flee her broken heart?

Chiharu and Yamazaki were out on one of their play dates, a precious pair but with heavy hearts. They sat, so late in summer, on a bench in Penguin Park licking ice cream and holding hands. Though it was still early in the afternoon, they felt like it was closer to sunset with all the things that had happened that day.

Sakura had left quite quickly after they had made their rounds together, Tomoyo had walked her home, and Chiharu and Yamazaki had decided to go a different way from Rika and Naoko soon afterwards. The conversation today was more serious then it was on their average date.

They had spoken long and hard on Sakura's going away, and on her and Xiao Lang's feelings for each other. There were tears shed and questions asked about their own relationship, and when it all came to an end, they did indeed know more about the other.

"You hate it when anyone is upset!" Chiharu pointed out.

"Yeah, but I really hate it when you're upset," he repeated.

Chiharu forced herself to smile for him, but that only brought a deeper frown to his face. "Don't," he said smushing his thumb against her lips. "Smiles are only pretty when the person smiling means it."

Chiharu let her head sink and let a tear come to her eye. "Well, then I suppose you're out of luck. I don't think I can smile while knowing that Sakura is going away. Especially because the reason she's leaving is a broken heart..."

Yamazaki put his arm around Chiharu's shoulders and pulled her in close to him. He rested his chin on top of her head and pondered on what she said. "I suppose I am... I don't know what we could do to cheer her up. I would just tell her a joke, but that wouldn't work because she always just believes them to be real. Though I have to admit, that is one of her cuter traits."

Chiharu was forced to chuckle at that. Yamazaki really was twisted in his sense of humour. "You would find that cute, wouldn't you?" but it was then that Chiharu was struck with a revelation. "I know! Why don't we throw her a going away party?"

"Oh, so you want to celebrate getting rid of her?" Yamazaki teased.

Chiharu hit him for that one. "No, you idiot! Let's just... make the last of her time here a happy one."
"Something tells me you want to go and find the others now?" It was really more of a statement then a question, but he raised the tone at the end of the sentence to be polite.

"You bet! Let's go!" and with that they were off.

Two small female figures moved purposefully down the sidewalk of beautiful Tomoeda. Their motion was slow but steady and lacked any signs of physical strain though there was admittedly a lack in the energy one might expect in two such young girls.

"Onii-chan's going to kill me when I tell him..." Sakura admitted, looking bashful.

"I'm sure he'll understand," Tomoyo encouraged. "It's just... a shame that Li-kun has done this to you."

"It's not him, Tomoyo-chan," Sakura said as they approached her front door, though by the tone of her voice it was clear that she was more attempting to convince herself of that fact than Tomoyo. "It's like Kero-chan keeps saying; everything happens for a reason. I wouldn't have gotten that letter unless I was supposed to go to that school."

Sakura opened the door and announced her presence as always, but for once not even her guardians responded. In fact, they were in one of their heated arguments that were so typical of opposing forces.

"Would you quit being so stubborn all the time?!" Cerberus yelled at close to the top of his lungs.

"Would you quit being so jealous of the Mistress's attentions?!" Yue retorted in his own quiet version of a yell.

"This goes beyond that, and you know it!" Cerberus growled out in frustration.

"There is nothing beyond my Mistress!" Yue insisted.

"It's Sakura-chan's wishes that I'm thinking about!" Cerberus insisted. Sakura chose this moment to intervene. Coming up in between them without any fear, she held a hand up to each. Yue instantly fell to one knee in respect while Cerberus continued to chew Yue out. "You insufferable, pig-headed, grumpy--"

"That's enough, Kero-chan," Sakura said absently. "What's this all about? Why are you two fighting now?"

"Cerberus doesn't want me to come with you!" Yue accused.

"Kero-chan, is that true?" Sakura demanded, aghast.

"No!" Cerberus insisted. "He's twisting what I'm saying!" When Sakura just looked at him expectantly, the Sun Guardian ruffled his feathers indignantly and sat down to explain the situation to his young mistress. "While you were out with Tomoyo-chan and your other friends, the Otou-san came up with a very good point."

Yue made to interject, but Sakura silenced him with a gesture.

"He pointed out that the Onii-chan is Yue's source of magic, and that if they get too far away from each other, then Yue might fade away again. But Yue's being too stubborn and saying that he won't stay behind!"
Sakura was filled with horror at the thought, but Yue jumped to his own defence. "I am a Guardian; my place is at the side of my Mistress!"

"Your place is with the Onii-chan! I can guard Sakura-chan perfectly fine by myself!"

"You wouldn't be able to guard her against a power like Spinel Sun and Ruby Moon's!"

"What makes you think I'd have to?!"

"Power draws chaos! You know that!"

"And what if you do disappear?! How much can a dead Guardian guard?!"

"If I die serving my Mistress, I have done my purpose and have no regrets, just as a Guardian should. You are a failure as a Guardian Beast if you do not feel the same way!"

"NO!" Sakura's sudden outburst shocked even Cerberus into silence. Tears were streaming down her face and her nose was all red. "I won't go, then! I won't go if it means someone is going to die! I don't want you to die, Yue! I don't want anyone to die!!"

She flung herself on the silver being and was soon encompassed in a hug. "Now look what you did! You've upset her saying such things!"

"You upset her with your stubbornness to not just stay here with the Onii-chan like you should!"

"Stop arguing over me, please, both of you!" Sakura insisted.

"I live to be of service to my Mistress," was all Yue said.

He didn't need to say anything more, she understood that she couldn't talk him out of his decision, but still she had to try and explain to him what he meant to her. "If you, either of you, any of you died to protect me... I don't think I could continue on, anyway. I'd rather die myself then have to live knowing that someone took my place for me!"

The mindless love, love that took no proof or action to entice, that she saw shining from his eyes told her that her efforts were for naught. It was just one of those things Yue would never understand, nor was he supposed to. He would obey her every wish, whim, and fancy, but he was a Guardian Beast and was created for her protection. Telling him otherwise would be as pointless as telling the sun not to set or the moon not to rise.

"Um..." Tomoyo's voice was so uncertain in speaking up that it took Sakura a moment to even realize that someone had even made a noise. "You need to get your school supplies, right? I mean, they have to have a special school supply store for it or something, because I don't think you'd be able to find wands and cauldrons just anywhere..."

"That's right; they have a street there in London, Daigon Alley, that only magic users can access. It supplies Britain with all of its Magical merchandise," Yue informed, back at his normal tone of voice.

"Well, it's just..." Tomoyo eyed Sakura to see if she really ought to continue, "Sakura-chan was looking forward to this school thing, and now I think she'd rather not go because she's worried about Yue-san, but maybe if Yukito-san takes Sakura-chan to get the supplies and Touya-san stays here..." She didn't even have to finish the sentence, everyone understood enough.

Yue looked to Sakura for her decision. "Would that please you?"
"Yes, then we could find out if there really will be any troubles involving you and Onii-chan being apart!" Sakura said, returning slightly to her normal happy self.

With the argument over with, Yue and Cerberus returned to their sealed forms. Yukito ruffled Sakura's hair affectionately, said his greeting to Tomoyo, and wondered off to go find where Touya had gotten to during his alter-ego's possession. Kero, now with nothing better to do, went to the fridge to get a snack before going upstairs to play his newest video game that Sakura had bought him, a proof to him that he was loved. Sakura and Tomoyo, for their part, went to find Fujitaka to tell him about her decision.

Rika had just barely taken off her shoes when the phone rang. Running to go get it, she picked up the receiver and held it to her ear. "Moshi-moshi?"

"Rika-chan, is that you?" the voice said from the other end of the line, barely containing excitement.

"Chiharu-chan? What's up?" Rika asked, kind of surprised as Chiharu's happy tone.

"I was thinking, let's throw Sakura a going away party!" Chiharu announced, proud of herself.

As soon as it was said, Rika's face lit up. "Oh, that would be a wonderful idea! A surprise party is just the thing Sakura-chan needs right now!"

"Surprise party? You think it should be one of those?"

"Oh yes!" Rika insisted, "I could bake a cake--do you think angels food or devil's food would be better?--and Tomoyo-chan likes cameras, right? So she can be the one..."

Fujitaka had been very supportive and understanding of all of Sakura's reasons behind her decision as she had talked them out one after another to him as a practice run before she officially broke the news to her overprotective big brother. He had patiently listened to all she had to say, prodding her reasons and ensuring that she had really thought this through before smiling and giving his consent.

"I feel like things aren't over yet," she had explained. "Both against Eriol-kun and The Void I almost lost, I can't keep relying on luck to get me through. If Eriol-kun had meant it, his spell would have put Onii-chan and everyone else asleep forever, and Void-san really did take everyone away before I beat her... I don't want to loose everyone like that again. I need formal magic training, or I might not be able to save everyone next time."

While Fujitaka had accepted this reasoning as sound, Touya had challenged it. "But why England? Surely you're not the only person in Japan with magic, why can't you find someone here to teach you?"

Sakura really couldn't find it in herself to blame her brother for being stubborn this time. After all, it wouldn't only be saying goodbye to his little sister who he saw as his responsibility but to his most beloved person as well. She felt a little lonely for him, being left behind with no way to follow because he gave his magic away to make up for her short comings. But as for why she needed to go to England for it, the only answer she could find was "Because England is the place that called to me."

Touya knew enough about magic that he couldn't properly argue against that, but Sakura could tell that he was trying to piece one together with all his might just the same. This whole situation was
tearing him apart, which in turn was hurting her even more that this was what she had to do.

“I won't be completely alone,” Sakura reasoned, trying to reassure her brother. “Both Eriol-kun and Mizuki-sensei live in England, I'm sure if I need any help at all they'll be willing to provide it. And both Kero-chan and Yue are such wonderful protectors, I won't be in any danger or anything, I promise! Everything will surely be alright.”

When he couldn't find any further arguments, Touya had pulled Sakura into a tight hug before sending her to go pack for her shopping trip. She had barely left his room when his arms found their way around Yukito instead. His desperate hold was nearly bone crushing in its intensity, but Yukito merely returned the embrace without complaint. “Promise you won't forget about me?”

Yukito blinked at the unexpected request, “Forget you? How could I?”

“When Kaho went to England, she found someone new to love. I couldn't bare it if I lost you the same way,” he explained.

“Oh, To-ya,” Yukito admonished, his face in his boyfriend's shoulder, “I could never replace you. You make up too much of me for that. Even if you put me aside, my love for you runs too deep for me to ever be able to replace you. I promise, the only one I will ever love more than you is Sakura-chan, and that's--”

“Different, I know. Your love for the kaiju comes from her being Yue's Mistress and like being a little sister to you as well. Though she must be first and foremost in Yue's mind because you are her Guardian, I know your feelings for her are not romantic in the least. You don't have to worry about that,” Touya acknowledged.

Fujitaka came up around twenty minutes later to tell his children and Yukito that the earliest flight he could get Sakura and Yukito on was for the following day. Yukito thanked his boyfriend's father and promised to reimburse him for the travel fare once they returned after their trip.

Touya and Yukito had been planning to go to the movies the following night, but seeing as the plane would be gone before then, they decided to reschedule their date for tonight instead. They headed over to Yukito's house so that Touya could help him pack before the movie started, leaving Sakura with only Kero and her cards to worry about.

Mirror offered to help, and Flower came out as well, though the latter was more of a hindrance than a help. She kept filling the suitcase with petals, and was decorating the room more than anything. Still, she was doing it with such enthusiasm that Sakura couldn't bring herself to put Flower away again. Instead, she and Mirror just worked around the excitable woman to varying degrees of success.

“Ne, Kero-chan, have you ever been to England before?” Sakura asked as she scooped the new pile of daffodils out of her bag so she could put her shirts in.

“Me? Plenty of times!” Kero answered from where he was sitting on the edge of his drawer. “Clow Reed was half English, after all, and eventually inherited the family estate in London after the rest of his relatives died off. He also had descendents in England that he would keep tabs on. His first wife was from there, and their kids never left. Of course, we never met any of them, they were all before mine and Yue's time.”

“Hoe? First wife?” Sakura asked, stopping what she was doing to give her whole attention to Kero.

“Clow Reed lived for hundreds of years looking younger than the Tou-san does. He outlived many wives and children before he decided it was time to become what he is today. Sometimes I still
wonder if even dying wasn't something he did just on a whim,” Kero admitted.

“So Clow Reed lived in England?” the Card Mistress questioned.

“He lived where he pleased. He owned property all over the world by the time he died, at least fifty houses from here to South America. He'd go somewhere for something it had, usually to study some ancient ruin or relic, and buy a house to stay in while he was there. Then, when he left, instead of selling it or giving it away, he'd lock it all up with magic so that no one else could enter and keep it. 'You never know when we might need to come back,' or so he said.

“But even still, England seemed to have a draw for him that the other countries didn't seem to share. He always seemed to go back there every few decades at least, even if just for a visit. Don't know why; he avoided the Li Clan like the plague, and that's where he spent his childhood, so it wasn't like it was his home town or anything,” Kero explained.

“What is it like there?” Sakura's curiosity pursued.

“What, England? Cool, wet, rainy... depending on the decade it also smelled at times. London proper was overpopulated, and busy no matter the time of day or night,” the Sun Guardian reminisced.

“Is it much different from Japan? Will I fit in?” the young girl worried.

“You're Sakura. It may take a little getting used to at first, but everything will be alright for you,” he reassured with a toothy grin.

“I just hope that I'm not really making some sort of huge mistake...” she admitted.

“It'll be fine. I promise. I'll be right there to take care of you, so you have nothing to worry about,” her Guardian promised.

Smiling her thanks, Sakura set back to work, finally putting Flower and Mirror away when nearly every surface in her room was covered in blossoms and petals. Firey offered to clean up the mess for her, but Sakura thought that it may cause more than just the flowers to catch fire and so declined the offer. Instead she called out Erase to take care of the mess, effectively removing the problem without any property damage.

It wasn't much longer before a knock rapped at the door. Sakura pulled the handle to reveal Fujitaka standing there holding a tray with a pair of steaming mugs sitting on it. “If you are going to be attending school in England, you had best become accustomed to their time zone as early as possible so you don't have troubles when classes start.”

“Already? But it's still the middle of August!” Sakura protested.

“Yes, and it will be September before you know it. Here, I brought you some warm milk to help you go to sleep, and one for Cerberus as well,” Fujitaka insisted, placing the tray down on her table and patting the Sun Guardian on the head before exiting the room once more.

“*Sigh*, alright...” Sakura gave in, going over and picking up the mug that Kero didn't claim.

“Arigatou, Otou-san.”

Fujitaka smiled as he closed her door behind him. “I'll see you bright and early tomorrow morning, alright? Goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” Sakura parroted, drinking her milk and changing into pyjamas despite it not even been
8 pm yet. “Kero-chan, can you pull the curtains closed for me?” she asked as she pulled her covers down.

“You got it!” he replied, darkening the room as much as he could in the still-bright evening. After he was done, the little beastial Guardian fluttered over to his Mistress's pillow and curled up under the blanket with her.

Sakura stood with her staff drawn at the boundary between a forest and a lake. Lights, like a million little candles, flickered in the distance indicating a building that she couldn't make out. The sky was alight with billions of stars, twinkling breathtakingly on this clear moonless night.

Above her, one star seemed to shine more brightly than any of the others, though something told Sakura that it was merely her own perception making it so. Some part of her recognized that this was her star, her own special one that supplied her with her magic and that was why it stood out so brightly to her. She wanted to point it out to someone, but there was no one around to do so to.

That's right, she was completely alone out here in this place, why couldn't she hear anyone's voices? “Kero-chan?” she questioned aloud. “Yue? Card-san?”

No reply, she was alone and abandoned in this place and not even her Guardians would be there to answer her call. She extended her magic out, intent to find them and summon them back to her. The star pattern formed beneath her feet—the same that was printed on the back of her cards—and lit the forest around her with a brilliant blue that rivalled the daylight. But still no answer was forthcoming.

Panic was starting to build, something was seriously wrong, why weren't they answering? Her friends, these ones who were so close to her that all she need do is think of them and they'd come running to see what she needed, what was keeping them from hearing her inner voice now? Putting forth all her effort, Sakura called with her magic, running through each of the signatures of her twenty cards and her two Guardians. Over and over she cried out to them, begging for some response, until finally a quiet little flicker of an answer came. We will not return to you, for you are no longer Master.

Screaming in her horror and grief, Sakura threw out her arms and began to run towards the last flicker of their fading presences. “No! I love you, don't leave me like this! Card-san! Kero-chan! Yue!”

Yukito stopped mid step and whipped his eyes around in the direction of the Kinomoto residence. Touya only took a moment to notice his boyfriend's distraction, and by the time that he registered the distress in the golden eyes the feathery wings had already burst from the thin back. There would only be one reason, Touya knew, that Yue would begin transforming in the middle of the street.

“Sakura...” Touya breathed out in horror. It took a moment for the fear and shock of the impending danger to ware thin enough that he could get his muscles moving. By that point Yue was already several wing beats ahead and unlike the event of last June, appeared in no interest of waiting for Touya to come with him.

Pushing his body as hard and fast as his club activities gave him the ability to, Touya pursued the angelic being the best he could. Being high on adrenaline helped him to ignore the ache of his muscles that began protesting to the anaerobic sprint, but even at his fastest speed he barely managed to reach the corner of the block he lived on in time to see the Moon Guardian entering through his little sister's window.
Seeing this gave him some minor relief. If she was at home in her room, then that meant that she had their father and her cards—not to mention her other guardian—to make sure that she wasn't hurt. It still didn't explain fully what the emergency was that caused Yue to fully emerge in the middle of the street, but at least he could trust that she wasn't laying unconscious somewhere on the side of the road.

Continuing to move, though with some of the urgency out of his step, Touya jogged the rest of the way home and after pausing to take off his shoes, went up the stairs and into her room. He entered to find the room packed between the the 20 summoned cards, two Guardians, and their father already all gathered around the young Card Mistress's bed, where the girl lay crying and screaming in her sleep.

In fact, the room was so full that even Yue had been able to do little more than land over by the window and stare worriedly over heads and shoulders at the bed from across the room. Yue's eyes had locked on to him momentarily as he entered the room, though the eyes had shifted off of him almost as fast when he was registered as a non-threat.

Fujitaka was kneeling at the head of the bed, looking worried. Touya knew their father had likely come running up the stairs at the first indication of Sakura's distress. On the bed with Sakura was Kero, still in sealed form, Jump, Mirror, Glow, Hope, and a bird that he assumed was probably Fly when it wasn't attached to his sister's back. Shadow and Illusion both clung to the walls behind the bed, and he could see Maze still in card form—probably coaxed into returning by Yue when the Moon Guardian desired to enter the room—floating around above Sakura's head. Shield stood dutifully hovering in the air above it's unconscious Mistress, and it's partner Sword lay rather uselessly propped against the wall by the door. Windy and Wood had stretched themselves up to take up much of the remaining space above the bed, while the remaining cards—Light, Dark, Firey, Earthy, Watery, Thunder, Flower, and Erase—hovered around in the remaining floorspace of the room. The only empty space in the room was at his father's shoulder, which Touya had the distinct impression was probably occupied by his mother's resident ghost, even if he could no longer see or feel her for real.

Touya had no chance to do anything but stand silent sentinel by the door. He couldn't get to his sister, and couldn't even get to his boyfriend, who was being forced to stand just as distant on the other side of the room. He felt so horribly useless here, the only being present without the powerful call of magic flowing through his veins in a room full of magical beings. For the most horrible of moments he felt out of place, an intruder in his own home, one that didn't belong in this family his sister and father had built. He couldn't even be there as something of moral support for his boyfriend’s other self due to the fact that the Moon Guardian had ignored his existence completely after the initial registry glance and he couldn't even catch the androgynous angel's eye after that.

Finally, after what had felt like hours of worrying though was likely only a minute or two, Sakura jerked herself upright from her nightmare, panting with tear-streaked cheeks as the fear dimmed to realization. Fujitaka moved to sit at the head of her bed in the space the young girl had vacated when she sat up. With gentle soothing hands placed on her shoulders to help steady her, the man spoke to his child. “Sakura-san... are you alright?”

When the girl's eyes shifted to her worried father, tears welled anew and she crawled up to wrap her arms around the man's neck. “Otou-san! It was horrible! Everyone had left me and I was all alone! I called everyone, but no one would come! They didn't love me anymore *sob*! They left me... they didn't... Syaoran-kun...” that was the last she got out before dissolving into heaving sobs of pain and residual loneliness.

Touya cursed the gaki twelve ways from Friday for hurting his little sister like this, but knew from
his own experiences that there was nothing but time and new love that could heal the wound of
heartbreak, and that any words spoken to attempt consolation were just empty noises to the one in
pain. Most of the Cards looked disturbed about the nightmare Sakura described, and those that he
didn't recognize the emotion in was mainly because they lacked physical features to express the
emotion with. However, Hope's expression held a distinctly horror-struck empathic quality to it that
few other faces even came close to sharing. She understood on a level that the others didn't the horror
of being alone and abandoned by those you loved.

The only other one who's expression came close to that same level of empathy was Yue, who's pain-
filled posture made it all the more clear that while he watched the scene with longing, lonely eyes, he
was seeing a man holding his Mistress who was long dead and who's reincarnations had either
forgotten or replaced him. Though Touya could not get to his sister amid the mass of magical beings,
he could push his way now around the perimeter to where the silver Guardian stood.

The first time Touya attempted to touch Yue he was shrugged off. However, he persisted and won
out the second time with a minimal purse of the lips for his troubles. “Yukito is fine.”

“Ah, but you're not,” Touya insisted, “and I need to be someone's support right now.”

Yue flashed him a look. “You what?”

“I can't be the thing Sakura needs to help her right now, but I don't want to be useless and I can be a
source of comfort for you,” the teen explained to the angel.

“I am a Guardian, it's my job to take care of people, not the other way around,” Yue stated.

“Yeah, but I need this, so take care of me by letting me take care of you,” Touya instructed, pulling
the androgynous being forward and kissing his eyebrow softly. “Besides, if the kaiju saw you all
upset like that, she would only feel worse. So just shut up and let me be your doting boyfriend
already, would you?”

"Are you excited about the trip? " Yukito asked as he handed Sakura her orange juice and made
himself comfortable in the seat next to her.

"Oh yes! " Sakura exclaimed, turning her attention from out of the aeroplane window and to her
Moon Guardian. "I'm so happy that Otou-san is letting me go. And thank you again, Yuki, for
coming with me."

"You don't need to thank me, Sakura-chan, it's like your father said when he found out about your
magic, you'll always have my support."

*Flashback*

Fujitaka finally awoke after sleeping for over a day. He looked around, and though he didn't know
where he was, he was not lost and he knew he knew this place from somewhere. Getting up, he
walked out into a hallway and looked around. He seemed to know which way to go to get to the
bathroom, and then once he was done, he found his way easily into a large room with only a single
high-backed chair sitting before a fire.

Feeling for a moment like he had never seen such a lonely little chair, he walked over to it. He knew
the feel of the fabric, the smell of the air in here, and he felt overwhelmingly depressed and like the
world was on his shoulders. Sinking into the chair, he laid his head back, trying to ignore the feelings
dejà vu. As he looked at the fire, he felt a tear roll down his cheek for a reason he did not
understand.
"O-Otou-san! You're awake!" Sakura's voice spoke up from behind him.

Turning in the chair, he saw his daughter standing there in the doorway with two strange creatures, which oddly enough were not entirely foreign to him. They were both staring at him in shock like they had just seen a ghost. "Sakura-san! What happened, last thing I remember is you casting some sort of... spell on me."

"He is Clow..." the lion murmured

"Otou-san... I have been keeping things from you... for a long time now. I-I'm not a normal girl. I'm a sorceress, and these are my Guardians," Sakura acknowledged at last.

Cerberus stepped forward to the man sitting in Clow's chair. The man had no fear, just a gentle acceptance of the massive and dangerous beast. "So, we finally meet face to face. I'm pleased to meet the Otou-san at last."
Fujitaka smiled pleasantly down at the Guardian. "I've never been the father of a... talking... winged lion before. It's a pleasure to meet you, umm... what is your name?"

To this the lion looked disappointed, and the angel in the background actually looked angry. "I am Cerberus, and the other back there is Yue."

"It is an honour, both of you," he said, extending a smile to the cold figure in the back as well.

"So... so you're not mad at me?" his daughter asked insecurely.

"No, why should I be?" he asked pleasantly, coming to kneel in front of her.

"I-I didn't tell you..." she reminded, in shame.

"No, but I still knew. I've always known that you and Touya-san were sensitive and special. But you've said on several occasions that you were afraid of your abilities. So, I never pushed you to confess, I knew you would come to me with it when you were ready."

"Bu-but-but--"

"Sakura-san, I am your father, and I love you dearly and wish you nothing but the best, but sometimes being the best parent isn't shielding your child from harm or to nose into their business, but to step back and let your child struggle through and find their own path while providing them with the knowledge and ability to come to you whenever they need you."
Fujitaka paused, letting this information sink in for his daughter before he continued. "Sakura-san, you are loved, by far more than you may well know, and though I may not always be right at your side when you need it, your brother, your Guardians, your friends... everyone that cares for you will be there to help you as you need it, because that's what love is." *Kcabhsalf*

Yes... Sakura thought to herself, I am loved, and because of that, because I love in return, I can get through anything. Everything will surely be alright.

Well, there you have it. Originally this and the other half of Chapter 3 that consisted of what was going on in China had all been written in a single night with large chunks of the originally intended content missing. I had written up parts of those missing pieces with the intention of one day finishing them up and releasing them as they are now. I had actually finished Chapter 3A back in December, but didn't want to put it up until 3B was complete so they could compliment each other. However, it
was a rough semester and sadly school work takes priority over hobbies. So this stood in stasis for the better part of six months until I had the time and muse to get it written out. I'm not 100% happy with the nightmare scene, it was meant to be darker and more traumatizing, but I couldn't figure out how to go about fixing that. Basically you have to remember that the most horrifying reality to Sakura is one where everyone forgets the people they love, so getting stuck in a nightmare that manifests that would be an absolute hell to her. So, the question you now have to ask yourselves is: is this just a nightmare brought on by Syaoran announcing that they were to forget about each other, or is this a vision of things to come?

Shade and Sweet Water, everyone

Keysha
Chapter 4: For Love, War, and Stores Part One

Chapter Summary

Having reached England, it is now time to go shopping. Join the Li children as they get their first taste of the famous London shopping strip Daigon Alley. All they have to do is find it first. Meanwhile, Sakura and her Guardians find themselves lost in London, only to be rescued by literally bumping into the lady fated to meet everyone that way. Rejoice the reunion with Eriol and his extended family. Part 1 of 2 for the shopping trip.

Chapter Notes

Ok, just a reminder to everyone:
Bold: Chinese
Italics: Japanese
Normal font: English

Living in the Li Clan, one tended to get up early. Each member of the family bathed or showered before beginning the long process that was dressing for the day. For Xiao Lang the process was simple, for his pants he chose a simple, black, loose-fitting design that had elastic around the ankles. He chose one of his short-sleeved mandarin style shirts that fastened simply up the front and lacked any design or distinguishing characteristics beyond the fact that it was green. From there, all he had left to do was pull a comb through his ear-length hair to remove any tangles, and sit and wait for the others to come out.

Xiefa was the next to be done, strictly on the fact that her hair was too short to do anything with. She was dressed today in a dress that on first glance seemed black, but in highlights was noticeable as a very dark green. It was ankle length with a slit up to her knee on the left side that was just an inch or two off towards the front from being on the hem line. The sleeves came down just past the shoulder and the collar veered to the right along the top of her chest. Trimmed in real gold and embroidered with a dragon on the chest and a phoenix on the skirt, she required little jewellery save for her earrings and a few bracelets on each wrist.

She smiled when she caught sight of her brother, who always had dressed down, and attempted to imagine what it must look like to everyone else to see him walking with his sisters. He noticed her smile and eyed her wearily before she came up and kissed him good morning on the cheek. "How are you to ever impress your girlfriend if you always look so plain?" she whispered before straitening up once more. He made a face of malcontent at her teasing which caused her to giggle before turning away as Fudie exited.

Fudie chose to wear a traditional styled red cheongsam in pride of their mother-country. A thick black trim went around the base of the neckline and swooped to the side to trail down the curves of her front until reaching her hips where it swerved over and vanished into the mid-thigh slit. The bottom of the dress, which came to the middle of her calves, as well as the upper rim of the collar and
the sleeveless arms were all trimmed in a thin black cord that was separated from the rest of the dress by a fine golden line. The whole of the silk was finely embroidered with a cascade of elegant flowers in gold and blue that suited her nicely and accentuated her eyes.

Her shoulder length hair was pulled up into twin buns that were adorned with gold phoenix ornaments that had red tassels hanging from them. Her earrings were small golden flowers and on her right arm she had an armlet that looked like a dragon biting its own tail. On each wrist she wore a thick bracelet with a pair of matching sapphires imbedded into them, large enough to cover the back of her wrist. She greeted her sister with an almost arrogant smile for being able to pull off a better look, and then examined her brother and rolled her eyes at his complete lack of effort.

Feimei was next to exit, unconfined as always she left her hair long and loose, letting the silky smooth texture speak for itself. She chose on this day to wear a light blue silk cheongsam that only reached down to about mid thigh. Covering the silk was little butterflies embroidered in deeper blues and pinks. The buttons that held the mandarin collar in place were small, silver flowers that had a shard of jade within the centre of each to bring out her eyes. On each wrist she wore a number of fine silver bangles that jingled together like a song of bells.

Eyeing her sisters, she bore little surprise to see how decorated Fudie was, nor how elegant Xiefa was, and took a good moment to size up whether her innocent charm or their mature beauty were more appealing this day, feature by feature. Once content that she was, though not the beautiful bloom among the dead thorns, at least not in any form of poor taste, she walked over to sit down. Upon rounding the corner, and spotting her brother slouched on the sofa however, Feimei's eyes crossed and she got a look on her face as if to imitate someone who was dead. "Oh, what an embarrassment..."

Fanren, last to exit, was commonly known as being fashionably late for everything in order to make the greatest entrance. Her waist length hair was up in one of china's traditional styles, bound and looped on top of her head, though from the front you could hardly even see the intricacies of the style. This was because she wore a hair-piece consisting of three chopsticks bound in white silk with strings of diamonds handing of the end. Where the three met there was an array of silver and gold flowers, each finely molded by expert hands and embedded with jade and sapphire.

Her dress was made of a silvery white silk embroidered with gold thread flowers. The trim was a thick, pale green and the cording was gold. It buttoned once at her neck, but then opened to reveal a triangle of skin as the hem reached out to attach to her sleeves--which were short, just covering her shoulders--before returning to the centre just at the point where her cleavage began to show in order to continue on being buttoned down the front to around the middle of her shin. The dress stretched further to her ankles with a slit up to her knees on each side. The other girls knew the dress at once as the one she spent all her money on last time they had visited Shanghai, but for the most part all they had on their mind was that she had managed to out-dress them once again.

As for Xiao Lang, he met her eyes with as much disgust as she to his. She turned to her sisters and indicated their brother with a point from her manicured thumb. "Can't we leave him behind?" she begged of them.

"Unfortunately not. We are on this trip to shop for him most prominently," Xiefa reminded.

All four girls looked at their brother, dressed as any other nobody, and gave a unit sigh. "Well, he could use the fashion sense..." Fanren admitted. The others gave a unanimous nod before, ignoring his look of horrified refusal, eight hands grasped him and drug him out to start their shopping spree.
"Oh god, I am NOT going in there!" insisted Feimei as they stood outside an old department store that looked like it hadn't had a customer in nearly a decade. The sign above the door read Purge and Dowse, Ltd.

Fudie examined the dirty crumbling red brick and sighed "Well, these English folk sure don't take very good care of their magical environment..."

"It doesn't matter. Look, it says it's closed, we can't go in anyway." Xiefa pointed out and the five Li siblings continued on walking.

The Lis had found themselves in something of a dilemma, while they were aware that Great Britain had a shopping strip secreted away somewhere named Daigon Alley, none of them had ever actually been there before. With no guide to lead them, they were left following their senses in search of the appropriate magical location.

After searching the internet for a map that they could use in their search, Xiefa had realized that London had increased it's size drastically over the last couple of decades. She theorized that such a famous place as 'London's Daigon Alley' would likely not be in any of the recent expansions and so they narrowed their search to the older sections for starters at least. But still, that had left them wandering back and forth for the last few hours as they combed the streets for the elusive entrance.

“Come on, the next one is up that way,” Xiao Lang indicated with a jerk of his head as he pressed on regardless.

“I'm getting hungry, can't we go get something to eat?” Fanren pleaded.

“A diet will do you good,” the youngest Li retorted, earning him a disgruntle squawk.

“What do you mean by that?! Are you calling me fat!!” the older twin challenged. She only got a teasing smirk in return.

"Oh gods, I hope there’s no one here that may recognize us..." grumbled Fudie, with a hand over her face to try and hide it.

"You're the one who wanted to come along!" reminded Xiefa.

"That was when I thought that we were going on a shopping trip, not stand around an old telephone booth and wait for you to figure it out..." Fudie complained, leaning against the metal strip of the corner and crossing her arms impatiently.

Xiao Lang sat over by the others, Feimei and Fanren had decided to spend their time sipping chocolate mochas while watching the eldest two across the street. Xiao Lang, who didn’t like anything that this place had to offer save for maybe chocolate milk—which he would not be caught dead drinking ever again now that he was no longer a little kid—just sat grumpily between the twins, slouched low and glaring at the lack of progress his sisters were achieving.

"How much longer is it going to take, do you think?" Feimei asked her older twin.

"That's hard to say, with the number of folded magic spots in the city... it's almost as bad as Hong Kong..." Fanren said.

"But I want to get to shopping!!" whined the youngest Li sister.
"Maybe he’ll know where to go?" Xiao Lang said, indicating a passing man who had a stronger aura then most. "One of you go ask."

"But… we don’t know him!" whined Feimei. "Why don’t you ask?" she suggested.

"Because I’m number one son and I say that you’ll do it." he replied, pulling rank to get out of doing something he didn’t want to do.

Grumbling, the youngest Li girl got to her feet and went to the man that had almost gone out of sight. “E-excuse me… Excuse me, sir? Sir?” she finally got his attention after chasing him half ways down the block. “Sorry to bother you, but I’m from out of town and I was wondering if you could direct me as to the location of Daigon Alley?”

At first the man looked too startled to reply, but slowly he took in the soft Asian skin and the nicely proportioned body that fit under rich embroidered blue silk. And smiled at the teen. “Of course, I’ll take you there myself…”

“Really? How sweet of you. Just a minute please, let me go get the others!” With that, she turned and hurried off, long brown hair bouncing around her shoulders as she ran.

“Others?” he questioned, concern darkening his tone even though the young beauty was out of hearing range. However his smile returned as not five minutes later the young teen returned with three other girls, each equally as stunning, and some little kid that didn't matter. Four under aged Asian teen beauties, sisters by the looks of them, going with him to where he could get a room for cheap...

The boy would be easy enough to stun and bind, and the girls—too young use magic outside of their classrooms—would be easy pickings after that. A few imperious curses and they'd be his to do with whatever he pleased.

“Others?” the wizard in his early forties stated to the five Asian foreigners “here we are…”

They looked at the run down little pub with varying levels of distaste, horror, and boredom. “And where exactly is here?” the young heir questioned, his eternal scowl shifting slightly to show the minor hints and traces of a look that was to say ‘oh bother’.

“The Leaky Cauldron!” He announced proudly, placing a hand on the nearest sister, Fanren's, elbow to lead them in. “Entry way to Daigon Alley, it is! We have to go through here, so you'll have to follow me once we get inside, yes?”

While Fanren dealt with a way to politely tell this British wizard to keep his hands the hell off of her, Xiao Lang scanned the people around. They seemed not to notice the building being there, so he assumed that it must be inside of a magical fold, only visible to those who had magic, or perhaps only to those who knew about it.

The Li siblings followed the older wizard into the pub all the same, though, and shared a simultaneous reaction in putting their hands to their faces at the overwhelming grunge that met them inside. Several of the siblings had to hold back the desire to cough up a lung at the thick smoky air.

“Now, wait here for a moment while I explain things to the bartender,” the man told them, leaving them by the front door.

“These English sort, they're very dirty, aren't they?” Fudie said conversationally to her siblings.
“Horrid, disgusting place,” Feimei agreed.

“About... a dozen customers, looks like rooms upstairs,” Xiefa observed.

“Who would eat in such a dump? They probably have rats and all sorts of other types of vermin,” Xiao Lang turned up his lip.

“Oh, come off it,” Fanren defended slightly. “Not all of China's shops are perfect either.”

“It is true that many of the more ancient shops are a little... rickety,” Fudie aloud, as she pulled a silk handkerchief from her pocket and wiped it along a nearby counter. “But even the shabbiest of shops still maintain their cleanliness,” she finished, showing them the soft silk that now had a blotch of brown on it from the dust and grime build up.

They were too busy with their own inter-squabbling to pay any mind to the wizard, however, as he stepped aside to talk to the owner about a room for the evening. In fact, the five siblings continued to bicker among themselves until they finally realized that the wizard was attempting to gain their attention on the third or fourth of his tries.

“Come along ladies, this way, that's right, all of you,” he called to them from where he stood at the base of the rickety looking stairwell as they manoeuvred themselves through the tables and to where the man stood. “Right up here, ladies...” he said, reaching out and grabbing hold of the elbow of the girl closest to push her up the narrow passage.

His efforts were swatted by an iron grip and a pair of honey eyes glaring up at him. “And just WHAT do you think you're doing, touching my sister like that?” demanded the young heir. “Get your filthy hands off of her!”

“Go away, kid, you bug me,” He replied, pulling his wand and casting a fast spell to knock Xiao Lang off his feet and into a nearby table.

This simplest of mistakes put a whole new momentum into play where the wizard found himself dewanded and sent flying across the room by the four Asian beauties dressed in garb fit for queens.

“Hey, toots!” one large and burly wizard called as he slapped a hand down on the elegant Fanren's shoulder. “You just cost me my drink, I think you should apologize!”

Xiao Lang, who was in the middle of dusting himself off from his little mishap with magic when he looked up at the stranger who held his second to youngest sister's shoulder. He cocked an eyebrow and shook his head, muttering to himself about how 'he shouldn't have said that', as he stepped over to the owner and politely asked for directions to Daigon Alley.

Elsewhere in the room, the other occupants of the bar stood, anticipating a fight as the elder twin snapped her head around. The wizard had to hold himself from jumping back in surprise as the warm green of her eyes flashed to the cold heartlessness of jade. “What did you just call me?” she demanded, her voice dripping with venom.

The wizard stood frozen, as if encased by the jade that her eyes reflected, unable to make his mouth work to give a suitable answer before her fist met his jaw. And that was it, a trigger like none other to start the fight. Xiefa grabbed an available mop that had been innocently slopping the floor with water and took an advantage point atop a table. She sat with her chosen weapon ready, until she was met by a flurry of sparks, to which she quickly aerialled her way over to the adjacent table and quickly lifted a serving tray to deflect the spells and even reflected a few back at their casters.
This gave the people a smart enough warning to discard their apparently useless wands and regress back to the much more primitive way of just slugging your opponent. Xiefa then began to use the mop as if it were a staff, swinging it and jabbing it, giving her the advantage of reach over those who would otherwise overpower her. But she did not ever let down the guard of the severing platter either, holding on to one handle and letting it lay across her arm like a shield.

Fudie had managed to obtain two glass mugs, and had broken them in such a way that they became fighting knuckles for her, as she rashly ploughed her way with jabs and kicks through the throng of people. Fanren also took the initiative and charged her opponents, though her style was much different, relying on momentum to carry her through from one opponent to the next, as if in some elaborate ballet.

Feimei fought much like her twin, with spins and a strategy relying heavily on momentum, but as Fanren's relied on her own personal momentum, Feimei's was more reliant on her opponents, in a duck, dodge, and redirect approach to battle. Xiao Lang, for his part, sat atop the bar's counter and massaged his sore temples as he watched the progression of the fight with something mildly akin to interest.

At one point, Xiefa's mop was broken in half, and she sent the two pieces along to Fanren who used them much like schema sticks, and was left to just fight by whipping the large metal serving tray around until her pole arm-like weapon was replaced by Xiao Lang tossing her a nearby broom.

The fight, for all the damage it ended up being worth, didn't last much longer then ten minutes or so, before the girls found themselves victorious due to a lifetime of heavy training. The only real problem at hand was Fanren's refusal to stop hitting one poor witch who had pulled her hair. But after the other three sisters, as well as Xiao Lang stepped in, she let the fact drop. Well, at least physically, she still grumbled and whined about how that wench had ruined her hairstyle.

Xiao Lang, however, proved himself capable once more of pulling rank by insisting that they leave this filthy place because it was giving him a headache. So, obediently, the four girls followed their little brother out into the back cellar where he had obtained confirmation that the shopping district they were looking for was located.

“You know...” Xiefa pointed out as they walked through the opening that was left in the wall by the bricks moving aside. “Leaving that pub isn't going to make your headache go away...”

“What are you talking about? Of course it will! I didn't start getting a headache until we were in there!” Xiao Lang objected.

To this Fudie just shook her head. “It doesn't work like that, cub. Wizards aren't like us Sorcerers, when they get together in packs, their auras blend together so bad that it just becomes a total mess. Don't you remember that from your readings?”

Xiao Lang attempted to think about it, but the headache was getting worse now that they were out in the hordes of witches and wizards. Feimei placed a cooling hand onto his hair and spoke softly. “Try not to put too much thought into it, you're headache's coming from concentrating too much. They're absolutely everywhere, and you're just so busy trying to identify one from the next, you can't hardly even think strait, can you?”

“If he can't think strait, then how is he going to go to school?” Fanren asked innocently enough, while she distracted herself in the merchandise of a nearby street vender.

But though her words were not meant to bring harm or offence, the meaning behind them ran true
enough, and brought an even darker scowl to the golden eyed boy. Feimei began massaging her younger brother's scalp, and said as comfortably as she could manage, “Just try and block it out, You di.”

“I am trying... It just hurts more!” he whined slightly, pulling away from her fingers.

At Feimei's hurt pout, Xiefa placed an arm around her shoulder. “It's alright, poor little Xiao Lang just can't concentrate enough to do something like that right now.”

“Why aren't any of you being affected by this?” Xiao Lang demanded.

“It's worse for dark aspects, who can't block the magic out,” Fudie reminded, “and Xiefa and myself are older and have had more training for our defences.”

Feimei just responded with a nod as Fudie stepped up to the place of leader. “We had best hurry up and get the shopping done with, then.”

Fanren cocked her head to the side for a moment's thought. “But... wouldn't it be better to drag the shopping trip out? I mean, he has to live in this once he starts school, right? He needs to get used to it.”

“What would probably be best is if we do the shopping in segments, and let You di rest in the middle,” Xiefa pointed out.

“Alright, it's settled then. Let's go!” Fudie said, then looked around. “Where's Xiao Lang?”

It had taken the Li sisters a good ten minutes to locate their more-grumpy than usual charge. He had wandered on ahead, shoving several people out of his way, as he marched impatiently onward, determined to get this all over with as fast as he could.

When they located him, he was demanding to know where it is they change over their money into local currency. Though the question was intelligent enough, his headache and consequential lack of concentration left him rudely insulting the unhelpful shop owners in a garbled mixture of three different dialects of Chinese, as well as Japanese.

Fanren, always one who easily got along with others, jumped in to stop any problems that may be arising. "Hi, hello... Yes... please forgive my little brother, he's tired and has had a very long morning. He tends to forget at times that not everyone can speak ten different languages..."

The owner of this particular shop, a witch that had to be in her eighties, eyed the girl in white suspiciously, as three others did their best to drag the still scowling boy away. The owner could tell upon looking at the girl that she was of the material sort, one who would buy before thinking, and pay much more than what the object may be worth. She smiled at the girl, revealing poorly kept crooked teeth. "Why of course, my dear, such a small child such as himself, he must be going to Hogwarts, yes?"

"Yes, we're here doing his school shopping, he's going into his first year," Fanren said politely, smiling back, relief washing over her that they had managed once again to avoid a conflict.

"First year, you say? Well, let me show you this, this is a sneekascope, and it's a must have for all first years!" the witch insisted. "And because you're such a sweet little girl, I'll sell it to you for only half it's worth!"
"Wow, really?" Fanren's eyes lit up, but then dulled again, "But it's not on his list..."

"Oh, well no, of course not!" the old woman thought quickly, "But that list is only for what you need in class, it's got nothing for what's going on the rest of the year!"

"Oh..." Fanren had to admit that what the woman was saying did seem to ring some note of truth. "Okay, I'll take it! Do you take yuan?"

"Do I take what?" the woman asked, face jumping to confusion and voice taking on a dead-panned tone.

"Yuan. Chinese currency. We haven't had a chance to change over our money since we got to London."

The woman looked at the brunette girl dressed in white for a moment, then pointed farther on up the street. "You want Gringotts. That's the bank. Change all your money there. Then be sure to come back so we can continue our little conversation, yes?"

Fanren really didn't pay any further attention to the woman who ran the vending booth, she just turned back to her sisters and relayed the information. "The bank's this way," and as easy as that, the five siblings wandered off.

"Well, this is it!" Fanren announced, standing proudly before the towering marble building.

"Oh, gee, what gave that away?" Fudie asked, rolling her eyes.

"The sign up there says so," Fanren replied with a snicker.

"Can we just hurry this up? My head's hurting so bad that the building looks crooked!" Xiao Lang complained.

"Um... You di? The building IS crooked..." Xiefa pointed out in what she could only hope was a comforting manor.

"Jeez, honestly? These wizarding folk need to learn how to maintain their buildings," Xiao Lang complained, marching past the tackily dressed guard goblin and through the front doors.

As his sisters followed, Feimei took a moment to examine the rhyme engraved onto one of the doors. "Not a very friendly welcoming, is it? They must do terribly during tourist season..."

"Hey, you!" Fudie called to a nearby goblin as it scurried past with a pile of papers. "Yeah, you. Where's the debit machine?"

"Debit...?" the small creature repeated, looking at the eldest Li.

"Yeah, you know... MasterCard, Visa..." Feimei said, coming to Fudie's side and pulling out one of her many pieces of plastic.

"My lord, you really don't know what we're talking about, do you?" Xiefa let her jaw drop at that one.

"You really need to get out more, buddy," Fanren pointed out, crossing her arms and looking annoyed.

"And I thought Visa was accepted everywhere..." Feimei pouted, looking at the card she had in
her hand.

"No worries, I'm sure they're just behind the times, I mean look at what he's wearing," Xiefa comforted, placing a hand around her youngest sister's shoulders.

"I'd rather not, thanks," was Feimei's reply.

"Who cares about that, we've got cash on us!" Xiao Lang cut in before the girls had a chance to derail the conversation further, already standing before a near-by teller.

"You di's right. We can just hit a debit machine tomorrow before we come in and everything will be cool," Xiefa agreed, slipping over to where the littlest Li stood. Feimei followed, as there seemed to be no other intelligent thing to do at the moment, and the others followed.

Together they poured out all of their money onto the counter as Xiao Lang looked up at the goblin with a 'what are you gonna do about it' sort of look. Grumbling the magical creature shifted through all the change with it's long fingers, then turned and opened a drawer behind him. He turned around once more with 12 gallions, 7 sickles, and 4 knuts.

Fudie placed her hand over the stack of gallions and waved the others back. "We'll just take these," the goblin nodded, counted out what he was owed of the yuan, and then carried it off. The girls took their money and left.

"So, where to?" Xiao Lang asked as they stepped out of the bank, not really caring about their answer and mostly predicting them already.

"The clothing store," Fudie answered at once.

"Yes, definitely the clothing store," Fanren agreed. Xiao Lang blinked when it wasn't immediately followed by Feimei's voice insisting.

"I want to go and check out what kind of books they have here. I'm fascinated with the prospect of European magic, and wizardry at that. It must have such depths of change from our own magic..." Xiefa gushed to no one's great surprise.

"I'd... rather like to know what wand You di will end up with," Feimei piped up.

There were a few nods of agreement, but the vote was still quite split. "So... books, clothes, or wand?"

"Oh, no! Not books! We don't have any car, and I am not going to be seen carrying around a large pile of books all over London!" Fanren vetoed.

"She's right, I don't want to carry all those heavy books everywhere!" Feimei agreed.

"Point taken, we'll do the books tomorrow when we can bring along a vehicle," Xiefa gave in.

"So then, wand or clothes?" Fudie asked, looking around for a vote.

"We already passed the clothing store, so let's continue onward to find the wands then come back for his robes," Xiefa thought logically.

When no one objected with the strategist's plan, Xiao Lang turned and continued to push his way
further up the alley. As it turned out, the wand shop was a narrow, shabby building with golden letters above the door indicating the company—Olivander’s—what they did—make wands—and when they supposedly came into business.

It was this third bit of information that the Li family looked at the longest, however. “382 BC?” Feimei pondered, looking at the sign with an air of innocence. “That was a long time ago…” “2377 years ago,” Fudie stated.

“Were wands even in existence that long ago?” Feimei asked anyone who may know the answer. “78,” Xiefa announced in the background. “What?” Fudie asked, turning to the second of the Li’s to verify that she was indeed being corrected.

“Was the Li family even in existence back then?” Feimei continued to ask, ignoring the argument of exactly how many years ago it was and just being happy to leave it as old.

“2378; going from a positive to a negative, the zero becomes a significant number in the equation and must therefore be counted,” Xiefa explained to the eldest.

“Of course we were around back then! The Li Clan is one of the oldest in China! We are superior to these British fools, we even predate recordable history!” Fanren boasted.

“Is there a year zero? I don't think there is,” Fudie countered. “I mean, the Europeans are the ones who made the numbering system, and the stupid Europeans didn't even know what a zero was for most of history.” “Hmm, I see your point. Maybe you're right?” Xiefa considered.

“Besides,” added Xiao Lang who was staring at the number with minor boredom, “It's not like the shop or this alley were here back then. They probably just sneak the number back one every few years for notoriety sake.”

With that, Xiao Lang entered the wand shop, followed closely by his sisters. “It looks like a library,” muttered one of the twins.

“It doesn't smell much like one though,” commented the other.

Xiao Lang’s honey eyes skimmed the shop carefully, the ancient sources of magic were much more pronounced in this dusty old building than out in the crowded streets. He took this moment to actually stop and analyze the magical fluctuations. They appeared to be categorized into segments, which also helped him to focus more clearly on them.

He felt very clearly the purity of the mother phoenix's fire, the burning spirit of righteousness and the immortal spirit of maternity and love. The fire was a deadly element, when out of control it could devastate and destroy, but it also served to heal and cleanse away evil for a new start, refreshed so that it could grow back stronger than before.

He felt, also, the presence of fast moving water. Cool and soothing to the touch, never exerting itself over hard ground, always taking the easy path, but also always going. Its flow could almost whisk him away, throw him against the rocks, and rake him against it’s bed. It chose it's path and moved
forward, ever-flowing, ever-patient. It would erode away slowly at it's opponent until it dug itself to the heart.

The dragon's wind, Xiao Lang's own element, was free and unconfined. Flowing higher than any mountain, and settled below every ant, it was everywhere. Grand and strong, and a giver of life, it was the power of yang, father of the elements. Capable of being either a playful breeze or a deadly tornado, all life was subjugated to it's will.

And then, of course, the all encompassing, peaceful wood. Ancient and wise, patient and loving, everything that a mother could possibly be. The perfect teacher, the perfect learner, the essence that made up the soul of sorcery. Calm and calculating, awaiting the decisions of others and acting on them accordingly.

"Their missing two..." Xiao Lang mumbled, more to himself then his sisters. "Earth and thunder..."

"You're out of luck, Fanren..." teased Xiefa, who was rewarded with a sticking out of Fanren's tongue.

They were halted from any further chance of banter by the entrance of an old man with eyes like fogged ice. He eyed the large group of five who stood and waited to be served. Each one radiated their own distinctive aura of power and confidence that brought a look to the old man's face that only those who were old and omniscient could achieve.

"Welcome, welcome children. I am Mr. Olivander. How many wands can I provide you with this fine day?" he asked, looking from one to the next.

"Just one," Fudie replied, indicating her little brother.

"Ah, yes... Hogwarts bound, I suppose? Lucky boy indeed, never has that fine old school seen such a great Headmaster..."

Xiao Lang ignored his speech and turned to Feimei, "See? I told you the sign was phony. There's no way the shop could have stayed under one family's management for nearly two and a half millennia."

"Maybe there was a corporate take over?" Feimei pondered.

"Or maybe they changed the name of the store when the family name changed," Fanren suggested.

"But that wouldn't really be being around for all that time, would it?" Fudie pointed out.

Not understanding the quarrelling between the Asian family, Mr. Olivander cleared his throat. Politey the five siblings looked at him. "May I, ah, ask what circle you use, Mr..."

"Li. He uses the Clow circle," Fudie sniffed.

"Ah now, not many a customer comes in who follows Clow Reed's discipline," Olivander said, indicating that the family should follow him into a room in the back. This, like the one prior, was lined with shelves, stacked with boxes containing wands, but unlike the other room, this was much smaller, and on the end of each box a circle was drawn.

"Well, not everyone is a direct descendant, now are they?" Fudie bragged, and the other three sisters
looked duly haughty, Xiao Lang however just seemed to sulk in annoyance at the reminder.

"Let's see, let's see... Clow circle... Ah, here we are!" Mr. Olivander muttered to himself, pulling off the shelf only four separate boxes. "This is all I have with the Clow circle on it. Try this one: birch at 9 ¾ inch, has a white feather core said to be the feather of--"

“Yue,” Xiao Lang spoke, recognizing the distinct signature of the Moon Guardian even with so little being radiated. The recognition pulled the curiosity of his sisters as they too tried to memorize the presence. He took it and examined it for a moment, before shaking his head and handing it back.

"Then how about this: 12 inches exactly, made of hawthorn with a core of a mermaid spine?"

Xiao Lang didn't even take a hold of it before shaking his head, "I don't think that one is for me," he informed.

Mr. Olivander was about to present the next wand when a clanging bell was heard all throughout the shop. "Well, here are the other two, please forgive me, I must see to these customers," and with that he hurried back to the front of his shop.

Once he was gone, Xiao Lang examined the other two in his own time. One was long and thin, unusually so, in fact. It, too, had the distinctive energy of the flame to it. He easily imagined Fudie using something like this one, but for Xiao Lang himself, it was no good.

The other, in contrast, was short and a little on the thick side. It held the grounding solid presence of earth, and though it cleared his head to be holding it, he doubted whether he would be successful trying to cast magic with it.

Feeling slightly at a loss, Xiao Lang abandoned the four wands he had been presented with, and instead began wondering up and down the shelves, running his fingers along all the circles and finding a simple sort of amusement in making them light up one at a time as he touched them. He soon found himself, however, hovering around a certain area of the shelf.

Repeating the motion over that section again and again, Xiao Lang finally came to stand before a circle that was strange to him. Knowing runes well enough, he was able to tell that it was a moon circle, but from what family it originated, even from what part of the world, Xiao Lang didn't know.

He supposed it was local, because there were many of them here. He stood tapping the symbols of each one until he finally decided to take one out and look at it. It wasn't too terribly long, and was a nice rich shade, the tree this branch had been taken from had been a good, healthy, strong old oak. Under his fingers he could feel a rhythmic swirl to the magic current not unlike a heartbeat.

The power in it surged and welled, warred and came to rest in an endless dance. And something about it was so hypnotically familiar that it put him at ease. The way the energy moved back and forth, back and forth, he had to move with it, back and forth, without even realizing he was doing it, back and forth, back and forth, back and--

"You di? Have you found something?"

Feimei's words broke his trance and he turned to look back at the youngest of the ladies. Nodding, he raised his hands slightly indicating the object which he held and replied, "I found this..."

She smiled at him in a very sisterly way, and held out her hand for him to take. He put the wand back in it's box and brought it over to her, and though he didn't take her hand like some small child, he did stand at her side trustingly.
Accepting that to be what it is, she instead laid her hand between his shoulder blades and together the youngest two of the Lis returned to the other three just as Olivander came back into the room.

"Ah, Mr. Li, have you found a wand that's to your liking yet?" he asked in a professional yet not unfriendly manner.

"I have. I've decided I will have this one," he stated, handing the box to the elderly salesman.

Mr. Olivander hesitated for only a moment before taking the box offered. He seemed to gauge Xiao Lang on some higher unknown level. This was a sensation that, though not unfamiliar to the Li children, was not altogether welcome by them. "Interesting..." he finally said at length. "Oak, just over eight inches, core of werewolf heartstring," he rattled off out of habit.

However, he remained seemingly unawares of the youths mounting curiosity as he turned once more in an almost scolding manner to Xiao Lang. "This is a very temperamental wand, Mr. Li, I'm not sure if it's suited for a child. It requires a powerful wielder with an unshakable will. The consequences to casting anything less--"

He was interrupted by the sound of a very feminine giggle. "Moody, hot-headed, and stubborn, it sounds just like our little Xiao Lang, doesn't it?" Fanren teased.

"I-I do not believe you quite understand the ramifications of--"

"Save your breath, old man," Fudie spoke up, shaking her head tiredly. "The more you insist it's too much for him, the more he'll insist its the only one he'll have." She then waved a dismissive hand. "Let him have it, it suits him. Perhaps it may even teach him some humility."

"Oh, I doubt that!" Feimei spoke up. "Knowing Xiao Lang, he'll work at it off in some little corner somewhere until he has it mastered. He's always taking the hardest rout for things, you know that!"

Xiao Lang began to blush under their scrutiny, and Xiefa curled her fingers through his bangs "Why did you choose that particular wand, anyway, You di?"

He shrugged a little self consciously, "I just liked the feel of it when I picked it up."

Olivander shook his head in disbelieving wonder at their lacking interest in listening to him. "Well I'll be... maybe it really WAS Clow Reed that requested them made..."

This caught the sibling's attentions, causing them to raise their eyebrows in curiosity. "What do you mean by that?" Fudie demanded as they followed the owner back to the front of his shop.

"Oh, nothing much, it's just a long time ago, when I was still just getting into the business, a man came into my shop and requested the creation of five wands made out of some material he had with him. He was very specific about the wands, too. He dropped his name as Clow Reed--not that I believed him, of course, who would, when dealing with such an infamous hermit? You'd expect him just to make his own."

"But I made the wands to his request, as it is my job to do, and waited for him to return to retrieve them. But I waited in vain, as the man never came back. I've only sold one of them since then, and that was a good seven years ago to a young lady. No one else has been in requesting one of his circles," Olivander trailed off. "That one there was one of the five that he requested, and I suppose if you really are his descendant then it belongs with you. Come on out front and I'll ring it up for you."

And with that, the wand was purchased and the Li's were on their way. The next stop on their little family outing had Xiao Lang's poor mood plummeting even further than before. As any male will tell
you, hell has no torture as clothes shopping with a woman, and the young heir had four.

Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions was a prettyish shade of green with a large sign above the doorway. In the windows, were several marionettes that would change poses every minute or two, modelling some of the new fall fashions. As Xiao Lang pushed open the door and led the others into the reception area beyond, a ringing could be heard like the chime of a bell; however, there was no indication of one in sight.

Brushing aside the oddity of anyone who would bother casting such a charm rather than just putting up a bell to begin with, the young heir turned from the door just as a short, plump woman bustled up. "My! What exquisite robes you girls have! Where ever did you have them made?" the woman asked.

"In China," Fudie responded, "by our family's tailor."

"Well, mine was bought in Shanghai," Fanren pointed out.

"Ah, so you come from China, then?" the woman asked conversationally as she led them in to one of the fitting rooms.

"Yes. Our brother has a special invitation as an exchange student in Hogwarts," Feimei said in like.

"School robes it is, then! Step up on here and I'll fetch them for you." As Xiao Lang stepped up onto the platform, he was left by his sisters to look at himself in the angled mirrors as they wondered back out to look at the designs in the windows and racks. He only had to wait about three minutes for the woman to come back in with some robes draped across her arm.

They weren't exactly the type of robes Xiao Lang was used to wearing, namely his green robes he wore while he assisted Sakura in the capturing of the cards the previous year. These ones were black and looked more like dresses, there were no slits in the skirt part of the robes and Xiao Lang had to refrain from cringing at the lack of mobility one was restricted to in such a getup.

The collar was wide and loose, like a t-shirt, easy to slip over the head without complexities such as buttons or sashes. The sleeves were long, and though no where near as full as what he was used to in robes, were loose enough not to catch as you moved your arm around. The belt was buckled with a simple square gold clasp that lacked any design or trick to it's buckle.

After slipping the first robe on over his head, Xiao Lang found the length to be rather for one many inches taller than he himself was. The woman stifled a chuckle at the incredulous look Xiao Lang shot her. "It's very rare that I get someone Hogwarts bound that's so small. It will take a fair bit of tailoring to get them to fit right."

"Don't you simply have a spell or something that can fix it?" the eleven year old asked incredulously as the elderly witch began pinning and tucking at the loose robes.

"There are, but the result is always shoddy at best. To get quality results, you need to take the time to do the work properly." The heir pulled a face in response, but admitted silently that she had a point. So with a sigh, he resigned himself to his fate of standing on a platform for the next hour as she worked away at getting the three sets of school robes, a set of work robes, a big pointy hat, and two different cloaks for varying weather conditions all fitted to his small stature.

On top of his purchase, his sisters also added each their own large arm load of multi-coloured fabric. Whether they were robes or just the fabric to make them (probably both, knowing his sisters) Xiao Lang could neither tell nor cared to find out in his present predicament. His head felt like someone had wedged a chisel between the two halves of his brain and let a toddler go at it with a ten ton
"Can we go now?" he asked with a tinge of impatience as they left the shop.

"Yes, I think that would be for the best," Fudie agreed, easily catching Fanren by the elbow as her eyes began drawing her in the direction of another street vendor. The siblings left the Leaky Cauldron not even five minutes later and hailed a taxi. They chatted idly during the drive, Feimei finally got to use her Visa to pay the driver, and they all went up to their hotel room. The girls all played with trying on their new clothes while Xiao Lang locked his door and took a nap.

The plane finally pulled to a stop and the seat belt sign ceased flashing. Yukito smiled down at his young charge who had fallen asleep somewhere over central China. He nudged her gently, encouraging her to stir both physically and through the link he shared with her via Yue. She mumbled something about there not being school today, and this earned a chuckle from her escort. "Sakura-chan," he prompted once again. "The plane has stopped, we're in London now..."

"Mmm...? London?" She blinked the sleepiness from her eyes and looked questioningly at Yukito before her memory kicked in and she smiled at him. "Are we going to go shopping now?" She asked, standing up and stretching.

"No, it's too late to go now. By the time we got there the stores would all be closed. We'll go tomorrow."

"Too late? Isn't it morning yet?" Sakura whined a little as she picked up her handbag. From within it Kero began to get active, and Sakura put a hand on him to tell him not to come out yet.

"Not yet, Sakura-chan, London is in a different time zone, remember?" With a whimper and some mutterings about less then favourable situations, she resigned herself to hang sleepily off of her brother's boyfriend's hand.

He guided her out, the only child among all the people dressed in business suits. They collected their luggage, Sakura's small pink suitcase stood out in the rotation like a sore thumb, but they had to hunt for a bit to find Yukito's green duffel bag. Once they had all of their luggage, they went out to get a taxi.

Alright Yue, where do we go now? Though most people wouldn't know it for his introverted nature, Yue actually had quite a lot to say. Too much, most of the time, it seemed. In fact, Yukito felt slightly bad in saying it, but Yue was very opinionated. Having his mind connected to Yue like it was had its moments of great annoyance, especially where his own wants conflicted with his alter ego's. Yue, it turned out, was quite god at throwing mental temper tantrums. And so the complete silence in response to Yukito's question was surprising, especially being Yue tended to like ordering Yukito around. Yue?

The silence drug on for a moment more before Yue's cold tone floated forward. This is different, he admitted, almost sounding embarrassed. They did not have planes when I was here last, I do not know where this is. He pointed out indignantly.

With a sigh, Yukito shouldered his bag and took hold of Sakura's suitcase. "Yue doesn't know his way from the airport, so we're going to have to find somewhere he recognizes first," he explained apologetically to Sakura.

"Okay," she replied, more awake now and willing to be active. "Are you really okay carrying
everything, Yuki?"

"It's fine. Come along."

"Stupid Yue! Doesn't even know his way around London where we spent so long!" Kero's voice came from the handbag.

Sakura opened it and looked in at her little golden Guardian. "Does Kero-chan know how to get there?" she asked hopefully.

"Do I know? Of course I know! I know London like the back of my paw!" he said confidently. Yukito had to nearly bite his tongue to hold back Yue's retort to that as Sakura pulled her head back to let Kero out. At once the small yellow animal shot to the sky, the faster he went meant the less chance there was that anyone would see him. He flew up as high as he could manage while still making out streets, and looked carefully at everything. He knew simply and at once that Yue was merely lost from the immense changes that had come to this metropolis, but he would not admit that at any cost.

After taking in a similar pattern of roads that he remembered around the area of Daigon Alley, he let himself drop back down until sitting with his upper body poking out of the hand-bag. "We need to go that way," he told them, pointing in the direction with his paw.

Jealousy and a feeling of being insufficient swarmed up from the recesses of Yue's mind. Yukito understood at once, but still took Sakura in the direction indicated by the little golden beast. On Sakura's insistence, she was allowed to pull her own suitcase behind herself and she did her best to keep up. It was after a good fifteen minutes of walking that Yukito stopped and turned around, "Sakura-chan, I can take that for you if you need me to..." he called back to her.

"No! You have enough things you're carrying already!" she insisted once she got about five feet away.

Yukito opened his mouth again to protest when something knocked into him. He was sturdier than he looked, and heavier than whatever it was, so he merely stumbled, but the other one was small and light enough to fall to the ground. Turning quickly, Yukito noticed it was a woman who had come out of the store to his left, arms laden with bags so she couldn't see him. "Oh, I'm sorry, miss!" he apologized, putting down the duffel bag to help collect her scattered groceries.

"Oh, no, it's alright, it was my fault! I'm too clumsy, I should have been watching where I was going!" she insisted, also grabbing for her apples that were starting to roll towards the street.

"Mi-Mizuki-sensei?!" Sakura stammered. Both woman and Guardian looked at Sakura in surprise, before finally looking at each other in realization.

"Mizuki-san!" Yukito cried in delight.

"Mizuki-san!" "Yukito-san? Sakura-chan?" she questioned in a general state of confusion. But that feeling was quickly pushed aside when she lift a dripping carton of eggs. "M-my eggs..."

"Oh, I'm very sorry, please, let me replace them," Yukito insisted, pulling out his wallet.

Kaho smiled up at them all. "No need, it's okay. I can go out again tomorrow and get more. Come, everyone will be thrilled to see you!" she said, gathering her refilled bags and getting at last to her feet.

Anxious to see Eriol and the others again, Sakura did not even argue when Yukito took hold of the
suitcase that she had abandoned in favour of helping the clean up. The three walked together for a
good ten blocks or so before coming to a large Victorian mansion. Kaho lead the way up to the front
door, shifted her bags for a moment before she pulled out her keys and unlocked the door. Opening it
up, she called out, "I'm home!" before excusing herself to go and put away her groceries.

"Welcome back, Kaho!" a voice they quickly recognized as Eriol's came from further in.

Sakura hurried towards where she heard his call and flung herself around his neck in a warm
greeting. "Eriol-kun!" she cried as she made contact.

The small sorcerer literally jumped in surprise at her sudden contact with him and looked up at her
with wide eyes. "Sakura-san?" at her smile, he recomposed himself and returned the gesture. "My
dear child, whatever are you doing here? You weren't due to show up for another few days!"

Blinking confusedly at him, she finally smiled and said, "I'm sorry that I'm early."

He chuckled in reply to her innocent politeness and shook his head. "No, no, it's fine. I was just
intending to go and collect you from the airport myself. Please, treat my home as your own."

"Oh, okay," she said happily, and then seemed to notice something. "But... Eriol-kun, if you can't
see the future anymore, how did you know we would be coming?"

To this Eriol smiled, "Though I do no longer know everything, it takes so long for time to change by
the power of the heart alone that the memories I have from when I still could, guide me through all
things without question."

"So, my spell didn't work?" Sakura asked apologetically.

"No, on the contrary it did, as I said, I was not expecting you for another few days..."

"But you were still expecting us," she pointed out, to which he gave a sad nod.

"So is the nature of dark magic..." he then smiled at her. "So, how long will you be staying with
us?"

"Hoe! But we can't intrude like that!" Sakura insisted.

"Nonsense! You are the daughter of my other half! You are family to me, and I insist that you treat
my home as if it were yours!"

"Ha-hai..." she said, blushing. "We were going to stay for three days unless something happens to
Yuki," she indicated, turning around to look at Yukito who stood patiently at the door.

In Yukito's eyes there shone through a troubled longing felt by Yue, though he smiled in greeting to
the ancient sorcerer all the same.

Eriol smiled back for a moment, understanding locked in the puzzling maze that was his look, before
turning to Sakura and smiling lovingly. "I am very glad, I have missed you all greatly and have
been longing for company."

With that said, Eriol called Nakuru in to lead Sakura and Yukito to their rooms. After the initial
settling in was complete, Sakura insisted in helping to prepare dinner in payment for letting them stay
at the house. Nakuru shrugged and showed her the way down there, along with Kero who was
interested in anything involving food. Yukito, on the other hand, found his feet had carried him back
to Eriol, instead. The small sorcerer was waiting expectantly when he entered. "What is bothering
you, Yue?" he asked, though his tone gave the impression he already knew.

With no reason not to, Yue drew himself forward within the psyche of his host. "Master... have I somehow failed you?" he asked, full of self-doubt as he knelt before the sorcerer.

"Now, Yue, what would ever give you that impression?"

"You didn't want me, Master!"

"Now when did I ever say that?"

"You replaced me, Master, with that one Ruby Moon."

"Yue... How many times must I explain it to you? I am not Clow Reed. Clow Reed is dead. My name is Eriol."

"But Master, you are his reincarnation!"

"I am half of it, yes. But so is Fujitaka, who you live with!"

"It's not the same, he doesn't know me! Not like you do, Master!"

"I am not your master, Yue," Eriol stated firmly as he stood and walked away. But the memories of his last life's guardians caused him to stop and sigh. "Yue... Before Clow Reed died, quite some time before in fact, he had foreseen the existences that were both I and Fujitaka. He knew that the dark magic he himself possessed would be capable of splitting the soul, but not the magic or memories themselves. And seeing as I bear his power, not only would I face the same obstacles, but also my power would never work against Fujitaka."

"But what does that have to do with anything?" Yue demanded.

"Simply this: Though we were both his reincarnations, I had all his power while Fujitaka had nothing. You, Yue, as well as Cerberus, were left with Fujitaka because he was the part of Clow that needed you the most. And more than that, Clow knew Fujitaka was going to have Touya-san and Sakura-san, and he looked at them very much as his own children. He chose to give you to them because he wanted the very best protecting his family."

"I am... the best?" Yue asked, awed at being referred to as such.

Eriol smiled down at him. "Clow poured all his heart and soul into making you and Cerberus, Yue. That's why you surpass all other Guardians by so much. And now Sakura-san needs you to be there for her to protect her, as well as her family, until she comes into her true power. And even after she does, she needs your centuries of wisdom to help her live out the rest of her life. I have Clow's memories, I have the wisdom already. So I ask you, as the last of Clow Reed, to guard and protect my other half and his family."

Pride filled Yue at this moment like Eriol had never seen with his own eyes. Yue was the best of Guardians. Clow was intrusting his most precious family in Yue and Cerberus's care. Yue was important. "I will not let you down, Master," and with that Yue stood and went to go find his Mistress.

Nakuru stopped before the door to the kitchen. "This is it, have fun!" before she turned and continued on walking.
Kero zoomed around the corner into the kitchen before Sakura even got there. "Hey! Nee-san! What's to eat?"

"Kobanwa, Kero-chan. Are you here to help?" Kaho asked pleasantly.

"He's here to sneak snacks while we're making them..." Sakura said as she came up to Kaho's side. "Where is the aprons?"

"Right in the cupboard over there," Kaho told her. "Usually Eriol would be in helping me, but he said he has work to do tonight, so I guess it will just be us."

That is when a noise from down the hall reached Kero's ears. "Hey, Nee-chan, what's that?"

"What's what?"

"That music... it sounds distinctly like a video game."

"Oh, probably Nakuru managed to rope Spinel into playing with her again," Kaho announced. Kero was at once floating out of the room to go and see what they were playing.

"What are we going to make?" Sakura asked.

"I don't know. I'm not a very good cook." Kaho admitted. "What can you make?"

"I'm good at making pancakes..." Sakura said, for lack of anything better to suggest.

"Okay, you start on that, I'm pretty sure the mix is in that cupboard over there and the pans are in here. Hmmm... what can I make... Oh! I know! I can make rice!" and so began the preparation for dinner...

"Oh, common Suppi! At least try and play!" Nakuru complained. "I'm wiping the walls with you!"

"Who is this 'Suppi' you keep talking to? There is no one here besides you and me," Spinel replied indignantly, mindlessly pressing the occasional button on the controller.

Kero chose that moment to fly up over Spinel. He hovered their and watched the two playing the game, and sure enough, Nakuru was kicking some serious butt. "Oh man, you suck," he informed the blue Sun Guardian.

"Thank you for the observation, Cerberus," Spinel growled out annoyed.

"Kero-chan's right, you know, you do suck," Nakuru informed 'helpfully' as she beat her opposite once again.

"I could do better then that with my eyes closed!" Kero bragged.

"Really...?" Nakuru asked, intrigued. She shoved Spinel aside and pushed Kero down in his place. "Show me."

And thus it began, a bonding of beasts so different, yet so the same.

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It was quarter past six when Xiefa cantripped her way into Xiao Lang's room. He still lay asleep, which was rare for him, and she smiled at the fact that he held the little winged teddy bear so tenderly as he did so. She took his shoulder and gently shook it, stirring him from his sleep. "Good morning,
"sleepy head."

"Mmm?" the boy asked, then rubbed the sleep from his eye and tried again. "Morning already?"

Sheifa chuckled at him, "No, it's only evening. But it's time to get up, we've decided to have dinner here, then Feimei says there's going to be a performance on tonight at The Royal Opera House, and Fudie says that we shouldn't miss the cultural experience while we're here anyway."

"In other words she's bored and doesn't want to go somewhere alone," he paraphrased, already feeling much better than he had earlier that day.

"Quite. But you know how she gets if we try and deny her her way at times like this."

"Absolutely impossible," Xiao Lang agreed. He spent another few minutes staring blankly at the bed's canopy above before rolling over and pulling himself up to a sitting position.

"Okay, fine. I'm up."

"So, are you going to tell the others about your little girlfriend, or are you going to just leave them to wonder on where the little cute toy came from?" his second oldest sister teased, eyeing the toy he left in the middle of his bed.

Xiao Lang flushed at the sudden change of topic and snatched Sakura-teddy up quickly and shoved it back in his suitcase. "Mind your own business!" then, as an afterthought he added a sullen: "and she's not my girlfriend..."

"Indeed? Does this mean you'll cradle just any girl's teddy bear in your sleep?" Xiefa asked, making herself comfortable on her brother's bed.

"Aren't we going to dinner?" he changed the subject. When Xiefa only sat and laughed at him, he grabbed her arm and pulled. "Quit that! Get up! It's time to go!"

Still laughing at her brothers expense, the lady in green let herself be pulled from the bed and out the door.

Never had the lonely mansion at the end of Reedington Drive seen such a party of people. Four Guardians and three sorcerers of varying levels of supreme power all sat before a table the prepared meal from the two young ladies. The meal was diverse in variety and taste, and while Kaho sat proudly presenting the meal to those who wished to eat it, Sakura was flushed in embarrassment.

You see, the meal consisted of the following dishes: pancakes, rice, instant-ramen, a salad, grilled cheese sandwiches, fresh fruit strips, spaghetti, chicken noodle soup, and omelets.

Eriol sat there at the head of the table, with his hands folded before his face and grinning to the point of tears. Sakura saw the tears in his eyes and lowered her head in shame. "I'm sorry it's no good, but-"

"No, no, Sakura-san! It's wonderful. It's beyond perfect, because you made it with your heart," he said, giving her a kiss on the forehead. "I am just... unaccustomed to the family life is all. I am just very, very happy."

The fact that they had made him so happy brought a smile and a blush to the faces of both the chefs.
"But Eriol-kun, you have a family..." Sakura pointed out, indicating Kaho and his Guardians.

"Yes," he agreed, taking her hand lovingly. "But soon I hope that you will come to see me as family, too," he told her, a longing in his voice.

Sakura looked a little surprised for a moment, before breaking out into one of her patented smiles. "I would like that."

"Well, enough of such things! Let us eat!" Eriol said, gesturing for everyone to help themselves.

The meal was entertaining, even with the odd assortment of choices; talk was in abundance with the variety of participants present, and laughter rang and echoed off of every bare wall and shadowed corner the mansion had to offer. Even after the food was gone, they sat and talked and were merry until midnight had come and went. It wasn't until Sakura fell asleep at the table that it was admitted that all should probably go to bed. So after Yukito laid his Mistress down to sleep, he himself went and rested as well.

Chapter End Notes

So there you have it, the first part of the edited “For Love War and Stores” monster chapter(s) this one ending at 15 pages and over 11,000 words. For those who have read the original chapter previously, you may notice that the order of things has been rather rearranged. There's nothing I could do about it, as the events of one of Sakura's days are being removed from the story and so I had to shuffle everything as a result.

For those that are interested in my interpretations, here's a little on the Li sisters: Fudie, born 1976, the lady in red, a dark fire elementalist (so she's a sun). Her weapon of choice is the fighting claws. Her personality is said to be very strong and duty bound, she is highly traditionalist and holds her clan above all else, including herself and her family. Xiefa, born 1978, the one in green, her power is a natural trinity between wind, water, and earth, making her a wood elementalist (moon, dark). Her prime weapon type is the spear and shield. As for her nature, she is the family strategist and also the maternal one of the girls. She is Xiao Lang's favourite sister. Fanren, the older twin, born 1980, she's the one in yellow in the movie, her element is earth (sun, light). She fights with the Chinese twin maces. She's got an easy-going personality and likes having lots of trinkets. Feimei, the younger twin, also born in 1980, wears blue, uses water as her element (moon, light). She fights with the sickle chain. Something of a free spirit, wonderful at potions, suffers from minor cases of claustrophobia. And if anyone's interested, Xiao Lang's element is wind, though he is studying to learn to master all the elements like his mother has. Yelan, their mother, is naturally a thunder, made up of the trinity of fire, earth, and water (sun, dark).

The point to pay attention to in this chapter is that perception effects interpretation of events. For Harry, who longed for something different from the normality of his upbringing, the medieval and bizarre setting of the magical world was given a promising light. He saw everything that was strange or different as amazing and fun. That being said, pay note to how the Li family observes all of the same locations and gain insight to the way the family was taught to think.

Well, that's it for now, and remember everyone, be sure to review! Critiques are loved, flames are tolerated, and all other comments are inspiration!
Shade and Sweet Water!
Key
Chapter 5: For Love, War, and Stores Part 2

Chapter Summary

The second part of the shopping trip, where both Sakura and Xiao Lang wander Daigon Alley to collect their school supplies. Eriol progresses the subplots and enjoys a bit of family life, while the Weasley twins get bored and start a pranking war against the Marauders.

Chapter Notes

Just cause it's been a while, please remember:

"Bold is being said in Chinese"

"And italicized is being said in Japanese"

"And normal is being said in English."

And italics outside of quotation is thought or written words.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was just as the first of the predawn light started to make its way into Xiao Lang's hotel room that the young boy awoke. The cultural exploration they had indulged upon the night before had ensured that they hadn't returned home until after midnight, though it had admittedly been a very fascinating performance.

However, agreeing to all head out to finish their mandatory shopping first thing in the morning had driven them all to bed as soon as they returned to their suite. It was when Xiao Lang came from the shower, towelling his hair as he walked, that he noticed something to be wrong. Well, not wrong exactly, but his sisters all sat in a row-already dressed for the day-with rather peculiar smiles on their faces.

He barely opened his mouth with the intent to ask what was going on when suddenly he found himself pounced by all four giggling girls. As they each took a limb and began carting him off to his room, Fudie winked down at him and announced "We've come to an agreement. You have no fashion sense and we can't be seen going everywhere with a dorky looking brother, so we're going to help you."

"Help?" he squeaked out, dreading what they could have in mind at such a statement.

His only response was four smiles which some part of his brain registered as having been inherited from Clow Reed.

August 18th, 7 AM found Sirius coming down the stairs into the kitchen with his hair charmed to
have bright pink streaks in it. He sat, quietly fuming, next to Remus, who couldn't quite manage to 
stifle the smile at the sight of his friend, nor could he avoid looking at him from the corner of his eye.

"Your doing?" Sirius almost snarled at his best friend.

"Oh, honestly Padfoot, I haven't done anything so mundane since third year, and you know it," 
Remus responded with an offended snort.

"The twins, then," concluded the dog-man. "This has a distinctive air of a challenge, you know. 
They could also use some lessons on class," Sirius mused, slowly gaining something of a smirk.

"Care for some assistance?" Remus asked, pulling forth a smile that had to have the dust shook from 
it and the rust oiled away to manage to be pulled on his old face.

Eriol lovingly pulled a brush through Kaho's long auburn hair as she sat and fixed her makeup. He 
brought a fist full up to his lips and kissed it adoringly, treasuring the silky-soft texture and the floral 
shampoo scent. Kaho smiled at his reflection in the mirror, amused by his small acts of affection.

The moment was ruined all too quickly by the thundering of footsteps down the hall out the door. 
"Akizuki-san! Give that back! It's mine! To-ya gave it to me!" Yukito's usually calm voice cried from 
the other side of the door, for once sounding truly agitated.

"Make me!" came Nakuru's teasing response. There was the sound of something heavy hitting the 
ground followed by a minor scuffle and a girlish squeal before they heard Nakuru call out "Kero-
chan, catch!"

As two voices rose in laughter and Yukito's voice carried farther down the hall calling in a half plead 
to his brother, Kaho and Eriol exchanged looks before breaking into fits of their own laughter.

"THIS is what my life has been missing..." Eriol confessed once the laughter had subsided a little, 
"the utter chaos that only children can bring..."

Kaho flushed at the unspoken implications in his admittance. "E-Eriol..." she whispered in something 
between awe and fear.

His only response at first was to smile lovingly at her before he changed the subject slightly, "It's 
nearing seven-thirty, I had best get breakfast started, the children will be getting hungry soon." With 
a chastate kiss to her temple, he walked out the door.

After forty-five minutes of debating, the four Li girls had finally settled on an outfit to wrestle their 
brother into. He was lucky that he didn't have many elaborate or gaudy outfits, lest they be there all 
day. As it were, the outfit they chose for him was not even remotely appealing to his personal tastes, 
but at least they were satisfied. As it turned out, he got forced into a 'welcome home' present sent to 
him as a bribe from the Shu Clan.

They had a daughter around Xiao Lang's age, and had been trying to impress the family long enough 
to marry her to him. They had sent Xiao Lang a jade green changshan that hung down to his mid-
shins. The silk was of an impressive quality, with his clan's name in a darker shade of green 
patterned all over, save for a gold embroidered circle on the back which sported Clow Reed's 
insignia. With it he wore a pair of black pants held at the waist by a sash beneath the changshan, and 
a pair of slippers that matched the changshan. As an accessory, Fanren enchanted the hat of his 
formal robes to match the rest of his outfit.

With that out of the way, Xiao Lang escorted Fudie down to the hotel restaurant where the five Li
siblings ate their breakfast. They sat ironing out the last of their plans on where they were going to go and when as they waited for the limousine to come for them. By the time the limo came, no less than seven other people staying at the hotel had asked if the Li girls were princesses, three of them got the wrong country and called them Japanese or Korean.

Climbing into their transportation, Xiefa gave the driver directions to the pub they had been at the day before. Everything was without a hitch until they finally reached their destination. When the limo driver pulled over and came to open the door to let the passengers out, he asked in an honestly concerned tone of voice, "Are you kids sure this is where you want off? This isn't exactly the sort of neighbourhood for rich people to wander without some sort of bodyguard..."

Fudie rewarded his concern with a smile. "We'll be fine; we can take care of ourselves. Just wait here for us until we get back and everything will be fine."

"If you say so, Miss. But I'd really feel better if you'd let me go with you, or at least call someone to escort you..." the driver insisted one last time.

"Thank you, but no. We will be fine."

"Alright, if you insist there's nothing I can do. To have me wait for you here's going to be added to your tab, though."

"Yes and...?"

"Oh, nothing, just law that I tell you so you can't get mad at the charges later."

"Oh, of course. Thank you for your concern and time, Mr..."

"White. John White."

"Mr. White. We will see you in a few hours, then. Good morning," and with that last thing said, the five Li's turned into the Leaky Cauldron.

8:48 AM.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione paused on the landing on their way up the stairs after breakfast, to watch the twins come from a room and stalk past them. What held their attention, however, was not the twins' oddly dark mood, but rather that they were both sopping wet and that one of them, Fred if they weren't mistaken, had a fish flopping around in his shirt.

The last thing the Golden Trio heard before the twins rounded the corner to the kitchen was a muttered "This means WAR."

Eriol was just setting the last of the dishes in the drying rack when Sakura poked her head in to see if there was anything he needed help with. "Its fine, Sakura-san. I've just finished."

"Hoe? Gomen ne, Eriol-kun! I would have come earlier to help but Akizuki-san and Kero-chan were picking on Yuki and Yue got mad and came out and I had to stop them from all fighting before they disturbed Spinel-san's reading..." she tried to explain her tardiness.

Eriol just gave a chuckle. "Daijoubu, Sakura-san. With a bit of magic, even feeding those three Guardians is rather easy," he told her with a wink.
"Honto ni?" Sakura asked, with her eyes wide, understanding from personal experience just how much food Yukito and Kero could go through when they both sat down to the same meal.

"Hai. I'll show you how one day, if you'd like. But putting that aside, if I remember correctly you and Yukito are going to go and get your school supplies today?" he clarified, changing the subject.

"Ah! That's right! I can't wait to see what a real magic shop looks like!" she agreed, visibly regaining her childish energy.

"Wizards and witches really do do things differently than us sorcerers or those without magic. You ought to have fun there," Eriol admitted, seemingly in reminiscence. "I only wish I could come along to see your face at everything!"

Sakura's face fell once more. "Hoe? Eriol-kun, you're not coming with us?"

"Iie, I'm afraid I have too much other business to attend to today. Oh, and while we're on the subject of your next school year, have you sent your acceptance letter back to the school?"

"Iya, I tried, but the owl had already gone away and I couldn't find another anywhere," Sakura admitted with a flush of embarrassment

"Alright, not to worry, I'll take care of that, as well. It won't take me more than a few extra minutes," he informed her, smiling parentally. "Also, have you thought yet of how you're going to smuggle Yue and Cerberus in with you? Lord knows Yue would never let you leave him behind..." he rolled his eyes to show his exasperation, but his smile was genuine and loving all the same.

"Haï, Onii-chan said he should be my translator seeing as I can't speak much English yet," Sakura explained.

Eriol nodded in understanding, putting away his apron and starting for the hall. "Very clever of Touya-san. Alright, I'll be sure to add that bit of information into the letter so they will be expecting him."

"And Kero-chan said it was okay to just call him a pet."

"Did he now?" Eriol questioned, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, after a very long argument about it with Yue, but..." this admittance managed to draw a chuckle out of Eriol, but as Sakura had chosen to gloss over the whole situation the reincarnated sorcerer chose to follow suit.

"Yes, there are spells that can give normal seeming animals special features. It's generally frowned upon in the British Isles because of it's obviousness relating to magic; however, if we just write it off as an Asian fashion statement, there should be no problems," the stormy eyed sorcerer plotted.

"Hoe? Will I get in trouble?" Sakura worried.

"Hmm?" Eriol glanced up at her a moment before brushing the thoughts aside, "No, no, I was just thinking aloud. No, you won't get in trouble for it; everyone will just write it off as a cultural thing and leave you alone on the matter. Britain allows a much broader rage for self-expression in schools than Japan does."
Tonks dove from the room at the top of the stairs, followed by an ominous cloud of green powder. Remus Lupin had been assisting Sirius and Tonks in clearing out this old library of anything that Sirius deemed 'unnecessary waste of space'—which admittedly was over half the books in the room—when he had opened a new can of cleaner to get at the mould that had began infesting the shelving unit, it had erupted into the gaseous state of green it was now.

Tonks had given a squeal of surprise and dove as fast as she could from the room, nearly throwing herself off the landing, having to balance—teetering for a moment—on the rail. Remus and Sirius stumbled out after her a moment later, coughing and sputtering and waving their hands around in an attempt to clear the smoke.

Tonks looked at them with concern and thinly veiled amusement at the all around disgruntled looks on the two men's faces. "Are you two okay?" she enquired.

"Yeah, just-" Sirius began, but halted when he heard his own voice. Tonks's eyes widened and Remus looked at him as if he'd sprouted a second head. "...The hell?" Sirius squeaked.

"It seems—wow that feels strange—" Remus interjected, rubbing his throat. "It seems there was something in the powder that had some... unusual side effects." Tonks could only giggle at the helium voices.

"Well, that appears to be every book on the list..." Fudie announced, looking over the pile and cross-referencing them with the list she had nabbed from Xiefa once they entered. Speaking of which... "Feimei, where is Xiefa?"

"She's been lost in the history section."

"And You di?"

"He wandered off down the isle entitled 'Combat Magic'."

"And Fanren?"

"I think she's over looking at the magazines."

"Honestly, this family..." Fudie gave a roll of her eyes. "Alright, you go stand in line and pay for all this, I'll go see if I can't find the others."

Backtracking along the lengths of the isles that were stacked high with every type of book imaginable, Fudie headed for the history section first, knowing that her responsible younger sister by two years would be the most likely to agree to come away from the texts without causing undue stress while looking for the others.

Eriol sat at his study writing documents and double-checking forms when Sakura and Yukito poked their heads in. Turning to the daughter of his other half, he smiled welcomingly to her and her guardian. "Um... we're going now, we'll be back in a few hours, okay?" Sakura announced.

"Alright, have a safe trip; I'll see you when you get back. Is there anything you want for dinner?" he bid his farewells.

"Anything would be fine. We'll see you when we get back!"
"Bye," Yukito added. Eriol just waved and returned to his paperwork.

"Oh, Yukito!" Eriol called just before the two had left his office. The grey-haired man poked his head back into the room for a moment. "You'll need wizarding money to buy things in Daigon Alley. Go ahead and just take what you need from my account. Yue should remember the vault number and particulars involved."

"All right. Thank you, Hiiragizawa-san," and with that final comment they left.

Nearly twenty minutes later, Kaho poked her head into the room and asked "Have you got the paperwork in order yet?"

"Yes, I've just finished. We'll also have one extra stop on our way home, Sakura-san hasn't given her reply yet so we'll be dropping that off for Professor Dumbledore as well," Eriol replied without looking up from the paperwork he was sorting.

"That's that weird house that's hard to find, isn't it?" Kaho questioned with a thoughtful finger to her lower lip, recalling the name of the English wizard.

"Yes, that's the one," Eriol confirmed, finally turning now that his documents were in order and looking the beautiful woman in the eye. "You don't mind, do you?"

Kaho shook her head carelessly. "No, not particularly, shall we be off?"

"Yes we shall." Eriol stood from his desk and exited the room with Kaho at his side. Stepping aside, Eriol detoured to the living room where Nakuru was sitting and watching TV. "Nakuru, Kaho and I are going out. We will be back in a few hours. You know what to do if someone comes to the door, right?"

"Don't let them in, and don't let them know there's not an adult here," Nakuru recited for her master.

"Alright, good job. We'll see you later."

"Have a safe trip, Eriol," Nakuru responded without even taking her eyes off the television.

10: 01 AM

Tonks had just barely managed to duck behind the door frame in time to avoid being seen as the twins stepped out of the room into the hallway where they had laid their trap. The three adults huddled together to hide as the loud and shocked voiced of the two identical red-heads filled the otherwise empty hall.

It had been pure genius, in her opinion, on Lupin's part to charm the floorboards with a temporary sticking charm that made the planks of wood stick to the bottom of the boy's feet. Stumbling and tripping over themselves as the boards lifted off the floor as they tried to escape the predicament the pranksters in hiding nearly couldn't contain their laughter as the clacking travelled further away.

After convincing Xiefa that she didn't need to buy a copy of every single book the store had, and managing to talk Xiao Lang out of giving a live demonstration of the spells he had found in the duelling books, and when Fanren was finally convinced that she really and truly didn't need to know all the latest fashion secrets of London witches for the upcoming fall season, the family of five made their way back into the streets.
"So what now?" the young heir asked, looking to his eldest two sisters who seemed intent on playing 'pass the list' between themselves every few minutes.

"No worries, little cub, we're almost done. We need only to buy your potion supplies and a telescope for you and then we can be off for some lunch," Fudie insisted, striking a path through the crowd.

"Don't call me that," he grumbled, following the eldest of them on her path. She lead them across the street to a store that had on display a variety of magical interments, some of which had an obvious function to them—such as scales or telescopes—while others were completely undefinable, many of which were comprised of intricate spirals of a silvery-coloured metal and had enough moving parts to be nearly considered optical illusions.

The sign out side indicated that they sold Hogwarts supplies and while the other three wandered over to examine the telescopes, Feimei caught hold of her brother's arm and the two youngest Li children headed inside "If you're going to be taking a potions class, you're going to need a proper set of tools. Just leave that up to Jei jei here," she assured him, giving the arm linked with her own a light squeeze of reassurance.

Coming to a large section of shelving, covered floor to ceiling in scales of all sorts of material and accuracy readings, Feimei pulled a small bauble from her purse and began to carefully go through one by one each of the scales, adjusting knobs and moving weights before seemingly narrowing down her selection to a few choice options.

Having narrowed it down to ten choices, which she pulled from the shelves and lined up on the floor before her, she then returned the bauble and pulled out another, smaller one instead and repeated the process, this time discarding all but three of them. One last time, she dug into her purse and produced a tiny crystal-like bead. She fussed with this one the longest, going back and re-checking values on each of the scales several times over before finally deciding on the one to the far left.

"These charms," she began, lifting the chosen scale delicately, "are my personal weights. Exactly 100, 10, and 1 milligram respectively. This scale's 0.352 milligrams off on its calculations, but it's better than the other two. It's made of a platinum alloy and so can withstand a lot of heat. It's not magnetic, nor is it very reactive with anything, so it shouldn't mess with your readings at all, either."

"That's wonderful, Mei mei, but the list clearly states that he's supposed to have brass scales..." Xiefa spoke up when they two of them were joined by the other three, apparently also having finished selecting a telescope that they had found satisfactory for the young heir.

"This one's better," she said, as if that were all the reasoning needed to disregard the school rules.

"You di's supposed to-" Xiefa began, but was cut off by the younger twin. This was, after all, the one and only point upon which Feimei could be horridly stubborn.

"It's better. He'll get better results and get better marks with this one. No one will complain about the likes of that."

"They will, seeing as it's against the rules."

"Fine! Then you go find him a set of poor quality brass scales, but I'm still buying this one for You di!" she insisted with determination. She marched stubbornly off to the glassware section where
she instead began carefully measuring various pieces of different shaped and sized funnels, flasks, and beakers, mixing and matching them to give the results she desired.

10:21 AM

Ron paused on his entering the bathroom to see both his older brothers kneeling before the door, doing something to it that he'd rather not know about. They looked at him, he looked back, they held a finger to each of their mouths, and he sighed and nodded before turning and heading for the stairs down. He would have to remember not to use the fifth floor bathroom for the rest of the time he was here.

Sakura looked everywhere as she and her guardian stepped from the brick wall that moved and into the street. Her sea green eyes were alight as she looked up and down and all around herself, trying to take in every unusual sight and bright colour that the little alleyway afforded.

"Hoe! Yuki, look at that! There's a broom shop over there! The witches really do ride on broomsticks! And oh! There's owls! I've never seen real live owls before!" she cheered.

Yukito gave a melodious chuckle at his young charge's exuberance, "Yes, yes, and you'll see much more before the year is up, I promise you that, but first thing's first: to the bank!"

He took her hand in his own pale one and led her down the zigzagging alleyway. The swirling of bright, vibrant colours kept the excited child's head craning every which way. Busy witches and wizards hurried here and there, voices raised in an effort to talk over everyone else as they bartered prices and called out their wares.

Yet looming in the distance, dwarfing all the buildings around it, a tall marble building drew close. "Here we are, the Gringotts Bank. You ready to get our money exchanged?"

"What are those things standing by the door?" Sakura asked, pointing at the small figures with long fingers.

"Those are goblins, a type of magical race," Yukito explained. "They can be rather dangerous if provoked, so stick close to me, okay?"

Sakura nodded and took a step closer to her guardian. "Alright..."

By the time they finally exited the shop with two scale sets and a number more measuring instruments than the list called for, Xiao Lang found himself the owner of the makings of his own potions mastery set. No where, mind you, as extensive as that which Feimei had for her own personal potions laboratory back in Hong Kong, but it was a decent start.

The last stop of the day, the apothecary's was just a quick jump across the street from the cauldron shop. There was far less banging of heads when buying a cauldron as they located one with a good thickness and wide base for even heating. They had loaded the cauldron with the potion supplies listed as being required for the student to bring, and many of which had Feimei stopping to ponder on the use of.

They were local supplies, you see, not the ones found commonly in China that she was used to, and before they had left the shop she had secured from Xiao Lang's bags his potions text book and become so lost in reading it over that Fanren and Xiefa had to each take an arm and steer her along to walk as she read.
They left the alley through the Leaky Cauldron and surprised poor Mr. White when he saw the armloads of things they had accumulated from the dirty old tavern. After hurrying forward to help them with the big metal pot and then the books to get them all into the trunk, the glassware was wrapped and set on the floor of the back seats and all the people piled into the limo one after another with the only directions from Xiefa being to "take us somewhere decent to eat."

Thirty minutes later found the five of them sitting in a rather classy restaurant browsing the menus.

11:17 AM

As Fred and George stepped out of the tropical rainforest that had once been the east wing of the house, George turned to his brother and said "You know that was actually a pretty good one."

"Indeed. When this is over, we're definitely going to have to get them to tell us how they managed it," Fred agreed.

"Quite. But for the moment, what to do for revenge?"

"It was a pleasure doing business with you, Ms. Mizuki, Mr. Hi—erm..." the teller staggered over how to pronounce the last name written on the papers as he handed them over to the woman.

"Eriol will do just fine, thank you," he responded, shaking hands with the man once more before getting up and exiting the bank with his 'legal guardian'.

She tucked the papers into her purse as they walked. "Are you sure you want to be doing this? Getting rid of all of it, I mean?"

"Yes... I have been the sole possessor for far too long and I really don't need it all, anyway. I still have the house here, and most the money, so it's not like there's going to be any problems or anything..." Eriol explained, slipping his hand silently into her own.

Observers were oblivious to the secret caresses of his thumb against her pale skin, to the gentle squeeze he felt around his hand as her fingers pushed their palms just that much closer. All they saw was what they wanted to see, a beautiful mother holding the hand of her handsome little son as they made their way down the street.

12:05 PM

The table sat in a tense silence. The bright yellow spots all over the twin's faces still continued to fuse and divide at random, and Tonks had taken the ring that screeched horridly off-key love songs from the start of the century and decided to wear it in her hair for the meal, just to torture everyone else in the room.

But other than that, there had been something of a truce called for the meal by order of one Mrs. Molly Weasley on the threat of hexing anyone who didn't bend to her rule with, and I quote, 'a curse so bloody horrifying that Merlin himself would faint away at the sight of it!' Admittedly, for the sake of curiosity, all five participants in this little competition were on the edge of their seats, awaiting a moment where they could spring a trap for Molly. However, self-preservation and a mother's watchful eye had ensured their behaviour thus far.
Yukito carried his Mistress out of Gringotts piggy-back style. Her eyes were still spinning from all the twists and turns on the roller coaster-like ride to and from the vaults and when she had tried to get off had lost her balance and fallen over. So now she sat quite contentedly on his back and waited for the world to stop spinning at super sonic speeds.

"So, what do you want to get first? Your wand? Your books? Your robes?"

"I want a broom!" she suddenly announced, loosing all dizziness and becoming her usual hyper self in a flash.

"But Sakura-chan, the letter says you can't have a broom until second year."

"Awa... but witches are supposed to have brooms..." she pouted as Yukito let her back down on her feet once more.

"How about we go get you your magic wand, instead?"

Sakura's face lit up again at once when he said that. "Okay! I wonder what it will be like?"

After a few minutes further in which they wondered around looking for the wand shop, Yukito finally spotted a sign carved above the door of the last shop on the alley in weather-warn wood. Guiding Sakura into the dusty old shop, they eyed the tall dark shelves somewhat unsurely. There were rows upon rows of old boxes coated in dust and cobwebs stretched along the ceiling and in obscure corners. It gave the building an almost abandoned feel to it, and Sakura was quite sure that it would be haunted as well.

The Japanese duo would have exited for mistake of it being just a storage house if another family were not already standing and awaiting perches of their own new wand. The woman was willowy and pale and obviously of European decent. The boy, on the other hand, was from African ancestry with dreadlocks and warm black eyes. When he noticed how Sakura fidgeted nervously, he gave her a grin full of toothy confidence born of one who was totally at home in his surroundings. He bounced easily on the balls of his feet to the beat in his head that only he was privy to.

A moment later an old man with pale eyes and white hair stepped out from the back of the shelves and started slightly at the sight of Yukito and Sakura standing there. "I'll be with you in a moment, sir, miss." he told them before handing over the thin box he was carrying to the boy. The boy confidently took it out and gave it a quick wave, electing a sort of fizzle and a few puttered sparks and the old man took the wand back. "No, no... but no worries Mrs. Shacklebolt, we'll get your boy a fine wand, the right one for him is in here somewhere! The strongest wizards always take the longest to sort out, after all."

"Yes... if the number of times he's stolen his father's wand to play with it is any conciliation then we know he at least has a talent for charming cats green," the woman said, giving the boy a stern look and earning a bashful grin in response.

Olivander, for his part, gave a hearty laugh at this, "What pure-blooded boy hasn't at least once in his life gotten his hands on his parent's wands to try their hand at a bit of spell-work? No harm done in a little innocent curiosity."

It was another ten minutes before the boy, whose name had been revealed over the course of the conversation to be Lucas Shacklebolt, had been situated with his wand. (Elder wood, 10 inches, phoenix feather core, natural for transfiguration.) With a wave goodbye to Sakura, Lucas followed his mother out of the shop and Olivander then turned to Yukito and his charge.
"Well now, this is to be a busy year! Second family of sorcerers in as many days! Right this way, we'll find you your wand in back here, miss," Olivander stated, beckoning Sakura and Yukito to follow. "So what circle do you use?"

"Hoe?" Sakura cooed out in her confusion, turning to look to Yukito for a translation.

"Sorry, she doesn't speak much English yet," Yukito excused. "She uses an original circle, though I suppose Clow Reed's would be the closest for both of us."

"Both of you?" Olivander parroted, eyeing the silvery haired teen as well.

"Yes, for appearance's sake I'll need a wand as well," Yukito admitted, but didn't elaborate further.

"Well," Mr. Olivander said, pulling four boxes from the shelf for the second time this week, "these are all the wands I have inscribed with Clow Reed's circle."

They had barely been shown when Yukito's hand reached out and lifted one of the middle boxes. He was halfway through bringing it back to himself when he seemed to blink and remember himself.

"I'm sorry, I... do that some times. My body just seems to move on it's own."

Mr. Olivander was staring hard at the box Yukito held, and without taking his eyes from it he said, "Well, may as well give it a wave."

Yukito barely took the piece of wood from the container and already Olivander was nodding sagely. "I thought so, that one's yours alright, young man." Yukito gave it a casual flick all the same and the room momentarily filled with what appeared to be moonbeams. "Birch, 9 ¾ inches, it's core is supposedly a feather of Clow Reed's own Moon Guardian, Yue."

So that's what he did with it, Yue's voice mused in the recesses of Yukito's head.

"And now for this young lady," Olivander stated, eyeing the wands in his hand doubtfully for a moment longer. "How about this one? 6 and a half inches, maple wood with a core of erumpent tail hair, sturdy."

Sakura took the offered wand carefully, having witnessed Olivander's habit of snatching them away from customers already. Sure enough, she had hardly taken it fully into her hands when it was removed again and replaced by another.

"12 inches exactly, made of hawthorn with a core of a mermaid spine?" Olivander tried.

This time Sakura was at least able to swish the wand before he took it away. It was replaced once more by a long thin stick.

"This one's one of my personal favourites. An astounding 14 inches long, reed wood. It has a core of phoenix tail feather," Olivander rattled off, though it meant nothing to Sakura who couldn't understand him.

Like the previous two wands, Sakura took the wand when it was offered to her and waved it as she had watched the boy, Lucas, do earlier. And once more, there was no reaction from the wand. Understanding that this one was also a no, she offered it back to the man who seemed strangely unsurprised.

His misty eyes bore into the young Card Mistress in a judging fashion for a long moment before he seemed to come to a decision. "If you would, miss, may I see this original circle of yours?"
When Yukito was kind enough to translate for him, Sakura beamed sweetly at the old man, “Hai!” she cheered. After a moment more of concentration, the floor lit with a light that seemed to darken the rest of the room in comparison.

Finally, when the light dimmed and faded away, it was to the old man nodding to himself sagely. “I thought so. One moment, please.” Olivander turned on his heal and marched to a secluded corner of the smaller room.

Upon his return, Sakura let out a gasp at what she saw adorned on the side of the box. “Yuki, look!” There, on the end of the dusty box was Sakura's own personal star circle painted meticulously in gold, faded with age.

“I believe, miss, that this belongs to you,” he said as he presented Sakura with the box. “I had my suspicions when you mentioned the young lady's unusual circle, and more so when you picked the wand you did, sir.”

“Really? Why would my wand lead you to such a conclusion?” Yukito questioned.

“Because, these are two of five wands that were specially requested some sixty years ago by a man claiming to be Clow Reed. After the events of this week, I believe I am more inclined to believe him. Of the five wands he requested, four have found their partners: a young lady who ought to be in her seventh year at Hogwarts by now, a young gentleman who came by just yesterday to pick up a wand so he may start his first year, yourself... and this young lady, now sporting a cherry wood wand of 12 ½ inches with a dual core of a white feather and a silver hair that rather resembled a veela's. The last sits there, the reed wand,” the old man indicated towards the three remaining boxes sitting on the floor.

“I may not be a seer, but my old age has given me a foresight in it's own right. If that wand is not collected by the end of this summer, bound for Hogwarts, I will be very surprised. Something is brewing, it is about to begin, and you had best be sure that you and the young lady are ready for it.”

1:38 PM

The knock on the door caused the three adults to eye each other, both curious and weary of what the twins could be up to by setting such an obvious trap. When the knock rang a second time, Remus shrugged in defeat and went to open the door. It's not like they wouldn't get back at whatever the twins were up to, after all.

However, when the door opened to reveal the Asian woman from the other day, Remus's heart took a leap into his throat at the unexpected surprise. Their eyes met for a moment as each took in the other's features in recognition, and then she smiled at him like she was truly happy to see him. "Oh, hello again. I'm sorry if I was interrupting something, I just came by to drop this off..." she announced lifting up yet another mysterious letter.

Remus could feel himself heat up with a flush worthy of a first year at her charming smile. "Ah, yeah —er, no. No, nothing at all, just cleaning," Remus stammered out, mentally he shook himself to try and clear his mind of the odd daze it seemed to have fallen into at this point. "Um, thank you. I'll give it to Dumbledore when I see him, Miss..."

"Mizuki."

"I'm Remus. Remus Lupin."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Lupin," she said with a slight bow. "I must be going now."
"Oh, ah, of course. Have a good day."

"And a good day to you, too."

When Remus closed the door again and turned back around, his heart froze solid. Sirius was grinning. At him. And it wasn't one of his friendly grins, either. "I think someone's in loo-ooove..." the dog-man snickered out. Remus's face only grew redder.

At the end of the street, Eriol stepped from around the tree he had been waiting by and to Kaho's side. "Did you give them the letter?" he asked, more out of politeness than an actual need to be told.

"Yes. Is it normal for werewolves to be affected by our magic fields?" Kaho asked conversationally.

"Quite often, yes. It depends on how long they've been a werewolf, of course, but on the whole the virus that turns them into a magical beast once a month is also enough of an influence to make them part of magic, and therefore more susceptible," Eriol lectured knowledgeably.

"I see..."

"Oh? So am I now doomed to fall into horrid fits of jealousy and vengeance due to my lady fair finding comforts in the arms of another man?" the small sorcerer asked, with feigned innocence.

"Oh... really Eriol, you can be such a tease..." Kaho scolded through her laughter.

"When did you see that he was a werewolf?" Eriol asked conversationally, as they began their walk home.

"Last night. I wasn't sure if it was him, because it came as just a series of flashes at the time. Him, and others, including a werewolf running around that school... it wasn't until just now when he opened the door that I saw a clear image of his transformation."

Eriol nodded sagely at this. "Do you think it was from the past, or the future that you were looking?" he prompted, falling into the role of mentor to his lovely apprentice.

"It seemed like a mixture, like an introduction to the important information necessary to understand something that is yet to come..." the young seer expressed.

"I see. Well, if your sight indicated that they would be players in some future event, you had best keep an eye on them so you can decide what course of action is right for you to take," Eriol advised.

"Yes, I understand."

"Oh, dear, look at the time! We really should be getting back to that alleyway soon..." Fudie commented as she eyed her watch.

"Why? We already finished all the shopping," Feimei pointed out, not interested in such rickety looking shops when the rest of London had wonderful designer clothing and expensive perfume and jewelry to be browsing instead.

"Yes, but we did agree that You di needs as much time in among their magic as he can get during the days so that he can be used to the chaos of it in time for classes," Xiefa pointed out, pulling out her credit card from her purse.

"I know it's the smart thing to do, but I really don't want to right now..." Xiao Lang grumbled,
still not over the headache he had from spending the morning there.

"I know, but it's been over two hours already and the shops will begin closing before too much longer. And this time we can go and look in other shops and find something you may find enjoyable. How would you like that?" Fudie pointed out to him.

"*Sigh...* Yeah, fine. I doubt there'll be anything, but it's definitely worth looking," Xiao Lang agreed.

"Good. And if nothing else, we can always head back to the book store and you can get lost again in the combat magic section," Xiefa teased. And with that decided, the five Li siblings exited the restaurant and headed out to the limo once more where Mr. White drove them back to the Leaky Cauldron.

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"Okay, so now that getting our wands are out of the way, how about we work our way back up the street to finish up the shopping trip?" Yukito suggested as he and his Mistress exited Olivanders. He had already stowed his own wand away in one of his pockets while Sakura walked next to him, lazily waving her wand and enjoying the sight of the sparkles that drifted down from the tip.

"Okay! That'll work!" Sakura happily agreed, placing her hand in his so that he could steer her to the next shopping destination without her having to look away from the silver and pink glitter ejecting itself out the end of her new stick.

With that agreed on, Yukito lead his young charge back up the street, passed the bank, and into a cutey little robe shop called Madam Malkin’s.

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2:06 PM

Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Ginny lay on their stomachs at the top of the stairs while they watched the mayhem down below. Quite some time ago it had been agreed that by far the safest thing to do until this little pranking war had run its course was to hide away and not touch anything anywhere.

Old Mundungus had been up here earlier and had set up a bet with Ginny and the boys over who would win. Ron and Ginny had both bet on their brothers, insisting that they knew just how stubborn the two were and that they wouldn’t give up until they won. Harry had to go with Sirius and Lupin, who he knew from stories were veteran pranksters along with his dad from back when they were all teens in Hogwarts. Hermione could not be enticed to join, insisting that such bets were not only futile but also a waste of money.

That had been close to an hour ago, though. After Dung had gotten the bets off them he had said he didn’t much feel like sticking around and getting covered in feathers or anything and so had apparated away shortly afterwards. They had since then seen a couple of things more interesting than just feathers show up, including the one that had Ginny giggling to the point of tears. Fred had somehow been cursed to belch fire, and had decided to put on a performance for them by belching the alphabet and ended up accidentally setting Mrs. Black's curtains on fire which had caused a good deal of noise and chaos.

It was just then that Mr. Weasley came up the steps and stopped next to the children. "Hello kids! And what are you all doing here?"

"Hi dad," came the chorus from his children while Harry and Hermione added in an echo of "Hi Mr. Weasley" for their part. Then Ginny took it solo and continued the explanation. "We're hiding so that
"we don't get dragged in to the pranking war."

"Ah, I see..." Mr. Weasley murmured out.

"Yeah, we figured its safest not to move around or touch anything until that lot has gotten it out of their system," Harry added.

"Hmmm... Smart plan!" and so Mr. Weasley lowered himself down to the floor beside them and struck up a conversation about how vacuum cleaners work with Hermione.

Getting the robes done had been surprisingly quick, Sakura proved to be a very efficient model after all the times that Tomoyo had insisted on her dressing up and trying on clothes. And the design of the robes was simple and clean cut, with the only problem arising in the fact that Sakura was slightly smaller than most the children who came in to try on robes.

However, with the problem quickly righted, leaving her with a slightly baggy set as it was the smallest size of uniform they had, they had paid the money and were off to the next building over to buy books. There were several stands set up out front of the store that were made to promote a specific book over the others. There was a towering collection piled up in the shape of a castle, and another spot where the books were flapping around and required being tethered to the table to stop them from flying away. And still another set that were in a thick metal cage with warning signs all around them to keep back. These books snarled and snapped at everything with sharp teeth and one would occasionally lunge at the bars causing the whole cage to rattle.

"Hooeeeee... look at all of them! There's so many!" Sakura breathed out in awe.

"Indeed there are. Come inside, now, though. The books you need are in here," Yukito gently prompted, leading his mistress within the little building.

Sakura jumped in surprise as she stepped through the doors of the little shop and somehow entered a three-story building that was larger and had more books in it than she had ever seen before in her life. Confused by the physics of it, she quickly hurried back outside and looked again to see the small stature that held the huge library.

"Sakura-chan?" Yukito questioned as he stepped back out to be with her.

"From the outside it's little but inside it's huge! Yuki, which one is real and which is the illusion spell?"

Yukito's eyes grew distant as he listened to an internal knowledge for a moment before speaking.

"It's not an illusion, it's compressed space, like The Maze. It's much bigger on the inside than it is on the outside because space has been folded in on itself here."

"Wizard magic can do that?" Sakura asked in amazement.

"Yes, that's one of many things their spells can accomplish," Yukito reassured.

"Hoe..." Sakura whispered on the edge of boiling over with excitement. Being lead inside once more with an eagerness to be impressed, the little sorceress followed her guardian's lead without question. He grabbed a cart and they walked up and down the isles, him browsing the titles for the books on the list while she pushed the cart.

They had gotten nearly two thirds of the way through the book list when they were forced to stop momentarily. A small furrow creased Yukito's brow as he stared up at the Standard Book of Spells:
Grade One on the top shelf. While it's location would be no problem for a Caucasian adult customer, Yukito had the height of an average Asian woman, and so the bottom of the top shelf was still a few inches higher than his hand could reach.

Worrying his bottom lip for a moment, Yukito turned to his charge. "Sakura-chan, you wait here with the cart for a moment, I'm going to see if I can't find an employee to assist us."

"Hai! I'll be good!" Sakura assured, watching Yukito walk away with a resigned shake of his head.

Having nothing better to do while she waited, Sakura's eyes scanned the displays set up at the end of each isle. One display had a poster above it of some blond man in purple who was fighting what looked like a big mean dog-man. Another display had a big pink and green sign above it with bold golden writing that scrolled through. Sakura amused herself for several moments attempting to translate the revolving message:

Make your Dreams become Reality! Transfiguration's Guide to Creating Everything you Ever Wished to Make! Twelve Easy Steps to Making the Ordinary become the Extraordinary!

And then the message would start again. Though Sakura couldn't understand the full meaning of all the words, she could understand enough to get the general gist of everything said. A book that can make anything you want appear? "Hoeee..."

It was only a moment or two later when Yukito came back trailing after a tall young woman. "I'm back, Sakura-chan. Sorry to keep you waiting," the silver haired young man called out, causing his Mistress to turn and face him.

Smiling brightly at him, Sakura responded. "Welcome back, Yuki! Look at that book over there! It says it can tell you how to make anything you want!" the young girl announced excitedly.

"Hmm?" Yukito questioned, glancing up at the display and reading the sign a moment before smiling fondly.

Before he had a chance to correct her, the lady he was walking with turned and asked him "Standard Book of Spells, right? First year?"

"Yes, that's correct. I am sorry that we are an inconvenience," Yukito said sweetly, taking the book from her as she pulled it off the shelf.

"Oh," she giggled, "not at all. It's rather silly of them to put a first year Hogwarts book on the top shelf, after all..."

"Thank you very much for your assistance," Yukito acknowledged with a slight bow.

"Thank you very much," Sakura mimicked.

The young lady blushed at being bowed to for only getting a book down and giggled again in her nervousness. "N-no, really. No problem. H-have a nice day."

"You too," Yukito agreed, waving to the employee as she left.

"Have nice day!" Sakura parroted once more. Then when the young lady was out of sight, she turned once more to Yukito. "May we get the everything book, too? It would be very useful!" she insisted.

"Oh, Sakura-chan. It doesn't really make everything, it's just a figure of speech. A sales gimmick,
you understand?" Yukito explained, smiling at her innocence.

"Hoe? You mean it doesn't teach you to make things appear?"

"No, I'm sorry," Yukito explained. "Should we continue with our shopping now?"

"Hai," she responded, taking hold of the cart once more and they continued on their way. Before rounding the corner, however, Sakura turned one last time to look at the display. It would be nice though, she thought, a book that could create anything you wanted...

Unnoticed to either Sorceress or Guardian was the faintly growing of a magic circle where the young Card Mistress had stood a moment before. A slow swirl, compressing the magic in the locally charged atmosphere, condensing it into a solid form. A small rectangular paper spun suspended within the empty space above the slowly fading circle. Then, as if making up its mind, it floated over gently to the revolving stand which had a number of notebooks and diaries within it.

The card glowed for a moment, then stretched and pulled in all three dimensions until it became a pretty little pink book and settled itself innocently in behind a blue diary.

Xiao Lang gently tapped the glass tank holding the silvery multi-legged tweezers causing the skittering instruments to converge on the location his hand hovered by. "Weird... what are they?" he asked the shop owner of the grubby store the Li children had found in an off-shooting alley to the main Daigon Alley. This side alley was far less populated, and so it was easier on Xiao Lang to keep his head strait.

The owner, who had been eyeing the expensive silks and jewels on the Asian group since they came in, swooped in on the young boy with all the air of a car salesman. "Ah, those are Remote Potion Injectors."

"Oh, assassination tools. Curious country, Britain, that a common little shop vender would be selling such things out in the open..." Xiefa noted, looking in at the skittering instruments.

"Oh, no! Not at all, miss!" the shop keeper quickly insisted. "They're medical tools used for patients with highly dangerous and contagious diseases."

"Yuck! They look like spiders! Who would buy something like that?" Fanren squirmed and pulled a face showing exactly what she thought about such things. "Forget it; I'm going for ice cream. Come on, Feimei."

"B-but...!" the youngest of the girls whined as she was pulled from the shelf advertising vials of blood collected from a wide variety of rare magical animals and even humans.

"We're going with them. Don't get yourself poisoned by the metal spiders, You di," Fudie called to the heir as she and Xiefa followed the twins out of the shop.

"Yeah, yeah," he waved his sisters off without really hearing them. "Hey old man, how do these things work, anyway?"

"Ah, you see this glass bubble here in the centre? You place the potion within there, and then levitate the injector into the room and set it down on the patient's bed. And when it detects a hot surface touching it, it will use the needle seen there on the bottom of the injector to dispense the potion and will then return all on it's own to its registered case."

"Oh, so it's thermosensitive, huh? But how?"
The shopkeeper blinked at the unfamiliar terminology. "Pardon? I-I just told you: you put the potion in the-"

"No, no! I mean how does it know where the heat is? How does it move around like that? How does it know where to come back to?" Xiao Lang explained himself, rather irately.

"I'm sorry, little boy, but those are professional secrets..." the shopkeeper insisted.

Xiao Lang gave him a long, penetrating glare. "...You're not very smart, are you?"

Sakura yawned.

This fact to most people would seem inconsequential and unnecessary to note or elaborate on. However, for Yukito and more exactly Yue who resided within Yukito, Sakura's existence was the world's primary concern. She rubbed at her eye with one little fist and Yue exclaimed that something must be wrong because it was only the middle of the day. Yukito countered that thought almost immediately with the problems of jet lag for beings that actually require rest regularly to function rather than just as a boost to help restore their magic levels.

Still, Yukito smiled down at his boyfriend's little sister. "Feeling a bit tired?"

"I'm okay," replied Sakura, "we've just been doing lots of stuff today."

Yukito glanced up just in time to see a sign indicating an ice cream parlour and got an idea. "Why don't we stop and have some ice cream before we continue, shall we?" Sakura brightened up at once at the promise of the sweet treat and nodded empathically. Yukito laughed and lead her into the small shop and over to the counter. "What would you like?"

Sakura examined every flavour on display before choosing one that was chocolate with swirls of caramel and candies in it. Yukito just ordered a simple triple scooped strawberry flavoured cone and placed their orders. It was when they were just walking out the door that they nearly ran in to four teens in fancy Chinese silk. "Oh, excuse us," Yukito apologized with a slight bow.

"Excuse!" parroted Sakura, who also bowed.

"Oh, no, no. It's quite alright. We weren't watching where we were going either," The lady in green exclaimed, bowing slightly in return.

In the background, the twin in blue leaned over to her counter part in gold and whispered "He's kinda cute, isn't he?"

Yukito flushed upon hearing this comment. "Thank you, I think," he responded.

"You speak Cantonese?" the young woman in red questioned, sounding minorly impressed. "But your features, aren't you Japanese?"

"Some, yes. I've picked it up over the years." Yukito replied. The girl in blue looked rather embarrassed about her comment now that she knew she had been understood. Taking pity on her, Yukito changed the subject quickly. "You young ladies wouldn't happen to know where we might be able to purchase a cauldron, would you?"

The young lady in green pointed back towards the mouth of the alley. "They're right next to the entrance, across from the apocrathary," she informed them.
"Thank you." Yukito said, bowing once more and pulling at Sakura's hand to lead her away. She bowed a quick goodbye over her shoulder and hurried off at his heels.

When they were out of sight, the four girls turned among themselves. "Now they were cute," Xiefa announced to her sisters.

"That little girl had the most adorable hair cut!" squealed Fanren.

"I wonder who he was..." Feimei mused.

"I wonder who both of them were," Fudie countered. "He was impressive, sure, but that kid... I've never felt anyone who draws people so strongly. She is powerful as hell to even have that sort of effect on us in such a surrounding."

"You think she might be going to Hogwarts with You di?" Feimei asked.

"It's probable, due to her age. We should inform Mu qin about this when we get back home." Xiefa decided. With that settled the four Li girls entered the parlour and ordered their ice cream, getting an extra chocolate one for their brother, before heading back to find him once more.

They arrived back on location down the little side alley to find him being hauled out of the shop by a smouldering, irate shop owner who had hold of the scruff of his neck. "That is it! Out, out, out! No more questions, no more spell work, get out and don't come back!"

3:48 PM

The werewolf and the two cousins sat around a scrap of paper covered with quick scribbles of illegible words and overly-simplified diagrams to the point that the diagrams became complicated. "So we're all good on the plan?" Padfoot asked the other two.

"I know my part!" Tonks practically cheered, holding up her hand.

"These kids won't know what hit them." Moony smirked, looking coy and fiddling with his wand. "Let's begin, shall we?" he prompted the other two, raising a brow and turning his head slightly to the left in order to emphasize that they should get moving.

However, before the three could do more than stand from their crouching positions, the Weasley twins threw themselves against the banisters above, and pulled a cast-and-dash on the adults below them. As they heard the twins laughing voices float farther down the hall, the cousins and werewolf all looked among themselves at each other.

It had been some sort of jumbled up transfiguration spell, giving them a multitude of random animal parts which included toucan beaks, large mouse ears, frog limbs and... Remus blinked. "What type of animal has that kind of tail do you suppose?"

"I think it's a zebra..." Sirius responded.

While Tonks clicked her beak experimentally, and sashayed her hips back and forth to get her new tail to wag, Sirius reached into his pocket with his newly webbed hands and pulled out his wand to begin removing the partial transfigurations on his kid cousin and pack brother.

The door to the Reed Mansion swung open to reveal to Eriol and Kaho a state of chaos. Apparently,
some point in time during the day while everyone was out, Kero and Nakuru had decided to turn the
grand entrance way into a fort, having moved many of the blankets and tables into the room and
propped them up to build their play house with. The broom from the kitchen had even been taken
and stuck up on top with one of Nakuru's shirts tied to it like a flag.

"Ah, it seems as though the children have been having fun while we were out..." Eriol commented,
not the least bit concerned for the state of the antique furniture.

"So they have. Is that your bedside table?" Kaho commented, walking around the construction so not
to disturb it.

"Indeed it is; you have a good eye," Eriol smiled. From the far room, the sound of music, shouting,
and laughter could be heard. From the conversation it sounded as though Nakuru and Kero were
battling it out in some sort of fighting game on Nakuru's gaming system. And if the occasional thuds
and screams of despair were any indication, they were getting very into the game, re-enacting
powerful moves and painful death scenes in the living room.

The door to the study cracked open on it's own for a moment before a small black and blue kitten
floated through, with a look of pure torment and pleading on his face. "Eriol..." Spinel whined,
"they've been noisy all day. I can't even hear myself think..."

"Oh... there, there, Spinel. Do you have a headache?" Eriol asked, plucking his sun guardian from
the air and cradling him in his arms.

"No," Spinel admitted, rubbing the side of his face against his master's chest. "Just bored. And
annoyed. I can't concentrate with all this racket. How am I supposed to read with them running in
and out screaming all day?"

"Alright, Spinel. I'll make everything better," Eriol told him lovingly. He stepped over and pulled
one of the blankets from the abandoned fort and laid it over his shoulder then went into his study and
cast a quick wind spell to float an odd dozen or so of Clow Reed's old journals and make them
follow him.

Going into the back yard, he laid the blanket on the ground, the books and Spinel floating around
and watching in varying levels of curiosity. He beckoned the books and guardian onto the blanket,
and then cast a shell of silence over the whole thing. "There, now. Is that better?"

"Yes. Thank you, Eriol," Spinel said, making himself comfortable on the spread and levitating one of
the books over to read.

When he was sure his guardian was comfortable at last, Eriol moved from the dome and back into
the house. In the entry way he found that Kaho had already put the children to work cleaning up
their fort and so merely stepped past rather than interrupt their conversation about the fighting game
and who had beaten who more often.

He paused mid-step by the foot of the stairs when he saw Kaho standing at the top of the stairwell
watching him, but she merely smiled adoringly at him and so he returned the expression and
continued up to join her. "The children are all well occupied and shan't be wanting attention for a
while..." he spoke quietly, holding out his arm to the woman he loved.

She smiled coyly in response. "And you wish to take advantage of that fact, do you?"

Still, she placed her hand on his forearm and let herself be lead away down the hall.
Sakura stepped from the cauldron shop, eyes bright and arms laden with purchases. She was so excited about going to Hogwarts. There were so many amazing things in this alleyway alone; she couldn't even begin to imagine all the amazing things she would be seeing for the rest of the year.

Suddenly her vision tunneled and noise cut out of her world. She swooned, trying to stay on her feet, and felt a hand reach out and steady her. Familiar, warm, and accompanied by a worried voice that somehow cut through the spinning of her head. "Sakura! Sakura, daijoubu?"

"...Yuki..." she asked weakly. A few startled passer-bys had stopped as well, one boy of chunky build in his mid teens was even being nice enough to help gather up the contents of the bags that had spilled when Sakura had dropped them. She opened her eyes to see his concerned gold eyes looking down at her from where he stood, half holding her upright.

"Oh, thank goodness. You nearly passed out on your feet. How are you feeling?" he pressed her, kneeling down and sitting her on his knee until he was sure she was better. Her face was pale and her skin clammy.

"Gomen ne, Yuki. I'm just really sleepy. It must be the jet lag..." Sakura tried to excuse. "I'll be better after some rest, I promise."

Yuki looked like he wanted to argue the matter for a moment before relinquishing to her will. "Alright. We've finished shopping, so let's hurry and get back ho-er, to Eriol's house. You can rest there."

"Is she alright?" the lad asked, stacking the last of the bags upright by Yukito's side.

"Yes, thank you. She's just suffering from sleep deprivation," Yukito responded, though he didn't sound too very sure himself.

An elderly witch in green robes with a red handbag and a stuffed vulture on her hat pushed her way through the small crowd and stood over the boy. "What is the hold up?" she demanded curtly.

"Oh, Grandmother. This girl fainted, I was just helping pick their stuff up..." he replied.

Giving a curt nod, the elderly witch pulled out her wand and with three sharp swishes all their possessions shrunk and stacked themselves smartly into the cauldron sitting at Yukito's side. "That ought to do it. Now, young man, make sure that girl is taken to St. Mungo's strait away. We can't have some strange epidemic spreading throughout all of Daigon Alley, now, can we?"

"Yes, thank you ma'am," Yukito said, supporting Sakura's shoulders as he gave an awkward bow beside her.

It took a bit of effort on his part, and Sakura fussed that it wasn't the least bit necessary, but Yue was insistent that the Mistress mustn't come to any harm and so Yukito managed both carrying her piggyback style and her schooling supplies out to the front curb where he called for a taxi. He probably would not have managed if it weren't for the assistance the old witch had provided in shrinking their possessions to fit in one container, but he did all the same.

4:25 PM

Hermione was busy reviewing old textbooks, refreshing the course material from the year before, and insisting that it was never too early to start studying for OWLs. Harry, Ron, and Ginny on the other hand were spending their day off of cleaning house in a much more practical way: Exploding Snap.
This serene scene of average adolescence was disrupted by a combined cry of the Weasley twins calling for "GINNY!"

The youngest Weasley nearly got knocked off the landing as both her boxily built brothers ploughed into her with a running tackle. It took a minute for anyone's mind to catch up with the events taking place and once they did, they wished they hadn't. For where usually they would expect to see two gruff-looking Gryffindor Beaters with matching grins worthy of perpetually naughty toddlers, they instead found long ringlets of red held up in pigtails by lace bows, full length poufy dresses in pink and lavender trimmed with beaded pearls, and painted faces in a 1920's style.

"What... the... hell...?" Ron finally spoke for everyone present.

"Oh, isn't it just wonderful?" gushed Fred in a falsely high voice, pulling out a fan and waving it in front of his face while batting his elongated eyelashes at his little brother.

"Black and Lupin did something fun this time!" George chimed in in matching tone, continuing to rub his cheek against his little sister's, smudging his blush all over the side of her face.

"It was a marvellous idea..." Fred insisted once more.

"Now Ginny won't be alone any more!"

"Isn't that wonderful?"

"Now that we can all be sisters, we can exchange clothes..."

"And do each other's hair..."

"And make up..."

"And Ron and the others can have this happen to them, too!"

"Yes, and then we can be the Seven Weasley Sisters!"

By this point in time Ginny and Hermione were both laughing quite hard at the boy's antics and Harry was only able to sit in stunned silence that the twins wouldn't be too embarrassed to even dare showing their faces while dressed like that. Ron, on the other hand, seemed to know exactly how to take to that last line. Pushing himself away from them until his back was pressed against the wall behind him, he held his wand in their direction and threatened, "Try it, and die."

The day had proven to be rather eventful as a whole for the five Li siblings. Twice more they had been chased from shops along the side alley because of Xiao Lang's pestering of the owners. These people did not seem too comfortable discussing their merchandise in too great of detail, nor were they very willing to divulge their sources in acquiring said wares.

But it was getting late, and they had spent most the day here wandering up and down the two alleyways. So when Fanren began whining that she was getting hungry, they all agreed that it was time to call it a day. Now, as they made their way back out to the muggle part of London, they bickered back and forth on where they ought to eat.

"We're in England! We should take advantage of that and have a real British meal," Fudie insisted.

"I want pizza. We should go find somewhere that we can order pizza at!" Fanren announced.
"Pizza? In these clothes? Are you out of your head?" Feimei complained, indicating their high-class dresses and expensive ornamentation.

"Rich people can like pizza too..." Fanren grumbled.

"We are not going for pizza," Xiao Lang piped up, intent to nip the insuring argument at the bud.

"You can order a pizza to our room when we get back to the hotel, if you want it so badly," Xiefa added, backing her brother up.

"Oh, fine," Fanren huffed, being outranked by the other two.

"If we are to be going out, we ought to go somewhere with class," Fudie insisted once more.

"We always go to places 'with class', I want to have fun for once!" Fanren whined.

"Fanren's right, we always have to play to the crowds back home. But no one here knows who we are! So can't we just this once slam it? Even if just a little?" Feimei begged.

"We should go to a common restaurant," Xiao Lang interjected. "A stake house, or an Italian place. I don't much care which, but I'm sort of in the mood for pasta."

Xiefa and Fudie looked to each other, Xiefa shrugged and Fudie responded with a sigh. "Very well. An Italian restaurant it is..."

6:37 PM

The day was slowly marching onwards into evening inside Grimmauld Place. The mounted House Elf heads still occasionally pulled a face as you wandered past them, and the children still sat together playing exploding snap on the landing in order to keep out of the way. However, the pent up energies of the four tricksters locked within these walls was finally beginning to subside after a full day's worth of play.

Sirius reached down and ruffled Harry's hair in passing, earning a half-hearted protest from his godson as he, Remus, and Tonks turned and made their way down one of the halls towards the twins' room. There was a faint zap sound as Sirius stepped down and what felt like a static shock jolted up his spine followed by a quiet pop. Both Remus and Tonks turned to see what caused the sound and broke into laughter at the sight.

A slightly dazed Sirius stood with every long black strand of hair on his whole head standing on end. The afro-like style easily reached from one end of the hall to the other. Sirius pulled a face at their amused reactions as he prodded gently at his ridged locks of gravity defying hair. "They're solid... there's no give to them at all..." he informed the other two.

"There's no way with all that hair you'll ever manage to get through the door," Remus pointed out around a snicker.

"So, you think this is funny, do you?" Sirius asked with a growl. It was his 'I'm pretending to be angry at you now' look, so Moony wasn't the least concerned.

"As a matter of fact, yes. I find this quite amusing!" Remus replied with a confident nod. Sirius pulled his smile that always meant trouble, but Remus stood his ground. That is, until Sirius snatched him by the arm and tugged the startled wolf into the spell effect as well.
As Remus stood and tested the lengths of his hair, Sirius and Tonks gave out a hearty laugh. "Ah, I see what you mean; this is quite a funny situation!" Sirius cheered.

"How very mature of you..." Remus sneered through a smile, sticking his tongue out at his childhood friend.

"How very mature of both of you," Tonks pointed out at their childish behaviour. She realized her mistake in pulling attention to herself when the two canine Marauders eyed her hair and then exchanged side-long glances and sneers growing on their lips as Remus once more tilted his head as a signal that they should begin.

Taking a quick step back out of their easy reach, Tonks held up her hands as if to ward them off. Padfoot cocked an eyebrow at her; Moony lowered his head down between his shoulders. Holding up one finger in the pose of a street performer, Tonks brought her thumb to her mouth and blew as if she were blowing on a whistle. Suddenly, her short pink hair stood on end all by itself. "Ta-daaaa...!" she said once she was done metamorphing herself.

Both men began laughing, which she quickly joined in on, as they laughed at each other and themselves for a good five minutes. Today had been fun. Now if they could only figure out how to get through the door like this, so that they could continue on their way...

"Let's go, oh dearest prodigy..." Xiefa teased.

"Don't call me that," Xiao Lang growled angrily.

"Xiao Lang? Are you alright?"

"No."

Xiefa slipped farther into the room, closing the door behind her so the others wouldn't eavesdrop so easily. She came up to his bed, which she could only barely see in the dark room. She sat down at his side and ran her fingers tenderly through his hair. "What's wrong, You di?" she asked, voice full of motherly compassion.

"I'm not worthy of leading the Clan!" he cried, "I'm no good at anything!"

Xiefa was rather surprised by this, where had this new line of thought suddenly sprouted from? "Don't be ridiculous! You're the young heir, the product of generations of breeding, you-"

"Right!" Xiao Lang insisted, when he looked up at her, she saw tears in his eyes and noticed that he had that little pink teddy bear in his arms again.

She blinked at him. Did this bear have something to do with what he was on about? "Okay, you've lost me."

"I was supposed to be this great prodigy, this miracle child produced by the ultimate breeding plan, and yet when I was faced with the task of retrieving the Clow Cards, I couldn't do anything! I was useless! A rankless nobody out-shined me in every aspect..." He choked on a sob of guilt and shame, but continued to talk anyway, feeling relief in finally getting it off of his chest. "I couldn't even help, I was nothing! She took everything that I was supposed to be, and she did it so sweetly, with such a nice smile, that I can't even be mad at her!"
"Do you blame yourself for not hating her?"

"I'm supposed to hate her! I'm expected to... But she's so... and just... how could I do anything other then fall in love..."

"Is she really that wonderful?" Xiefa asked. "You have always been someone who had an untouchable heart; you never smiled, and hardly even talked unless you were being forced to. You were always kind, helping anyone who lived, but you never felt anything beyond a sense of duty. For someone to so completely gain your love, I have to be impressed with her and love her myself."

"I'm not kind, I'm selfish! I've always done everything for myself. But not her, she was always helping people, thinking of others, and didn't even need a reason to do so, she just did it. Even me; no matter how mean I was or what I did to her she always looked at me with that smile and did her best to help me in whatever it was that I wanted. She was always cheering for me, even if I was against her..."

"Is that what your type is? I can see how you could fall for someone like that. I envy you for finding such a girl."

"It doesn't matter, nothing will come of it. I'm going to be at Hogwarts for the next seven years, how could I even think of asking her to do something like wait for me? There are too many people who love her, it's too impractical. And even if by some chance I could talk her into waiting, and she did wait, and everything else went wonderfully, the Elders would never agree to such a union, and I have to live for the Clan, not for myself."

Xiefa was silent for a while, not really sure what she wanted to say. Finally, she said the only bit of comfort she could manage to think of. "And that, You di, is why you are the perfect candidate for Clan Leader. You will forever put the people first, even above yourself. And as much as I hate seeing you do it, it is what is for the best, and it is the mark of a true and wonderful leader," and with that she stood and left her brother's room.

She came out to the impatient faces of the other three sisters. "It took you long enough!" grumbled Fanren.

"Where is he?" Fudie asked suspiciously.

"He's meditating. He'll come down later to join us when he's done," Xiefa explained.

"That was a long time to be in there to tell us that much..." Feimei pointed out, smelling gossip that she wasn't being involved in.

"I'm hungry, let's go," was all Xiefa replied with, making it clear to all that she wasn't going to indulge their curiosity.
That is 18 pages (over 13,000 words) of what is almost the same as the original third part of the Love War and Stores trilogy. Having cut out that one day, the trilogy is changed to a 2-parter instead, but you got a lot more extended in chapters 3a and b. The only real change made in this chapter was that I extended the scene where Sakura's in Olivander's to include her actual buying of the wand. Other than that it was just the name changes and a few grammatical and spelling errors rectified. However, I am dyslexic, and this is more or less a self-beta, so there may be mistakes still. Feel free to point them out if and when you notice them, just recall that I'm writing this in Canadian English, not American English, so it's not wrong when I put something down like “colour” instead of “color”.

Anyway, back to talking about the actual chapter, during the initial run of this section of the story, I was getting a lot of complaints about the lack of Harry and friends. I feel compelled for the sake of new readers to remind everyone that this story takes place during the events of Order of the Phoenix. Now, while there will come to pass great changes to the events going on involving Harry, Hermione, and the Weasley children in which they experience a great deal character growth and development, this story follows the concept of a snowball effect in which the changes start out small by influence of key alterations that take place and grow at an exponential rate as things continue to progress. So at the moment, there isn't enough alteration to warrant more than a passing comment or two as the children are busy scrubbing mould off of cupboards and walls. There has always been a scene planned during the event of the prefect badges where the golden trio discuss the mysterious hand-delivered letters, because I judged that everything should be discussed at once rather than a dozen or so smaller conversations that had to keep recapping and referencing each other for continuity sake.

So, just heads up for everyone: if the events of a scene are not different enough from things that took place in the book, I will not be rewriting them. I will expect that everyone bothering to read this fanfic has already read and/or seen the movies enough times to know how those scenes take place and should you require a refresher there are several sources that one could turn to for this purpose. Many web pages have a chapter-by-chapter summery, the Harry Potter Lexicon has a day-by-day calendar of events that I myself have made use of to build my timeline, there is also the option of re-reading the section in question from a personal collection, pirated e-book, or basically any public library in North America and likely most of Europe. The point being, you don't need me to be wasting my writing time telling you things that you can already find elsewhere. We all know I'm a horridly slow writer to begin with, made slower by being a full time university student. That being said, if I write a scene you can bet that it's going to be at least 25% original content. The very VERY few exceptions that might be made are those so mandatory to the plot that they can a) not be altered for whatever reason, and b) can not be glazed over or skipped completely. So far I have found no such points, but I am not omniscient and so may end up being forced to do so in the future. However, until such an exceptional event takes place, that is the rule you are to expect from me.

That being said, I will close off this chapter by saying Shade and Sweet Water everyone, and I will see you next chapter, which will be comprised of predominantly original material (with a bit of me smudging in some of my favourite Sakura-Eriol moments that could no longer fit in these two chapters).
Chapter 6: Goodbye at Summer's End

Chapter Summary

Sakura and her Guardians return to Tomoeda and discover what her friends had been plotting behind her back in her absence. Harry gets a few more clues about the mystery he'll be faced with this year. Syaoran reveals his own mystery that begins to unfold until his mother makes her own appearance in London. This chapter includes highlights such as interacting with Chiharu, Rika, and Naoko, a guest appearance by Yamazaki, and a Nadeshiko/Fujitaka moment.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sakura rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she came into the study where she felt Eriol's presence. He turned to the opening door with a smile. "Good morning, Sakura-san! Did you sleep well?" he asked, putting down his pen for a moment.

"Hai," she said, coming up to the side of his desk. "Good morning. Am I interrupting your work?"

"This?" he indicated the paper. "No, it's nothing urgent. I'm just rewriting some of Clow's older works on European Sorcery," he explained, placing aside the sheet for him to return to it later. "Is there something that you need?"

"No, I just woke up so I came down to say good morning to everyone," Sakura said, a little surprised by his question.

"Oh, I see," he smiled warmly at her. "Are you hungry? I was about to start breakfast soon. What would you like?"

"Anything is fine. Do you want me to help?"

"You don't need to. I can manage on my own."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," he said with a smile. "Nakuru should be in the living room watching cartoons. Why don't you go and join her?"

"Okay," Sakura nodded and hurried out of the room.

Sakura gave a sigh of minor depression when she left the room at Eriol's shooing her off. She knew he meant no harm, and offense was probably the farthest thing from his intent, but to her it was like he didn't want her around or something. But never one to worry about such things for long, Sakura went in search of Nakuru like she had been told. It took her a little bit to locate the living room, partly because she didn't know which way to start at and partly because the house was so large. But her search was aided by the sound of Nakuru's voice singing along with what she could only suppose was some sort of theme song.

Finally, after making her way into the living room, Sakura saw that the TV was sporting a trio of
rather poorly drawn animal people. Sakura couldn't even tell what they were supposed to be! "Ohayo, Nakuru-san," she announced her presence.

The brunette turned and looked at the small girl and smiled, "Ohayo, kawaii Sakura-chan!" Nakuru greeted back.

"What are you watching?" she asked curiously, coming to sit on the sofa next to the teenager.

"Animaniacs," she informed helpfully.

"Are those bunnies?" Sakura asked.

"I think they're puppies. Or maybe monkeys..." the older one replied, scratching her head in embarrassed confusion.

"Oh. What are their names?"

"The tall one's Yakko. The one in blue is Wakko, and the girl is their sister, Dot."

"Who's the big fat guy?" Sakura asked, trying to understand what was going on. "Why are they running from him? Isn't he a policeman? Isn't that what policemen wear?"

A vein began to pop on the side of Nakuru's head as she forced a smile and explained, attempting to hear the TV over their conversation. "He's a security guard, he's trying to catch them cause they're always running all over the place."

"What does that say?" she asked, pointing to a sign that the camera had panned to focus on.

"Audition in progress," she informed quickly.

"Why is there an audition going on?" was the innocent question she was met with next.

"Cause they live at the place movies are made," Nakuru replied, annoyance beginning to seep into her voice.

"Hoe?? That must be fun, don't you think? What is he saying?"

"..."

Friday morning, Dumbledore and Moody arrived at the Order Headquarters together while Harry, Ron, and Hermione were eating breakfast. Molly had made pancakes while the children had still been in bed because both Tonks and Arthur had left for work shortly after dawn. The pancakes had been left on a heating plate to keep them warm so the children could eat whenever they pleased. Ginny and Hermione had already eaten as both the girls were naturally early risers, but Hermione had opted to keep her two male friends company while they ate. As for the twins, they were still in bed, it was unusual for the twins to get up after Ron and Harry were; however, when Ron made an off-hand comment about it, Sirius had sniggered and said something about a “last prank” keeping them from going to bed for most the night. Remus had apparently taken pity on them before he had headed home at nearly one in the morning the night before, and finally let them get to sleep.

As it were, the topic of discussion that morning at breakfast had been the pranking war of the day before and all the things each side had done to the other. Sirius had been all too willing to sit down and go over the glorious details of everything Harry and his friends had missed when they had vouched to hide away on the landing the day before, and so both the boys and the man were
laughing quite hard when the elder wizards came in.

Perhaps it was the jovial mood, or perhaps it was that Sirius was still against them hiding things from the children, but whatever the reason Sirius stood when Dumbledore entered the room and began talking despite the audience. “Oh, Dumbledore, good thing you're here! Mizuki brought another letter for you,” he informed, pulling the slightly crumpled envelope from his pocket.

The name was echoed from Mad-Eye's lips before the letter even reached Dumbledore's awaiting hand. “Mizuki?” One electric blue eye swivelled around to focus on the parchment folded into the shape of an envelope and the wax-seal crest adorning it. Moody's scarred and gnarled face contorted into a furious scowl at the sight of the offending letter, causing Harry's curious ears to itch. “Another one?!”

Sirius flinched back from the crusty old auror ever so slightly before barrelling on as if nothing were the matter, handing the letter over with a smile. “It arrived yesterday afternoon. We knew you were planning to come over today, so Remus and Tonks and I just figured to wait until now to give it to you,” he explained conversationally.

“Dumbledore, this is a breach in our security, surely you realize this! We can't trust this woman, what if she's an impostor, or is put under the Imperius Curse? Until we know for sure her method of finding this place, we should not be resting so easily!” Moody insisted.

“Dumbledore says it's fine, so it's fine,” Sirius insisted, though the tone of his voice made it clear even to the children that he was as much attempting to reassure himself on this matter as Moody.

“‘Fine’ is it? And what about when Voldemort and his merry little band of Death Eaters follow her in, using the same breach of security, to your godson, hmm? If memory serves, it was you and James who had insisted so wholeheartedly that Pettigrew had what it takes to join the Order. And wasn’t your reasoning at the time ‘because James said so’? Have you learned absolutely nothing?!” Moody accused.

Sirius was a waxy sort of pale, resembling more the insane man who had escaped from Azkaban the two years before than he had the whole summer. But more disturbing than his appearance was the low, threatening growl that rumbled around in his chest. Harry wondered if Sirius would turn into a dog and bite Moody for what he was saying about this situation and the past.

However, before either Mad-Eye or Sirius could open their mouths to continue the argument, Dumbledore interjected in that way that only Dumbledore could. “I assure you, Alastor, that I have never met a person who's perception I trust more than my correspondent. And speaking on the subject of perception, perhaps you may care to save the remainder of his discussion until after your young audience has left the room…” he reprimanded, giving a stern look at both the careless arguers and the guilty eavesdroppers.

With that said, neither adult spoke of the matter until the teens had finished the last of their breakfast and were shunted up the stairs.

"A-ano..."

Eriol turned to the noise coming from the door that was cracked just enough for Sakura's head to fit through. "Sakura-san?! Weren't you watching cartoons with Nakuru?"

"Well, I was, but..." she looked minorly embarrassed. "I couldn't understand any of it, and... and I
think I made Nakuru-san mad at me for always asking her what was being said..."

The surprised look on Eriol's face melted away into a parental smile, like Fujitaka always used. "I see. Nakuru is very smart and curious, but it's true she doesn't have the patience it takes to teach. Please don't think poorly of her, by the time breakfast is ready she'll have forgotten the whole thing. Yukito-san is probably in the garden, and Kaho is most likely still asleep. I think Spinel is in the library again..."

"U-um..." Sakura squeaked out. Eriol fell silent and looked at her expectantly, waiting to hear what it was she had been wanting to say. "A-are you sure you don't need any help?"

Eriol looked at Sakura's almost pleading green eyes as if to ponder something, before he ventured to ask, "Do you want to help?" the idea was, admittedly, rather new to him. Spinel found it a waste of his time to try and cook, Naruku was too lazy most of the time to learn, and Kaho had announced herself a disaster in the kitchen back when they first met. Eriol had simply gotten used to doing it all himself, using spell work to make up the extra hands he lacked on his own accord.

And yet Sakura nodded, blushing, at his question, and hurried over to pull out an apron. Unable to help himself, Eriol marveled, and not for the first time since Sakura-tachi's arrival two nights before, at this new sensation known as 'family'. He cursed himself silently as envy and jealousy overcame him at the thought that his other half knew nothing but this feeling. Sometimes Eriol really did hate Clow, leaving him with all of this while the other got away with living the life of a normal person.

"Eriol-kun?" the voice was filled with curiosity, and a little annoyance, that dragged the enigma back to reality.

"I'm sorry, what was that, Sakura-san?" he asked with a smile, as per usual.

"I asked what you would like me to do?"

"Oh, yes, of course!" Eriol stepped from his stool and over to a cupboard on the far side of the room. From there he pulled out a mixing bowl and turned once more to Sakura with a smile. "Have you ever made baking-powder biscuits before?"

"No..." Sakura replied, shaking her head slowly. Her eyes were fixed solidly on Eriol's, she had seen the ancient shadow cross through the stormy gaze like a cold, hollow wind: too old to feel and too tired to care. It was so out of place on his babyish face to find the eyes of the dead that she couldn't repress the soft shiver that ran up her spine.

If Eriol had seen the shudder, he did a wonderful job of hiding it, for all he did was wander up to the table and say, "I'll show you, then." After gathering the ingredients for her and explaining how to do everything, she set off to work and he returned to preparing the dish he had been working on before. At one point Nakuru came in to find out what they would be eating, and Kaho came by twice to get a shopping list from Eriol, and Kero had to be shunted out of the kitchen repeatedly to keep away from the snacks. But despite it all, the two sets of small hands worked with surprising efficiency, being done the meal before the cartoons were over, which raised it's fair share of complaints from the one watching them when called away to eat.

Breakfast as a whole was uneventful. The guardians ate three times the amount of food the humans did, and Kaho misplaced her fork for a few minutes, but as a whole, and with everything that could happen among such a group, it went smoothly. It was during the time that Nakuru was trying to outrace Yukito and Kero in the cleaning up of the last few bits of food that were left over that Kaho got to her feet. "I'll go and get the groceries now!"
Yukito abandoned their game and stood as well. "I'll go with you."

"You don't need to..." she said.

But Yukito shook his head, "I still have to replace those eggs that I caused you to drop."

"Alright, if you insist..." Kaho then paused and began digging in her purse. "Now where is it..."

"If you're looking for the shopping list, it's upstairs on your bedside table," Eriol informed, not looking up from his clearing the table.

"Oh... heheh!" and with that Kaho hurried up the stairs.

Sakura looked blankly at Eriol for a second as she piled the plates that she had gathered on top of his. "Does Mizuki-sensie often leave her shopping lists there?"

"Not particularly," Eriol said, off hand.

"Hoe? Then how did you know that that's where it was?" Sakura asked, getting more confused.

"Because when she came in last time to find the list, she didn't have her earrings on, but she does now." He explained as if it was no big deal.

"And that is where she keeps her earrings?" Sakura asked, starting to get the gist of the logic behind everything. Eriol only reply was a nod. "Hoe! You're really good at noticing things, Eriol-kun! I didn't even know she wasn't wearing her earrings from before!"

Innocent as the praise was, it still brought a flush to Eriol's pail cheeks that he was found out in his silent observation and admiration for the young teacher. Though he was rather positive that Sakura was quite clueless when it came to the reason for his studying the woman, he still wasn't too sure how she would react when she found out and so the conversation being on such topics put him on edge. The last person he wanted to think badly of him was Sakura.

As they walked into the kitchen to clean the dishes, Eriol looked back over his shoulder to talk to Sakura. "You are going home today, right?"

"Yes, the plane leaves at three," Sakura replied thoughtfully.

"Have you finished all your packing?" Eriol pressed. "I was hoping for a chance to speak with you about some things. Just catch you up on some basic sorcery knowledge for when you go to school."

"Alright. It shouldn't take me more than half an hour to finish packing the last of my things, I'll go hurry and do that, then we can talk for the rest of the day if you want."

Kaho and Yuki returned to the lonely mansion some forty-five minutes after their departing, arms laden with produce. Every hand was recruited to help with the unloading of the groceries. After they were done, Eriol lead Sakura away to one of his private studies so they could have their talk.

"Magic, or at least Sorcery, is made up of several components that work together. The easiest of these, the one you've had the most experience with, is called 'alignment'. A sorcerer's alignment is traditionally either sun or moon. The occasional sorcerer, such as Clow Reed, has a secondary alignment. For myself, my primary alignment is sun with a secondary of moon. You on the other hand, are quite special. Your primary alignment is mostly unheard of, as it being that of the stars, with secondary and tertiary alignments as moon and sun respectively. The wider spectrum of
alignments that a sorcerer has, the greater their power becomes.

"Another one that you will most likely hear a lot about in your training this year is 'attributes'. An attribute is the element that the sorcerer is most inclined to cast. There are six attributes in the known cycle, and those are, in no particular order of power: fire, wind, water, earth, wood, and thunder. Sun and moon split those attributes equally, with fire, earth, and thunder under sun, and wind, water, and wood under moon."

"Like the cards..." Sakura said softly, pulling them out. "I used Windy and Wood on Yue, and he said that they were both under him..."

"Yes, Clow used the basis of attributes in creating the cards. Other things effect magic as well, though not as seriously as alignment and attribute."

"Other things? Like what?"

"Well, what affiliation you have refers to the type of spell work you use, like a class... The Li Clan is traditionally affiliated with a branch of eastern magic. There are other branches, each with it's own set of slightly different circles and spells, but all eastern magic has the same base to it's style. That base is known as an affiliation. In England, here, and when you get to Hogwarts, the affiliation that they will be teaching will be western magic. Over in America, they learn the new-world magic affiliation, in Africa they use more of the ancient affiliation... are you getting the idea?"

"Sort of..."

"Also, something that can not be changed no matter how much you train, something that all sorcerers are born with, is the aspect of their magic. This means whether their power will be light or dark. I am dark, and you are light. It has little effect on how the spells are cast, the effect is more in the result of the magic and what the caster can do with it. I can never learn to block out visions, or any magic for that matter, because of the dark aspect in my casting. The closest I can do is instead to attack the incoming spell with one of my own and hope it deflects it. You, on the other hand, are a light aspect, and so shielding yourself from such things will come quite easily and naturally.

"However, just because this is how sorcery works, this is not necessarily how wizardry works. While both are magic, they are not the same thing. By attending a wizarding school, you will not be able to express yourself freely as a sorceress. They do not believe we still exist, and they would treat you with disbelief and fear if you were to attempt to inform them of what you really are. I believe Yue and Cerberus already expressed this sentiment in some way to you, but I must re-enforce it by stating that while you can acknowledge the existence of magic within you, you can not discuss sorcery with anyone beyond fellow sorcerers you happen to meet while attending."

"And there are? Other sorcerers going there, I mean?"

"Yes, though I doubt there are very many as most prefer to be home-schooled, there are always a few who wish to be able to participate in the wizard's world and so attend a magic school. You need not worry, you will not be alone and alienated there, I just needed to make sure that the secrecy of the situation was clear to you. I did not want you to get hurt because the situation hadn't been explained to you. Far too often people make the mistake of trying to protect their loved ones by concealing facts from them, when in actuality that leads to far greater pain in the long run. Not only do they get hurt from acting off of incomplete information, but they are hurt even more later when they find out they could have been spared all along if they had just been told the truth to begin with.

"You will be facing hardships at the school that normal wizards and witches do not suffer from, born solely from the fact that your magic is of a sorcery source while theirs is from a wizardry one."
Casting their spells will be harder, until you get accustomed to converting their spells into a form you can cast. And unlike the wizards, who can borrow another's wand for dampened results, you will never be capable of casting spells without having an insignia engraved on the wand. However, if you are in a dangerous situation, where you have no other choice, you do have your sorcery to fall back on which they lack the capability for."

Sakura examined the butt of her wand for a moment, where her circle had been intricately and likely magically carved as if it were some seal. “But Eriol-kun, why are sorcerers different from wizards? If they both use magic, why aren’t they the same?”

Eriol smiled at his heiress. “That, sadly, is a mystery that may never be solved.”

“Not even the most ancient of Guardians know the reason behind it, the facts having been lost long before their creation,” Kaho interjected as she came in to put down some sandwiches and tea for a morning snack.

"Guardians...? Like Kero-chan, and Yue, and Nakuru-san and Spinel-san?"

"Not... exactly like them, but yes. There are hundreds of Guardians around the world, bound to the most ancient and powerful of Sorcery Clans."

"Hoe..." Sakura mumbled in awe, "Will I meet any of them in Hogwarts?"

"Perhaps. It depends on the families attending and whether they feel it necessary to send the Guardians with the children, or keep them at home with themselves." Eriol explained.

Books packed securely in her suitcase, and the rest of her new school supplies stacked neatly within the large chest in the room she had been staying in as per Eriol's instructions. It was time to return to Japan, to load up Kaho's car and drive to the airport. To say goodbye once more to friends and family alike.

Kaho, the only one present with a valid drivers licence, was of course the one behind the wheel, and Eriol took his place in the front passenger seat. This left Nakuru to sit in the back with Sakura and Yukito, which meant that the drive was filled with bickering, because no one could decide who should sit where. Yue was demanding within Yukito to keep Sakura away from the 'thieving impostor', but to have the two Moon Guardians sit side by side was just begging for disaster, for it was in their very nature to battle.

Nakuru's jealous, taunting nature led to her wanting to sit in the middle, with Sakura behind Eriol and Yukito barricaded from them both. But Eriol saw at once that this was a bad idea, and told her plainly that the answer was no. This lead to only one other solution, to have Sakura sit in the middle and put up with the two Moon Guardians bickering over her for the whole ride. At least Kero and Spinel were easier to pacify, letting them float freely around the inside of the vehicle so long as they didn't get in Kaho's way.

As Eriol sat and listened to Yukito insist that it was *his* Kinomoto family, he tried his best to hold in the laughter. Leaning over to the side, he spoke to Kaho in a tone that betrayed his amusement in the situation at hand. "I doubt it would really do to threaten at this point to turn the vehicle around and go back, would it...?"

"Indeed, I doubt it would..." Kaho replied with a smile of mirth of her own.

Eriol grew quiet for a moment, however, as he appeared to be pondering something. "Though, what else is there that fathers say to the children on road trips?"
The teacher pondered this question herself for some time. "Well, they reply to the children's questions of 'are we there yet'..."

"But they have not yet asked that. How can I tell them 'no' for something that has not yet been asked?" he inquired.

"Quite," Kaho agreed, "Well, I suppose your primary option then is to accept that you have better children than most of the world."

"Yes... I believe I may feel pride in that," Eriol admitted with a nod.

"I would dare to think you should," Kaho insisted. Then, unable to help it any longer, the 'parents' of this little family shared a good hearty laugh.

Sakura, Kero, and Yukito stood before their hosts at the London airport saying their goodbyes.

"Thank you for having us," Sakura said with a bow.

"Not at all," Eriol responded with a shake of his head, "it was our pleasure. The only regret is that you have to go so soon."

"Bye, Kero-chan! Sakura-chan! Come back and play again soon! You can leave Yue behind, though," Nakuru insisted, waving at the three.

"Or better yet, would you mind trading Ruby Moon for Yue?" Spinel pleaded with Sakura.

"And what is that supposed to mean?!" Nakuru demanded, turning quickly to her twin in challenge.

"That you're loud and annoying, and doubly so when Cerberus is present. Such an arrangement would be ideal, actually. You could go and pester Touya-san to death, being as rambunctious as you see fit with that spaz of a Sun Guardian's help, and I could get you out of my fur permanently."

Noticing the subtle way that Yukito latched on to Sakura at the mention of such a trade, Eriol chose to interject his Guardian's squabbling before Spinel's teasing brought about any unwanted problems with Yue. "Come now, Spinel, you know the nature of your duality wouldn't allow for such a thing. You and Ruby Moon are perfect point and counterpoint to one and other, and it must not be any other way."

"Too bad for you, looks like you're stuck with Suppi-chan for the long haul," Kero told Nakuru.

"Yeah, well... I'm rather used to it by now," Nakuru responded with a shrug.

Kero rolled his eyes. "Tell me about it. I've been stuck with Yue for centuries, and he is way worse than Suppi-chan is. Always either asleep, or grumpy. At least now there's the Snow Bunny to even things out a little."

"As I recall, Cerberus," Yukito said in a haughty voice, obviously Yue speaking through him, "it was you who spent all your time sleeping on your back in the middle of the yard until Clow would come and feed you."

To the sidelines, Sakura and Eriol stood beside each other and looked on at the four Guardians exchanging verbal taunts and blows. "That was nice of Kero-chan to come to Yue's aid like that," Sakura observed.

"Oh? You think he said something to defend Yue?" Eriol questioned, a secretive smile and a raised
eyebrow on his otherwise innocent looking face.

“Not... defend. But rather allowed him the opportunity to join in. Yue was getting a little sad that Nakuru-san, Spinel-san, and Kero-chan were all playing together,” Sakura explained.

Eriol gave a chuckle at her explanation of the situation, but then turned a loving smile on to her. “I'm glad that I chose to leave those two to you. You understand them in a way that not many people could, and give them what they each need to grow. Clow Reed took their development as far as he could go. If I had taken them, I would have only been able to take them a little farther before I ended up stunting their growth once more. Please, Sakura-san, show me where it is that only you can take them...”

“Ano... you mean back to Tomoeda? Or are you talking about that Hogwarts school? Hoe...”

This got both Eriol and Kaho laughing, which only sufficed to make Sakura blush. “Don't change, Sakura-san. Never change. You are too wonderful the way you are now,” Eriol told her.

Kaho, on the other hand, took pity on the young girl and made an attempt to explain. “Eriol is talking about long-term metaphysically. How you treat them and how that treatment alters their behaviour. If they are happy, it will show in their actions and their words.”

Further conversation was cut short by the automated voice telling passengers that it was time to board the plane. So with much exuberance, waving hands, and promises to miss each other and see each other again soon—including an attempt by Nakuru to sneak in among the boarding party—Sakura and her two Guardians were off, returning to Japan.

The flight was long, and at times uncomfortable. Kero had watched the inflight movies from his Mistress's lap, and Sakura had played rounds of cards with both her Guardians at different intervals. She had drawn, been read to by Yukito out of both novels and one of her new textbooks, and fell asleep for a while.

By the time the flight touched down in the Japanese airport, Sakura was all too ready to go home. Being bustled along through the “Arrivals” gateway, Sakura had to cling to Yukito's hand so not to be separated from him within the throng of people. Kero was nestled in the crook of her arm, the cards in their special purse, and the Sakura Book safely in her winged backpack, along with a few other things to entertain herself with.

Sakura knew the instant that Yukito spotted Touya through the river of heads by the burst of elation that shot out of him through their conjoined hands. A few minutes more and she saw the first signs of her father's smiling face between the brakes as the masses fanned out to their respective loved ones as they exited the gate.

Excited as only a child could get, and missing her family oh so much, Sakura broke from her Moon Guardian's hand and ran forward, flinging her arms around her father's midsection. Immediately she was engulfed in a return embrace, the gentle presence that she associated with his familiar warmth spread through her and the spicy smell of his aftershave told her she was home at last.

The greeting between Touya and Yukito was more subdued than the one between father and child. Theirs was a greeting which predominantly consisted of long looks filled with affection and pleasant conversation about the trip. However, the fact that they stood closer together than was strictly necessary in the crowded room during all the exchanges of greeting each other wasn't brought up by any of the party involved.
They gathered the luggage and piled into the car, Sakura getting shotgun so that Yukito and Touya could sit together in the back. The two were content conversing quietly their sweet nothings while Sakura talked loudly to her father about all that she had seen and experienced in England. It was a round-about means of explaining, but Fujitaka was well practiced in listening to his children chatter on about whatever they cared to tell him.

She had been explaining all about the huge bookstore that was larger on the inside than on the out when they had pulled up to the house. Yukito and Touya helped with the bags, making it so Sakura could go into the house ahead of them. She didn't notice that Fujitaka and Touya hung back, with Yukito automatically following suit to remain close to his beloved. She merely pushed at the handle of her home and entered.

The moment she stepped fully into the entrance, not even having gotten a chance to stoop in order to take off her shoes, she was met by the happy cry of six voices calling out “Surprise!”

“Hoe?” Sakura blinked unintelligent at everyone gathered in her hallway. “What's all this?”

“We’re throwing you a party!” Chiharu said excitedly.

“Because you're going to that English boarding school soon, everyone thought it would be nice to make a few last happy memories of summer before you left,” Rika explained.

“Everyone...” Sakura teared up, touched by their thoughtfulness.

“Group hug!” Rei suddenly called, jumping forward and dragging the nearest two—who happened to be Naoko and Tomoyo—with her to engulf the Card Mistress. Chiharu and Rika hurried forward, Rika holding Hikari's hand to urge her into the growing mass of giggling preteen exuberance.

“Oi! Take it somewhere else, you're blocking the door!” Touya scolded from behind them. Most of Sakura's friends weren't accustomed to her gruff older brother as they hardly ever came to visit. Being addressed by him made many of them jump and scamper to do as he bid them to. Sakura hurried to remove her shoes and join her friends where they had relocated their gathering in the living room.

Behind her, Touya lead Yukito up the stairs with their luggage, to put her things in her room before vanishing into her brother's room together. Fujitaka headed to the kitchen to ensure that food would be in ready supply whenever the guests became hungry.

Sakura, still holding Kero, came into the livingroom and opted to make herself comfortable on the floor so that her friends could share the sofa and chairs without being too crowded. Almost at once the first question escaped Chiharu, “So tell us about England!”

Yes, what was it like?” Naoko parroted eagerly.

“Well, I went and stayed with Eriol-kun in his house while I was there. He lives in a really big house, there had to be at least fifty rooms in it!” Sakura began.

“Fifty?! I never knew he was that rich...” Rei exclaimed, eyes wide. “Shame, if I had known, I would have given it a go.”

“Rei-chan!” Rika scolded, only half serious.

“What? What girl doesn't want a cute rich boyfriend?” Rei countered.

“I don’t think such things as wealth really matter in finding love,” Tomoyo philosophically debated.
“Well, of course you wouldn’t care, you’ve got more than enough money as it is! The rest of us live in a practical world, though, where money’s hard to come by,” Rei nodded sagely at her own words.

“I don’t know if it would have done you much good, anyway. Hiiragizawa-kun seemed rather intently focused on Sakura-chan,” Naoko pointed out.

“Oh? You noticed that too, huh? Did you like Hiiragizawa-kun as well, Naoko-chan?” Rei asked.

Naoko blushed, and then began to fidget with the edge of her skirt. “No, not really. I haven’t found a person I like yet...”

“For me, there’s no one but Yamazaki-kun, never has been. And Rika-chan is going out with someone older, right?” Chiharu clarified.

“That’s right,” Rika nodded, blushing slightly.

“You never did tell us who you were dating...” Naoko pointed out.

Rika covered her cheek with one hand and looked away from her friends. “Maybe one day, but for now I’d rather not say...”

“What about Tomoyo-chan?” Chiharu questioned, looking to the camera girl curiously.

Tomoyo smiled at everyone and told them rather easily, “The person I like most already has a number one love who is someone else. I’d rather not come between them so I’ve opted to stay on the sidelines and be happy for their happiness.”

“Wow... that is so deep...” Rei said, stars in her eyes.

“Hikari-chan was telling me that she had a crush...” Naoko said, looking at the quiet member of their group.

“Oh, well, yes, but...” Hikari stammered out, hiding her face in her hands. “I’d never have the sort of courage it takes to confess...”

“Oh, come on! That’s no good!” Rei complained.

“I remember that stage.” Chiharu nodded sagely, “I used to be so nervous about confessing to Yamazaki-kun, I was scared that we wouldn’t be able to be friends anymore if I did.”

“Yes, confessing your feelings can be one of the hardest things you ever do. But you never know until you try, that person might just love you back...” Rika agreed.

“What about you, Sakura-chan?” Hikari asked, trying to get the focus of the conversation somewhere other than herself.

“Yes, that’s right. Didn’t you have someone you were trying to confess to a few months ago?” Rika recalled.

“It... didn’t work out,” Sakura confided, taking her turn to blush. “I didn’t get a chance to tell him before he left...”

“Oh, how sad...” Naoko expressed. Hikari put a hand to her mouth and watched Sakura with sympathetic eyes.

“We still talk on the phone some times, and write letters to each other regularly... I gave him a bear,
but we haven't discussed it yet. I don't want to tell him over the phone or in some letter, but next time I see him, I'm definitely going to make him understand my feelings,” Sakura insisted.

“Now that's conviction for you!” Rei cheered.

From there the girl talk started to drift into other topics, such as school gossip and opinions of different classmates. While Kero sat and listened, pretending to be a stuffed animal, he wondered at how fast little girls grew up. While his Mistress still had points where she played with toys or was overbearingly childish, he couldn't deny those moments in time where she expressed her more adult interests.

Kero noted with some amusement that Fujitaka waited until the conversation had drifted safely away from boys before he brought out the bowls of snacks, and with some trepidation that it was only at this point that Fujitaka discreetly removed Kero from the room. The Sun Guardian remained huffy about being denied the treats served to his Mistress and her friends until he realized that Fujitaka had thought ahead enough to set aside a special tray of snacks in his office for Kero.

The girls had watched two movies when a knock on the door announced the arrival of Yamazaki. He had dropped by to welcome Sakura home and ask her how her little trip had gone. He had ended up staying with the girls for a movie, but excused himself when they pulled out the karaoke machine that Tomoyo's company would be releasing in a few months. Her mother had suggested she bring it along and give the product a test run prior to public release.

They had been passing the mic around for a good hour, getting up and dancing along with favourite songs whether they were singing it or not, and generally being a group of giggling prepubescent girls when Fujitaka braved the scene with ice cream in hand. The sweet treat proved to be distraction enough for the girls as they sat down in and proceeded to chatter incisively to each other all at once in voices pitched with excitement.

Fujitaka pondered as he returned to his study to continue marking papers if the reason Touya never had get-togethers like this when he was Sakura's age was because he was a boy, or if it was rooted in his quiet, antisocial personality. When Fujitaka had been her age, he was still going by Nanashi, and living in an orphanage, trying to catch up on ten years of missed life lessons. But then, Fujitaka supposed that wasn't right, either. After all, according to what Eriol had said, that had only been his first year of life.

But when he had existed for eleven years, his body had appeared to be that of a young man in his early twenties, and so friendships had behaved differently than they do for a child. Opening his study door and slipping in, Fujitaka was met with the sight of his wife's ghost fussing adoringly over Kero. The Sun Guardian was currently in his smaller, sealed form as he worked his way through devouring the bowl of ice cream Fujitaka had given him due to the size illusion making it seem like the bowl was that much larger.

Nadeshiko had discovered at some point over the summer break that while she couldn't physically interact with the real world, being a ghost and all, for some reason the Guardians and Cards were exempt from this fact. Fujitaka could only guess it was because they were made of solidified, concentrated magic, but for whatever reason Nadeshiko's gentle fingers could brush through their hair, caress their flesh, and jingle those strange little earrings the two wore in their true forms.

Currently, Nadeshiko was leaning over the table, scratching the small head with her immaculately manicured nails. “Enjoying yourselves?” Fujitaka asked.

“Thanks, Tou-san!” Kero offered with a large grin.
“Kero-chan is so cute...!” Nadeshiko cooed, giving the little beast an Eskimo kiss. Kero didn't even bother pretending to be embarrassed by the gushing, he simply returned the gesture and happily went back to eating.

“You don't find it odd? All of our new children...” Fujitaka questioned, his hand reaching up and gliding through her intangible hair.

“I don't mind,” Nadeshiko insisted. “I always saw things when I was little. Creatures and people that no one else could see. It was lonely, and I felt so horrible when I realized Touya would have to face the same fate. The most I could do was just let him know that he wasn't alone. That Kaa-chan could see and feel and hear everything that he could.

“These children of your past self, they're not all that different to the things I had always seen growing up as a little girl, so their forms don't bother me. And Sakura needs you to reassure her that what she can do is just as normal as any other talent, just as Touya needed to hear the same from me. And because of that, I want to support you and Sakura both. If that means becoming mother to a few more than I gave birth to, then so be it.”

“Nadeshiko-san...” Fujitaka whispered, wishing so badly that he could hold her and kiss her right now, but at the same time so very grateful that he had at least this much of his beloved left, and knowing that most people didn't ever receive so much of a gift.

“I love you, and I love our children. But the wonderful thing about the heart is, there's always room to find new love. Just because you find someone new to love, doesn't mean that your old loves have to be forgotten. So it's okay to welcome these new members of our family. I don't mind at all,” Nadeshiko insisted.

After that, Fujitaka got back to work. Nadeshiko arranged herself in such a way that it seemed she was hanging around his neck, small gestures to show their love for one and other, Kero returned to his true form and laid his large body on the floor along side Fujitaka's chair with his head wrapping around to the front, where it rested on the sorcerer's feet.

Fujitaka didn't know why the pose the cougar-like beast took was so comfortingly familiar, but he let sleeping cats lay and only occasionally put down his marking pen to reach his hand up and let it hover over the spot that Nadeshiko's hand sat. It gave the comforting illusion of holding those delicate fingers once more, and he would often move his thumb along the digits that he could see, but not feel. He missed the feel of her so much, and sometimes wished he had been made as much a magical being as Clow Reed's other creations.

As evening progressed, and dinner time rolled around, Touya and Yukito finally emerged from Touya's room. They joined Fujitaka, Sakura, and her friends for the meal before trudging back up the stairs together. The sound of young female voices still drifted up through the floor and past the closed door, but the location at least gave the illusion of being alone in their secluded little world.

“How much energy do girls have, anyway...?” mumbled Touya as he reclined once more on his bed. The way he was shuffled over to one side and the look he was giving his silver haired friend was a clear invitation for company.

Not one to disappoint, Yukito crawled up onto the bed next to his boyfriend and laid his head in such a way that he could listen to Touya's heart beating. “It's not because they're girls. They're just young... and happy. Being happy and young makes for very excitable individuals.”

“You won't let me get away with grumbling about anything, will you?” the dark haired teen teased.
“I want you to be young and happy, too. That way you can be easily excitable for me as well,” was Yukito's coy reply.

Touya flushed at the suggestive words, earning an endearing laugh from his teasing bed-mate. For as much as he loved his companion, Yukito's own adoration of seeing him flustered had it's moments of annoyance. But then, this generally hidden attitude that only Touya knew of was one of the things that most endeared the lunar Guardian to the stonic teen. He didn't know how he'd manage in the coming months with both his adorable little sister and his true love half a world away.

That thought brought about the impulse that he didn't waste time contemplating. He merely acted, reaching his arms around the smaller, silver haired body nestled against his own and clung with all his might. “T-To-ya...?” Yukito stammered out, surprised by the sudden act of extreme affection. Usually following such a joke Touya would attempt distance in order to recompose himself before facing his snickering beloved once again.

“Don't leave me...” Touya whispered into the soft strands, “Yuki, stay with me tonight?”

Now it was Yukito's turn to blush a deep red. Though his words were often teasingly suggestive, and they had been dating for well over a month, their relationship up to this point had been surprisingly platonic, consisting majorly of held hands and hugs with only the occasional bout of kissing when neither could hold out any longer. “To-ya... I'm sorry, but I don't think... I'm not quite ready to...”

Yukito's stammering was initially met with a rather confused—if not hurt—stare until the proverbial light bulb visibly went on in Touya's head, causing him to sputter and choke over his own breath as he turned redder than Yukito had ever seen before. “N-no! I didn't-that is-I wasn't... I meant just... you know... spend the night. In my room. With me. Not...”

“Just stay close...?” Yukito hazarded a translation for his stammering boyfriend.

That seemed to do the trick, letting Touya calm down to speak the words correctly. “You're going to be gone soon... for so long. I just... want to be with you while we can be...”

“Ah,” Yukito acknowledged, “I feel the same. I'll miss you so much...”

With that confession, Yukito reached up and brushed his lips against Touya's.

It ended up that the girls stayed up well past midnight, and didn't get up until around ten the next morning. This wasn't all that odd for Sakura, and in a way helped with her jet lag as England was several timezones away from Japan. Fujitaka happily provided a large brunch for the children, who finally began trickling home one by one when their parents arrived to pick them up starting around noon.

It finally dwindled down to the point where the only remaining guest that didn't practically live there to begin with was Tomoyo, meaning that Kero could come out of hiding and Sakura got the chance to talk about all the magical things she had seen on her trip that she had had to keep secret from her other friends. It was when they got to the look of the school uniform that all hell broke loose.

“What do you mean the uniform is all black? How can that be? And what about the cut? Don't they have any aesthetic value at all?! How could my cute little Sakura-chan be reduced to wearing a featureless, pure black robe all the time!? That can't be! I won't stand for it!” the young seamstress ranted.

“Hoe... Tomoyo-chan... it's not that bad, really... I mean, it's a school uniform, so...” Sakura tried to comfort.
“But it's completely un-cute in any way, shape, or form! How can my idol of absolute adorableness be reduced to wandering around for a full ten months in such an atrociously un-adorable outfit?! Oh, I'm ruined!” Tomoyo bemoaned. “Not only will I not have my Sakura-chan to film in all her wonderful adventures about learning magic and becoming a true magical girl, but now I'll have nightmares the whole time of her wandering around in such an ugly sack!”

"Ano...

“My artistic sense can't stand it! The adventures of Magical Girl Cardcaptor Sakura: Season 3 can simply not take place with the heroine wearing such a horrid outfit!”

“Hoe...? Season three?”

“That does it! I simply must produce true shows of adorableness and culture for my Sakura-chan to wear so that others may lay eyes upon her cuteness and see the error of their ways!”

“Hoe?!?”

“And I simply MUST have documentation!” Tomoyo ended dramatically.

“That would be problematic,” Kero announced.

“Oh? Why is that?” Tomoyo asked, turning her attention to the small golden plushy.

“Electricity doesn't function in extremely magical environments. The currents disrupt each other and magic tends to prevail,” Kero explained.

“Hoe? But Kero-chan, Tomoyo-chan always filmed me using magic before...” Sakura attempted to point out.

“It's not the same thing. While the Mistress's magic is powerful, it was on the scale of point spells, not enough to compare to hundreds of years worth of magic residue radiating within the very atmosphere. Surely you noticed the difference when we were at Daigon Alley?” Yue spoke up from the wall upon which he was leaning.

“Not... not really...” Sakura admitted, looking shy and abashed that she apparently failed such a rudimentary skill like that, “It felt magical, but not all that different than the time before the Judgement, though, lacking Clow-san's presence, of course...”

“I'm actually not all that surprised,” Kero announced, nodding sagely as he sat up on the table. This was one of his 'I'm going to be a responsible Sun Guardian now' poses, causing both the young girls to perk up in interest for the lesson they were about to be taught. “Sakura-chan is a Light aspect, and a very powerful one at that. It's not much of a shock that she would naturally protect herself against the overbearing chaos that most long-time magical communities become, especially if they aren't sensitive to the residues and don't purify the area regularly.”

“I-I'm not THAT powerful... am I?” Sakura modestly questioned.

“Sakura-chan is so cool...” Tomoyo fan-girled over her magical cousin.

“Mistress, you have bested Clow's creations, and even bested Clow himself on multiple occasions. Must you still question such facts?” Yue pointed out in a way that would have been exasperated if his face or tone ever wavered that far from the blank porcelain mask.

“But not by that much...” Sakura insisted, “Eriol-kun--”
Is the reincarnation of Clow, who was the most powerful sorcerer in history. And before you get in on it again, that Gaki was way weaker than you, even as far back as the Judgement,” Kero cut her off, having had this same conversation with her countless times since her two fellow sorcerers had returned to their homes months before.

Sensing her cousin’s distress at being singled out as one so far and above her peers, Tomoyo decided it was time for a tactical subject change. “Anyway, getting back to the important thing, you said that a video camera wouldn’t work in Sakura-chan's new school? So does that mean that I’ll have to spend an entire ten months without even being able to watch Sakura-chan on film? What about phones? Will we be able to call each other?”

“Well, phones are a no-go, same with video cameras, televisions, computers, video games, and most other modern appliances. They have adapted some devices, such as normal cameras and radios, but it’s taken a long time as most wizards don’t interact with the non-magical communities and there are so few who do have outside contact that go into inventing magical based versions that their technology is about the equivalence of the start of the century,(1)” Kero explained for her.

“The start of the century? That is rather troublesome...” Tomoyo pondered.

“Though that was nearly forty years ago now that Clow had any real contact with the wizarding community, so they have likely made some minor progress, but they are still likely some fifty to sixty years behind what you are accustomed to,” Yue supplied for the girls.

“I see... well, then a normal camera it will just have to be! Season 3 must be recorded, even if only by photograph! We'll just have to artificially re-create it for film over the school breaks! Do you think Illusion-san would work?” Tomoyo chattered determinedly.

“Season 3 of what?” Touya asked as he entered, having just come back from one of his countless part-time jobs.

“The adventures of Magical Girl Cardcaptor Sakura!” Tomoyo explained amid the many greetings of “okairi” that greeted the moody teen before giving one of her own.

“Tadaima, I thought that whole thing with the missing cards over the summer was supposed to be Season 3?” Touya nagged the small black haired girl as he made himself comfortable on the couch.

“Oh no, that didn't last anywhere near long enough to be qualified as a season!” Tomoyo exclaimed, politely ignoring the fact that Yue chose this moment to become sociable enough to join the others around the coffee table, and that his chosen seat was between herself and the new arrival to the room. “That wouldn't be more than a movie. Or, perhaps an OVA... or a sub-arc? Anyway, there's not enough to it to last a full length of a season!”

“Hoooooeeeee...”

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(1) Keep in mind, this story takes place in 1995, so when Kero says “start of the century”, he's referring to the 20th century, not the 21st.

Li Xiao Lang wandered leisurely back to the hotel from the Leaky Cauldron. Once again, he had spent his day for as long as he could stand it wandering up and down Daigon Alley. It had been a little over a week since his sisters had returned to China, leaving the young heir far more relaxed now that he was on his own again than he ever could be when under the constant scrutiny of his family members, whether they were intending to scrutinize or not.
Tom, the bar tender of the Leaky Cauldron, had become accustomed to Xiao Lang's comings and goings from his pub, and always had a smile and a comment of some sort when the Chinese boy made his way through the shop. That was how he had first heard of the strange occurrences happening in and around Daigon Alley the last two weeks. Tom had stopped him at the time of the first incident, which occurred only a few days after Xiao Lang had first been introduced to the magical rift, mentioning something about a “You-Know-Who” being up to no good.

He had insisted that the young eleven year old boy shouldn't go to the alley, even with his sisters still present at the time, insisting that it wasn't safe because of this person that he seemed to think the Li children should recognize by such vague phrases. It had sounded to Xiao Lang as if he were trying to be some bad spy movie character, going on about a you-know-who doing some you-know-what type things. As it turned out when the five siblings had merely pushed on into the alley despite his warnings, that the you-know-what was the book store exploding out into the street.

For whatever strange reason, the spells that had folded space allowing for all the books to be put into a larger building than the building actually was, had failed. The result was that all the store's contents had been ejected into the street, which had apparently never happened before to local knowledge. Surrounding shops were also effected, though not to the same extent, and the whole of the alley's populous were muttering about acts of some “he-who-must-not-be-named”.

Xiao Lang, being a sorcerer who had been trained in such things since he had been able to stand, could tell that the shop had been purified of it's magical residue form centuries of spells and magical books being used in that place. It was refreshing and familiar, in this chaotic maze of presences and layers upon layers of long-dead spells. Yet the locals were convinced that this was some malicious act aimed to destroy the education system so there would be no opposition.

The local law enforcement were out in full force at the sight, doing their best to hush up people and insist that this “You-Know-Who” wasn't around. It seemed to Xiao Lang to be a scene of paranoia and propaganda that lead to the Lis leaving early that day.

The spells had all been re-cast, and two thirds of the books had been declared ruined merchandise—though Xiao Lang didn't see what was wrong with them, they merely no longer moved or talked or whatever else on their own anymore and functioned as normal books instead—and became open to the public once more. Since then Xiao Lang had been using it as a reprieve sight when wandering through Daigon Alley, as it was still one of the cleanest locations around.

Furthermore, the odd occurrences of magic going missing continued up and down the alleyway at various times, though nothing as drastic as the first. Three other shops had their contents spilled into the street, including one on the side-alley that Xiao Lang had come to learn was supposedly a “dark wizard's” alley known as Knockturn. When even the Leaky Cauldron was hit, resulting in no less than seven muggles entering it before the protection spells could all be reapplied, the whole of the wizarding population seemed to be up in arms.

Xiao Lang remembered that he had nearly been included in the group of muggles that were going to have their memories erased, but Tom had spoken up quickly and vouched that the boy had been visiting daily for over a week by that point. While all the local theories were screaming about attacks from nameless people and what seemed like death-eating monsters of some sort, Xiao Lang was pretty sure that some spirit or minor god had decided to move in and make a lunch of all the spare magical energy.

Though that was his theory, he cursed himself for being too weak to be able to track this spirit in any way. He had spent, yet again, nearly half his day wandering around trying to catch some sort of sense of the strange spirit, but in a place that was so overflowing with magical presences, he hadn't
had any real success so far. He wasn't going to acknowledge the fact that his mind kept wandering back to a certain green eyed little girl rather than his search was affecting anything at all. He had been thinking of her too much lately, and it was playing hell with his senses, causing him to keep mistaking feelings for shadows of her presence.

He had finally called it a day when evening started to fall and he decided to go back to the hotel and have some dinner before spending the night meditating or perhaps practising his sword technique in order to clean out his senses for tomorrow's visit. And so here he was, nearly back in his temporary living quarters when something clicked.

He knew that feeling, even in his exhaustion from spending time in the magical rift, he knew that over-powering presence even before he had come to the entry hall of the hotel. Xiao Lang paused momentarily to straighten his clothes and brush his fingers through his hair in some semblance of tidying up before he went up to his room and faced his all powerful mother.

He entered the hotel calmly, head held high and shoulders back as any heir ought. This was not the time for being exhausted, nor was it the time to mourn his lost freedom. If he did not arrive punctually and perfectly for his mother, she would be upset. Or worse, she would be disappointed. He really didn't want his mother to be disappointed with him, that felt like it would be worse than any other person feeling it towards him, save perhaps Sakura.

You see, Xiao Lang's mother was the image of perfection. She was strong, and beautiful, and even the stuffy clan Elders groveled before her graceful figure. She was the granddaughter of Clow Reed from his last marriage, his closest living relative who had came and married Xiao Lang's father, the previous clan head. Xiao Lang recalled in his distant memories of his early childhood how his mother once smiled at him with loving adoration—or perhaps that was merely his second sister superimposed—but he had been so young when his father had died and his mother had been forced to step up and take his place.

He knew the reason she was so stern was because she had to be a strong leader, had to ensure he would be a strong leader in the future, and he really didn't want to waste her valuable time that she spent on him by being useless. He knew he had already failed her where the whole incident of the Clow Cards were concerned. Though he understood now that Clow Reed had meant for Sakura to have the cards and the Guardians because she was so much more powerful and wonderful than anyone else could be, he also knew that he was still a disappointment in the eyes of the Clan.

That he had lost in skill and power to a nobody who didn't even have a family line worth mentioning, and not only had he lost the Cards to her, but his heart as well... He was not the prodigy child that the Clan had believed, but a failure that had dragged not only his name through the mud but that of his mother, sisters, and whole Clan by association. How could his mother be anything but disappointed in him after something like that.

He didn't want to be a waste of her time any more, he wanted her to be proud of him—to love him—so he was aiming to change and grow into something of his own right. If he could not become the “next Clow Reed” because Sakura and Hiiragizawa already held that position between the two of them, then he would just have to make his name into a legend all by himself. Something new down a path that hadn't been walked before. Though, what that “new” was he wasn't yet sure, but that's why he had to go and find it, by seeking out ways beyond what he was already comfortable with.

With that reassuring thought flashing through his head, Xiao Lang opened the door to his room with as much confidence and pride as he could muster in her all-consuming presence. Walking quickly to her side, the young heir hardly took notice of the presence of the Li Clan's two new Guardian beasts that he had made in his rush to greet her. “Mu qin (1)…”
The head of the clan took a moment more to sip at her tea before setting it down and turning to address her only son. “You were out until late today, Xiao Lang.”

“Yes, Mu qin, I was at a local wizarding location, practising my concentration in preparation for my attending one of their magic schools,” Xiao Lang explained.

“I see. Was it that shopping district your sisters informed me of?”

“Yes, Mu qin.”

“And how long were you able to stay there today?” Yelan questioned, pulling the small Sun Guardian into her lap and petting the child's ponytail as if it were some sort of pet.

“I have been there since nearly nine this morning, with only a moderate headache,” he informed.

“That's nearly ten hours... Fudie reported that a week ago you showed signs of exhaustion after merely seven. You have improved, but with only a few more days left, do you think you have improved enough?”

“I will not—can not—run away from this,” Xiao Lang insisted, eyes burning with determination.

“You know that extreme exhaustion can kill you...” Yelan warned, only a bare shadow of concern tinting her level, commanding voice.

“Nothing is gained without risking a loss. There are no coincidences, everything happens for a reason, including this offer of transfer into Hogwarts. There is something to be gained at the end of this path, and I only have one chance to learn what that is. I-I wish to grow beyond that which has come before, but to do so I must take a path that is as unique as the goal I seek. Forgive my selfishness, Mu qin, but I can not stay in the shadow of Clow Reed forever, nor do I believe that is the place the Clan will shine at its true potential. I must take this path and find what lays at the end of it,” the young heir reasoned.

The matriarch was silent for a time, scrutinizing her youngest child, trying to locate that quiet, shy little boy that once clung so needingly to her skirts in the determined young man standing before her now. She knew with a word she could stop him, perhaps even spare his life, but he had chosen to argue for this, even against her who none in the Clan ever dared object to any more.

She supposed it was a little late in the game to decide to be-a-mother-first. She had given that path up long, long ago when her beloved died, and she chose to become the temporary head until her son was of age rather than see the Clan torn by war or fall under less adequate rule. She had chosen to place the lives and happiness of hundreds of Li Clan members above those of her own five children, and now she was forced to do the same once again.

“Very well, if that is your decision then so be it. The Elders request that after your failure to collect the Clow Cards in Japan that you be strictly evaluated for your candidacy as Clan Head, and as the current ruling body, I have chosen to be your judge. Whom better than myself, after all, to know what the heir needs to become a competent head,” she informed her son.

“It is being left in the joint care of your sisters and the Council of Elders for the daily concerns, and for anything more than that I will be in contact with them and able to return from time to time. As the matter stands now, I will be acting as a visiting diplomat from Hong Kong, here with my youngest two children to strengthen the bond of friendship with the Great Britain that officially owns us. What with that treaty nearly come to an end, we wish to maintain a profitable and friendly relationship with our long-time allies despite returning to our own rule.”

“Wait... two youngest? Is Feimei coming as well?” Xiao Lang questioned, confusion clouding his mind.

“No, this little one is,” Yelan responded, gesturing to the toddler-like Sun Guardian sitting within her lap.

“Jiao Yang is going to be written off as my little sister? Is that actually going to work?” Xiao Lang pondered.

“It will under my claims. Your sisters and the Council have all agreed and the story has been set. If anyone should question beyond myself as to her identity, they will find nothing but unanimous confirmation from the Clan,” the matriarch informed. “It would be too difficult excuse her presence without making her a member of the head family, and the Elders expressed distress at the idea of their head and primary heir both being in potentially hostile territory without the protection of the Clan's Guardians, no matter how inexperienced they may yet be.

“However, despite the Elders and my own best efforts, this child refuses to acknowledge the designation or cover story without her creator's approval. The issue of her stubbornness aside, the task therefore falls on you to explain everything satisfactorily to this little one so that our cover is not blown.”

Xiao Lang became acutely aware of the three sets of expectant eyes focused on his person. This idea, in itself, was mind boggling. In his orderly world of rules and expectations, the founding pinocle of truth was that his mother was the ultimate authority figure. For as far back as he could remember, her regal presence and astounding level of power always ensured complete obedience, and never did anyone look to him over her for confirmation of anything. In fact, it had always been the exact opposite. He had been allowed in the past to play the part of little prince, making small decisions and giving out little orders to train him for when he would take over, but before any order had ever been executed, eyes had always shifted past him to where his mother stood watching and listening, awaiting her silent gesture of support for his decisions.

But here the tables were turned, and the Guardians weren't even attempting to be subtle about it. Though they acknowledged Yelan as a Li, acknowledged all the Li Clan as being their charges, it seemed they had at some point in their formation designated him as there supreme Master. A little nervous at the way he was being given sudden power over his mother, Xiao Lang scrounged up an explanation for his little Sun Guardian.

“Tai—er, Jiao Yang, while we are away from Clan territory, when you're in your sealed form, people can't know you are a Guardian, right? But it will be too suspicious if you were just some random kid, and where I am going they wouldn't let you come if that were the case. So in order for you and Chandra to be able to come, you're going to have to pretend that you're part of the Li Clan. I need you to be my You mei(2), Li Jiao Yang, and I will be your Zhang
xiong(3) and this will be your Mu qin. Do you understand?”

“No,” Tai Yang responded honestly with a shake of her head, “but if that is what Master wishes...”

“Not 'Master' in this form...” Xiao Lang reminded gently.

“Zhang xiong,” the newly appointed Li Jiao Yang amended.

Xiao Lang felt himself smile at his toddler-like Guardian, and reached down to pat her head, “That's a good girl,” he soothed as she buried her face in his palm and nuzzled like she were some sort of cat.

“Me too! Me too!” cried Chandra, zooming up and burying herself in Xiao Lang's neck for a moment before reaching up and lapping at his cheek with her rough tongue.

Yelan watched silently as her son bathed his imperfect creations in love and attention, praying that somehow, just as in the stories that she had heard growing up of her esteemed grandfather and his own masterly crafted guardians, as long as Xiao Lang had those two by his side he would really be able to face anything that came his way.

(1) – Ok, so for those who don't remember and can't simply figure it out from context, this is what the online dictionary told me is a very respectful way to address one's mother. Something along the lines of “Haha-ue” for those anime fans who recognize the term.

(2) - Like the above, this is a very respectful term for one's little sister.

(3) - And a brand new one here that intelligent people probably would have put together on their own due to context, this is a highly respectful way to say older brother.

Chapter End Notes

I have decided to cut this chapter off here as it's 17 pages already and the next batch of things to talk about all happen around the same subject and on the same day. The characters of Rei and Hikari are OC's that were introduced in the prequel “Birth of the Deck Master” to fill in places in the play the class preformed. I dragged them in to the party as “new friends” just to make the sleepover have more people at it and to voice angles in the girl talk that Sakura and her cannon friends wouldn't take on their own. Don't worry about them too much, because after the next chapter we (hopefully) finally get everyone on the train and those two are going to more or less vanish save for occasional mention in letters.

On one final note, this chapter is being dedicated to Lovely Lady A who left such a nice review for me. Yes, I am still working on this story, but as a full time biology student in my sixth year of university, I have little more than half an hour a day to do with as I please, and many interests beyond just CCS and HP. So if I don't have people talking at me about my story, it's hard to find the inspiration to sit down and work on it. I hate to sound like I'm begging for reviews, but really the greatest inspiration for a writer is to be reminded that people do actually enjoy reading your work. And the best way to remind
is with questions, or critical feedback. Tell me what you liked out of a chapter, rather than merely that you liked it, or what you didn't like for those moments where you thought things weren't very well written. Ask me about things you're curious on, even if it's something as simple as “what houses will they be in?” or “what's going on with this character?” Knowing that people are doing more than just giving the story a cursory glance and backing out really means a lot to a writer. So even if all it is is bombarding me with PMs every now and again to ask “have you put any more work into this story yet?” it will get me to write a lot more often and hopefully get the next chapter out before this time next year.

So to leave my readers with a sense of a cliffhanger, changes are starting to amass and strange things are being put into motion, how are things going to turn out? What will change and what will stay the same? What is going on with that strange spirit Xiao Lang has found? And will Sakura manage to keep her conviction of not letting him go? And when WILL they find out that they are both attending Hogwarts? Theorize, rant, or dredge up more questions beyond these few that I came up with off the top of my head. I'm giving up on trying to get people to play the trivia games with me for bonus scenes as no one has answered any trivia questions yet, so instead if you inspire me enough I'll send you one as a present. So for Lovely Lady A, if you could get back in touch with me and give me some means of contact, I will send you your choice of the four bonus scenes I have written so far: 1) a glance at Clow Reed's early life, 2) the first day of Eriol's life, 3) how Kaho met Eriol's family, or 4) Yukito's first time of seeing what Yue looks like. Or if those aren't your cup of tea, you can hold off on it and get a scene later, which include character topics of Touya, Fujitaka, Nakuru, Suppi, Yue, Eriol again, and another two on Clow.
Chapter 7: Late Letters

Chapter Summary

The last day before the Hogwarts Express pulls out from Kings Cross Station. Many plot threads begin to be woven on all fronts as last-minute preparations are underway. A few revelations on various people's parts help spin the future in its new direction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Everywhere in the halls it was being whispered and murmured. Fears of a man they dare not name, words of a boy who spoke of him, and ponderings of a man who supported the boy. The whole thing made Umbridge sick.

How, with the Minister of Magic himself saying it was false, was the Ministry overrun by people who still believed Dumbledore? She was sure this was proof that the true loyalty of the people was not for her Ministry, but for the old fool instead. It had to be that he had his claws in the Ministry, Her Ministry.

And that was simply unacceptable.

Putting on her sweetest, most endearing smile, Dolores Umbridge strutted in to the Minister's office and gave a quiet cough to gain his attention.

“Oh, Dolores,” the Minister greeted, looking up at her from his desk. His green bowler hat sat on his desk, as did his elbows. His hands were gripping his head as if in pain. “What am I to do with all these strange things going on? These attacks on Diagon Alley...? Perhaps Dumbledore was right all along...” he acknowledged with a sigh.

Umbridge's blood ran cold. How could it be that even her Minister was falling prey to that man's deceptions? The Dark Lord was dead, everything belonged to the Ministry. That fact should be undisputed.

“No!” she insisted, as though she were a child throwing a temper tantrum. Her outburst caught the Minister's attention and caused the man to stall. Flushing at her momentary loss of control, Umbridge stuttered and stammered her explanation out. “Really, Minister. That even you would believe those slanderous lies... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, revealing the Leaky Cauldron to muggles? Letting muggles come in and intermingle with us magic folk? No, no, Minister. That's not the goals of You-Know-Who at all. Everything we know of him proves that, after all.

“And besides, you and me both know that he's already dead. Will you really listen to a lying, attention seeking little traumatized boy over the logic and reason you already know? I mean really, raising from the dead? There is no such thing, magic has already proven it to be impossible. Even if there was such a way to go about it, why would He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named wait nearly fourteen years to do so? No, no, Minister. Those lies reek with obvious cohesion. Dumbledore must have done something, to convince the boy to say those things...”

“Dumbledore?” the Minister echoed.
“But of course! Who else do we know who is powerful enough to do all those things, yet is the champion of muggles? A friendly and peaceful co-existence between muggles and magic users has been what he's been preaching all along, isn't it? And he's willing to even use the name of You-Know-Who to scare people into listening to him! But when you revealed his lies, told the people the truth, he went and did all those things in Daigon Alley to try and fool people into believing him! He's nothing but a fear-mongering old wretch, determined to make all the world sit in the palm of his hand! You can't let him do that, Minister! You can't let him turn your country into his own personal stage!

“We have to show the people—we have to show him—that Dumbledore's lies are not going to affect us! The Ministry must be seen as being strong. We must face this threat as a united front, unwavering in our conviction! If we do not, then the whole of the Wizarding World will fall to the deceptions of that power-hungry old fool. We can not let Dumbledore undermine us like this, cutting our network and breaking our support from underneath of us. Why, he's even in the school, brainwashing those impressionable children with his lies before they have the chance to understand reality for themselves!

“The Ministry mustn't allow him to get away with that though. We must be the supreme authority figure. You are the Minister, your word is law, not his. And the people must see that we have everything under control or else the panic will spread! We must prove that it is us in charge, not Dumbledore, and definitely not some falsified rumour of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named rising from the dead and ruling everything. We have to be the ones calling the shots. The people have to see that we're the ones in charge. That we have control over everything. Even Dumbledore. Especially Dumbledore.

“He is our biggest threat, spreading those lies and gaining favour under any means necessary. Even sabotaging the safety and secrecy of our great nation by destroying our wards and letting muggles wander freely through our most esteemed establishments, like the Leaky Cauldron and Daigon Alley. The people are scared right now, Minister, talking about attacks on the education system. We must show them that the children are safely under Ministry protection.

“All these rumours about cursed teaching positions and questionable staff placement—really, exposing the children to a werewolf! The people have to know that their children are learning the right things, in a safe environment! We have to stop the fears at the source by proving there's nothing wrong with the education system. By putting limiters on the amount of action Dumbledore can take. We must stop him from warping the minds of the people—of the children—to be his support rather than our Ministry's.

“If we do not, then obviously he'll corrupt them beyond repair, until they listen to none save him. Not even their Minister's words of truth will be able to stand against him if we do not sway this momentum before it gains anymore strength. We need someone we can trust to not be swayed by his lies to be there and make sure he doesn't have the ability to take any more power away from our Ministry. Dumbledore must be stopped before his goals to make his army of followers is complete and he overthrows our good democratic government with his tyranny! It's obvious that's what he's after, anyone with eyes could see it's so, after all...”

“Are you sure you're going to be alright?” Touya pressed his boyfriend as they stood in the airport once more.

It was the night of August 30th, and Sakura, Kero, and Yukito were returning to London on the evening flight because it was cheaper. Sakura was over being smothered in affection by their mother's cousin and Tomoyo as Fujitaka watched on with that serene loving look that just made their
“I’ll be fine, Clow-er, that is Eriol, did not indicate the possibility of any problems arising during this trip. I don't believe there is anything to worry about. Our trial run didn't cause any problems that anyone could detect and it's not like Yue was without Clow's magic for only a few months before he started disappearing. That happened after nearly thirty years of not seeing him,” Yukito argued. “Everything will be fine, To-ya. The months will pass faster than you know, and in the blink of an eye it will be December again, and we'll be back to see you.”

“I don't believe you,” Touya stubbornly insisted. “Not having my most important person for almost three whole months won't ever pass that quickly.”

“It will for me,” Yukito countered, “because you'll be in my thoughts always, so it'll be like you never left my side. I want it to go quickly, make every day like a second so I'll be back in your arms in mere minutes. Don't say it will take an eternity, my heart would break if it took so long!”

It took a lot, but Touya resisted looking around for prying eyes before he pulled the love of his life into a tight embrace. “If anything goes wrong... should you need me for anything at all...”

“I'll call,” Yukito promised.

“And I'll be there as fast as I can,” Touya assured.

It was early in the morning when the residents of the Reed Mansion filed into the airport. The sort of early that ought to be late still by most people's reading. However, contrary to what most would expect, it was not the child who yawned tiredly and tried to rub the sleep out of their eyes. Eriol smiled kindly at his Moon Guardian, still very much a child in her own right despite her teenaged appearance. He slipped off his jacket and folded it up in a neat square, laying it down on the bench. “Here,” he told the auburn haired girl. “Go ahead and rest up, we have another twenty minutes before they get here.”

“Wai! Wai!” Nakuru cheered, waving her hands in the air. “Eriol is so wonderful!” She flopped over on the bench and rubbed her cheek against her Master's jacket affectionately. “But why do we have to be here so early? Why is the plane arriving at such an hour? I bet stupid Yue slept in and made it so they couldn't catch one at a more decent time!”

“It is at this time because the plans were made so late, and the only affordable way for Fujitaka to manage all of this was for the incoming and outgoing flights to be at unfavourable hours. Remember, he is on a fixed income, after all, unlike us who are living off of the interest on Clow Reed's investments,” Eriol pointed out.

“But I'm tired. It's too early,” she whined lethargically.

“Well, I did suggest that you stay home and sleep until they wake up in the morning...” the sorcerer pointed out.

Suddenly Nakuru bounced up, all signs of sleep deprivation gone. “No way! I gotta see Sakura-chan and Kero the moment they get here and greet them properly! I need to tell Kero about beating his record on the racing game!”

Eriol gave a sigh at his Moon Guardian's ploys for attention, and subtly changed the topic. “Just remember, Nakuru, that Sakura-san and her company will be requiring their rest, they are going to be leaving for Hogwarts in just over 24 hours and will need time to make sure everything is in order
before they leave.”

“Yes, I know,” Nakuru relented.

"Speaking of Hogwarts, you haven't told her yet about Li-kun going as well?" Kaho interjected.

"No, I'll save that little surprise for later. It will make things more entertaining this way!"

Kaho looked at the ancient sorcerer for a moment. "You're being cruel, again."

"Am I? I don't mean to be," Eriol confessed.

"I know," Kaho nodded to herself. "You've spent so long knowing everything that to you there is no present more cherished than a surprise. However, for Sakura-chan there is only the fact that her beloved person is beyond her reach and she does not know when their paths will cross again, if ever. For a woman, there is little sorrow greater than being unable to see the one you love each day."

Eriol reached over and interlinked his fingers with Kaho's, understanding the message of her words in all the layers it entailed. "Not only for a woman, Kaho. A man, too, feels the loneliness and longing as each day passes. It is hard, no matter who you are, to not be with the one you love. And possibly harder still to see them every day and know you can not love them how you wish you could."

"Though... my question is: at what point did Li-kun's jealousy over Sakura-chan and Yukito-san's interactions change from it being Sakura-chan's time with Yukito-san to it being Yukito-san's time with Sakura-chan?"

"I'm sure it happened so slowly, that not even I could give you an accurate reading on that."

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It was mid-morning of the 31st and Xiao Lang was just finishing up his sword training when a tap on his window caught his attention. Still unaccustomed to letters being delivered by owls, it took Xiao Lang a minute to register what was going on and why this bird was sitting at his window tapping angrily at it. By the time he had finally broken out of his daze and gone to let the bird in, he would have sworn the thing rolled its eyes at him if it were physically capable of such an act.

The bird didn't bother entering, merely extended one taloned foot and deposited a rolled up letter into his palm before flying off once more. Xiao Lang spared the bird only a momentary observation as it flew away before turning his attention to the paper in his hand. Correction, it was not paper, but parchment, a simple note scrawled in the same green ink and handwriting that the school letters came in.

Attention to all first year students,

Due to a last minute change of staff, all students attending their first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry are required a copy of Defensive Magical Theory, by Wilbert Slinkhard. We apologize for any inconvenience this has caused for the students and their families.

Yours,

Deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall

Nodding to himself, Xiao Lang pulled on his shoes and headed for the door. At the door he found Yelan also preparing to go out. “Ah, Mu qin, you're leaving?”
The woman paused and looked at her son, “Yes, it would be prudent for me to go and greet the prominent Clans and announce to them our plans and length of stay in their territory.”

“I see,” Xiao Lang acknowledged, “are you going to take the Guardians?”

“That will not be necessary this time. You are on your way back to that wizard shopping street, are you not?”

“Yes, Mu qin. There's apparently been an emergency change of staff that requires a new book to be bought, so I'll be picking that up while I'm out as well,” he informed the Clan head as he handed over the short note.

Yelan took a glance at the writing scrawled across the parchment and hummed to her self. “Sloppy of them. Very well, but do not forget to come back in plenty of time for a rest before the train ride tomorrow. It will be your last one before the winter holidays roll around in December.”

With a nod of his head, Xiao Lang excused himself from the room and exited the hotel at a brisk walk. While the Leaky Cauldron was more than a half hour's walk away, Xiao Lang's independence and active lifestyle made him loathed to take a vehicle somewhere that he could get by his own two feet. So instead, as part of his training, he would run to the wizard's pub every day, getting there in just under 20 minutes if the traffic was cooperating.

When he entered the door, hair a little more tussled than when he left and only slightly out of breath, the barkeep Tom smiled at him. “Back again, eh? Shouldn't you be starting your classes soon?” he asked in a friendly manner.

“Train leaves tomorrow,” Xiao Lang acknowledged as he strode pass the people milling about and out to the brick wall that opened to Daigon Alley.

The hustle and bustle in the street was much more congested this day than it had been previously in the month, and Xiao Lang noticed for the first time a vast number of teenagers swarming about amongst the crowds. The concentration of magical energies hit him once more, nearly as hard as it had on that first day, and he was thankful for all the extreme conditioning he'd been putting himself through these last few weeks to withstand it.

The magic of these children were far more chaotic, having not been trained and honed like that of the adults, and so they flared and fizzled with the wandering emotions of their hosts. To Xiao Lang, who had been taught the art of sorcery since the time he could comprehend basic speech, the way of these wizards seemed completely nonsensical. If you knew your child bore magic, why wait until they were nearly grown to begin teaching them to control it?

Sadly he knew of no one who would have the answers to such a question, and so had little more that he could do besides push his way onwards towards the bookstore. With the alleyway being far busier that normal—and Xiao Lang suspected far busier than it was originally built to be—he had to squeeze between people a few times to get by. Being only eleven, and somewhat smaller than a European eleven year old on average, without a guardian to help clear his path proved that his progress was slow and difficult.

He kept getting jostled as people would step back or turn without paying attention to were they were going and end up running into him. It was quite annoying to say the least, and he was rather thankful when he reached the bookstore. It wasn't hard to find the place where the shop's workers had put the missing book. There was a huge crowd around the table that the books were piled on, and Xiao Lang could make out many older students passing copies to their friends and relatives further back.
However, Xiao Lang was patient enough and before too terribly long he had managed to make his way through the throng of students and parents and over to one side of the table where there was still a good number of books stacked up. However, just as his hand reached to take the top copy of Defensive Magical Theory, something blindsided him from the right and sent him sprawling to the ground.

“Mummy! Mummy!” Ginny’s voice called as she bounded into the room. “Mummy, the book lists are here!”

Molly Weasley looked up at her daughter's outstretched hand showing the aforementioned list. “Oh, good. It's about time, too.”

“There's only two new books I need this year: this defence one here and Standard Book of Spells Grade 4. But I can just borrow that from George, so you don't need to buy me one! But what I could really use instead is a new diary. Please, Mummy? My old one is almost all used up and I just have to have a new one,” the teenaged girl insisted.

“Well, I suppose, if you're alright using George's old school book...” Molly conceded.

“It's fine, he'll give it to me no problem. You shouldn't waste money on something like that,” the girl continued to press.

“Hmm, you and Ron will need some new robes as well. Children grow like weeds, I swear,” she muttered as she placed the last of the folded clothes in the laundry basket and hoisted it up on her hip.

She bustled up the stairs with it in her head that she would have to collect the lists from the other children as well before she left. As she approached the hall that had all the children's rooms down it, she could hear the five of them talking in Harry and Ron's room, though she didn't know about what. Deciding this was a fortunate coincidence, she chose to make that her first stop.

“Ginny said the book lists finally arrived,” Molly prompted from the boys and Hermione. “If you give them here, I'll head into Diagon Alley and get your things while you're packing.” Two neat piles of laundry were beginning to form as Molly dug through the basket to pull out all of the things that belonged to the residents of the room. One by one the piles grew until one of Ron's night shirts got caught and was partially unfolded as she pulled it out. Lifting it up to look at it as she refolded the shirt she spoke absentmindedly. “Ron, I'll have to get you more pyjamas, these are at least six inches too short. What colour would you like?”

“Get him red and gold to match his badge,” one of the twins piped up.

The words only half registered in her mind, so busy she was in making a list of everything she'd need to buy once in town. “Match his what?”

“His badge. His lovely, shiny new Prefect's badge,” a twin reiterated.

Still, it took a moment for the words to penetrate Molly's preoccupied mind. “His... but... Ron, you're not...?”

The red haired matriarch turned slowly, and a little disbelievingly to stare at her bashful youngest son who was presenting her a polished new yet very familiar badge. Excitement surged and Molly let out a cry of jubilation. “I don't believe it! I don't believe it! Oh, Ron, how wonderful! A prefect! That's everyone in the family!” she exclaimed as she threw her arms around her boy.

“Wait until your father hears! Ron, I'm so proud of you, what wonderful news, you could end up
Head Boy just like Bill and Percy, it's the first step! Oh, what a thing to happen in the middle of all this worry, I'm just thrilled, oh Ronnie!” the woman gushed as she peppered her son with all the affection and congratulations she could muster.

The embarrassed boy squirmed under the attention. “Mum... don't... Mum, get a grip...”

Finally getting ahold of herself, Molly shifted to hold him at arms length and said breathlessly, “Well, what will it be? We gave Percy an owl, but you've already got one, of course.”

For a moment, Ron just blinked at his mom. “What do you mean?”

“You've got to have a reward for this! How about a nice new set of dress robes?” Molly suggested.

“We've already bought him some,” Fred interjected.

“Then a new cauldron, Charlie's old one is rusting through, or a new rat, you always liked Scabbers-...”

“Mum,” Ron began, uncertainty radiating through his whole person, “can I have a new broom...?”

Mrs. Weasley faltered slightly for a moment. Broomsticks were expensive, and while they did have a little extra money with all the extra raids Arthur was doing and with three of her seven children out of the house, money was still somewhat tight.

Sensing his mother's unease, Ron hastened to explain himself better. “Not a really good one! Just-just a new one for a change...” he pleaded with such hopeful resignation that Molly couldn't help but smile.

“Of course you can...” Molly turned to gather up the letters from the other teenagers as she blinked the tears from her eyes. When she came to Hermione, however, she noticed the girl also held a matching red and gold badge in her own hand. “Why, Hermione... isn't that...?”

Hermione looked down as if only just remembering that she, too, was chosen for the role of Gryffindor Prefect. “Um, oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm the other new Prefect for our house this year,” she announced with a somewhat forced grin as she held up the badge in presentation.

“Oh, dear, congratulations! I'm so happy for you, your parents will be so proud of you when you write and tell them!” the motherly woman hugged the girl, to a much warmer reception than her son had given.

“Thank you, I'm sure they will be,” Hermione confirmed.

“And you dear? What would you like as a present?” Molly pressed.

It was now Hermione's turn to blink. “Eh? Oh, no, no! That won't be necessary at all!” the genius tried to reassure.

“Nonsense! You and Ron worked hard to earn those badges, that hard work deserves to be rewarded!”

“No, really. You don't have to worry about it at all. Getting the badge is all the reward that I need,” Hermione attempted to continue insisting, backing away and shaking her head and waving Mrs. Weasley off all at the same time until she had backed herself up against the wall.

Molly gave the girl one of her patented motherly stares that seemed to work at guilt tripping even the
most stubborn of children into submission. After all, she didn't raise seven of her kids without learning how to stare down a dragon. As predicted, sweet, well mannered Hermione didn't last even a fraction of the time any of her own children did before the girl began to blush and fidget. “R-really... I just... I don't... want to be a burden...” she finally confessed.

Molly flushed slightly in response, realizing where the girl's true concern lay. “W-well, I'd better get going so I'll have time to get everything. I'll see you all later... Little Ronnie, a prefect! And don't forget to pack your trunks... A prefect... Oh, I'm all of a dither!” Giving her youngest son one last kiss on the cheek, and a loud sniff as her pride brought tears to her eyes once more, the Weasley matriarch bustled out of the room.

On the stairs, Molly's path crossed with Sirius, the only other adult in Grimmauld Place at the moment. When she shared the good news with him, the dog-man forced a smile for her sake. “That's wonderful, Molly. Good for them.” But she could tell his heart wasn't in it and she felt a little put out at his inability to be happy for the children's sake.

Going to her and Arthur's room, Molly grabbed the coin purse from off the table. With her mind full of everything she needed to buy she apparated to the entrance of Diagon Alley with a loud crack. As she walked, Molly sorted through the letters in her hand and read the booklist for new volumes. There were a lot of books between the six children, so she supposed that she ought to go and buy those books first, as they were mandatory items and then she wouldn't accidentally overspend on any of the other things she had to pick up. However, she had promised Ron a new broom...

After fretting about it a moment more, Molly made up her mind and headed for the bookstore first. Buying the books was more important than getting the reward. If nothing else, she could always send him a broom or new clothes at school after Arthur got his next paycheck, sending him his school books would not be such an easy task. She found Flourish and Blott's to be predictably overcrowded by parents and students hurrying to get their copies of the books before the school year began. At the table with the flashing sign above it announcing Defensive Magical Theory there was such a congestion that people at the front of the crowd had began passing books back over their heads because they could not wade their way out through the mob of people pressing in.

However, Molly was not the wife and mother of the Weasley family for nothing and so she squared her shoulders, braced herself, and joined the fray. She had just reached the heart of the mess in time to see two older boys around Ron's age shove a small first year out of the way and sent the brunet boy sprawling across the ground. Molly's protective motherly instincts were just about to take a piece out of the two bullying boys who were laughing when the child they had knocked over pounced back up to his feet.

The next few moments happened too fast for Molly to really follow, but somehow the little oriental boy had used muggle martial arts to knock both the larger boys off their feet and was now sitting on the one who had hit him and punching the boy in the face. It took Mrs. Weasley a moment, but she soon hurried forward and pulled the brown haired first year from the two older boys, much to the younger boy's offence.

“What is this? Acting like a pack of wild animals, you should be ashamed of yourselves! You two especially, is that any way to represent your House and families to a new student? I want a word with your mothers!” Molly scolded, one hand on her hip and the other still holding the younger boy's elbow.

The pair of teens looked acceptably reprimanded and after a time of arguing with their mothers on whether or not they had done the accused actions, were taken away to be fussed over. It was only then that Mrs. Weasley turned her attention onto the child who had been trying to dislodge her for the
last ten minutes. “And you...?”

“Me, what?” the boy glared defiantly up at her with a prominent pout in place.

“Where is your mother?”

“Not here. She had more important things to do today than accompany me to a store,” Xiao Lang insisted with yet another yank.

“Then your father,” Molly pressed on, not about to be deterred by such things.

The honey eyed boy gave a snort. “Good luck talking to him, he's been dead for years.”

“Then whoever it is that you're here with,” even her patience was beginning to run dry as this boy continued to make things as difficult as possible. She supposed it was just too much stress, what with all the danger being in the Order lead to and putting up with a werewolf being so close to her children all the time and those attacks on Harry lately... She just didn't have the patience to put up with other people's rebellious children. That is, until the next phrase left his mouth.

“There is no one! I'm big enough, I can take care of myself!”

Those words stated by such a small child... they were at the onset of such dangerous times, not even the Ministry could hush up the truth about the recent events happening around the alley, and yet this boy was cared for so little that his own mother just left him to wander around regardless. It wasn't any wonder that he tried to act big and strong, he had to compensate for the neglect and obtain a sense of normality somehow. She couldn't help it as her heart went out to this boy and she felt tears prick the corners of her eyes. “Oh you poor dear,” Molly expressed.

The boy froze, his whole body taking on a sort of still-life quality with his face locked in something between exasperation, disbelief, annoyance, and dread. Slowly he turned his eyes to the plump red-haired woman and asked in a complete monotone, “...What?”

“You're all alone, let me help you,” Molly insisted.

“Screw off, you old busy-body!” the boy yelled at her, finally yanking his arm from her grasp. “I've already lived for over a year by myself, it's not like a little trip to the bookstore is anything to fuss about!”

“By yourself? As in alone?! At your age?!” Mrs. Weasley gaped.

The boy's only response was a casual nod. “Oh, of all the irresponsible... And such dangerous times, too, with You-Know-Who running about...”

The red-haired matriarch of the Burrow swooped to pull this poor neglected child into her arms and show him everything that a loving family life could afford, but the brunet in question ducked and sidestepped her in one smooth motion. “Crazy old coot. Quit being a public nuisance already and get a grip! You're annoying, leave me alone, you old hag.” With that said, the boy pushed himself between some of the people pressing in to get their books and disappeared from Mrs. Weasley's sight. She spent a few minutes more scanning the crowd and worrying about the boy, but his stature was too small to make out above the many heads of the taller customers. Finally even Molly Weasley had to admit that he was a lost cause and return to her own shopping.

Piling up six copies of the dwindling books, Molly made her way back through the crowd, noticing the refill box was being raided as well before the poor employee could even make it to the table to try and add to the display. However, rather than make her way towards the checkout like most the
people carrying copies of *Defensive Magical Theory*, Mrs. Weasley went over to where the magazines and such were kept. In one of those spinning racks were the notebooks, day planners, and diaries that were less commonly used in the Wizarding World where rolls of parchment were preferred.

However, Ginny had since a young age enjoyed keeping a diary to record her thoughts and feelings, saying that doing so helped her sort out her thoughts on things that troubled her. Despite the family's monetary issues, Molly had always striven to give her children everything she could, because she felt that it was the least she could do to be a good mother to them. Unlike the mother of that poor Asian boy who was abandoned for over a year and was neglected so much that his mother wouldn't even make time to take him out school shopping.

It wasn't like Hermione's parents, who didn't have the option of being there for their daughter. She sometimes felt sorry for those poor muggles who had to give their daughter up to a world they would never be a part of or understand. They weren't even able to be there to congratulate her on becoming a prefect, if they even would know what one was. Molly wanted to get something for Hermione, despite the girl's silly insistence that she didn't need anything, to prove that someone still loved and cared for the girl, even if her own parents couldn't be there to express how very proud they were.

Molly knew Hermione loved books, she was always reading and had her nose in them as often as she could manage, but she didn't know which books Hermione already had. She really didn't want to get her anything useless, and while she thought about getting her a new release, she didn't know which would be to the girl's tastes. However, Hermione was a girl, and girls like keeping diaries to store their thought in, and especially with Hermione's friends being a pair of guys she needed somewhere to express her feelings in...

With her mind made up, Mrs. Weasley picked out another diary from the stand. This one was an elegant little book with a faux leather cover in a pale, cherry blossom pink, with gold highlights and a star burst on the cover with the same. Mrs. Weasley thought it suited someone of Hermione's intellect and manners while still being distinctly feminine. Congratulating herself on a choice well made, Molly flipped the book over to look for the price tag. Finding none, she put the book atop her stack and headed to the teller, figuring if it cost too much she could just exchange it for a different one.

With a brief explanation to the young witch manning the till, the employee started flipping through the pages. Finding them all blank, even after a few swishes of her wand, the witch—who had the name Johnson on her tag—eventually shrugged. “I guess the sticker must have fallen off. It happens some times. No worries, Mrs. Weasley, I'll just ring it up for the same price as the other one. Your price comes to 7 galleons, 15 sickles, and 5 knuts, please!”

Mrs. Weasley handed over the money and left with a promise to give the teller's regards to the twins—though she wasn't really sure who exactly the teller was—and headed out of the bookstore to go look for the next thing on her list.

Hermione sat on Ron's bed, wiggling her foot to the tune of *A Whiter Shade of Pale* stuck in her head as she watched her boys hurry around the room to pack their things. Unlike them, Hermione was smart and organized and realized that they would have to be going back to Hogwarts soon and so had been packing slowly over the last week. As it was, she only had a few more things to put away, one of which being the book Mrs Weasley was picking up for her in Daigon Alley at this very minute, and so could afford to lounge around and watch the other two.

“It is strange, though,” Ron suddenly spoke up as he took his new prefect badge off his bedside table and shoved it into his pocket with one hand and grabbed the small stack of chocolate frog cards he had been flipping through a few nights back with the other. “I mean, usually the letters don't come
the day before the new term starts, you know?"

“Oh, that's likely that just no one wanted the job,” Hermione theorized. “I mean, it's not exactly had the best track record these last few years, you know?”

“That's for sure,” Harry agreed, thinking back over the list of faces that had come and gone from the staff table.

“They say the position is cursed, and from the point of view of anyone who believes Dumbledore about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, it's the most dangerous place you could be standing,” Hermione pointed out.

While Harry grumbled something about believability and trust, Ron latched on to the end of Hermione’s statement. “I know the rumour has been around for years, but why is it so much more dangerous now than before?"

Hermione rolled her eyes at this. “Think about it, Ron. The DADA teacher, responsible for training the next generation of witches and wizards to have what it takes to take down the likes of the Death Eaters, will be practically Dumbledore's sword and shield in the upcoming war. They'll be the prime target for attack, and do you really think they won't be?”

Ron turned a sort of green colour and pulled a face, but Harry's recent uncharacteristic temper reared it's head once more. “It wasn't Dumbledore who said it, it was me! And it's not like anyone believes what I say or thinks I have the right to know anything, anyway!”

Hermione, growing tired of being snapped at and having her head chewed off for completely uncalled for reasons, argued back. “Now that's hardly accurate! What with all the weird things that have been going on in Daigon Alley recently, more and more people have been loosing faith in the Ministry, they've been looking to Dumbledore instead.”

“Things happening in Daigon Alley? Like what?” Ron asked, Harry's brows also contorting in a similarly confused expression.

“What do you mean 'like what'? The stories have been all over the Daily Prophet these last few weeks!” Hermione stated incredulously.

“Daily Prophet?! You're still reading those lying, sleazy, conspiring--” Harry would have gone on into a new rant about her supporting brainwashers and so forth, but Ron stepped in between them with his hands held aloft towards each of them.

“Just tell us, Hermione,” Ron prompted, levelling her with a warning look where Harry couldn't see. He knew from experience after growing up with so many hot-headed brothers that no good would come from continuing to argue in this state.

With an exasperated huff, Hermione began to recap the events. “It started back around the same time as Harry's trial, spells and wards that have been on shops for decades, or even centuries, are inexplicably vanishing, leaving disastrous results. Because the place that's been hit the most is the bookstore, people think You-Know-Who might be targeting the education system to try and stop himself from having any trained opposition. But apparently even the Leaky Cauldron was hit, causing a huge stir when a bunch of muggles started coming in.”

“Spells breaking around the time of Harry's trial? You don't think that could have anything to do with that Mizuki lady bringing letters for Dumbledore to the house, do you? The first time it happened was the day of Harry's trial, remember?” Ron hypothesized.
Hermione frowned at this, “No, I don't think so. Remember, Dumbledore said that the person who wrote the letters was a friend of his. Maybe Dumbledore just let her know how to find the house?”

“With the way Moody was acting? I doubt it. Something seriously weird is going on, I'm telling you,” Ron insisted.

“Is it really such a big deal? I mean, I know this house is under protective spells and all, but...”

“Look, I know you two may not understand being raised by muggles and all, but this house is protected under a Fidelius charm. That's practically the strongest magic protection you can get, outside of the really ancient stuff that's been around forever. It's not the sort of spell that someone can just waltz around all hunky-dory like,” Ron argued back.

“...I wonder if that's why Sirius has been acting all grumpy and aloof lately,” Harry pondered.

“I really don't think that's it,” Hermione insisted. “He didn't seem too worried about the second letter, after all. Personally, I think his mood has more to do with you, Harry.”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Ron questioned.

“Well, I think he likely just got his hopes up about the idea of Harry coming to live with him. It was rather selfish of him, in my opinion. He knows Harry belongs at Hogwarts,” she explained.

“I don't think that's right,” Harry insisted, “he wouldn't give me a strait answer when I asked him if I could.”

“Oh, he just didn't want to get his hopes up even more,” said Hermione wisely. “And he probably felt a bit guilty about it all, I think part of him was probably hoping that you'd be expelled so that the two of you could be together.”

“That's a bit harsh, Hermione,” said Ron, his prefect badge making its way out of his pocket and atop his folded robes. “You wouldn't want to be stuck inside this house without company, either.”

“He'll have company! It's the headquarters to the Order of the Phoenix, isn't it?” challenged the bushy haired girl.

“Oh, come off it, already!” Harry complained while Ron rolled his eyes, but Hermione merely shrugged.

“Suit yourselves. But I sometimes think Ron's mum's right, and Sirius gets confused about whether you're you or your father, Harry.”

“So you think he's touched in the head?” accused Harry heatedly.

“No, I just think he's been very lonely for a long time,” she defended her point.

Ron, seeing things were about to boil over again, attempted to change the topic by reverting to a previous subject. “Hey, wouldn't it be awesome if Professor Lupin came back to be the DADA teacher again? I mean think about it, a member of the Order, and the best teacher we ever had...”

However, his plan backfired as all he got out of Harry was a moody, noncommittal grunt, and from Hermione an almost scalding glare. “Ronald Weasley, you know perfectly well why he can do no such thing!”

The room went quiet for a bit, but it wasn't the comfortable sort of quiet they had earlier. Tempers
were hot and anger and tension seemed to be rolling and coiling like some withering mass of serpents just under the silent atmosphere. The red-head was acutely aware of how it seemed that one wrong move or miss-chosen word would release a monster who’s venomous bite would destroy them all. The seething was all too obvious, really, what with Hermione's too-stiff posture and Harry's overly forceful packing. It made part of Ron just want to run away from the room and hide, pretending the problem never happened, but he also felt obliged to try and rectify the situation as these were his two best friends.

Casting his eyes about, his gaze landed once again on his shiny new badge. “Still... who would have thought that I would be the new prefect of the year? I mean, Hermione was obvious, but out of all the guys in our year, I didn't think McGonagall would nominate me!”

“That's for bloody sure,” Harry muttered out with a roll of his eyes, resentment thick in his voice.

Ron froze, stung by what his best friend had just said, before levelling him with a look. “What did you just say?”

“Oh, forget it,” the Boy Who Lived grumbled.

“No. You obviously have something you'd like to say, and I think I ought to hear it!” Ron insisted stubbornly.

With a sudden surge of vindictive pleasure, Harry finally snapped. “Oh, you want to hear it? Fine! That badge should have been mine! I'm the one who saved Sirius from all those dementors! I'm the one who beat the bloody basilisk! I'm the one who went through all those Tasks last year and became the Hogwarts Champion! I'm the one who saved the world over and over from Voldemort! I deserve the recognition! The Ministry having their heads up their asses is no excuse for that old coot to ignore me like this! You support me, don't you? I'm the one all of this pertains to! The Order should be begging me to join and help them, not trying to lock me up in the dark like some criminal and not tell me anything!”

As Harry paused to take a few heaving breaths after his enraged rant, Hermione took the opportunity to stand and speak. “You're right, we do support you. But support is not the same as servitude. You're sounding like Malfoy, Harry, and if you think you can get away with treating us like Malfoy treats Crabbe and Goyle, you have another thing coming.” With that, the bookworm turned sharply on her heal and marched out of the room.

Harry's jaw hung open for a moment at the accusation, part in shock that she would put him on the same level as Malfoy, and part in shock that she would dare turn her back on him like that. Ron, meanwhile, refused to make eye contact with him as he shuffled around the room, almost redder than his hair, and shoved the last of his things in his trunk. “I'm going to go check that I didn't leave anything elsewhere in the house,” he muttered out stiffly, before stalking out of the room and away down the hall, leaving the shorter boy alone in the room with his thoughts.

It was around 4:30 at the Reed Mansion, and Sakura was already hard at work in the kitchen helping Eriol to prepare the food for that night's dinner. He had her chopping up vegetables for a salad while he mixed up the ingredients to make the dressing and ensured the turkey had all the trimmings before putting it in the oven.

Though she adored the fact that she was being allowed to help, and loved spending time with her friend/father's other half, her hands still came to a slow stall and her brow furrowed. She didn't know how to explain it, but she had this overwhelming sensation that something was going to be coming soon. Something that would effect her in the future. To make things more perplexing, Eriol stepped
away from his preparations and wordlessly opened the kitchen window, which struck Sakura as somehow being the proper action to take.

Her confusion became sated a minute later when an owl swooped through the open window, causing the Card Mistress to give a little jump and exclaim “Hoe!” The brown bird landed on the counter next to the small Japanese girl and held its foot aloft to show off the letter which it deposited in her hand when she reached for it. Then, with one mighty flap of its wings, the bird lifted off and flew away.

Sakura opened the envelope and took out the single sheet of parchment it contained, looking at it carefully and trying her best to decipher the meaning. “Is everything alright, Sakura-san?” Eriol asked, voice pitched in polite curiosity though largely without any immediate concern.

“I don’t know,” the girl admitted. “I’m having troubles reading this... Can you help me, Eriol-kun?”

The ancient reincarnation turned to her with a smile, “Of course. Here, let me see...” Taking the letter from her, Eriol played the part of scanning over the document quickly before he began to explain. “It says here that one of the teachers has changed, and that the new teacher will be requiring the students to buy a new book for her class.”

“Hoeee... A new book? But there's no time to go all the way to Daigon Alley to buy it before the store closes! What am I going to do??” Sakura began to panic.

Drawn by the Mistress's distress, the door was soon pushed open and a head of silver hair poked through. “Sakura, is everything alright?”

“Oh, Yuki,” Sakura acknowledged before going on to answer his question. “The letter says I have to have a new book, but there's no time to get it tonight, and I have to leave on the train in the morning!”

“The letter was likely sent out late last night or early this morning to inform the students, but with the fact that Sakura-san was coming from outside of Great Britain must have caused a mix-up in the mail,” Eriol provided the explanation sagely.

There was a moment of silence following this statement as he let the other two have their pensive moment. Finally, Yukito spoke up a suggestion. “I could conceivably go and buy the book in the morning while you catch the train, Sakura. You would have to ride alone, but as Yue I would have no problem catching up to you and following the train from the air.”

Sakura's face lit up at the suggestion, “Oh, would you Yuki? That wouldn't make Yue too tired, would it? I wouldn't be completely alone, I'd have Kero-chan with me, but if it's too much trouble...”

“Not at all,” Yukito insisted, while Yue felt the need to speak up through him to add, “I live to serve.”

Mrs Weasley got home around five that evening, and handed out everything she had purchased. It was obvious to Harry that Hermione had been less than thrilled with her present, but had done her best to smile politely as she took her new things to pack away and get a head start on her new book. Ron had wandered back up the stairs with his new broom, holding it aloft as if it would break with the lightest of jostles.

Still upset and uncomfortable about the argument he had gotten into with Ron and Hermione earlier, Harry opted to give his friend some space before he returned upstairs. Instead, he tried to endear himself to Ron's mother in hopes of being cheered up. “What's for dinner, Mrs. Weasley?”
“Oh, that won't be for a while yet, dear,” Mrs. Weasley informed. “It's been decided that there's going to be a party tonight, to celebrate Ron and Hermione's becoming Prefects! Oh, I'm still all a titter! It's just so heartening!”

Harry forced a smile, “Ah, I see...” he responded, before turning and hurrying off. He just didn't know how to quell this storm of jealous indignation. A party, huh? his mind lingered on that fact. Part of him, the part that was able to be happy for his friends, was excited at the prospect of a big, fun, happy party to put the water back under the bridge and get back to his usual self. But on the other hand, the much larger part of him that was angry for being ignored and underestimated and slandered and a million other horrible things could only focus on one fact: They didn't throw a party for me, when I got cleared after my court case!

And indeed, they hadn't. He had gotten the same treatment then that he had upon his first entering Grimmauld Place. He got shunted up the stairs and ignored while all the grownups gathered around in the basement and talked about a war that practically revolved around his existence. He was the important one, why couldn't they see that? No one else was nearly as special and important as he was, and he deserved to have it recognized, not be called some lying, deranged, psycho!

But then, that's what grownups did, wasn't it? They shut you away and ignored you, only taking you out when it benefited them. He knew that, he had learned it long ago, so why had he ever began to think these ones would be different? They had seemed so nice... but he couldn't rely on them, and apparently he couldn't rely on his friends, either. They had kept things from him as well, hadn't they? And now they were Prefects and adored and loved by everyone when he should have been the one getting all the praise. He had fought Voldemort, he had won the Tournament, he had beaten the dementors, all of it, all him!

The image of Cedric's dead body floated to the forefront of Harry's mind.

He had a headache. A low, deep throb that left him feeling tired and drained. He was discontent, dissatisfied with his life and unable to change it all because of a little scar. He felt a little like he was being unfair, taking things out on others, but he also felt like he deserved leniency on the matter, what with everything life had thrown at him these last... last what? Months? The Triwizard Tournament and its ending had hardly been the first time that his life had been on the line since entering the Wizarding World... So then years? But even before he entered Hogwarts, his life with the Dursleys had been no walk in the park....

With a sort of disturbing clarity, he realized just how screwed up his life had been and wondered if he had ever had a happy, peaceful childhood. After all, his parents had been forced into hiding when he was only a baby. Who's to say that back then hadn't been filled with just as much danger and fear as all the rest of his stay in the Wizarding World? Why did he have to be the one to deal with all this? Maybe he really was going crazy? How did one tell without seeming crazy for checking? But then, how could he be normal with all that he had lived through? Was that why he had been so testy lately? That all this stress and trauma had just come to a head and finally made him crack under the pressure of it all? He felt kind of broken, with his head hurting and him having troubles acting like he normally did. Or perhaps that was just what everyone felt like when they were practically a murderer...

He was dead before he hit the ground, his blank eyes staring out into the cool night air...

Stop it! Harry screamed into his own mind. Don't think about it, just block it out and it will go away like all the other bad things do...

But the bad things didn't seem to be going away anymore. They just seemed to keep coming, and
piling on bigger. But what should he do when he had no one he could turn to? The adults wouldn't tell him anything if he tried going to them, because he was “too young” to be a part of everything, “just a kid” even though it all revolved around him and it was his back that had the giant bullseye painted on it with the flashing neon sign over his head saying “Priority One Target” in multi-coloured flashing lights. And how could he go to his friends when they were part of the problem...?

“Harry...?” Ginny's voice, tilted with confusion, reached the black haired boy.

“Oh, Ginny,” Harry acknowledged as he turned to look at the red haired girl, though he really wasn’t sure where to go with it after that.

“What are you doing out here? Shouldn't you be packing?” she asked, indicating the landing of the eastern stairwell he had planted himself on when he had left Mrs. Weasley.

He had thought it would be private, as the bedrooms were all down on the west wing and most the rest of the traffic used the main stairwell in the middle. He would have asked Ginny the question right back, but she was coming from the floor that had the study on it with an armload of obvious summer homework and reference books that she had probably left the last time she was in there getting her school work done.

When Harry hesitated to reply, Ginny huffed out in irritation. “This has to do with the fight you three got into, doesn't it?”

Harry felt his cheeks grow red, “You heard that, huh?”

“No,” she acknowledged, putting down her books and sitting on the steps as well, “but Hermione came in and ranted at me and Tonks for a while afterwards. So I more or less know what happened. Wanna talk about it?”

“No,” Harry huffed out stubbornly. “It's just that I don't really get it. What makes Ron so much more trustworthy than me? I'm the one who fought Voldemort, and the Basilisk, and saved the Stone! I've fought dementors, and dragons, and mermaids, and a sphinx... I'm the bloody Triwizard Champion, for Merlin's sake! So why won't Dumbledore trust me?!”

Ginny held a hand up and clamped it over Harry's ranting mouth. “Okay, whoa. Slow down there, Seeker. You aren't in a race for the Snitch, so just cool your jets for a bit. Firstly, what does any of that stuff have to do with being a Prefect? I mean, yeah, you did a lot of cool stuff and saved all our butts a couple times over, and I'm probably more grateful to you than most because you saved me personally.

“But, just because you're able to take on a dragon doesn't mean you're fit to lead the masses. Not everybody is meant to be a leader, and that's okay. It doesn’t mean that those who aren't are worse people, or are liked or trusted any less, it just means that their role is something different. Besides, Hermione was a shoe-in for the job but Dumbledore and McGonagall made Ron the other Prefect for you...”

Harry yanked his head back from Ginny's fingers and looked at her accusingly. “What do you mean, 'for me'?!?”

“Well, they're your support... they back you up and help you out with everything, no matter how dangerous things get. And everyone knows how hard the end of last year must have been for you... so they wanted to give you the freedom and resources that being a Prefect affords without the added responsibility being piled on to your plate. Because everyone knows that anything you'd need Prefect-level access for, Ron and Hermione will get for you, no questions asked...”
Harry blinked at the red haired girl in astonishment. “Why do you say all that?”

“Well, come on, they're always helping you out with all the crazy things you get up to every year,” Ginny pointed out.

“No, no,” Harry waved her off, “I don't mean that. I meant why do you think that's what Dumbledore's up to with the decision?”

Ginny just shrugged. “Because, it just sort of makes sense. It's what I would do, at least, if I was in his place.” Then the younger girl got a sort of distant smile on her face. “Still, I'm glad that it was Ron who was chosen. He's dreamed of this for so long...”

“He has?” Harry questioned, confused.

“Yeah,” Ginny said a little wistfully and a little like she thought he ought to know this by now himself. “Don't tell Ron I let you know, but he's always really idolized Bill. Wanted to grow up to be just like him when we were little. I guess it would be probably because of mom and dad, now that I think about it.

“Bill is the oldest, and was the first to go to Hogwarts. I was only a year old when he started his first year. Me and Ron, all we ever really knew of him were the stories mom and dad would tell us of him, they were always talking about him and the others, later when they started Hogwarts, too. I guess they were trying to keep them fresh in our minds, but their names were said so often that I think Ron got it in his head that Bill was special somehow. He started trying to emulate Bill's actions and such...

“Of course as soon as Fred and George realized this they began teasing Ron mercilessly about it, so he stopped whenever they were around. But still... I don't think he ever stopped idolizing them. Bill, being popular and stylish, with being a Prefect and later Head Boy. Of course, Charlie became Quidditch Captain instead of Head Boy, but him too, in a way. I think what Ron was looking for was to be someone mom would be as proud of and talk as much about as Bill and Charlie. He doesn't really get how much she praises him when he's not around, the sorts of things she says to strangers... but still, I'm happy for him that his dreams are starting to come true.”

“Yeah...” Harry found himself agreeing. And this time agreeing for real, not just because he felt he was supposed to be polite and congratulate his friend. He remembered now, the Mirror of Erised and what Ron had seen in it. Acceptance, acknowledgement, attention... Harry's own reflection would never be realized, and though not all of Ron's were likely to ever take place, it felt nice to know that his friend was on the first step to realizing at least some of his dreams.

“Well, I need to get back to packing,” Ginny suddenly announced, standing up and gathering her things once more. “You should, too. We're leaving in the morning, remember, and it's getting late.”

“Ah, yeah... thanks,” Harry said as Ginny went up the stairs ahead of him. He waited until she was out of sight before pulling himself to his feet as well. He meandered more slowly back to his and Ron's room, where he found the redhead sitting on his bed. A look of apprehension clouded Ron's blue eyes for a moment when he caught sight of Harry in the doorway, “hey.”

“Hey,” Ron replied, obviously not sure where things were going.

“So...” Harry began, feeling like he was testing the waters. “I guess I've been kinda acting like a bit of a jerk lately, huh?”

“Yeah, well...” Ron gave a shrug, “you've been through a lot this last little bit. Anyone would be
testy in your situation."

“All the same, I'm not looking forward to the earful Hermione's going to give me over it later,” Harry acknowledged, rubbing the back of his neck. “I just hope she doesn't make a scene in the middle of the party your mom's throwing for you guys.”

Ron gave a groan, “Seriously? God, mom can be so embarrassing some times... Really, she's making way too big a fuss over this. Fred and George'll give me hell for sure, now!”

Harry just laughed at his friend's expense, knowing whatever the twins chose to do to stop Ron's head from swelling thanks to the promotion would be more than enough to make the job not worth having. “Hey, at least you got a new broom out of it! Lemme see it?”

“Sure!” Ron agreed, and dove for his prize once more.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I was originally going to drag this out through the party and make a big deal over the bogart scene, but then Ginny came along and decided to hijack everything and change the ending of the chapter. So now it ends with the boys bonding over Quidditch. The whole thing with the party and the bogart still happens, but it's not really altered enough to make it so very different from the book as to be mandatory to rewrite. Just be aware that it happens, and recall that Mrs. Weasley went up near the end of the party to deal with the bogart which kept transforming into dead loved ones. Harry's face is among the many shown killed, which spooks the shit out of Sirius and Remus.

Other than that, writing semi-possessed, angry teenagers is very difficult for a happy-go-lucky person like myself. Therefore, Harry's fits of jealous rage will likely be few and far between. I know it's a side effect of the horcrux, bla blabla bla bla, but just to make sure that the story will actually progress and I won't keep getting stuck on his characterization, I'll probably tone it down (and may even end up accidentally forgetting it from time to time) to just general annoyed and snippy rather than full out hissyfits from now on. But yeah, if he seems OOC or any of the dialogue he had appears forced, its because a lot of it was.

Other things of note, I see Hermione being the sort of kid who grew up listening to the older sort of music on records and cassettes because that's what her parents listened to. I don't see her as the sort to have been into teenybopper type stuff, so recent music (as in 1995 recent) wouldn't really be her style. I chose Whiter Shade of Pale because it's from her parents generation and I didn't want to do anything like Beatles, and I can't really see her as the sort to chill to the likes of Led Zeppelin or Pink Floyd. Nor is she really the sort to do disco or motown type music.

Also, in case you didn't catch it, Angelina Johnson had a summer job this year working for the bookstore. She's the one at the till when Mrs. Weasley buys her books and she's also the one that helped Yukito and Sakura a few chapters back to get the book off the top shelf. That fact isn't too very important, but if it comes up in passing anywhere, I just want to make note of it so no one can say “that came out of nowhere!”

And that's really all I can think of to say, the rest seems somewhat self-explanatory to me. There may be some notes and referencing to things that happened over the course of
this evening that weren't touched on in future chapters, but none of it really seems relevant to the plot in a way that needs to be written out as full-blown chapters. Look forward to the next chapter when everyone finally gets on the train.
The morning sun was cutting through the fog that still hung around Kings Cross Station that September 1st. It gave the air a crispness to it that foretold a warm afternoon despite the current chill that clung desperately to the morning hours. It was a bit of a shame that they would not be sticking around for the promised beautiful day. But they were outward-bound, to their destination of somewhere unplotable in Scotland's wilderness.

The scarlet engine was still being prepped by the workers for the time-honoured annual trip that would take hundreds of children away to a place of magic and mystery for another year. No one knew when the traditional trip began, or when the red engine became the staple of their journey towards adulthood, but it had become almost ceremonial in its loading and travels.

However, for one boy who stood with his mother so very early on Platform 9 ¾, the time-honoured history bore no meaning. The train wouldn't be leaving for a couple of hours still, at least, but the Asian family had decided to come early so that the mother could see the boy off without the annoyance of a large crowd. At least I'm guaranteed to get a good seat, Xiao Lang acknowledged to himself.

“Xiao Lang!” Yelan called, drawing her son's wandering eyes back to herself.

“Xiao Lang!" Yelan informed. Xiao Lang nodded his head, having already been told the details the night before. However, he also understood that this was a show being put on for any observers who happened to be watching. “I shall await your arrival at Hogwarts. Farewell.”

“Xiaomei?”

“You will be riding the train by yourself. Be sure to take good care of your 'sister',” Yelan informed. Xiao Lang nodded his head, having already been told the details the night before. However, he also understood that this was a show being put on for any observers who happened to be watching. “I shall await your arrival at Hogwarts. Farewell.”

With no more words, Yelan vanished within a vortex of wind. Xiao Lang's eyes shifted down to Jiao Yang's toddler-like form. She stood looking up at him expectantly, awaiting her further orders. To make this seem realistic to the magical community, Xiao Lang knew she could not be teleported in any way as the wizard's magical transportation methods were potentially fatal to small children. So to make her seem like she was a proper member of the Li family, and not just a Guardian in disguise, there were a few extra hoops they would have to jump through. “Well, 'You mei', shall we get going?”

"Yes, Mu qin?"
"If it pleases you," was her only reply. The newly appointed siblings made their way to the atrociously suspicious train in its “lucky red” paint hand in hand. With his other hand Xiao Lang manoeuvred the trolley cart around to one side of the entry and placed the young child up on the train first.

“Step back into the hall, Jiao Yang, I've got to put this up,” he told her as he began unfastening his trunk from the trolley. She obediently did as she was told as the eleven year old pushed the large trunk on board after her.

As the Li Clan heir was so early, the train was as good as empty, save for a few workers that were making their rounds and ensuring everything was as perfect as could be, Xiao Lang had his choice of seats. He soon claimed a compartment right up near the front as it was a shorter distance to walk. Storing his trunk away, and shutting the door for what privacy it could afford, he let Chandra out of her cat carrier and settled down for what was due to be a lengthy wait.

And indeed, it was nearly an hour and a half later when the near silence of Xiao Lang's reading was disturbed by a sudden loud crack, like a gunshot going off. Jumping slightly at the unexpected noise, honey-gold eyes snapped to the window to see where the danger was. Instead what he found was a family standing in the middle of the platform. All the children clung to the arms of one of the adults and were only just then slowly letting go.

The Li boy began loosing interest once more as they loitered around, putting off saying their goodbyes. However, he did pay enough attention to witness the next few cracks with his own eyes. What a noisy teleportation spell, he mused as he watched the fifth family pop in the same way. That must cause problems for trying to avoid detection. It would draw everyone's attention every time they enter.

With the mystery of the noise solved, Xiao Lang attempted returning to his book, though the sound was still annoyingly distracting. It was also happening in a slower frequency as more people were opting to take the foot path through the barrier instead. “Master?” Jiao Yang piped up. Xiao Lang gave the toddler a reprimanding look at the title, and the small Guardian turned her eyes away in shame. “Forgive me, 'Zhang xiong'. What is the reason for the change in their behaviour?” the little Sun Guardian asked, indicating the people outside.

“What do you mean?” Xiao Lang asked, glancing out the window at the ever increasing crowd.

“Why have they stopped teleporting in with those loud bangs? Are they concerned about damaging everyone's hearing?” she asked.

It took Xiao Lang a moment to understand what it was that she was trying to express, and then a moment more to consider the question properly. “That... could possibly factor into it, I suppose... But it's probably more to do with the fact that they don't know where other people will be when they teleport in. Mass from two different bodies can not occupy the same space, the displacement resulting from trying anyway is likely... ugly.”

“Ugly? How?” Chandra asked.

“Well, like the body ripping apart to accommodate the mass already present. Or maybe just fused together as the molecules of one occupy the space between the molecules of the other...” Xiao Lang attempted hypothesizing, using hand gestures to try and get his picture translated more clearly. However, the conversation was halted from further gruesome speculation by the compartment door sliding open.
There stood a trio of girls, all European and probably around his own age judging by the childishness of their features and build still. They looked at him with something between curiosity and superiority, and he looked right back with all the pride he had been ingrained with. After a minute, in which he seemed to have passed some unspoken test, the lead girl, the one with long, dirty blond hair, stepped confidently into the carriage and sat down in the middle seat.

Quickly following the first girl's lead, the other two settled in as well, one on either side of their friend. Only when all three were seated did any of them address Xiao Lang. “Xanthia Greengrass,” the first girl introduced, holding her hand out like she expected him to bow down and kiss it reverently.

Greengrass was a pretty enough girl, as they go, of the tall and willowy sort. She had hip-length dirty blond hair brushed strait and let to hang loose down her back. Her eyes were thin, and heavily lidded to make them even thinner, and were a light green colour. Though, not the sort of green that reminded Xiao Lang of Sakura, but rather more the sort of colour of celery, or the grass her family name was indicating. She had a long neck that she arched just so, and a nose that sort of turned up at the end so it always looked like she was staring down it at people. But still, when she smiled, she gave the impression of being rather pretty. Not that Xiao Lang was looking to anyone but Sakura.

“Li,” he returned the introduction, reaching out to briefly shake her hand. He figured by the way these girls acted, they must be part of the upper liaison of Britain's magical community, and as heir to his Clan, he knew that it was never good to snub potential political allies, no matter how much he disliked the idea of having to deal with them.

The next to take the initiative was the girl sitting across from him. She, too, was blonde, but unlike Greengrass, her hair was a light blonde and quite wavy. It was cut short, in almost a Shirley Temple style, with a pink headband that had a heart clip on it. Her eyes were round and baby blue and she had a very baby face. “I’m Shanel Avery,” she introduced, her voice having that 'I’m so cute' quality to it that so many young children acquire.

“Hi,” was the chime in from the third girl with a wave and a sweet smile. Unlike the other two, her hair was a dark auburn colour, the upper part of which was pulled back into a half-ponytail and tied with a large blue ribbon forming into a bow. Her hair was wavy and came down to her shoulder blades. Her eyes were a dark blue, and she had a rather prominent chin.

“She's Lydia Rossier,” Avery supplied when it was clear that the girl was not going to take the initiative and introduce herself. When Xiao Lang's response was a nod before he returned his eyes to the window, Avery began pressing for details. “I like your kitten, where did you get it?”

“Hong Kong,” the heir replied in a crisp tone that made no effort to elaborate.

“And that's where you're from? China?” Greengrass pressed, a slight superiority to her tone that all prideful people get when addressing an outsider within their territory.

Xiao Lang began opening his mouth to answer when the compartment door rattled open to reveal an older girl flanked by a group of other young boys. The girl was obviously a student, already dressed in her uniform, but looked around his sister's age, mid to late teens. Her black hair was strait and trimmed cleanly at shoulder length with bangs and a green headband matching the tie around her neck and badge sewn to the front of her cloak. On the badge was a fancily embroidered silver S, whatever that stood for. Her face was sort of puggish, but not all together unattractive.

The boys behind her were all rather obviously Xiao Lang's fellow first years. There were four of them, two blond, one brunette, and one with black hair. The black haired boy and one of the blonds looked at Xiao Lang curiously, the brunette eyed Jiao Yang like she might be diseased, and the other
blond retained a general air of annoyed disinterest. The older girl, however, didn't seem to notice him at first. “There you girls are, Avery, Greengrass, Rossier... Has Jorkins decided to attend Durmsrang after all?”

“I wouldn't know,” Greengrass was sure to speak up. As if her alone not knowing would mean it impossible for the other two to be any the wiser. “I haven't spoken with her since June.”

“My mother had me write to her, of course, through the summer,” Avery added. “I did get one letter back in early August, but it didn't say much of anything. Oh, you know how she is.”

“Oh, yes,” the older girl responded, sounding very much as if she wished she didn't. “Always with her nose in those books of hers. Practically slotted for Ravenclaw already!” She gave an over-dramatic sigh and a roll of her eyes, earning the appropriate titter from the younger girls. “Still, there are far worse places one could end up…”

“Like Hufflepuff…” Avery conceded.

“Try Gryffindor!” the pug-faced girl said in a way that made it seem like even saying the word itself made her sick to her stomach. That exclamation got a few snorts from the boys standing behind her along with the titters from the girls sitting in the cabin with Xiao Lang. But whether it was over whatever Gryffindor was to end up in, or if it was because of her melodrama, he couldn't say.

It was when she finally finished being smug about her own joke that she seemed to take note of Xiao Lang and his sister for the first time. Over the time since first coming to the compartment, Jiao Yang had opted to curl up with her head laid on Xiao Lang's lap. Though she looked to the world at large as though she had drifted off to sleep, somehow Xiao Lang just knew she was feigning it and was really listening to every word being said. Because of that, he felt compelled to place a hand on her small back, the tingling familiarity of her magic tracing up his arm and helping a little to clear his head.

“And you are…” the older girl prompted after a good five seconds of taking in everything about the two of them that she could make out with her eyes alone.

“The person who was here first,” Xiao Lang replied, being a bit difficult on purpose because of the attitude she was giving him. It earned him a quirk of the lips from the blond that had shown interest in him at least.

The look in the older girl's eyes made it clear that she didn't consider that a valid reason to avoid eviction. “You didn't answer my question.”

“You didn't ask one,” Xiao Lang pointed out. “You started a sentence, I chose an ending for it.” Now Xiao Lang had most of the boys smiling, and the brunette even began to chuckle to himself.

The older girl took note of this also, and bristled, unwilling to be shown up by a stranger who was younger than her. “Very well, then. My name is Pansy Parkinson, (“Good for you,” Xiao Lang threw in, just because he could.) may I inquire after your person?”

“Li.” It was short, simple, and sweet. It was also Xiao Lang's only reply to the flowery, superior to thou wording and tone that the enquiry was made in.

“Li…” Pansy demanded.

However, Xiao Lang just shook his head. “It doesn't matter. The likes of you is never going to have the honour of addressing my person as anything but.”
This, however, was insult enough to have the Parkinson girl bristling. All pretences of class and manners vanished and her face was replaced by an unattractive sort of scrunched up red tomato. “Just because you think you're a big name from where you come from, doesn't mean you're a big name here!”

“Just because you think you're a big name, doesn't mean you actually know what a big name is,” the Clan heir responded, without missing a beat. Xiao Lang had four older sisters around her age, all of whom were professionally trained from infancy to excel in academics and debate. If she thought she could win a cat fight against him with this level of hissy-fitting, she was sorely mistaken. Especially if she wanted to bring family pride into it. He had over three thousand years and a God-on-Earth of a great-grandfather worth of it to throw around.

Still, his showing up of the older girl brought proper laughter out of the boys that she had rather clearly been escorting. “Oh, give it a rest already, Pansy,” the black haired boy finally spoke up. “It's not like there'd be room for all of us in there even if he left. This way if Jorkins really does decide to grace us with her presence, she'll be able to sit with the girls.”

For the other children, it seemed at least, the black haired boy's word made it as good as law, the blond that had been at least pretending to ignore everything even took that as cue to turn and prepare to walk away. The older girl, however, seemed to war internally with the logic of the statement. Finally she backed down with a huff, a glare, and a vague comment about watching his back and knowing his place, before turning on her heal and stomping off down the corridor.

After her leaving, the black haired boy exchanged a glance with the remaining blond before stating, “I'm Acelin Parkinson.” Brother, or perhaps close cousin of the older girl. Their features were similar, though the boy ended up on the prettier side of things. His hair was wavy and looked like it had once upon a time been styled, but had grown out some since then and just ended up as it was. He turned his blue eyes towards the blond once again. “This is Dominic Flint...”

Flint was also wavy haired, though his was parted, and his dark blue eyes were almost purple. Not quite as pretty, he stood to the side and a half step back from his friend. For Xiao Lang who grew up in politics, he understood social standing enough to recognize a superior and his advisor. Acelin then gestured to is other side, to where the brunette stood away from the other two by a more casual and comfortable distance. “Mckay Carrow,” as he was introduced, had very curly hair cut to only a few centimetres long. His black eyes held something in them that was just a little off-setting, and his figure showed signs of inbreeding. They obviously needed a larger gene pool if children like him were accepted among the local aristocracy.

“And...” Acelin continued, eyes casting past Flint to where the other blond had been earlier, but stalled when he came up with only empty air.

“He already went ahead,” Flint supplied.

“Oh,” the leader of the boys said, casting a look the other direction down the hall. “And Ignacio Yaxley, who's almost to the next train car by now...” Acelin finished with a shrug, obviously not caring if the Yaxley boy waited or not. He met Xiao Lang's eyes for a moment more before smirking. “See you around, Li.” And with that, they left.

How it happened that every year without fail the Weasley family had to scramble last minute to get to the train was beyond Harry. He would have thought that with all the children they had been sending to Hogwarts over the years, with the train always leaving at the same time, that they would have learned to wake up early, or put their things by the door the night before, or some other sort of preparation to get them underway.
But they didn't, and again this year it was chaos as everyone scrambled to get their things together and out the door on a level that the Dursleys never would have tolerated. And possibly because of that fact, it brought a wide grin to Harry's lips every year to be right in the middle of it as the unofficial eighth Weasley child. But this year it was more than just the Weasleys and Harry. Hermione was there too, as was an entire entourage of adults who would be coming along to protect the precious Boy-Who-Lived on his perilous journey to King's Cross Station.

Still, even if he thought the level of precaution was absurd, he was happy to get to spend a little more time with the likes of Professor Lupin and Tonks, who he had grown quite fond of this last month. And currently, there was an argument going on with Moody over if Sirius would even be able to come or not. The idea of his godfather being there to see him off to school, even if he had to do so in the form of Snuffles, had Harry a little giddy. It was almost like they were a real family this way, and he really hoped the combined force of two Marauders and a metamorphmagi would be enough to sway even the paranoid Mad-Eye.

It was getting later in the morning, and everyone was scrambling last second to get their trunks and pets to the door and be ready to go on time. Fred and George, relishing in their ability to use magic freely now, had tried levitating their luggage down to avoid carrying it, and had knocked Ginny down two flights of stairs. They were currently upstairs being chewed out by Mrs. Weasley who was competing with Mrs. Black for who could scream the loudest. Harry, meanwhile, was in the kitchen with the trio trying to conjole Mad-Eye as he scarfed down a quick breakfast before it was time to go.

Initially, Moody had wanted the guard to consist of himself, the Weasley adults, Professor Lupin, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and Tonks. However, Kingsley had insisted that while he would be able to meet them at the Station, he couldn't be a part of the escort. Therefore Moody set instead on the idea of Sturgis Podmore being the replacement for the missing member, however he was running extremely late, apparently a no-show, and so the cousins and the werewolf were attempting to convince him that Sirius should take the vacant spot as he was already present.

It was when Molly bellowed for all attendance that Mad-Eye finally caved, insisting that it was on Sirius's own head one way or the other, and with a whoop of joy there was suddenly a big black bear of a dog bounding up the steps a few paces ahead of Harry. “All right, Gin?” Harry asked her as he came and joined her and the twins by the front door.

“I'll live,” Ginny grinned in response, showing a brave face for a girl that nearly broke her neck at the hands of her older brothers, but then a girl couldn't make it with that many older brothers without being able to dish it out and take it as good as any of them.

Hermione hurried down the stairs, fighting a struggling Crookshanks into his carrier while Ron helped her by pulling her luggage to pile by the door. Now that all the children were assembled, Molly began talking once more. “Alright, you lot. Alastor said he'd see to the luggage and pets, so go ahead and leave them here with him. Ron, Ginny, and Hermione will be walking with me and Arthur, we'll be leaving first. About ten minutes following us, Harry, Fred, and George will be going with Remus and Tonks, and I suppose Sirius as well…” she instructed, voice making it plenty evident that she disliked the idea of the convict being anywhere out in public, even if he did so as a pet dog.

Still, Lupin was already fastening the collar around his friend's neck, the long leash hanging from his wrist. Though he looked somewhat annoyed, Sirius stood patiently through the process, knowing they'd have a harder time if they were stopped for having the dog run loose. Harry couldn't quite get the grin off his face, his parent's two best mates—one of which was his godfather—were going to be seeing him off to school this year. It was almost like he had a real family to do all those real family things! And Tonks was kind of big sister-ish, even if she didn't really look like it right now. Today
Tonks was sporting an old woman look with grey hair in tight curls and a wrinkled face. Still, her posture was not at the moment that of an old lady, nor the way she winked at him when he moved up beside her.

“Well, young wipper-snapper,” Tonks joked, earning a bit of a chuckle from Harry who felt at the moment like nothing could possibly go wrong in the world. He was honestly more worried about being in the prolonged presence of the Weasley twins and their Marauder idols during the walk than he was about Voldemort or any of his Death Eaters jumping out from behind people's hedges and dust bins to attack him.

But still, it was clear what the real concern was. Get the children away from the target, surround the target with as many adults as possible, without drawing attention to themselves. Harry Potter was too dangerous to even walk down the streets of Muggle London with. Harry shook such self-destructive thoughts free of his head and focused once more on the good parts of this. Sirius was getting out of the dark, stuffy, old house. Harry himself was getting to go to the train station with people that were almost his family.

The first group left and Lupin shut Mrs. Black up while they waited nervously for the allotted time. Professor Lupin looked a little strange in muggle clothing, the style nearly ten years out of date, but otherwise casually professional, if a little threadbare. It wasn't the poor fashion sense that he had seen other wizards wear while attempting to look muggle, and so Harry assumed that he had been properly instructed at some point or other as to how to dress like a muggle, but rather it was merely the fact that the man was not wearing the robes that Harry had grown so accustomed to seeing him in.

It would be like seeing McGonagall in a frock with her hair down, or Snape in t-shirt and shorts. It just clashed so much with his internal image that he couldn't help but feel put off by it ever so slightly. And really, trying to picture Snape in a t-shirt and shorts was quickly becoming the most prominent thing in Harry's mind. He must have made a face because Sirius whined at him and Lupin suddenly became self-conscious.

“Ah, don't worry, Harry. We'll be meeting up with the Weasleys again once we reach the station. You won't have to put up with being with me very long at all,” Remus insisted, fingering a place on his shoulder as he looked away. Sirius gave a whine again and licked at the back of his knuckles on his still lowered hand. “It's fine, Padfoot, really. I've been a werewolf so long, I'm used to it...”

It suddenly clicked. He thought Harry wouldn't want to walk with him, be seen in public with him, because of what he was. Harry's wandering mind while he looked at Lupin had somehow made the man jump to the wrong conclusion. “No! It's not that! Really, not that...” Harry insisted, his hands waving around stupidly on their own accord as if he were trying to wipe the thought from their minds. Realizing how idiotic he must look—his uncle would have yelled at him for flailing about like that for sure—Harry quickly shoved his hands behind his back and looked away. “It's just-I was just thinking. It's cause Professor Lupin is in muggle clothes, I'm not used to seeing my Professors in muggle clothes, and so I started wondering what the other Professors would look like in muggle clothes, and somehow it turned into trying to picture Snape in a t-shirt and shorts trying to get a tan on the beach and getting all red and burnt up like a crisp instead and... yeah.”

Harry now had five pairs of eyes staring at him with varying degrees of shock and horror. He couldn't help but flush under their scrutiny. “B-besides...” he felt himself continue, anything to pull attention off of what he had just said. His mind scrambled for a way to finish the sentence, but it seemed his mouth had it all planned out already. “...I kinda like that I get to walk to the train with the two of you, almost like... like a real family...”
Remus did that aborted reach towards Harry that he would sometimes do, eyes filled with so much emotion, before settling on just placing a hand on Harry's shoulder and smiling. Sirius wagged his tail and leaned his shoulder into Harry's leg in a dog-hug, tongue lolling out of his mouth around his canine grin. Tonks squeaked from behind Harry and the next thing he knew she had thrown herself on to his back, arms around his neck, with a cry of “Awwwa!”

Unfortunately, with Sirius underfoot, the impact overbalanced him and nearly sent the two of them crashing to the floor, but Lupin managed to step up just in time to counterbalance their momentum and he merely ended up with his face planted in the Professor's chest instead. “Nymph...” Lupin said scoldingly, arms holding Harry steady around the shoulders. The smell that hit Harry's nose was strange, almost unique, not really the smell that he associated with human, but somehow almost scarily familiar. He had done this before, some time in the past, been held by this man and had been safe and happy.

“Oh, you! It's Tonks!” she complained from behind his ear. But even still, Harry was finding it hard to focus on that, his brain scrambling to locate the source of this memory. Professor Lupin had always maintained a professional distance, at most laying a hand on Harry's shoulder to show support or comfort. The only thing he could think of was back before he was a teacher, worrying about imposing on Harry's life, back when he was a baby with his mom and dad.

“Not when you're acting like that, you're not,” Remus insisted back, a smirk in his voice. Sirius gave a bark, tail still wagging, and looking up at everyone, pinned between them by their legs.

Moody gave a cough, and with a pointed look reminded them, “It’s high time you be leaving, isn't it?”

Tonks bashfully pulled back from Harry, which let Lupin help him to stand upright once again. He cast a self-conscious glance over to the twins, only to find them politely pretending to have not seen anything as they looked over some list on a sheet of paper instead. At Mad-Eye’s grumble, they drew their eyes up and George re-folded the paper and shoved it into his back pocket. “Are we off, then?” he prompted.

The party of six filed out the door in a somewhat orderly fashion, Harry finding himself quickly sandwiched by the twins. “You know, I just got to say, there's something seriously wrong with you,” Fred began.

“Really and truly wrong,” George agreed.

Harry flushed at the insult, shooting the twins a dark look, “What's that supposed to mean?!”

“It's the truth, though!” Fred defended. “I mean, seriously, what sort of person would actually want to see Snape showing more skin?”

Harry's retort froze on his tongue, ending up with his mouth just sort of hanging open instead as his face turned an interesting colour, trying to go pale, flushed, and green all at once. “Th-That's not what I meant!!” he finally managed to sputter, voice nearly reaching a shriek over the laughter of the twins and Tonks. Even Lupin couldn't suppress a chuckle, and Sirius alternately barked playfully, and looked like he was trying to shred the idea into submission with his teeth.

For close to the next block, Harry walked with his hands over his face trying to hide his embarrassment. He finally lowered them after a time when Remus began rubbing soothing circles on his back. “I'm good,” he tried to reassure, but the Professor's smile made it clear that he hadn't quite managed to keep his voice from being a little too tight. “At least I'm not the ones who tried to corner Neville with a bogart just so I could get a chance to see Snape in women's robes...”
“Oi, oi! That was for blackmail purposes!” Fred countered, though he was still laughing along side the others at Harry’s comeback.

“Sure it was,” Harry responded in a humouring tone.

“And it would have worked, too,” George put in.

“But really, how were we to know—”

“—That Longbottom would have to go back to class for his forgotten book,”

“Or that Amanda Broadmoor had a fight with her boyfriend—”

“—And so decided to sit across the room for him that day—”

“—In Longbottom's favourite chair?” they ended in unison.

“Though it was funny to watch the room scream and scatter when millions of little spiders poured out from under her seat,” Fred conceded.

“Oh good lord,” Remus laughed, rolling his eyes. “I can imagine. One doesn't need to be arachnophobic for such a scene to cause them to get squeamish. And for your brother especially that must have been a horrifying sight.”

“Yeah...”

“We weren't trying to be mean to him,” George defended.

“At least mom could have listened to our explanation before she sent us the Howler,” Fred complained.

George gave a nod in agreement. “It is much nicer to listen to getting yelled at when it's about something we actually meant to do.”

“Wouldn't it be better to not get yelled at at all?” Harry suggested.

“Where’s the fun in that?” was the immediate reply from both the twins.

“If they're going to yell anyway,” Fred began.

“And trust us, parents are going to yell,” George put in.

“May as well get yelled at—”

“—While having the most fun!”

“But...” Harry began, recalling Uncle Vernon and how horrible it was every time he'd start yelling. All the bad things that would happen if you were bad. And while he knew his Aunt and Uncle were unfair and went overboard, he also knew that every time he'd ever seen Mrs. Weasley yell at the twins they kinda deserved it. She didn't seem like the sort to go overboard, and Mr. Weasley had never gotten mad at all that Harry had seen, except that once in the bookstore with Malfoy's father. But that was a Malfoy, and so obviously Mr. Weasley was justified in standing up for his children. And why would anyone consider being yelled at and getting in trouble to be fun?

“Harry won't understand,” Remus told the twins, “he doesn't really take much after Prongs.”
“I don’t?” Some of the sting the statement made must have shown in Harry’s eyes or face or body or something because Lupin nearly flinched at the question.

“All I meant to say is that your personality takes much more after Lily...” he explained himself.

“Oh,” Harry breathed, and somehow that touched him. Everyone had always gone on and on about how he was the spitting image of his father, Snape especially strangely enough. But really, no one ever said much of anything at all about his mother. The brave woman who had died in order to save his life, because she had loved so deeply that such a sacrifice was not really a sacrifice at all. And he was like her.

That's how it worked, then. Physically he took after his father, almost his clone, but spiritually—emotionally—he took after his mother. That was how he was his parent's son. Yeah, he could live with that. It made him feel as if he knew them a little more. The thought kept him preoccupied for the remainder of the walk, watching Sirius stir up pigeons and half-listening as the twins pestered for stories from the Marauder's glory years from a laughing Lupin.

Finally, after nearly twenty minutes of nothing more horrifying than the twins teasing, the party arrived at Kings Cross Station. Once inside they made their way to the barrier between platforms nine and ten and slipped through as casually as they could manage, though there were a pair of children and a woman who had asked to pet the dog in turn.

On the platform Harry could see the bright red engine of the Hogwarts Express shining in the sun and felt his spirits soar. The hundreds of voices, the squawks of various owls and yowls of various cats, the smell of the sooty steam. He could hardly believe he was really going back.

“Mad-Eye should be along shortly with the luggage, as for the others...” Lupin said, hand once more on Harry's shoulder as he scanned the crowds from his slightly taller height.

“Fred! George!” a voice called from the crowd and the twins pulled away to go see the tall boy with dreadlocks who called. “Nice dog, Harry!” he acknowledged the seeker.

“Thanks, Lee,” Harry called back, grinning, as Sirius wagged his tail and gave a soft little huff of a bark.

It was then that Harry heard Lupin give a little start and turned to look and see what had caught his eye. A rather pretty Asian woman had just stepped through the gate and smiled in greeting to the suddenly flustered werewolf. “Oh, Miss Mizuki, what are you—that is—I wasn't expecting—um...”

He cut himself off as an older girl, a Ravenclaw if Harry wasn't mistaken, hurried through the gate at a run and barely dodged running in to Ms. Mizuki, stepping rather rudely between the two in order to get by. In the space of time that the girl had broken his eye contact, hardly even shooting an acknowledging wave at the ex-Professor as she hurried on, he seemed to have managed to pull himself together. “How are you?” he tried again.

“I'm fine, thank you. And what about yourself?” she inquired politely.

Harry half watched a little pair of first years enter the gate behind her. A boy and a girl, both Asian, and recalled his first time stepping onto the platform. The little girl's wide green eyes lingered curiously on the group gathered talking beside the entrance, lingering longest on Sirius and Lupin so Harry assumed she was muggle-born. However, the black haired boy she was with tugged at her hand after only a moment and she quickly followed him further in, wide eyes taking in everything the station had to offer. Behind the two first years, a lighter haired young man followed pushing a trolley with a pair of trunks on it. By the looks of him he was likely the older brother or something of
the little boy, though Harry didn't recognize him from around school at all.

Lupin continued to engage in small-talk with the woman, a distinctive pink tinge on his cheeks, and Harry felt oddly comforted by that. So it seemed that regardless of how old you were, when you talked to someone you fancied you would always end up making something of a fool of yourself. Ah well, good for Professor R.J.Lupin. At least she didn't seem put off by his attention.

“Harry!” he heard Ron call, and turned to see the taller red-head sidestep around the possible-brother pushing the cart. Ms. Mizuki took the chance to excuse herself as the Weasleys and Hermione stepped up. “We saw Fred and George over with Lee, so knew you were here. Who was that?”

“Mizuki, or something,” Harry acknowledged, shrugging his shoulders. The name caused both Molly and Arthur to raise their eyebrows and not-so-subtly try and casually glance over their shoulders at the retreating back, which of course quipped the interest of the children.

“That's right, 'Miss Mizuki~'” Tonks practically sang, her and Sirius somehow managing to give Lupin matching sideways glances and smirks, despite one being a dog and the other an old lady. The werewolf just let out a noise through his nose somewhere between a groan and a growl.

The next person to walk through the gate, however, just happened to be Moody, which was a thankful distraction for Lupin as Harry was covering up a grin of his own with his hand and the other children were now looking at him curiously. “We'll discuss this later,” Harry managed to catch Mrs. Weasley saying to Lupin as Tonks piped up to Alastor about how he was a paranoid old man and nothing worth anything was worthy of mentioning. Mad-Eye scolded back about diligence and expecting the unexpected, which earned a side comment from Tonks about it not being unexpected then, when the twins noticed the whole party had gathered and returned to get their luggage.

Then there was a short flurry of motion as everyone figured out whose luggage should go where and which way up and pets were divided up and then finally—finally—they moved away from the gate and towards the train. They got about a quarter of the way there when the next interruption happened, this time a voice calling out “Arthur!”

They looked over to see Kingsley Shacklebolt waving to them, a thin Caucasian woman and a boy with him. The three made their way over to intercept the group, smiles all around. “How are you?” the man greeted. “Haven't passed you at work the last few days, those muggle artifacts not causing you too much trouble, are they?”

“No, not particularly. Though I've heard you've been rather busy down by Daigon Alley. Are these the wife and son you talk so much about?” Mr. Weasley replied, doing a wonderful job at keeping appearances to the level of friendly acquaintance.

“Oh, that's right, forgive me. This is Gwynevere, my wife, and our son, Lucas. Dear, this is Arthur Weasley, a co-worker of mine in the Ministry's Law Enforcement department. And his wife Molly, and at least some of his children, and... I'm sorry dear, but you are...?” Kingsley asked, directing the question towards Hermione.

Catching on that she ought not know him, Hermione stretched out her hand. “Hermione Granger, a classmate of Ron's and Gryffindor's newest Prefect. If your son ends up in Gryffindor, I promise to keep an eye out for him.”

“Well, on him would probably be more along the lines than out for him, but thank you all the same, Miss Granger. And of course, this young lad requires no introduction.”

No introduction indeed, Lucas had caught sight of Harry, or more exactly his scar, nearly right away
and had been staring open mouthed this whole time. “Dad, dad! It's Harry Potter, dad! It's really Harry Potter!” the boy gushed excitedly. While usually the attention got to Harry, with all the negative comments from the Prophet lately the positive idol-worship sparkling in the boy's black eyes was heartening.

“Lucas!” his father scolded, causing the young child to flinch and grin sheepishly in his father's direction. “He is also a person, not just a character out of one of your story books. Remember that.”

“Sorry,” Lucas mumbled, looking properly ashamed. It made sense, in a way though, that the son of an Order member would know Harry was not a liar and would still like him.

“It's alright,” Harry said, “I've unfortunately gotten kinda used to it by now. Say, Lucas, what house do you think you'll be in?”

Lucas got a look on his face that said 'he said my name!' for a moment, but did not go into another bout of idolizing and instead forced himself to give a casual sort of shrug. “I don't know, I figured I'd just let the chips fall where they may...”

“But what're you gonna do about the troll?” Fred asked. Ron suddenly shot him a dirty look.

“Troll?” Lucas asked, confusion crossing his features.

“The troll you have to wrestle in order to be sorted,” George joined in with the teasing. And suddenly, Harry remembered that that was what they had told Ron the sorting consisted of.

“What!” the little first year squeaked. “There's no troll!” he insisted, but quickly whipped around to look at his parents. “Right mom? There's no troll!”

“There's no troll,” his mother responded without batting an eyelash.

The twins looked slightly put out while Ron sniggered, but before any more conversation could take place the train blew it's last warning whistle. Final goodbyes then began, the Shacklebolts stepping away slightly to give the larger party some privacy in their conversations.

“Look after yourselves,” Lupin expressed, shaking hands with all the children, coming to Harry last and placing his hand once more on his shoulder, “be careful.”

“I will,” Harry assured.

“Yeah, keep your head down and your eyes peeled,” Moody put in, taking Harry's hand as well. “And don't forget, all of you: careful what you put in writing. If in doubt, don't put it in a letter at all.”

“It's been great meeting all of you,” Tonks insisted, swooping in with hugs for the girls, “see you soon, okay?”

Mrs. Weasley, on the other hand, was hurrying them all along, hugging them at random as she shuffled them towards the train and managing to catch Harry twice. “Write... be good... if you forgot anything, we'll send it on... On the train now, hurry, all of you.”

The great black dog jumped up and put his large paws on Harry's shoulders, tail wagging even though he let out a whine and dropped his ears. “I'll be fine,” Harry insisted, reaching up to give the dog a hug before Molly noticed and gave a hiss.

“For heaven's sake, act more like a dog!” she scolded quietly as she ushered Harry up on to the train.
Harry leaned out as the train began to slowly pull away from the station and called down to everyone, “See you!”

As Eriol and Kaho explained to Sakura about the gateway on to Platform 9 3/4, she had been a little apprehensive. Even though they had insisted that it was just an illusion spell and she watched both Kaho and Nakuru walk through before her, she still wasn't so sure it wouldn't suddenly turn solid on her. So Eriol had smiled at her just like her father always does and took her hand gently in his and walked her casually through the wall.

Sakura had expected some sort of noticeable distance that she had to cross and had even taken a deep breath like she was about to dive under water, but found the illusion truly was only paper thin and she crossed it instantly without any resistance at all, entering into a place full of noise and colour that didn't match the rest of the train station at all.

When they entered, the first thing Sakura noticed was that Kaho was talking to a man and a boy and a dog and that all of them felt somehow like they ought to be very important. She looked at them, especially the man and the dog because neither seemed quite right looking like they did, but she couldn't quite place why. However, she only got a moment to look because Eriol tugged at her hand.

“We'd best not block the entrance,” he reminded, just as Yukito followed them through pushing the cart that had her and his things on it.

“Who is that Mizuki-sensei is talking to?” Sakura questioned, knowing Eriol would know.

“Oh, just some people that she's met before,” the reincarnation responded cryptically.

Sakura glanced back for a brief moment, “They seemed different somehow...”

“Yes, they are,” he replied evasively once again.

“Are they sorcerers too?” she asked, taking a guess at why she felt that way.

“No, they're not,” Eriol acknowledged before continuing, “and remember what I told you about that? You can't let people know that you do a different kind of magic...”

“I know,” she sighed. “It seems rather silly, though. After all, don't they use magic, too?”

“People can't understand things that are different from themselves, and what people can't understand, they fear. That is unfortunately human nature.”

“I wish it wasn't...” the Card Mistress expressed.

Eriol paused and turned so he could look at her a moment. “If that really is what you wish, then hold on to it in your heart and who knows, it may even come true. You are Sakura-san, after all.”

“Hoe?”

“Wishes have power,” Yukito explained, having caught up to them and parked the trolly next to where they were standing. “The stronger the soul, the louder their wishes cry out, and the loudest wishes are the ones that are heard and shape the future.”

“Hoe...” Sakura said in awe, but then a thought occurred to her. “But what about the people without power, does that mean that their wishes never come true?”

“That's not exactly it. Every wish that every person makes helps change the future, and people acting
on their wishes rather than just wishing them causes the change to happen more drastically. But with so many people in the world, sometimes wishes contradict, and in those cases the stronger wish is the one that wins.” Eriol then gave a sigh, “But enough about that for now, you have a train to catch and a boarding school to attend.”

“Right,” she agreed with some false bravado. “I have a whole future ahead of me, I mustn't be late.”

“And I had best be heading to get you that book,” Yukito admitted, kneeling down and taking his Mistress's hands in his. “Will you be alright on your own?”

“Oi, oi! What's this 'alone' stuff?! I'm here too, you know!” came the loud voice from her pocket, followed by the disgruntled Sun Guardian.

“Kero-chan!” Sakura scolded in a panic, glancing around to make sure no one saw. However, there were so many people all talking over each other as they milled about that no one noticed one more voice in the crowd. Giving a sigh of relief, the young sorceress turned back to her other Guardian. “Don't worry, everything will surely be alright.”

Kaho had finally caught back up with them and pulled Sakura into a hug. “That's right, because it's Sakura-chan. But still, be happy... I'll be sure to write to you often to see how you're doing.”

“Yes, I'll write too,” Sakura responded, her arms reaching up to hug Kaho back. “I'll miss you.”

“I'm going to miss you all, too. Thing's will be so quiet...” the math teacher admitted.

“Ah, was I loud?” Sakura worried.

“No, you made things bright and lively,” Eriol informed, that melancholy smile of his coming back to his face.

“I'll definitely write,” Sakura insisted again as Yukito helped her pull her trunk on board. “Ah, the other...” she said, looking at the remaining trunk.

“Don't worry about it,” Eriol told her. “I'll make sure it gets to where it needs to go.”

“All right then,” she nodded, “I'll see you at Christmas.”

“Until later,” Eriol replied.

“Until Christmas,” Kaho echoed with a smile.

“I'll be at the school by the time you get there,” Yukito reminded. “Kero, take good care of her until then.”

“I'll take good care of her always, you don't have to worry, you can just go back to your boyfriend...” Kero grumbled.

“But, what about Nakuru-san?” Sakura asked worriedly, glancing around the sea of unfamiliar faces.

“Don't worry, she's just gone ahead. I'll pass along the message to her,” Eriol reassured.

Sakura looked less than thrilled that she couldn't say goodbye in person, but nodded anyway. “Well then, you too Spinel-san, enjoy your reading.” The black cat Guardian gave a nod from where he was draped across Eriol's shoulder, and Sakura bravely took hold of her trunk and turned to drag it away.
“Will it really be alright to leave you with the luggage?” Yukito asked.

“Yes, go and take care of getting Sakura-chan her book,” Kaho insisted.

Yukito gave something between a bow and a nod, “Well then, Mizuki-san, Spinel Sun, Clow...”

“I am not Clow, Yue,” Eriol sighed out as the Moon Guardian wandered away back towards the gate. It was then that Eriol turned to look at Kaho. “I am going to miss you, though...”

“Oh, Eriol!” Kaho cried, crumbling to her knees to embrace the sorcerer. And if the embrace was a little too long or a little too passionate, no one bothered to pay mind, all too intent to pay attention to their own goodbyes. “I'll write, every day, even if there's nothing to say...”

“I'll keep my Sight on you,” Eriol promised, and then whispered, “I love you.”

“Me too,” Kaho insisted, “don't forget about me...”

Eriol gave a chuckle at that, “That should be my line. I'm going to be surrounded 24/7 by children, you're the one who will have a whole world of people. People who you could love properly...” he admitted a little sadly, pushing a strand of hair behind her ear just as an excuse to caress her face.

Kaho shook her head, “None of them will be anything in comparison to you.” The whistle blew, and they both knew this was to be the end. “I still think you should have told her.”

“But then this wouldn't be a surprise,” Eriol pointed out.

“And to you, that is the greatest gift anyone could ever give...” Kaho acknowledged.

“Besides, she already sensed it somewhere inside. Didn't you notice? The only one she actually said any kind of goodbye to was you.”

“I did,” Kaho acknowledged, “and I noticed you didn't say any real kind of goodbye to her either.”

“Oh, Kaho, I know it's a lonely old house, but you'll be alright. Everything will be alright.”

She chuckled, “Now you're sounding like Sakura-chan.”

“It's because it's Sakura-san who wants it, so I know it will be true that way. I'll see you in December.” He gave her a kiss on the cheek as a final farewell, and she returned the gesture with a kiss on his forehead. Then she gave Spinel a scratch and a nuzzle to say goodbye and watched as Eriol used subtle magic to lift Yukito's luggage onto the train easily. He then stood in the doorway with eyes full of more longing than any eleven-year-old could ever feel. The sort of longing that only the elderly can feel, when they have lived a good century and learned what real loss and treasures are. His eyes did not leave her as the train pulled out of the station, not until it turned the bend and she was finally out of sight.

Xiao Lang stared out the window feeling bored as he did his best to ignore the gossiping girls sharing his compartment with him. They had given up on getting him to talk not long after the Parkinson boy and his entourage had wandered off. The train was filling up quickly now, last minute farewells being expressed all over the platform as children piled aboard one after another. The empty space in their compartment had been filled by a boy with long platinum hair who had introduced himself to everyone as “Corvin Black” and was therefore seemingly acceptable company to the girls.

They were currently swapping gossip, retelling everything that they had heard about the school from
various family members. The grey-eyed boy was proving to be a much more engaging conversationalist as he elaborated on everything with flair and drama. Xiao Lang listened with half an ear for anything important, but he had learned from growing up with so many sisters that gossip was usually only half-founded at best and shouldn't bear too much weight.

While he listened to the chatter, Chandra on his shoulder and Jiao Yang still feigning sleep on his lap, he stared almost sightlessly out the window, watching the multi-coloured swirls of colourful robes and muggle garb as people milled about. That was until he managed to catch a flash of a hauntingly familiar taupe-haired profile that still managed to make his heart jump, regardless of the reason why.

It had only been a moment, over by the gates, heading back out to the rest of the world. He tried to tell himself it was crazy to see such a person here, but still he found himself standing with hands and nose pressed against the window, eyes boring into that place, searching for some sign that he hadn't been mistaken. His mind whirled at the implications of such a thing. If that really had been Yukito... Yukito wouldn't leave Sakura, could it really have been him? The world had some six billion people in it, and he had only seen him for a split second, but hadn't he been sensing traces of Sakura's magic in Daigon Alley? He had thought it was just because he loves her that he had been feeling her everywhere, his foolish heart clinging on and playing with his senses. But could it have possibly been that he really had been sensing her presence over those two weeks?

The train lurching under his feet pulled the young heir back to reality as he found the compartment was suddenly quite silent. He glanced over his shoulder at his fellow occupants, not really even fully aware of the moment he had stood. His Guardians, of course, were watching him with rapt attention, awaiting any signal he should give to indicate how they were to act. The other four occupants were not so accepting of his odd behaviour, looking at him between mocking smirks, quipped curiosity, and concern over sanity.

But if Yukito was here, then Sakura would be here. And if Sakura was here, the only reason for her presence would be that she, too, would be attending Hogwarts. And if she were indeed a fellow new student...

Xiao Lang scooped Jiao Yang up under the arms and braced her against his hip as he ordered, “Chandra, stay here and watch my things. I need to go and check something out.” With that command given, the heir stepped out into the hall to begin his search.

There was a knock on the cabin door and Lee Jordan opened it to a pentagonal-faced young girl who looked to be going into her first year. She was a small oriental child with short hair the colour of burnt sienna and eyes that looked as if they were shimmering pools of clear water off the coast of some tropical island somewhere. One could almost see the ocean’s endless depths and sandy bottom shining out from her pretty green-blue orbs. “Er, can I help you with something?” Lee asked after a second.

“Ano… Ko-konnichiwa minna-san, ano, I, eto, here sitting…? Onegai?” her timid, broken English had an immediate affect on the three friends.

They looked among themselves for a second before all nodding to each other. “I guess if you really want to…” George said, clearing a space for her by the window opposite.

“Domo arigatou gosaimasu! Hajime mashite. Watashi wa Kinomoto Sakura desu, o namae-wa(1)?” the girl blurted out, bowing deeply before coming in and emptying a yellow mouse with feathered wings out of one of her jacket’s many pockets.
“Uh, we only speak English, sorry, kiddo,” Fred announced as the girl sat down across from him, brushing some hair unsuccessfully behind her ear.

“Engrish? Hoe… I is Kinomoto Sakura,” she said, looking around hopefully, praying that they understood.

“Hi, my name’s Fred, this is my twin George, and our friend Lee,” Fred introduced easily as Lee leaned over to look more closely at her mouse.

“Hey, Sakura, how’d you get these wings on your little mouse?” he asked.

“Hoe??” there was a look of confusion on her face for a moment before it dawned on her what he was asking. "Eto, is, ano… is magics! Yes, big magics.”

“It’s probably transfiguration,” George said, joining Lee in examining the mouse.

Lee ran one of his fingers along the fine feathers of the delicate little wings, mesmerized by the detailed work done on the transfigured creature. The mouse watched him cautiously, uneasy about the stranger's large hands running over its tiny body. To put the animal at ease, Lee stroked down the rodent's spine and along its long tuff-tipped tail. He wondered by the tail if it had maybe started out originally as a kangaroo mouse, or if the furred end was a later addition that the transfigurer had added.

Because he was so focused on the little beast that he was hunched over with his back to the door, Lee didn't notice the new arrival and actually jumped slightly when a young male voice spoke up from behind him. “Konnichi wa, Sakura.”

The first thing that popped into George’s mind when he saw the boy standing in the open doorway was a puppet. One of those old fashioned ones chiseled lovingly out of maple wood; with the shavings glued back on as hair, giving it a messy, back-curl look. He was, even at this young age, obviously going to grow up into a dashing young man, standing there with a bemused smirk playing along his lips. But what really set this boy apart from every other person on the train was that he balanced a toddler on his hip with the same thin honey-caramel eyes and cinnamon wisped hair.

“Konnichi wa…” she replied without even thinking, smile bright and welcoming and stretched with such a cheery warmth that her eyes had squinted shut. She then turned back to keep an eye on her pet, who was staring at the door somewhat agape. Slowly, something seemed to register in the young girl's mind, and she blinked as she realized that something was not quite right about all of this. “Hoe?”

“Konnichi wa, Sakura…” he repeated, the teasing smirk growing ever more prominent by the moment.

A frown creased her cute little brow before she turned to look at the boy as if seeing something impossible standing there. “Syaooran-kun?” she asked in almost a whisper, tone baffled yet eyes both hopeful and scared.

Now it was no longer a smirk but a full blown smile that looked down at her. “Konnichi wa, Sakura,” he repeated for the third time now.

“HOOOOEEEEEEE!!” she squealed, popping to her feet to throw her arms around his neck. The little girl on his hip widened her eyes as she pulled back, apparently scared by such a show of enthusiasm. “What are you doing here? I thought I’d never see you again, after that phone call! Oh, I’ve never been so happy to be proven wrong before in my life! Who is the baby?” Sakura finally asked,
registering the youth’s presence.

“Who are you calling a baby?” the toddler accused.

“This is Li Jiao Yang, she is my, eh, little sister.”

“What? I didn’t know you had any little siblings, I thought that you only had the four older sisters…”

“Yeah, well, we’re kind of like Hiiragizawa and Akizuki.”

“Ah…” Sakura then turned to the other occupants in the room. “Is George, Fred, Lee.”

“English?” Xiao Lang eyeballed them skeptically, they nodded in reply. “My name is Xiao Lang Li, this is my sister Jiao Yang.”

“Oh, you speak proper English? Good,” Lee sighed in relief.

“I speak a good many languages, don’t you?” Xiao Lang gloated as he came to sit beside Sakura, shifting his sister so she sat in his lap.

“Syaoran-kun…” Sakura started warningly.

“What’s with the baby?” a sudden drawling voice broke into the introductions. “Only students and staff members are allowed on this train, kid. I have half a mind to report you to the Headmaster for this.”

The Weasley twins shuddered at the sound, but the thick irises of both the Li ‘siblings’ flashed dangerously at the challenge. “Who dares to address me in such a tone?” Xiao Lang demanded.

This caused the other occupants to take a double take at Xiao Lang. Sakura had not heard him speak with such arrogance in ages, and the others had no previous knowledge of his rank or personality, so they were shocked beyond audible reaction, but unfortunately for the situation, it was Malfoy that found his voice first. “You impertinent little brat! Don’t you see this?” he indicated the ‘P’ badge on his robes. “Don’t you know what this means?”

“…Prick?”

Whether Malfoy turned that shade of red out of anger or embarrassment, would be something that all witnesses would debate upon for a long time to come. “It… means… Perfect… you insufferable little brat!”


“Syaoran-kun!!” Sakura cried, obviously appalled at whatever her friend had just said.

“Nani?” he asked, but did not remove his eyes from Malfoy just yet.

“That was so rude of you!!” the Card Mistress scolded.

“It’s obviously true,” the Chinese boy defended.

“Is that so? Well, then it must be true for you too, because I can’t see any difference in the way you behave,” Sakura huffed.

With most, such a statement wouldn’t affect the young heir, but Sakura held a sway over Xiao Lang that few others could compare with. Her displeasure hit him like a bucket of ice water, and as he
turned his pleading eyes on to her, a dread seeded itself in his chest. Her cross little pout was so
damning it couldn't even be seen as cute. He felt if he were to salvage any of the situation, his only
hope at the moment would be to swallow some of his pride and humble himself. “Gomen…” he
grunted out reluctantly, half looking at Malfoy and half at Sakura.

But the young Mistress of the Cards had turned her nose up to the Li Clan’s heir. Literally. She had
turned in her seat so that she was no longer facing him, then crossed her arms and stuck her nose
towards the top of the window-frame. He sat for a minute or so looking at the back of her head
before he began to fidget uneasily. But his problems of how to get back in her good graces was
temporarily solved when she stood up, picking up Kero with her, and announced in her poor English
that she was going to take a walk. But before she left she shot Xiao Lang such a look as to tell him
he was not welcome to join her.

(1) She says “Thank you so very much! It's very nice to meet you. My name is Kinomoto Sakura,
what is your names?” I'm using a lot of Japanese in this section on purpose to express the general
confusion that everyone has at what she is saying. Most of it should be able to be picked up by the
context, but if there is any phases or words you don't understand and don't feel like looking up
yourself, feel free to ask me and I'll be happy to explain it in probably a lot more detail than you care
about listening to.

(2) He tells Malfoy to f-off and calls him an asshole, which is what Sakura is so shocked about. Not
only are they young, so swearing is still a shocking thing to do for them, but the Japanese are more
polite in general than North Americans and so that's why she's so very appalled that he would talk
like that to a senior ranking student and stranger.

“Hello, I’m so sorry to intrude, but may I sit in here with you?” a sweet voice spoke up from the door
that had only been cracked slightly mere minutes after Ginny had magically cleaned the compartment
of stinksap. It was the first year boy that Harry had seen at the gate when Lupin was talking to Ms.
Mizuki, the possible-little-brother kid. His black hair glimmered a midnight blue in the few rays of
sunshine that filtered in from outside and his pale skin was almost of a vampiric complexion. Yet
what captured the occupants of the train’s car were his eyes. Harry assumed that it was merely the
glasses, but to look into his eyes was like looking into the depths of the sea on a stormy night.

But not ones to be rude, Harry spoke up nearly at once, “Yeah, sure, come on in!”

The boy pushed the door open more and slipped in quietly. In his arms he cradled a small black
kitten that appeared to be asleep. Before doing anything to further address the compartment he had
just entered, the first year youth pulled a book from his bag and opened it to the page that was
marked. He laid the kitten on the pages and addressed it. “There you are, just as you left it, no need
for sulking so.”

The kitten, who notably had small blue wings attached to it, looked disgustedly at its owner with thin
blue eyes as if it had understood what had been said to it before turning its attention to the book it
was now laying on.

The youth seemed unperturbed by this and set about making himself comfortable before turning his
eyes on to the other occupants. After a general sweep, they finally and predictably came to land on
Harry, though notably without the customary flickering glance upwards towards his scar. The boy
rested his elbows on his knees and rested his chin against his interlocked fingers, smiling across the
compartment in a coy sort of way. “Yes, I was hoping I would get to meet you,” the boy said with
confidence.
This oddly enough caused the girl Luna to lower her magazine into her lap and level the strange boy with a long penetrating stare that he conveniently completely ignored as though she were doing no such thing. After watching this reaction for a few moments Harry brushed it aside and continued with the conversation at hand. “Yeah, I get that a lot.”

Suddenly the boy blinked as if coming back to himself and straitened up with a smile. Or... at least his smile changed expressions... somehow... “Oh dear, I fear I haven’t introduced myself yet. My name is Eriol, and this here is Spinel.” He said gesturing to the winged kitten who was currently ignoring all patrons of the conversation in favour of staring at the book like it could read. “Well, now, whom might all of you be?” at the sight of Harry’s gawking face, he shook his head sadly, “come now, I told you all my name, now it’s your turn to tell me yours.”

“I’m Ginny Weasley,” she finally spoke up, “And this is Neville Longbottom, and Luna Lovegood.”

“It’s a pleasure I’m sure,” Eriol responded with a nod of acknowledgement before turning his eyes back on to Harry and resuming his previous posture. “And what about you? Who are you?”

“Don’t you already know? You said you wanted to meet me,” Harry pointed out.

Eriol's coy sort of smile spread further, looking like the Cheshire cat hording all the secrets and laughing at the world for understanding none of it. “To meet someone and to know them are two very different things. So again: who are you?”

“I thought it would be obvious. I’m Harry Potter.”

“And just who is 'Harry Potter'?” the boy prompted further just as the compartment door slid open once more.

There, standing in the doorway, was a sight that Harry really rather would not have seen; Draco Malfoy was flanked by his ever-faithful goons Crabbe and Goyle. And worse off the blond git had a shiny new badge emblazoned with a “P”. “Who’s 'Harry Potter'?” Malfoy drawled with a sneer. “Obviously dealing with a little mudblood then, if he doesn't even know who Saint bloody Potter, Boy Who Lived, is.” Malfoy then looked down at the first year who smiled up at him as though unaware how badly he was being insulted. Then again, if this boy was muggle-born, he probably wasn't aware.

“Hello, my name is Eriol, and I'm sure it's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Malfoy,” was the first year's polite response. Meanwhile, the kitten turned the page.

Malfoy's brows contorted as he took in the youth's features. “What are you, some sort of bastardized squib's offspring? You have that 'Potter' look to you, but there shouldn't be any others left!”

Eriol's smile widened fractionally. “So Mr. Potter has a signature 'look' now, does he?”

Malfoy opened his mouth like he was about to say something, then seemed to change his mind and merely shake his head, waving the younger boy off. “Why do I have to explain something like that to some mudblood?” He then turned his eyes onto Harry instead.

“Just get to the point, Malfoy,” Harry snapped aggressively.

“Manners, Potter, or I'll have to give you a detention,” drawled the blond. “You see, I, unlike you, have been made a prefect, which means that I, unlike you, have the power to hand out punishments.”

“Yeah, but you, unlike me, are a git, so get out and leave us alone,” Harry retorted.
Ginny and Neville laughed while the kitten continued to read the book and the odd first year boy sat back and watched the show with a pleasant sort of detached smile. Malfoy curled his lip in a snarl. “Tell me, how does it feel being second-best to Weasley, Potter?”

Harry couldn’t help it, his hand twitched in the direction of his wand, but he managed to abort the action before he took any steps towards getting himself expelled. Ginny glared daggers at the older boy, while Neville suddenly looked uneasy, as if he just noticed Ron and Herminone's absences and was now spinning his gears imagining a million different reasons why that might be the case.

“Oh, hit a nerve, have I?” Malfoy purred condescendingly. “Well, just watch your step, Potter, because I’ll be dogging you this year in case you put a toe out of line…” Snickering to himself, Malfoy shot the compartment one last superior look before he departed to go be a pain in someone else’s side.

Harry shifted in his seat, suddenly uncomfortable. Perhaps it wasn’t such a good idea, after all, that he had been seen off by his godfather and Professor Lupin. Was his life doomed to never see even an ounce of normalcy? Ginny caught his eye and tried to smile, but he could tell she was unnerved. If it was about Malfoy's choice of words like he was, or because she was hoping he wouldn't have another blow up, Harry was sorry to say he didn't know her well enough to be able to tell. However, he did his best to smile back and cast his eyes about for something else to focus on instead.

It was then that Harry noticed Luna was still watching Eriol with an almost disturbing level of fascination. He was just to the point of contemplating asking her what was up when she divulged the information herself. “It’s rather unusual, isn’t it? I mean, most of your sort don't care about what's happening in the Wizarding World, let alone go out of their way to meet a wizard celebrity. And you even have a Guardian Beast that you're taking with you to Hogwarts meaning you're from one of the old families, but I don't recognize you even though I've met most of the local families, and that one isn't one of the Guardian Beasts that I remember reading the description of in the archives, and everyone knows the last Guardians made were Yue and Cerberus, but they belonged to Clow Reed and were lost when he died, and besides they say Cerberus was a great golden beast anyway.”

“You’ve got a sharp eye, Luna was it? But what else could one expect from Cecelia’s daughter.”

“Oh, you noticed? Most people don't, I don’t look much like my mother.”

“It was your last name that let me know who you were.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!! Hold up here! What are you implying here…?” both the stormy eyed boy and this silver gazing girl looked at Ginny with a calm, almost bored look on their faces. “Oh gods, you are… Do you mean he’s really…? Are you really… one of them…?”

“And what precisely would that be, Miss Weasley?” Eriol asked, getting a dangerous spark in his eye despite the fact the placid smile never faded from his face. Somehow, that just made the smile look all the more terrifying. Harry felt his hand squeeze around his wand, not really understanding why. After all, this was just some first year kid... right?

She suddenly got very nervous under the first year’s cold gaze. “W-well, um, it’s just, don’t take this the wrong way, but wh-what she was saying, it sounded almost as if she were, uh, referring to you as a, erm, a-a Sorcerer…”

His eyes thinned ever so slightly as the smile on his face grew wider, looking almost evil. “How very perceptive of you, Miss Weasley. Yes, that’s what Miss Lovegood was reflecting on, and yes, I am. But I’m afraid that if I hear so much as a murmur of this past this box, I will have to wipe the minds of all of you, and everyone you tell, turning the lot of you into mindless vegetables for the rest of
Harry blinked, he had seen the effects of a memory charm on Lockheart in his second year, and he didn’t much like the idea of ending up like him. Also the way that Ginny fidgeted, shifting her weight around on the bench, trying to get as far away from the boy across from her as she could without insulting the seemingly amused child. Also, that Neville looked so chalk white that Harry was surprised he was still conscious, though Neville was known for not being the best there was, he was still a Gryffindor…

In fact, the only one who seemed calm about it was Luna, who looked a long few moments at the black kitten, Spinel, before asking, “So, what does it draw its power from?”

“It’s a Sun Guardian, and it draws its power from my staff,” he said sweetly. To that, she just nodded and buried her nose in the Quibbler again.

“Ano, Kero-chan…” the young Card Mistress sighed.

“Yeah?” Kero whispered back.

“Was I out of line?” Sakura questioned as she wandered her way towards the front of the train. She couldn't really help but feel guilty for what she had said to her crush. She was angry, appalled that he would talk to an older student like that, but still regretted walking out on him after she had spent so long wishing to see him again.

“If it was what you want, then Sakura is never out of line. You surpassed Clow Reed, the one who makes the rules from now on is you,” Kero insisted.

This, however, just made Sakura feel even more disturbed. “I don't want that kind of power. No one should always be right, no matter what. People need others to tell them when they have gone to far. It's just... I was so shocked. I thought Syaoran-kun had changed. Was I mistaken? Do I really not know him at all?”

“I couldn't say,” Kero admitted. “The Gaki comes from a prominent magical lineage, dating back thousands of years. Before, when you were capturing the Cards together, you were living in a non-magical environment where he was just another kid in school. But here, he has obligations and expectations that his name and rank weigh on him. He has to act all superior like that, whether he likes to or not. Having power's... not easy on everyone.”

“I wanted so much to see him, no matter what, but now that he's here, I feel so scared. I told myself over and over that I love him, I wanted more than anything to have the chance to tell him face-to-face. But now that he's in front of me again, I lost my nerve,” the Card Mistress confessed.

She wrung her hands carelessly, accidentally twisting Kero in the process. “Ow, watch it!”

“Oh! I'm sorry!” Sakura jerked her hands away, letting the little golden Guardian go. He hovered by his own power while his Mistress assisted in stroking his fur all back down into proper order. “I'm really sorry about that, Kero-chan. You know I didn't mean to hurt you. I was just lost in thought and forgot I was holding you... I'm just worried. What if Syaoran-kun didn't change? What if he isn't who I thought he was? There's so much about him I really don't know, after all. What if... what if he doesn't feel the same way I do?”

Kero gave a sigh as he let himself be pulled into a hug. “That, unfortunately, is something that you will just have to take the risk and ask, like everyone else. Facing rejection from someone you like is perhaps the one true universal equalizer, regardless of species or power. But even though I can't tell
you if the Gaki returns your feelings or not, I do know he truly cares for you at least as a friend. I
can't see him acting too unkindly towards you, even if he does end up rejecting your advances.”

“But he told me last time we talked to just forget about him. That he was going to forget me...”
Sakura recalled.

“...Sometimes... it's easier to not hold on. To spend years upon years missing someone, clinging to
their memory and polishing it until it shines brighter than any truth ever could. Dreaming of what it
would be like to be able to see each other again. You don't do that sort of stuff for someone you don't
care deeply about. But when you do meet again, to find they have moved on without you... I wish
sometimes that Clow had been so nice as to just let us forget his existence.”

“Kero-chan...” Sakura's heart went out for the Sun Guardian.

A little paw wiped away the tears and a toothy grin was forced into their place. “But, we have
Sakura-chan now! So I guess we moved on as well, right?”

Though she nodded enthusiastically in support of her friend, inside her heart she felt fretful. But I
don't want Syaoran-kun to move on past me...

Xiao Lang stared for a minute at the compartment door that had just been shut on him. He was aware
of the three older sets of eyes that were watching him curiously, and hated the idea that they were
ridiculing him. It wasn't like they were important people to him, or even that there was much chance
of the issue making it's way back to the Clan—or worse, his sisters where he would never escape it
—but the principle of the thing... Not wanting to put up with the older students bullying teasing, the
young heir soon opted to lift his little Sun Guardian onto his hip and excuse himself from the
compartment.

He was embarrassed. Borderline shellshocked by the fact that Sakura had rejected his presence so
completely. He hadn't meant to upset her like that, but when he had been addressed with such a
belittling tone of voice, his ingrained pride reared it's head and he had spoken before really even
thinking things through properly. Which was another thing to curse himself over, actually, he
shouldn't have done that. He should have known better. He was to be Clan Head after all, dealing
with people was something he had to be good at. The Clan could ill afford a leader that shot their
mouth off without thinking all because of a little bruise to their pride.

Shit... Xiao Lang wasn't much in the mood to go back and deal with a compartment overrun by
gossipers and Chandra was watching his stuff anyway. Any eleven year old stupid enough to snoop
under her watch was in for more than they could handle, even if he'd have to come up with reasons
his “magically transfigured cat” was so powerful. At the moment he just wasn't in the mood to add
worrying over that to his plate, and really it may make things easier in the long run if it was known
that she was special beyond some cosmetic manipulation.

So instead, the young heir set out in search of isolation. He knew he likely wasn't going to find any
compartments that were devoid of students, but still wondered as he wandered towards the back of
the train where he could go to obtain a bit of privacy. He wasn't about to go hide himself in the
bathrooms like some looser, that would surely just spread his embarrassing rejection regarding
Sakura even further. So instead he just let his feet keep carrying him farther down the length of the
train until finally he had reached the back door of the caboose.

He thought for a moment before realizing that there weren't likely any students out there, and so
opened the door and stepped through. Sure enough it was empty, and while a little on the chilly side,
the wind was mostly to the sides of the caboose so when he sat in the middle it wasn't too bad. For a
time he just sat on the platform, letting his legs dangle between the bars that held up the railing, and watching the world appear between them one plank of wood at a time. It was hypnotizing and relaxing in it's mindlessness. But given time, the little heir began to think once more.

It was such a shock to his system to see Sakura here. He hadn't been expecting it, had been preparing himself to let her go forever, even though he still may have to because of his stupid mouth. He had wanted to see her, of course, who doesn't long to see the people they love when they are separated from them? But he was also dreading their impending arrival at school. His mother was going to be observing him at school. His mother was going to meet Sakura for herself.

He agonized over the thought, and the cruel turn that fate was dealing him. To finally be reunited with the girl he loved, only to be forced apart from her because he was expected to hate her. She was his rival who stole his inheritance. He was supposed to hate her, even though he loved her, but he knew his mother would surely despise her. After all, his mother always did what was right for the clan.

He hated the thought, it would be agony to see Sakura every day and not ever be able to be close to her, to have to act as an enemy towards her because it was what the elders expected of him. He wasn't sure he could do it, not if she looked up at him with those sad eyes she sometimes gave him. When she gave him that look, he always just wanted to make the world a better place just so her smile would come back.

Xiao Lang was suddenly pulled from his thoughts when Jiao Yang, who had been sitting beside him humming to herself, sprung to her feet and began reverting to her true form. His eyes followed the line of her sight above them to where a silvery figure was held aloft by a pair of giant feathery wings. "Yue!"

The Moon Guardian began a downward ark, causing the Sun Guardian to begin charging an attack in defence of the boy seated on the walkway. "No, it's all right," Xiao Lang insisted, grabbing at Tai Yang to halt her offensive action. "Yue isn't an enemy, he belongs to Sakura."

The glow building around Tai Yang's hands dissipated at her master's words, though it was clear that she did not care for the stranger that landed on the roof when Xiao Lang waved him down. The slender, elegant form radiated unadulterated lunar magic, and the young heir felt the magic within himself stir and reach out longingly to the embodiment of it's source. It wasn't really a surprise that to the inexperienced this sort of thing could be mistaken for love and many could probably live very happy lives under that assumption, but in comparison to the real thing, Xiao Lang knew now that it was just a cheap imitation.

Yue looked down from his perch at the Li boy and his strange Guardian with as much weary curiosity as his porcelain face ever showed. "Since when did the Li Clan have a humanoid Sun Guardian?"

"Since this summer," Xiao Lang replied. "Yue, this is Tai Yang."

"Tai Yang' was a lizard-shaped Guardian who died in defence of one of your ancestors a few centuries back. I know, because I watched the fight happen," Yue pointed out.

"I know," Xiao Lang acknowledged. "But Jie jie thought it would be for the best if we just pretended we were talking about the dead Guardian when mentioning Tai Yang." Xiefa had said that it would be strategically advantageous to keep potential enemies in the dark for as long as they could about the true power the Clan had gained possession of in order to keep the other Clans from feeling the need to form alliances against the Li Clan to compete.
“Why does that one need to know all of this?” Tai Yang asked her Master.

However, before Xiao Lang could explain anything to her, Yue spoke up for him. “Because this one is old enough to remember the truth and important enough that others will listen. Not that I think it would make much of a difference, I am far from the oldest Guardian still walking around. Word will get out sooner rather than later, little Li child. But... my Mistress bares no ill will towards the Li Clan, so I have no need at this time to out you on your little lie.”

“Thank you, Yue,” Xiao Lang responded, some tension leaving him. Yue still said Sakura didn’t see him as an enemy. That, at least, was good, right?

“We were not expecting you here,” Yue pointed out. “Your presence makes my Mistress very happy, but the Li Clan should keep in mind that regardless of that fact, any action taken against the Mistress will still be met with hostility from Cerberus and myself. Do not think that you have an advantage over my Mistress and her Cards just because you have a Guardian now, too.”

“I wouldn’t! I could never raise a hand against Sakura. Even if it was what the Clan expected me to do, fighting her... that, I... I love her. You’re the one who helped me realize it in the first place!” the young heir insisted passionately.

Pale, periwinkle eyes bore down on the Li boy as if daring him to look away, but when honey eyes earnestly returned the gaze for a minute, the Moon Guardian spread his wings and took to the sky once more.

“I'm starving!” Ron announced as he slid open the compartment door and walked in confidently. He swiped a chocolate frog from Harry's pile and stowed Pigwidgeon next to Hedwig before plopping down next to Harry. Hermione, who had entered with him, took a moment to look around first and notice the lack of room and two strange faces.

“Oh, hello Neville, so good to see you again. And, I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting either of you two,” Hermione greeted politely, eyes casting to the blonde girl and the first year boy.

The room went quiet and on edge, eyes flickering over to the young sorcerer in mild fear. Ginny finally gained the courage to speak up, “Ah, this is Luna Lovegood, a Ravenclaw from my year, her family lives rather close to the Burrow, actually. Um, but there doesn't seem to be enough room for everyone, I was wanting to see my friends anyway, so why don’t I just go ahead and see you all at the feast tonight, okay? Bye!” and with that, the red haired girl ducked past the new prefect and hurriedly disappeared out the door.

“Traitor...” Harry mouthed under his breath after the girl who took the first opportunity presented to her to ditch the awkward atmosphere, only half meaning it. In a way, he wanted nothing more than to follow her, or send the sorcerer out in her place, but it wasn't like he could exactly do that.

Hermione sat in the now vacated seat none the wiser and addressed the first year, “I'm Hermione Granger, a prefect this year for Gryffindor House. I didn't catch your name.”

“It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Granger, I'm sure. My name is Eriol,” the smiling child returned the introduction with a gentlemanly bow.

“Ariel?” Ron piped up. “Isn't that a girl's name?”
“Ronald!” Hermione hissed across at him while Neville turned white and Harry elbowed him rather roughly.

The boy, however, just smiled. “Actually, the name Ariel was long used as a unisex name and was not popularized as a female name until after a certain little mermaid obtained it. But no, it is not 'Ariel', it is 'Eriol'. My name is taken from the Silmirilion.”

“Oh! Tolken!” Hermione acknowledged.

“Quite, though no where near as famous a source as your literary reference,” Eriol confirmed. “But then again, a name, once given, comes to define a thing. Therefore, one must not name lightly and always pay mind to what they wish to gain from a thing. Words hold power, after all, especially those put in writing.”

“Er, right. Anyway, mate, take a wild guess who Snape made Slytherin's prefect?” Ron piped up, turning the conversation rather forcefully away from things he didn't care about.

“Malfoy, we know. He was already here a bit ago,” Harry confirmed with a scowl.

“Course, Snape's always playing favourites for that git,” Ron complained.

“And that complete cow Pansy Parkinson is the other one,” Hermione sneered. “Hanna Abbot and Ernie McMillan are the prefects for Hufflepuff, of course. Hanna is such a dear, it's obvious why she was picked. And Anthony Goldstien and Padma Patil are Ravenclaw's. But how Parkinson managed to worm her way into the prefect position when she's thicker than a concussed troll...”

“The Parkinsons are one of the oldest and purest blood families. Slytherins give a hoot about all that, after all,” Ron explained in passing.

“...You went to the Yule Ball with Padma Patil,” Luna observed, finally surfacing from behind her magazine. She watched Ron with unblinking eyes until he responded.

“Yeah, I know I did.”

“She doesn't think you treated her very well, because you wouldn't dance with her,” Luna informed him, before thoughtfully adding, “I don't think I would have minded, I don't like dancing very much.” She then submerged behind the cover of The Quibbler once more, leaving Ron to stare blankly at the cover and his neighbour hidden beyond.

“Sirius – Black as He's Painted? Notorious Mass Murderer or Innocent Singing Sensation'?! What the hell?!” Ron blurted, reading off the front cover of The Quibbler.

“Honestly, Ron,” Hermione huffed exasperatedly. “It's obviously nothing but nonsense drivel. That's all The Quibbler ever writes!”

“Excuse me!” Luna suddenly snapped, her voice having lost all of it's dreamy quality. “But my father just so happens to be the editor!”

“Oh, um,” Hermione stammered out, realizing too late her social blunder. “Well... it's got some interesting... I mean, it's quite...”

Luna gave her a hard stare for a moment before humphing to herself and returning to her magazine. Hermione's red cheeks did not immediately fade, when the little first year spoke up while turning a page within his own book. “One should not look down on information, Miss Granger, simply because one disagrees with the source. If people were not open to the possibilities beyond
conventional wisdom, the world would still be going around claiming to be flat and saying the Earth was the centre of the universe.”

“Surely you don't mean you believe everything written in those tabloid articles,” Hermione challenged.

“Of course not,” Eriol replied. “Just as I do not believe everything written within my textbooks. I merely keep my mind open to all the possible facts, no matter how seemingly contradictory, and build my own version of the truth off of what I observe to be the most accurate depiction of reality.”

“That...” Hermione began, her tone clearly intent to lecture, but she was beaten to the punch by the smiling boy.

“Think back for a moment, if you will, Miss Granger, to when you were ten. When you knew for an indisputable fact that everything in the universe had a scientific explanation. Where magic only existed within nonsensical storybooks, and things like matter and energy bowed to unyielding things called Laws of Conservation. Then bend your mind to just a year later where you used magic to transform wood into metal and vice versa, where you changed living creatures into inanimate objects and back again. So then to the you of before, and all other muggles out there, just because you have not experienced something yet, does not mean it is not real. And further on that, do you think now that it is not possible that there is more that you have still not experienced?”

“I... see your point...” Hermione conceded. “Though far more weight ought to be put on the facts supported by rigorous research, and a good deal of common sense should be expected to come into play as well.”

Ginny slid open the door to the compartment where her two best friends, Janell Kissinger and Victoria Chiwara, were seated. In the compartment along with them were Janell's little sister, Karenza, who would be a second year Gryffindor this year, as well as Collin Creevy and his friend, Todd Rowel, who was making eyes—as usual—at Janell.

“Ginny! What are you doing here? We thought for sure you'd still be with Potter for the whole of the train ride!” Victoria greeted as the red-head entered the compartment, causing the girl to turn the same colour as her hair.

“Th-that...” Ginny stammered.

“Don't try and deny it,” Janell teased with a coy smile. “We saw you, clear as day, standing on the platform next to Harry Potter, and we have several confirmed reports that you and him were seen walking along the hall alone together. No brother or bookworm in sight!”

“Come on, guys, lay off her,” Colin tried to defend the blushing carrot top, even though he was laughing at her expense while doing so.

“Oh, we're just teasing,” insisted her African friend, “you know we love you, right Gin?”

“Yeah, I know,” she responded to Victoria, giving in and sinking into a seat that the two girls cleared between them. “And when either of you get a guy you like, I'll be glad to give you the exact same treatment.”

“Riiight, like Jane doesn't already have someone she likes...” Karenza said, rolling her eyes. Janell shot her sister a dirty look, and Todd Rowel's jaw nearly hit the floor, but Ginny and Victoria got instantly excited.
“Really? You like someone? Who is it?” both the girls gushed at their brunette friend.

“It's really not like that,” Janell tried to deny, but her squirming and inability to meet their eyes made it clear she was lying.

“Who is it?” Todd echoed, expression both hopeful and devastated at the same moment.

Janell looked almost guilty when the smitten boy asked that, but still, the stubborn girl steeled herself on her resolve and turned an accusational finger at Ginny. “Don't try and worm your way out of this by changing the subject! You've hardly written any mail at all this summer, and what you did have to say was barely enough to be even considered vague! And then when you do show up, you're practically on Harry Potter's arm? Details, girl! I demand a full report!”

“That is so changing the subject and you know it…” Ginny challenged.

“Report!” snapped Janell in the commanding tone that she would acquire every now and again.

“Sir! Yes, sir!” Ginny responded, making a strange sort of gesture where she brought her flat hand to her head. She didn't know what the reference was about, but she had picked it up from Victoria when Janell took that tone with her, and the muggle-borns all seemed to get a laugh out of it, so it couldn't be all that bad.

“Well?” Victoria prompted, equally willing to hear the news regardless of the topic of conversation. Colin similarly leaned forward, always excited to hear any news available about his idol. Todd, however, simply sank back into the corner, looking dejected and a little like a kicked puppy. Karenza, for her part, looked more bored and resigned to the conversation topic at hand than interested.

“Well, there's really not much to report on. I helped Fred and George early on in the summer with a prank on mum and dad, and then spent the rest of the summer confined to the house, being grounded and made to help out with housework. And you guys already know my brother, Ron, is best mates with Harry, and that he usually comes to spend the last few weeks of summer with us, so of course we all came to the station together.”

“That's seriously it?” Janell demanded, sounding a little disgusted that it was all the news she was going to get.

“What do you want, a description in great detail about the finer points of scrubbing dishes and wiping walls? A poem about sweeping floors?” Ginny teased.

“Can you do a sonnet on window washing?” Karenza piped up snarkily.

“But, what about what happened at the end of last year? Has he said anything more about that?” Colin prompted.

“What, you don't believe him, either?” Ginny snapped out a challenge.

Colin sank back at once, holding his hands up in defence, “No! Of course not! I believe him, I'll always believe in Harry Potter, no matter what anyone else says! People said he was evil back in our first year, too, but look how that turned out. He saved both our lives from that big snake you told us about. It's just... Dumbledore hasn't really said much. Just that You-Know-Who did it, and Harry was there...”

Ginny let her steam evaporate a little before she answered so not to bite his head off in doing so. “He hasn't said anything to me. I don't think he's said anything to anyone. He acts more like he just wants
to forget about it, but can't, you know? He's been in such a foul mood most the time, I don't even think Ron or Hermione have dared to breach the subject yet. And they are way closer to him than I am.”

“That's not good,” Colin lamented. “Not healthy, I mean. He shouldn't try and bottle it away like that, he should rely on the people around him.”

“He seems to be under the delusion that the universe is against him right now. It's really rather annoying, honestly. Every time you ask him anything, he acts almost like you're trying to interrogate him, and he goes on about how no one will believe him anyway. Hermione said that she thinks what he needs right now is people to just stand by him and show their loyalty without demanding things from him in return. And I get that, but... it's still hard at times, with him acting like everyone's his enemy,” Ginny explained.

“So that's why you haven't pushed him to open up and let it all out?” Victoria asked.

“Yes,” Ginny agreed with a nod. “Hermione thinks he'll talk about it when he's ready with people he trusts. And that's why you shouldn't press him for details either, Colin. Even if you are just trying to help, he'll think you're just doing it to get a 'scoop'.” Colin gave a solid nod, though he looked rather troubled at the idea of someone he admired so much having to face hardships and not being able to do anything about it.

“So then, does that mean you and Potter aren't actually dating? I mean, you still like him, right?” Victoria prompted. “It sounds like the boy could use some TLC in this situation, after all, and having a little kissy-kissy on the side should be alright too, right?”

“Victoria!” Ginny accused through a burst of laughter at her friend's audacity. “No, we are not an item. I've more or less given up on becoming one with him, after all, it's been four years and he's hardly more than aware that I even exist. And I wouldn't want to build our relationship on something like that, anyway. For now, I'm just happy to at least be his friend, he seems to need that more right now than he would need a girlfriend.”

“Awa...” the girls cooed before sandwiching the red-head in a hug.

The bright red engine clattered along the tracks ever northwards as the day waned closer to evening. The sky, which in London had promised a clear and beautiful day, was here threatening an impending storm, with ever darkening clouds. Still, the boy seated on the caboose stubbornly refused to budge until the first falling drops splattered down on top of his head. Giving in to the inevitable destiny, lest he end up soaked through to the bone, the young heir finally got to his feet and began making his way back to his compartment full of gossipers.

However, upon his arrival he found to his surprise that the people within the compartment were not the same people who had been there when he had left. He almost walked back out, thinking that he had entered the wrong compartment by mistake, but Chandra still lay comfortably on the seat cushion with her cat carrier on the floor between the seats, under the window where he had left it. He had ordered her to guard his possessions, and if they had attempted to move her or the carrier at all, she would not have allowed it. Therefore, this must be his compartment.

Those three girls and that blond boy named Black were gone, and in their place was two of the boys who had been by earlier. The black haired one who's older sister he had shown up—Perkins? Parkinson? Something like that—and his blond lacky that had actually bothered to stick around for the whole show. “Do I even want to know what happened to the people who were here before?” Xiao Lang asked in lieu of a greeting. The corner of the other boy's mouths twitched upwards.
“Probably not,” Parkinson replied.

“Greengrass, Avery, and Rosier were talked into going to seek out more people to gossip with about an hour ago by that branch-family Black boy,” Flint was kind enough to inform. “We came to sit here some time after you left, as the other compartments were all too full for us all to be together. Did you enjoy your walk, Li?”

“Yeah, sort of. I went out and sat for a while on the deck behind the caboose...” Xiao Lang informed conversationally. After all, these were to be his classmates, and they seemed to belong to some of the more important families, given their knowledge of each other and their general behaviour.

“Really?” Flint questioned.

“Are we allowed to do that?” Parkinson verified.

Xiao Lang shrugged in response. “There was no sign saying I couldn't, and the door wasn't locked...”

“So you went out to enjoy the view, huh? It must have been nice,” Flint commented, leaning back in his seat as he sized the Clan heir up.

Xiao Lang shrugged again, “It was a little cold, cause of the wind, but yeah, it wasn't bad. At least it was quiet.”

“Well said,” Parkinson declared with a solemn nod.

“The girls were saying that you had jumped to the window before you left, so we were wondering if you had gone off to go get a look at Harry Potter for yourself,” the purple eyed boy confessed.

“No, I just saw someone I knew that I wasn't expecting to see is all. Who is Harry Potter?”

Both boys stared agape at him for a moment. “You don't know who Harry Potter is? What are you, muggle-born?” Parkinson questioned incredulously.

Xiao Lang's face hardened. “Don't insult me. I bet I have a better documented bloodline than either of you. Hell, I probably have a better documented bloodline than the both of you put together!” That accusation certainly ruffled their feathers enough that they began to return the insulted looks. “So what, is this Potter person some sort of local celebrity or something?”

“Something like that,” Flint confirmed.

They were quiet for a time, letting the sting of bruised egos fade before Xiao Lang attempted to bridge the gap with his peers again. “So, why didn't you go with the girls when they went for their walk? Aren't the lot of you friends?”

“It was quieter to stay here,” Parkinson responded.

Not really having anything to say one way or another in response to that, Xiao Lang just nodded and settled in his seat to let his mind wander. If either boy desired to speak to him, they would do so. So instead he let his mind begin to ponder over the coincidence of both Sakura and himself receiving letters offering a foreign exchange to the prestigious Hogwarts. He knew she had to have received the letter as he had, because no matter how famous the school was within the magical community, there was no way Sakura would have been able to know about its existence in order to apply on her own.
But that they, who had already had their destinies woven together through the capturing of the Clow Cards the year before, would both receive invitations out of the millions of magical children world-wide was just too much of a coincidence to not be planned out. And when he thought of someone planning out the future, only one name came to mind before all others: Clow Reed.

Xiao Lang mentally cursed his ill luck. He really should have guessed it weeks ago when he bought his wand. Or even months ago when he had received the Guardian Eggs as a present in the name of his great-grandfather. No one but Clow Reed knew how to make Guardian Eggs anymore, but his great-grandfather was dead these last thirty years. Which meant Hiiragizawa was pulling their strings again. And when Hiiragizawa played puppet master last time, Sakura had nearly been hurt several times over.

Olivander had said five wands. One had already been sold years ago to an older student, and then there was the one that he bought, and he'd bet one was with Sakura... That just left two wands unaccounted for. He wondered where the other wands had ended up. He hoped they didn't go to anyone dangerous—or worse, to someone that Sakura would fall in love with. He didn't want to sit by and watch her find happiness in the arms of another, though realistically he knew that he would never be permitted by the Clan to pursue her himself.

Xiao Lang was suddenly thankful for the existence of his Guardians now more than ever before, even if they were somewhat defective in comparison to most Guardians. ...But wait... the idea drifted to his mind, if Clow Reed was dead these last thirty years, the one who probably sent the Eggs in his name would have been Hiiragizawa. And Hiiragizawa is a total bastard and probably did something to the Eggs before sending them to me, just to make me look bad! Damn him!

It just seemed so perfectly a thing he would do. He had delighted in showing Xiao Lang up the whole time they had known each other, proving he was superior and ensuring Xiao Lang never looked good in Sakura's eyes. Of course he would continue the insult on, simply because he was petty like that. Everyone knew Clow Reed looked down on those around him, he made a human-shaped Guardian, after all. But Xiao Lang was determined that no matter what it took, he'd be one step ahead of that smug creepy bastard one way or another.

"Hey, Sakura!" Fred greeted happily when she opened the compartment door. "Your friend with the baby left a while ago. We were wondering when you'd come back."

To this, Sakura just smiled politely, which they took for her not understanding what was said. Which was fine in all honesty, it was obvious that Xiao Lang had left and that she was back. It was Lee who tried to speak to her next. "You should get changed... your robes..." he indicated his own, as well as George's, and then tugged at her sleeve. "You should put on your robes now. We'll be at school soon."

She looked troubled for a second before asking, "I... change... where?"

"Ah, I'll show you. Come on," Lee insisted, going to stand at the door. Fred and George helped her get her trunk down so she could get her robe out and then put it back up while Lee lead her to the wash rooms where she could change in privacy.

On their way, they walked past a group of seventh year Ravenclaws gathered around an open compartment door. "Hey, Jordan," Ruth O'Hare greeted in a friendly way.

"Hey, girls!" he replied, grinning at them confidently.

"Who's the kid?" Meghan McCormack asked.
"Isn't she too young to be your girlfriend, Jordan?" Jeannine Birch teased.

"Ha, ha! She's a first year, and she doesn't understand much English. I'm showing her the way to the bathrooms so she can change."

"I didn't think Mr. Joker had a heart," Meghan taunted as she crossed her arms over her chest.

"Awa, lay off him, you guys! She's a cutie, after all," the girl sitting in the compartment spoke up. Lee leaned over around the rest of the people standing to visit in order to confirm his suspicions.

"Hoe...?" Sakura let out in quiet surprise when the bodies parted for the figure that had just stood. With a wink and a finger to the side of her nose, Nakuru of all people pulled a pose before stepping fully out of the door. Sakura didn't know why she was being gestured to remain quiet, but as she was a good girl, she did as her elder instructed her.

"Akizuki! What are you doing back!" Lee demanded in surprise.

"The job that we moved to Japan for got finished just before summer break, so we moved back. Got a problem with that?" she asked, placing her hands on her cocked hips and throwing her head back confidently.

"Is there any chance of sending you away again?" he grumbled testily.

She smirked evilly at him. "No, not really."

"Ah well, I guess I'll be forced to see you around, then," was Lee's parting statement. He reached down and guided his young charge away by the shoulder, not putting any real thought into it as the child looked back over her other shoulder to stare at the group that closed back in now that their ring leader had returned to sitting inside.

When they finally reached the washrooms, there was a small lineup of girls from various years already standing and waiting with their robes over their arms. Lee indicated that Sakura should join them before politely stepping away so he didn't seem like one of those creepers that squat outside the girls washroom.

It didn't take too very long for it to be Sakura's turn to get dressed, and as she had spent so much time being Tomoyo's living doll, she could get changed in a hurry. But even as she did, her mind still got caught up on Nakuru's existence. Lee Jordan had known her name, so that meant that she wasn't new around here like Sakura was, right? But then, why was she here?

Could maybe the school teach even Guardians magic? If so, did that mean that Yue, too, once went to Hogwarts? Did this mean he was now her senpai as well as her Guardian and her brother's number one person? The idea was a little mind boggling, but exciting and fascinating to the little sorceress at the same time. She made a mental note to question Yue about it later as she fastened her cloak in place with the silver clasps and straitened her hat before stepping out of the bathroom and letting the next girl take her place.

When Lee saw the little girl come out, he smiled at her and gestured with his head as he said "C'mon!" and made lead the way back to their compartment. Once there, he dropped himself unceremoniously into his seat and asked the twins, "Guess who came back?"

The twins looked at each other for a moment, before turning back to their best friend in dreadlocks. "You couldn't be talking about Lupin...” Fred began.

“And I doubt you mean Lockheart…” George added.
“Ol’ Mad Eye’s back in retirement...”

“And Quirrel is dead...”

“Then, maybe Rookwind from when we were ikkle firsties?”

“Or that muggleborn teacher, Smith? He managed to piss a good number of people off...”

“Especially the Slytherins,” Fred reminisced.

“Which would be very fun to see again!” George cheered.

Lee just laughed at their assumptions. “Ah, no. I'm not telling. It'll be more fun to see your reactions live, anyway.”

“See our reactions?” George parroted.

“Meaning it's someone we would react to...” postulated Fred. The last ten minutes of the train ride was filled with the twins wracking their brains over possible people amid their friend's laughter. Sakura sat quietly, only half trying to listen to what her nice new senpai were talking about, with her cheek pasted to the window pane as she strained to see her first glimpse of the place that would be her home for the better part of the next decade.

It was already night, and though she was feeling rather tired, she was too excited to be able to fall asleep yet even if sleep had been an option. But through the dark she could see several lights fast approaching, though they were still too far away to make anything out in this light. However, it didn't take long at all before the train gave a slight lurch and began to slow.

The older students took this as the signal to jump up and begin packing their things back in their trunks, and so Sakura followed suit without being told. When all she had left out was her Cards, secured safely to her belt in the carrying case Tomoyo had made for her, and Kero hanging out of her breast pocket, she turned to look at the happy trio and smiled patiently.

She watched out the window as the train pulled to a complete stop into what she could now see to be a station with a quaint little town nestled in the valley beyond. She wondered which set of lights belonged to her new school, and was happy that the setting was such that it seemed very immersive and she would surely have many things to write home describing and sending photos of. Maybe even Touya would be able to be convinced to stop worrying about her so much if he saw photos of such a rural and classical location.

Sakura moved to pull her trunk down from overhead, but was stopped by one of the twins. “No, no! Leave it, the House Elves will come and bring all the luggage to the castle once the students disembark.”

The Card Mistress hesitated unsurely, not having understood everything that had been said to her. “Hoe? Demo... my bag...” she tried to explain.

“It's okay,” the other twin piped up. “Hogwarts will take them all later.”

“Take... move?” Sakura verified.

“Yes, move, to the school,” the first twin agreed, gesturing up over his shoulder towards where she assumed the school probably was located. Meaning none of the lights she had seen so far out the window were the right ones.
Though she was hesitant about doing so, she did as they bid of her and left her things on the train as she followed them out. She felt a little better once out in the hall, seeing as all the other students had left their things behind as well. Still, she wasn't sure how they would sort out whose was whose when the time came, but at least she was pretty sure she would be able to find hers back because of the Book.

When they stepped down onto the platform was when things got confusing again. There was a middle aged woman over to one side bellowing out something or other, but over the bustle Sakura couldn't make out either what was being said nor the location of the woman. However when she tried to follow where all the students were walking, the three kindly senpai that she had found stopped her. They were gesturing over to the side, trying to explain something in words much too complicated and speaking much too quickly for her to piece together the meaning.

She understood they wanted her to go over that way, but she didn't understand why. After all, she was a student at Hogwarts as well. Shouldn't she be going where the students go? She was about to try and explain to them that she was to be their kohai, not just some random kid taking the train to go to the town or something. However, before she could start explaining herself, Xiao Lang hopped off the train behind her and without a word took her hand in his free one and pulled her off in the direction the older boys had been gesturing.

Though they blinked for a moment, they seemed content by this turn of events and just smiled and waved her off as they turned to follow the rest of the crowd. “Hoe...” she whined out as she followed the Clan heir as he wove them between the older bodies that passed them by. On his opposite hip he still supported his new little Sun Guardian, and across his shoulder lay draped another Guardian that Sakura had yet to meet.

Both Guardians had their eyes firmly glued to Sakura's pocket, where Kero's head and forelegs were hanging out. “Yo!” he called in friendly greeting to them, holding up a paw.

“Kero-chan!” Sakura hissed in scolding, pushing Kero's head back down into her pocket in punishment. “How many times have I told you 'not in public'!”

“Meet you nicely, yellow-thing,” chirped out the purple Guardian. Jiao Yang just turned her face to bury it in her master's neck and continued to watch the pocket in question out of the corner of one eye.

As they reached the far end of the students, Sakura saw a gathering of other first years around a woman who held a lamp aloft and waved it back and forth. Now that she could hear clearly, it was obvious the woman was calling for the younger students to gather around her and Sakura felt bad for misunderstanding her senpai's intentions. Of course they knew she was a student, one of them had taken her to get changed into her school uniform.

“I wonder if we are going to be taken to an entrance ceremony? Or, maybe an orientation of some sort?” Sakura pondered aloud to the boy next to her.

“I heard something about being sorted into dorms when we get to school, and yeah, probably something to do with an official introduction to the school or some such, seeing as only the first years are being gathered. But I don't know if it will be the same sort of entrance ceremony that you're thinking of,” Xiao Lang replied.

“But shouldn't they have things like room assignment and class placement already figured out? I mean, they're making an awful lot of work for themselves all at the start of the year by not organizing better before hand...”
Xiao Lang just gave a shrug, “Who knows, it seems to have worked out for them so far...” He cast his eyes over his fellow first years to take them all in. Some looked scared, others excited, most looking somewhat confused and anticipatory. Over to the left was the group he had met on the train, the local power families, all intermingled and conversing between themselves. Many at least glanced in his direction and cast cursory looks over Sakura who stood beside him. An African boy standing on the other side had a moment of recognition and smiled in the direction of Sakura, much to Xiao Lang’s displeasure. However he made no move to approach and quickly returned his attention to the teacher. One red head boy standing near by looked so nervous he seemed he would be sick. Or at least faint.

The teacher announced that everyone was to follow her and to watch where they were walking and began marching off. There were a few complaints about walking in the rain, and someone whined about mud on their shoes, but over all the first years obediently began to follow the brisk middle-aged witch. However, they had only gone a few steps when Sakura suddenly cried out “HOE!!” Turning to see what the sorceress was exclaiming so loudly about, everyone saw she stood slack-jawed and pointing. Following the direction of her finger, Xiao Lang saw that the large group he had met had moved aside to reveal behind them none other than Eriol Hiiragizawa. He smiled his usual charming smile and waved at the duo, eyes dancing with laughter. And just like that, Xiao Lang’s shock melted into annoyed disgust.

The woman leading the children bustled back to where the commotion was taking place and demanded, “What's going on here?”

Sakura flinched back slightly at the reprimanding tone, but before Xiao Lang could come to her defence, Eriol swooped in with easy grace and disarming smiles. “I'm sorry, Professor, but it's really nothing. They are just surprised because I hadn't informed them that I was also going to be accepting my Hogwarts letter.”

“Why wouldn't someone accept placement at a prestigious school like Hogwarts?” Grubbly-Plank questioned, confused why it would be an issue at all.

“Eriol-kun!” Sakura cooed with a wide toothy grin now that she had gotten over her initial shock.

At being addressed, Eriol cast a look over his shoulder and his smile took on a mischievous tone. “Not that I'm complaining or anything, but just how long are you two going to hold hands?”

This question was initially met with a pair of identical blank stares. “Hands...?” Sakura mimicked out quietly as she processed what the emphasized words meant. Both parties in question looked down at their conjoined hands as they processed that their appendages were indeed intertwined. Blood rushed to their faces at the realization that they had been so naturally joined and with a squeak of “Hoeee!” from Sakura, both of the pre-teens jumped apart, unable to meet the other's eyes in their own embarrassment.

It didn't help matters that Eriol gave a hearty laugh at their expense, a few other students joining in more quietly. Xiao Lang fumed silently at the reincarnation for publicly humiliating him like that, and prayed that Sakura wasn't too upset at him for the whole thing. The Card Mistress, for her part, covered her flaming cheeks with her hands and struggled to hold in her giddiness and shyness about holding hands with her crush in public just like real couples do.

The professor, for her part, was unaffected by the momentous occasion playing out before her and just rolled her eyes with a tired sigh at the young drama being presented. She turned and continued on the path, calling out for the students to follow and keep up when she noticed most were still watching to see what would happen next. With everyone moving once again, Sakura moving to walk with Eriol so she could greet him and Xiao Lang tagging along less happily because he was not
going to leave the girl he liked with the manipulative creep under any circumstances.

“Eriol-kun, konban wa,” Sakura repeated once she reached his side, giving him a quick hug.

“Konban wa, Sakura-san. I surprised you!” the ancient soul returned affectionately.

“Yes, you surprised me!” she agreed as she stepped back.

“You say that almost as if you were hiding on purpose,” Xiao Lang accused. The laugh he received in return was not promising. Casting his eyes away from that grinning Cheshire face, the young heir noticed attention was still somewhat focused on the pair. In particular, he saw the signs of malicious gossip from the pair of blond girls he had been sitting with initially. The baby blue eyes of Shanel Avery was taking in Sakura's figure as she talked to Eriol with a sort of predatory cruelty that Xiao Lang did not like. He stepped forward in such a way as to place himself between Sakura and the girl's view and shot a warning glare at the two blonds.

Avery looked startled and slightly affronted at the silent reprimand, before turning away in a huff. Greengrass, however, just looked down her nose at the heir and sneered before much more slowly returning her gaze towards the front. Black, however, and a few more girls that Xiao Lang had not yet had the misfortune of meeting personally, seemed to take his protective show as all the more reason to stare. Though most of them had looks on their face closer to wanting to coo and squeal than harass.

When they turned the bend in the trail they were being lead along, many students stopped to ooh and aah over their first look at the grand old castle they would be calling home for the next seven years. Xiao Lang did have to admit that it was an impressive sight, very fantasy-esque like in all the RPG video games. However, his appreciation was cut short by the almost horrified gasp from Sakura.

“What's wrong?” Xiao Lang demanded quietly, noting to himself how Eriol looked almost somber.

Sakura's eyes danced over the flickering lights of the castle and their reflections in the lake. Her mind raced back to her dream where her Cards and Guardians had left her—abandoned her. She nearly called on them in desperation to assure herself they were still there for her, but Xiao Lang's steadying grip managed to keep her grounded within reality as she tore her eyes away from the scene to focus on his face instead.

“I-it's nothing, I'm fine. I-I'll explain it later...” she insisted, letting herself lean slightly in order to feel him supporting her. This time no teasing ridicule came from Eriol as the Li boy did what he could to support his crush.

Eriol then began talking about inane things like the weather in Scotland and the history of the school to fill the silence, but Sakura and Xiao Lang remained tensely quiet for the remainder of the walk down to a dock where a number of small boats were tied. The rain had made the wood docks a little slippery, and so Eriol took Sakura's hand to help steady her as he guided her into one of the boats. They were already damp from the water dripping down on them, but the benches within the little row boats were wet and cold to sit on.

Xiao Lang sat in the space across from Sakura, placing Jiao Yang in the last remaining seat. She glared at the wet, dark sky above them as if it had decided to rain specifically to insult her, before she buried herself under her Master's cloak for some form of protection. When all the students were seated, the professor struck her wand declaratively against the front of her boat and commanded “Onward!” causing all the small boats to lurch and begin their drifting path across the glossy lake.

“I wish I had thought to bring an umbrella...” Sakura bemoaned as she shifted uncomfortably on the
“We’ll be out of the rain soon,” Eriol soothed. “And then the staff will dry us off with magic before the ceremony begins.”

“You left Suppi-chan with your stuff?” Kero asked, once again hanging out of Sakura's pocket.

“Yes, he will be in my dorm room when I get there. Unlike you, Spinel does not enjoy crowded places,” Eriol acknowledged.

Chandra, who had been basking in the chilly rain, jumped down onto Xiao Lang's lap and then tentatively stepped across the gap onto Sakura's. The Card Mistress noticed that unlike Kero who was mainly bipedal in his sealed form, this little purple Guardian had yet to change to an upright position at all. Even when she did finally stretch up to get a closer look at Kero, she still propped herself against Sakura's chest with her front two paws for balance.

“Yellow-thing is same as small-thing, yes?” the new Guardian asked the older one.

“Small-thing?” Kero questioned, confused.


“Something wrong with your voice-modulator, kid?” Kero asked, eyeing the feline-like Moon Guardian.

“Busy-head big-thing do think-do for Chandra and small-thing. Chandra hatch and yabber-jabber lots no work,” the little Guardian informed.

“I believe that would translate as 'yes','” Eriol confirmed. “Don't worry, it's not all that uncommon a problem for Guardians who are running on limited power. Certain things must be sacrificed in order to make other things work, after all. Once my 'cute little descendant' comes more into his own, the problem should clear itself up naturally.”

Xiao Lang bristled at the condescending tone, still convinced that Eriol was at fault, despite Kero's solemn nod of agreement. Sakura, on the other hand, smiled warmly down at the little Moon Guardian. “I think it's cute, the way she talks. It's very nice to meet you, Chandra-chan.” With one finger, she reached out to scratch at the chin of the little purple cat, who nuzzled the finger back in an affectionate gesture.

“Meet you nicely, too, soft-pretty big-thing!” Sakura's cheeks tinted pink at being addressed as pretty, and though Xiao Lang was shy about the whole thing, he had to admit that his Guardian did have a very good point.

The boats pulled in under the arch way of the castle to an indoor dock where the silvery form of Yukito stood waiting patiently for his young charge. Sakura took this as a sign that it was time to pass the little Moon Guardian back to its master, her cheeks flushing slightly as their fingers brushed. Eriol looked to the girl beside him and smiled one of his mysterious smiles, “Well, it looks like we're finally here. Are you ready for your new school year, Sakura-san?”

“Hai!”

Chapter End Notes
Oh my god, some of these scenes in this chapter were written back in 2005. They were even in the story's original formatting still, before I had to change it because ff(dot)net doesn't accept symbols beyond the most commonly used punctuation ones. I had to do minor editing on them to get them a little more up to current standards, but I tried to leave them as intact as possible. See if you can pick out which sections were scenes I recently wrote and which ones were from when the story was being first put together. On another side note, over the last eleven years, I have named every single student in the school, and given basic personality and physical description to most all of them as well. So just because someone has a name, does not mean they are going to be a main supporting character. Keep that in mind as you see names appearing, I'm not just pulling them out of my hat at random, but at the same time not every name matters. Time will reveal which ones are prominent and which ones aren't. But coming in at a whopping 30 pages, this is one of my longest chapters yet. But, as promised, I managed to get them on and off the train before the new year and managed to start quite a few subplots in the process. I'm not expecting people to be able to pick out all of them at the moment, but much like the name dropping, hopefully in future re-reads once I have more of the story done, it will become clear the roots of things and how points build and feed into each other. And as always, getting reviews gets me to write, and if you review in such a way to inspire me to write any chunk of story, I will reward you with your choice of my bonus scenes. Next up is the sorting and what Yelan and Yukito's day had entailed. See you then!
Chapter 9: The Sorting Hat's Song

Chapter Summary

Li Yelan exchanges words with Albus Dumbledore as two leaders with rather different agendas face off. The Sorting Hat sings a long and confusing song. The cast of first years are all sorted into their houses, including the three little sorcerers. And another sorcerer beyond Sakura and her friends is introduced.

Chapter Notes

Finally caught up to the posts on fanfiction.net once more. Don't be too surprised if I fail to remember again that this story is posted here and not update it when I do so on ff.net. It will be quite some time before the next chapter is written up anyway. I’m only about a page in to the writing of the next chapter and time is a limited thing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

With a swirl of tossed up leaves and twigs Li Yelan arrived within the crisp clear morning air of Hogsmeed. The cobbled streets of this quiet little country town were still predominantly bare in this early hour. The residents preferring to hide away from the rain the damp air and cloudy skies promised were sure to come. Therefore, there was no one to welcome the powerful force of nature known as the Li Clan's matriarch.

Even still, decades of training ensured the presence of the sorceress was forever poised, and when the beautiful woman walked by with such an aura of power, even the breeze seemed to still in reverent awe of her regal presence. Almost as though she were an otherworldly creature, Yelan walked with smooth gliding steps up the road to the ancient castle that sat atop the hill above the little magical village.

Long black hair that was brushed with one thousand strokes every morning caught the rays of sun that struggled to peek through the clouds, shining iridescently as it drifted down her back behind her. Her skin so white she appeared to glow like a moon within the morning mist that darkened the space beneath the trees and swallowed the world beyond the path she walked. But it did not deter her, and instead only added to her air of mysticism. She could see it in the eyes of the hunchbacked man standing by the iron gates of the castle as she approached.

“Mrs. Li, I presume?” the elderly man called as the woman approached.

“Yes, and whom may I be addressing?” Yelan responded when she got a to a little more comfortable of a distance.

“Argus Filch, caretaker,” he informed. “Right this way, ma'am.” Turning with a shuffling step, the caretaker pushed open the gate and lead the matriarch inside.

The ancient stone citadel was indeed a formidable sight, looming with tall spires reaching to the sky like fingers grasping upwards. Magic seeping into the very earth the castle stood upon like blood
soaking through the soil. It was not an unfamiliar sensation, but unlike the clan grounds that she had come to recognize as home, the magic here was layered and laced like some strange creature's nest, knotted and nearly impossible to discern where one ended and the next began.

Yet though her logic told her it was useless to try, her instincts and training still drove her senses to dive into the mix, to seek a means of making sense of any of it. Even with all her power and control, it was an effort to keep herself centred in all of this, and the pressure was forming a headache. She spared a moment to worry over the welfare of her young son, would he be able to hold his own for an entire year in this place? Or would he loose his mind, and then perhaps his life trying to solve the unsolvable?

But the matriarch held her mask through her worries, as a leader one must never show concern or fear. And so her porcelain face was poised in a calm sort of confidence as she delicately lifted the silk of her skirts and daintily strode her way up the steps and through the large arching doorway. Interestingly enough, the first to greet them upon arriving was not her hosts, but rather a dusty old cat, who sat just inside the entrance as self-important as all cats do. It watched intently as the pair entered, content to hold its ground until the wet of outside was safely locked away behind the thick oak doors before sounding a loud and territorial meow. As it called, it rose to its feet and trotted expectantly to the old caretaker, rubbed itself against his legs and then circled around to sniff curiously at the ground where Yelan had stepped.

It was not a stupid animal, it would not approach the strange woman strait off, her presence bore too much power for it to feel comfortable daring. It instead followed at a respectable distance as the caretaker lead their guest further into the castle. “This is the teacher's lounge,” he informed when he finally stopped at a door. “It's customary the Headmaster gathers everyone here before students arrive to introduce new faculty and discuss the year's curriculum.”

“So, the teachers are expected to keep up with the curriculum level of their peers?” It was more of a statement than a question regarding policy, however to be polite Yelan raised her tone at the end of the sentence. It was a good sign, regardless, that the staff discussed the subject of the student's learning curve. That way they could address any issues before they became problematic and make sure the students were always being pushed to their full potential.

When the door was finally pushed open, she was met with a small gaggle of witches and wizards, dressed in a verity of colourful robes, and of varying ages. An elderly gentleman with a long white beard and electric blue eyes stood with a smile on his face. He was dressed in full elaborate robes of a rich purple that had stars enchanted to twinkle and sparkle out at those who dared to look. “Ah, my dear Mrs. Li at last, it is an honour I am sure.”

“Headmaster Dumbledore, I presume?” Yelan replied in like, allowing for one of her hands to be grasped between his bony old wrinkled ones. His eyes twinkled at her recognition, his smile like that one would expect on a loving old grandfather. “Your reputation proceeds you,” she acknowledged.

Oh yes, she had hardly been in the country a day when she made her rounds to the various sorcery clans of Great Britain and on her barely mentioning the word Hogwarts she was treated to much news about the eccentric yet genius man. This was a game she would have to tread carefully in, lest even she be caught. And she could feel in his grasp how strength did not fail him with age, his potent magic would be a dangerous thing should she be forced to cross him.

“Ohly the true things, I should hope. But I simply mustn't keep such a charming young lady all to myself. Come, let me introduce you!” he then turned to the room, where in which his staff became instantly attentive as any respected leader ought to receive. “Allow me to introduce to you Mrs. Yelan Li, the current Minister of Magic of Hong Kong. She is here accompanying her son during his
exchange program.”

“It is an honour, I am sure,” Yelan supplied, raising her fist to her palm and nodding her head politely to the room at large. “However, it is not just my son, my youngest daughter will be staying with me as well. She is too young to be staying away from me for so long.”

“I see, I will ensure accommodations are arranged for the young miss as well,” he assured in stride, leading the younger woman over to one side of the line up of teachers in order to continue his introductions. “This here is Minerva McGonagall, my Deputy Headmistress and current Transfiguration Professor.”

“I do hope that you are aware that Hogwarts has a policy of treating all students equally, regardless of their background. Your presence or not, your children will not be getting any special treatment,” she forewarned.

“My purpose here is to observe the progress of my son in order to ensure he is suitably prepared for his position. I have no intentions of interfering in your work, Professor.”

McGonagall gave the visiting matriarch a coy sort of smile, “Well, then, welcome to Hogwarts, Minister Li.”

“To the left here is Poppy Pomfry, the school’s healer...” Dumbledore began, methodically going through each and every person in the room. For the most part she was met with polite smiles plastered over confused eyes. A few even looked past her to Dumbledore as if demanding some sort of explanation for all of this. Some offered their own words of welcome when it was their turn to be introduced.

The man called Snape, however, eyed her down his long hooked nose with a certain air of suspicion, obviously put off by her trained poker face. He met her dark eyes openly, and held her stare for several seconds before getting to his feet and speaking to Dumbledore with a tone that bore the intimacy of causality. “If that is everything, Headmaster, I have matters to attend to.”

“Of course, Severus, your potions mustn’t spoil. Thank you for your time, just don’t get so lost in your cauldrons to forget when the feast begins,” Dumbledore jovially sent him on his way.

However, something in the way that short conversation was carried made Yelan suspect that there was something other than potions amid that man's purpose. However, she was not given the chance to ponder the matter as the introductions continued followed by a rather sudden offer for a private tour of the facilities.

“Is that truly all you have for staff? I must admit, I expected a little better from such a world-renounced school,” Yelan criticized as she exited the room.

“I assure you, Mrs. Li, that my teachers are the top of their professions,” Dumbledore assured.

“Regardless of their talent, your curriculum is too narrow. My son is to be Head of the Li Clan, and is heir to all that entails. He is to be made ready for his position. He is required to be trained in world history—Muggle history—in politics and debate. My Xiao Lang needs to be trained maths and sciences, so that he understands the world around him. And speaking of understanding, how many languages does this school teach? I expect him to continue his studies into further languages, and that he shan’t get rusty in the nine he already knows in the mean time. Further, his body is to be trained and his reflexes honed. In short, Headmaster, I expect perfection, and I expect the faculty to not hinder my son in his pursuit of it.”
“Isn’t that a little much to be asking of him? He is just an eleven year old child, after all,” Dumbledore attempted to reason.

“Headmaster, I have already lost a husband, a brother-in-law, and a father-in-law to assassinations, not to mention the attempts made on my own life and those of my eldest daughters. I will not lose my only son the same way.”

The old man seemed a little taken aback by this sudden and unexpected insight, but recovered quickly. “I see, please be assured that any concern parents may have towards our school’s policies and curriculum can always be voiced to the Educational Board of Trustees. After all, no matter how great one may become, they can always strive to better themselves further, is that not correct?”

“Indeed, you can be assured that I shall do so.”

“Of course,” Dumbledore agreed, all smiles once again. “Here we are, this is the Hospital Wing, as you can see our healer is fully outfitted for any and all ailments that may befall our students. And continuing on this direction we shall reach the stairs that lead up to the Astronomy Tower, the tallest tower in the whole of the castle...”

Dumbledore had lead his foreign guest up stairs and down stairs and along every sort of twisting hallway and hidden passage, it would seem, as he spoke with pride about his school and its thousand years of history. Of the great witches and wizards who had graduated from these halls, and the Headmasters that came before and that he hoped would come after. Of the times the school had been damaged or destroyed, needing to be rebuilt as an eternal beacon of hope to the people.

But, in time, the conversation veered to the subject of her presence here. “The last time the school hosted exchange students was the Triwizard Tournament held just last year, which Hogwarts won, by the way. So the students should be open to the presence of foreigners within our halls already.”

“Do not pretend that this is normal, Headmaster. Even I know that Hogwarts does not make routine invites to foreign children to attend. I think it's high time you inform me why you want my son,” the matriarch challenged.

“As expected of a mother,” Dumbledore nodded sagely. “I assure you, Mrs Li, the only thing I desire of your son—of all of my students—is their safety.”

“Then explain to me why you felt so obliged to call my son half ways around the world, away from his guards and the people he knows and recognizes, for 'safety's benefit.”

Here, the old man faltered. “Ah, that... That was actually on the request of a very old friend of mine. I value his opinion very highly, and so when he wrote to me requesting your son's attendance in my school, I deemed it wisest to heed his advice.”

“And whom, pray tell, is this 'friend' of yours who seeks to position the heir of the Li Clan like some chess piece?” Yelan pressed, extruding an aura of intimidation. This was not a request, this was an order from a powerful person who did not harbour disobedience lightly.

The twinkle within the old eyes faded as he seemed to recognize the level of threat he was being presented with. The whole demeanour of the Headmaster changed from that of a good-natured loony old man, to a genius scholar, a master duellist, a man that the whole of the Wizarding World turns to. This was the true Albus Dumbledore, whom dark wizards tremble at the name of. “I doubt you would have heard of him, he does not publish in scholarly articles despite his obvious mastery level. But, if it puts your mind at ease, my friend’s name is Clow Reed.”
“Grandfather?!” was Yelan's immediate, flabbergasted response. Of all the possibilities, she was honestly not expecting that one. That over thirty years of being ignored by the man who gave her her maiden name, of centuries of avoiding the famous Li Clan, that the great and powerful god among men would single out her young son so completely. But why him? He, who wished to finally part with Clow Reed's legacy... why was it her Xiao Lang that was the only one so worthy of his attentions?

“Oh, my, how very curious. I was not aware that one of the students I had been requested to summon was his own great-grandson.”

“Yes... about that, it would be best if you do not mention it to my son. Xiao Lang is at a stage, right now, where he seeks to discover where he stands by his own merit. Learning that his placement within this school was on the recommendation of a family member—especially that family member—would be counter-intuitive to his goals and may cause him to act rashly,” Yelan advised.

“Ah, I see. It is a noble goal, to achieve greatness in one's own name rather than that of one's predecessors, even if it can be a little sad for those that came before. But, very well. It is not as though I speak of my friend to the students to begin with, so there is really no need for me to bring up Clow Reed now,” Albus conceded.

Dumbledore then took a moment to direct the matriarch's attention to a very old painting of a famous wizard who had been responsible for setting up the current system of classes that ensured the moving staircases never prevented students from attending. He touched on the old system and how there were times that classes were forced to be cancelled because no one could figure out how to undo the curse that made the stairs move until this genius of a man actually noticed they followed a pattern and devised a schedule around it that made the whole curse irrelevant.

However, it wasn't long before he used the chance of the topic change to breach a new subject with Hong Kong's 'Minister of Magic'. “As the Cheif Warlock of the Wizengamot, I know for a fact that you are not the Minister of Magic in Hong Kong; however, all of my inquiries into you after your acceptance letter had everyone unanimously agreeing that should the Li family wish to claim the position, it would be best to let them have their way.”

“...I thank you for not outing me to your staff,” Yelan put out, waiting for the catch in return for the favour.

“Given the reactions of those I spoke with, it would appear that the Li family is held in very high regard in China,” the Headmaster noted.

“China had a system for its magic users in place thousands of years before your little British colonists sought to settle and 'educate the masses'. Thankfully for the sake of your people, the wizards who sought new homes there were smarter than to try and conquer a country with more magic users on the Eastern shores alone than the population of your whole kingdom. It has been amusing watching their governments tip-toe around our treaties and land claims. Hong Kong is the Li Clan's ancestral home. The island and its surrounding area have been in the family for longer than anyone has record. A few pieces of paper signed between some muggles bear no weight on that.”

“I see, so that is how the situation stands. Even more so, it seems, I have something to discuss with you. I am sure if you have heard of me then you must know of my campaign against those who would bring harm to my students here. The recent revival of Lord Voldemort is true, as is the amassing of his Death Eaters--”

“Europe's problems with your evil wizards are your own. I will not subjugate my people to a war waged on foreign soil over something that will bring them no benefit.”
“The benefit is their safety. To stand united against the common threat and squash it out before he gains too much power and poses a danger to your people on their home-front,” Dumbledore attempted to reason.

“If he ever reaches so far as our home-front, as you call it, then we will simply take back the territory he captured and keep it for ourselves. No, Headmaster, my people will not bleed for the sake of your people being able to keep their heads buried in the sand and continue on their daily little lives undisturbed. If I mobilize my army to march on Europe, it will be to take it for ourselves. Are you willing, as the Cheif Warlock of the Wizengamot, to let that happen?” the matriarch challenged.

For a long moment they stood in silence, eyeing each other up in light of this new revelation, before the old Headmaster smiled his cheery, loony old man smile and said, “Have I shown you the library yet?”

The evening had begun falling on the castle before Professor Filius Flitwick lead a young man into the Headmaster's office. Dumbledore put down the paperwork he had been reading over and asked, “Oh, and who is this?”

“He... said you were expecting him,” Flitwick squeaked, a slight fluster starting to show as he realized that might not have been the case.

However, the Asian youth showed a dazzling smile before dipping his head and shoulders and announcing in slightly accented English, “My name is Yukito Tsukishiro, I am the translator for Sakura Kinomoto. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“The translator?” Dumbledore echoed, taking in the man's appearance, “I was under the impression that you would be arriving along side your young charge.”

“Ah, that was the original intent; however, there was a mix up with the letters and as a result I had to go this morning to buy her book instead,” the young man informed, flashing a copy of *Defensive Magical Theory* by Wilbert Slinkhard which he held in his pale hands.

Honestly, Dumbledore was not sure what to make of Yukito. He stood comfortably in the most magical place in all of Great Britain dressed in a pair of jeans and a buttoned front, short sleeved, white shirt. With his soft voice and short stature, Albus would have assumed him to be a fourth year before the teenaged growth spurt, but indeed his face was too matured and the golden eyes that stared out from behind his round glasses held too much wisdom to belong to a child.

“How old are you...?” Dumbledore asked, without really meaning to.

Still, Yukito did not seem to take offence at the question and answered readily enough. “I am currently seventeen. I just finished school this last spring. But don't worry, I am fully fluent in both English speech and writing.”

“How old are you...?” Dumbledore asked, without really meaning to.

Still, Yukito did not seem to take offence at the question and answered readily enough. “I am currently seventeen. I just finished school this last spring. But don't worry, I am fully fluent in both English speech and writing.”

“No, I was more merely wondering how such a young person came to choose to spend a year translating for a child like this,” Albus explained himself.

The golden eyed boy smiled with deep affection for a moment as his mind drifted back over the events that lead up to this moment. “I owe my life to the Kinomoto family in more ways than one. I would do absolutely anything to repay even a fraction of what they've done for me.”

“I see,” the Headmaster smiled, content with the answer so full of feeling. “Well then, Mr... Tsukishiro, was it? Welcome to Hogwarts, I pray that your stay is a pleasant one.”
With those words of welcome, Yukito was soon lead from the busy man's office and taken on a short tour of the school, highlighting the locations of all the classrooms a first year would need to attend, and finally ending off in the Great Hall where the staff had began to gather. It was when they stepped into the room that Professor Grubbly-Plank gave a squeak. “Oh! It's not time yet, is it?! The train—it shouldn't be here for another 25 minutes!” she fretted, checking her watch and turning her eyes to McGonagall to ensure that she hadn't gotten the time wrong.

“No, no,” Flitwick spoke up to reassure the panicking woman, this was her first year taking over this position for the half-giant. “This is Mr. Tsukishiro, an interpreter for one of the new first years.”

Yukito bowed to the people in the room as a whole, and gave them his best smile. “It's an honour to meet you all, I'm sure.”

A thrum of magic caused Yue to force Yukito's head around, to meet the eyes of the one Yue insisted was a potential threat to the Mistress. The woman herself had paused, taking in Yukito's existence and the truth of what lay just beneath the masking shell. Her dark eyes momentarily widened in shock as her mind registered who and what this figure standing before her was, before composing herself once again. Ignorant of the magnitude of this moment, the ever polite and helpful Head of Ravenclaw House repeated the introduction of the one he believed to be human.

“White moon...” Yelan mused, taking in the whole of the humanoid figure once again, “A fitting designation you have given yourself, I must say. It will be interesting to lay eyes on grandfather's young heiress for myself.”

“Threats to the safety of the Mistress will be disposed of,” Yue insisted.

“Here is not the time nor the place for such conversations,” Mrs. Li warned, and after a moment later Yue finally allowed Yukito to turn his eyes away.

The distraction came in the form of Professor Grubbly-Plank getting to her feet and making her way out. “Well, I'm off to send the carriages on ahead, then it's down to the docks with me to go collect the first years. You said you're a translator for one of them? Will you need to come with me to tell the kid where to come to?” the witch asked of Yukito.

The youth smiled at the older woman, “That shouldn't be necessary. Sakura-chan can understand basic English, it is merely the more complex concepts that she will struggle to understand. So unless you intend to begin explaining school rules or the like on the way here...”

“Oh, no, that would be Minerva's lot. I just lead them to the boats and make sure they get across alright,” the witch insisted, shooting the Moon Guardian a wink before bustling off.

“Minerva?” Yukito echoed, looking to his miniature guide for clarification.


“I see, I suppose I'll be in your care, then,” Yukito acknowledged the stern old witch and greeted her properly with a bow. She returned the gesture with something between a nod and a curtsy. Yukito then turned his eyes back to the small figure beside him, “Ano, if it's not too much... would I be allowed to see the room Sakura-chan is assigned to? I would like to be able to take her there after dinner. Is there... a secretary or something I could get that information from?”

“Oh, about that, we won't know where your charge will be staying until after she is sorted into her House. Don't they do it that way in Japan?” Flitwick informed, curious about the cultural differences.
“No, the students who require to stay in the dormitories apply months in advance and all of that is worked out before they ever step foot on campus,” Yukito informed.

“But what about their Houses?” the small wizard questioned, trying to imagine how such a system would function.

“Eh? W-well, yes, most students do just live at home or some of the older ones rent apartments, but Tomoeda is a little far for Sakura-chan to commute every day, isn't it?” the Guardian reasoned.

Flitwick just looked at the youth a moment before admitting, “I believe we have a misunderstanding somewhere.”

“It seems so...” Yukito acknowledged with a slight worry to his brow.

Yukito looked out across the darkness as the last rays of dusk glinted across the soft lapping of the water against the dock. The deep blue sky swirled with star patterns above and the moon hung low still over the mountains to the south east, waxing as hardly more than a sliver smiling at the one who drew its power. The ivy coiled down in tangling lines that showed gold under the light of the lamp Professor McGonagall had supplied.

A breeze kicked up and ruffled Yukito's bangs and he breathed it in deeply, savouring the cold chill that rushed into his core. This was his element, and he could bask in it for hours if he was allowed. However it wasn't long before a speckling of dark shapes became visible across the surface of the water. Though gifted with exceptional night vision, Yukito could have picked out the boat that held his Mistress blindfolded. The Cards sang to him, 'welcome home', and Cerberus hummed that ever-familiar presence, and Sakura... his Mistress shone in his mind's eye like the moon itself.

And there below the roar of her presence was an older bond, stretched thin and faded but still present. Would always be present so long as both their souls existed. It was because of this that when the boat finally pulled into the light the Moon Guardian didn't even so much blink at it reflecting off a pair of glasses and an all too familiar smile.

He reached for the children as the boat bumped up against the side of the dock, and at once Sakura's hand was in his and he was pulling her up onto solid ground. Xiao Lang was meanwhile placing his small Sun Guardian securely next to her senpai before pulling himself up as well. Eriol took the other hand Yukito offered, stepping nimbly up to stand with his fellow sorcerers, smiling up at the Guardian with a polite “Thank you.”

Yukito dipped his head in acknowledgement as Professor McGonagall began to speak, “Right then, everyone here? Come along, follow me.” The elder witch turned and lead the children briskly up the stone staircase and through the large oak door into the school proper. The children tailed behind, seemingly instinctively understanding that this was not a woman that one should push their luck with.

She lead the students past the tall doors where the the Great Hall stood and the sounds of hundreds of voices could be heard. Instead took them through a small side door to an otherwise empty little room that was so small the children had to crowd in somewhat tighter than many may have liked.

Yukito stood against a wall, trying to take up as little space as he could while Sakura stood with her back leaning against Yukito's front. Eriol hovered to their left, seeming content about their situation, while Xiao Lang, who had entered the room first, now stood on their right. When he was forced to step back to make room for all the children to fit, his shoulder accidentally bumped into Sakura's, bringing a pink flush to both preteen's faces.
As the girl with the long blond braid who had been tailing behind slightly entered the room, the door pulled itself closed behind her. It was only then that McGonagall began speaking to the room once more. "Welcome to Hogwarts, I am Professor McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress here at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The welcoming feast will begin shortly, but first you must be Sorted into your Houses. The four Houses are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, each with its own noble history of outstanding witches and wizards who graduated from there.

"While attending Hogwarts, your House will be something like your family. You will eat, sleep, and attend classes along side your housemates. Your achievements will win you House points, while any rule breaking will result in loosening them. At the end of the year, the House with the most points will be awarded the House Cup, a great honour. I hope each of you will be a credit to what ever House you belong to.

"The Sorting Ceremony will begin shortly within the Great Hall, I suggest you take this time to make yourselves as presentable as possible as it will be taking place before the rest of the school." With that reminder, McGonagall left and the nervous first years had nothing to do but look among themselves and murmur.

"I couldn't get my mom to tell me how the Sorting worked..." a latte-skinned girl who's crimped black hair was pulled into a half-bun with a pretty flower pin in it admitted to the people around her.

"My cousins told me you have to wrestle a troll," a very freckled girl in thick glasses and untamable auburn hair informed.

"My mom said that wasn't true!" argued Lucas Shacklebolt.

"My sister told me about your cousins, Weasley," a girl with long blond hair in pigtails and glasses over her green eyes piped up. Xiao Lang thought she was one of the ones who had been cooing over him and Sakura earlier. "I wouldn't trust anything those two have to say!"

To Xiao Lang's right a different conversation was taking place. "I called it, there is at least one Weasley in our year, pay up Flint," the Avery girl insisted.

"It's hardly a bet, I mean anyone with half a brain could tell you there'd be Weasleys in the year. They breed like rabbits, after all," Flint argued, but pulled a sickle from his pocket and handed it over to the grinning girl anyway. "Oh, isn't that an Abercrombie? He looks just like the Abercrombie my dad works with in the Ministry. They're only halfbloods, but they're not all together intolerable, and the mixing was several generations back. They're almost pure again."

"One shouldn't be judged by the mistakes of their ancestors, I suppose, especially if they've learned from them," Acelin acknowledged.

"Exactly," Dominic beamed a calculatingly charming smile. "And not to mention—ah, there's Jorkins. So she really did come, after all. Do you see her there? Shall we go say hello?"

"No, if you see her, then she's here, and we'll run into her later. There's no need to go bother with her now," Acelin insisted.

"True, true. That boy there, with the wavy brown hair, I think that's either a Proudfoot or a Fawley. I know the Fawley daughter married into the Proudfoot family and both are supposed to have children around our age. Either way, it makes him a new blood, nothing impressive in their history yet, but at least not an embarrassment to be seen talking to..."

With Yue gone to collect his Mistress, Yelan leaned back against the wall just inside the Great Hall.
She needed a moment to gather her thoughts and compose herself away from the questions and polite conversation of the staff table. Her grandfather was the one behind Xiao Lang’s summons after presenting him with a pair of Guardian eggs. His own Guardian was also present, meaning his heiress would be here as well. What was his purpose in gathering the players in his inheritance farce together once more?

She had to think this through to ensure the outcome was to the Li Clan’s benefit this time. Ensuring you stay one step ahead of your opponent was mandatory in battle, but at the moment there were too many gaps in her knowledge to form any cohesive strategy. The best she could do was build tentative plausible connections between the clues to maintain the illusion of being in control when the situation arises.

The teens wandered in, chatting among themselves excitedly and loudly, as they discussed summer events and the mouthwatering feast yet to come.

This headache wasn’t making it any easier to sift out the hidden intent of the great Clow Reed from the near infinite possibilities the future might hold. Yelan’s natural attribute was for thunder, after all, a solar element. She had no gift in foresight, and had only her own wits and logic to deduce likely outcomes of the future.

Wait... the teens wandered in? Talking only of the past and their own empty bellies? Yelan furrowed her brow at this. People did not just wander past the Li Clan’s matriarch, all-powerful granddaughter of the great Clow Reed. People stopped and stared in awe of her exquisite presence, or trembled in fear of her terrible might. They did not chatter on undisturbed by her presence. It was just not how things were done.

She turned her eyes, as blue as the starlit skies, to the children who entered the room in pairs and small clusters and felt her culture face an unexpected shock to its system. These children were horrifyingly unaware of their surroundings as she had seen several small groups stride past before even the first took notice of her existence. That one child, a boy in probably his third or fourth year at the school, merely gave her a cursory glance before turning away once more with some comment about “new DADA teacher” to his friend as they walked on.

That was not a wholly unique reaction from the students who did take note of her, as the room slowly filled with mutterings about it and those teens already sitting at the tables now craned their necks to see around their neighbours and get a better look at the mysterious woman they had failed to notice as they first entered.

There was something of the blind enamour that all powerful sorcerers eventually become accustomed to facing. A pair of twins with hair like a pair of bright flames, for instance were rather loud about the matter. The one on the right let out a whistle that nearly bordered on being a catcall. “Who do you think that is? New teacher?”

“I hope so!” the other twin agreed. The dark-skinned boy with them just nodded mutely.

“Are you nuts?!” accused the blond that walked a few paces away from them. “Look at her, she looks as strict as Snape!”

“Oh, you’re paranoid of everything, Towler! Don’t you see? When the face yelling at you is that gorgeous, who cares if you’re getting yelled at?” the second twin insisted.

“It’s just one more excuse to look!” agreed the first.

“I’m paranoid of everything because I had the misfortune of having to share my sleeping quarters...”
with the three of you for the last seven years...” Towler grumbled, after which point their conversation had moved too far away to overhear what the group continued to say on the matter.

Then, abruptly, the flow of youth trickling into the room came to a sudden halt. Though voices still raised beyond the door, growing in irritation, nothing entered. Turning to examine what the issue was, she met the wide-eyed stare of a boy in his late teens rooted in spot in the doorway and unwilling to cross her path. His eyes were bright like silver water, a colour and nature to them not found in normal individuals and alerting Yelan at once to the fact that this boy was a fellow sorcerer. As she took in his form more completely, the boy seemed to almost pull back, as if attempting to give her a more respectable distance.

However, before his body could do more than shift its weight in preparation of a step back, a hard shove from behind hit him squarely in the centre of the back and sent him stumbling forward. “Move it, Hawke, you're blocking the door!”

Hawke, one of the local sorcery clans, though she had not seen this boy in particular when she had gone and introduced herself to the head family. She tacked his movement on instinct as the boy caught his balance somewhat ungracefully after a few steps, using the inertia to turn the stumble into an awkward scurrying run down the isles and away from the Li matriarch, only to trip and face-plant part way along. Yet though some part of her brain was aware of the young sorcerer's actions, the vast majority of it was preoccupied by the one who had given him the shove in the first place.

That was no human, any sun aligned sorcerer worth half their weight in salt could tell you as much. Though it wore a human body and masqueraded the face of one, Yelan instinctively knew what this creature that smirked at her was. But how was it possible? Yue was famously known throughout the world as the only one, her own son's audacity not yet public knowledge. No one would dare be so brazen as to alter the form of a preexisting Guardian into such a form, the very idea of what one must think of humans to do such a thing—it would draw the attention of the whole of the community. Yet this could not be the great and famous creation of her honoured grandfather for she had shared words with the beast not an hour before. So for this to be neither altered Guardian nor Yue left only one disturbing option: this was another new Guardian, as of yet unheard of by the world at large, and far closer in power to the terrifying might of Yue and Cerberus than her son's own creations. But then, to whom was such a Guardian bound?

The strange Guardian stared at the last of the Reeds for a moment with hungry eyes—how dare it see her as nothing but a meal!—before turning it's attention away without further thought, dismissing her as a non-threat with all the casualty one would an ant on the sidewalk. It made its way over to one of the long tables and sat, talking excitedly to those around it, maintaining its facade of humanity regardless of the midnight eyes that studied it.

For the Guardian to be so casual in the face of one such as herself, its Master must be terrifyingly powerful. Even Yue had expressed caution, and its Mistress had mastered Clow Reed’s unique magic. Most sorcerers spend decades studying in order to cast even basic spells of Clow Reed’s design and would never even dream of the possibility of controlling something on the level of a Card. Yelan was no fool, she knew someone capable of mastering such magic in only a year must be exceptionally talented and powerful, even if they were born to a lost bloodline. No, probably even more so because of it. Yet that Yue saw her as a potential threat and this strange Guardian didn’t? That did not bode well for the future of her Clan, nor for the safety of her son.

Her eyes scanned the faces of the students as the last of them finally came in and settled into their seats. None looked exceptionally powerful, and the Guardian seemed to be the only other force in the room drawing any level of enamoured stares. Did that mean the Master wasn’t in the room? Or
were they powerful enough to block the senses of others seeking their presence? She dared not put too much effort into seeking a presence in this tangled mess of magic, lest she be lost within, but it was so terribly tempting.

Before further contemplation could be spent on the matter, the door to the Great Hall swung open once more and the Deputy Headmistress lead in the procession of first years. The first few passed without incident, mixtures of nervous and excited energy as they tried to look in all directions at once. Their wide eyes seemed almost incapable of blinking as they tried to take in the sights before them and not miss a single thing.

While several of the children noticed Yelan standing beside the door, they did not observe her with the same curiosity that the older students had. In their innocence, they did not know that hers was a position one did not generally stand in and so assumed that she was just supposed to be there.

As the line began to reach the middle of the new first years that were making their way in for their sorting ceremony, in came the two new students Yelan was most interested in, surprisingly walking together. Yue's sealed form stood out blatantly against the stream of eleven-year-olds standing an easy head and shoulders over the lot of them. From his hand hung the one that could only be the new Card Mistress: Kinomoto Sakura.

She wasn't really what Yelan had been expecting. Small and practically glowing with innocent wonder, she met Yelan's eyes with a quiet "Hoe?" She was far from the schooled, infallible master of the arts that Yelan had unconsciously assumed she would be to capture the Clow Cards and make them her own as she had. If anything, she looked more curious and—dare she say it—in awe of Yelan, rather than expecting it to go the other way around.

Xiao Lang, who followed the young sorceress in closely while shooting daggers at another boy for some reason, paused upon entering to bow to his mother, as he had always been taught. Though the other boy did not even spare her a glance as he kept walking past, Yue stepping back away from his Mistress to give the black haired boy the room to walk. Sakura, for her part, saw Xiao Lang bowing to Yelan and hurried to follow suit.

Jiao Yang, fulfilling her assigned roll as the youngest child, squirmed free from her Master's side and latched her tiny toddler hands onto Yelan's outer-most skirt, reaching no higher than the matriarch's knee. Beyond the doors, the procession had come nearly to a stop as the first years that hung back eyed the bowing children and turned calculating eyes onto Yelan. She could read their questioning stares easily, wondering about who she was and why she warranted such a reaction.

"Xiao Lang," Yelan acknowledged, so not to detain him. At once he straitened and took note of the Kinomoto girl with a look between exasperation and confusion.

Before anyone else could act, the moment was penetrated by a pointed voice from beyond calling back an expectant "Sakura-san." The boy who Xiao Lang had been glaring at had paused and was waiting for the Card Mistress up ahead. The girl straitened at once and met the boy's gaze without concern, though seemed hesitant to obey the obvious summons, eyes first turning in question once more to Yelan, before finally landing on Xiao Lang.

He wordlessly gave her a little nudge towards the far end of the room, and she turned and happily hurried on to catch up to the boy that had called for her. The Clan heir followed along more sullenly, going back to glaring at the bispeckled boy, and the remaining first years trickled in after.

“Syaoran-kun,” Sakura started as he caught up, “who is that pretty lady?”

“Haha-ue,” Xiao Lang informed her.
“Hoeee??” Sakura cried in surprise, bringing her hands to her mouth before turning and looking again at the woman in question. “She looks so young... Don't you have four onee-san?”

“Yeah, but Haha-ue is also a sorceress, so she doesn't look her age. Just look at Hiiragizawa, who is your Otou-san's twin.”

“Ahh... that's right...” she muttered, looking curiously at Eriol. When all the first years stood assembled finally at the front of the room in something that more or less resembled a line as they spread themselves out to get a look at the Deputy Headmistress and the hat she had just brought out on the three-legged stool, the Sorting Hat opened it's rip wide and began to sing a long and rambling song.

In times of old, when I was new,  
And Hogwarts barely started,  
The founders of our noble school  
Thought never to be parted.  
United by a common goal,  
They had the selfsame yearning  
To make the world's best magic school  
And pass along their learning.  
"Together we will build and teach"  
The four good friends decided.  
And never did they dream that they  
Might some day be divided.  
For were there such friends anywhere  
As Slytherin and Gryffindor?  
Unless it was the second pair  
Of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw,  
So how could it have gone so wrong?  
How could such friendships fail?  
Why, I was there, so I can tell  
The whole sad, sorry tale.  
Said Slytherin, "We'll teach just those  
Whose ancestry's purest."
Said Ravenclaw, "We'll teach those whose
  Intelligence is surest."

Said Gryffindor, "We'll teach all those
  With brave deeds to their name."

Said Hufflepuff, "I'll teach the lot
  And treat them just the same."

These differences caused little strife
  When first they came to light.

For each of the four founders had
  A house in which they might
Take only those they wanted, so,
  For instance, Slytherin

Took only pure-blood wizards
  Of great cunning just like him.
And only those of sharpest mind
  Were taught by Ravenclaw

While the bravest and the boldest
  Went to daring Gryffindor.

Good Hufflepuff, she took the rest
  And taught them all she knew,
Thus, the houses and their founders
  Maintained friendships firm and true.

So Hogwarts worked in harmony
  For several happy years,
But then discord crept among us
  Feeding on our faults and fears.
The Houses that, like pillars four
  Had once held up our school
Now turned upon each other and
Divided, sought to rule.
And for a while it seemed the school
Must meet an early end.
What with duelling and with fighting
And the clash of friend on friend.
And at last there came a morning
When old Slytherin departed
And though the fighting then died out
He left us quite downhearted.
And never since the founders four
Were whittled down to three
Have the Houses been united
As they once were meant to be.
And now the Sorting Hat is here
And you all know the score:
I sort you into Houses
Because that is what I'm for.
But this year I'll go further,
Listen closely to my song:
Though condemned I am to split you
Still I worry that it's wrong,
Though I must fulfill my duty
And must quarter every year
Still I wonder whether sorting
May not bring the end I fear.
Oh, know the perils, read the signs,
The warning history shows,
For our Hogwarts is in danger
From external, deadly foes.
And we must unite inside her
Or we'll crumble from within
I have told you, I have warned you...
Let the Sorting now begin.

The older students and staff table all clapped politely, and some of the nervous first years followed suit unsurely. Then Professor McGonagall took a long roll of parchment from where it sat at the staff table atop a silver platter and unrolled the top of it from which she began to read. “Abercrombie, Euan!” she called, pronouncing each syllable clearly so that all in the room could hear.

Slightly shaking, a blond boy who's wavy hair was in a bowl cut stepped forward out of the crowd to be the first sorted of their school year. Sakura only got a glimpse of his slightly wide, deep blue-grey eyes before the singing hat was placed on his head and slipped strait down over his vision. He sat there for only a moment, barely beginning to fidget with the edge of the stool when the hat opened at the rip and shouted out in a gravelly voice that made a few of the nervous first years jump slightly in surprise, “GRYFFINDOR!”

Seeming to give a shaky sigh in relief the boy took the hat from his head and made his way over to the red-adorned table that lined the far right wall where the students were clapping and cheering just a little bit louder than the other three tables. Sakura made sure to commit to her mind the fact that the red table was “Gryffindor” just as she was determined to memorise the names and faces of all her fellow first years so she would not be made to make a blunder in etiquette against them. (1)

“Ackerman, Alejo!” was the next name called. What looked like a tanned girl with frizzy strawberry blond hair and pretty brown eyes was the next to step up to the stool. This raised a few shocked murmurs of “That's a boy?!” from the other students, earning them a scathing glare from the boy in question before the Sorting Hat hid his eyes as well.

This time the hat took a little longer, and a few of the more impatient older students started ticking off time before finally the hat called out once again “GRYFFINDOR!” in the same gravelly voice that got fewer surprised reactions this time due to the first years more expecting it.

Once the not-a-girl had joined the first student at the red table, Professor McGonagall read off the next name on the list. “Avery, Shanel!”

She walked to the stool and sat down, the perfect image of sugar and spice and everything else that characterized little girls' innocence. However, the hat had barely touched her baby-blond hair when it shouted out “SLYTHERIN!” and the young lady was allowed to go and sit among the cheering mass of students at the green adorned table.

The sorting then continued with “Banks, James!” making his way up next. The boy looked a little tight around the edges of his features, but still managed to grin out bravely with excitement before the hat plunged his eyes into darkness, hiding much of his spiky, dirty blond hair. His body seemed to almost hum with the strain of remaining poised and still as he sat there in front of everyone before he, too, was sent off to “GRYFFINDOR!”

After Banks was "Barnwell, Oliver!" who was the reedy red haired boy who had looked like he would be sick earlier. He was so nervous that his arms and legs moved together in synchronization as he moved up to take his seat. He was another fast one to be sorted, the hat suddenly calling out a new name of "HUFFLEPUFF!" not long after it was placed on his head. The boy took the hat off and handed it back to the Professor politely, before stalling slightly as he looked confusedly out at the
four tables with his striking cobalt eyes. After a moment, the Deputy Headmistress pointed him towards the yellow table, and he thanked her with a nod before hurrying off, cheeks bright with embarrassment.

There were many rolls of eyes as a whispered word of "Mudblood" swept among the first years, too quiet for the staff to hear, as the next name, "Black, Corvin!", was called.

Over at the Gryffindor table, Harry perked up from his daze of inattentiveness at the sound of the familiar last name. "Wait, I thought Sirius was the last of the Black family," he whispered out to his two friends in confusion.

"He's the last of the Main Family," Ron explained quietly in return even as the Black in question was sorted to Slytherin, "but there are still members of the branch families and descendants of the disowned members wandering around."

Lavender and Parvati from further down then squealed as "Brown, Natalie!" was called upon.

"Oh, I hope your little sister ends up in Gryffindor too," Parvati could be heard confiding.

"I do, too," Lavender replied as she watched the blond girl take off her glasses so they didn't get in the way of the Sorting Hat. However, Lavender and Parvati's wish was not granted as the young Miss Brown was instead sent to Ravenclaw. "Don't worry, Lav, I'm sure Padma will look out for her," Parvati tried to comfort, earning a smile for her efforts.

"Carrow, Mckay!" McGonagall then called up. The Sorting Hat took a bit of time with this one, seeming to take its time to sit and think over its decision before announcing that the boy belonged in "RAVENCLAW!"

Sakura couldn't suppress a shiver as the Carrow boy brushed passed her on his way over to the blue table, which Xiao Lang attentively honed in on. "Is everything alright, Sakura?" he asked.

She nodded to her crush, pinkening slightly at his attention towards her, though reminding herself that it was really nothing new. "Yes, it's just..." she trailed off, not sure how to phrase it without seeming too rude. "That boy, it just seems like something's not quite right about him..." she finally admitted. At this, Xiao Lang turned his honey eyes to glare distrustfully at the aforementioned student, much to Sakura's regret.

She had been so busy with her thoughts that she almost missed "Collins, Renae" (a confident looking girl who's black hair curled away from her face, giving her the impression of eternally facing in to a strong wind) being sorted into Gryffindor. Reminding herself of what she was supposed to be doing at the moment, Sakura mentally shook herself as Professor McGonagall called up "Dawlish, Dzi!"

The Dawlish girl seemed more calm, having witnessed those before her putting the Sorting Hat on, and moved with something of ease up for her turn. There was a hint in some of her features and darker complexion of having some ancestry outside of Europe, but given her frizzy red hair and blue-green eyes it wasn't likely to have been recent. By the plethora of brightly coloured jewellery and the half pigtailed look she adorned, she gave off the impression of creativity and a comfort with self that Sakura just couldn't imagine feeling at the moment. She even smiled at the Deputy Headmistress as the woman placed the hat on her, earning a tight and strained one in response.

It wasn't long before the self-confident girl was made a Gryffindor, nor Kyle Dobbs, a boy with sandy brown hair, after her. Next up to the stool was one Miss Hazel Edgecombe, who's long dirty blond hair was pulled back into a loose braid that almost matched her golden-hazel eyes. The
nervous, shy seeming girl was after a moment sent to sit at Hufflepuff table, and she shuffled off without trying to pull too much attention to herself.

The next to be called up was “Figg, Zaley!” who was a girl with shaggy blond pigtails who gave the overall impression of a puppy from a pet store. She giggled a little, like she was trying to chase away her nerves as she hopped up on the stool and jiggled her feet and drummed her fingers through the entirety of her time under the hat. It took just long enough for Professor McGonagall to start levelling the girl with an annoyed glare for her fidgeting habits before the Sorting Hat announced once more “HUFFLEPUFF!”

“Flint, Dominic!” McGonagall called with the air of one who really just wanted this to be over, but was sadly realizing that she wasn't even a quarter of the way through the alphabet yet. The third blond in a row stepped up. He passed a thoughtful glance over the student body with his dark blue eyes before they vanished beneath the hat. He sat patiently for nearly a whole minute before the hat finally called out “SLYTHERIN!” He sat still a moment longer while the hat was removed from his head before moving with a practised calm and reserve to sit down near Miss Avery.

Following Flint was “Gibbon, Gaines” who had shoulder-length black hair that shone red in the candle-light and a mysterious glint shining deep within his hazel eyes. The foxish boy sat obediently on the stool, but flopped his head this way and that as he waited for the hat to call out his placement. As he began to tap the toes of his shoes together and even giggle to himself, the hat finally decided to cry out “RAVENCLAW!”

“Greengrass, Xanthia” was the next on the list. She determinedly marched up to the stool, where she sat with an air of superiority. The hat had barely even brushed against the girl's bangs when it announced to the whole hall, and to the surprise of very few students, “SLYTHERIN!”

As Miss Greengrass stood and walked over to the clapping table decked out in green, Professor McGonagall looked down once more at the student list in order to call out the next name and, for the first time in remembered history, the Deputy Headmistress faltered. Her brow contorted into one of confusion and concentration for a moment before she began trying to figure out how to pronounce the next name. “...Hi-” she started, as if she were to say 'his', “...Hee-?” she tried again “...High-?” she struggled.

Within the assembled students, a slow and arguably evil smile spread across Eriol's face as he began to move as smoothly as flowing water and with a poise of one that owned the universe and had nothing to fear from anything in existence. As he passed his young heiress, he touched her shoulder in a motion of reassurance that was infinitely reminiscent to her of Fujitaka. He stepped up before the teachers as McGonagall still attempted to work out the proper pronunciation of his name and smiled his most mysterious smile at the woman. “Just Eriol will do fine, thank you,” he informed her calmly as he took the Sorting Hat from her hands and placed it upon his own head as he sat himself down.

I would like to go into Ravenclaw, please, the reincarnation thought pointedly the moment the hat was on his head.

“Oh, um, well, yes... Yes, that does seem to suit you, so then I suppose it had better be RAVENCLAW!” the hat responded, shouting only the last word out for anyone but Eriol to hear. Sweeping the hat from his head and returning it to McGonagall with a gentlemanly bow in one smooth motion that spoke volumes about his good breeding and manners, Eriol wasted only one moment longer to spare a loving smile at the nervous Sakura before sweeping over to his chosen destination.

The confused eyes of the whole room only followed the ancient soul a moment longer before the woman turned her gaze down to the parchment held within her hands once more. “Jorkins, Jasmine!”
she called with far more confidence.

It turns out the illusive Jorkins was a girl with reddish brown hair that layered down her back and almost matching brown eyes. She pulled herself up onto the stool with only a minimal show of nerves as she sat and waited through the ten or fifteen seconds that the hat sat on her head before it announced out “SLYTHERIN!” she slipped from the chair with a smile breaking out across her face as she went to join her new House.

“Kinomoto, Sakura!” the stern looking witch called, making the little sorceress jump slightly. Xiao Lang quickly and quietly slipped his hand around hers for a split second and gave it a reassuring squeeze to comfort her.

Taking a deep, gulping breath, and letting out a quiet “Hoeeee~” she moved up to sit herself alone in front of everyone. She got a momentary look of a room full of curious faces looking up at her before her eyes were covered by a fall of black fabric.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here?” a voice seemed to whisper in her ear.

A sudden chill shot up the Card Mistress's spine at the disembodied voice and before she thought twice about it, she gave a shrill scream and bolted from the chair. She heard Xiao Lang call out to her, surprised and confused as he moved to try and protect her from whatever unidentified threat had startled her so, but at the moment for as much as she loved Xiao Lang, there was only one person that she wanted to find comfort with.

With tears in her eyes and trailing down her quickly reddening cheeks, Sakura ran strait passed all the assembled first years and down the isle. With her arms outstretched, the sorceress all but flew into the awaiting arms of her Moon Guardian's sealed form, Yukito, who she met part way down the room and was immediately enveloped into a tight and protective embrace. “Mistress! What is wrong, Mistress? What do you need?”

She cowered for a moment in the warmth that surrounded her. Like a blanket of protection that right down to her very soul she knew would always be there for her and keep her safe from anything that could ever do her any harm. She let out a sob that shook her whole frame as Xiao Lang placed a hand on her leg. “Sakura...?” he questioned in concern.

Embarrassment welled up within the young girl for the spectacle she was making of herself, and she swallowed down another sob to try and explain herself to the pair that worried over her. However, all she managed to choke out was “G-ghost...”

Xiao Lang let out a sigh of relief at this, while Yukito rubbed circles on her back. Eriol stood from his place at the Ravenclaw table and held out a beckoning hand towards the worrying Guardian. With his Mistress upset and giving no indications on how to correct the issue, the Moon Guardian submitted to the familiar tug of his old Master's will. He moved forward and knelt before the ancient soul that had once been the most powerful of sorcerers.

Eriol placed a hand tentatively on Sakura's light brown hair and spoke in a soothing voice,”Yoshi, yoshi. Daijoubu, Sakura-san. It's not a ghost, it's just a spell on the hat. Nothing more, it won't hurt you.”

Sakura soon sniffled her way to quieting down after that, soothed by the presence of so much love and concern blanketing her from all sides. The thought occurred to her that she should probably give the Sorting Hat another go, and Yukito responded at once by standing and carrying her back to the front of the room, content on his task now that orders were forthcoming.
Xiao Lang lingered for a moment, eyes locking with Eriol's in mistrust and discontent, before they lowered of their own accord. Once again, he had been useless when she had really needed someone. She had looked to Yukito, who he remembered had once been her number one, and to Eriol—to Clow Reed who had tricked her and manipulated her in the past—and his heart was heavy with the all of it. He slowly made his way back up to the other students and watched with a tired sort of melancholy as Sakura sat nervously upon the stool, clinging to Yukito's hand for support as he knelt devotedly at her side.

"Are you quite done running away now?" the Hat was saying in her ear.

"Hai, I'm sorry about that. Y-you really aren't a ghost... right?" Sakura replied quietly.

"You don't need to speak aloud, I can hear your thoughts clearly enough. And weren't you supposed to be working to get over your fear of ghosts, anyway?"

"Hoeeeee..."

"Indeed. Well, where shall we put you? I see you have a courageous heart, willing to put yourself in harm's way for others. You have experienced many selfless moments, far more than most children your age, and have proven you can stand your ground against such adversities. So shall we send you to Gryffindor? You are also very clever, thinking your way through your problems and finding innovative solutions to the challenges you face. Your observant nature has enabled you more than once to work out the solution even without the prior learning one would usually require. Though school work may not be your forte, your creativity allows you to problem-solve and you think quickly on your feet, which is all very Ravenclaw...

"Ah, but no, I see the true face of your soul is love. It is your friends and family that motivate you, it is for them that you would face even your deepest of fears, and those fears are none other than loosing those you care for. You are open and accepting towards others, making room in your life for even the most unlikely of members. And when those you love choose a path that does not lead to you, you do not turn them away and instead stand by them loyally. You are, without a doubt, an exemplary choice for HUFFLEPUFF!"

With the announcement made of the Hat's choice, the tattered old cloth was removed from the young girl's head and without prompting the Moon Guardian scooped his Mistress into his arms once more and carried her down the isle to where he sat and soothed her. At once the pair became surrounded by the coo of the older girls, asking if she was alright and pressing their advantage at being the first to meet her handsome caretaker.

Professor McGonagall gave a moment to direct a reprimanding stare at the sixth and seventh year Hufflepuff girls before turning her attention once more to her roll of parchment. "Li, Xiao Lang," she called, and the little heir stepped forward. By the questioning, measuring looks filling the eyes of the assembled instructors, Xiao Lang knew that once again, his name had proceeded him. He was being judged, critiqued, scrutinized. My, what a familiar sensation. He sat before the masses, undaunted by the sea of faces looking up at him, and put on his most regal continence that he could muster as the Hat fell over his eyes.

"Well, well. Now this IS a complicated little one. Where oh where shall we put you? Will you take Gryffindor? You have the courage to stand up for what's right, even when others oppose it, and will fight for your beliefs, even when against seemingly unbeatable odds. You are not one to falter easily, and rise to challenges when they are presented before you. Or is Hufflepuff your home? You're loyal to those who you have given your trust to, and honest with yourself and others. Not to mention that one in particular there holds your heart, and how greatly you long to be near her..."
That's beside the point, we're in the same school, there's nothing that will stop us seeing each other. My future can't lay teetering on my current affection for one girl.

“Very well, very well. Then what of Ravenclaw? You are quite smart, and you value what that means for you have seen first hand the worth of one who lives by their wits. You even idolize her, working in your own quiet way to become more intelligent yourself so that you can do all that she does. Or do you reside among the Slytherins? You have such a vast amount of untapped potential, and you chase the top with an unyielding ambition. You understand the importance of connections and making smart allies to bring about the best allegiances for the future, even if you are still learning about how to do so.”

Watch your tongue, hat, I happen to be a young lord.

“Yes, I am very much aware of exactly what you are. And that makes this process all the harder. So then, where would you like me to put you?”

Aren't you supposed to be telling me that?

He heard the hat chuckle within his mind. “Most students who arrive here have some predetermined notion within their minds of who they are and where they fit. Even if they can't narrow their placement down to only one, they have already narrowed it down to two main choices that fit them the best. All I do, then, is explain in greater detail what aspects they have to fit into either category, and they decide which they value more strongly.”

Isn't that kinda, I don't know, cheating? Aren't you supposed to choose off of what the founders of the school would have chosen?

“Stories and methods change over time, your lordship, you know that. The honest truth is that who a person is is not determined by what they are when they walk into this building—for every person has every one of the traits to fit into each house—but rather what choices they make upon the moment. The saying 'actions speak louder than words' has not stayed around so long for nothing.”

So then why all four for me?

“Ah, because you entered with an open mind, spotting and understanding the true value of each signature House traits and accepting your place within any of them equally well. So now the choice is up to you: you do not need to loose any to become another, but those around you will help lead you to your future. Among whom do you place your values the greatest, young prince?”

If it doesn't matter which place I go, they are all good in their own way, and all speak to who I am... then I choose to go where it will help my Clan the most. They need me to be a strong, powerful leader—one who will ensure enemies will tremble before my might and think twice before challenging... Hat, make me great!

“Very well, then. For you, it seems the only place that suits what you want would have to be: SLYTHERIN!!” and with that cry, the young heir slipped the hat from his head and made his way to his new house table.

Following Xiao Lang was a rather boxily built girl by the name of “Maddock, Rebecca (“Becky, please,”)”. There was a moment of awkward setting of the Sorting Hat on her head as she wore her long, curly dark brown hair up in a high ponytail. However, once the Hat was on her, it wasn't long for girl to be sent on her way to Hufflepuff as well.

As “Mason, Kismet” was sent to join Ravenclaw, the Flint boy slid over across the few spaces to
speak to Xiao Lang. “Fancy seeing you here, stranger. So who's that girl that had the freak out up there? Your girl?”

“No,” the golden eyed boy was unfortunately forced to admit.

“Then is she with the black haired kid with the glasses? What was his name, Ariel?”

“Definitely not!”

“But, you all know each other?” Flint pressed again, completely ignoring Wayne McGuffin—an auburn haired boy built like a refrigerator with legs—being sorted into Hufflepuff. He did however glance up when the name “Moon, Corabelle” was called, lingering a moment more on the girl's pretty face and elegant posture.

“We were in school together last year,” Xiao Lang admitted.

This caught the attention of the students sitting around them, several completely turning away from the pretty brunet being sent to Ravenclaw in favour of eyeing the young heir. “School? Before Hogwarts?” the Avery girl questioned.

“Oh, right, you lot don't start your magic study until now, huh?” Xiao Lang mused as he watched the chubby Toby Munsch get sent off to Gryffindor.

“You've already had magic training? Since when? How much?” quizzed the curious Black boy, his blue-grey eyes lighting up with the eagerness of one addicted to gossip.

“Since I was physically able to go through the motions,” the young heir informed. Several of the Slytherins looked impressed, while others appeared more envious than anything.

They were silent for a moment as a curly haired blond by the name of Victoria O'Hare was called up for her turn on the stool. “So, does that mean your little sister is already learning magic, too?”

“Yes,” Xiao Lang responded, already growing bored with this line of questioning. Sensing his disinterest, Flint reluctantly conceded to giving the Li boy his solitude and they went back to watching the sorting in silence. This girl took nearly a full minute before being sent on her way to Ravenclaw, and then finally came a name that pulled the attention of almost the entire Slytherin table.

“Parkinson, Acelin,” Professor McGonagall called and the pretty boy stepped up. Xiao Lang could see the older girl that had been escorting the kids around earlier sitting further up the table with the prick. She was almost beaming with pride as her little brother vanished for a moment under the fabric of the hat before he was sent on his way to join them within Slytherin. The boy did his best to glide to the table and when he sat down Flint slid up next to him right away and whispered something in his ear. By the way Parkinson studied the Chinese boy for a moment, Xiao Lang had a pretty good idea that he was being updated on what he missed from his friend.

By this point the Sorting was nearly two-thirds done and those still standing up front had thinned out considerably. The new first years, aware of this, had began to grow increasingly nervous and fidgety, save for one girl who was still spaced out staring at the enchanted ceiling with her mouth hanging slightly agape. Some of the oldest students had begun getting a tad restless, and the occasional person was even turning their smitten attention back to Yelan instead. At the Ravenclaw table, amid her group of friends, Nakuru had begun to whine about how she was hungry.

“Payne, Francis” was a platinum haired boy who heaved a large sigh, obviously knowing that his name was going to be called soon as he seemed to shake off his nerves the best he could and step up hurriedly to the stool, intent to get the whole thing over with. Seemingly intent to not be outdone by
those who had been called up before him, he set his jaw and straightened his posture just that much more as the hat fell down over slightly-too-wide brown eyes.

After a few moments of quiet, Payne asked aloud with enough volume that the teachers and students sitting closest could hear “What? Why!” and then seemed to get into a muttered argument with the Hat before finally the hat called out “RAVENCLAW!” and the boy was sent on his way.

After that, “Perkins, Theodore” was called forward. The poor shaking boy was easily the smallest male of the year, and had a round face and drooping hazel eyes that made him look more like he was a tall seven year old than a short eleven. His fretful little pout earned a chorus of “aaawa’s from many of the more mature and mothering of the girls. All too quickly, the Sorting Hat had him on his way to Hufflepuff where it was clear he would be coddled in the coming weeks.

Next up was Pepper Princeton, a girl in braided bright orange pigtails and enough freckles that she could have been mistaken for a Weasley. She stepped up shyly, with her head ducked down between her shoulders and her steps a little too fast to be casual. Looking at the young girl, Harry couldn't help but recall his own nerves during his Sorting Ceremony when the Hat called out the name of Gryffindor.

“Proudfoot, Brandon” McGonagall called, and a mature looking boy with wavy dark brown hair down to his shoulders stepped up. Adding in the fact that he was one of the tallest of his year, the boy really looked closer to 13 than 11, though Harry didn't really know what made the boy appear so much older than he was. Still, when the Hat declared the boy to be a “RAVENCLAW!” Harry supposed it must have been some deep-rooted wisdom that Harry had observed in the boy's dark green eyes.

As young Brandon took a moment to take off the Sorting Hat and straiten his hair before stepping down, being replaced on the stool by Lydia Rosier. She sat there playing with the ends of her long hair until finally the Sorting Hat called “SLYTHERIN!” to no great surprise for anyone familiar with her family name.

“Rowel, Maegan” who followed next was a cute little girl with platinum pigtails held up with bright blue ribbons. The small girl gave a nervous little hop when her name was called on, as if she were taken by surprise, and all but ran up to the stool.

A few seats down from Harry, Ginny leaned across the table and said to the boy sitting there, “Awa, Todd, your baby sister's adorable!” He returned the off-hand compliment to his family with a grin, his eyes flickering to the brunet beside her to see if the other girl agreed with the sentiment. However, Janell's eyes were one of the ones glued marvelling at the woman and toddler standing at the back of the room. Her eyes had actually only ever left the woman for the spectacle of the crying girl and for the Chinese boy who had been sorted after her.

When the Sorting Hat declared the young Rowel girl to be another “GRYFFINDOR!” Ginny and her friends all clapped especially loud, Todd giving his little sister a thumbs up as she came to join her fellow first years further down the length of the table.

“Shackelbolt, Lucas,” Professor McGonagall called over the clamour of her house.

“Go Gryffindor,” Harry cheered quietly.

“Oh?” Hermione perked at hearing what Harry said. “You think he'll be in Gryffindor?”

“C'mon, Hermione, his dad's an Auror, and a member of the Order, where else would he go?” Harry argued back.
“Harry, there's a lot of good qualities that go into making an Auror that fit into the other Houses, and there's plenty of examples of children ending up in different Houses than their parents or siblings. Just think of the Patil twins from our year, or Sir-Snuffles and his family. And those are just two examples of the top of my head...”

“That's just because Snuffles is good and the rest of his family are, well...” Harry argued back, eyes skimming over to the Slytherin table where Malfoy sat watching the ceremony with an impossibly bored expression. Harry still couldn't believe that Malfoy of all people was Sirius's cousin. “So that's why he ended up in Gryffindor instead.”

“Harry Potter! Do you listen at all to anything the Sorting Hat says each year about the strengths of each House?!” Hermione finally exploded quietly at him in exasperation.

“HUFFLEPUFF!” the Sorting Hat cried and the faces of Ron and Harry both fell into slack-jawed expressions in response.

“Way to ruin a perfectly good wizard,” Ron grumbled, as the next young witch, a shy blond with glasses named Ulyssa Urquhart, was called up for her turn.

“How is Hufflepuff going to 'ruin him' exactly?” Hermione grumbled.

“Well, obviously, it's where you go if you're not strong, brave, smart, or evil enough to get into any of the other Houses! It's the House for losers,” Ron argued back.

“You do realize that Tonks was in Hufflepuff, right? And that she's an Auror, just like Mr. Shacklebolt,” the bookworm pointed out.

“Well, yes, but... you have to admit, she's not one of the best. I mean, she admitted herself that she barely managed to pass her tests...” Harry put in.

“Because she is clumsy, which has absolutely nothing to do with magical skill. And again, how is it 'ruining' a student to end up in Hufflepuff? The House of hard work, determination, loyalty, acceptance, inclusion... the House that Cedric Diggory—the Hogwarts Champion that the completely impartial Tri-Wizard Cup chose without tampering—was in!” Hermione argued at the two boys as the Sorting Hat sent the blond girl up front to Slytherin House.

Ron shot an unsure look at Harry when she brought up the events of last year. It was clear he hadn't been convinced by the argument, but would let the subject drop for the sake of avoiding another blow-up from Harry-the-ticking-time-bomb in the Great Hall. Hermione held her accusing glare on him a moment longer, trying to out-stubborn him, but eventually even she let the subject drop.

Harry, meanwhile, was still too busy with his own introspections to notice the battle of wills by his friends. He was angry at Hermione's insinuation that he was not a real Champion of Hogwarts, despite all he had been through, and a nasty little feeling in the back of his head even gloated that he had survived while Cedric had not, so clearly he was the better Champion to begin with. He did his best to squash down that voice, as it had been the same one that had made him unfairly jealous of Ron. So instead, he focused on the other voice that pointed out that Hermione was right about Cedric's House and how he had been a wonderful, powerful wizard, and so perhaps he should concede that little Lucas Shacklebolt may not be as lost as his first impulse had implied.

Harry's thoughts were pulled back to the here and now when he heard McGonagall's voice call out “Weasley, Quentina!” He spun around in time to see a girl with spikey auburn hair and a pair of square glasses step nervously up to the stool.
“Weasley?” Harry echoed, looking to Ron in bafflement.

“Hmm? Oh, yeah. She's my... second cousin, I think?” Ron waved off, “What, did you think my family was the last Weasleys in existence? There's even other Weasleys in the other Houses. We're actually one of the most common Wizarding families in Great Britain.”

“Oh...?” Harry trailed off, suddenly taking a moment to scan the rest of the room to try and see if he could pick out anyone that looked like Ron or his brothers.

“There used to be more of us. In the last war, you know entire families were wiped out for not doing what You-Know-Who wanted, right? Well, a lot of those families happened to be Weasleys. That's why mum and dad were so ready to join this fight...” Ron reflected.

Harry's mind flashed back to the night where Mrs. Weasley had challenged the bogart. The lifeless corpses of her children spread out before her on the ground. Harry's own body among them, as precious to her as any other of her children. The stricken look on Sirius and Lupin's faces upon seeing it. And suddenly, he thought he understood a bit more why those fears were so prominent in the matriarch, and why she was so desperate to protect her little ones from danger for as long as physically possible.

Ron's young cousin was soon enough sent to Ravenclaw, and Ron just nodded and said something vague about suiting her. And then, McGonagall was moving on to the next student. “Whisp, Acacia,” she called clearly to the room. The room waited in silence, eyes on the last four students at the front of the room. No one moved. “Whisp, Acacia!” McGonagall repeated, an impatient edge entering her voice.

Of the four still standing up there, the two boys eyed the two girls questioningly. One of the girls, of obvious mixed ancestry, was similarly eyeing the other girl, and so soon the whole room was staring expectantly at the little girl with cropped sandy curls as she stood zoned out and staring at the ceiling. The girl apparently didn't notice.

The blond boy, who wore his hair in a loose tail down his back, tugged at his sleeves and began inching away from the girl beside him so as to remove himself from the range of fire. The other boy, who had short fluffy, layered brown hair, stared at her around the other girl with round, incredulous baby blue eyes. “Miss Whisp!” McGonagall snapped, still getting no response from the child.

Tentatively, the other girl standing up front beside Whisp reached out and poked her in the arm. The young curly-top turned her slanted black eyes onto the darker skinned girl blankly, who quickly proceeded to point nervously at the stool in front of them. Whisp turned her gaze to the empty stool and the stern witch shooting daggers at her for her inattentiveness. Whisp sighed and walked unhurriedly up to the stool, turning on her heel and plopping down unceremoniously. Her eyes already returned to the ceiling in a bored sort of detachment.

McGonagall lowered the Sorting Hat over Whisp's head, and Whisp leaned forward and down in order to continue to see the ceiling beyond the rim. You could see the blood vessels popping out on the Deputy Headmistress's temple. You could see the disbelieving stares of the staff table. You could see Dumbledore struggling to contain his amusement. Many of the students in the audience didn't manage to as laughter began to pick up across the tables. McGonagall forcefully cleared her throat as she all but shoved the Sorting Hat down over the girl's eyes and with a resigned sigh the girl pushed herself back up to a slouched position.

The room fell silent after a few residual snickers as everyone seemed keen to discover where the oddball girl would end up. The Sorting Hat seemed to be taking its sweet time, but the student body did not wane in interest after the show put on so far. Finally, after almost a whole minute, the Hat
declared the girl to be “GRYFFINDOR!” which caused poor McGonagall to turn a little green around the edges.

“Woodrook, Jayce” was called up as Whisp drifted her way towards the red table, and though he was still giving the spacey girl an incredulous look, he did not make the Deputy Headmistress wait. His obedience seemed to unrruffle a few of the witch’s feathers and she managed not to shove the Sorting Hat onto his head as well. It didn't take very long before the Hat had the boy headed off to Hufflepuff as well.

“Yaxley, Ignacio,” McGonagall called, looking down at the blond boy expectantly. The boy tugged at his sleeves once more—obviously a nervous habit—and put on his best defiant face as he stepped up to meet his fate.

Snape watched carefully as Yaxley sat stiff-backed on the stool. If he wasn't mistaken, this was the son of Corban Yaxley, though Snape had not personally ever met the boy. Though he wasn't to the point of the Rosiers who were so wrapped up in themselves they seemed to forget they had a child, Corban was definitely not the overly doting and spoiling type that the Averys were, nor as proud a parent as the Parkinsons or Malfoys who insisted on parading their children around and making everyone else fawn and coo over them to be polite. Therefore, at the formal events—which were the only ones Snape ever bothered to attend—the young Yaxley boy was never forced to make an appearance, and so never had.

Still, Snape knew enough about what Corban would instil in terms of morals and values in the boy to not be surprised in the least when the child was soon sorted into Slytherin. The Death Eater's son sat still as the Deputy Headmistress removed the Sorting Hat from his head, tugged at his sleeves once more, and made his way over to where the rest of the Death Eater's children had been grouped together by their elders.

And finally, there was only one last name to be called upon. Her dark, mixed ancestry skin was blanched with nerves and her poor limbs trembled slightly as all eyes honed in on her expectantly. She dipped her head forward slightly and let her long frizzy mane of not-quite-black hair fall around her shoulders in a curtain, her flower hairpin catching in the candlelight with the motion. “Zeller, Rose!” McGonagall articulated for the benefit of the audience. Rose attempted to swallow, but her mouth was abnormally dry, so instead she set her square jaw and stepped forward to face her fate as bravely as she could. Once seated, she closed her round brown eyes and awaited what would come next.

The Hat had barely began to sink down over her brow when it called with no uncertain terms or hesitation “HUFFLEPUFF!” and Rose quickly swiped it off her head once more and slid to her feet. She handed the Sorting Hat back to Professor McGonagall with a polite curtsy before turning and hurrying to her new table where she sat between the puppy-like girl and the muggle-born boy who had been the first sorted into Hufflepuff.

With all the students sorted and seated, the Ceremony had officially come to a close and the Hall gave one last round of applause as the Deputy Headmistress set the Sorting Hat back on its stool and carried them away to the side room once again.

(1) – In Japan, it is considered extremely rude to not refer to a person by their name after they have been introduced to you. Sakura, being a good, polite child, doesn't want to cause any problems with her classmates by not remembering how to address them.
Oh, how that chapter did not want to be written. Computers dying, corrupted save files, and more lead to large sections of this story (as in 5 to 10 pages worth) having to be rewritten in entirety no less than three times, plus being a full-time med student means free time to focus on expressing my imagination is very limited. But, finally, I present this to you. I decided to cut it off here and save the welcoming feast for next chapter as to ensure that my dear readers did not have to wait another year or more to see what happens next. I know some people will be impatient about how I handled the Sorting Ceremony, but unlike Harry, Sakura's the sort to actually pay attention to her classmates and so I took this opportunity to introduce you to the main 37 kids that will be the backdrop for her adventures in the chapters to come. If you're interested in them, I have a picture of them that I posted to DeviantArt. I would supply the link but this page deletes links, so just go to the page and search “Deck Master Class Picture” and you should find it no problem. Up next is the start of term feast, where we meet even more new characters (older students from the different houses) and get a few more mandatory plot points out of the way. And as always, ask questions and tell me your thoughts, if you manage to inspire me with something you say, I'll send you one of my bonus scenes. See you all in *starts singing the slinky tune* Everyone Loves Yuki-to!!

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