**The Magic of Hogwarts**

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The Magic of Hogwarts

by colormyworldbright

Summary

"The wall clock reads fifteen minutes till eleven. The newspapers indicate that today is the first of September.
King’s Cross Station is bustling... Here our fairytale begin." Excerpt from Prologue.

Betaed by the lovely and amazing Crystal (niuniujiaojiao).

Notes

Before y'all get into this fic, just know that I've literally been working on this for about six years, even though the publishing date is in 2016 (I wrote the first version on fanfiction.net when I was just starting high school.) That means two things:
1) It's taken me a long ass time to write and it'll probably take me a while to finish it.
I do usually update every so often (at least twice a year) and I don't think the story is by any means unsatisfying despite being not being technically complete since a lot of stories do get wrapped up in earlier chapters.
2) My maturity, both as a writer and as, a general human, has changed drastically since I started this fic. There are some decisions I made in terms of language and actions at fifteen that I wouldn't make now that I'm twenty. Specifically, it feels really weird to talk about underage people having sex now that I'm so much older than them, but it felt totally normal when I was that age, so much so that I didn't even think to mark it as underage in the warnings when I first wrote this. (Pleeease don't think I'm some creepy perv)
That being said, there's a reason why I keep coming back to this story. I really love the concept and the characters and I've essentially grown up with it. I hope you enjoy. (note added: 1/10/2020)

See the end of the work for more notes.
The wall clock reads fifteen minutes till eleven. The newspapers indicate that today is the first of September.

King’s Cross Station is bustling. The sounds of children laughing and parents yelling create a hum in the air. The smell of coffee and cigarettes waft through the station.

While it feels like any other day, there are signs that it isn’t. Every year on this particular day, groups of peculiar looking people from all around the United Kingdom flock to this particular train station. They drag along trunks filled with clothing and school supplies. They cart around strange animals—owls and rats and toads. They buzz about spells and charms and a place called Hogwarts.

These people tread through the station with caution, weary of others. Their voices, though animated, are incredibly hushed. They are as discreet as they can be.

When they arrive between platforms 9 and 10 they wait until they are certain no one is watching. Then they head straight for the wall that separates the two platforms. Instead of crashing as one would expect, the witches and wizards arrive comfortably at Platform 9 ¾.

Here our fairytales begin:

A wealthy teenager sneaks away and sees a scruffy young pick-pocket.

A red haired vixen with a secret swims through the stream of people.
A conspiring Chinese girl stumbles past a rather annoyed young man.

A young brute crashes into a distracted beauty.

A sunshine blonde searches for her two best friends.

–The first is escaping two stepsisters.

–The second is evading a stepmother.

Two sisters walk together; one holds things in, the other lets things out.

One girl closes her eyes and imagines painting with the colors of the wind.

A fiery haired maiden storms away from her unbearable mother.

An arrogant teen flirts with a girl who ignores him and a girl who adores him.
Chapter 1: And So it Begins...

Chapter Summary

Jasmine meets Aladdin. Ariel reunites with Jasmine, Rapunzel, and Anna. Mulan thinks over her scheme.

Chapter Notes

Beta-ed by the one and only Crystal (niuniujiaojiao), the actual best. (Updated 5/15/18 for grammar/syntax)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And so it begins…

Jasmine sometimes hates her father. Bodyguards. Only he would make her bring along bodyguards to the station. They’re inspecting the train. For what, she can’t imagine. It’s ironic that not a single one notices when she escapes out of eyeshot.
She feels almost normal as she walks away, as she becomes just another face in the crowd. No fancy robes, just a tank top and jeans. She looks like an Arabian girl who’s grown up in England, not the daughter of one of the richest wizards in the world.

Jasmine’s eyes settle on a pick-pocket. He is presumably her age. She can’t make out his face exactly, but that shaggy, long black hair... she’s seen it before.

His victim is “the Devil,” Cruella de Vil. He manages to get a handful of her coins. Immediately, he tosses them to a couple of beggar children, who thank him profusely. Jasmine is impressed. She can tell by the state of his clothing, a little too small, a little too worn, he could have used that money.

“You know the ancient Arabs used to cut off the hands of those who thieved,” She remarks, stepping closer to him, “Even if it was with the best intentions.”

He spins around, “You know, you don’t have to assume I’m Arabic because--”

His eyes are filled with surprise as he sees her face.
He mutters something she cannot make out, leaving the sentence to die unfinished.
“Excuse me?” She asks.
He shakes his head. “You’re not going to rat me out are you?”
She shrugs. “It’s the Devil’s fault for carrying around that much money, and you used it better than she could have.”

His eyebrows shoot up at the nickname, drawing attention to a pair of gorgeous brown eyes.
Jasmine takes him in, internally blushing as she notes that the whole tall dark and handsome thing works on him very well.

“Cruella de Vil, the millionaire,” Jasmine clarifies.

He seems to recognize the name.

“That explains why she only had galleons in her purse.”

Those brown eyes are still fixed on her.

Jasmine nods. It’s silent for a moment.

“So, do you play Robin Hood often?”

“I guess so,” he replies.

Jasmine likes his nonchalant tone, the way he doesn’t seem to regard his behavior as something unusual. She likes how he seems like he has nothing to hide. She wishes she could be like that.

She considers not asking him her next question, but her curiosity beats out her polite nature.

“Do you ever feel guilty?”

He doesn’t hesitate to answer.

“Do you ever feel guilty seeing people starve while you get meals everyday? Does it seem right that some people have more money than they know what to do with while some people can’t even get by?”

The way he says it is so passionate, she does feel guilty.
“Yes, but there’s a reason stealing is wrong,” she says, her voice faltering a little on the last word. Stealing is wrong. She knows this, but something about him is making her reconsider.

“There’s a reason people do ‘wrong’ things.”

In that moment, she wants to take his hand. She wants to ask him to sit with her on the train. She wants to get to know this Robin Hood boy with his piercing brown eyes and his disillusioned attitude.

Before she gets a chance to say anything else, though, the bodyguards rush in.

“Miss Jasmine Agrabah, your father wanted you on the train upon arrival.”

The thief glances between her and the guards. Jasmine can see the shift in his expression. Surprise for sure. He’s recognized her name.

“Princess,” he spits out the title, “you better go.”

He stalks off. A part of her considers running after him, with some kind of an explanation, asking for his name, at least. Before she can even think through the idea, her bodyguards, whose names she never could remember, lead her to the train. Which is probably fortunate. What would she have said to a boy she’s only known for five minutes?

They reach her luggage and her lion cub, Rajah, who is leashed. And not very happy about it, if the scratch marks on Bodyguard 3 are any indication. The guards load her things away.

Jasmine scoops up her pet.

“Come on Rajah, let’s go.”

Rajah nuzzles close to her, and she takes them to the usual compartment, but before she can open the door, it opens from the inside..

“JAZ!” Ariel screams, right in Jasmine’s face before pulling her into a tight hug. “I’ve missed you so much! Tell me all about your summer! I know you wrote me like every week, but still!”

Jasmine hugs her back and doesn’t pull away, “I’ve missed you too, Ariel.”

They sit down on the comfy cushioned seats. “So was your summer really as boring as the letters?”

“Yeah,” Jasmine sighs, “it was a bunch of Disney Society meetings and business dinners.”

“No boys?” Ariel pouts.

“Unless you count Ahmed.” Jasmine rolls her eyes.

“The arrogant asshole you tried to have Rajah attack does not count.” Ariel affirms. “Anyone else?”

The door swings open before she can answer.

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Ariel considers herself quiet when compared to Rapunzel.

“ARIEL! JASMINE! It’s so great to see you guys!” Rapunzel practically yells. She looks as eager as ever. Right behind is her cousin, Anna, who waves.

“Hey Blondie,” Ariel replies, “Great to see you two, too.”

Rapunzel glares.

“Fine,” Ariel waves her hands in defeat, “I’m sorry, Rapunzel.”

Rapunzel smiles again and pulls Jasmine, Anna, and Ariel into a big hug.

“I still don’t understand why only Rider can use the name,” Ariel complains.

An obnoxious voice replies, “Did somebody call for Flynn Rider?”

Ariel rolls her eyes. “No.”

“Good to see you too, Red,” he calls, sitting down on the other side of Rapunzel.

“Why are you here, don’t you know the train ride is girl time?” Ariel asks, annoyed.

“Hey I haven’t seen Blondie here in two whole days.” he replies with a cheeky grin.

Ariel glares at him. “Yes that’s much worse than how me and Jasmine haven’t seen her in three months.”

“I’m glad you understand.”

She scowls at him again.

“Fine, fine, fine,” he sighs, getting up from his seat, “I just wanted to say hello to my girlfriend.”

He turns to Rapunzel and says “hey,” in his cheesy “sexy” voice.

She gives him a quick peck on the cheek. “Goodbye, Flynn.”

“I can’t believe your parents let him stay over at your house all summer,” Jasmine says after the door shut.

“Well he was the one that introduced them.” said Anna.

Ariel shakes her head, “Still what kind of parents let their teenage daughter’s boyfriend stay with them all summer? I mean, it’s like they were asking for a teenage pregnancy.”

Rapunzel turns as red as a tomato. Jasmine gives Ariel a warning look.

Ariel doesn’t stop there though (she never stops), “Speaking of which, spill. How ‘far’ have you gone?”

Rapunzel’s blush deepens even more.

“Oh come on, I’m only fourteen! We haven’t gotten past kissing and we’re both okay with that,” she says definitely.

Ariel snorts, “Oh really? I bet Rider’s suffering from blue balls. He’s been a man whore since he
was fourteen.”

Jasmine elbows Ariel again. Hard.

“Anyway, who wants to play a game of Exploding Snap?”

The group assents. Just as Jasmine has finished dealing the cards, there’s a knock at the door.

Anna answers it.

“Hi, Flynn!” she starts as he, followed by two other guys, walks in, “And hi, Flynn’s friends!”

Ariel opens her mouth to protest, but Flynn interrupts her.

“Look,” he explains holding up a large quantity of sweets from the trolley, “Some seventh years took our compartment. Can we stay?”

“Depends,” she considers, “How many chocolate frogs do you have?”

One of his mates throws her a few packs. The bloke with the weird accent.

Ariel gives an appreciative nod. “Well then, I suppose I’ll make an exception.”

“Thank you very much,” weird accent guy says, sitting down next to Ariel and discreetly taking a glance at her chest. Pervert. Jasmine would say she should wear things that were less revealing if she didn’t want them to stare. She doesn’t understand Ariel’s clothing choices. She doesn’t understand Ariel’s annoyance with clothes.

The same way none of her friends would understand if Ariel explained what she really did over the summer while they visited their parents and traveled.

Jasmine redeals the cards for a tournament. Anna whips Flynn’s whimpering ass. Maldonia, the guy with the accents, makes wisecracks. Jasmine and Aladdin exchange looks. Ariel likes the bigger group well enough.

She is relieved though, when the guys find their a separate carriage for the second part of the journey to Hogwarts.

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Mulan doesn’t notice the other girls come in. She can only think about the plan, which has come far from the fledgling idea it was in the Pre-Victory Game Tea.

The Disney Society, one of the of the most prestigious witches’ societies in Europe, had of course hosted the Tea. The “mothers” were ecstatic at the chance to introduce their “daughters” to “the nice young gentlemen” competing in the games. Mulan had been the only girl, except Merida DunBroch, at the event who would have rather competed in the games than participate in the “Tea for Two.”

“Tea for Two” was supposed to be a way for the kids to mingle. A thirty minute blind date. To Mulan, it seemed just plain awkward. And she had the bad luck of being paired with Gaston Chasseur, who spent the entire time bragging about the team he was putting together for the Games. As the brawniest seventh year (ever) he was chosen to be captain of the team. Technically
he was supposed to organize the team and such, but he was leaving most of the responsibility to his second-in-command, Shang Li. He just had a vague outline of the type of people he wanted.

“So are you going for a half boy half girl team or—?” Mulan remembers trying to ask before immediately being interrupted.

“Ha! There’s no way some bird is getting on my team. No girl has ever won the games. They’d just bring us down with their worries of breaking a nail.”

Mulan had gritted her teeth, and said, “There’s only been four games played.”

“Exactly, and a guy has one every single one of them.”

“That doesn’t mean—”

“That means guys are better than girls.”

She remembered being so angry she couldn’t speak.

Gaston had continued with, “And if guys are better than girls, then why have any girls on the team?”

That was when she couldn’t take it anymore.

“You—you—you!” Mulan had shoved the tablecloth at him. “You sexist pig!”

Boiling tea splashed all over him.

Everyone had stared at Mulan, who blushed a bright red and ran into a bathroom.

Mulan could still see the tired look on her father’s face at that moment, all disappointment and shame as she sped past him. He was her favourite person in the world, the only one she couldn’t stand to disappoint—the reason she went to those stupid Disney Society events anyway, the man who always talked about the importance of honour… and she had let him down.

After sulking about the whole ordeal, Mulan had left the bathroom to whispers and wagging tongues:

“—she was so rash—”

“—with a temper, and ideas like that she’s never going to find a husband—”

”—Poor Zhou, having to live with such a disgraceful daughter—”

”—the man just had the misfortune of having a girl—”

”—imagine if he had a son instead, someone to bring him honour instead of shame him—”

And then she’d struck a plan: if the Fa family needed a son, then they’d get one.

She would join the Victory Games Team as a guy, win, then reveal that it was her all along. All she had to do was brew the potion. The same one Joan of Arc had used so many centuries ago. The same one every witch has used to masquerade as a wizard.

Mulan had squirmed when she first heard of it. She couldn’t imagine being a guy. Thankfully, the spell only made a girl look and sound more masculine.
Reviewing the plan one more time in her head, Mulan decides that it’s practically foolproof. But there are still some things that could go wrong. What if someone realizes Fa Zhou doesn’t have a son? What if someone sees her taking the potion? What if she fails and she doesn’t get to see the smug look come right off of Gaston’s face? What if she doesn’t make her father proud? What if?

Then what? She’d have to return to trying to become a socialite? Ha, Mulan isn’t as pretty as a social darling should be (at least, that’s what she thinks). And even if she was, she has no grace, nor manners. She is intolerably clumsy. She has no sense of style. She can’t cook. She can’t dance. She’s an awful hostess.

No matter how hard she’d tries, she can’t be that girl; she can’t be the person they want her to be.

Hopefully, being Fa Ping will be enough. Hopefully, Ping will be better at being a brave son than Mulan had been at being a dainty daughter.

Mulan looks out the window of the carriage. The time for thoughts is over. The Welcoming Feast will soon begin.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed. I'd appreciate comments/kudos very much. Thank you! :)
Chapter 2: Meeting and Greeting

Chapter Summary

The Beast is not happy. Briar Rose does not like parties. Ella and Henry talk about constellations.

Chapter Notes

Of course thank you to niuniujiaojiao for being the best beta ever. Your support is so appreciated :) (Edited 5/15/18 for grammar plus minor revision)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Meeting and Greeting…

The Beast is not happy. But then again he hasn’t been happy in a very long time. He hasn’t been happy since before Hogwarts. Since before his parents divorced. Since before the incident that made him “the Beast.” This day however, he feels particularly unhappy. The morning had been bad. He’d woken up to cruel sunlight burning his eyes and a throbbing hangover. He had thought his dad had skipped breakfast, the only meal they shared, but the reality was worse: he’d woken up late and would have missed the train altogether had it not been for some (technically illegal)
aparition. It was a terrible morning, a prelude to a likely terrible year at the most annoying place in the world.

Even now, a good hour later, settled somewhat comfortably into his seat, the Beast is not happy. He's restless. Only one year left. One year before it's all permanent.

He tries to focus on the view of the school looming before him, getting closer. He tries to think about the new Quidditch magazine he'd been owled before he'd left. But that just makes him think about the girl, the pretty girl he'd crashed into at the station, who'd been reading a massively thick book rather than the latest edition of Witch Weekly. What kind of story was so good people could tolerate all the words? He thinks back to the glint in her eyes as she turned the page. What kind of novel could make someone so...overjoyed?

She must be a Ravenclaw. Probably sixteen by the looks of her. Not a quidditch player, he would have seen her in one of his Slytherin vs Ravenclaw matches.

She was happy though.

Her smile was genuine.

Her horror was too. Her horror at him. Of course. He's a beast. Who wouldn't be horrified? That doesn’t stop him from snarling at the thought, though.

His emotions escalate from there until he's trashing at the carriage seats. Luckily, they don’t break. He kicks and punches for a while then finally he calms down and forces himself to breathe.

_Control yourself. Don't give into the Beast._

He repeats the command till he's seated in his regular spot at the edge of the furthest Slytherin table.

Somehow, his eyes wander to her. She's sitting alone at a Ravenclaw table, watching the sorting intently.

The Sorting Hat screams “GRYFFINDOR!” And she laughs as Franny Framagucci’s toad jumps off her lap and into the arms of a bewildered Lewis Robinson. He likes her laugh. She looks knowingly at the reassuring glance the newly sorted Fawn Swanson gives Silvermist Waters. The Beast cannot tell what it is about the way they look at each other that makes the Ravenclaw girl smile, but somehow it makes him smile too. He watches her watch an abundance of people get sorted into Hufflepuff. Iridessa Ray. Lilo Pelekai. Rosetta Gardner. There are a few students sorted into other houses too, of course. Vidia Gale, with her fierce glare and anti social vibe fits every Slytherin stereotype. John Darling, a boy with a thoughtful look in his eyes, joins his older sister in Ravenclaw. Lastly, there is Tinkerbell Zimmermann. The hat spends a good ten minutes on her and when it finally chooses “RAVENCLAW,” the little blonde tries to argue that it must be a mistake.

The Ravenclaw beauty looks bothered by this.

Headmaster Mouse begins his speech, but the Beast doesn’t care enough to pay attention. A part of him is still considering the girl's identity. A part of him hopes she’s Belle Dumas. That’s kind of sick, hoping that the girl you’re interested in is the one that’s meant to be your servant for the year, but whatever. The Beast is sick.

She probably isn’t Belle. He’ll find out soon though. Miss Dumas is supposed to meet him in the Slytherin dorm at seven.
There's a knock at his door at precisely six fifty-nine.

He answers.

The Ravenclaw girl is standing outside, shivering. She's beautiful even as the corners of her mouth turn downwards in a frown, even as her large brown eyes glare at him.

“Come in,” he says, hoping his voice sounds normal.

She follows.

“I’ll show you to your room.” He leads her down the corridor, to a door on the right.

Inside is a room, almost as nice as his own bedroom. Father's connections are fortunate at times.

“I hope you like it here,” he adds as she steps inside. “You can go wherever you like, just not--” his voice catches, “the West Room.”

Her eyes light up. “What’s in the West Room?”

His reacts immediately, nearly roaring, “It's forbidden!”

She’s afraid. Of course she is.

He catches control of himself. “Just don’t go in there… please.”

She nods, solemn.

“Is there anything in particular you want me to do?” She finally asks, voice small.

The Beast replies, “Assignments, cleaning.”

Then he adds impulsively, “Eating with me.”

“Okay.”

And then the real question bursts out, “Is my father okay?”

“He’s returning home right now.”

“Okay,” she manages again.

“If there isn’t anything you need right now, I think I’m going to try to sleep.” Her eyes are misty.

It’s too early for bed.

“Of course.”

He closes the door.

He can hear her muffled sobs. He hates himself a little more than usual.

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On the other side of the castle, at Gryffindor Tower, a party is in full swing. A party that Briar
Rose feels out of place in. Briar Rose hates parties. Crowds make her uncomfortable.

But her friends, who she hasn’t seen in months, like parties, so of course she’s there. She glances over at them. Snow has side bangs now and Ella has grown an inch. Otherwise, they’re the same.

Phillip on the other hand has changed a lot.

He’s grown again, 3 inches at least, and he’s cut his hair differently. And, he must have changed his exercise regime because, well, he looks more muscular. He’s always been… err... toned, but now… he is something else entirely.
He’s fit. Hot. Sexy. Attractive. Charming. Alluring. Handsome. Of course, he’s never been ugly, just maybe a bit… awkward, a little gangly, too tall and thin. He’s changed so much.
Phillip interrupts her thoughts, “Hey, having fun?”

“How?” Briar looks up, “Yeah.”
He hands her a drink. “It’s butterbeer, don’t worry.”
She nods and takes it.
They stand there, uncertain of what to say.
“How was your summer?” Briar starts, just as Phillip asks, “How’ve you been?”
She laughs. “I’ve been okay. The Aunts are acting strange though. I think it’s because of my sixteenth birthday coming up. I swear they’re like Americans, all obsessed with how that’s when you’re considered a ‘lady’.”

“—and it didn’t work.” Briar teases.
He sticks out his tongue, and something about the action reminds her that, even with all his ramblings, this bigger, “manlier” guy is still the same Little Philly.

“I google her and nothing came up.”
Briar rolls her eyes. “Some people keep their lives private.”

“I’m sure she does exist,” Briar smiles, but it feels forced for some reason, “And I bet she’s wonderful.”

“I’m supposed to meet her at this huge party her parents are throwing for her. The date’s not set, but would you like to go with me?” he asks.

“I-I’d love to, but I wouldn’t want her to get the wrong idea and get all offended or something.” Briar’s cheeks burn.
He shrugs, putting an end to the whole conversation, and turns to his friend Florian. They start talking about Quidditch matches and hunting trips. Briar fidgets in her seat. Any second now... Florian turns to Snow, and Briar lets out a sigh.

“Snow, I’ve missed you.” He smiles. “I didn’t think it was possible for you to get any more beautiful, but you’ve done it.”
Snow shakes her head and laughs, “Thank you, Florian.”
Florian’s grin widens.

“Listen, I was thinking about you this summer, and I had this amazing idea: why don’t you be my girlfriend?” he asks, as if it wasn’t the thousandth time. Briar considers burying her face in her hands.

Snow grins. “I had an amazing idea too, this summer. What if we all got pen pals from Beauxbaton or Durmstrang? Since they’re coming for the games and all.”
“I like your idea. How do you feel about mine?”
She shrugs, “It doesn’t seem very original, to be honest.”
Florian gives a resigned nod. “Alright, that’s fair. Would you like a drink?”
She asks for a spiked butterbeer and he goes off. As soon as he’s gone, Briar taps Snow’s shoulder.

“Stop torturing the poor boy,” she commands. “Either tell him you’ll be his girlfriend or tell him you just want to be friends. You can’t just leave him wondering like that.”

Snow refuses to meet her eyes. “I can do whatever I want.”

“Do you even fancy him?” Briar asks, for the millionth time.

“Do you fancy Phillip?” Snow counters.
Briar chokes on a sip of butterbeer, “What?”

“Oh please, don’t act like you haven’t been making cow eyes at him the last hour!”

“What?” Briar repeats, still flabbergasted.

“I understand of course, I mean he’s really grown into himself now,” Snow continues. “But do you fancy him, or do you just think he’s fit?”
Briar stares at her friend, wishing she could hide her blush.

“You fancy him!” Snow exclaims triumphantly.
Ella chooses that moment to join us on the sofa, “Briar fancies who?”

“Whom,” Briar corrects, still dazed.

“Phillip,” Snow answers, grinning.

“I can’t say I didn’t see that one coming.” Ella laughs, “I mean they flirt all the time.”

“What?”

“Come on, the witty banter, the teasing, and the playing with each other’s hair...”

Briar frowns. Was that flirting?

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Snow takes one look at Briar’s confused expression and sighs.

“You fancy him!” Snow exclaims triumphantly.

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“Come on, the witty banter, the teasing, and the playing with each other’s hair...”

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Snow takes one look at Briar’s confused expression and sighs.

“Please explain to Briar that she and Phillip flirt all the time,” she says to Florian, who has just arrived with her drink.

He frowns, “I think that, for once, you’re wrong, Snow. That is how Phillip flirts.” Florian points to Phillip a few seats away, joking around with some ditzy Hufflepuff.

Briar doesn’t catch what Snow says in return. Briar feels awkward. And oddly icky about Phillip’s interest in the Hufflepuff girl.

Maybe she does fancy him a little.

Shite.
Anastasia and Drizella. Of course they’re here.
Ella rises quickly from her seat, pushing past people hurriedly to find the nearest balcony. It’s empty except for one person.
“Do you mind if I hide here?” she asks, still a little out of breath.
He turns around, and Ella immediately recognizes him. Henry Charming. Shite.
“No,” he replies politely. Even the sound of his voice gives her chills. Then he frowns, “Wait, who are you hiding from?”

She doesn’t know how she’s managing to speak to him. This is the guy she’s fancied since they’d been potions partners in third year.
“Nobody important, just my stepsisters,” Ella says hastily, walking closer to the railing and turning her face away. Hopefully, at this angle, he won’t be able to see her blush.
“Your stepsisters are Drizella and Anastasia right?” he asks.
She sighs, “Unfortunately.”
“I think you’re lucky. I’ve always wanted siblings.”
Ha. Lucky? Ella had demons watching her every move, ordering her around, and downright bullying her every chance they got. She’d lost her mom before she could walk. Her dad died her second year at Hogwarts. Her stepfamily used her rightful inheritance as blackmail. She was probably the least lucky person in England. But, of course, Henry didn’t know that, and there was no way she’d burden him with the knowledge.
So she simply shrugs, “They’re a bit, err, overprotective, and would not be happy to find me here.”
“So you’re hiding?” he clarifies.
She looks up at the starry sky. “Yeah.”
He frowns, “I still don’t get it. What’ll happen if they find you?”
How ironic. She’d always wanted to talk to him. She never wanted to talk about this topic. He wanted to talk to her about this topic.
He’s still waiting for a reply. She keeps her face turned away.
“They’ll tell my stepmother, who’ll cook up some sort of punishment,” she sighs. “The last time they caught me at a party, she made me get a job at Hogsmeade during the weekends because ‘if you have time to party hard you’ll have time to work hard.’”
He grimaces, “That sucks.”
Not a moment passed before he adds, “But hey, at least you got some extra money.”
She doesn’t want to break his optimism, so she just nods and keeps her mouth shut. He doesn’t need to know that she had to use the money for school supplies anyway.
The next few minutes pass in silence, with Ella keeping her eyes trained on the stars. The stars…

She loved the stars. She and her dad had had this bedtime ritual where they’d name as many of the stars as they could before each making a wish on the North Star, Polaris. Back then, she’d wished for silly things: a new doll, a book or dress, a trip to the city, a better voice, to be able to stop biting her nails.
All of those wishes came true.
Now, none of them did. Maybe she’d used them all up. Maybe that was why her wishes couldn’t stop her dad from marrying Lady Tremaine. Maybe that was why her wishes couldn’t save his life. She can’t think about all of it any longer, so she turns to Henry instead.
His eyes are fixed on the stars, as her’s had been a moment ago, but his eyebrows are furrowed in confusion. Ella is ready to bet the only sickle she owns that he knows nothing about constellations. “You see that constellation over there?” she asks, pointing for him and hoping he doesn’t notice the slight tremble in her arm.
Henry nods, his eyes focusing in on the cluster.
“That’s Andromeda. It’s my favourite.”
He grins. “It’s cool. What’s it supposed to be?”
“It’s the image of a princess who’s chained to a rock.” She takes a breath and explains the myth: how Andromeda’s mother, Cassiopeia, bragged that Andromeda was even prettier than the sea nymphs, so Poseidon, the god of the sea, punished her by ravaging their city with a sea monster, how Andromeda was sacrificed to the monster but Perseus saved her.
“And then they got married and lived happily ever after?” he asks.
“Yeah, but they were of the few Greek couples that did. Most of them died or were punished unfairly. Anyway, this myth is probably my favourite because it gives me hope.”
“Really?”
“Yeah. No matter how bad things look there can be a way out. No matter how small of a chance there is for a happy ending, it’s still possible.”
He smiles (he has a gorgeous smile, those damn dimples!), “It’s good to be optimistic like that.”
Ella wants to point out another constellation, wants to stay here all night, but the two of them are interrupted by Drizella’s triumphant “AH HA!”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! So sorry for the wait! This month has been crazy. Also I’m posting this on the Saturday before a week of AP tests... As always please let me know if you liked this by giving kudos or comments. :)


“And then he said that he thought I was loads better than those Greek damsels in distress,” Ella gushes.

Snow nods, “That’s great! I can’t believe you got through a conversation with him without freaking out, though.”

“I can’t either,” Ella laughs, “Anyway, I gotta go, if Drizevil and Ananasty find me I’m dead.”
“You want me to come with you?”

“No,” Ella yawns, “I’m actually pretty tired. And I think someone’s looking for you.”

Snow turns to meet her gaze. It’s Florian.

Shite, it’s Florian.

.o.O.o.

Snow wakes up with a throbbing temple. She’s never had such an awful hangover before; she’s usually so responsible. Luckily, she’s still in her clothes and in her own bed.

And, wow, Ella is the actual greatest, there’s a hangover potion in her bedside table.

She doesn’t start remembering till after the shower, till after the first cup of coffee, till she catches Florian’s gaze at breakfast.

I love you.

She hopes he doesn’t. Florian Prince cannot love her. She hopes it was all just a dream.

Unfortunately, all these hopes are dashed as soon as she leaves the table.

“Snow, we need to talk.”

“Florian,” she tries for a usual charming smile, “I truly apologize for whatever horrid thing I did last night. I was smashed and you know how I get.”

“I saw the look on your face.” He won’t let her go this time. No easy avoidance. “You know I love you.”

And she jumps a little at those words. Love...

“You don’t.” She recomposes herself.

“But I do!” He really won’t let it go this time. “You’re smart and funny and beautiful and so kind. You’re complicated and simple and composed yet genuine and--”

She shakes her head, “I’ve got to go to History.”

She can’t face the truth. Not right now. Not ever, maybe. Ugh. Ugh. Why can’t he just leave her alone?

“Snow, we’re going to have to talk about this sometime. You can’t just avoid it forever. I know you have feelings for me. You might not love me but--”

Why is he pressing it? Why does he have to do this? She doesn’t want to think about the truth, but she needs to stop him from going on about this. She shut her eyes tightly, trying to make everything go away.

“Florian, I think,” she pauses, “I think I’m aromantic.”
And at that, Snow runs out of the Great Hall.

And Florian follows.

“Snow,” he calls in desperation, “Please tell me you’re not just saying that because you don’t like me.”

She feels small. Like she’s shrunk down to the size of an ant and he’s looking at her with a magnifying glass.

She doesn’t know if she can have this discussion now. With him. Here. Ten minutes before History of Magic.

She looks broken. And it’s wrong. She’s Snow White. Miss Composure. Miss Calm and Collected. She doesn’t look like either right now. And she’s too anxious to even hate it.

“Hey, it’s okay.” His face softens tenfold. In the back of her mind she knows he’s figured it out. There’s no way she’d joke about her sexuality. She’s Snow White. A part of her knows he was just heartbroken. Heartbreak. More like Heart Breaks Self Control. Heart Breaks Conscience.

“I can’t believe I said that,” and The Prince returns, regretting his actions under The Curse, ready to rescue the Damsel in Distress.

He leads her up the stairs. She knows where. The Room of Requirement. For Snow it’s always been the Extra Whiskey Room or the Lost and Found Room. Today it looks like the Hufflepuff common room, warm and inviting.

Florian makes her tea. Three spoons of honey for her. Two spoons of sugar for him.

It’s her favorite. English Breakfast.

“I’d like to apologize,” he starts, “I shouldn’t have told you that. I shouldn’t have pressured you into--”

“No,” she shakes her head, “You don’t have to apologize. I-I’m the one who should be apologizing. I-I’m the one who should be apologizing. I’m supposed to love you back. We’re supposed to get married and have a ton of children and be happy but,” she chokes, “I’m broken.”


He breaks apart a crumpet and hands her half.

She takes it numbly. She’s crying.

“Snow,” he says, “You are valid. You are perfect. There’s nothing wrong with being aromantic.”

She nods. The tears continue to stream.

He hugs her tightly. He is no longer the boy who’s madly in love with her. That boy never came into the room. Right now, he’s her best friend.

Finally, she breathes, “Thank you.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

She hesitates, talks a long sip of her tea then starts, “I guess I’ve always known. Deep down. I
mean. I’m not asexual and I guess I thought that because, well,” What happened to Pure as Snow? “I thought that because I was attracted to you like that, that meant I liked you. I mean, kissing you was great. Just, every time you asked me out, it felt wrong.”

He nods.

“How long have you known?”

Let'sgetthisoverwith, “I don’t think I came to terms with it until you said you loved me. At that moment, I knew I didn’t feel the same way--that I’ve never liked someone or wanted a relationship or anything.”

He strokes her hair and pats her back slowly, “Do you think you want to tell Ella and Briar?”

“They’re both convinced we’re supposed to be a thing.”

“They’ll both be completely supportive when they know,” he reassures her, “You three are all too sweet and kind not to be supportive of each other.”

She hears him but she can’t listen. Not really.

She nods, then yawns. Crying always make you feel so exhausted.

He suggests she take a nap, but she just wants to get to History. A sink appears, and she washes her face. Her eyes look a little puffy, but it’s nothing some basic cosmetic charms won’t fix.

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

From Nakoma Omohundro’s History of Magic Notebook:

So what are you going to tell Kocoum?

Nakoma!

Seriously!

I don’t know...

Come on he’s… attractive

He’s so serious!

Kocoum happy: -_-  

Kocoum mad: -_-  

Kocoum sad: -_-  

He’s not that bad

Please, I’ve seen rocks show more emotion than him

But he’s a huge Quidditch star. I mean he moved here from America to play for Puddlemere. Plus, his dad and your dad are friends…

Don’t get me started on my dad. He keeps shoving him at me.

Your dad keeps shoving who at you?

Kocoum Opechcananough

You mean Kocoum Fall? The youngest chaser on Puddlemere United?! 

YUP! His real last name is Opechcananough. Fall’s just easier to pronounce.
Pocahontas, you’re complaining that your dad is shoving him at you?! I’d shove myself at him…
Ugh go ahead, Esmeralda. He’s not at all my type.
Since when do you have a type? You’ve never had a boyfriend.
Because I’ve never met anyone who’s my type…
And your type is…
Brave
Handsome
Kind
And interesting
Hmmm Kocoum fits all of the criteria
You forgot sense of humor! And Kocoum is not interesting.
I’m sure he has one. He’s probably just serious because it’s part of his image.
If that were the case he wouldn’t have been like that when he came to dinner a few weeks ago...
HE CAME TO YOUR HOUSE?!
A fit world famous Quidditch player comes to dinner the one time I wasn’t there?
Yeah..
Damn it.
WHAT WAS HE LIKE??
I told you. Serious and boring.
You mean mysterious and brooding.
No, I mean serious and boring.
Was he at least nice?
He was cordial.
Cordial? Who the heck uses that word?
He does.
…really? I’ve always thought it was a wonderful word.
Why couldn’t he like you? I mean you clearly like him.
Amen.
Hey what about me?
Please, you have Quasi wrapped around your nimble fingers.
What, no I don’t. He’s my best friend.
Ha, like Phillip and Briar are best friends.
Pshh, he asked her out…
Really?
Yeah I think she said no. That’s why they’re avoiding each other.
Merlin, why would she say no to Phillip? They known each other forever! They’re PERFECT together!

I know!
…stop avoiding talking about you and Quasi. Or, as I have now dubbed you, Quasmerelda.
Eww. That sounds like a disease.
Yeah the looooove sickness.
Ah, no.
Why not?
I don’t see him as anything other than a friend.
Is this because he’s…
NO! I just..I think of him like a brother.
You sure he thinks of you as a sister? I mean he’s always ogling you.
He’s worse than Nakoma with her Kocoum poster.
I do not ogle.

He doesn’t ogle.

*There is ogling in both cases. I’ve seen it with my own eyes.*

So has Kocoum asked you out or something?

Yeah.

You’re going to turn him down, aren’t you?

Yeah. I mean I’m not at all interested in him…but I don’t want to hurt his feelings.

Ooh you have to figure out how to let him down gently. You’ve come to the right gypsy ;).

What do I do?

Just tell him he’s a great guy and all but you want to focus on school.

*That’s actually pretty good…how did you come up with that? I mean it can’t have worked for you.*

>:O How dare you insinuate that I don’t care about school.

...You skip half your classes.

Okay, okay fine.

Anyway, I just tell them that they’re sweet and all but I’m not into committed relationships.

*And they’re okay with that?*

I also redirect them to someone who is/could be interested in them.

Smart.

I know.

Uh guys, Sid’s looking this way.

.o.O.o.

The baby mandrakes don’t fuss as much for Pocahontas. Professor Fauna says she has a calming effect on them. Pocahontas thinks they’re just afraid of Meeko. She loves them though. She loves the greenhouse, loves how fresh everything looks and smells. It has a calming effect on *her*.

Today it feels extra calm. Quieter than usual.

It takes her a good ten minutes to realize that that’s because Meeko isn’t the greenhouse with her. She finds him eating a cracker by a bench in the quad. It’s odd. Hogwarts is big about making sure students keep the quad immaculate, so he couldn't have just found it, and everyone's at dinner, so no one could have just given it to him.

Then there’s a voice, “Okay, little guy, I got you some more crackers.”

Okay, so not everyone is at dinner.

Pocahontas turns around to see a semi-familiar face carrying a package of Saltines. John Smith. A seventh year on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. A chaser?

“I would prefer you not feed him that,” she admits as he approaches Meeko.

“Is he yours?” he asks, bringing the package back up and away from Meeko’s reach. Meeko frowns, as much as a racoon can frown.

“Legally, yes,” she laughs, “but in reality, I’m pretty sure he thinks I’m his pet sometimes.”

“Really?”

“Raccoons aren’t meant to be domesticated. They’re as wild as bloody hell.”

“Then why…?”

She tells him the story she's repeated more times than she can remember. “I found him stuck in my garbage a few years ago. He broke his foot and I mended it for him and when I tried to let him go he kept coming back. Eventually, I convinced my dad to let me talk to an animal healer who got rid of his rabies. She gave me the option of giving him a potion that would render him harmless, but I
couldn’t do it. I didn’t want him to lose what made him a raccoon in the first place. Unfortunately, being wild also makes him prone to destroying things. Which is why he’s not allowed in the dormitories. Professor Porter and Tarzan take care of him. And at home he lives in my backyard.”

She takes a breath. She usually doesn’t say so much at once.
“Wow,” he says.

She notices his eyes focusing on her chest. Normally her clothing choices don’t affect her at school, seeing as everyone wears robes on top and a uniform is “encouraged.” However, Pocahontas is so used to wearing her summer outfits she’d put one on by accident. And it was so warm outside in the sun, so she’d taken off her robes.

All she’s wearing now is a large t-shirt turned low-cut tank top that exposes her navel through some braided cloth and a pair of her favourite ripped short trousers… the ones that are so short they could pass as knickers.

He’s not ogling though. “I love the Kooks.”

John Smith does not seem like the type of bloke to be interested in a Muggle rock band. He seems like the sort of bloke that’d be into Jinx or even the Horcuxes, like every other wizard his age. Pocahontas hadn’t met a single person at Hogwarts that could recognize the lyrics reference on her shirt.

He starts singing, only slightly off key, “I’m always where I need to be”
She finishes, “And I always thought you would end up with me, eventually.”
He grins, “How did you find out about them?”
And that’s all he has to say to begin a conversation that starts at music, before moving over to family, then culture.

They don’t realize how long it’s been until Pocahontas shivers.

John gives her a concerned glance.

“You must be freezing.” He gives her his robe, “Merlin, It’s already dark out.”

“Oh, thank you!” she says, and then, “I guess we should get back.”

He nods, a little disappointed.

“I’ve left my robes in the greenhouse, do you want to go back with me to get them?”

He nods, more than a little pleased.

Pocahontas puts her hands in her… his pockets. Her hands brush against the crackers, and she pulls them out. He must have slipped them in there when they’d been talking on the bench. She returns the package after retrieving her own robes.

Meeko dives for them, misses, and ends up on the ground a few feet away.

“So why can’t I give him crackers?” John asks.
“He’ll just keep following you until you give him more.”
He smiles. “Would you follow after him?”
“I’d have to.”
“Then it’d be worth the trouble.” He winks and tosses the crackers next to Meeko.
And then he walks away.
Well, there goes Pocahontas’s plan to tell Kocum she’s not interested in dating.
DETENTION SLIP:

Student: Merida DunBroch

Date of Infraction: September 2nd, 2028 Time: 11:23 PM

Infraction: Threatening 3 younger students (Hamish, Hubert, and Harris DunBroch)

Punishment: 2 hour detention on Sunday

Signed: Kida Nedakh Thatch

Merida DunBroch should not be in detention.

“You okay, Miss DunBroch?” Tarzan asks. “You look angrier than usual.”
She knits her eyebrows.
“You’d be angry too if you didn’t deserve to be here.” Merida mutters bitterly at the gamekeeper.
He laughs, “I could argue that I don’t deserve to be here. I mean I have to watch a bunch of
grumpy teenagers clean when I could be at home with my wife.”
She rolls her eyes, “Yeah but you get paid to do this sort of stuff.”
He nods, “So why don’t you deserve to be here?”
“I didn’t do anything wrong,” she says immediately.
“That’s what you said last year when you and Aladdin jinxed off all of Maldonia’s hair.” He
remains after raising an eyebrow. That was an amusing prank. It took weeks for Naveen’s hair to
grow back and even longer for him to forgive them.
“It’s not like that this time.” Merida insists, “Professor Thatch, the female one, caught me
‘terrorisin’ my lil’ brothers last night. I mean I wasn’ even being scary and they were breakin’
curfew too!”
Tarzan shakes his head, “You’ve never seen yourself angry. It can be quite terrifying. I can’t blame
Professor Thatch for thinking that you were going to do something worse than just yell at them.”
“Hey!” Merida shouts indignantly, “You’re supposed to be on my side!”
“I’m not supposed to be on anyone’s side,” he counters. “Besides, technically you deserve to be
here for breaking curfew.”
She can’t exactly say anything to that. So she just huffs and waits for the other miscreants to file in,
thinking about all the reasons why Tarzan should be on her side rather than vocalising it.
Merida met Tarzan when she was just an ickle firstie. He was the first authority figure—if you
could call him an authority figure—that she actually liked. He never judged any of the
“delinquents.” He never said a cruel word or acted out of anger. He had a good sense of humour.
He was trustworthy too—she once told him about a prank she didn’t get caught for pulling and he
didn’t rat her out. He was a good sort of bloke, and she liked to think that he really was on her side
for the most part. The old Grandfather clock reads 7:58. Just a couple of minutes before 8 o’clock detention begins.

Aladdin enters first, followed by Flynn. No Naveen though. That sneaky bastard is good at getting out of trouble. Flynn nods hello as he takes a seat to her right. Taking the seat to her left, Al gives her a smile. She meets their eyes in acknowledgement and then turns back to the clock. One more minute. In that last minute the room starts to fill. She recognizes a few faces. Ursula Heks, Peter Pan, and James Hook, to name a few.

When the Grandfather clock strikes eight Tarzan leads them to the trophy room. He hands each student a toothbrush and a bucket of soap. A standard punishment. He looks sympathetic, “You should be done with the room in an hour if you work together.” When they start arguing over who should do what, he merely sighs and sits down with a book at the desk in the back of the room.

Merida feels bad for him. He’s only here because the last time Flynn, Aladdin, and her were punished like this they’d gotten into a water fight. This time, they do not. Everyone just takes a section of the room and starts scrubbing, making quiet conversation as they work.

“So what’re you in for?” The redhead asks Aladdin. It’s a bit early in the year for pranks, and he usually doesn’t participate in any unless it’s a group thing. Mrs. Dunbroch terrifies him about as much as she terrifies Merida. Except it’s not because “Lady Eleanor” can punish him like she can with her daughter. More, as far as Merida can gather, because she actually has expectations of him.

Al looks down sheepishly, “I was caught in the restricted section. You?”
“I ‘threatened’ my brothers.” Merida frowns, “what were you doing in the restricted section?”
“You know how you can’t make someone fall in actual love with you…” She groans, “This isn’t about Janice again is it?”
“It’s Jasmine!” he whisper-shouts, “And, so what if it is.”
“You’ve got to get over her,” the redhead sighs, “I mean you haven’t even said a whole sentence to her yet and you’ve been pining for her for over a year.”
“Actually…” He trails off, grinning.
Merida’s jaw drops in shock, “You didn’t. No way, you actually talked to her?”
He smiles, “Yup.”
“And she wasn’t a bitch?” she asks, now completely serious. There’s a galleon hanging on the answer.

He glares at her, then says dreamily, “Of course not. She actually listened to me and…” then he straightens up, “But, did you know she was Jasmine Agrabah?”
“I didn’t even know her name was Jasmine.” Merida remarks, slightly upset at losing a galleon. “Yeah, well, she is. Her dad’s this billionaire so now it doesn’t even matter if she might be interested in me. She’s never going to be able to go out with me.” He sighs.

After a bit of mind-searching, Merida recognises the name. Jasmine is a part of the Disney Society, this high class mother-daughter thing “Lady Eleanor” is practically president of. She should have made the connection earlier, but she didn’t think it mattered who the girl was.
“Sorry, mate,” she says finally, moving on to another trophy to clean.
“I’ll figure it out,” he replies.

Merida continues to clean, cursing stupid Professor Thatch and her damn mother under her breath.

“What’s wrong, kid?”

Ursula. Her voice alone should have given Merida chills.
Ursula is… terrifying. Big and beefy, with punk makeup and piercings and a foul expression. She looks like she could kill someone. But that's not what makes her scary. She’s scary because she bullies the first to third years. She’s scary because her idea of a joke usually involves someone getting hurt. She’s scary because she's cunning and clever and downright cruel. No wonder she's in Slytherin.

But Merida wants to rant, to anyone. She wants to complain about her mum and her rules. Her stupid expectations. So much that she doesn’t care if she’s giving personal information away to Ursula Heks.

“Ugh, and now my mum is going to murder me!” she finishes the story of how she got detention. Ursula’s green cat eyes light up a bit, “Your mum?”

“She so set on me being this high society lady with a proper boyfriend! She has no respect for what I want to do with my life.” Merida’s mind drowns in the vivid memory of the awful argument they had before she left for Hogwarts, “Nooo, she just wants me to do what I’m supposed to do. To ‘fulfil my destiny.’ Ugh! She doesn’t know anything. She just sees her side of the story.”

Ursula smiles.

“You ever hear of the will-o’-the-wisp?” she asks.

Merida nods. “They lead you to your destiny.”

“I’ve seen them before.” Ursula declares.

Merida’s eyes widen, “Where?”

“In the Forbidden Forest.” She grins. “Technically, they’re everywhere, but you only notice them whenever you need to see them. I bet if you found them, they’d lead you to your destiny.”

“And then I could change it. I could find a way to make my mum more bearable!” Merida exclaims.

“Thank you!” she says... to no one. Ursula is already gone.

Merida doesn't care. Her mind whirrs with ways to sneak into the Forbidden Forest.

Chapter End Notes

As always leave kudos or comments (or both if you're really awesome) if you liked it :)
Chapter 4: That Was Unexpected

Chapter Summary

Tinkerbell is jealous. Tiana gets a new job. Belle talks to the Beast.

Chapter Notes

Hi *grins sheepishly* nice to see you again. Yes, I know it's been forever. I am *so* sorry. I mean it. The thing is when I last posted, I was finishing up junior year and beginning the dreaded process of applying to universities. So basically, any and every time I yearned to work on this fic, my brain was like: well if you're going to write..you should be writing essays. But now I've finished applying (basically), and while I'm still crazy busy I can write fanfic without a guilty conscience :D. I can return to tMoH! That being said, I don't think the next chapter will be ready for another month or so as I have a regional conference next week, my school is hosting a debate tournament in 2 weeks, and I have a college interview in 3 weeks. Anywho, I hope you enjoy this chapter and it's worth the nearly year-long wait.

Shout out to niuniujiaojiao who miraculously hasn't given up on me :) (edited 5/15/18)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

C H A P T E R IV

...That was unexpected
Tinkerbell is bored out of her mind. She hates the Ravenclaw common room. She hates the stupid desks and all the stupid boring people just studying. She even sort of hates her dormitory, even if she does have a comfortable bed and the whole room to herself.

She considers trying to read or taking a nap or writing a letter begging for a house transfer. Before she can actually start anything, though, a weasel Patronus appears. Tink immediately cheers up. It’s Peter Pan!

“Hey Tink, wanna come prank with me and the boys? I’ll show you all around Hogwarts.”

Tinkerbell is from a wizard family like Peter, but it’s still odd to hear a weasel with his voice.

“Of course!” She grins.

“Okay, come to the Ravenclaw common room in a few minutes,” the weasel says, then scampers off.

Tinkerbell stairs at the mirror, considering her appearance. Sure, she’s only eleven. Sure, she saw Peter just a couple of weeks ago. Sure, it’s not likely that she’s changed since then. She sighs, putting her hair into a bun, wondering if it makes her look older, then goes off to the Commons to wait for Peter.

Tink has been in love with him forever. Peter Pan! The master of fun, leader of the Lost Boys, king of Neverland, the boy who will never, ever grow up.

When she finally spots him, making his way through the room, her heart skips a beat. He’s so tall and cuter than ever. 13 suits him quite well. So well, in fact, that she has to suppress a squeal when he turns his head in her direction. But instead of meeting her eyes, he catches someone else’s. A girl’s. And not just any girl, a pretty girl.

Tink can feel the jealousy steaming inside of her.

He’s flirting with her. She’s giggling. Oooh, she can feel her cheeks burning.
After about five minutes of shameless flirting, he finally notices her. “Oh, hey Tink. This is Wendy Moira Angela Darling.”

He says her name all proper-like and Wendy Moira Angela Darling giggles again.

“It’s nice to meet you, Tinkerbell,” she curtsies, “You can just call me Wendy.”

She’s polite, probably from what Mother likes to call “Good People.”

Tink rolls her eyes and mumbles, “Hi.”

“Aw, Tink, be nice.” Peter shakes his head, “Wendy’s important to me.”

Wendy blushes a light pink, looking even prettier than she did a moment ago.

Tink wonders why this is the first time he’s ever mentioned her if she’s so important and gives a sour “sorry.” He doesn’t dwell on her attitude and instead calls to the boys.

“If we’re going to go marauding tonight we have to get some food.” He grins. “Come on, Tink, I’ll show you the kitchen.”

He leads the group, with Tinkerbell and Wendy trailing behind.

“So, Tinkerbell is a lovely name.”

Wendy is what Mother would call “a delightful young lady.”

“Thank you,” Tink says flatly.
The pretty girl tries again, “Peter’s told me so much about you.”

“Oh, really?” Tinkerbell is not delighted in the least, “I haven’t ever heard of you.”

She skips ahead, leaving Wendy by herself. Mother would admonish her for being petty and jealous, but the young blonde doesn’t care. Mother isn’t here at Hogwarts. Propriety means nothing when it comes to pretty girls with soft voices that could steal away her Peter.

“So how long have you known Wendy?” Tink asks when she finally catches up with Peter in the front.

“Since first year. She was my partner in potions. She’s great, isn’t she?” He grins his classic Peter Pan grin.

“Yeah, sure.” She cuts to the chase, “Do you like, like her like her? Like, fancy her?”

“Tiiiiink,” he groans, “I’m not some grownup.”

She sighs in relief. At least as long as she can’t have him, neither can Wendy.

They reach the secret entrance to the kitchen. Thankfully, the corridor is empty. The passage takes almost no time to get through; within a few minutes, they’re all in the massive Hogwarts Kitchen.

“Peter Pan!” A house-elf shrieks in delight, “Happy is glad to see you, he is. Happy has been missing you students.”

“Missed you too, Happy,” Peter smiles.

“What can Happy get for Master Pan?” the elf asks, excitedly, “Perhaps some pie for you and Miss Wendy.”

The house-elf knows “Miss Wendy.” Peter has brought her here before.
“Oh, and who is this?” he asks.

“This is Tink,” Peter pronounces proudly, “She’s my best friend.”

“What would Miss Tink like?” Happy asks.

“How about some ice cream?” He calls to the group.

The Lost Boys cheer.

“You heard them,” Peter tells Happy the elf, “And yeah, some pie for me and Wendy would be nice.”

“Happy will get it immediately.”

It’s awkward sitting next to Peter and Wendy while they’re sharing a piece of apple pie. Tink has ice cream like the rest of the Lost Boys.

Wendy laughs at all of Peter’s jokes, just like Tink. She laughs as Peter gets a bit of milk on his chin and then wipes it away for him, motherly. Yeah, that’s right. She’s like his mother. Except mothers don’t look at their kids’ lips wistfully when they think nobody’s watching.

Tink tries to simmer, but her cheeks betray her, burning red as always. A bright red, not the pretty pink that colors Wendy Darling.

As people begin finishing their bowls, they start to grumble. Then the grumbling turns into a chant. “Adventure!”

As always, Peter takes the lead.

“We’re going to attack the evil Hook,” He announces jumping out of his seat, “He’ll surrender by
Now, James Hook, Tink has heard about. He’s a fifth year now. He tried to bully Peter and the boys into giving up their dormitory, the best one in the dungeon--Neverland. But of course, Peter led them to victory, defeating the older student in a duel. He’s described Hook as the ugliest teenager ever. A real pirate too, like in the storybooks.

“Let’s do this, Peter!” Wendy calls too, standing up. Tinkerbell is surprised by the excitement in her competitor’s voice.

“Come on, Boys!” She leads the way.

Tinkerbell tries to ignore the way Peter’s eyes trail down her figure. It’s easier to ignore than what comes next, how they walk almost glued to each other, how Wendy’s hands brush against his, how he looks at her when she discusses the logistics of the prank--all admiration at her intelligence.

Tinkerbell cannot handle it.

“Sorry, Peter, I promised my friends I’d catch up with them before curfew.”

“Aww, Tink, You’re no fun.” He shakes his head.

She shrugs, “I’m sure your Wendy will keep you company.”

Then she runs off.

The truth is she did tell Silvermist and Fawn and Rosetta and Iridessa that she’d catch up with them as soon as she could. But she knows she wouldn’t have if it had meant having Peter all to herself. She hadn’t seen him in the first week like she’d thought she would and then only briefly the last day, at dinner. She’d been looking forward to something coming up, to actually joining him on an adventure.

Stupid Wendy.
“Now, Tink,” Silvermist rubs soothing circles on her back, “You can’t get mad at Wendy for liking him too.”

“Yeah, I can.” Tink says, “I can and I will. I’ve had dibs for like forever.”

“Well, she doesn’t know that, sugar,” Rosetta replies, “Besides, I thought you said you were going to get over Peter. Since he clearly doesn’t fancy you.”

“Easier said than done,” Tinkerbell sighs and then tries to change the topic. “You’re so lucky you’re all in Hufflepuff together.”

“Aww, Tink,” Fawn detaches her right hand from Silvermist’s to give her a hug, “We miss you too.”


“I still don’t know how I ended up in Ravenclaw,” Tinkerbell says for the millionth time.

“Sugar,” Rosetta rolls her eyes, “You’re an inventor. You’re the smartest witch ever. You’re perfect for Ravenclaw.”

“It’s so cold up there. And boring. All anyone does is study.” Tink complains, “And it’s so lonely.”

“I thought Bubble and Clank were taking you under their wing,” Fawn says.

“Yeah they’re pretty okay,” Tinkerbell affirms, “They’re really sweet. Though I still can’t tell if they’re dating or not.”

“I think they are,” Silvermist says thoughtfully.
“Yep,” Fawn agrees, “Considering how they look at each other, there’s no way he and Clank aren’t romantically involved, just like there’s no way me and Silv are ‘gals being pals’.”

She throws her arms around Silvermist’s waist. Her girlfriend laughs.

“Ugh,” Tink fake-complains, “Stop being so cute.”

She continues, “How did you two get so lucky? Finding your soulmate at eleven.”

Iridessa steps in, “I think soulmate is a bit strong for eleven, Tink.”

“Maybe, but still. Everything is so simple for you,” She plops down on the bed.

“Well I mean,” Fawn sighs, “My dad kicked out my brother when he came out last month. I don’t think things are that simple. But yeah, we are pretty lucky.”

She smiles like a fool.

Tinkerbell remembers back a few months ago when they finally admitted they liked each other. They weren’t like other kids who would say they liked someone, “go out” for a few days, and move on within a week. Fawn and Silvermist really fancied each other.

Tink wishes she could have that with Peter, wishes he’d ask her to Hogsmeade tomorrow, wishes first years could go, wishes Wendy Darling didn’t exist.

At least she has her friends.

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Tiana sort of hates her best friend. At least, she does right now.
Normally, it takes Lottie at least a few months to get all dress happy. But of course this year it’s different. There’s the Victory Games, and Lottie has to “get the perfect dress for the dance so [she] can get that darling Naveen to fall head over heels in looove with [her]” (Lottie La Bouf). And of course, she can’t look for the perfect dress without her best friend.

So that leaves Tiana at Madame Malkin’s Hogsmeade store on a perfectly good Saturday morning, staring blankly at dresses that all look the same while wishing she was in the library revising instead.

"Oh, Tia!" Lottie beckons, "What about this one? Isn't it darling?"

Tiana glances up. The dress looks the same as the last one she'd eagerly modeled. Pink. Sparkly. Revealing but still classy.

"It's nice, Lottie." Tiana responds, trying to hide her boredom.

"I know. But do you like this one or the other one better?" She asks expectantly.

"They look the same," Tiana swallows, "quality."

"Miss La Bouf," The saleswoman simpers, "I have some more opulent options in this way."

Lottie grins and follows the woman to the stockroom where they hold the more expensive dresses. Tiana decides to explore. When Charlotte La Bouf enters a room full of fancy dresses, it’s foolish to think she’ll be out before at least an hour.

The store is moderately busy, like all the stores in the village nowadays. Hogsmeade has become more and more residential, much larger, and certainly more frequented.

Tiana wanders through the department, looking at robes and hats and jumpers and pants. Though Tiana isn’t really one for fashion, even she can see how much wizard clothing has changed through the years. Gone is the ubiquity of traditional robes with matching pointy hats, now rejected by most in favor of Muggle-style pants and blouses. Perhaps that’s what she’ll write about for that essay on the influence of Muggle culture on the magical community. Yes, clothing choice has changed greatly since the social acceptance of Muggles and Muggleborns and—
"What are you doing looking at these ties?" An annoying voice interrupts her brainstorming. That accent could only belong to one person. Naveen Maldonia.

"Why does it matter if I'm looking at ties?" she asks, not even bothering to look up.

"Well, first of all, you're a girl, and girls are not required to wear ties. Second of all, you can't afford to spend ten galleons on a tie. And third, you should be at work, no?"

"No." She grits her teeth. She will not let him get a rise out of her. That's what he wants.

"But you work at the Three Broomsticks."

"Worked. Past tense."

"Ah, you finally lightened up and quit waiting."

Tiana scoffs, "Try again. I got a better-paying job at Madame Puddifoots."

"Then why aren't you there?"

"I don't start till next week. Why do you care?"

"It's just odd to see you without an apron on, or school clothing."

Tiana rolls her eyes, "Well, there's nothing unusual about you. Still look and sound like an arse."

"Ah, Tiana the Waitress, charming as always."
She rolls her eyes again.

“What do you want Naveen?” It’s not like he approaches her often, and he hasn’t really made a point yet…

“Ah well, this may be hard for you to believe, but my parents seem to think I am… *irresponsible* .”


“I know!” He actually is surprised, “So strange.”

Then he remembers, “Ah, anyway they have decided to uh… ‘cut me off,’ so to speak. Unless I prove to them I’m serious about school and my future.”

She stares at him. Is he asking what she thinks he’s asking…?

“So, I was wondering if you’d be so kind as to tutor me since you’re good with all those nerdy, boring things.”

She cannot *believe* he’d think---

“My parents have promised to pay generously for a tutor if I actually get one.”

Aaaaaaand there it is. She can’t say no.

She clenches her jaw, “Fine. But you have to arrive on time, try, and be polite.”

“Oh Tiana, I’m offended you’d assume otherwise.” He oozes charm.

She’s resistant to it, “Good. I’ll see you tomorrow in the Library, 8 AM *sharp* .”
“I look forward to it.” He winks and saunters off.

Arsehole. She wants to flip him off, tell him to go to hell, and scream that he fucking deserves to get disinherited. He’s a self-righteous tosser that gets away with everything because he’s good-looking and from a wealthy, well-respected family. He’s never worked a day in his life and he constantly makes fun of her for her tenacity.

(Unfortunately, she can’t do any of that. She needs the money. She needs it for her restaurant--their restaurant. Her and her Daddy’s. He’d always dreamed of opening his own, with a world famous gumbo--good food to bring people together. And of course she wanted--wants it too. And now it’s her job to make that dream a reality, now that he’s gone.)

Why does Lottie like him? She’s sweet and well-intentioned. He’s an arsehole with all the most debaucherous intentions. Then again, he’s the closest Lottie will ever get to a prince. And Lottie’s always dreamed of being a princess.

"Hey Tia, what do you think of this?" The princess-to-be enters the room, interrupting her thoughts.

She looks stunning in the dress, like that old actress Marilyn Monroe.

“It’s perfect.” Tiana gives her a small smile.

“Now SHOES! C’mon Tia.”

*Oh dear.*

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

*Not again.*

“Why don’t you at least *try* having breakfast with him?” Cogsworth grumbles to the wall he’s staring at.
Belle puts on her blouse then turns to the clock and the caldera.
“As I’ve been saying for the last 2 weeks, I might have to do his homework, but I do not have to spend time with him.” She replies.

“Technically,” Lumiere pipes up, “You should be doing whatever he says.”

“It’s not like I made an unbreakable vow,” Belle insists, “And besides, I’m doing all of his assignments.”

Turning to the mirror, she straightens up a bit more, “What time is it, Cogsworth?”

“Precisely six-o-five.” He replies after glancing down at his stomach.

“Brilliant.”

Belle has almost gotten used to her routine of eating breakfast with the Beast’s enchanted household objects as they plead for her to give him a chance and taking his completed assignments to his room. Almost.

When she reaches the dungeon common room, it’s empty. All the other Slytherins must still be asleep. Belle feels like she shouldn’t be here. Sure, Slytherin has become so much more accepting since the war, from what they’d been told anyway, but the brunette is still a Muggleborn. She can feel the disapproval of Salazar Slytherin—literally, as his portrait glares at her.

Belle can’t just sit here and wait for the Beast. Normally, she gives him his papers before going to class, but it’s Saturday and who knows how long it’ll take him to wake up.

She makes her way to his dormitory. He has special permission to have his own. Belle does not know why, or even how, but he does. It’s one of the new ones too. The kind that’s split into four or five different bedrooms connected by bathrooms and a sitting area, rather than one giant room adjacent to a lavatory.

“Would you like a tour?” asks Lumiere.

She nods, suddenly intrigued. How does the Beast live? What are the rooms like down here?

Cogsworth, naturally, leads the tour, emphasising the architecture and décor and discussing just how “Master” utilizes each room.

She put his papers down in his “study,” which Belle gathers is where he reads Quidditch magazines and avoids people. No, actually, scratch that. He avoids people in every room.

They are approaching the end of the tour when she starts toward the last door.

“No no no, you don’t want to go there!” shouts Cogsworth.

Belle arches her eyebrows, “Why not? What’s up there?”

“Nothing, absolutely nothing at all!” Cogsworth grins shakily, “Nothing at all interesting in the West Room!”

Her eyes light up. His eyes widen in horror.

“The West Room,” she says, “You mean the one the Beast told me not to go in. I wonder what he’s hiding in there.”

“Nothing,” laughs Lumiere, “The Master is not hiding anything.”

“Then… there shouldn’t be anything wrong with me checking it out, right?” Belle steps closer to the door.
“NO!” They both shriek.

“Wouldn’t you, uh, want to make a visit to the library instead?” Lumiere pipes, panicked.

“The library?” Belle feigns excitement, “Yes, let’s go!”

She walks away from the door. The clock and candelabra laugh and skip off happily in the direction of the library, oblivious to the fact that she isn’t following.

She opens the door as soon as they are out of sight.

The room is a mess. Tables and chairs strewn all over. Furniture broken. Torn curtains. Torn tapestries. Everything coated with spider webs. She walks through quickly, looking at everything, until a glow catches her eyes.

In the centre of the room, encased in glass, is a single red rose surrounded by a mysterious pink aura.

Curiosity courses through her veins. Belle slowly removes the glass covering.

When she reaches out to touch it though, she’s blocked.

The Beast slams the cover back on and clutches the rose close to his heart before she can even process that he’s standing right in front of her.

The Beast growls, “Why did you come here?! I warned you not to come here!”

“I-I’m sorry,” Belle tries to breathe, “I didn’t mean any harm.”

“DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU COULD HAVE DONE?” He thrashes at the thing closest to him, a dresser of sorts, and smashes it to pieces.

She backs up as much as she can, terrified.

“GET OUT!” He screams, thrashing again, “GET OUT!”

Belle runs as fast as she possibly can. Runs out of the dungeon. Runs out of the castle. Runs into the woods. Runs into the Forbidden Forest.

She runs and runs until she can’t anymore. Until there’s something in her way.

Wolves.

She didn’t know the forest even had them.

Wolves, eight or nine of them, staring at her with hungry yellow eyes.

She shrieks and runs again. Runs for her life, faster than she ever had before.

She feels them right at her heels. She tries to go up a tree and fails.

They gnaw at her robes. She can almost feel their hot breath on the backs of her legs. She knows if she turns around now, she will be met with snapping teeth and vicious claws. She doesn’t believe in God, but in that moment she says a prayer.

And then there he is, fighting the whole pack. He’s basically on all fours, jumping at them, throwing punch after punch, growling, his teeth bared. He fights like a Beast.

*I didn’t know people could do that.*

He struggles.

*That’s because they can’t.*

She shuts her eyes, only to hear an array of incantations she’d never heard before. Bright light, colors burst beneath her eyelids. She opens her eyes when the fighting noises stop.

The wolves are gone, but the Beast is on the ground, bleeding.

For the first time in the last half hour, Belle remembers that, for Merlin’s sake, she’s a wand equipped *witch*.

She casts a lightening charm and carries him back to the castle through a secret passage that leads to the dungeons.

She knows better than to take him to Master Sweet. The burly doctor would surely tell Headmaster Mouse about his injuries and they’d both be expelled. The Forbidden Forest has its name for a reason.

She walks him back to his sitting room and lays him down on the couch.

Mrs. Potts, the enchanted teapot (yes, even his *teapot* is enchanted), pours her some hot water to clean his wounds with.

He regains consciousness, a good sign.

Unfortunately, it also makes her task much harder. When Belle attempts to bring the washcloth to his wound, he lashes out, roaring, “That hurts!”

*Merlin,* she’s glad the walls are soundproof.

“If you’d hold still, it wouldn't hurt as much.”

“Well, if *you* hadn't run away, this wouldn't have happened!”

“Well, if *you* hadn't scared me, I wouldn't have run away.”

“Well, *you* shouldn't have been in the West Room!”

“Well, *you* should learn to control your temper!” Belle retorts, her voice rising to a yell.

He’s speechless

“Now, hold still. This may sting a little,” his nurse commands.

He grunts but grits his teeth, complying for once.

She cleans the gash, carefully, not daring to cast a mending charm.

When she finishes, Belle softens. “By the way, thank you, for saving my life.”

His eyes widen with surprise. “You’re welcome.”
“You should rest,” she says, getting up from his side. “I finished the papers you have due on Monday, so don’t worry about them.”

Not that he would have.

“I’ll bring you lunch later,” she decides, still whispering.

He nods. “Thank you.”

Belle realizes something, watching him there, grimacing as he tosses and turns on the couch: he’s trying.

He’s been trying this whole time, probably. When he demanded she ate with him, he’d been mean and rude about it, and that’s all she’d seen. She didn’t care why he wanted to eat with her so much; she just knew he didn’t deserve it. Now that she thinks about it, the answer is clear: he’s lonely.

He has anger management problems. He acts beastly. But when it came down to it, he rescued her. He put her life before his.

When someone does that for you, you have to forgive them at least a little for their faults.

The least she can give him is a chance.

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She brings him soup for lunch. His arm is fully healed.

“I tried a healing spell,” he explains.

She doesn’t believe him, but she goes along with it, scolding him for taking such a risk.

They talk.

She still hasn’t fully forgiven him. He threatened her. He’d been nothing but cruel to her until the events of the forest. But he’d saved her life.

They talk about Quidditch. They talk about the weather. They talk about themselves—no, Belle talks about herself. (They don’t talk about the mysterious rose. A part of her bursts with questions. Why did he care so much? What’s so important about it? Why was it glowing? But she knows better than to bring it up.) The whole thing is odd for multiple reasons. Belle loathes sports and subsequently talking about them. She’s usually awkward when commenting on the weather. And she rarely ever talks about herself. And, most surprisingly, he’s actually a good conversationalist.

.o.*O*.o.

Dear Diary,

I made the mistake of checking out the Beast’s “West Room.” He wasn’t pleased when he saw me near his glowing rose. As in he scared me shi.$$ess. I ran as fast as I could out of the castle, and, I kid you not, right into a pack of wolves.
He saved me from the wolves. It was... ridiculous. Impossible, honestly.

I feel weird. I still sort of hate him, for tormenting my father. For tormenting me. But I sort of respect him, too.

I have all these pieces to a puzzle I can’t figure out. Enchanted household objects, a glowing rose, a guy that heals fast. I know it should be obvious, but it’s not clicking. Maybe I just need to sleep on it.

Till next time,

Belle Dumas

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave kudos/comments/bookmark this if you liked it and remember to subscribe to get a notification when I update. Knowing you guys are looking forward to the next installment inspires me to write so *wink wink* giving kudos, commenting, bookmarking and subscribing is just helping *you* out too. If all goes to plan next chapter will be from the points of view of Mulan, Aladdin, and Ariel. Also, if anyone is interested, I've started a playlist for this fic on Spotify. Comment and I'll post a link. (It's currently private.)
Chapter 5: Down to Business

Chapter Summary

Mulan tries out for the team. Aladdin finds a lamp. Ariel makes a deal.

Chapter Notes

Okay so this was supposed to come out last night but I was so tired I fell asleep. To be honest I feel like it should have come out sooner but life is still busy after apps are over with all my commitments and 4-5 hrs of homework. But enough excuses: I had a lot of fun writing these characters and I hope you have fun reading about them :) As always please leave a comment/kudo and consider bookmarking/subscribing. Thank you so much to those of you that have. I really appreciate your support ♡ (Edited 5/15/18, lots of repeated sentences, whoops)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
“Okay Mushu,” Mulan adjusts her hair in the mirror, “What do you think?”

The baby dragon, which honestly looks more like an Asian lizard, stares back at her in reply.

“I know, pretty convincing,” She grins. She’s glad she bought Mushu on an impulse that day in the market. It’s nice to have someone she can confide in and fun to think of this as a quest for honour they’re both undertaking.

She looks back to the mirror, “Okay, Mulan, you can do this.”

I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.

Except, she knows she kind of can’t. She’s kind of really fucked. She can’t even figure out how guys really walk, much less how they talk. Ugh, and practice means having to deal with their hygiene, which, based on her observations, stinks. Literally. Yep, that’s about all she knows about guys: they stink.

Okay, it’s not like she has guy friends. Well, honestly, Mulan doesn’t have any friends, not really. For once, that’s a good thing. No one to explain herself too. No one wondering about where she was this beautiful Saturday morning. Easy.

And probably the only easy part of the whole ordeal. She spent months trying, and failing, to procure the potion she needed and was eventually reduced to making it from scratch. (It took a lot of research to find out where to buy raw maca root in England.) Then at school, she spent two weeks freaking over the guy outfits she bought and the team application and the dueling spells and charms she'd need to know for tryouts.

It was exhausting. It is exhausting. So far, mostly in terms of anxiety, but the tasks ahead are going to wear her out too.

Mulan reaches the Quidditch pitch at a good time. About twenty guys are already there, but around ten more still haven’t shown up yet. Not too early not too late.

She marches in, taking large steps and puffing up her chest. It takes a few minutes before she realizes how ridiculous she looks. She turns it down a few notches and glances around nervously.

Silly me, no one even gave me a weird glance.

They’re all too engrossed in their own activities to notice the newest arrival. Nose picking and messing around take precedence over anything else.

One bloke is going on about this tattoo he had enchanted to protect him. It must have been a bad enchantment because the guy next to him easily manages to suckerpunch his arm. He, the suckerpuncher, and his friends double over with laughter at the naivety of the tattooed sap.

So this is what blokes do, make fun of each other, punch each other, and pick their noses in public like it isn’t disgusting.

Okay Mulan, you should say something. This will be easier if you practice.

She punches the guy on the arm, but before she can say anything, he spins around.

“You’ve messed with the wrong person,” he growls, stepping forward threateningly. “I’m going to hurt you so badly your ancestors will roll in their graves with pain.” She can feel herself twitching,
because she wants so badly to tell him that makes no fucking sense, and come on, that was a friendly bro punch.

She can feel herself twitching, because she wants so badly to tell him that makes no fucking sense, and come on, that was a friendly bro punch.

“I-I’m sorry,” she stammers instead.

“What, now you think I’m so weak that your pathetic punch actually hurt me?” he looks insulted. Oh dear, it seems like she took a shovel and just dug herself deeper into the hole she’s stuck in.

“No.” She tries to climb out of the metaphorical hole.

“So now you’re trying to correct me.” And ends up falling so deep within the soil she must have reached figurative China.

Thankfully, someone helps her out of the abyss. “Yao,” The biggest member of the trio starts, in a very calm voice, “Relax. Come and meditate with me.”

Meditation? Mulan has only seen the eldest of members of my family actually meditate and she can’t fathom the thought of this aggressive-aggressive adolescent agreeing to partake in the activity. To her surprise, however, not only does Yao go along with it, but it works.

He. Calms. Down. “Thanks, Chien-Po,” he gets up and faces her. “You are not worth my time.”

She sighs in relief.

Unfortunately, right then, Mushu decides to escape from her pocket and bite her.

FUCK. SHIT. OWWW.

Dragon bites are painful. Even when they come from baby miniature dragons.

Mulan crashes into Yao, which he, of course, takes as “fight me,” and before she knows it, the whole thing escalates into a full-fledged fight.

And naturally, when Shang and Gaston ask who started the battle, all fingers point at Mulan. She apologizes best she can.

She apologizes best she can. “What’s your name?” Shang asks.

“What’s your name?” Shang asks.

*He’s ready to put me on the reject list.* She hesitates before replying, “I’m Ping. Ping Fa.”

This is the name she wrote carefully on her application. She thought that being a Fa might help her get on the team. Her only worry was that they’d realize when her supposed uncle didn’t recognize “him” during the actual competition and then they’d do some digging and find out that Ping Fa doesn’t attend Hogwarts and that Ping Fa doesn’t actually exist and then they’d disqualify her from the competition. And then expel her from Hogwarts for lying, leaving her to spend the rest of her days begging in the streets of Knockturn Alley. Ha ha. Nothing big though.

As she suspects, Shang raises an eyebrow, “Fa as in THE Zhou Fa?”

“He’s my uncle,” she replies.

“I didn’t know he had a student here at Hogwarts,” Gaston said.

She’s mildly offended. Come on, she poured tea all over the wanker and he still doesn’t remember
she exists.

“He doesn’t talk about his family, often.” She manages to give a candid reply.

“I can see why. Someone is a bit clumsy.” Gaston laughs.

*Yeah, the same clumsiness you witnessed in MULAN.*

Shang’s less amused, “For your sake, I hope you can use a wand better than your fists.”

Mulan burns red. She hopes so too.

Tryouts start when Jim Hawkins finally shows up, a few minutes after that awkward exchange.

No one knows what’ll happen at this year’s games. Sure there are records of the past tournaments, but they’re all so different. The first round of the first games was what could only be summarized as a really dangerous magical obstacle course. The first round of the second games was what Mulan guesses you’d call group dueling. The first round of the third games was something that looked a lot like Quidditch but with a third team competing and only one ball. In other words, the only constants through the years are danger (*technically*, not life-threatening danger) and the need for decently advanced knowledge of magic.

Thus, tryouts are kind of odd. Shang tests the candidates on flying ability, magical ability, and athletic ability.

Mulan may not be on the Quidditch team, like half the other applicants, but she’s not a bad flyer. Shang makes them do some Quidditch exercises, and she feels confident they went well.

Mulan may not be a genius, but when you’re a witch who doesn’t have friends and are trying to please your parents, you learn a lot of magic and you learn it well. They do a few monitored duels and she wins all the ones she competes in, so that’s good, too.

And Mulan may not be an athlete, but...well. No buts there. Her biggest weakness is her athletic ability. For the final assessment, Shang makes them run a non-magical obstacle course and she cannot get through it. She struggles with the rockwall and the hurdles, and she most certainly cannot get up that pole.

She’s especially pathetic if you compare her performance to Shang’s. He does the entire course in five minutes flat (and looks great doing it. Mulan thanks whatever Supreme Being for making today hot. Shang shirtless is a glorious sight. She knows she shouldn’t relish in his appearance, but she can’t help herself. He has an *eight* pack for Merlin’s sake! And those biceps—no wonder he can carry those impossibly heavy weights that even Yao couldn’t lift.)

At the end, Shang and Gaston confer. There’s arguing, but eventually, they come to an agreement of sorts.


Like the others chosen, she’s ecstatic. That is until Shang tells them that because of what he calls “blatant nepotism” (it takes her a while to remember what that means and she can see a few of the guys with glazed-over expressions on their faces), he pointedly glares at Gaston, who gives a cursory shrug and continues flexing his muscles, they’ll have to work extra hard to be ready for the games.
She isn’t sure what he means by “extra hard” until he explains “boot camp.” Get up at the crack of dawn, work out till breakfast, then come back right after dinner for Review Lessons on magic until nine. And that was only the weekdays! The weekends were literally, dawn to dusk, training.

She can almost see the corny film montage play out in her head (and even hear the cheesy song that goes along with it).
Come in as boys (or in her case, girls), come out as men.
At least it’s a plan.

“Okay then, you know the plan right?”

Aladdin nods, “Yeah, Jafar, I go past that corridor three times and go to the door that comes up. Wish for the greatest treasure. Grab the lamp, give it to you.”

“Exactly. And you aren’t allowed to take anything else in the room.” Jafar contains the disdain in his voice with artificial charm.

“And in exchange, you’ll help me with Jasmine.” Al adds.

“Ah, of course. Now go!” The seventh year commands with a grin.

Rolling his eyes a bit, Al heads off.
From his position on Aladdin’s shoulder, Abu shakes his little monkey head at him. He doesn’t want to do this. Jafar always makes him squirm. He climbs into his Al’s vest.

Aladdin can’t deny that Jafar’s a creep. He’s this shady Slytherin guy who always has this coy scheming expression on his face, so yeah, he isn’t really the trustworthy type. But, he is Al’s best chance of being accepted by his dream girl. Jafar’s father is a close business partner of Jasmine’s, and he knows her personally. He can probably help Al get her as his date to the Welcoming Dance.
He walks through the corridor:

Once: I want the greatest treasure.
I just want Jafar to help me.
Twice: I want the greatest treasure.
I wonder what the greatest treasure is.
Three times: I want the greatest treasure.
Is anything even going to come up?

To Al’s surprise, double doors appear. He opens one slowly. What he sees inside makes him gasp. It’s glistening, glimmering, glittering -- Gold! He’s never seen so much gold in one place: coins, jewelry, trinkets, anything and everything you could imagine, all there, and all made of solid gold, no less.
“Just a handful of this stuff would make me richer than the Queen of England!”

Abu climbs out of his vest. He didn’t think monkeys could be so entranced with gold, but Abu all but dashes for the closest pile.
Al calls after him, “Abu! Don’t touch anything!”
Abu frowns but complies, dropping all the things he swiped. Fuck what Merida says, he completely understands Aladdin.

He follows Al and they traverse the room together. There’s an insane amount of stuff. How are we ever going to find the lamp?
Al scours the room. Abu tugs at his pants every few minutes.
Whenever he turns around, though, there’s nothing there.
After about the fourth time, Al sighs as he turns, “Abu, are you crazy? There’s nothing—”

Except there is. A carpet. Walking.

“A magic carpet! C’mon. C’mon out. I’m not gonna hurt you.” Al coaxes. He can’t believe this. He’s never actually seen a magic carpet, let alone an enchanted one.
Abu glares at it.

“Be nice Abu,” Aladdin gives him a patronizing look then he turns to the carpet, “Hey little guy, do you think you could help us find the… uhm… lamp?”

The carpet jumps up like he knows exactly what Al’s talking about, which is weird, because the lamp the carpet takes him to doesn’t seem like THE Lamp. It’s small and old and dirty and easily the least expensive thing in the whole room. Why does Jafar even want this?
Before he wonders too much, though, the room starts to spin. Al turns to see that Abu touching a huge gold monkey statue.

“Don’t touch anything.” Jafar’s voice echoes in Al’s ears. Except, he must have missed the whole “if you do, the room is going to crumble because it’s bloody booby trapped” part.

Shit.

Al dashes back toward the entrance as the room rumbles.

“Give me the lamp!” Jafar yells from the door.

Impulsively, Aladdin throws it at him.

“Now help me!” he screams. He can feel himself getting sucked back into the room by what seems to be a tornado of gold.

Jafar grins, and Al knows he made a mistake trusting the bloke, “Oh, I will.”

He pushes Aladdin off the ledge he’s clinging to and shuts the door as his pawn falls own with a thud. The room stops spinning and shaking.

He wants to scream. He claws at the door to no avail. “That two-faced bastard! Why did I trust him?! Now he has what he wants and we’re stuck here.”

Abu shakes his head.

“What you know a way out of here?”

He pulls something out of the little monkey vest Al got him.

The lamp!

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why Abu is his partner in crime!
He looks at The Lamp. It honestly feels more like plastic than gold in his hands. A dusty, old, plastic lamp. There’s nothing notable on its surface, except, there’s something, something written on the side. An inscription beneath the dust? He can’t make it out.

He rubs the lamp with his hand to clean it up a bit so he can read whatever it is.

Smoke erupts out of the lamp as soon as he does. Lots of it, followed by shaking and rumbling.

Shit. Another bloody booby trap.

He clings onto it as it practically jumps up and down.

And then through the smoke, someone appears.

At first, he thinks it’s a ghost. A blue ghost. But it can’t be a ghost. He’s too opaque.

“AHHH! Ten thousand years will really give you a crick in the neck!” The non-ghost exclaims. Then he rips off his head, seamlessly, and throws it in the air, letting it spin around till it reattaches to his neck.

“Pleasure to meet you” he bows ceremoniously, “Mr. ah…What’s your name?”

Aladdin stutters, “Uh. Al- Aladdin.”

“Nice name! You go by Al or din or laddin?”

“My friends sometimes call me Al.” He answers without thinking, still in awe.

“Okay great, Al, really is nice to meet you. Say, you’re a lot younger than my old master.” He notes, “Lot smaller too, he was a bit,” he motions to his stomach, which he enlarges to make this point,

“You know.”


“Oh forgive me for not introducing myself.” The genie grins.

“I am the impressive, long contained, and loved by all: Genie! Of! The Lamp!” He takes a bow, as though accepting applause, “Thank you, thank you, thank youuuuuuuuuuuuu!”

Genies. Al learned about genies in History of Magic, where they discussed their impact on Wizardkind and their lack of civil rights movement. They’re found predominately in the Middle East. (Al had never heard of one at Hogwarts or for that matter in all of England.) The subjects of genies also came up in DADA. Professor Merriweather stressed how important it was to be careful with genies if they were ever to encounter them. Genies could be immensely helpful, yes. But more often than not, they were bitter about being locked up and rather cruel. Their magic could be twisted and conniving. They’d grant your million galleon wish by taking from another vault at Gringnotts, surely getting you in loads of trouble with the Aurors. They’d take your wish for fame and make you infamous. They twisted your words and consequently your wishes. In fact, in Muggle Studies, Headmistress Mouse mentioned their presence in Muggle literature, often shown as neutral or evil characters, teaching people to be thankful for what they had.

Al couldn’t help feeling apprehensive.
“Now to break it down for you, in case you don’t know, you get three wishes. Three. That’s it. Uno. Dos. Tres. No substitutions, exchanges or refunds.”

Al nods, “Any three wishes?”

“Ahh, almost. There are a few provisos, a couple of quid pro quos.” The Genie answers.

“Like?”

“Ahh, rule number one: I can’t kill anybody. So don’t ask. Rule two: I can’t make anyone fall in love with anyone else. Rule three: I can’t bring people back from the dead. It’s not a pretty picture, I don’t like doing it! Other than that, you got it!”

His explanation is a show and he is the star, acting out every sentence.

Al takes a moment to think. Genies are tricky, sure, but he could be trickier.

“Ahh, provisos? You mean limitations? On wishes?”

He looks back at Abu and whispers loudly, “Some all-powerful genie--can’t even bring people back from the dead. I don’t know, Abu--he probably can’t even get us out of this room. Looks like we’re gonna have to find a way out of here—”

He stops them immediately. “Excuse me? Are you lookin’ at me? Did you rub my lamp? Did you wake me up, did you bring me here? And all of a sudden, you’re walkin’ out on me?” He was just getting angrier and angrier, “I don’t think so, not right now. You’re gettin’ your wishes, so siddown!” He motions at the carpet, who unfolds for them.

Then he takes the form of a stewardess, with lots of arms pointing out the exits, “In case of emergency, the exits are here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, anywhere! Keep your hands and arms inside the carpet. Weeeerrrrrreeee...outta here!”

He snaps his fingers and they’re at the edge of the forbidden forest, overlooking the lake.

Still imitating a stewardess, The Genie thanks them for flying with him and helps them out of the carpet.

“How’s that for all powerful?” he asks, all smug.

“I’m so sorry I doubted you,” Aladdin smirks, “Now about those three wishes—“

“Excuse me. You’re down one. You only have two wishes left.” The blue man says, certain, “You wanted to get out of the room.”

“Yeah, wanted, but I never did say ‘I wish,’ now did I?” Al asks, grinning.

The Genie gasps with begrudging respect, “Okay kid, I’ll let that slide, but no more freebies okay?”

The Gryffindor nods and starts pacing, “Hmm... three wishes. What do I wish for?” He knows what he wants.

“What would you wish for?”

Genie looks surprised, “No one has ever asked me that.” He softens and a dreamlike look comes
over him.

“I’d wish for freedom, of course.” He answers, looking longingly into the distance.

Of course. Genies are all trapped doing the bidding of their masters for millennia.

Genie sighs, looking forlornly at his gaseous tail, “But of course, I know that’ll never happen. I need to get my head out of the clouds. I can only be freed if my master wishes for my freedom.”

Aladdin can empathize with feeling trapped. Sure he’s not stuck inside a lamp, but he is imprisoned by his socioeconomic status.

“You know what, I’ll wish for your freedom.” He’s serious, “I mean, I’m a wizard, two wishes is more than enough.”

Genie lights up, “Ya mean it, Al?”

“Of course. Besides, there’s only one thing I really want.“There’s this girl—“Genie cuts him off with the sound of a buzzer, “Ehh! Remember the rules, kids, I can’t make anyone fall in love.”

Aladdin sighs, “I know but she’s smart and fun and…”

“Pretty?” he asks.

Oh, was she ever.

“Beautiful. She’s got these eyes that just…and this hair, wow…and her smile.” He imagines her huge upturned cat eyes, her silky long hair, her perfect teeth and tempting lips.

Al sighs again, this time a frustrated sigh instead of a happy Jasmine sigh, “She’s practically a Princess, though. Not a real one, but a Disney Princess, so basically a real one. Her dad’s this billionaire and she’s from high society. To have a chance with her, and her family and friends, I’d have to be a modern prince.”

Then the idea that’s been brewing in his head comes out, “Wait a second, could you make me someone rich and titled? Someone good enough for her?”

“Just say the words, and we’ll get down to business.” Genie replies.

So he thinks about his phrasing, “I wish I was a high society rich guy, someone good enough for Jasmine.”

.o.*O.o*.o.

If Ariel ever admitted to Jasmine that she actually looks forward to her periods, Jasmine would probably murder her. Jasmine has these horrible cramps and Ariel knows she’d give anything to not bleed a week straight every month. But the thing is, Ariel doesn’t lose blood or deal with cramps, she grows a tail. She’s pretty sure even waterphobic Jasmine would take this alternative.

Today starts as usual. Ariel groggily drags herself out of bed and into the Hospital Wing at about four. Master Sweet gives her a bit of bread, then an assortment of potions. He once tried to explain what exactly they were and what they did, but the mermaid didn’t care enough to listen. All she knows is that they’re absolutely putrid.
As the ghastly concoctions settles in her stomach, Mr. Sweet leads her to a secluded spot on the shore of the Black Lake. They share a hearty breakfast of eggs and sausages along with milk and discuss their respective lives. He asks her about classes. (“Yeah, Sweet, I am totally taking Potions seriously. I promise. Oh and according to Mama Odie, I should be watching my back. Apparently ‘trickery is afoot.’”) She asks him about his recent patients. (“I swear Hawkins took one of those Puking Pastilles to get out of some test but those are supposed to be impossible to keep within the walls of the castle.”)

They wait for the sun to come up. Ariel appreciates the routine, the normalcy of it all. She really likes Sweet. He’s definitely intimidating, all muscle and height, but he’s such a genuinely good person.

He never judges her for what she wears or what she says.

As the sun comes up on the horizon, Ariel shimmies into the water. She can feel a familiar tingling in her feet, almost like they’re falling asleep. It drives up her legs until her hips feel numb. Then, in the dim light of dawn, her pale legs grow bright turquoise scales. She can feel her fins replace her feet. Then her gills reform and within a few minutes the transformation is complete. She has her tail back.

She speeds through the waves to the headquarters of the Black Lake merpeople. After years of being their little nuisance, Ariel still feels the need to ask if there’s anything, anything at all she could do to help them. The answer is the same as it’s been since she was eleven. No. “Just stay out of the way, Ariel.”

They just didn’t want her to fuck anything up. Of course, that’s a reasonable request. Ariel has a tendency to accidentally make things shit. So after being rejected once again, she swims laps around the lake. After the second lap, she feels truly “one with the water.” She’s not the mermaid swimming, but speed, the Black Lake itself.

The cool water wakes her up a bit. One of the potions probably makes it possible for her to withstand the freezing lake, dulling the biting cold to a nibbling cool.

Ariel sings an old mermish lullaby as she swims. It’s the one she associates most with her mother. The soft tune only she could do justice--

The sound of shouting from above interrupts her thoughts. Naturally, she resurfaces to investigate. Someone’s drowning. A girl, by the sound of the cry.

Instinctively, Ariel zooms toward the pale arms that flail in an effort to stay afloat, moving so fast that the water seems to buzz in her ears. She grabs the girl without a proper glance and just races to the shoreline. She feels so still and cold in Ariel’s arms. She doesn’t believe in a god but she says a prayer. Please live. Please live. The thought repeats in her head as she repeats the words to the lullaby. It sounds wrong with all this urgency.

They reach shore within forty-five seconds, a new record, Ariel guesses in the back of her mind. She drags the girl out of the water and starts pressing on her gut like she’s seen in shows on Muggle television. Please live. She almost considers mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when she starts to cough. Thank you, Universe. She’s alive. It’s only now that she takes the time to fully take in who she is.

Erica McKinney. The Erica McKinney.
She nearly laughs at how cheesy it is. She saved the life of her long-term crush. The girl that made her finally get over Jasmine.

She hadn’t noticed anyone but Jasmine platonically or romantically till she ended up sitting next to Erica in Defense the year before. Merriweather thought it’d be good for them to “meet new people” and assigned seats. Ariel was apprehensive at first, since Erica was one of the more popular girls in the grade, friends with the ones who liked to call her a “bint” and a “slut.” But Erica was nice, always trying to be polite to the “shy” outcast she sat next to and even standing up for her when people were rude. Ariel found out that she’d made a lot of the girls stop teasing her. And then there’s the fact that Erica’s absolutely gorgeous. Those big, ocean blue eyes that contrast sharply with her shiny jet black hair and perfect white smile made her mesmerizing. Last year, she wouldn’t have thought in terms of wanting to bang, but now Ariel means it when she says that Erica is fucking fit as hell She’s probably definitely more butch, if she’s a lesbian, that is,” but the few times she’s worn something tight? Damn. Ariel had to force herself not to stare at her chest and that ass. Not that Erica would have realized it if Ariel had. She was pretty oblivious to any sort of attention from people, though she did date Audrey for a few months before they decided it wasn’t going to work. All she cares about, really, are sailing and her dog Max… who’s, in fact, running toward them right now, barking like the end of the world is nigh.

Someone shouts from behind Max.

Of course, Erica couldn’t have been alone before. She must have had friends with her.

Ariel dives back into the water to avoid getting caught.

This little scene, Ariel saving Erica, replays in her head for days. She almost wonders if she dreamed it. It was so surreal.

She finds out for sure it wasn’t when she returns to the castle. Apparently, Erica has been talking about this gorgeous girl who saved her the entire time Ariel’s been gone. She rambles on and on about this mystery girl’s voice to his friends. It’s easy to overhear for Ariel to overhear those conversations as she passes her table on the way to her usual spot with Jasmine.

It was real. And she remembers my song. She’s looking for the girl who saved her. She’s looking for me.

Is this really happening?

When she reaches Jaz, her friend has this peculiar look on her face. She looks like she’s bursting with information and for once in her life, she doesn’t look like a model, entirely composed.

“You’ve missed so much in these last few days, oh my God!” Jasmine exclaims as Ariel sits down, “There’s this dance coming up.”

This takes Ariel by surprise, “What? No way! You’re not just fucking with me?”

“I am not messing with you. Mouse made the announcement a few days ago. It’s in honour of the games. Well, to be more precise, it’s in honour of the other schools coming here for the games. You know Beauxbatons and Durmstrang?”

Ariel nods and Jaz continues,“That’s why they’re calling it the Welcoming Ball. It’s really formal. As in, we’re-having-dance-lessons formal, or, we’re-going-to-have-to-wear-dresses-and-suits formal, or—“
“Okay, Jaz. You’re starting to sound like me, and I can’t tell if it’s because he’s asked you, or because he hasn’t.” Ariel interrupts.

“Ugh,” Her beautiful friend sighs, “He still hasn’t even talked to me yet.”

“Seriously? What a fucking prick.”

“I think he might just be nervous,” Jasmine replies, flaring up a little at Ariel’s words. Oh, poor, poor, love-struck Jasmine. “I saw him talking to Jafar a while ago…”

“Ohhh,” Ariel doesn’t even need her to continue.

Jafar’s the second reason the beautiful, brilliant Jasmine Agrabad still hasn’t ever been on a date. Reason number 1: She’s not allowed to date anyone her dad doesn’t approve of. Reason number 2: Jafar, the son of one of her dad’s colleagues or something, always blabs to her dad when guys seem to show interest. Reason number 3: Jasmine Agrabah is intimidating as fuck. Reason number 4: She has hella high standards.

“So he’s given up?” Ariel asks.

“No,” she seems uncertain, “I mean… I don’t know. I’ve noticed him staring at me. And he always looks deep in thought. I think he’s planning something.”

“I hope so,” Ariel, “For both of your sakes. But if he doesn’t say yes, you have to promise to come with me as friends.”

“Of course,” She smirks, “But you know… this would really be a good time to ask Erica out.”

“What?” Ariel cannot contain her blush, “What are you talking about.”

“Okay, come on, Ariel,” Jasmine rolls her eyes, “I’ve seen the way you look at her.”

Okay, so apparently Ariel is obvious as fuck. Uh. Cool. Cool.

“So. Uhm,” Ariel chokes out, “How long have you known I’m not straight?”

“You knew ?!” Okay so maybe Ariel really isn’t that great at keeping secrets.

“Ariel,” Jasmine almost sounds offended, “You know I’m good at reading people. Also, you blush really obviously. Anyway, you’re the reason I know I’m straight.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, when I realized you liked me romantically I wondered if I liked you back. When I realized I didn’t, I was lowkey freaking out about hurting your feelings.”

Ariel imagines little Jaz, still publicly wearing her hijab, freaking out like that. Agh, what a cutie.

“I thought we’d have this conversation earlier, though,” Jasmine gets serious. “Why didn’t you tell me you were… lesbian?”

“I’m pan,” Ariel corrects, “I wasn’t kidding all those times I’ve gushed about hot blokes. Well uhm. You’re like religious and uhm I was kinda worried my best and only friend would reject me because of my orientation, ha ha…”
“Oh my goodness,” Jasmine shakes her head, “The Quran teaches us not to judge and to love everyone, Ariel. I am certainly not homophobic. I’m so sorry you’ve had to worry about that.”

“Ah I’m fine,” For someone who always wears her heart on her sleeve, Ariel feels really awkward talking about this.

Jasmine gives her a hug. “So you’re asking Erica?”

“I don’t know, I mean, she’s obsessed with that mystery girl.”

“Yeah, but newsflash: you’re a real person. And a really amazing one at that.”

Agh, Ariel loves Jasmine so much. She sighs, “I guess I could try.”

Her stomach growls, and she decides to switch some of her attention to the plate of food in front of her. After a few minutes of munching, a thought occurs to her.

“When is this ball thing?” Ariel asks, hoping that she’s not as unlucky as she thinks she is.

“October 21st.” Nope. She is. Fuck.

Her face sinks.

“What’s wrong? That’s like four weeks from now, we—oh.” Jasmine realizes, “Isn’t there something you could do?” she asks, “Or, I mean I know you said it’s impossible to cure the pain, but could you try to just stand it for a few hours?”

Ariel wishes it were only that simple, “I don’t know. Ugh, I’m going to try to figure something out at least though. There is no way in fucking hell I’m missing this dance.”

She wants more than anything in the world to go. Ariel know’s it’s silly, but she thinks that maybe if Erica heard her singing, she’d recognize her, and they’d be able to go together. Or she’d see her at the dance and not even need to hear her voice, she’d just know.

She know’s she’s being pathetic with these fantasies, but she yearns for it so badly her heart hurts. It’s not until she’s in the lavatory fixing her makeup that she finds a way to manage what she wants. Or really, when a way finds her.

The way is dressed up like a terrifying seventh year, but it’s a way. Ursula Heks.

Ariel’s heard the rumors. The seventh year had some sort of way with potions, this sort of weird magic. Not only that, but she’s one of the biggest bullies in Hogwarts. She torments first and second years and anyone else she feels like messing up. No one can control her. The Hogwarts staff almost expelled her a million times, but for some reason she’s always given a second chance.

When Ariel first hears her enter the lavatory she tries to scurry out.

“Where you going?” Ursula asks after a puff from the cigarette in her hand. “You haven’t finished your other eye.”

The Slytherin is right. Ariel has this new smokey eye on her left eye and was starting on her right one when Ursula came in.

“It’s okay, love,” she grins, “I’m not going to hurt you.”
The shorter girl gulps, “You’re not?”

Her voice is smoother than butter, “Nope, in fact I’ve come to help you out, Fishy.”

Fishy.

Ariel nearly faints then and there.

She knows. SHE KNOWS. How many others know by now? Are they coming to get me? Am I gonna get forced out of school by angry mermaid haters?

“Relax, Ariel,” She gives her another unsettling smile. “I haven’t told anyone. And I won’t tell anyone. Your secret is safe with me.”

Ariel lets out the breath she’d been holding.

“I also know how to get you what you want,” she declares. Ariel gives her a blank look and she continue, “I know how you can go to the Ball.”

Ariel can’t believe it.

“See, they’re so wrong about me. I’ve actually made part of my agenda to help poor unfortunate souls like you,” she laughs, “Anyway, I don’t require much for the potion. Just an Unbreakable Vow.”

She lets the last sentence hang in the air before finishing, “You have to vow not to disclose your feelings for Erica McKinney nor the story of how you rescued her. Oh, and of course, you must give me your voice. Simple right?”

I am so screwed. I can’t leave. Ursula looks capable of Avada-ing me if I refuse her “simple” offer.

She finds herself saying yes.

She finds herself performing the Unbreakable Vow.

She finds herself still dazed when Ursula leaves the room. Maybe this is her special magic.

When she gets herself together, she laughs bitterly. Exactly what she wants, but twisted. Like the work of a genie. Probably the worst deal ever.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, so lots of plot development, haha. Who are your favorite characters? I personally can't pick a favorite. Again, I'd love it to get some feedback in the form of kudos or comments. Next chapter is set to be Pocahontas, Anna, and Wendy.

Update: 3/6/17: I realized I had the wrong (old) date for the Ball so it's edited now. October 21st not November 8th.
Chapter 6: Dance With Me

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

aaand one month later she returns! Spring break just started for me so there is a good chance chapter 7 will be out much sooner than chapter 6 was. I hope you like this chapter! Please give kudos/comment/bookmark/subscribe if you do :D (Also spoilery trigger warning: 13-year-olds will be making out in this chapter.) (Updated 5/24/18 for grammar/minor revisions)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

...Dance with Me
*** YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED ***

to Attend the

* W E L C O M I N G  B A L L *

at

° H O G W A R T S  S C H O O L  O F  W I T C H C R A F T  A N D  W I Z A R D R Y °

***

⋆ ⋆ ⋆ ⋆ ⋆

The Masquerade Ball will take place in the Great Hall on the Twenty First of October from 8 o’clock to 1 o’clock, preceded by a Grand Feast from 6 o’clock to 8 o’clock

The competitors from each school will be honored by officially beginning the dance with a Waltz.

Please arrive in appropriate dress robes as well as masks. Those under the age of fourteen will be asked to leave after 9.

W E L C O M E  T O  H O G W A R T S  A N D

L E T  T H E  V I C T O R Y  G A M E S  B E G I N!

.o.O.o.

Pocahontas stares at the invitation as it theatrically announces the Welcoming Ball. The theatrics, presumably, are to impress Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. In the back of her mind, Pocahontas decides it’s too flashy for her taste, but of course, when it comes to the rivalry between the European wizarding institutions, nothing is too flashy. However, she isn’t paying much attention to the card; she’s thinking about the dance it describes.

Well, if she’s being honest, she’s imagining herself waltzing in the center of the Great Hall with John Smith. In her fantasies, it’s just the two of them. Her in the perfect dress, him sexy in a suit and tie. Yeah, if it were about what she wanted, she’d be going to the Ball with John.

John, who’s vastly more interesting than his boring name would lead you to believe. John, who in three weeks time has become the most fascinating person she’s ever met, the first of maybe twenty
Johns to really capture her attention. John, who’s taught her what “whirlwind romance" means. John, who she might be half in love with already.

John, who she’s meeting tonight. She sighs. If only it were about what she wanted. If only there wasn’t Kocoum. Kocoum, who may be the only Kocoum she’s ever met, but without a doubt, is less interesting than a fucking rock. Kocoum, who asked her to the dance last week while lamenting (as much as an emotionless rock can lament) his inability to compete in the games due to his Quidditch deal. Kocoum, who her dad absolutely adores.

“Ughhh.” Why is she stuck in this stupid love triangle?

“Aw, babe, you worried about the ball again?” Esmeralda calls from the bathroom. Somehow, she recognizes the groan and its cause. “You wanna go with White Boy, right?”

“Yes,” Pocahontas says, ignoring Esme’s little nickname. “What do I fucking do? I can’t reject Kocoum or my dad will find out why, and he’ll kill John, but I can’t just go with Kocoum.”

“I thought your dad was the King of Progressivism. Isn’t being anti-John and pro-Kocoum a little ethnocentric or whatever?”

“It’s not about him not being Native American. John’s dad develops condos, apartments, skyscrapers…. oh, and he's also affiliated with all the assholes that are killing the Amazon.”

“So he can play the ‘POCAHONTAS, THIS GUY IS EVIL’ card?” Esme asks.

Pocahontas sighs. “Yep.”

Her best friend is silent for a moment, probably putting on an earring, then continues, “So, just tell John the situation and go with Kocoum and… uhh… I dunno? Make Kocoum not like you.”

“You don’t think I should just tell everyone the truth?”

Esmeralda laughs, “If you want someone to tell you to be honest, ask Nakoma for advice. You know I think there’s nothing wrong with a little white lie.”

Pocahontas laughs. She certainly does.
Esme steps out from their lavatory. “So… what do you think?”

The outfit exudes sex. Her off-the-shoulder bohemian white blouse bares her shoulders, yes, but also a good amount of cleavage and her navel. Her purple cut-off shorts, if they could even be called shorts, are covered by a thin, flimsy scarf that manages to highlight more than cover all the skin she’s revealing. Her gold, high-heeled sandals draw attention to her great legs. Her makeup is Standard Friday Night, smokey black eyeshadow, emphasizing her bright green eyes, thick black eyeliner, making them pop even more than usual, and bright red lipstick, the kind a guy wouldn’t mind getting on him. And of course, her messy hair doesn’t say “whoops forgot to comb.” Nope, it screams “just had sex.”

“Some one’s horny.” Pocahontas laughs.

“Hey, I wouldn’t be talking, Polka Dots.” Esmeralda smirks, “I’ve seen you eye-fucking Johnny Boy.”

And then the question comes up. “Wait, have you guys like actually fucked yet?”

It’s a valid inquiry. Unlike Nakoma, who has sworn to save herself for a serious long-term relationship, Pocahontas has had flings. After concerts, after parties, sometimes before school, if she’s feeling particularly in the mood. She isn’t a stranger to sex, but she isn’t Esmeralda. She doesn’t have a reputation for sleeping with basically everyone. She’s never tried half the positions Esme has. She hasn’t done it for nearly as short nor long and she doesn’t have it half as often. Esme, damn, if they weren’t protected by fucking foolproof magic that girl would have gotten an STD or pregnant in like fourth year.

“Actually…” She can not believe this is flustering her, “I was thinking maybe, uh, tonight.”

“Ayyy, nice!” Esme lights up, “You’ve been tense lately, you need an orgasm. Wait, is that what you’re wearing?”

Pocahontas is still in what she’d worn under her robes for class today, a pair of sweats and a tank top.

“Of course not.”

“Oh oh oh!” Esme has a scary glint in her eye, “Let me dress you up!”
“Esme, don’t you have a date?” Pocahontas raises her eyebrows.

“I’d hardly call a booty call a date, babe. Though if it were, I technically have two, but Friday sex with some Quidditch players can wait till you look so good he gets hard after just one look.”

Pocahontas rolls her eyes, “Don’t keep them waiting.”

“Aw, pleeease Polka Dots? It’ll be fuuuuunn.”

Esme loves that stupid nickname she came up with in first year. After struggling for months to give Pocahontas a good one, she saw her new best friend in a horrendous polka dot dress, and the rest is history.

“Fine. But I told John I’d meet him at eight so this can’t take more than an hour.”

“YES!”

So for forty-five minutes, Esme convinces Pocahontas to break out her concert clothes, helps her apply a liberal amount of makeup, and does her hair. The end result is worth it. Now, Pocahontas exudes sex too--her intense eyes even more intense. Her high cheekbones defined by contouring. More skin revealed than the first time she met John. And then these stilettos. She’s definitely as tall as him in these shoes.

“Oh, if you need any tips, I know how to make a guy cum in five mi--”

Pocahontas plugs her ears. “Nope. I’m going now.”

“Ah, okay, I’m spending the night either with… uh… Naveen… ooor Phoebus. Probably Phoebus, since Naveen’s like fifteen.”

“Ew,” Pocahontas gags.
"Stop sleeping with younger guys, *slut,*” She teases.

“Hey, they deserve to have a little fun too.” Esmeralda winks.

Pocahontas struts out of the room rolling her eyes. It’s impossible to wear these shoes without strutting. And also without almost falling over twenty times. Somehow, she manages to get up to the Astronomy Tower without twisting an ankle.

“Hey, Poca- *woah!* ” John’s eyes widen.

This time she *knows* he’s staring at her boobs. And probably her ass. She grins because she can tell Esme got *exactly* what she wanted, but also because the room is… gorgeous.

He’d lit like a hundred candles and brought up some dessert and wine. Fancy. So this is what it’s like to date someone. There’s romantic effort involved before sex.

“Wow, you look amazing.” John looks into her eyes. “Sexy, yeah, but also really beautiful.”

How is it that she got together with the *one* seventeen-year-old guy who can tell the difference between sexy and beautiful? Wow, she’s so lucky.

She grins and goes in for a kiss. She’s expecting long and passionate, so she’s surprised when he makes it quick. Barely more than a peck.

“There’s time for that later; I really wanted to talk first,” he explains, leading her to the corner where he’s set up the wine and cake. It’s chocolate.

“You remembered chocolate’s my favorite.” She smiles.

“Yeah, of course.”

“Not ‘yeah, of course’; I told you like a couple days ago.”

“It’s hard not to remember things about someone as awe-striking as you.” What a flirt.
“Oh yeah?” she teases, “Then why is this wine and not whiskey?”

“Wine is more classy.”

“Mhm, Mr. High Society.” *Is this what you drink with your dad?* she almost finishes, but then she remembers.

“I think you’ll change your mind once you’ve had it with the cake.” He pours her a glass.

“Booze is booze.” She shrugs and takes a large sip.

It’s actually perfect with the cake.

But- “Whiskey would’ve been better.” She sticks her tongue out.

He rolls his eyes and they both laugh.

“So is this all just so you can ravish me?” she asks, still laughing a bit after another sip of wine.

He looks almost hurt. “No, I actually wanted to ask you something.”

If she’ll go to the dance with him.

“Yeah?”

“Do you know how to waltz?”

Oh, so that’s how this is going.

“A little.” She doesn’t know why but her voice has become more of a whisper.

“Dance with me.” He meets her volume.

“Where’s the music?” She’ll be perfectly fine if he says something along the lines of “we don’t need any,” but she loves that he puts on “I Wanna Be Yours” by the Arctic Monkeys instead.

There’s something so sexy about the Arctic Monkeys and the candles and the moment that it takes barely thirty seconds for them to stop dancing and start making out.

At the end of the song he breaks it off long enough to ask, “Will you be my girlfriend?”

Okay, that’s so fucking sweet. “Yes,” she answers before kissing him again.

He can probably feel her giant smile.
“Then, will my girlfriend be my date to the Welcoming Ball?” he asks, as her hands slide up his shirt.

That kills the moment.

She sighs and steps back. “I don’t think I can. My dad really wants me to go with this guy, Kocoum—”

“I know him.”

“Don’t interrupt me when I’m talking.”

“Sorry.”

“Anyway, Kocoum is, from my dad’s point of view, ‘husband material,’ even though he’s the last guy I’d ever want to go on a date with, let alone marry. He’s boring and emotionless and ugh. I can’t hold a conversation with him. Yet, somehow, he thinks we should go out.”

“So he asked you?”

“Last week, yeah.”

“Oh. Can’t you just tell your dad you don’t like him and you do like me?”

“You know you’re not just a white dude, but a white dude has one of those families that have killed more trees than they’ve seen in their life, developed a shitton of housing in the place of parks, and stands for essentially everything we’re against?”

“... Right. There’s that. So… what do you think we should do?”

“Well, I was thinking… I could go with Kocoum, make him hate me, aaand introduce who you are to my dad in very small doses.”

“That, uh… is it to jealous of me to say I don’t want you going on even a fake date with a guy who likes you?”

“No, I think it’s reasonable…. I’m sorry.”

“No, I know all about parents impacting lives in stupid ways.”

His dad brainwashing him conservative, which nearly killed their relationship prospects. The plans for a lucrative career in business, when all John wants to do is play Quidditch and maybe coach when that’s through.
“Do we have to think about all of this now?” Pocahontas finishes off her glass.

“No, I guess we have time,” John replies, still sounding a bit sullen.

“Help me forget?”

She can see him taking in the moment, the dark, secluded room, the candles, her outfit.

“Of course.”

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

Dear Diary,

There are some things I just wish I could forget. Well, okay, more than a few things, and I guess to be more specific, they’re problems.

Problem number 1: Elsa has been virtually ignoring me since I was like seven.

Problem number 2: My parents died when I was twelve.

Problem number 3: They were the monarchs of the Norwegian Government which means

Problem number 4: I’m practically the wizard equivalent to a princess and because of this my parents kept us away from the public because of the harmful effects of the press which gave me

Problem number 5: A friendless childhood which led to

Problem number 6: social awkwardness.

And that doesn’t really help with my latest problem: there’s no bloody way I’ll ever get a date to the Welcoming Ball. Ugh. Why am I so invisiblilllllllllllllllll? *sigh* I know, I know, I just need to suck it up, and I should probably go have lunch since I’m starving. Thanks for listening to me rant about my problems. (Wait is it listening or reading or… feeling? when it comes to diaries???)

Love Always,

Anna

Anna sighs as she closes her diary. She is invisible. It’s not all bad; she’d rather be invisible than be the center of attention (like Elsa when they’re back in Oslo), and it’s pretty much exactly what Mother and Father wanted for her too. That’s why they sent Elsa and Anna to Hogwarts instead of Durmstrang- the more convenient option. They thought that the girls would be away from the spotlight if they spent most of the year in Scotland, where people wouldn’t recognize them so
easily. They were absolutely right. No one, except, of course, the faculty and the older students with an interest in politics, cared about Norway, let alone its leaders. So yeah, out of the spotlight. Invisible. Dateless… how is it that she’s royalty and she still doesn’t have a date to the ball? Oh right, it’s literally the only interesting thing about her, which is also why she doesn’t have a ton of friends.

Well, at least that’s what she assumes because it can’t be because she’s mean or anything. She’s totally nice and approachable. In fact, if Elsa ever has to describe her (she probably hasn’t and won’t) she’d say in her posh little voice that Anna is "an affable individual with a sweet disposition."

And it’s also not because of the few friends she does have. If anything, it may be that she doesn’t measure up to any of them, all of whom are much more successful in the romance department. Rapunzel, her cousin, is beautiful and so artistically talented and smart, she’s practically at the top of their class, and she's dating Flynn Rider, a really popular bloke who’s like two years older than her. Oh, and she transferred here a year ago. No one transfers to Hogwarts! Then there's Jasmine, who's apparently 16, exotic and alluring, fashionable, kind-hearted, and almost as poised as Elsa. Anna’s never seen her with guys, but everyone has seen the way they look at her. Ariel gets those looks often too, but that's got to do more with how she dresses. She’s really confident, despite the rumors that always circulate around her, and she's got an amazing voice, like a siren. Plus, she's always so fun to be around. Anna figures she and Jasmine already had lunch since they always eat early. Would it be worse to sit with the lovebirds or all alone? Anna ponders this as she walks through the corridor until her face collides with someone’s chest. Her head instantly falls back to the ground with a thud.

“Hey!” she yells. Then she looks up, and what she sees immediately extinguishes her anger. The handsome older guy apologizes immediately. “I’m so sorry. Are you hurt?”

Anna fumbles, “Hey. I-ya, no. No. I’m okay.”

She’s still on the ground. He looks down at her. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I just wasn’t looking where I was going. But I’m okay.” She starts to get up. “I’m great, actually?”

He offers her a hand. “Thank goodness.”

He’s still smiling at her when she gets back on her feet. “Hans. Hans Westergård.”

“Anna,” she replies. “Anna Arendelle.”

She reaches to shake his hand, because he seems like the kind of person used to this sort of introduction. But, of course, because she’s awkward as hell, she trips over herself and suddenly he’s the one on the ground and she’s practically right on top of him.

Awkward. So awkward.

“Hi, again.” she says, “Ha. This is awkward. Not that you’re awkward, but just because we’re--I’m awkward. You’re gorgeous.” Did she really just say that? “Wait, what?”

Without responding to her ramblings, he helps her up. Then he looks her right in the eyes (his eyes are gorgeous, like a sea of green Anna could get lost in forever), “I’d like to formally apologize for
bumping into the lovely Miss Arendelle.”

The title makes her think of Elsa. It’s formal and conjures up images of curtsies and respectful nods—neither of which are things Anna receives at home (or at Hogwarts, for that matter, but that’s kind of a given) but to which Elsa is constantly privy to. Not that Elsa’s really respected here. (More like feared and bitched about.)

“It’s okay, it’s not like you bumped into my sister Elsa or anything.” She shrugs.

“She’s your sister?” He seems surprised. “The Snow Queen?”

The Norwegian girl nods. Anna doesn’t really remember exactly how Elsa got the nickname, but she knows why it stuck. Snow because Elsa’s generally cold and brisk. Queen because she acts all high and mighty, always right, always following and upholding rules, and surrounded by this air of regal superiority. Or something like that.

Hans doesn’t press the subject. Instead, he invites her to have lunch with him, and she (obviously!) accepts the invitation. He is, as she’d verbally noted, gorgeous, and seems to actually be interested in her, boring old Anna Arendelle, of all people. He’s definitely older. A prefect badge pinned to his perfectly pressed Slytherin robes indicates he’s at least a fifth year, though he looks more like a sixth or seventh. It’s kind of intimidating, but also a real ego booster. He’s the kind of guy who could be with anyone, and he’s with Anna.

She realizes quickly that he’s not just a pretty face. He hangs on her every word as if how she feels about Charms is the coolest thing ever. He laughs at her jokes. His own quips are hilarious and clever. He never misses a beat. They talk until the cafeteria’s nearly empty, and there’s really no excuse to still be there. Then they wander around the school. He asks about the white streak in her hair. He tells her about his many, many brothers.

“I don’t just want to want to be another Westergård brother. I want to do something with my life. Something that makes a difference. Something all my own.”

She shivers at the raw honesty of the statement. She can see the ambition in his eyes and understands why he’s a Slytherin. But he's not like the stereotype; he’s so nice.

She keeps hoping he won’t find an excuse to leave, and somehow, he doesn't. In fact, before she knows it, he’s asking if she’s been asked to the dance.

“No, not yet,” Anna feels herself thrumming with anticipation. She’s read all the books, seen her friends go through it, knows what he’s going to say. “Do you think you’d like to go with me?”

“Of course—I mean… yes!” Anna grins, ducking her head. “I’d love to.”

They spend the remainder of the day together, continuing to get to know each other. Everything she learns about him, from his hobbies (Reading and drawing! Just like her!) to his favorite foods (Chocolate and sandwiches! Just like her!) just adds to her theory that he’s absolutely perfect. She likes him so much, it hurts to have to say goodnight.
But she does after he walks her all the way back to her dormitory. She gives him a peck on the cheek right outside her door. It feels like something from one of her favourite novels. So romantic.

Anna collapses on her bed, a stupid grin glued to her face. She’s going to the dance with Hans! He likes her! He’s probably going to ask her to be his girlfriend soon! That night, she sleeps soundly, dreaming of love at first sight and happy endings.

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

Wendy Moira Angela Darling should be sleeping. That’s what the prefects assume she’s doing. That’s what all the professors would expect. That’s how her mother raised her. ("Bed by nine, feel quite fine.")

“Be a good young lady, Wendy,” her mother reminded her before she'd left the station, “You have a reputation to maintain. Don't let any bad influences ruin it.”

Mother was referring to Peter Pan. The same Peter Pan who's keeping her up now, ten minutes past midnight. The same Peter she could be in love with already.

“The boys in bed yet?” she asks as he closes the door to Neverland.

“Yes, Mother. I believe your singing took care of that.” He teases.

“Oh Father, does that mean we're alone for once?” She smirks.

He's not fazed by the innuendo. He's never fazed.

“Yes, alone at last.” He winks, taking her hand.

She's always fazed, fighting not to blush or swoon.

“Let’s go.” And he's dragging her away from Neverland.

“Where to, dear husband?” She asks, knowing full well he won't answer.
“Ah, I must keep it a secret to surprise you, my lovely wife.”

She knows he's kidding, but her heart still skips a beat at the word *wife*.

She speeds up so he's no longer dragging her, and it seems as though they're holding hands. Lovers running off together.

*If only.*

He doesn't seem to mind. In fact, he slows down. Oh, wait, no, that's because they're getting close.

“So, I found this room a while ago. It belongs to The Beast.”

She shudders involuntarily. Wendy Darling fears nothing, except the notorious Beast. He towers over everyone and those scars, that temper. She has no idea why Belle Dumas would have anything to do with him, but then again no one understands why Belle does anything. It's one of the things the younger Ravenclaw girl admires about her.

There's a secret passage. Of course. Peter has an obsession with finding every secret passage in the school, especially since some of them, like this one, lead to remodeled rooms.

The room is a mess: beat up chairs with broken legs, clobbered, quivering tables, bruised books, and this portrait, clawed beyond recognition. It looks like something from the horror movies her mother never let her watch, the same ones she and Peter marathoned last year. But at the center of the room is a gorgeous glowing rose encased in glass.

“It's like you, Wendy, a pretty glowing flower in a room full of rubble,” he whispers in her ear.

In the dark room, with him right there, *agh*, it's incredibly hot. Dare she say it, sexy. (Is she old enough to use the word?)

“You think I'm pretty?” She manages to sound aloof, teasing.
“I wouldn't be alone with you in a dark room if I didn't,” he laughs.

And in that moment her mind flashes back to the first time she met Peter. When she was eleven he'd found her on the train. She helped him get his shadow (apparently he had found a way to remove it) and he offered to let her join the Lost Boys and “live” in Neverland. As a Muggleborn, knowing no one and terrified of being friendless, she was so relieved, she could have kissed him. In fact, she offered him a kiss. However, for some reason, he hadn't known what a kiss was and held out his hand, so she gave him the only thing she had in her pocket, a thimble. He said he'd give her a kiss as well and she puckered up, only to have an acorn placed in her hand. (She still had that acorn, on a necklace she always wore. He still had the thimble too; he wore it on his finger for good luck on pranks.)

“You know, I think I might want that thimble now,” he whispered.

She'd offered him a “thimble” after accepting the acorn. She puckered her lips and he even began to lean in when a shrill voice yelling “Peter!” interrupted--Tinkerbell Zimmerman on his walkie talkie. They pulled away and hadn't talked about it since. Until now.

“Oh, really?” She can't hide the earnestness, how her voice shakes even whispering.

He leans in, squeezing her hand. His voice barely audible in the silent room, he answers with the same earnestness, “Yeah.” And then he closes the space between them.

Her first kiss. With Peter Pan. The boy she's pined after for two years. It last thirteen seconds, all of which she spends trying to memorize how it feels to have his lips on her. It's awkward and clumsy but oh-so-perfect. Because he's oh-so-perfect.

She can't stop smiling as he pulls away.

“How was that worth the wait?” She asks.

He grins sheepishly. “Of course.”

She wants to kiss him again, but instead she holds out her hand. He takes it, lacing his long, nimble
He takes her by the hand closer to the rose. Then without his usual teasing voice, “Would you like it, dear wife?”

“Oh, husband, you know it's wrong to steal.” Her eyes are bright.

“I'd break any rule for you, Wendy Moira Angela Darling.” He pronounces each part of her name carefully.

“I wouldn’t like to see you mauled by the Beast.” She frowns. She's not kidding.

“You don't think I could take him?” She can't tell if he's actually offended or joking.

“Peter, you know I think the world of you, but he's a Beater. He took out John Smith last year.”

“I fear no one.” He says matter of fact.

She rolls her eyes. “If you do get hurt, don't expect a thimble from me ever again.”

“Oh, you wound me, Wendy,” he laughs quietly.

Then more seriously, he says, “I won't if you really don't want me to.”

She's relieved. “Thank you.”

“Anything for you,” he repeats, grazing his thumb over her knuckles. It's a surprisingly sweet gesture. All of this is surprising.

He takes her out of the room, back up to Ravenclaw Tower. Except, they come across a prefect in the next hall and end up in a broom closet together. It's a tight fit, and she can feel every part of
him against her. No wonder these are popular destinations for snogging.

She's sure he can feel her breasts against him. Wendy can feel something, something suspiciously hard against her… her stomach. She's sure he's blushing from this.

She takes a chance before her nerve runs out and kisses him. It's longer this time, more frantic, and she finds her hands in his perfect hair, feels his hands gripping her hips. She loses track of how long it lasts. Thirty. Sixty. Two minutes? Three?

She can't imagine doing anything else right now, but maybe a few years from now, she could be in here with him being… scandalous.

Finally, she pulls away for air. And he pulls her back. He’s hungry, his kisses are rougher. His tongue feels weird in her mouth, but a good weird. His mouth is cold. His… hardness is… harder. He smells wonderful, like rain and soap and a smell that can only be described as boy .

She decides to do another thing on an impulse, she gets on her tippy toes so she's at his height and she feels him. Holy fuck she does. He kisses her with more passion. She didn't know he could do more passion. He pulls at her perfect hair and the bun comes down in one fluid motion. It feels nice to have his hands in her hair and his ...(member? hardness? dick? cock? penis?) against her. More than nice. Fucking fantastic.

He goes on crazy kissing her until his lips wander away and he pecks her neck questioningly. She finds herself shaking her head. They've already done so much. Too much. She’s too young.

He nods and keeps kissing her lips. She smiles. And she can feel him smiling too.

Eventually, her arms start to hurt from clinging on to him.

Between the next few kisses, she manages to gasp out, “I'm pretty sure the prefect is gone.”

He opens his eyes wide as if taken out of a daze. “Yeah, yeah, of, uh, course.”

It's the first time she's heard him stumble.
They stumble out of the closet. Breathing heavy. She's sure she smells like his sweat and wonders if his jeans are uncomfortable.

“Shall we go off to your room, wife?” He asks, his voice much less shaky now.

She stifles a yawn. “Yes, all these thimbles have worn me out.”

“You mean the snogging?” He grins.

“Yes.”

He takes her up the stairs to the tower. Hands clasped, they glide up the stairs silently, like nimble nymphs.

He collapses on her bed and she's beyond thankful she has her own little room in their dormitory, because she can hear him snoring softly as she changes. For a second, she's naked in a room with Peter Pan. Oh, what would her mother think?

She crawls into bed with him and his arms wrap around her. She can't seem to fall asleep, despite the slightly bruised lips and her tired arms.

Her mind races. Peter likes her. Peter kissed her. They snogged. She snogged Peter Pan for who knows how long. And then, her mind drifts to the dance. He would want to go, right? He must. Dancing and her. He said he'd do anything for her.

She falls asleep, finally, to his rhythmic breathing and dreams about herself in a pretty blue dress, whirling around and around in a ballroom with Peter Pan.

Chapter End Notes

Now wasn't that sweet? Next chapter won't be. DUN DUN DUNNN. Briar Rose, Snow White, and Merida. The plot shall thicken. Haha. Please give kudos/comment/bookmark/subscribe. It's definitely a motivator to write/edit when I get an email about one of those things :(
Chapter 7: Realize Real Lies

Chapter Summary

Briar learns the truth about herself. Snow accepts an offer she shouldn't. Merida makes an unbearable mistake.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so it's been a month. I'm sorry, I didn't mean for it to take this long. Unfortunately, my awesome beta was really busy and didn't have time to look at it till a couple days ago. Anyway, it's ready now! I hope you like this chapter! If you do, show me some love with kudos and comments and don't forget to subscribe so you won't miss any updates :) (Spoiler Warning: someone is anti-aro in this chapter.) (edited 5/24/18 minor fixes)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

...Realize Real Lies

...
Briar Rose is in the First Wizarding War. She’s in the thick of the action fighting in the Order of Phoenix. She knows James Potter and Lily Evans. She will fight Voldemort’s followers till they actually eat death… She and Phillip. Phillip Phillip Phillip. He definitely has the body for fighting Death Eaters… and when they aren’t fighting, he drags her to Beatles concerts and she shakes her head but goes anyway because it’s the Beatles and it’s him. Philly Phil Phillip.

Briar Rose is not in the First Wizarding War. She’s in the library. Apparently so foolishly crushing on Phillip that she can’t properly immerse herself in Modern and Post-Modern Magical History. The grandfather clock chimes three times, capturing the attention of other students in the expansive room.

As if on cue, her stomach growls. Perhaps she can’t focus because she hasn’t eaten in 6 hours.

She’s always done this, lost track of time reading, writing, solving problems. Now, though, it’s truly and entirely because of studying. Her seven NEWT courses demand everything she has and more. She’s spent the whole day studying and she’s just barely keeping up with the workload. And of course, her Phillip-centric daydreams aren’t very conducive to productivity either.

Briar never gets distracted, but ever since the awkward date declination, and between her nastily exhausting wizarding test preparations and his insane Victory Game Training, she hasn’t seen much of him. During difficult arithmancy problems, her mind drifts to all the times they’ve ever touched, he’s made her laugh, she’s teased him. She keeps envisioning them experiencing everything she learns from History of Magic, together. Maybe if they did live in the 70s with the constant threat of Voldemort, she’d tell him how she felt regardless of Aurora. Imminent danger makes it easier to do things you ordinarily find scary, makes you want to actually do the things you dream about.

But it’s not 1973. There is no more Voldemort. Just a guy she fancies. A guy who’s going to be dating Aurora Stefan.

She sighs and decides it’s probably a good time for her to grab something to eat before starting on that Potion’s report. Professor Queen will kill her if she doesn’t get it in by tomorrow. At least she’s not Snow though… For some reason, the potions master does not like Snow White at all, despite her gift for potions. Otherwise, they’d be able to work on the report together. Instead, her friends are at Hogsmeade together, probably enjoying a nice meal in the shade.

By the time she arrives at the Great Hall, lunch is basically over. The tired blonde manages to grab a sandwich and decides to eat it on a walk since the weather is so good. There’s something about the day that makes her want to take off her shoes and dance in the grass. (Like the first time she
She’s wiping the crumbs from her delicious sandwich off her hands when someone taps her back. She turns around to see Philip in athletic clothing, Well, no. In shorts and tennies. His jersey is nowhere to be seen. (Yep, that’s an image she’s going to subconsciously memorize.)

“Briar!” He grins. How is it that his once adorkable smile is now just another layer of attractive? “It’s nice to see you.”

“It’s nice to see you too, Phil. I feel like we never run into each other anymore. Though by the intensity of that practice I can see why.”

“It might also have to do with the fact that you’re Hermione Granger 2.0 and you’re taking seven NEWTS .”

“It’s possible,” she laughs.

“How’s that going?” He asks.

“O-cing it.” She grins with mock pride.

“Of course,” he responds affectionately, despite rolling his eyes.

His smile lingers for a second.

“You going to the Welcoming Ball?” She blurts out. “I mean with uh… Aurora, right?”

Can he tell that she’s just pretending to forget her name?

He grows solemn, “I don’t know. I’m trying to talk my dad out of it. He’s living in the past. It’s the 21st century. Arranged… relationships are so arcane. Like, come on.”
She regrets asking. “Arcane, wow. That’s not a word I expected you to use.”

“Ah, well, some pretty blonde taught me that during a feminist rant.”

She blushes. *He called me pretty.*

Someone blows a whistle. Shang Li probably. He’s in some of her NEWT classes, and she’s heard him complain about Gaston not helping out with training.

“Ack, I gotta go,” he apologizes. “Nice seeing you.”

He jogs back to the Quidditch pitch, leaving her to say goodbye to the wind.

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“Briar,” Aunt Flora says in a tone reserved for Serious Matters.

“Yeah?” Briar is a still putting the finishing touches on that Potions report. She’s almost done.

“Briar, this is important.” Aunt Merryweather chimes in.

“I’m sure it is, I just need to finish this, please,” Briar responds absentmindedly. This is probably about her sixteenth birthday. They’ve been whispering about it for at least a week, which is coincidentally the amount of time she’s going to need to correct all these mistakes in her paper. ‘A,’ not ‘the’. Ugh, why does she do this?

“No, dear, this can’t wait.” And… Aunt Fauna is there too.

And the paper’s conclusion includes theoretic improvements… Okay. It’s excellent. No, outstanding. Even up to Professor Evelyn Queen’s impossible standards.
“Except it just did.” She smiles and turns to look at them. “What’s up?”

“Maybe we should have tea first.” Aunt Fauna hesitates. Her voice doesn't float in the air, soft and lilted. It’s serious.

Briar narrows her eyes. Aunt Fauna *loathes* tea. She'd never drink it willingly, much less suggest it.

But she's in the mood for some chamomile, so she follows the aunts to Aunt Flora’s parlor.

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The familiar room feels peculiarly cold. The ever lit, roaring fireplace is silent and dark. The aunts keep looking at each other with wide eyes when they think Briar isn't looking. They all take seats on the old couches by the unlit fireplace. Briar thinks Merryweather will light it, but she doesn’t, she just stares at Flora as the older witch makes tea, as though she’s arguing with the back of her head. Aunt Flora ignores her youngest sister and makes tea: strong black English Breakfast for herself, jasmine tea for Aunt Fauna, and Earl Grey for Aunt Merryweather. Then, of course, Briar’s chamomile.

Once all their cups are filled to the brim and the warm biscuits are ready in a bowl, the Aunts turn to Briar, silently staring into her big violet eyes. Briar furrows her eyebrows and shivers. She can’t tell if the goosebumps are because of her aunts or the temperature of the room.

“Remember how we told you your parents died in the war?” Aunt Flora begins. She pronounces each word carefully as if she wouldn’t be able to get them out if she didn’t.

“Well, that wasn’t true.” Aunt Merryweather blurts out, her face turning red and her eyebrows furrowed.

This has got to be a joke.

Flora seems upset, “Merryweather, we agreed to break it to her gently.”

A cruel, cruel joke.
“No, you agreed.” She stands defiant. “It’s better to rip off the bandage now.”

A joke that isn't funny at all.

She looks Briar in the eyes, takes a hold of her hand (oh god, what if it's not a joke?) and lets it all out, “Your parents are alive, dear. They were Aurors, fighting Death Eaters and using family money to aid the order. But after the war, they got a warning. A prophecy about your “falling” after pricking your finger on a sewing needle on your sixteenth birthday. We think it’s a curse, so they sent you to us so we could protect you under a different name. There are a lot of people who would want to hurt you if they knew who you were.”

This is real. She's telling her the truth. This is really happening.

“And who am I?” Briar? stammers.

“Aurora Stefan.” Flora rushes. Of course. She wanted to reveal something. That’s Aunt(??) Flora for you. Not-Briar’s brain is in overdrive, trying so hard to process that her life has been a lie that she doesn’t recognize the name.

“Wait, so, are you even my aunts?” Her voice cracks. She feels like crying.

“No, my love,” Fauna gives her a hug, “But we love you just as much.”

“Why tell me now?” If she can learn as much as she can about the problem, it can’t hurt her as much.

“Well, you have effectively avoided sewing your whole life. Your birthday is in a week and your parents think it’s time for you to be announced to society.”

And something in her brain clicks.

“Wait… Aurora Stefan, like the Aurora Stefan that Phillip is supposed to date?” she spits out.
“Yes!” Fauna smiles. “I’m so glad you like him so much. It makes this much easier, doesn’t it?”

“Nothing about this is easy.” Briar/Aurora cries out.

“I think you might like some time to think about this,” Merryweather can see the tears forming in her niece’s perfect violet eyes.

“Ah yes, you’ll have time on the trip. Your parents wanted to meet you as soon as possible.” Flora explains.

Her voice is small when she says, “Okay.”

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They have to walk about a mile to a specially arranged Portkey, which gives Briar some time to think.

She’s not really Briar. Her name is Aurora. This must have been it. That nagging feeling she’s had forever about something being off. She thought for the longest time it must have been her sexuality. But even after telling her friends, after realizing her Giant Crush on Elsa Arendelle and dating Belle Dumas for a few months, she still felt like there was something.

And there was. Her whole identity was a lie. What the actual fuck?! WHO LEAVES THEIR KID? WHY WOULD HER PARENTS JUST LEAVE HER?

She’s dreamed about them. Constructed their personalities. Wondered for hours if she looked like them. If they would have liked her if they’d lived. Ha. Now she couldn’t care less. They literally left her with three (for all she knew) random women (not to say she didn’t love them despite her steaming anger right now)! They could have protected her fine! Apparently, they’d survived sixteen years without an assassination attempt!

WHAT THE FUCK?!
And then the beautiful fucking irony. She basically rejected Phillip because he was supposed to be with her. And now he doesn't want to be with her. Ugh.

But her parents. She can’t process the flood of emotions. (Especially not the bit of excitement, curiosity, and unconditional love for her parents she can’t help but feel fluttering in her heart.)

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Her room is perfect. It really is. Fairy lights and a gorgeous four-post bed. All her favourite books on the bookshelf. Even a Jinx poster (don’t tell Phillip, but she did actually like them; she only pretended to hate going to their concerts). The color scheme is weird though, a cluster of pink here, bright blue there. Flora and Merryweather must have gotten into an argument.

She sits on the bed and stares at herself in the mirror. She’s going to meet the people she inherited this golden hair from. These weird big violet eyes.

The Aunts (she can’t think of them as anything else) left her to get ready. A bunch of makeup and jewelry is on the vanity. A closet full of designer clothes. But all Briar wants is to hold on to the parts of her she still has left.

She hops off the bed and walks through the double doors out of her room, struck with a desire to explore.

Stefan Industries must really be doing well. The castle is huge, probably almost Hogwarts size, and fully staffed. The walls are decorated impeccably. Someone is an art collector. There’s a real Monet in the hall next to her room.

She decides to go up the stone staircase, assuming it’ll lead to a turret. She’s right. It’s beautiful. Bay windows all around. She doesn’t have time to really soak it in though. There’s a girl there.

“Hello,” the girl smiles, “You must be Aurora. I’m so pleased to meet you. I’m Sarah. I work here.”

She’s probably eighteen or so. Maybe older, she's short so it's hard to tell. Her blue eyes gleam.
“I’ve lived here my whole life and I’ve always wanted to meet you.”

Briar smiles. The girl’s good mood is infectious.

“Here, when I heard you were coming I made this for you.” Sarah hands her an exquisite handkerchief.

Except she must have left a pin in it because Briar can feel a prick.

And suddenly she feels dizzy. She’s fainting. And Sarah isn’t helping her. She’s watching as Briar falls to the stone floor. And she’s not Sarah. She’s Millicent Purnell, Head Girl. And as the world goes black, Briar hears her laughing.

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“What do you think Briar’s up to?” Ella asks Snow as they walk down the cobbled streets of Hogsmeade.

“Definitely studying. You know how many NEWTS she’s taking,” Snow replies.

“It’s unfortunate she couldn’t be here.” Suddenly, Ella has an idea. “We should make her a little gift basket!”

“Yes! With lemon drops and chocolate frogs!” Her absolute favorites.

“Butterbeer!” Unspiked because Briar doesn’t drink.

“Something from Zonkos?” Snow thinks maybe it’d be fun to get her something different.

“Maybe we should just go to Flourish and Blotts. Briar only tolerates Zonkos for Philly’s sake.” Ella replies. “I wish she could’ve been here for the grand opening.”
“I know! We should put that new Lovegood she’s been talking about in the basket!” Luna Lovegood is Briar’s absolute heroine. Possibly even greater than Hermione Granger herself.

“Definitely. She cannot get enough of those.” She preorders them as soon as possible from the Quibbler. Once a book comes in she reads it start to finish without a break. Nothing, not even Phillip or her homework can get her to stop.

The girls laugh.

“You seem better.” Ella notes, “I mean not like you’ve been in a bad mood or something. You just seem freer.”

“It just feels so good to be out,” Snow explains. She skips ahead of her best friend and turns to face her, grinning, “It’s like a weight’s off my shoulders.”

*If only it was the only weight.* Her mind darkens for a second but she pushes the thought out of her mind. Today’s a good day. A nice sunny beautiful day at Hogsmeade with El.

“So how are things with Henry?” Snow raises her eyebrows, smirking.

“I thought being aro meant no interest in romance,” Ella complains. She’s cute when she’s mildly embarrassed, the way girls are supposed to look. Pink cheeks and a scrunched up nose. Her eyebrows uncharacteristically furrowed.

“Well. I don’t really *get* romance and I’m definitely not interested in it for me, but that doesn’t mean I don’t want it for you, dear.” Snow explains again. It’s nice educating people about being aromantic. Especially when they’re nice, accepting people like the lovely Ella Chapman.

“Okay. That makes sense.” Ella nods. “Well, I haven’t really gotten to talk to him, what with classes and homework on top of the Terrible Twins’ chores.”

Snow gags at the mention of the twins. What real b*tches.

“But I dunno. I was thinking of maybe possibly meeting him at the dance.” Ella continues.
“I think you should. It’s a masquerade ball after all. The perfect opportunity to be with him without your sisters butting in.”

“But what would I wear?” She looks down sheepishly at her outfit.

Snow assesses her friend. This combination is an old favourite. Pants she’s turned into capris after growing a few inches over the last couple years. A faded blouse, worn from the wash. A light blue jean jacket that looks almost vintage. A beat up pair of flats she’s had since third years because Ella’s feet never grow. Ella makes it work. On Snow’s tall friend it looks elegant, the blue of the jacket bringing out the blue in her eyes. The brown tank top making her hair seem more gold than yellow. She’s beautiful.

But of course, Snow understands her concern. Ella never gets new clothes. Unlike Snow, she can’t even work a job to pay for these sorts of things. Ella’s money goes straight to school supplies and necessities. Whatever’s left over goes to presents for friends or people who seem to be having a rough time. That’s Ella, of course--who needs new shoes when your best friend can’t come to Hogsmeade this week?

“We could make something!” Snow suggests, grinning. The only reason Ella’s clothes have lasted this long is her sewing ability. Modifications here and there. Snow does more than modify. Most of her money goes toward the materials necessary for her own creations.

Her outfit today looks like something out of a Vera Wang collection. A yellow miniskirt paired with a detailed blue blouse accented with red that perfectly matches her lips. “If I could make this, we can definitely make you a dress.”

She has a concept in mind already. Something simple. Pink and flowery.

“That sounds wonderful!” Ella’s smile reaches her eyes and Snow feels a rush of pride. She’s always felt like Ella is truly the worst off out of their trio and yet the kindest. Getting to do something to help her, to let her have a night for herself, that’s worth anything. “We could use one of my mother’s dresses as a base. My favourite one is pink and…”

They amble on in the direction of Madame Malkin’s, discussing the dress and all the things they’d have to purchase. Snow is grateful for the savings this last summer has let her accumulate. Ella is grateful her aunt doesn’t know about her raise yet. It’s a sunny day. The flowers that wilted over the heat of the summer look reborn in the midst of the September breeze. Snow gathers them to
make a flower crown. The girls take turns playing a game. One person hums a tune until the other can recognize it and sings the next line. They don’t have an official name for it, but Snow calls it Tuning In in her mind.

Ellas’ voice is clear and lovely, adding a charming voice to a picturesque scene, a delicious stolen moment of freedom after a week of busy busy busy.

“Hello,” a dear elder woman calls, approaching the duo.

The girls smile kindly at the old woman with frayed hair and robes. She looks as though she’s in her sixties, almost reminiscent of Professor Flora if the professor hadn’t had all her meals.

“Would you like a caramel apple?” She offers, taking one out of her worn basket. “Free for such a pretty girl like yourself.”

“Oh no, we just had lunch, but thank you so much for offering.” Snow declines. She doesn’t want to take something the woman could sell.

“Oh, please do. I need some taste testers. I’m planning on selling these beauties during Halloween and I won’t get any sales if they don’t taste perfect. Help an old woman out, won’t you?” The lady croons.

Well, when she puts it like that...

And maybe it’s because the woman looks so desperate for her to try it. Maybe it’s because it’s been such a beautiful day that her ever constant guard is finally down a little. Maybe it’s just her trusting nature breaking through the walls she’s built. Whatever it is she finds herself accepting the apple from the old witch and taking a big bite.

It doesn’t taste right. There’s something bitter poisoning the sweetness of the caramel. Snow feels woozy. The world is spinning. Is she allergic to something in the caramel? What’s happening?

The world fades out just as Snow begins to ponder if it was her.
She wakes to a kiss on her cheek. It’s Florian.

“Oh, it worked!” He jumps up in triumph.

Snow tries to lift her head but she can’t. Her head feels as heavy as a ton of bricks, like the worst hangover of her life. It takes a full two minutes of shaking her head and rubbing her eyes for it to register where she is.

She’s lying in a small bed with soft white sheets. In the Hospital Wing. Surrounding her are her friends, Ella, Florian, Philip. All except Briar. And then a few more familiar faces. Master Sweet, of course. Headmaster Mouse, wow. And, bubbling with excitement--


“Happy’s so happy you’re awake, mum. When Happy heard you were sick he had to come down.”

“We all did, mum.” Doc agrees.

They all blush, none brighter than Bashful, of course.

“Yes, we were quite surprised when they came down,” Professor Mouse says, approaching Snow’s bedside.

Well f*ck. Secret blown. He must know by now that she’s been living in the house elves’ quarters during the summers.

“While I cannot comprehend why you wouldn’t just tell us about your living predicament, the important question here is, do you have any idea who would want to poison you?”

Her heart thumps faster at the thought. She thought she’d be safe. She thought if she kept a low
“Yes,” Her voice shakes, “My stepmother, Regina la Rue White.”

“But--I... I have no idea how she could have found me. I was so careful.” She can’t help the tears that follow. Or the way her whole body trembles as she explains, “My father died in second year. She killed him with a potion in his meals. It poisoned him slowly, making it seem like he was sick. I only knew because she tried it on me too. She was technically my legal guardian, but she made it clear she didn’t like me. I was supposed to inherit"- hic- "everything after his"- sniffle- "death. She tried to kill me at the end of the year by hiring an assassin, but he let me go so I wandered Hogwarts and wound up in the elves’ quarters. They all vowed to help me. Thankfully, she didn’t know where I went to school. Well, at least I thought she didn’t. I made her think it was Beauxbatons by speaking French whenever we were together. I did everything so she could- so she wouldn’t-” She. Can’t. Breathe. “What did she do to me?”

Master Sweet makes her take deep breaths as he explains. “She turned the Killing Curse into a potion. It’s a very difficult potion to master. I thought it was impossible, even. When they brought you here we were certain you were dead, but Florian didn’t want to give up.”

True Love’s Kiss. Of course. She didn’t know if it was his romantic love for her, one-sided as it may be, or their platonic intimacy, but he saved her.

“We need to learn as much as we can about this woman, tell us everything you can remember.” Headmaster Mouse says gently.

“Grumpy will bring the lady something to eat first.” The stubborn house elf glares at the Headmaster. Only Grumpy could have the guts and disrespect and devotion to Snow to do such a thing.

Headmaster Mouse looks taken aback but nods and the hou...
Tadashi is working to make sure no one asks too many questions, especially not Madame DunBroch, but apparently, Millicent hasn’t been seen since this morning. She’s gone.”

She says too much too quickly for Snow to register it all.

Headmaster Mouse, though gets right to business. “Where is Briar now? Saint Mungo’s?”

“Yes.”

“Keep me updated on her condition, Minnie. Are Flora, Fauna, and Merriweather all with her?”

“I believe they wanted to stay until they figured out what happened.”

“Do you have any idea where Evelyn went?”

“She mentioned going to Hogsmeade this morning. I assumed she’d be back by now.”

“Wait.” Snow White interrupts the Headmaster and Headmistress for a good reason. “I think I know where she is.”

Everyone’s eyes dart from the headmaster to Snow. “This may sound ridiculous, but Professor Queen has hated me since she came to teach here in third year. And she came right after my assassination attempt and Professor Queen never goes into Hogsmeade. What if it was her?”

Snow expects everyone to glare at her. To roll their eyes. Yes, the one teacher who doesn’t adore you is your evil stepmother. How else could she not love you? Briar has said it before. (Oh god, Briar. Please, Please, Please let her be okay. Please, God? If you’re real, take care of her.)

They don’t. Headmaster Mouse furrows his eyebrows. “She did come out of nowhere. No references, just demonstrations of her skill. It’s very possible.”

He turns back to Minnie, “Check her dormitory for anything suspicious.”
His wife nods and runs off, her heels clickity-clacking through the hall.

The headmaster turns back to Snow, “Have you come to any other realizations?”

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Merida DunBroch has no fears. Okay, no she has one. Her mother. Here. At Hogwarts. Why does she of all people have to get here early?!! Ugh. Ugh.

She thought she’d get more time to find the old witch and her old hut. Nope. Apparently not. She found out about her mother coming literally yesterday, so there went her plans of going to Hogwarts with Naveen and Aladdin. Instead, she had to sneak into the Forbidden Forest.

Surprisingly enough, it isn’t too hard to get into the forest without getting caught. She’s really shitty at charms but somehow her half-assed Disillusionment Charm keeps her from being seen from anyone. She sees the will’o the wisps immediately. The blue balls of smoke beckon her forward. Even if she wasn’t so determined to change her fate, she would have followed them. They entrance her like moths to a flame.

The cottage is tiny. Less than the size of her room in the dormitory. It feels like a shack, maybe because of the wooden things that filled it from wall to wall, save the center of the room. The witch appears out of nowhere, which is fairly normal for witches to do, but Merida jumps anyway.

The stubborn redhead figures out quickly enough that the old bat is fucking insane. She tried to sell Merida her trinkets and it takes a while to convince her that she needs her expertise. Merida needs her to change her fate. Her pleading works when she offers a necklace as payment. She accepts it after careful examination. A locket for a potion.

Merida has learned over the years that the more awful the ingredients of a potion sounds, the more powerful the potion is. This has helped her immensely in the multiple choice sections of potions examinations.

She waits for it to brew, expecting the nasty liquid broth to be bottled up, but instead, out pops a cake.

An impossibly unassuming mini cake. The old woman tells her that it’ll only take one bite for her to get her freedom, to change her fate, to change her mum’s mind. Make her someone “you can bear.”

Just one small bite from this one small pastry. Such a small little thing for so much trouble. Merida has to redo the Disillusionment charm to get back into the castle and it wears off in front of some first year, freaking them out. Probably a Muggleborn. Merida doesn’t bother to explain anything to
the kid and instead marches in the direction of the room she knows her mum is staying in.

She wishes this was simply about her mum trying to force a boyfriend on her but it’s more than that.

Lady Eleanor wants to court her off to one of the dunderhead sons of her father's friends. Well not really friends, rather, investors or benefactors or partners. She’s not exactly sure which, as she hasn't cared to pay attention. All she know is they want her, not to only to date, but to "court" one of them. You know what the difference between courtship and dating is? Courtships details a definite marriage. Her mum wants her to pick one of three idiots at the ripe old age of fifteen (fine, she’s nearly sixteen, but still) to end up with for the rest of her life. That’s not even some joke or a recipe for a reality show. It's legit. It's real. And it’s not what she wants at all.

Courtship and acting like a lady and being a homemaker.

She's tried to prepare Merida for this her entire life and Merida can't stand it for a second.

She wants to do archery, play quidditch, ride bareback on her horse, Angus. She’s aromatic. She’s comfortable with the fact that she’s never had a crush, never felt those telltale butterflies, just sometimes physical attraction, and even then to only women. She wants her closest relationship with a guy to be her friendships with Al and Naveen and Flynn. She want’s her mother to accept her the way that she is, personality, sexuality, all of her, not just the part that looks pretty in a dress.

I want my freedom!

She sighs and rehearses what’s going to happen in her head: Hello, Mum. Yeah, it's so nice to see you, too. I'm really sorry about what I said to you at the station, you know I didn't mean it. In fact, I made you this, to apologize. Why don't you sit and have a bite? Listen, I've been thinking about these guys you've been so adamant about me, uh, meeting with, and you know what, I think I've made a decision. I don't want to go out with any of them. Ever. I want to decide my own fate, is that alright with you? Really, you've had a sudden change of heart and it is? That's great. I know the cake is perfect.

She hopes to dear God, Merlin, whatever it was that was out there, that this would work. She’s so sick and tired of her mum talking about "suitors." Suitors, ha, like they live in the 1700s or something.

She finally reaches the room set up for her mum. Of course, the beloved public figure would get one of the most detached, biggest suites in the castle as a "most esteemed Coordinator" for the Victory Games.

Merida knocks on the door.

"Mum," she calls.

"Merida?" A surprised voice calls back from behind her.

She turns around, "Mum!"

"Oh Merida, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Mum, no. I'm sorry. I really shouldn't have pulled that stunt and—"
"It's all right," she leads me into her room, "Your father has things under control in Scotland."

"Really? You mean, I won't have to go through with picking a suitor?"

She scoffs, "Of course you'll pick a suitor. They'll all be here before the end of the games. April we think. Maybe May. Anyway, thank God, you came around."

"Uh, yeah Mum," Merida gives her a weak smile, "Anyway, I uh, made you this. You know as a sort of peace offering."

"You made a cake for me?" She looks down at the tray, eyes wide in shock.

"Yeah, I thought it'd be something nice."

"That is very nice of you."

She takes a bite and then coughs.

Her face overcomes with disgust. Her mother, the lady, couldn't help the nauseous expression on her face. Well then. "That's an," she coughed again, "interesting flavour."

"Uh huh, Mum. Back to the courtships. You haven't had a change of heart or anything?"

"Of course not," she gets up from the little table she'd sat down in and headed for the door, "In fact, I must tell your father and the men that you've changed your attitude on the matter. Maybe you can tell me the pick early and save us the trouble."

"Are you sure you even want to do it? I mean, how do you feel?" She’s desperate. Fuck, it seemed like this dessert made her mum even more adamant than she’d been before.

Suddenly, she stumbles, "Actually, dear, I'm not feeling too well."

"So you have changed your mind about the whole thing?" Merida can’t help but hope.

Mum looks sick, "Merida!"

She takes her mother’s hand and leads her back to bed, tucking her in the covers and adding a few extra blankets for good measure.

"It's okay, Mum," Merida tries to sound soothing, "We can figure this out tomorrow, when you feel better, maybe changed."

Her mother groans.

Gosh, she looks awful. What kind of potion was in that cake?! She’s going to pass out!

She groans again and falls off the bed, taking the covers with her.

"Mum?" Merida calls.
And then a figure comes out of the mass of blankets her mother had been under. A figure that’s much, much larger than her mother. Much, much taller. The figure shakes off the blankets and Merida barely stops herself from screaming.

*My mother is a bear! MY MOTHER IS A FUCKING BEAR!*  

Chapter End Notes

AND THE PLOT THICKENS hahaha. Lots of action this chapter. I hope you didn't mind the length. If you liked it please give kudos, comment, bookmark, and/or subscribe :) I'm so grateful for those of you that already have. Thank you so much for your support! I'm always so pleasantly surprised when I get a notification. Next chapter is one I've been looking forward too: Tiana, Peter Pan, and Elsa! Expect it within a month, hopefully. I might get busy with committing to college and AP tests but I think within a month is manageable.
Chapter 8: Study Break

Chapter Summary

Tiana tutors Naveen. Peter struggles with his feelings. Elsa meets a new distraction.

Chapter Notes

We have passed the 100 pages on Googe Docs mark! Fair warning this chapter will be longer than the average chapter has been. It was a lot of fun to write besides the thirteen-year-olds kissing which, believe me, is as weird for me to write as it is for you to read. (I promise you I'm just trying to be realistic, not intentionally perverse. Apparently, middle school age kids are hormonal.) Before we begin I'd like to give a shout out to the awesome misspandalily, who wrote these amazing, long comments on each chapter and ofc my lovely beta Crystal <3. Also speaking of comments, please leave comments, give kudos, subscribe, and/or bookmark this fic if you like this chapter :) (Minor edits: 5/24/18)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
He’s late. Of course, he is. He’s been late every single study session they’ve had. Cram sessions on Sunday mornings, Homework Review on Wednesday afternoons. He had to reschedule today’s session for 9:00 on account of “helping out a friend.” He probably just had some party last night and couldn’t be bothered to wake up early. Whatever. Tiana is used to waiting on the wannabe prince.

That is why she brought a novel, Luna Lovegood’s *Nargles in the Mistletoe*. It’s not the new one, but one of her favourite Lovegood novels because it makes it feel like Christmas even when it’s just early October. She loves how Lovegood can write about literally any genre, romance, mystery, horror, contemporary, historical, nonfiction--sometimes all of them at the same time--and maintain the same lyrical, mystical writing style. And how she kept Lovegood as a pen name despite getting married. And how she has this super cool life traveling and taking care of magical creatures on top of writing. Luna Lovegood is an inspiration. She does it all and takes shit from no one. She also has a really funny Twitter account…

She’s through only a few pages when Naveen drops a stack of textbooks in front of her.

“Sorry about the reschedule. My friend had an, err, hairy situation, you know,” He laughs.

No. Tiana doesn’t know. But considering the whole pranking party lifestyle Naveen leads, she doesn’t want to know.

“No problem,” Tiana says briskly as she puts her book to the side. “What do we have today?”

“Ah well according to my planner,” he makes a show of opening the planner she made him buy to organize assignments, “I have a charms assignment due tomorrow, some table to fill out for the Divination diary due Thursday, and, eugh, we have that Defense Practical Friday. On the bright side, Professor Queen disappeared over the weekend so no potions homework.”

“I was so worried when Tarzan came in. Do you think she’s okay?” Tiana interjects.

“You’ve got to be the only person who’s actually worried about her.” He rolls his eyes.
Tiana opens her mouth in indignation, “Well she took an abrupt leave of absence. She must be sick!”

“You’re such a Hufflepuff,” He shakes his head, “So naive. She was clearly evil.”

“You can’t call her evil for assigning a lot of homework, Maldonia.”

“Oh Rosy,” Naveen dares be patronizing toward her. “She was so fucking sketchy. Her name’s probably a pseudonym. She has literally no record on Wizernet.”

“Some older people don’t trust the Wizernet.”

“Oh yeah sure, Tiana. And I’m sure Milly just decided to disappear right when Briar Rose went off with her aunts and never came back.”

“What?! Briar Rose is missing too? How do you know all of this?”

“Ah, well, unlike you, I don’t use all of my energy to memorize all the silly details the professors drone on about. I gossip, and sometimes when I’m bored I watch the way teachers talk. Like it’s always obvious when Kida’s been shagged because she smiles more and her voice is lighter. Which, believe it or not, is at least once a week. So kudos to Milo.”

Tiana’s cheeks burn, “Why are you even in Arithmancy? You’re going to get a poor on the OWL at best.”

“Kida’s fit.” What a perverted wanker.

“Anyway, Amelia had a slight stutter in Defense and everyone’s been saying Briar isn’t here.” Amelia…? Right, Amelia Merryweather.

She frowns, “I hope she’s okay.”

“I wish Milly would come back. I mean I know she’s a bitch but at least she isn’t the Snow
“Queen.”

“Elsa’s going to be head girl?”

“Rumor has it.”

“Who’s going to take over potions?”

“I heard it was someone from Castelobruxo. Headmistress Yzma? But it’s also possible that it’ll be some professor from Ilvermorny.”

“How do you know these things?!”

“I am well-liked,” he replies, with a dramatic flourish of his hands. “My many admirers love to tell me what’s going on in the school. And they would also love it if I passed my classes…” He gestures to the stack of textbooks.

“Oh, right.” Tiana straightens in her seat. “I think we should finish the Charms Assignment and practice for Defense. I trust you can bullshit your Divination on your own.”

“Ah, Tiana, I do not bullshit Divination. I truly predict the future. In fact, I have a vision now. One day you will be as madly in love with me as the rest of the school is.”

Tiana’s face scrunches up in disgust and she mimics vomiting. “I’d rather kiss a frog than come anywhere close to falling in love with someone like you.”

“Ah, my dear Tiana, but I am much handsomer than a frog.” He ends the sentence in a wink, and Tiana cringes. She can’t tell if he’s flirting with her because he thinks it’s funny or because it’s just instinct. Either way, it's annoying.

“Nope. You’re just as slimy and as stupid. Let’s get to work.”

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“Tiaaaaaannnnnnaaaaa, I’m never going to get this counterjinx,” Naveen groans.

In all honesty, the divined future doesn’t look bright for the spoiled arsehole. They’ve gone over it nearly twenty times.

“I know what we need! A break.” He lights up.

“No.” Tiana knows that he’s not going to learn it unless he just keeps practicing.

“Oh, come on, Professor Rose. A break. You do know what a break is, right?”

She rolls her eyes. “Yes, Naveen. I take a three day break from you two times a week.”

“And you can handle me so much better because of it. If I take a break from this damn spell I’ll be able to look at it from a fresh point of view later.”

“Naveen, you’re paying me by the hour. Any break would just be a waste of your money. Besides, you’re also paying me to keep you focused.”

“Ah, come on. We can just finish the session tomorrow afternoon. I’ll pay extra. I just cannot wave my wand for another second.”

He’s not going to give up. Tiana sighs. There is that assembly tomorrow before dinner. She doesn’t have much planned for before the grand welcome.

“Fine. Tomorrow from four to five. If you’re late again so help me, I’ll--”

“Don’t worry.” He’s already walking away. “I won’t be late.”

He speedwalks off toward Gryffindor Tower. Not for the first time, Tiana wonders if he has some way of communicating with his friends that she doesn’t know about.

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By some miracle, He’s not late. But he looks...exhausted.

“You had fun in bed last night?” She raises an eyebrow.

“Believe it or not, Judgy Tiana,” he doesn’t even look at her and his tone is more serious than usual, “My sole purpose in life isn’t sex. I wasn’t in bed with some girl. I didn’t sleep enough because I was helping out Merida.”

Sure. With a prank, probably...but he actually looks upset...

“Sorry.” She hesitates. “Is she okay?”

“She’s had some problems with Lady Eleanor lately, but I think they’re okay now.”

“Well, that’s good. Do you want to try the counterjinx?”

“Sure.”
He fails again, falling three times consecutively. “Ugh, fuck Defense. I have bodyguards! Why would I need to know how to do a counterjinx?”

“Well your bodyguards don’t follow you everywhere. And you might not always have them there.” If his parents cut him off he definitely won’t.

“Come on, Naveen. You can do this. Just feel what you want to happen.” She instructs.

“Flipendo.” She casts the knockback jinx.

He doesn’t get it immediately but this time he falls lightly. They keep practicing and by five o’clock he can do it almost perfectly.

“Ashidanza!” He grins and places his hands on her shoulders. “Thank you, Tiana the Waitress. Perhaps you are not so worthless.”

His eyes are startlingly close to her in this position, and they're surprisingly not… that… bad. Uh oh. *Come on Tiana, keep it together.*

“Oh Naveen, you *really* know how to charm a girl.” She rolls her eyes, trying to look at anything but his face.

“And how to counterjinx one!” He spins her around and her heart jumps. She thinks maybe her cheeks are a bit red, and thanks her skin tone for disguising the blush.

It’s okay. He’s an objectively attractive guy despite his terrible personality. She’s a straight, teenage girl. Her body was bound to get excited like this at some point. But why towards *Naveen Maldonia*, she can’t fathom.

She composes herself. It’s Naveen. The idiot who can’t pass his classes without her help. “We should head to the Great Hall.”

“Ah, yes, and if you try to knock me down on the way there, I can stop you!” He grins and, without another word, races away down the hall.

Except he’s kind of an endearing idiot…sometimes.

.o.O.o.

Beauxbatons makes their entrance first. Despite the diversity in their students they seem unified with their pastel blue uniforms and veela-like attractiveness. Their dance routine is perfect. Not a single misstep. Tiana cannot help that her eyes keep falling on the main dancer. A beautiful young
man with light blond hair who looks like a model. He must have more veela blood than the rest of them. She tries to resist the urge to throw herself at him. She can tell some Hogwarts girls aren’t resisting.

“I LOVE YOU ADRIEN!” one Gryffindor girl squeals, waving a magazine. Tiana assumes he’s on the cover.

His cheeks flush lightly. Tiana only notices because she can’t help looking at his sharp cheekbones. He’s like a modern Adonis, good lord.

The dance routine ends with him and a petite Asian-looking girl doing flips in the air. She looks like she’s flying. She’s pretty, with black hair and crystal-blue eyes. Other girls glare at her as she stands back-to-back against Adrien.

The French witches and wizards take their seats by the Ravenclaws. Tiana wonders if they think they’re going to be with only the Ravenclaws the whole trip, because if so, they’re sorely mistaken. Hogwarts is all about interhouse unity. That’s why normally, students eat together at co-house circular tables instead of these long, segregated tables. Interhouse unity is important to ensure no group feels outcast (specifically Slytherins, most likely.) Tiana read about it in *Hogwarts, A History: Revised Edition*. Naveen usually sits with Flynn, Merida and Aladdin, but as this is a formal event, it’s just him and Flynn whispering to each other. Naveen winks at a blonde Beauxbaton girl wearing too much makeup for Tiana’s taste. She blows him a kiss.

The blonde is the last of her group to take her seat and the only one not looking at Headmaster Mouse, her eyes fixated on Naveen. Even then she blends into the perfection of her school. The girls sit with their legs crossed in the exact same way. The boys don’t shuffle or tease each other in whispers, they don’t fiddle with their fingers or rest their heads on their hands, even though they’re probably tired and bored now. It seems unnatural how prim and proper they are with their perfect posture and immaculate robes, even to Tiana Rose, resident perfectionist.

Once they are seated, Headmaster Mouse welcomes Durmstrang Institute.

They fly in on dragons.

*Dragons*.

They do a magnificent routine outside, all coordinated loops and flips and balls of fire. Tiana is torn
between being terrified and feeling awestruck. Her mind doesn’t process how the hell they have dragons until they start flying in and the students are a recognizable distance away.

Dragons. Right. Apparently, they’ve been recently legalized in Bulgaria. A student, one of the fan favourites to win The Victory Games, is rumoured to have campaigned the end of dragon hunting and started a dragon training class at Durmstrang. Except, Tiana has a feeling that’s more truth than rumour. Leading the group is a young man with longish brown hair on a sleek, black dragon. To his right is a beautiful young woman with braided blond hair. Despite her petite frame, she looks lethal, and so does her spike-covered dragon.

To his left is a guy with snow white hair. He’s the one that extinguished the fireballs with ice. Tiana heard about him on the Prophet. He’s Jack Frost, a so-called “Guardian” prophesized to save the children of the world with special magic. Although that’s probably not why some girls are chanting his name and some guys are looking at him like he’s a god. He’s about as handsome as that Adrien. He’s also, if Tiana remembers correctly--and to be honest she rarely does when it comes to sports--some sort of Quidditch star, about as famous as that Gryffindor guy, Kocoum. Except he hasn’t signed to a team yet so he can play in the Victory Games. He doesn’t look quite as scary as the other guys, and girls for that matter, on his team. There’s a group of Asian-looking guys that could probably kill Tiana with just a glance. He lacks their vicious scowls, sporting a cheeky smirk instead.

They take their seats by the Slytherins as per tradition. Jack Frost and his close buddies, in fact, end up right next to Naveen and Flynn. The two idiots look like they’ve won the lottery.

Tiana didn’t think Naveen was that into Quidditch, but then again, she doesn’t know him outside their tutoring sessions and Lottie’s massive crush and all the times he’s teased her.

Lottie whisper/shouts in her ear, “CAN YOU BELIEVE HE WINKED AT THAT FRENCH GIRL.”

Tiana gives her a look, “You owe me three galleons, Lottie.” They had a bet going on whether or not Lottie could keep her yap shut through the welcoming.

“Oh fiddlesticks, I don’t even care.” Her face turns red as she hands her best friend the three gold coins. “She blew him a kiss!”

Tiana shook her head. “I’m sorry, Lottie. I’m sure it was nothing.”
“Well the next time I see him, I am going to give him a piece of my mind! Oooh!”

Tiana sighs, knowing full well Lottie won’t. She’ll be over this French girl incident in a day and get all excited about going with Naveen to the ball. He asked her a week ago and she giddily said yes.

She wonders if Naveen likes her at all. A part of her wonders if he even really likes anyone beneath that thick layer of charisma. He doesn’t seem as close to his friends as they seem to each other. He doesn’t seem like he really trusts anyone. But then again, he seems like someone with no secrets or troubles to begin with, a shallow, spoiled rich boy that Tiana has the burden of tutoring… except he’s genuinely funny sometimes, genuinely charming, genuinely genuine.

Why is she even thinking about him? He’s an asshole. He’s made fun of her for years. He doesn’t respect women. He’s Naveen Maldonia. Not worth her time at all.

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Peter refuses to acknowledge that he’s spending more time with Wendy than he did before. (Even though he is.) She’s his best friend, he likes to justify, kissing doesn’t change anything. (But it does.) They’re almost joined at the hip walking out of the Great Hall, but not so joined that he’s holding her hand or anything. He’s Peter Pan for fuck’s sake, not some boyfriend, some teenager. Wendy seems fine with it though.

“We should find a nice quiet place to study tonight,” He whispers in her ear. She rolls her eyes. They’re pretty, light blue, kind of like robin eggs. Wendy-bird and her robin egg eyes. They seem to pop more tonight. Maybe she’s wearing makeup. He can’t really tell.

“Yes, but to actually study though,” She whispers back, “We have an examination in Sid’s class.”

“But history is boring,” he whines. He was planning on studying her, figuring out exactly what makes her moan and what she thinks is too much.

“Mm, but I can make anything interesting.” His mind is in the gutter. Guiltily, his brain comes up with different scenarios of her being… interesting. He knows she wouldn’t want to, not for a couple of years, but lately, he’s had this sort of hunger in his stomach. He wakes up hard, thinking about her kisses and what she might look like under those robes. (Oh puberty…)
“That you can,” he agrees, “But if we actually study you have to promise to keep Friday free for pranks.”

She stops walking and looks at him, “Peter you cannot possibly believe I’m so boring that I wouldn’t want to prank on Friday, the Thirteenth of October nonetheless.”

“You want to study troll wars on a Sunday.” He shoots back.

“Peter, you’re a straight E student without studying. Just imagine what you could be if you applied yourself.”

“Ah, and here I thought you were just Mother, but you’re also Teacher. Wendy bird, you’re starting to sound a lot like Flora.”

“Sorry, dear.” He likes it when she calls him that. It’s so perfectly Wendy.

“‘s okay.” And it is. Just like that.

“What’s the plan for tonight?” One of the twins shouts at Peter.

“Well, Mother wants everyone to do their homework and go to bed early.” He replies.

The little crowd groans.

“But I think we should begin planning Friday’s pranks first!” he finishes with a smirk.

The boys cheer. Wendy glares at him for making her seem like the stick in the mud.

Except, he makes sure not to make her look bad. She plays a big part in figuring out the logistics of the giant prank and the boys look at her with wide eyes as she explains why scientifically her plan makes more sense than his own original idea. And he helps her help the boys with their homework so they all finish before nine. He doesn’t hate it that much and the smile she rewards with him makes it doubly worth it.
She reads everyone a bedtime story from her book of adventures and despite her captivating voice, by nine ten they’re all out. Neverland is dark and silent.

Peter takes Wendy to the Room of Requirement to study. He makes it a green and blue room with a nice large desk and a roaring fireplace and a bookshelf filled with volumes of magical history. Instead of a couple of chairs, he makes sure there’s a nice large couch. He tells himself it’s for comfort, but he knows in the back of his mind what he really wants to do on that couch.

Wendy manages to keep Peter focused by reading the textbook like a story explaining everything, even the boring stuff as an adventure. She’s amazing like that. Peter gives her memory tricks even though he never uses them himself.

“Things just seem to click for me. I just remember things easily.” He’s always been clever. So much so that he gets those “you’re not living up to your potential” lectures all the time. He’s glad he doesn’t have parents or it’d be really unbearable.

He knows Wendy envies him. Not because he doesn’t have parents (she seems to actually like hers) but because of his intelligence. Sure she’s a straight O student but she studies for those Os, frequently when he and the younger boys are carrying out the pranks she helped plan.

After an hour of stories and mnemonics and some highlighting by Wendy, Peter starts to get restless, fiddling with her hair and looking longingly at her lips. He wants her very badly.

“Come on, let’s take a study break.” He says in a whisper that he knows she likes then kisses her cheek, very close to her lips.

She sighs. He can’t tell if it’s in defeat or because she liked the kiss. He hopes it’s both. He wants to be on top of her more than anything but she sits cross-legged across from him.

She lets him snog her though, thoroughly. He loves how she plays with his hair, it’s so hot. He loves how he can feel her smiling. How she smells like girl. Some special vanilla perfume. He wants to feel her skin. He pulls at her cardigan and she obliges, leaving her arms bare for him to touch.

He can see the top of her tits too. The hormones coursing through his body want nothing more than to squeeze them, but he doesn’t. He can control himself. Except he can’t control these grown-up
thoughts, no matter what he does. He wonders if this is what most thirteen-year-olds think about and do or if he, *Merlin forbid*, is ahead of the curve.

Then he forces himself to focus on the taste of her lip gloss and how delicate she is right there next to him.

Face flushed, she pulls away after about twenty minutes and smiles up at him, her eyes shining with puppy love. She wraps her arms around him in a hug.

They sit there hugging for a couple beats before Wendy pulls away and asks with a shaky voice, “Do you, uh, want to go to the, uhm, ball with me?”

“Of course, you’re my best friend,” He answers quickly.

“Uhm, is that all I am to you?” She looks confused and then impatient.

“You’re Mother?” he guesses.

“Oh come on Peter,” Wendy shakes her head, “You want to snog me. You hold my hand when we’re alone. You flirt with me. You’re the person I want to spend all my time with.” All true.

“Doesn’t that mean that we’re more than just platonic friends?” She sounds frustrated.

“As opposed to what? *Boyfriend and Girlfriend?* ” He spits out.

He’s flooded with emotions he can’t process. Anger. Confusion. Frustration. Fear.

“I’m Peter Pan. I’m not ever going to be your boyfriend.” He says coldly.

“Why? Because you’re afraid you just might like it? Because you think it means you’re growing up?” She matches his tone but her volume climbs higher than his. “Fine! I don’t want to go to the dance with a *coward* anyway!”
She gathers her things and storms out the door lighting fast.

The word slices him. *Coward*. Peter Pan isn’t a coward! He’s braver than a fucking lion and sneakier than a snake! He’s not afraid of anything.

But she’s right about one thing. He doesn’t want to grow up. Adults are arseholes. They lie and steal and cheat (and leave you for something better). You can’t trust an adult or adult feelings. Everything he feels around Wendy isn’t real. According to Muggle science it’s the result of a shitton of stupid chemicals in his body. Chemicals that are supposed to make him just like them.

He punches the wall. Despite the lean muscles in his arms, it hurts like hell and leaves his knuckles bleeding. He’s not going to grow up, least not for a girl who wants to dance and hold hands and be all mushy and get married someday. Hell no.

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He doesn’t speak to her on Monday. Nor Tuesday. Nor Wednesday. Nor Thursday… She sits with her brother John and one of his friends, a second year named Alice, at lunch instead of with the Lost Boys. The boys ask Peter why relentlessly. They miss her cool stories and how she always has everything anyone needs in her little purse, from a tissue to a piece of gum to a band-aid to tiny vials of important potions. They miss her pretty perfume and her soft voice. They miss her helping with homework problems and messy beds and ripped robes and silly arguments. (He misses her too.)

Peter thinks they’re soft. At least the younger ones are, but that’s to be expected. They miss their mothers. Some of them don’t have mothers, like Peter, and grew attached to the idea of one. The only person who isn’t upset is Tink, who claims they never needed her anyway and takes her seat next to him at the table.

On Friday during dinner, a fourth year asks Wendy to go to the ball with him. Hiro Hamada, genius extraordinaire. Peter remembers her talking about how he was working on the integration of magic and technology. The genius was tutoring her in physics in their free time. Peter hadn’t thought much of it, except to attribute her ability to plan the logistics of pranks better because of this knowledge but now he wonders if that’s all he tutored her on. *Maybe that’s why she was so good at snogging.* He wants to punch Hiro in the face, but he knows this was the hormones talking. (The same ones that made him ache not being around Wendy.) So he just glares as they hug and the Ravenclaw table cheers. He glares as the Head Boy, Tadashi claps his brother on the back. He glares until he remembers. It’s Friday. Friday the thirteenth.
The prank goes exactly as planned. Right as pudding begins to be served, spiders start to crawl out of every dessert. People squeal and shout and wail. Peter laughs at their panic. The spiders chase people to the doors where a trap is waiting. Wendy’s trap. Buckets are triggered to pour potion-infused syrup on to everyone rushing out. The syrup makes the spiders stick but also has wicked side effects. People turn orange and green. People feel ten times as frightened. People turn invisible.

Peter knows he’s going to get caught for this one. He’s still sitting in his seat and he’s laughing. But it’s so worth it. The best part is, Hiro gets doused in syrup. He has the worst reaction: puking. Ah yes he made that potion from puking pastilles extract. Gold.

Wendy marches over to him.

“What the hell?!” she screams. He may have changed her original prank idea. He couldn’t help it, it was too tame. Fake spiders? Regular syrup? Too amateur.

“You’re a real fucking tosser! You- you- foolish boy. Can’t you see you’ve hurt people?! Grow up, you arse! This isn’t funny! It’s just mean.”

.o.O.o.

Peter has never seen Minnie so angry. She yells at him for nearly twenty minutes straight for endangering the lives of the other students and embarrassing Hogwarts in front of guests.

“My lord, Peter Pan, I thought Miss Darling had knocked some sense into you!” she concludes.

He shrinks in his seat at her name. The Darling Darling. She was so mad, fuming at him. He knows he should probably feel bad about the kids in the infirmary. Apparently, the reactions were really serious… She’s probably going to visit Hiro. She’s probably going to visit everyone. Unlike himself, Wendy isn’t just courage and cleverness. She’s considerate and kind and--

“She tried to. I, uh- resisted,” He says vaguely. Then he straightens, “Will you be contacting the orphanage about my behavior?”
The deputy headmistress softens, remembering that this foolish, idiotic child is in fact parentless.

“That will not be necessary. However, on top of your detentions, you will be moved out of the dormitory you are living in now.”

He shoots up from his seat, “What! No, you can’t do that! Neverland is my bloody home. I take care of those kids!”

They were allowed to stay in Neverland, as he had dubbed it, because of the tricky family life, because he’d known the kids for such a long time, because they needed each other. Besides, it wasn’t as though living together was doing any harm. If anything it helped everyone, particularly with the presence of Wendy.

Except now, it seems to Professor Mouse that with the absence of Miss Darling, it serves as merely a place for them to plan pranks.

“And I take care of all of the kids, Mr. Pan,” She explains, “I can’t have you cooking up plans to threaten them. Perhaps if you are an exemplary student, if you turn in all your homework on time, refrain from these horrible jokes, act responsibly and kindly and serve the full length of your detention, then you can return to the dormitory.”

His whole body itches. He hasn’t been away from Tootles since he arrived at Hogwarts. Tootles has had a hard time adjusting…

“Okay.” He swallows. He’s Peter Pan, he’ll find a way to sneak in.

“And that means no sneaking visits either, young man.” It’s like she can read his mind.

Wendy’s voice echoes in his mind, “You’re a real fucking toserter! You- you- you- foolish boy. Can’t you see you’ve hurt people?! Grow up, you arse! This isn’t funny! It’s just mean.”

She said "boy" with such contempt.

“Do you think it’s wrong to want to be a kid forever?” He asks quietly, regretting the question as
soon as it escapes his list. It’s not like an adult can help.

“No, it’s not wrong to want that. But Peter, what you did, that wasn’t the act of a child.” the Headmistress responds, “That was a mean stunt characteristic of a teenage boy.”

“Oh.”

And it’s not the hormones. It’s him. He’s changed. He doesn’t want to admit it, but it’s there. The plain truth. Two years ago, he wouldn’t have devised this kind of prank. He didn’t understand what it meant to hurt someone, not really. He didn’t understand the full extent of anger, how it could boil your blood and make you steam with a thirst for vengeance. Even hurt-- he didn’t understand hurt until he saw Wendy walk away. At least not the way it felt now. This melancholy. This empty feeling.

He must look really pathetic because instead of excusing him, she adds, “You’re one of my kids too, Peter. I want to protect all of you, even if it means from yourself,” she smiles slightly, “You’re so smart, so talented. You just need a little direction.”

.Elsa Arendelle has direction, a path ahead. That path, at the moment, leads her to the library at eight in the morning on Saturdays. She regrets sleeping in, but after staying up to check on the students hurt by Peter Pan’s horrid prank, she slept through her alarm. It was worth it, though.

“Elsa,” Headmaster Mouse had pulled her aside around eleven, “I was going to meet with you earlier to thoroughly discuss it, but in light of the crisis, I hope a brief conversation will suffice.”

She nodded lightly and refused to get her hopes up.

“What would you like to tell me?” She asked.

“As you know, Millicent Purnell disappeared a week ago. Further investigation has proved that she has left permanently without any sort of notice. As she was Head Girl, we require someone to fill her shoes, and with your lengthy qualifications, it is my honor to offer you the position.”
"I would be honored to accept. Thank you," she gave a slight smile.

The race for the title had been between her, Mary Fair, Esti Rodríguez, and of course Millicent Purnell. She had been surprised at the results. Sure Millicent was qualified, but like Elsa, she was also a bit cold. Of course, she knew she was too unliked (“the Snow Queen” they called her) to attain the distinction, but Millicent? Why not Mary or Esti?

She solved the mystery early in the year. Esti is in a romantic relationship with Tadashi, so it was sensible to avoid choosing her if it was possible. Moreover, she was so devoted to her potions experiments and that prestigious internship with Callaghan that she wouldn’t have time for it. Then there was Mary. Perhaps they found her personality ill-fitted? Mary is a particular sort of person, the kind that keeps her eggs in a row and fusses if they aren’t arranged to her liking. However, in Elsa’s opinion it was likely due to the fact that Tadashi is a Ravenclaw, and having two heads from the same house takes away from the image of “interhouse unity.”

But now that was irrelevant with the only non-Ravenclaw gone. They chose Elsa, despite her reputation.

And now it is another responsibility for Elsa to keep track of. Speaking of which, she has to get to work. Today she must write two essays, one on the production of the Wolfsbane potion for the new Potions professor, an American wizard who introduced himself as Bud Robinson, and another on analyzing the impacts of the Second Wizarding War, revise for an examination in Arithmancy and practicals in Charms and DADA, and finish translating a set of runes. She has to finish at least half of the work before her meeting with Tadashi and Headmaster Mouse on her duties as Head Girl, even though she’s sure “half” will require at least four and a half hours of intense concentration when she only has four. Additionally, she cannot work tomorrow as she has a meeting with the Norwegian Minister of Magic, “Uncle” Kai, a lunch with her sister, tutoring with a couple of second years, and an important dinner with special guests for the Games.

Her hands feel cold just thinking about it all, so she focuses on organizing her notes and textbooks. She begins the Wolfsbane essay first. Wolfsbane, also known as aconite and monkshood…

“You come here often?” a male voice interrupts.

Though it is clearly a joke, Elsa responds seriously, “I do." She does not bother to look up, “This is the only place in the entire castle where I can work without disruption .”

She’s hoping he’ll get the hint. The Hogwarts Library is her haven. Thousands of books in one place. Strict silence. Study nooks everywhere. It’s the eye of her hurricane life.
“That’s interesting. At Durmstrang we have a library connected to a hallway of private study rooms,” He continues, apparently not getting the hint, “At least I think that’s how it works, I’ve never been.”

Durmstrang Institute? His accent did not sound Russian or Scandinavian. Elsa is so surprised at this revelation that she looks up.

He is as white as the parchment in her hand. Pale skin, pale lips, pale blue eyes. Even his messy hair looks paperwhite. Tall and slender, he towers over her. She meets his gaze. Those pale blue eyes gleam back at her, playful and teasing.

“You can’t be serious. I’d have noticed if there was a library connected to a hallway of private study rooms,” she says, her eyebrows raised.

“Then why have you bothered to come to this one?” She asks absentmindedly, returning to the essay.

“I realized I’ll actually have to study to pass exams this year. I usually coast by on paying attention to lecture but I’m not sure what your professors expect of us.” He answered with a shrug.

“Then I suggest,” she tries to formulate the next words of her essay, “you start working.”

He takes a seat across from her and opens a book. Elsa glances at it. She cannot read Cyrillic perfectly but she thinks it’s Herbology. Interesting.

She ignores him.

Four hours later, and somehow she’s done with the essentials. Just in time. She lets a small sigh of relief escape her lips and rapidly cleans up her desk.

“Rushing off so soon?” Paper Boy is still here.

Elsa nods, “I have a meeting to attend to.”

“Head meeting?” he asked, referring to the badge pinned proudly on her blouse. Elsa nods.

“I’m sure you’re quite good at head stuff,” he says, then grimaces at the words.

Ignoring his possibly unintended, implications, she responds, “Yes, and now I’ve got to work, if you’ll excuse me, Mr…”

“Call me Jack.” He quickly interrupts. “And you are?”
“Elsa. Elsa Arendelle.”

Putting her notes and books in her left hand, she offers her right hand.

He shakes it firmly, “Pleasure to meet you.”

Elsa nods.

“See you later,” Jack smiles.

She gives an insincere nod. “Goodbye.”

When Elsa Arendelle says goodbye, she means it. She doesn’t expect to see him again. Hogwarts is a big school, and she is a busy woman.

.o.O.o.

The meeting is illuminating. It’s a wonder how many secrets the administration keeps. Apparently, Briar Rose/Aurora Stephan is under a sleeping curse. Her best friend Phillip Thompson desires to attempt “True Love’s Kiss” as it worked for Florian Prince and Snow White. Headmaster Mouse is thoroughly against the idea. He fears the kiss could send him to sleep. It’s impossible to know the risk. She currently resides in a private suite in St. Mungo's and Phillip is furious he cannot visit. On the matter of Professor Queen, she is absolutely gone for good. Apparently, she was actually Regina White, Snow’s stepmother. Her vacancy is not to be discussed with any Durmstrang or Beauxbaton students or faculty under any circumstances. Peter Pan was not expelled for the horrid prank but has, shockingly, been on his best behavior. As Head Girl, Elsa has to attend a flurry of meetings, dinners, and formal events for which she must learn the names of every important guest here for the Games. She must also dance the first waltz at the Welcoming Ball. And of course, she must be available in case any incident arises in addition to rounds and organizing prefect meetings.

It’s enough to overwhelm any straight O student at Hogwarts, but Elsa barely bats an eye. Hogwarts is similar to a miniature Norway. The so-called insanity is nothing compared to the chaos of actually running the Ministry at home. Which explains, then, why they chose Elsa over anyone else. She can handle all the work and pressure the best.

She can handle the remaining four hours of homework and Kai’s endless lecture. What she cannot handle is Anna Arendelle, her younger sister.
“Hans? The sixth year?” She cannot hide the alarm in her normally neutral voice.

“Ahh yes! He’s fantastic! SO CUTE, and smart and funny and sooo charming. I think I might even possibly be in love!!”

Elsa’s eyes widen with each exclamation until they’re watering.

“Love?” She chokes on her tea.

“Love.” Anna says dreamily.

Elsa hesitates. Every time she looks at her sister she cannot help but fixate on the white streak in her hair. The one that she, she, she-- her hands freeze up. No, conceal, don’t feel. She can handle remembering what happened. She can look at her baby sister without reliving every excruciating detail.

Anna. Oh she looks so genuinely happy. Happier than usual, or what Elsa assumes is usual. They only really see each other twice a month for Sunday Lunch (or for Anna, Breakfast!) and normally there isn’t this much conversation. Just pleasantries and grades and small talk. But Hans Westergard. His family is known in the Ministry for their ruthlessness, their desire for the crown…

“Oh, Anna,” Elsa fails to sound unpatronising, “I’m sure you do have feelings for this boy, but please take care of yourself. Refrain from impulsive behavior. Do not rush into anything.”

“Can you puh-lease just be supportive, sis?” Anna rolls her eyes, “I got a nicer response from Jaz and Ariel and they aren’t family.”

“I just want you to be smart.”

“I’ll be fine, Elsa. Just because I’m not Head Girl material doesn’t mean I’m not smart enough to make my own choices on who I date.” Anna shoots back.

The conversation shifts to the ball after that. Or rather, Anna blissfully blabs on about her dress and their group and how EXCITED she is as Elsa contemplates who in the world she will go with
and how to keep an eye on Hans that night.

Strangely enough, tutoring twelve-year-olds is a nice reprieve from the conundrums.

.o.O.o.

Jack is back. Why?

.o.O.o.

He’s there again. Two days in a row at the same nook as her. Right after dinner.

.o.O.o.

“Is this pattern going to continue?” she asks quite frankly on the second hour of the third day.

“Is it bothering you?” He seems genuinely concerned.

“Well no…”

“Then yes. I like watching you study. You have this cute focused expression when it’s Arithmancy.”

“Nothing about Arithmancy is cute.”

“Aw, come on, Arithmancy is my favourite.”

“Really? I would have thought Herbology.”
“Nah, I’m rubbish at that, can’t keep a single plant alive, much less recall all the different ones. Hence the studying.” He nods to the old book then scoots his chair closer to her. “Numbers, on the other hand, are excellent, quite easy to work with.”

He’s so close that she can smell his minty breath. She doesn’t mind very much because he is quite good at Arithmancy. He works through the most difficult problems as fast as Professor Thatch.

“Thank you.” She stares at his neat handwriting in mild disbelief, “I can’t believe it was so...straightforward.”

“Glad I could be of service,” He says cheekily and scoots only a couple centimeters away before returning to the Herbology book.

.o.O.o.

She feels like she should help him in return.

“Is there anything, in particular, you don’t understand about Herbology?”

He’s still sitting practically right next to her, but he nearly falls out of his seat in surprise.

“Oh, uh, honestly, none of it makes sense. I only took NEWT level Herbology because I don’t want to rule out being a healer.”

“That’s a noble cause.”

“Well, you gotta have a backup in case you get injured when you play Quidditch.”

And a vague memory ignites in her brain. Jack. Quidditch.

“Oh, you’re Jack Frost.” She says dumbly.

“The one and only,” He winks.
She grants him a small smile. “Would you like me to go over some notes with you?”

And that’s how she ends up reviewing all of sixth year Herbology and a month of seventh year Herbology with a famous Quidditch player in the space of an entire evening.

.o.O.o.

“These notes are amazing. How do you have time to make them so pretty and concise?”

Another evening with Jack Frost.

“You know what else is amazing?”

“What? The fact that you made Herbology make sense in less than four hours yesterday?”

“No, that you have no concept of personal space.” She finds herself laughing.

He smirks, “You don’t seem to be complaining.”

“That’s because I am far too busy taking notes to complain.” Which she should return to…

“Ah, see, that’s your problem. You’re too busy to even complain. You, mi’lady, need a break.”

“Nooo.” This is her break. From politics and people and gloves…

“Let’s go for a broom ride!”

“I’ve known you for less than a week.”
“Come on, it’ll be fun.” Of course, Jack Frost would base an argument on the amount of fun.

Elsa is unconvinced.

“It’ll be a show of cultural exchange and shit.”

And this is what happens when you try to be helpful. “Fine, but for only half an hour.”

“Fine, for at least half an hour.” He grins already putting the textbook away.

She packs up her stuff and puts on her gloves.

He doesn’t waste a second, “So where are you from, originally? You don’t sound English.”

Elsa is mildly embarrassed. “Norway.”

“Wow, a Norwegian Hogwarts student. Almost as crazy as a British Durmstrang student.”

“Why do you go to Durmstrang?” She’s curious.

“My mum’s English, a Muggle, but my dad went to Durmstrang. It’s also a better Quidditch school, and c’mon, we have dragons.”

“I am not here to argue about which school is better, Mr. Frost.”

“Of course not, you’re here for my life history.”

Elsa can’t help but smile.
“Well, you see, my mum is the most fantastic person in the world. She bakes homemade cookies and they are magical. My sister is not. She is beyond jealous of me and our next door neighbor Jamie who’s about her age and probably going to Hogwarts next year. Pippa is the loveliest ten-year-old in the world. Uhm, I love Quidditch more than Hiccup loves dragons and I actually have naturally brown hair. Your turn.”

They’re almost to the Quidditch pitch.

“My parents died in a shipwreck when I was fifteen. They had high expectations for me. My sister is a student here and about as silly as you. I like being busy. This is my natural hair color.”

“Aw, come on, where’s the passion?”

“Sorry, left that on my desk with material I’m passionate about.”

“Was that a nerd joke?”

Before Elsa can answer though, they’re getting yelled at.

“We have the pitch booked! Don’t you dare try to learn our secrets!”

Why is Gaston even captain of the victory games team?

“Snow Queen, you can’t betray us now that you’re head girl. I don’t know what you did to Millicent but it doesn’t mean you can tell Jack Frost how we train.”

Elsa freezes.

Luckily, Shang Li interrupts, “It’s alright. As long as they aren’t on the pitch or explicitly watching us, they can still fly, Gaston.”
The burly teen grunts.

“No problem,” Jack responds. He produces a Nebula 5000 from thin air and speeds them out of sight.

Elsa hates brooms and could never imagine talking while in the air but, “How did you get it to appear.”

“Wandless Accio, of course.” She can hear the smirk in his voice. What is with this boy and smirking?

“Is that a professional quidditch player thing?”

“It is, actually. The ladies love it. I mean, look, you’re clinging on to me.”

Elsa rolls her eyes even though he can’t see “Just so I do not fall from this piece of metal.”

“I am offended. The Nebula 5000 is the best broom in existence. You have to play pro to even be allowed to ride one of these things, they go so fast.”

Elsa clings on tighter reflexively.

“Hey, don’t worry.” Jack turns to look at her, stopping the broom, “I won’t let you fall.”

She nods but doesn’t loosen her arms.

“So, Snow Queen?”

“I’m cold and aloof.” She says blankly, trying to focus on the sunset and not the ground so far, far below her.
“Ah, of course.”

“And Millicent?” His voice drops.

“She was Head Girl till she disappeared a little over week or so ago.”

“What’s your favourite childhood memory?”

She answers reflexively, “Playing in the snow with Anna.”

She surprises herself. She hadn’t thought that was her favorite memory until it escaped her subconscious.

She surprises herself again. “I know we barely know each other and you probably already have a date, and it’s only a couple days from now, but is there any way you’d consider being mine to the Welcoming Ball? I need to do the first waltz, as head girl and it would be a great show of uh, cultural exchange, as you said.”

“I’d love to be your Snow King,” he says, grinning.

Is it too late to rescind the invitation?

Chapter End Notes

At last the other schools have arrived! Kudos to anyone who can figure out who our cameo people/new minor characters are (if you comment with who you think Esti Rodriguez is I'll give you a shout out in next chapter's notes :D). Speaking of kudos...kudos and comments are so encouraging and nice to receive so please leave a comment about what you thought about the chapter and give kudos if you haven't already. Thanks! Next chapter is going to be (at last) the first part of the Welcoming Ball. It is set to feature Ella, Aladdin, and Erica :)
Chapter 9: Masks On (The Welcoming Ball Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Ella dances with Henry. Snow gets laid. Aladdin, as Ali, pursues Jasmine. Phillip wakes up Briar--no, Aurora.

Chapter Notes

Guess what? I GRADUATED! Yay, no more high school! And what that means for this story is way more writing time :) I was considering releasing this weeks ago, but I wanted chapter 9 and 10 to be read together so violá we have a double update today. This chapter is longer than usual and more thematic, in my opinion. As always, I appreciate every kudos, comment, subscription, and bookmark. I love this story and it's heartening to know other people enjoy it. By the way, TW: this chapter has consensual sex between a 16-year-old and 15-year-old (this is legal apparently in the UK so I'm not counting it as "underage"), mentions of drug use, and description of PTSD. (Minor edits 5/24/18, did you know I couldn't decide between Regina and Lucille for Snow's Stepmom's first name lol)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Ella doesn’t want to go anymore. How can she dance and dress up while one of her best friends is cursed? How can she have fun while Briar (no, Aurora, right?) is in danger?

Her eyes linger on the dress she and Snow designed. It was something to do while they were stressed and unable to visit their friend. A nice distraction, a way to pretend that everything was normal. She imagined them all going together, dancing in their own little world like it was just them on the dancefloor. She imagined that Aurora would be okay, would be too shy to dance with Phillip, but still smiling and laughing. Every time she felt worried she’d pour herself into the design, the sewing, the sequins. The dress is stunning, really, a testament to just how worried they’d been. Sequins and lace and a floral sort of design, probably the loveliest thing Ella Chapman has owned since her father’s death. It killed her a bit, changing the dress her mother owned, but it was easier knowing that it had already been transformed. Her mother was like Snow, the kind of person who liked to take vintage clothes and modernize them. She’d want this. Besides, working on the dress made her feel her mother’s presence. And her father’s. It was like she was a little girl and they were together in the cottage, singing songs as they all made dinner. It was a happier version of the nostalgia she felt when she visited the graveyard in the summers where they were buried, side by side.

Ella sighs. There are so many emotions coursing through her veins, she’s waiting for the second she snaps. There’s no way she can go to the dance. One look at Henry will definitely put her over the edge.

“Hey.” Snow’s voice is hushed as she enters their dormitory. “I know you’re having second thoughts, but it’d be a shame to let that dress go to waste.”

How does she always know what Ella’s thinking? It still feels weird sometimes, feeling so understood and loved by her friends and so loathed and manipulated by her stepfamily. No matter, Snow is right. Weeks of work and a good portion of her savings went into the gown.

“It’s just… Briar-- Aurora-- whatever she wants to be called-- I can’t dance when she’s--” Her eyes sting from all the crying but she can’t help tearing up again, “Snow, what if she never wakes up?”

“She will.” It’s Phillip. Phil, the knight in shining armour, or rather, a shining tuxedo. “We know her better than anyone. She would want you guys to go and have fun. In fact, she’d kill you if she knew you didn’t take a chance at Henry when you got one without those sisters getting in the way.”

“Stephisisters,” Ella corrects automatically.
Phillip grins. “I’m sorry, but it’s so funny how angry you get when I do that. It’s like the only time you ever get upset, weirdo.”

She glares at him. She’s not the angry type. It’s against everything her parents taught her. Good manners and a good attitude. “Have courage and be kind.” Phillip makes it hard sometimes, pushing her buttons like this. What did Briar see in this loser again?

“Anyway, I’m going to sneak out tonight. Visit her at St. Mungo’s and try the kiss. I’d rather take
the risk than live without her.”

Oh, right. That’s what she saw. The hero complex. His gallant devotion. He’d rather risk death, risk falling under the same curse than live without her. What a Gryffindor.

“Why don’t we go with you?” Ella asks. She may not be a Gryffindor, but she wants to be brave for Aurora. To help.

“Too suspicious if we’re all gone. More of a chance we’ll get caught,” he answers immediately.

Ella sighs, “I just wish I could do something.”

“You can,” Phillip adds quickly, “Meet me back at the Astronomy Tower at midnight, yeah? You can let me- or hopefully, us- back in.”

“Sounds super,” Snow grins, “But what if I find someone to shag?”

Did she just say what Ella thinks she said?! The fragile blonde cannot contain her shock.

“I have so many questions. Number one: Are you not saving yourself anymore?? Number two: What about BRIAR, OUR FRIEND? Number three: Are you planning on just leaving me?” Ella shrieks.

Snow laughs. “Answers: Number one: After my own brush with death I figured there was no point in waiting anymore. Number two: It was a joke, Ella, geez, I know you’re on edge, but come on. Number three: Of course I’m leaving you; you’re dancing with Henry all night.”

As if on cue the stepbitches storm into the room. “OH NO, YOU’RE NOT. DON’T EVEN THINK ABOUT HENRY CHARMING.”

It’s like they rehearse this stuff.

“Why not?” Ella asks with a bit of sass. She just can't be sweet and soft around these two.

“Well, a) you’ll be way too busy helping us get ready to get ready yourself,” Drizella answers.

“And TWO, we have a list of chores for you that’ll totally last the entire night, naff,” Anastasia finishes.

Oh, Anastasia. Ella sometimes wonders if she’s really a mean person or if she’s just a victim of her family. She doesn’t have the same bite Drizella and Lady Tremaine do. She smiles more, likes bunnies and romcoms and when Drizzy isn’t around, speaks softer and actually thanks Ella for her tutoring.

“Well.” Ella keeps her cool, “What if I finished all the chores, then could I go?”

“If you can do the impossible without magic then sure. Knock yourself out, dorkerella.” Drizella laughs obnoxiously. “Now, come on, you have to fix my hair.”

“And my makeup-”

“And my nails-”

“And my jewelry.”

Ella looks at Snow and Phillip. “I guess I’m not going anywhere tonight.”
“Nonsense,” Snow smiles, “I’ll help you and we’ll both get to go.”

Phillip nods. “Good luck.” He leaves the room, marching toward a different castle to find his beautiful princess, locked away for her safety.

And then the nightmare that is Drizastasia begins for Ella and Snow. They enter the grandiose dormitory at five o’clock and do not leave until half past seven, when, at last, every last strand of stubborn hair has been curled, every nail painted, and their hideous faces covered in enough makeup that they look unrecognizable. It’s a good thing the Feast wasn’t mandatory. Not that the Tremaines eat much, anyway.

Except, of course, Drizella has a list of chores that she almost forgot about. With her sister in tow, she barges in Ella’s room as she and Snow begin to prepare themselves.

“If these aren’t done by tomorrow, mother will know about it.” Drizella says. Then, her eyes alight upon Ella’s bed.

“Oh, is this your dress?” Anastasia stalks forward to where her dress lays. “It looks so…” She studies it with wide eyes. It almost seems like she’s going to say something nice but she hesitates, sneaking a glance at her sister, and finishes, “homemade.”

“Oh yeah,” Drizella answers, lips curling up into a sneer, “Like it could fall apart at any moment.”

The both of them are so close to the bed now, hands just an inch away from the fabric.

“DON’T TOUCH IT!” Ella shouts. But it’s too late. It’s not like Drizella would have listened anyway.

A loud, horrific RIP, and there go two weeks of work. There goes her mother’s dress. There goes her the last relic of her old, happy life.

“What the hell!” Ella hates that she’s crying. “That was my mum’s! Why would you do something like that?”

“Oh, it was your mum’s, that explains the cheap material.” Drizella laughs. “Enjoy cleaning our dormitory. Make sure to tend to the fire, Cinderella.”

Her sister obligingly laughs with her as they exit the room.

Ella falls to the ground by her bed and just sobs. She sobs for the dress, just scraps now, the last she has of her mother -- the last thing her father gave her. He said that’s what she was wearing when they first met. It was the only thing that belonged to her mother that Lady Tremaine hadn’t managed to steal and sell. The only physical proof of a family that loved and wanted her. No-- Snow and Briar are her family too. Oh, Briar! She sobs for Briar, who will probably never wake up. She sobs for herself, and her shitty life.

“Oh, Ella,” Snow rubs her back, “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Ella takes deep breaths, struggling to stop crying. “You--you just go--I have to do all of this shit--anyway.” She stands, holding the list of stupid chores her stepsister conjured up. Now that she’s lost it, she realizes how much she needed this one night. Just one night, one reprieve from the hellhole.

“Oh, Ella,” Snow looks her best friend in the eye, “I am not leaving you.”
“And you won’t have to.” And for the fourth time that day, Ella and Snow’s door is opened without a knock.

It’s Professor O’Conner, the old Transfiguration instructor who always seems to give Ella an E when she deserves an A. She must have heard the entire thing.

“Ella,” the old woman walks toward her. “Did I ever tell you I knew your mother?”

Ella wipes the tears off her face. “What?”

“Oh, of course not. I mean, I wasn’t supposed to anyway, gives me away.” She takes a seat on Ella’s bed. “Well, I guess now I should explain. I’m not merely your Transfiguration professor, I’m your godmother.”

This makes absolutely no sense. “So why don’t I live with you?”

“Your stepmother had a stronger claim, unfortunately,” the professor, whom Ella has never felt particularly close to, responds.

“I’m sorry I can’t do more. I’m sure your stepmother would find some way to make your life harder if I made it easier. But I can help you out with this one night, yes.” She smiles kindly, then orders Ella to put on the dress.

“Professor,” Snow responds first, “It’s kind of torn, if you didn’t notice.”

“Hmm, I always guessed you had a sarcastic sort of side, Snow White. Now is not the time to disagree, though.” She turns back to Ella. “Put it on.”

So Ella goes to the bathroom and changes.

When she gets out the professor has her wand ready.

“Bibbity bobbity boo,” she hums as she waves.

Snow’s jaw drops. “That cannot be the spell.”

“It’s not,” her godmother agrees, “ Haven’t you heard of a nonverbal spell, dear? I’m nearly seventy, of course, I can do this without words.”

And she does. Ella’s pink tatters transform into a beautiful blue gown. It’s breathtaking, somehow more so than the first one. Ella cannot help but gasp at the huge, old-fashioned skirt, the tight silk bodice, the crystals that make the whole thing sparkle.

“Go put on your own dress, Snow,” Professor O’Conner adds, “ Instead of griping about this one.”

And with a wave of her wand, Ella’s cheap mask is transformed into a beautiful, beaded, blue one.

“Fits your face perfectly.” The professor admires her handiwork, “And now for the hair and makeup.”

She waves her hands and a dozen products fly in the air, all applying themselves on a bewildered Ella Chapman.

Within ten minutes the pretty blonde looks absolutely astounding. Based on Snow’s reaction, jaw-dropping.

“Okay,” Snow says, eyes still impossibly wide, “can you please do me too.”
“Oh, fine.” She doesn’t even turn to face Snow, but makeup bombards her.

“And jewelry.” She takes some strings on their desk and transforms them into a diamond necklace and matching earrings.

“And SHOES.” She points her wand to Ella’s old tenners and they transform into glittering, glass heels. Wow.

“I hope you don’t mind. The changes are permanent.” The old woman smiles. She has a lot of laugh lines, looks like she’s spent her life smiling and laughing quite a lot.

“Actually, is there any way you could make the dress reappear, and the shoes?” Ella blushes, “I need my tenners and the dress was once my mum’s.”

“Ah, sure. A bit more complex magic but,” she waves her wand, “there you go, everything but that mask will return to its original state tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you. Thank you for that and for everything, oh my gosh.” She looks in the mirror, “Is that even me?”

“Yes!” Her godmother squeals, “Now go. You’re already late!”

She promises to get that ridiculous list of chores done for Ella (with magic, suck it Drizella) and nearly pushes them out the door.

So Ella and Snow dash off. Glass heels are easier to walk in than you’d expect.

“You look fantastic.” Snow grins, not an ounce of jealousy on her face.

She feels fantastic. Finally, some good luck.

They reach the doors of the Grand Hall at half past eight. And Snow does something Ella loathes in the moment: she opens the door and pushes Ella in the room, running off to the side so Ella is the only one standing in the center of the hall, the only one making a grand entrance.

Ella avoids tripping but can’t help the rush of heat to her face as everyone stops looking at Elsa Arendelle and Jack Frost waltzing and instead at her.

Thank Merlin for masks.

She takes a seat at a table and pretends not to notice the glares of the girls and the ogling of the boys. The bodice leaves little to the imagination.

At the end of the waltz is another formal dance, this one open for everyone. Couples rush to the floor and someone taps Ella on her shoulder.

“Hello.” It’s Henry. Henry Charming. He’s looking at her. He’s right there.

“I couldn’t help but notice your entrance,” he laughs. “You look gorgeous. Would you like to dance?”

“Yes,” she blushes, “I would love to.”

And again, all eyes are on her. Even Drizella and Anastasia.
“I have a feeling I'm going to want to see more of you after tonight, so you should know straight off the bat,” he whispers near her ear, “I’m transgender.”

“No problem.” She smiles genuinely. “Doesn’t change the fact that you’re the cutest guy in the room.” She blushes. It’s so much easier to flirt with these masks, phew.

He grins. “Thank you.”

“So are you from this school?” he asks.

“I am.” Ella answers.

“Forgive me for not recognizing you.” He’s so cute and polite, aahhh.

“It’s alright, Henry.”

“Aw, even worse. You know me.”

“Everyone knows you. You’re the nicest guy in all of Hogwarts.”

“I’m sure there’s someone nicer, but thank you. What about you?” He twirls her.

“Me?” I’m in love with you.

“Who are you?” The girl who was your silent potions partner when you were thirteen.

“I’m nobody important.” Just another orphan.

“What’s your name?” Ella, but my stepsisters call me Cinderella because they’re arseholes.

“Ahh, isn’t a little bit of mystery fun?” He cannot know.

“Oh,” he raises an eyebrow, “How do I know you’re not some evil enchantress here to steal my heart?”

“Honestly, with all the craziness happening, I can’t blame you for wondering. I’m just a girl who wants to have fun for a night.”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“Blue,” Like your eyes. “Yours?”

“Same, actually, the shade your dress is, to be exact. What do you want from life, mystery girl?”

“Favorite color to what do you want from life, quite a jump there.”

“You seem like you’d have an interesting answer.”

And she does. She talks about her dream of becoming an Auror, despite thinking she’s not brave enough. She’s never told anyone, not even Briar or Snow, about her true career aspirations. She talks about wanting to have a nuclear family, how nice she wants to have some normal. He tells her about his expectations. About how his parents are supportive and all about him being a guy (I mean he had already transitioned by first year, of course, they were supportive) but they want him to find a girlfriend, settle down as soon as he finishes school, only one terrifying year away.
She doesn’t tell him anything that would give away her identity, but she tells him more than she’s ever told someone besides Snow and Briar.

It’s easier to talk to people when you have a mask on. Even if it’s your crush of three years. Even when you know the clock is ticking and your best friend could be stuck asleep forever. Even when you’re more afraid than you’d like to admit that your stepsister might rip off your mask and kill you right then and there. It’s easier to forget it all. To get swept up in the mystery and beauty of the ball and the music.

Everything is easier behind a mask. But what happens when the mask comes off?

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It’s easier with a mask. Snow knows this from experience. Pretend you like a boy, and no one, even you, has to face the fact that you don’t like anyone and you never will. Pretend you’re fine, and no one will know you’re living with house elves in the summer. Pretend you’re normal, and you can forget for a while that your stepmother tried to kill you. That she’s still out there. That she will probably try again.

It’s also easier to figure out if you want girls the way you want boys. Snow hadn’t really considered the possibility while preoccupied with her aromanticism, but now she can’t help but wonder if any girl could possibly be into having a random makeout session until midnight.

“You look like you could use a drink.” A Scottish accent interrupts her thoughts.

“What gave it away?” she asks.

“You look either really horny or really worried.” The redhead has no shame in saying the word.

Snow hates that she’s blushing. She’s not going to be pure as snow anymore. Who knows when her last day on earth is going to be with Regina running around? All Snow knows is that life is too short to save herself for the sake of an institution (marriage) which doesn’t seem to apply to people who don’t feel romantic love.

“A little bit of both,” she admits, then assesses the girl who’s offering her a cup of clearly spiked punch. She’s pretty. A sprinkle of freckles, messy, almost “just had sex” red hair, and a tight dress.

“Mm, but I might be a bit more of the former looking at you.”

The girl’s jaw drops a bit, “I did not expect that, Snow White. I thought you were ace.”

“Aro…” Snow corrects and tries to place her name. Red hair… “Merida.”

“What a coincidence, me too.” Merida grins.

“Would you like to make out?” Snow still doesn’t know how to initiate these things.

But Merida doesn’t seem to mind, “Sure.”

They slip off to her dormitory; no one bothers suspecting two girls. Probably, they’re assuming that the two of them are tired, when, in fact, the exact opposite is true.

Snow starts kissing Merida as soon as the dormitory door closes.
“Sorry about the mess, didn’t expect company,” she manages to gasp out between kisses.

“No problem.” Snow breathes. If she wasn’t so in the mood, that would totally be a problem, but she can deal with a little disheveledness right now. And speaking of disheveled…

Merida pushes her to the bed and starts kissing her neck.

“Fuck.” Snow moans. And there goes not cursing…

“I should let you know this is my first time.”

“With a girl?”

“Ever.”

“I’m not much ahead. I got to second at a party last year but the girl was ‘experimenting.’”

“Mkay,” Snow breathes, unzipping Merida’s dress, “Is this okay?”

Merida kisses her harder in response. “Fuck yeah it is.”

For the first and second time in her life, Snow orgasms because of someone else. So does Merida. Damn, for virgins, she and Merida have skills.

And then she notices the time. Fifteen minutes till midnight.

“Shit, I have to go.” Snow grabs her dress.


“I made a promise to check on a friend.” Snow replies. Then she lowers her voice. “Don’t worry, though, there’s plenty more where that came from.”

“Yeah?” Merida asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah.”

“Good.” Merida gropes her ass under the skirt. *Fuck.*

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

While fuck represents what his best friend is doing between the hours of nine and twelve on this cool October night, it also represents the essence of what Aladdin Abdullah is feeling.

Fuck. How is he going to pull any of this off?

According to Genie, It’s going to be easy. Badabing bada boom. He’s basically a prince. Totally the kind of guy Jasmine would be interested in. He has to admit, the outfit definitely cleans him up. His cream colored purple accented tuxedo looks like something an obnoxious Forbes list ranking rich dude would wear.

Genie wishes him off and promises to take good care of Abu. He’s late, about half an hour late, but isn’t that what rich people do? Show up “fashionably” late?
He’s leaving the tower just as Merida brings a girl up it. *Huh*, good for Merida.

When he reaches Jasmine, she looks bored.

“You’re late.”

“Or are you just early?” He goes for a charming grin.

“No, you said eight thirty. It’s nine. You’re late.” She glares at him.

“Sorry, babe.”

“Oh, I am not your babe.” Jasmine is gorgeous when she’s mad. “Just because you asked my father for permission to take me to the dance and he insisted doesn’t mean somehow that I like you.”

“I apologize, I bet if we spent a bit of time together I could win your heart.” Charming and Suave, that’s Ali Ababwa.

“I am not a prize to be won!” Jasmine is indignant. She turns to her best friend, Ariel. “Come on, let’s go dance.”

“Sure, babe,” Ariel replies. Why does she get to say it?

The girls hit the dance floor. Without Al. Or rather, without Ali.

*Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* He knew he shouldn’t have gone through with this plan. What is he thinking?

He leaves the courtroom, wanders outside to the courtyard.

“Genie,” he summons.

Poof, there he is, with Abu in tow. And the Magic Carpet, with whom he’s playing chess.

“What am I going to do? Jasmine won’t even let me talk to her. I should have known I couldn't pull off this stupid wish,” Al complains.

His so-called dutiful servant ignores him, complaining about losing to a rug instead.

“Genie,” Al tries again, “I need help.”

Genie stops the game. “All right, sparky, here's the deal. You wanna court the little lady, you gotta be a straight shooter, do ya follow me?”

“What?” Where did that impression come from?

Poof, the genie makes a blackboard appear and words appear as he says them, “Tell her the...TRUTH!!!”

“No way! If Jasmine found out I’m just a damn street rat, she’d laugh at me.” She’s used to high society, and the real Aladdin is anything but high society.

“A woman appreciates a man who can make her laugh!” Genie responds, “Al, all joking aside, you really oughtta be yourself.”

Himself? The pessimistic guy who steals from the rich and gives to the poor while complaining
about a system he doesn’t work to change, the troublemaker who always gets roped into helping Flynn or Merida with one of their crazy schemes, the quietest nerdy one who tutors Merida, the orphan who wants to make Lady Eleanor proud, the guy who can’t talk to a girl to save his life. No, himself is just a person who wants to be better than what he is.

“Hey, that’s the last thing I want to be. Okay, I’m gonna go see her. I gotta be smooth, cool, confident. How do I look?”

“Like a prince,” his blue friend sighs.

Take two. This one’s his last shot though. He can’t blow it.

“Jasmine,” he finds her standing near the balcony with Ariel, “I wanted to really apologize.”

“If pets were allowed in here.” Jasmine smiles sweetly. “Rajah would have clawed your throat out by this point.”

Aladdin gulps. He never knew the quiet, beautiful girl in the year below him could be so venomous. Then again, he hadn’t realized that she was the Jasmine. The It girl of the Disney Society.

“Just leave me alone.” If he were Aladdin he would have, but tonight he has the look, the attitude, the mask of someone else.

“Just give me a second chance,” Al tries. “A dance, maybe.”

She’s looking deeply into his eyes which seems like a good sign.

“Wait, wait.” Her expression is quizzical. “Do I know you?”


“You kind of remind me of someone I saw at the train station.” She squints her eyes at him.

“She remembers!”

“Well, I go to Beauxbatons, so it could not have been me.”

“No, I guess not.”

Then, Al can hear a bee buzzing.

“Enough about you, Casanova. Talk about her! She's smart, fun, the hair, the eyes. Anything--pick a feature!” It’s Genie.

“Uhm, Jasmine,” he stumbles for words, “you’re so…”

“Wonderful, glorious, magnificent, punctual!” the blue bee buzzes.

“Punctual,” Al repeats.

“Punctual?” Jasmine looks over at Ariel like “Who even is this guy?”

“Beautiful,” He amends quickly.

“I’m also rich too.”
“Yeah, rich and beautiful.” He has no idea where she’s going with this.

“Quite a prize right, for the son of a CEO like you?”

“Yeah, like me.” He’s still clueless.

“Yeah like every other arrogant, self-important, stuffed shirt tosser I’ve met.” Oh. That’s where she was going with that. She is quite vicious. “Just go jump off the balcony!”

And then she just walks away. Most people would wonder if this girl who seems to hate him is worth the trouble, but not Al. If anything, this side of her makes her even more attractive.

“Stop her! Stop her! Do you want me to sting her?”

He swats at Bee Genie, “Buzz off!”

“Okay, fine. But remember--bee yourself!”

“Yeah, right!”

Jasmine turns around, “What!?!?”

Aladdin thinks as he talks. “Uh, you’re right. You aren’t just some prize to be won. You should be free to make your own choice.”

Jasmine and Ariel look at each other in confusion.

“I’ll go now.” He steps up on the ledge and drops off.

Jasmine’s too nice to actually want him to die… right?

“No!” She shouts.

Oh good, he was right. He pops his head up, “What? What?”

“How--how are you doing that?”

She looks over the edge and sees the carpet.

“It’s a magic carpet.”

Jasmine looks at it admiringly, anger seemingly forgotten. “It’s lovely.”

The carpet takes Jasmine’s hand with a tassel.

“You, uh, you don’t want to go for a ride, do you? We could get out of the castle, explore a bit.”

Jasmine is still in awe. “Is it safe?”

He smirks. “Sure. Do you trust me?”

Jasmine looks like she cannot believe he would ask that, “What?”

Aladdin extends his hand again, “Do you trust me?”

Jasmine grins and Aladdin can see now why she was sorted into Gryffindor. “Yes.”
She turns to her friend, “You okay on your own?”

“Yeah.” Ariel has a glint in her eyes. “Have fun with Ali.”

Erin should be more excited. She had a fairytale moment, finding the girl who saved her life. Vanessa is as gorgeous as her voice. That long brown hair and those stunning purple eyes, wow. She’s the femme to Erica’s butch, dressed in a lovely dress the color of her eyes. Erica’s tie matches it exactly and they’re visually a perfect couple, especially with these matching masks.

But it’s like, well, underneath the masks, they have nothing in common. Erica is all about fishing and chilling and rock music and her dog, Max. Vanessa loves fashion and (god awful) pop and doesn’t seem to want to tell Erica anything else about herself. Maybe she’s just shy?

But there’s no point in worrying right? She saved her life. It’s textbook true love (and yes, despite preferring the company of boys and all that shit, she actually reads romance novels). They’ll probably figure things out later. It’s only been two weeks. They have time.

Still, she finds herself wandering toward the snack table where Ariel is loitering.

“Hey.” She grins at her short friend. “I love your dress.”

It’s a rosy pink, off-the-shoulder sort of thing. Very low cut and short, of course, per Ariel’s personal style. Erica can’t help but find it hot. (Is she still allowed to find other girls hot after finding True Love?)

“Thanks.” Ariel grins her distinct giant grin.

And Erica can feel her heart jumping a bit. Before finding out about Vanessa, she started talking to Ariel, the coolest weirdo in the whole school. They met by the Lake and bonded over their love of the sea, agreeing about everything except seafood. Erica loves fish, crabs, lobster, pretty much anything that can be caught on her father’s fishing boat or served on their yacht. Ariel, on the other hand, is a strict vegetarian and cannot believe that Erica can eat cute animals. But she did laugh when Erica said she could help the fact that they tasted so good. They kept talking after that meeting, even going on some almost-date, sneaking out to row in the lake and breaking the first rule of the Black Lake: NEVER ENTER THE BLACK LAKE.

Ariel is fun. So much fun. She’s funny and quirky and likes Panic! at the Disco and doesn’t give a shit about what anyone else thinks. For a couple weeks Erica thought (hoped) maybe it was Ariel that saved her, but it wasn’t her.

That doesn’t mean they can’t still be friends.

“I listened to Cage the Elephant.”

“Aren’t they great?!”

“Yeah, fantastic!” Ariel’s enthusiasm is infectious. It’s one of the things that Erica likes about her. She’s always so excited about life. With Ariel, what you see is what you get. Bright red hair, bright sexy clothes, huge eyes; she looks like the kind of girl who isn’t afraid to break a rule or tell you
what she thinks. Even her pink mask can’t take that away.

“How did you even get into Muggle music?” Erica can’t help but wonder. It took so much work for her to find them on the Wizernet. She had to go on some really sketchy sites. Erica only knows about Panic! because her last girlfriend was actually a Muggle she met while vacationing with her parents.

“I got bored over the summer and found a way to access the Internet.”

Damn. She must have been really bored because it’s basically impossible to use Mugglenet, as everyone calls the “internet,” as a witch or wizard. And there really isn’t a point to the Internet. The Wizernet has everything the Internet does, even Twitter.

“Of course you did.” She must sound silly, acting like this is so something Ariel would do, when she’s only really known her for a couple of weeks. Before that, she was just the girl who sat next to her in Defense. The girl her “friends” thought was a “slut.” What is it with girls attacking other girls? Reason number two it’s easier to hang out with guys when possible. Anyway, she hadn’t really thought much of Ariel before, but then again, she hadn’t really talked to her since she’d gotten into dating. They stopped sitting together after Erica and Audrey got together… Wait what was Erica thinking about? Oh right, now it’s like they’ve always known each other. Like they recognize each other’s souls.

There she goes romanticizing things again.

“So,” Ariel looks like she’s struggling to get the words out, “I’ve missed you. Haven’t seen you much lately.”

“Sorry about that,” Erica cringes, “I have this shitty tendency to kinda drop my friends when I get a girlfriend.”

“It’s okay, as long as you haven’t forgotten about your music buddy.” There’s a lightness in her voice Erica doesn’t expect. Ariel isn’t not offended at all; she understands. How can someone be so nice?

“How could I forget your firecracker personality?”

“You mean my firecracker hair?” Ariel laughs, twirling it in her finger. Her hair really is beautiful…

“Yeah, that too.”

“So how is it going,” Ariel asks, “I mean, I heard she serenaded you…?”

“Yeah!” Erica could talk about this forever, “She was the girl who saved me from drowning and she sang that popular Jinx song.”

“Jinx,” Ariel raises an eyebrow, “I thought you shared my deep hatred for that glorified boy band.”

“I do,” Erica affirms, “But her voice--Ariel, her voice is so good it makes Jinx songs sound pretty.”

Ariel whistles, “Damn. Is it really that good?”

“I don’t really believe in God,” Erica says, “But I wouldn’t be surprised if she was an angel, she sounds so good.”
For some reason, Ariel blushes. “That’s high praise.”

“Higher than me on a yacht.” Erica jokes. Shit, no, why did she say that? Now she sounds like a stoner.

“Don’t you spend your summers on yachts?” Ariel looks surprised. “You can’t be high the whole time.”

“Relax, it was just a joke.” She saves herself. “I’ve only gotten high a few times.”

“What does it feel like?”

“It’s like everything kinda goes away and you feel ridiculously chill and happy.”

“That’s the most generic description ever.”

“Well, that’s how it feels.” Erica shrugs. “I have a couple joints if you wanna find out for yourself.”

“Yeah,” Ariel nods. “Everything going away sounds nice.”

A couple of seconds of silence pass before Erica just blurts, “So yeah, Vanessa is cool.”

“Cool.”

“Uhm.” Erica doesn’t want the conversation to end. “What about you? Who could we set you up with... Wait, are you straight or...?”

Ariel snorts. It’s cute. “Pan.”

“Cool, cool.” Erica probably sounds like such a dork. “I’m hella gay myself.”

And then she says the worst thing ever. “I could probably set you up with Audrey. She’s really cool. I mean, not really my type, but maybe yours?”

Did she really just offer to set Ariel up with her ex? Whyyyy?

“Uh… I don’t think she’s really my type.”

“What is your type?” Why is this conversation continuing? Shit.

“Smart, but not in a grades way, more just practical knowledge. Good sense of humor, brave, honest, good taste in music, free, unafraid of being silly or breaking rules, fun.” Audrey actually fits that description...Maybe she’s already into someone else?

“Are you into anyone right now?”

“Yeah.” Ariel has that look. Like she wants to say something. “I like this girl, but I can’t tell her how I feel.”

“You should just do it!” Erica wants to be supportive. “Better to just tell her and find out she doesn’t like you back-- which is impossible because you’re you-- than just suffer in silence.”

“Yeah.” Ariel is quiet all of a sudden.

“Babe.” Oh, that’s why. It’s Vanessa. “It’s a slow song and I wanna dance.”
She turns to Ariel, “You don’t mind if I steal her, do you?”

“’Course not.” Ariel smiles. It’s a weak one though, not her usual dazzling grin.

And then Vanessa whisks her away to the dancefloor.

And it’s nice, having Vanessa’s head on Erica’s shoulder, but she can’t help but wonder about who Ariel likes.

The grandfather clock chimes twelve and a girl runs off the dance floor. She drops her mask, and her presumable date picks it up and tries to follow her.

Erica wonders what it’s like to leave like that. To just drop the mask. She wonders why the girl left. Because it didn’t feel right?

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It feels right. Sneaking out. It’s probably the riskiest thing Phillip has ever done, but it’s also probably the thing that’s felt the most innately right. He has to do something. Anything. Everything. He loves her.

He loves her so much. It was love at first sight. He was eleven and eager to prove his bravery. He snuck out to the Forbidden Forest, a dumb move looking back on it, but before he even got a few steps in he saw her. Dancing barefoot in a pile of leaves. He fell in love with Briar Rose before he could even recognize the feeling, when he was fourteen and just always wanted to be around her.

He was in love with her when he dragged her to their first Jinx concert. He was in love with her when she told them she was bisexual. He was in love with her when she started dating Belle. He was in love with her when she broke up with Belle. He was in love with her when he was too tall, too skinny, too stretched out long-ways to be anything but “Philly” to her. He was in love with her even though he tried everything he could to keep from her from finding out.

He was in love with her. But he was her best friend first. And then he asked her out and she said no. But it wasn’t because she didn’t like him. It was because she didn’t want to get in the way of him and Aurora, herself. How ironic.

He sighs as he zooms on his broom, wondering if any of this could’ve been prevented. If they had known, could they have gotten together earlier? No. There isn’t a point in wondering about earlier when the getting together part in itself could still not happen.

She could be stuck. He could fall asleep himself. No one knows, yet.

St. Mungo’s looks the way it always does, a castle frozen in time, the same people sick, the same people tending to them.

He gets to her floor easily. No one questions a young man who walks with purpose, something his dad taught him over the summer.

The problem is, of course, getting past the healers. He waits till the nurse guarding her room, 7724, decides to take a bathroom break and walks in quietly, head down.
She looks beautiful, as always. But sickening at the same time. Too pale. Too lifeless.

He doesn’t have time to stare, though.

He kisses her just as a nurse notices and barges in.

“You can’t do that!”

Except he does.

And her eyes flutter.

And she wakes up.

“Phillip!” She shouts. It’s a strangled sound, almost a scream, something that will haunt him for years to come.

She’s awake but she’s sobbing. “PHILLIP! PHILLIP! NO, NO, NO!”

“I’m here, I’m here.”

“You’re okay.” Her breathing slows but the tears still stream. “Oh, thank god, you’re okay.”

And he is. But is she?

“I’m okay.” He holds her gently as she sobs against his chest.

“I saw you die,” she whispers, “You and Ella and Snow and you and the aunts and and she tortured you. She kept me alive just to watch you die again and again.”

It is now that the mask on the moment comes off. It isn’t the fairytale ending. He isn’t the knight in shining armour. She isn’t the princess. He saved her, but it wasn’t on time. He feels like he was a century late.

She keeps crying quietly, even as he “kidnaps” her on his broom and brings her home, back to Hogwarts.

Chapter End Notes

And now let’s see what happens when the mask come off :O but before you do feel free to comment or leave kudos ;) ;) haha.
Chapter 10: Masks Off (The Welcoming Ball Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Tadashi's golden moment is interrupted. Pocahontas finds out the truth about John's family. Lottie spends the whole evening with (who she thinks is) Naveen. Belle discovers the Beast. Tiana gets turned into a frog. Naveen reveals a secret.

Chapter Notes

TW: Discomfort over homosexual tendencies. (Minor edits 5/24/18)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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...Masks Off (The Welcoming Ball Part 2)
Tadashi Hamada is dancing when they find him. He looks sharp, in a black tux with a popping yellow tie. It matches his girlfriend’s vintage lemon-yellow dress. The dress suits her, meshing well with her honey colored hair and sun-kissed skin. Honey Lemon, the perfect nickname for his golden girl. She glows under the yellow light of the floating lanterns littering the ceiling of the Great hall. She looks perfect with her arms around his neck as they sway to a love song. Her green eyes meet his brown ones and he whispers, “I love you,” just as Elsa taps his shoulder.

He turns around and the shining moment evaporates. He isn't alone with his girlfriend, no, he's at Hogwarts. He's Head Boy at a time when the Head Boy can't catch a moment's breath.

“Sorry to interrupt Mr. Hamada,” Elsa says professionally, “but the headmaster requests to see us immediately.”

He turns in the direction of the table where the headmaster had been sitting before. He could have sworn just a moment ago…

But he's gone.

Tadashi turns back to Honey, who gives him a melancholic smile. “Duty calls.”

She understands of course. In fact, she will tell him later that it's lucky that it was past midnight, that they were able to enjoy so much of the evening together and with their friends.

“I'm sorry, Esti.” And he is. So much so that he utters her real name.

She squeezes his hand and gives him a Honey Lemon™ smile, big and bright, and he sees her wander off toward Gogo as Elsa drags him out of the room.

As he leaves the ball, he takes off his mask. He’s no longer just another boy dancing with his girlfriend, but the golden boy of Hogwarts.

“Did you have fun?” She must genuinely care. Elsa, as a rule, doesn't speak unless it's something that she feels truly should be said.
Tadashi likes that about her, despite her reputation.

“I did.” He smiles, “What about you? I saw you with the most eligible bachelor in the room.”

He chuckles. Even Hiro’s date, Wendy Darling, couldn’t help but swoon at Jack Frost, and she was five years younger than him and getting over some sort of breakup.

“Yes, Mr. Frost is a charmer.” Elsa smiles. Unlike her usual courteous smiles, this one meets her eyes. There’s a glint in them as she shakes her head.

“Wait, the headmaster’s office is that way. Where are we going?”

“The Hospital Wing.”

There are only four people in the stark white room when they arrive. Headmaster Mouse. Master Sweet. Philip. And Briar Rose, and she's awake. Alive. But something is off. The bright girl who sat in on his first Charms class looked more alive: her skin was tanned by all the time she spent dancing barefoot outside, she always sported a kind, albeit shy smile.

This girl is broken. Brittle hair and pale skin. Sunken, hollow eyes.

“It seems she has suffered from immense stress.” The headmaster informs the two as Master Sweet asks her questions.

“We are guessing that this curse was more than one that made her sleep--different from the Draught of Living Death. It appears that she was made to endure horrendous, lucid nightmares. She claims that a year has passed.”

Elsa and Tadashi respond with horrified silence.

“What I need from you two is to keep this from getting out too much and ensure she’s left in peace while she recovers.”
“Yes sir,” they answer in unison. It’s weird how quickly Elsa has adapted to the role of Head Girl.

They are directed out of the room, back to the ball. But there’s something off. Tadashi cannot seem to enjoy the last hour of fun with the image of a shell-shocked Briar Rose haunting him. Once the mask is off, it’s off for good.

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The mask falls. Pocahontas doesn’t know it’s happening when it does, but later she imagines it: the music and chatter making it impossible to actually hear the sound but hearing it anyway, seeing it fall to the ground like a pin dropping in slow motion.

What she’s actually doing is making out with John in a sketchy corner. She feels a little slutty, but it’s the end of the dance, all the kids have left, and it’s not like anyone’s going to see her.

Except... he does. Seconds after realizing that it was Nakoma under the mask he spots her. Her eyes go wide when she sees him coming. She wants to say something, to explain, to apologize.

“Pocahontas?”

But everything happens so fast.

He marches up behinds John and slams his right fist into his jaw. The impact is so hard John nearly falls over.

“You think it’s okay to play me?” He goes for another punch, which John blocks.

“You think it’s okay to steal my date?” He goes for a kick and reaches for his wand. By this point everyone has stopped dancing to stare at the showdown. The head boy is on his way over with professors.

“Whoa, man. Calm down.” John tries to remain on defense only.
“You have the audacity to tell me to calm down?” He gripes before finally pinning his enemy to the ground, his shoe over John’s chest, his wand pointed. “You know, Pocahontas was fine before she met you. She was nice and respectable and would never have done something like this. Like any of this!”

The mention of her name jolts her into action. She tries to push Kocoum off of John. “It’s not his fault! It’s mine. It was my idea. I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have lied. Nakoma didn’t want me to lie. I dragged her into it. Kocoum, please don’t be mad at them.”

He grits his teeth, and, without bothering to even look at her, says the most words Pocahontas has ever heard him say, “Oh, of course not, Pocahontas. I’m totally going to forgive the asshole who went after you, knowing I fancied you first. Ha. You don’t get it, do you? He doesn’t understand you, our culture, or lifestyle--it’s a story to him. A phase of teenage rebellion. He looks at you as another conquest, just like his father looks at the Amazon. Did your little secret boyfriend inform you that his father is Jonathan Smith, CEO of the Kensington Corporation? He’s going to wake up one day and realize his ‘exotic’ experiment is over and you’ll be all alone. Actually, you know what? You deserve each other. You’re both--”

He’s cut off by a spell. A jinx. Cast by Thomas, a younger Gryffindor who apparently idolizes John enough to risk a detention. Kocoum is stunned. His head hits the marble ground with a painful thud, just as the teachers arrive. A couple professors carry the Quidditch player off to the hospital wing.

The heads are left to deal with Thomas. Pocahontas can make out Tadashi smoothly assuring everyone that Kocoum will be fine, likely only suffering from a minor concussion. She takes a breath. Elsa requests everyone resume their prior activities. There’s something about her icy glare that makes the request sound like a demand. It’s effective though. Everyone returns to the dancefloor, leaving only John and Pocahontas standing frozen in the corner.

Pocahontas is as calm as always as her mind processes this new piece of information.

“Kensington Incorporated, huh?”

Her boyfriend gives her a pained expression, from the name or the punch or both.

“You didn’t think to tell me you were Jonathan James Smith Junior?” She mentally hits herself for not seeing it. She’s only glared at Jonathan Smith Senior’s cold expression in the news a hundred and twenty thousand times. How could that same face enchant her?
“I didn’t want it to affect how you see me... like it is now,” he says in his defense. “I really, really like you, Pocahontas.”

And she likes him too. A whirlwind romance, the kind that blinds you to the facts, to reality. Shit, she thought he was exaggerating when he said the Amazon, or at least implying that the connections were vague. She’d been overdramatic when she vented to Esme, as she tended to be around her best friend. That’s why this whole thing started.

She imagines that mask falling to the ground. God, Nakoma. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

“We can talk about this later, John.” She’s a little too disgusted at herself to handle this conversation and a lot a bit too worried about her other best friend, her fucking cousin. Her family.

.0.O.o.

She finds Nakoma in their dormitory, sobbing into her knees.

“Oh my god,” she rushes to give her a hug, “I am so sorry, Nakoma. It was a horrible, shitty idea that I hadn’t really thought through, and I shouldn’t have put you up to it. You didn’t deserve any of this.”

Nakoma mumbles something, then insufflates her snot back in her nose. “He hates me now, doesn’t he?”

Pocahontas gives her a tissue, “No, definitely not. If anything he hates me and John.”

“What happened after I left?” Nakoma asks after blowing her nose.

“Well, he got into a one-sided fight with John and revealed that he’s actually Jonathan James Smith Junior.”

Nakoma’s jaw drops. “Okay, I know you said his family was conservative and anti-environmental protection, but I didn’t think it was that bad.”
“I didn’t either. Ugh I can’t believe I SLEPT with him,” she moans as she lets her head fall back onto the bed.

Nakoma wipes away her tears, “I’m sure he’s not really that bad of a person himself.”

Oh, Nakoma. Always the Optimist.

“I don’t know who he is. I’ve known him for less than a couple months! For all I know he’s just been charming my pants off this whole time and I’ve been deluded enough to think I was in love with him.”

“Hey,” Nakoma stops her, “What happened to the calm and collected Pocahontas that keeps Esme out of too much trouble?”

“Please.” Pocahontas sighs. “We all know you’re the one that keeps Esmeralda and me out of trouble. You keep us responsible.”

Nakoma smiles. “So you really think he doesn’t hate me?”

Shite. Right. This is about Nakoma. Not Pocahontas. Why is she so self-centered all of a sudden?

“Agh,” She bolts up, “I didn’t even finish telling you what happened. I’m sorry! Okay, so after he started ranting to me about how shitty both me and John are, Thomas stunned him and he hit his head really hard. They had to take him to the Hospital Wing.”

Nakoma faces screams alarm. “Is he going to be okay?!”

“Dr. Tadashi-” (a little nickname they had for the head boy) “–says it’s probably just a minor concussion.

Nakoma bites her lip, “Do you think I should visit him tomorrow? Would it be rude?”
“No. As long as you don’t bring me, I’m sure he’ll enjoy your you-ness.”

“What’re you going to do about John?”

“I don’t know. All I know is I can’t keep believing our biggest problem is my dad or Kocoum getting in the way of our relationship. His family leads literally everything I’m against; I can’t forgive that just because he’s good in bed and calls me beautiful.”

.o.O.o.

Lottie feels infinitely beautiful in the arms of her darling Naveen. He’s been by her side all evening! Hasn’t even glanced at that damned French blonde. Devoted entirely to her. It’s like a dream--no, a wish -- come true!!

With her tiara on and her gorgeous cute little mask and even gorgeouer cute little dress, she feels like a princess, a real bonafide princess. Which, she essentially would be if she got married to Naveen since he’s descended from actual royalty!

Charlotte La Bouff has yearned to be princess for as long as she can remember. Her earliest recollection of the desire is the first time Tiana’s mother read aloud from the book of fairytales bequeathed to Charlotte by her deceased mother. She had sat mesmerized by the stories, especially the one called the Frog Prince. It had been her evening star wish ever since. She didn’t know it yet, but it wasn’t just the basis of her attraction to Naveen, but the whole reason for her passionate crush. If Naveen Maldonia wasn’t directly related to the last King of Maldonia, she would find him...average. Barely above Travis, the sixth year who fancied her so much he was willing to stand the embarrassing sting of rejection again and again and again.

Except Naveen is royalty, or would be had the monarchy remained in Maldonia, and without the benefit of hindsight, Lottie looks at him through the royal filter and finds every ounce of him absolutely scrumptious.

“Oh Naveen, you are a divine dancer!” Lottie sighs. “But I’ve got to powder my nose. Try not to miss me too much while I’m gooone.”

The sweat gathering in her armpits might be negligible to Naveen, but Lottie can’t stand knowing she’s sweating like a sinner in church. The only flaw to her evening gown is that it’s thick, practically designed to leave a girl distressed about smelling funky.
She rushes off to the dormitory she and Tiana share to freshen up when she spots her best friend at the edge of the dance floor, covered in beignets.

“Oh, Tia.” She gently drags along her bestest friend and helps her find a different outfit to change into.

According to Tiana, her biggest problem isn’t the dress, it’s that the spot in Diagon Alley she’s always wanted has just been sold. She saw it on the Wizernet only a few minutes ago. Lottie doesn’t see why Tiana won’t just accept her money. It’s not like it’s charity if Charlotte is investing in and expects a handsome sum to amount from her amazing cooking skills. But Tiana doesn’t see it like that. That girl has no idea how to let others help her, or, for that matter, let destiny work itself out. Lottie wishes Tiana would just wish on stars like she does. It seems to be working pretty well for Lottie.

“I was beginning to think that wishing on stars was for babies and crazy people,” she explains as she touches up her mascara, “but the evening star pulled through for me!”

She turns to see the expression on Tiana’s face (still dreadfully morose) and is pleasantly surprised by how well the light blue dress suits her dark skin.

“Oh, well, don’t you look like a million bucks!” She grins. “Now let me do you up a bit, please.”

Five minutes later, and voila, they both look as lovely as royalty. Lottie checks the clock. Half past twelve, only thirty minutes left till the dance is over! She rushes back onto the dancefloor after Tiana promises she’ll join her in a minute.

.Belle Dumas is nowhere near the dancefloor. In fact, the only person farther from it is probably The Beast, who has locked himself up in the West Room and instructed her to remain far away from him.

Normally, Belle would object to the demand, like she did to all of his demands, but this was one she actually wanted to follow. A night away from everyone. A night off from the Beast. A night to explore the rest of his private rooms.
It seems almost too perfect.

Everything in the dungeon looks different tonight, prettier under the glow of the full moon coming in from the few windows in the Slytherin quarters.

The only unsettling thing about being alone in the dungeon of an old castle in the dead of night, at least to Belle, is the sound of wolves. She still hasn’t recovered from that wolf attack and now, each loud howl makes her jump.

She wonders why it’s so much louder tonight. Is it really true that wolves feel connected to full moons? Or that there are actually werewolves in the Forbidden Forest that howl together when they turn?

In the back of her mind, Belle remembers the story of Remus Lupin and wonders if perhaps there’s a werewolf here at Hogwarts now. According to the Lupin Act, named after the deceased professor, no werewolf is required to reveal his (or her) condition so long as he (or she) takes Wolfsbane Potion every month. The details of how they track it are lost on Belle; she spent the remainder of that lesson doodling in her spiral and wondering if she was related to the author of The Count of Monte Cristo and if that meant she was destined to write a work as brilliant herself. Oh, third year, she had been really idealistic then.

Of course, it’s easy to be idealistic at thirteen, especially when you’re dating one of the prettiest girls in school, Briar Rose.

Belle wonders if Briar’s okay. She heard about what happened with the curse and even though she was never really in love with Briar, she did care for her.

She decides that Briar is probably fine. She’s got a great group of friends, probably anxious to help her out. And there’s no way Phillip wouldn’t try True Love’s Kiss, if he’s got any balls.

Oh, Phillip, probably the reason her first and last relationship ended as quickly as it did. Not that Belle blamed him. She and Briar didn’t really click. They both knew it and whether the older girl recognized it or not, it was so obvious because she did click with Phillip.

Belle is so caught up in her thoughts that she nearly misses the next door. It’s not her fault for being ill observant though; the door blends in perfectly to the wall. All the more reason to open it.
She’s surprised by what’s inside. A potions closet, a smaller version of Professor Que--no, Professor Robinson’s.

She traces the titles of the little bottles. Peprup Potion. Draught of Peace. Felix Felicis (surprising for someone with keenly bad luck). Hiccoughing Potion. And…

Wolfsbane Potion. Four bottles. One, distinctly still open. She grabs it.

Belle feels a chill come over her. The awful howling intensifies.

Her hand tightens around the vial. She closes it. She forces herself to walk toward the West Wing. With her right hand clutching the vial, her left closes upon a dozing Lumiere.

She gulps. Why is she doing this? She’s not a Gryffindor for a reason.

Except, it’s because she’s a Ravenclaw that she keeps going. The only thing more intense than her fear is her curiosity. She has to confirm the theory. She needs to know if the picture she formed from these shattered pieces is right.

Trembling, she opens the door.

And there he is, chained to the wall, growling.

His yellow wolf eyes grow wide at her entrance.

She nearly drops Lumiere then and there. She nearly drops the vial. She nearly screams.

Instead, she takes a second to collect herself to take in his monstrous face, the scars on his hairy lupine body.

“So this is why they call you the Beast,” she quips, shaking the vial.
He howls with what looks like pain.

Despite her common sense screaming “BAD IDEA”, Belle enters the room.

She walks up to him and forces a smile.

“You know, I actually think you’re better in this form,” she jokes. “Less of a jerk.”

He calms a bit.

Belle has an idea. She runs back to the sitting room where she’d left her things and brings out a book.

She sits as close as she can without his claws being a danger and sets down Lumiere.

“This is a book I think you’ll like. I like to imagine that the author is my great great great great grandfather, as we share a surname. *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas.”

It’s the only hardcover she personally owns, belonged to her mother and passed down to her by her father in pristine condition. Maybe she was really related to him - her mother was French after all- or maybe she loved his writing as much as she did. Belle will never know. Mama is just another character to her, no more real that Edmond Dantès.

Whatever the reason, tonight, the story of Edmond Dantès isn’t just hers.

It also belongs to the Beast.

Unlike when she normally reads to him, he is actually quiet, albeit the occasional moan and howl. His lack of interruption makes the story smoother, cleaner. The words glide across her tongue as though she’s read them a hundred times. While she may have been kidding when she said she liked him better in wolf form, sitting and reading to him while privy to his deepest darkest secret, may actually be the best experience she’s had with Adam Jonathan Hadaway.
This is by far the worst experience Tiana has ever had with Naveen Maldonia.

“AHHHH! What did you do to me? I’M A FROG !” she screams at her horrified reflection in Lottie’s silver hand mirror. “YOU TURNED ME INTO A FROG !”

“Ah, no. No no no no no. You failed to turn me back into a human!” Frog Naveen protests. “You said you were a princess.”

“I never said I was a princess! You made an assumption like you always do!”

“Like I always do? Wait, do I know you?”

“Yes, you idiot! I’m Tiana.”

“Oh, ew, I kissed a waitress. Disgusting.”

“Oh, that’s what’s disgusting, not the fact that we’re green... and... eugh, slimy amphibians!” This cannot be happening.

“This is not slime. You are secreting mucus.”

“MUCUS? How is that any better?” Oh, this REALLY cannot be happening.

“Much more dignified.”

“Dignified?” HOW? Is? This? Happening?

Frog Naveen sighs. “I do not have time to argue with you. I must find another way to break this insipid curse.”
“Well, how did you even get cursed?”

“I don’t know! One second I’m charming and handsome, and next thing I know, I am tripping over these.” He refers to his webbed feet.


“Well, what were you doing last?”

“I was having my fortune read!” Naveen declares proudly.

“By who? Mama Odie?”

“No, not that cuckoo; this charming Slytherin with this very sharp suit.”

“Please tell me you’re not talking about the creepy seventh year who was expelled last year for experimenting with dark magic.”

“Oh no, I am sure it wasn’t him.” Except his voice doesn’t sound so sure. It sounds distinctly guilty.

“Oh my gosh, you are truly something special. Only someone as foolish as you could fall for such a cheap trick.”

“Hey! My butler fell for it too!”

“We have to find them.”

And then her (tiny gross frog) brain processes something.
“Wait a second, if you’re in there, then who is Lottie waltzing with down there.”

“An imposter!”

Tiana puts two and two together.

“Polyjuice potion. Okay, we really need to find Professor Odie and maybe Professor Robinson too.”

They hop off to the ballroom as fast as they can.

Big mistake. Even at the dead end of the dance, at one am, the room is packed with stragglers being forced out and they nearly die four times because frightened witches and wizards keep trying to curse them or step on them.

This really shouldn’t be an issue. They’re wizards, for Merlin’s sake. A quarter of Hogwarts students own toads (a fact Tiana read in a recent survey conducted by a group of prefects). They should be used to amphibians! At the very least they shouldn’t be out to hurt what could very well be someone’s pets! It’s not really everyone that seems to be after them, just this one particular woman with a chic black haircut, too old to be a student but too unfamiliar to be Hogwarts staff. She yells French obscenities at them and hunts them with a knife. Tiana can’t tell if she wants to kill them because they’re gross or if she wants to cook them.

They make a dash for the balconies, and, as Tiana’s dreadful luck would have it, they get tangled up in the strings of some festive balloons and end up clinging on for life, drifting toward the endless sky, over the Forbidden Forest.

To make matters worse, it’s raining. Not that Tiana has any hair to deal with. Actually, the rain feels kind of nice on her new skin. Ugh, no. She cannot enjoy a single second of being a frog.

But the night is beautiful, the full moon that illuminates the sky is both practical for sight and coats the world in a silvery glow.

“So, you talked to Shadow?” Tiana scolds him, “Come on Naveen, you of all people should know which people in the school are sketchy.”
Shadow. Ursula, or Urs, when they’re male. The Beast. Hades. And Jafar, if you’re clever enough to see behind his diplomatic facade. All of them creeps, the worst of the House of Slytherin.

“He was very charismatic,” Naveen says in excuse.

Tiana can’t even roll her eyes at that. It doesn’t seem like something she can do now, at least not in the same way.

So, instead, she puts the eye roll in her voice. “You’re an idiot!”

“Me ?” The condescending disbelief in his voice makes Tiana want to fight him, however frogs attack other frogs, but if she did that, they’d both fall to their doom. “You’re the one who wore a crown.”

“It was a ball! A masquerade ball! Half the girls were in crowns, you spoiled little rich boy.”

He harrumphs, “Well the egg is on your face, alright, because I do not have any riches!”

Tiana gapes. Did his parents finally do it?

“I’m completely broke.” And with that, the strings on the balloons break, leaving Tiana and Naveen to fall, fall, fall right down a puddle in the middle of the Forbidden Forest.

Her inclination is to yell at him for lying to her, for getting them into this mess, but she resists.

“They cut me off for being a… leech! Leech!”

She stifles a laugh as she removes it from him. This is serious, not a time for gigglin’.

“But your grades are improving. I thought they hired me because they still…”
“Had hope I might change?” Naveen finishes. “They made the decision last year after I got a Troll in Charms and then ran off to the Riviera without a word.”

Wow.

Naveen continues, “I was hoping I could persuade them to give me another chance, but I got a letter from them a while ago saying I couldn’t access their Gringotts account anymore.”

They trip and fumble along till they manage to land, head first (owwwww) onto a log in the middle of a river. “So how do you plan on paying me for kissing you?” She’s more curious than indignant, but she doesn’t show it. In truth, she didn’t think he’d give her the money. It was some pathetic, last ditch attempt at getting the restaurant back. The restaurant she never even had to begin with.

“Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa, I made the one wish promise to a beautiful princess, not a cranky wai…”

“Why are those branches moving?” He looks at the trees which seem to be waving.

“Those aren’t branches!” Could this night get any worse?

Cornish pixies. *Hogwarts, A History* : Revised Edition mentioned that they were released into the forest after ex-Professor Lockhart had brought them into class. They buzz after the frogs. Tiana can’t remember if they’re carnivorous but she’s not planning on finding out.

Instinct tells her to swim away, helps her avoid getting caught. The frog DNA knows. It remembers.

She manages to swim up a hollow tree. Safety. Her brain clears.

Naveen cowers at the trunk of her tree.
“Lover the vine.”

She wouldn’t let him die, but she also wants leverage. “Find your own tree.”

Between the leaves, she can see a swarm of electric blue.

“Okay, help me out of this swamp and I will be indebted to you forever. I will find a way to get you whatever your wish was.”

She smiles to herself and throws down the vine.

“Well, waitress, looks like we are going to be here for a while, so we may as well get...comfortable.” And immediately regrets it.

“Take your slime away from me.”

“I’ve told you! It is not slime! It is *mucus* .”

And that’s the last word Tiana hears before falling asleep in the bottom of the forest as a frog.

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“Rise and shine, sleepyhead. Pixies are gone.” These are the first words Naveen hears when he wakes the next morning.

And the words just continue. “We’ve got to get back to Professor Odie and undo this mess you got us into.”

Tiana has made a little raft. Quite ingenious. Naveen can be ingenious too. He grabs a pair of twigs, and, poof something to strum with. “I was not the one parading around with your phony baloney tiara.”

“Music to paddle by.” He strums “Dippermouth Blues” as Tiana paddles. Making the most of a
lame situation.

“I could use a little help!”

“I will play a little louder.”

“How about a little less piggin’ and a little more rowing.”

Naveen complains about aching muscles but grabs a twig to help.

“Tiana,” he asks, “What do you even want for your little “wish”? I assume money, but for what?”

“I’m going to open up my own restaurant someday,” she smiles.

He had not guessed that at all. Tiana Rose, full of surprises.

“What kind of restaurant?”

“Cajun. It’s going to have Jambalaya, gumbo, red beans and rice, muffulettas, po' boys… It's gonna have it all!”

“Stop, Tiana. You are making me so very hungry.” He eyes a group of flies and feels compelled to eat them. Well, when in Rome... “Interesting.”

“What are you doing?” Tiana calls after him as he jumps into the water.

“Shh, you are frightening the food.” He says as he goes for one...and misses. “This is harder than it looks.” He tries again but instead of catching a tasty (his instincts say tasty) fly, he catches a branch right in the face. Fuck. Being a frog is quite dangerous.

He hears Tiana laughing at him. It’s a pretty sound, even in frog form. And distantly he hears her say in disgust, “What? Oh, no! No, no, no! There is no way I'm kissing a frog and eating a bug on the same day.”

Naveen picks himself off the ground and spots the perfect fly sitting on a dandelion. He goes for it. Instead of getting a fly in his mouth, he gets a tongue. Normally this would make him very pleased,
but it’s Tiana’s tongue, tied up with his and as a frog, he actually wants a bug in his mouth.

They smash together.

“Hello” He mutters, his lips stuck to hers involuntarily.

“Uh, uh uh,” She pushes him away.

“Wha are you doin’?” Every step just makes his tongue hurt and he struggles to pronounce his words right. “Stop movin’!”

Of course, she has to fight him on it. “You are makin’ this very difficul.”

“This is all your faul!” Tiana complains.

“My faul... my faul ...Let me tell you somethin. I was…”

“Well, looky here!” They turn to see a firefly. “Girl, I guess you and your boyfriend got a little carried away, am I right, am I right?”

No. You are wrong.

Flustered, they deny his implication.

“Let me shine a little light on the situation.” He farts. “cuse me. One more time now.”

He tries a couple more times before he does it. And then, by some miracle and he pulls Naveen’s tongue and they are finally separated.

The firefly looks rightfully proud of his handiwork. “Bout time I introduce myself. My name Raymond, but everybody call me Ray.”

He sounds so weird. Very unEnglish and not particularly American either. “Pardon me, but your accent… It’s funny, you know?”

“Cajun. Born branded the Bayou,” he says in explanation, “brought here in a jar by some strange fellow about five years ago. You must be a new around here, ah?”
How to put this delicately, “Actually, we're from the place... Far, far away from this world.

“Go to bed. Y'all from the east side of the forest?”

Okay, maybe not so delicately. “No, no, no. We are people!”

“The prince charming here got himself turned into a frog by a novice voodoo man” Oh that’s low, comparing him to Henry Charming.

“Well, there you go,” Ray says.

Tiana continues, “And we are on a way back to Hogwarts, we think maybe Professor Odie could...”

“Hogwarts? You headin' the wrong direction, cher.”

Ugh. Of course. They are so close to the ground that it’s hard to tell north from south and east from west. How are they ever going to find the way?

“My relations and I can show you back.” The firefly saves the day, calling all his relatives. The jar he came in must have been big to hold this family.

“Achedanza!” There are hundreds. Perhaps thousands. Brothers and sisters. Aunts and uncles. Nieces and nephews and their children. They light the way back to the castle. Their bright glow makes the creepy forest look friendlier, cozy almost.

They leave them at the end of the river, telling them to just keep going straight.

“You know, waitress, I have figured out what’s wrong with you,” Naveen says after the glow of the fireflies fades.

“Have you, now?” She clears out the path in front of them.
“You do not know how to have fun. There. Somebody had to say it.”

“Thank you, ’cause I figured out what your problem is too.”

“I am... too wonderful?” He guesses. He can’t even tell if he’s kidding or serious.

“No, you're a no-count, philandering lazy bump on a log.”

“Ahaha... Killjoy.”

“What'd you say?”

“Ahh, nothing.”

“Stick in the mud.”

“Listen here, mister. This stick in the mud has had to work two jobs her whole life while you've been sucking on a silver spoon chasing maids around your… your ivory tower!”

“Actually, it's polished marble.” He mutters before something catches him. A wizard. A drunk one from the sound of his voice.

Apparently, a few of them decided it would be a good idea to get wasted and look for a keepsake from a trip to the Forbidden Forest. They assumed a frog wouldn’t be too hard to catch and they were right. They were wrong though about how hard it would be to keep the frogs in captivity, though. Tiana and Naveen manage to escape within five minutes. Not just escape, but leave the shit-faced wizards sure to never come back. They’ll probably wake up wondering if the weird frogs talking in the Forbidden Forest were real or a hallucination.

“‘And we talk too’. I like that! You are secretly funny.” Naveen smiles.

“Not a stick in the mud?”
“W-well I was...”

“Say it.”

He stutters.

“Say it”

“All right... You're not exactly…”

“I can't hear you, I'm sorry. What?”

“...a complete stick deep in the mud.”

For once, he doesn’t find her smug attitude annoying, it’s actually kind of adorable, the little extra jump in her hop.

Naveen’s stomach growls. He recalls that since he failed to catch a single fly he hasn’t eaten in hours. “If you are a chef, do you think you can make us dinner? Perhaps ratatouille. I had some amazing ratatouille at this one restaurant--”

“There’s no way I can find the ingredients for ratatouille in the forest. How about swamp gumbo?” Tiana suggests.

“Sounds delicious! I'll start with free dinner cocktail and something to nibble on, while I wait, thanks.” He makes a little seat for himself, propping his tired legs on a mushroom.

“No, no, no, no, Your Royal Highness.” Tiana stops him.

“What's a matter?”

She takes his feet off the mushroom he was using as a footrest. “You are gonna to mince these mushrooms.”
“To do what?”

“Mince the mushrooms.” She wanders off to get other ingredients, “Hop, to it!”

“This is ridiculous.” He stares at the fungi.

“Are you mincing?”

“All right… Relax. One!” He breaks a sweat as he cuts off a slice.

“Step aside, Mister.” She grabs the makeshift knife from his hand.

“Watch-” she cuts them all into teeny tiny pieces in two seconds, “And learn.”

“All right.”

Thankfully, she guides his hands a bit. “There you go.”

“You know, I have never done anything like this before.” The scene feels like when he taught her that counterjinx. Tiana seems to always be teaching him something…

“Really?”

“I’ve always had someone to do everything. Cook and clean for me. Pick out my clothes, help me dress. Even brush my teeth.”

“Aw, poor baby.” Tiana mocks him.

“I admit it was a charmed life but when I got cut off I realized I don't know how to do anything.”
“Well hey… You've got to make a decent mushrooms mincer, ok?” She tries to comfort him. It’s unnatural, not her tone, but the act itself. It’s actually quite sweet…

“Oh, you think so?”

“Keep practicing and I just might hire you.”

“Really?”

“No.” Nevermind, Tiana doesn’t do sweet when it comes to him.

“Come on, what was that?! That was below the frog belt.” He shakes his head. “For that, you must divulge a secret.” He’s kind of joking but also kind of not.

“No.” Tiana stops smiling.

“Aw, come on. Just one. How about… are you a virgin?”

She’s riled up again. Cute. Except she’s not responding instead of blowing up. Damn.

“Okay, fine, how about… who was the last person you kissed?”

“The first person you kissed?”

She keeps her eyes on the gumbo. “I’ve never kissed anyone.”

“What about you, who was the last person you slept with?” She’s participating. A shocker. She’s really serious about not being a stick in the mud.

“Esmeralda, a couple weeks ago.” He doesn’t mind telling, especially when it means he can ask another question. “Why do you want to open a restaurant?”
“My daddy always talked about opening one. Our good food bringing people together. It was his dream.”

“He sounds like a lovely man.”

“He was. He died right before I came to Hogwarts. The War.”

The Muggle war against terrorism. Wow.

“Do you actually care about anyone you sleep with?” It’s her turn. She gets a bit flustered. “I’m sorry but I’ve always wondered…”

His brain flashes back to the summer on the Riviera. To the pool boy. He’s never told, anyone…

“There was one person. I met him on the Riviera this summer.”

Tiana doesn’t look disgusted. That’s a good sign.

“He was the son of a diplomat. At first, it was just sex and no talking but then he tried to talk about it and…” Naveen Maldonia never struggles with words.

“You’re not comfortable with the fact that you’re attracted to men?”

“I suppose not.” Naveen sighs.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Tiana squeezes his hand.

Then, thankfully, she changes the subject to something a lot easier to talk about “I’ve always wondered, what are your friends like?”
He tells her about the quiet, witty Al who’s actually quite talkative when you get to know him and Flynn, who used to be a romancer like himself but is now devoted to Rapunzel and apparently named Eugene, and Merida, who loves her crazy family but is always this close to murdering one of them.

He gets an extra question after that and he expects her to stop it there but she doesn’t. They continue. Just back and forth questions and answers till the gumbo is ready.

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“Wait, I’m sorry. Would you like seconds?” Tiana asks as she finishes the story of why she hates frogs so much. The moment feels like almost like it does when he’s with the gang, Al, Flynn, Mer. Except there isn’t the slight uneasiness that makes him think he is the Peter of their Marauders.

“That was magnificent.” He hands her his bowl, “You truly have a gift.”

“Well! Thank you!” If frogs can blush, she’s doing it.

“So why is it you and Charlotte even go to Hogwarts? Why not Ilvermorny?” He asks as he takes a sip of the gumbo.

“The La Bouff family has gone for generations. I think her great great great great grandmother decided to leave France for England and then her great great grandfather decided to settle in New Orleans. Anyway, her daddy was the one who explained my magic to Mama and it just made sense for me to go to Hogwarts with her, for us to know someone going in.”

“That does makes sense.”

“Do you think you and Lottie would have become friends if not for your childhood?” The back and forth game has kind of ended, but the conversation continues.

“I don’t know. We don’t have much in common. For one thing, she likes you,” Tiana kids, “But she’s a real sweetheart. You know she gave me that dress that made you think I was a princess because mine got dirty.”

“How did your dress get dirty?”
“I was serving beignets.”

“I was serving beignets.”

“Serving? So you did not dance?”

“No, but it’s alright. I’m not much of a dancer anyway. Besides, all I know is the waltz.” Tiana blushes.

“No, this is a travesty. You may not be a princess or as traditionally girly as Charlotte, but you still deserve a dance with a handsome young man.”

She doesn’t protest. Not even to his claim that he is handsome.

Naveen picks a waltzing song to hum. The dance is slow and smooth and romantic, like the ones he’s had with the girls he’s wanted to charm. But none of them knew what she knows. None of them meant anything. And now here she is Tiana Marie Rose, who’s smart and stubborn and graceful, even as a frog.

The song ends and he meets her eyes. Briefly, Naveen considers kissing her but she speaks before he can, “Ah, Lottie's got a heck of a dance partner.”

Right. Lottie. The girl he’s supposed to be with when the masks are on.

Chapter End Notes

Phew, so many words right? I broke 50,000 :D Please let me know what you thought via kudos/comments, bookmark this fic so you don't forget about it, and subscribe to be notified when I update :)
Chapter 11: Less "Hallow"

Chapter Summary

Mulan hangs out with the boys. Elsa's pondering patrol is interrupted by Jack. Wendy gets good advice. Flynn exchanges gifts with Rapunzel.

Chapter Notes

:o Didn't expect to see me back so soon did you? Well, here I am! Happy in-universe Halloween! I hope you like this chapter and the title isn't too cheesy. :) Give me some love in the form of kudos/comments/bookmarks/subscriptions if you like it. Many thanks to my beta Crystal. TW: Guy hitting on a girl in an inappropriate manner. (minor edits 5/24/18)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Listening to him bark instructions at them, Mulan can't help but wonder who Shang went to the Welcoming Ball with. That is, if he went at all. Mulan didn't go. Not that her mother didn't send a dress and shoes. Not that she didn't want to go. She just didn't have a date. Or, really, friends to go with. She wonders if sexy-as-hell Shang Li has a girlfriend (or boyfriend...Mulan thinks he's straight but she's never had a good gaydar.) If he did, she hadn't seen her (or him) around as Ping.

Right, shite. Mulan, you can't stare at him like that. You're Ping.

But can't Ping admire those cheekbones? Ugh, and his voice. His gorgeous deep voice. She can't exactly focus on what he's saying, but it sounds marvelous.

“Fa, can you repeat what I just said?” Oh. He's talking to her--him. Shite.

“We’ll be doing laps around the pitch, then another go at the obstacle course, and cramming necessary spells yeah?” She answer-asks. Thank Merlin for echoic memory.

She can see a glimmer of surprise in his eyes and knows that by some miracle she guessed correctly.

She's gotten better at flying. She bets she could be a halfway decent Seeker with her size and speed. She heard a couple Gryffindor Quidditch players complain about not practicing enough for the upcoming game. She couldn't believe they were thinking about a ball game when there was honor and tradition, not to mention 75,000 galleons, in line. True, John Smith was a wannabe Quidditch player, but no one heard Flynn Rider complain about it. Strange, seeing these alpha males up close. She'd always heard about them, whispered rumors and wild giggles about their handsomeness, but it felt like they were celebrities, not real people. She imagines this is how it must have felt to go to school with the Weasley-Potter Clan and thanks Merlin that she missed that generation of kids. Anyway, here is what she has learned about these boys so far:

1. John Smith- is in some sort of argument with his new girlfriend. Honeymoon phase must have ended. Seems to be very rich.
2. Flynn Rider- quieter than she'd expected but maybe that's bc Aladdin and Naveen and Merida aren't here. Usually meets up with one of his friends or his giddy, cute Ravenclaw girlfriend- the girl that transferred a while ago, Rapunzel. Probably wants to win so he can impress her parents.
3. Jim Hawkins- has a lot of emotional baggage. Likes to backtalk Shang and make fun of Gaston but hands down the BEST flyer in Hogwarts history. Well, the best non-Weasley or Potter one for sure.
4. Hercules Xenos Clements- very very (half) Greek and also incredibly built. Like, woah. He looks like a younger Gaston. That is if Gaston was kinda shy and nice. Apparently, he used to be super skinny and short, but he got some sort of massive growth spurt.
5. Phillip Thompson- not here under special circumstances today. Basically, some shitty thing happened to his girlfriend and now he’s with her 24/7.

6. Phoebus Carter- another Gryffindor with an urge to prove his bravery. Doesn't talk a ton during practice, but is pretty good at everything.

7. Tadashi Hamada- Hogswood’s token Golden Boy. Props to him for achieving that status as an Asian. Can't tell if he's doing this because he wants to or because he's supposed to. (Damn, if he's anything like Mulan, his parents must put a shitton of pressure on him.) Dating Honey Lemon and has a ton of nerdy friends. Brother to Hiro (who Mulan sits next to in History and Charms due to their mutual antisocial attitude, and, of course, every teacher assuming that, since they're yellow, they must know each other).

8. David Ling- awkward as hell but in a cute, humanizing way. Probably only on the team because he's an ace at Charms since he can't fly or run to save his life. Best friends with Yao and Chien-Po.

9. Jason Yao- scary as fuck. Will fight you. Will fight everyone. Calls Shang “Pretty Boy.” Amazing at hand-to-hand combat and dueling (no surprise there). Has a perpetual black eye (possibly never healed because he keeps getting into more fights??)

10. Clark Chien-Po- huge, but not in a Hercules sorta way. Mulan thinks he's like a quarter giant or something because he can't just naturally be that strong and that tall. Very into Taoism and Feng Shui and essentially is the epitome of FOB in that sense. Can pick up 3 teenage boys with ease. Also pretty good at all sorts of magic. Seems like the kind of guy who joined because “hey, that looks fun, and it involves my friends!”

11. LeFou Butler- only here because he's Gaston’s favourite lackey. Might be gay or could just be hero-worshipping him. Who knows. He sucks at everything except cheering up Gaston when he's being pissy.

12. Gaston Chasseur- dim-witted, misogynistic asshole who's annoyingly good at pretty much everything that doesn't require a ton of brain cells. Lets these three blondes watch everyone practice and they all sigh when he takes off his shirt.

13. Shang Li- should take off his shirt more. Amazing at everything. The magic, the flying, the athletic stuff. Totally would be fine if he was the one to beat Mulan. Why is he so beautiful??? Also, doesn't like Mulan... Apparently, Gaston was why she got on the team.

From what Mulan had gathered, Gaston liked to tease Shang about getting the position as vice-captain because of his legendary father. Part of that joke was letting in Ping, whose lineage was essentially the only impressive thing about him. “Blatant nepotism” indeed. It didn't matter if she had sort of made a fool of herself on the first day; Ping had proved himself since then. He’s faster and stronger and less clumsy. When Shang makes them study and practice, he’s always the fastest to get whatever it is down. Not that Shang’s impressed.

When they finish laps, it's on to the obstacle course. The month of training has really paid off. Everyone, even LeFou, makes it through. Best of all, MULAN BEATS SHANG’S TIME!

Yes yes yes yes yes!! Winning the games, here she comes!

After the obstacle course, they hit the showers. Mulan checks her watch. Noooooo. No. No. This isn’t okay. She has less than a few minutes left before the potion wears off. Damn it. She hadn’t expected the practice to last this long.
All she needs is to get through this shower. Then she can take another dose of the potion before the cram session in the Gryffindor common room.

She runs to the locker room fastest and claims a shower. In her bag are the essentials: a bar of soap and a two in one shampoo conditioner. It’s so easy to be a guy. The actual shower takes only five minutes. Great now Ping can…

Crap. Nope, now Mulan has to find a way out of the showers. Okay. No problem, just wait for everyone to leave.

She keeps the water running for a few more minutes and tries to enjoy it. Cold water on sweat is actually almost heavenly.

“Hey Ping, look.” Yao’s voice inches closer and Mulan opens the shower curtain to reveal only her head.

And she immediately regrets it. He’s flashing her. What is it with guys and their junk! She is way too innocent for this. “Bet mine’s bigger than any of you losers.” He laughs.

“Nah, look at mine,” another voice replies. Mulan squeezes her eyes shut. If there’s anything she wants to see less than Yao’s junk, it’s definitely Ling’s. Ew. Ew. Ew.

As the boys bicker about girth and length, Mulan looks at her backpack.

She brought Mushu (named after her favorite type of pork) and she thinks perhaps those sharp teeth could finally help Mulan instead of hurting her.

Just as Ling asks Ping to compare, she has him free on the soaking floor of the shower stalls. Thankfully, he doesn’t go after his owner, instead, taking a big bite out of Yao’s foot.

“Snake!” He yells, and without looking back, grabs his towel and zooms out of the locker room. Ling and Chien-Po are right behind him.
For the bravest Hogwarts have to offer, they are a bunch of “sissies,” as the honorable Yao would say.

Laughing to herself, she puts her hair up and tightly wraps her towel around her body. Luckily, she’s already established Ping as rather conservative, so no one should ask. She steps out of the stall. There’s no one to ask. Phew.

She changes into cargo pants, a cotton tee, and an oversized (thank Merlin) sweatshirt. She checks herself out in the mirror. With her long hair in a traditional “man bun,” she could almost maybe pass as a guy, even without the potion.

“Good job, Ping,” she says in her “male” voice. Nope, there is no way she could pass as a guy without that potion.

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Even after having a late start, Ping beats almost everyone to the common room. Everyone except, of course, Shang. He’s pacing back and forth as he speaks into his phone.

“I believe everyone is ready. No, sir. Sorry, I should have said I know. I know they’re ready. We have an excellent team. I won’t disappoint you again, father.” All in Chinese. All with an unfamiliar quiver in his voice.

Mulan feels a bit shy but she goes for it, “Ouch, Asian dads, right? Never satisfied.”

Shang turns and looks at him, really looks at him and she feels like she could melt.

Ping continues, “For what it’s worth, I think you’re a great captain.”

He nods, his lips a perfectly straight line. Does he ever smile?

The rest of the team members file in, even the few non-Gryffindors. Apparently, there was a thing about including at least one person from each house because there they are. Tadashi for Ravenclaw. Flynn for Slytherin. LeFou for Hufflepuff. Ugh, why does LeFou have to be on the team? Ralph would have been a much better option. Sure he’s a bit unstable, but like Chien-Po he’s a half-giant and his size is a real advantage. Wait a second, Mulan forgot that Hercules was a
Hufflepuff. He’s one of the best on the team, it’s weird to think he’s not a Gryffindor. Not that Hufflepuffs can’t be great at this kind of thing but--ugh, even in her head, she can’t get the words out right.

Thankfully her magic is reliable. All the hours she would have spent with friends had she had any, instead, she spent working on magic and reading, of course.

By the end of the cram session, she’s helped Yao get the *accio* spell correct and got Ling to make a Patronus.

She’s never seen anyone so grateful. Maybe this is why people decide to become teachers. That look of relief in a kid’s eyes when he’s figured it out. The euphoric grin they give you. It’s really nice.

“You know, Ping,” Yao says as everyone gathers up their textbooks, parchment, and quills, “You might not be so bad.”

“Yeah, you want to go to Hogsmeade with us next week?” Ling offers.

“I bet I can eat more candy from Honeydukes than you can,” Chien-Po laughs. With him, these “bets” aren’t challenges, just simple truths.

“I bet I can stand more beans than you.” With Yao, it’s always a challenge.

Ping grins. “I’d love that.”

For once, going out with people her own age. Finally!

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“You think being in the games will help us pick up some pretty birds?” Ling asks he shuffles in his seat. The Three Broomsticks looks livelier than Mulan remembers, maybe it’s the fact that she isn’t alone.
“I’d love a girlfriend with big eyes that shine like stars,” he says dreamily.

“When I win,” Yao brags over a butterbeer, “I’ll get whatever girl I want. She’ll be hot as fuck and she’ll worship my muscles and sexy scars.”

Mulan waits for him to laugh because that has to be a joke. Nope, no laugh.

“I couldn’t care less what she wears or what she looks like,” Chien-Po weighs in. Finally someone with sense! “I just hope she can cook. Beef, pork, chicken mmm.”

“What about you Ping?” Yao asks, “I saw a couple of girls giggling when you passed them. Quite a charmer, you are.”

As Ping takes a second to consider her answer, the others continue to answer.

“My girl will think I have no faults.”

“That I’m a major find.”

“How ‘bout a girl who’s got a brain, who always speaks her mind?” Mulan asks, her eyes shifting toward Belle Dumas. Belle is beyond beautiful, absolutely stunning without even trying. How does she do it? She went out with Aurora once, so she’s definitely not straight…

The boys interrupt her thoughts, “Nah.”

“My manly ways and turn of phrase are sure to thrill her,” Ling continues.

Yao elbows Ping and laughs. “He thinks he’s such a lady-killer.”

Mulan fixates on Belle. She’s definitely a girl worth fighting for.

“What’s lookin’ at?” Yao asks.
They boys turn to Belle’s table, where Gaston has arrived, and immediately agree (through a few silent nods) to listen in.

“So, you didn’t want to go to the dance. I get it, dances are boring.” He grins. “But I’m not boring. Come on, why don’t we get a table together, get to know each other.”

“Smooth,” Yao whispers.

“Well, gee Gaston, I don’t know what to say.” Belle looks so uncomfortable.

“She’s totally gonna say yes,” Ling whispers.

Wow, guys are really bad at picking up signals.

Gaston surely isn’t getting any of the signals Belle is sending. He leans closer, his eyes wandering down her body like it’s a new toy he wants. They fixate on the minuscule amount of cleavage her shirt doesn’t cover.

Ugh, what a pig!

“She clearly doesn’t want to talk to him.” Ping whispers.

“Then why is she still there?” Chien-Po sounds confused, not accusatory. Mulan knew he was the good sort.

“Have you seen Gaston? Have you seen Gaston angry?”

They don’t seem to get it.

“Sexual assault is common as it is, that kinda stuff happens a lot more often when the guy’s an asshole who thinks he’s entitled to whatever girl he wants.”
“Oh.” Ling musters, flushed.

Yao shakes his head, “Gaston’s not that kinda guy. He might be a bit of a jerk but he’d never like... rape her.”

“I didn’t say rape. Plenty of nice guys commit assault every day,” Ping sighs, “According to the Daily Prophet one in every five girls by the age of seventeen have experienced some sort of nonconsensual contact with a guy, often guys they know, even their own boyfriends.”

“Wow.” Chien-Po frowns.

“Only a fucking sissy would stoop so low,” Yao condemns, “My sister broke up with her fiance because he got angry one night and hit her. She said he tried to screw her when she didn’t want to. Ugh, I want to kill that guy.”

“I’m so sorry for your sister,” Ping replies as Chien-Po strokes his shoulders.

“I still don’t see Gaston as that kinda dude, but I guess I can see why she’s still there.”

“Should we say something?” Ling asks.

Thankfully they don’t have to.

The guy everyone calls the Beast comes in.

“Come on, Belle, you said you’d help me with that paper for history.”

He’s so scary even Gaston backs off. No, he’s standing to be intimidating. Though it’s not as obvious as it was in the showers, Mulan thinks this is one of those size contests. They puff out their chests.
“Oh, are you this bitch’s boyfriend?” Gaston spits.

Mulan and Belle flinch at the word.

The Beast slaps him for it. “Never call her that again.”

“I’ll call her whatever I want!”

The pub lady, Jessica, yells at them to take it outside.

Everyone rushes to see what’ll happen. Gaston is the brawniest man ever. He’s not the kind of person who loses a fight. But there’s a reason they call Adam the Beast.

No one gets to find out, though. Professor Thatch interrupts before it’s possible.

Professor Kida Thatch isn’t as big as these men, but she’s scary in her own way.

She has their wands in her hand in less than a second and the murderous look in her eyes says what her lips shout, “If you lay another hand on each other I will personally guarantee you” -- she looks at The Beast-- “will never play Quidditch again and you” -- she glares at Gaston-- “Won’t even be in the first round of The Victory Games.”

Impressive, threatening to take away the only things that matter to either of them.

They grit their teeth and turn away, steaming with anger and adrenaline. Gaston back into the Three Broomsticks and the Beast toward the forest with Belle.

There’s something about they way she touches him that makes Mulan wonder if she is, indeed, his girlfriend.

Mulan feels heartened though. While she would have loved to see Gaston beaten up, it seems better that a woman stopped a fight over a woman.
Ping suggests they all go grab a bowl of ice cream from Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. Her cookies and cream taste just as good as it always does in Diagon Alley and with a few jabs at each other’s taste in ice cream flavour, everyone is calm again. Laughing and teasing each other about stupid things the group is so... so alive. Mulan smiles, for once not alone on a Saturday.

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Elsa wishes she wasn’t alone patrolling. She knows it’s going to be horrible, all the Halloween pranks, even without that Peter Pan pranking this year. She knows because she’s watched Jack and his friends plan out their pranks.

A glow-in-the-dark sign in the Library that says “Durmstrang Rules.” A dragon in the Great Hall during supper. Enchanting all the mirrors to make everyone’s appear goblinish. And who knows what else?

Why do they have to be so intelligent, damn it? Thankfully, the pranks so far have been harmless and Astrid warned Elsa over dinner which corners of the school to avoid.

The blonde, Viking-blooded Astrid Hofferson is quite remarkable. Stronger and more skilled in combat than her boyfriend, she’s Elsa’s favorite to win the games. Not that she doesn’t think Harry “Hiccup” Haddock doesn’t stand a chance. He’s remarkable with all magical creatures, apparently, not simply dragons. He also always achieves the highest marks, according to his friends. Moreover, although everyone seems to tease him about having once been scrawny, he certainly isn’t scrawny anymore. He’s no gargantuan athlete like Gaston, of course, but he could certainly perform well on athletic challenges. Elsa doesn’t care much for “Tuff” and “Ruff.” The twins are too loud and argumentative. So is “Snotlout.” That school really enjoys its nicknames. “Fishlegs” is the most curious, and frankly, the oddly named boy seems to be least suited for the competition with nothing but brains in contrast to Tuff, Ruff, and Snotlout’s brawn.

Of course, their team also has the more magically gifted. The Guardians are prophesied to defeat great evil with unique powers. Edmund, an Australian, can talk to animals. He himself is a natural Animagus, the only to have ever existed. Jack calls him Bunny and Elsa has a feeling if it hadn’t been against his will he may have chosen a different animal to turn into. Then there’s Toothiana whose power may as well be in dentistry. Elsa thinks her real name is Liliana but she prefers Toothiana because of her fixation on teeth. The first thing she did when she met Elsa was publically examine her “beautiful” teeth. Her abilities range from being a Metamorphmagus to being part fairy. If Elsa had to guess, which she is not wont to do, she would suppose that Toothiana is the ideal tooth fairy, the daughter of a dentist and a fairy. Fay folk, not to be mistaken for pixies, were so hidden and aloof with their own sort of world that one could live a lifetime ignorant of their existence. Of course, Elsa knew. She met with the High Fairy Council of Norway
just last year. Toothiana’s boyfriend is a large Russian man, the kind of person you would certainly expect to be from Durmstrang. Nicholas North is intimidating visually. Tattooed arms, the kind of build you would expect from a mobster, and a fierce poker face. But his voice gives him away, always a light-hearted laugh in his accented words. His eyes give him away too if you dare look at them. They’re as dark as coal but they shine like diamonds. Particularly when he’s looking at Toothiana. It’s heartwarming actually. He has the ability to know what any person needs and often also what they want. According to Jack, this makes him horrible to exchange gifts with because his present will definitely be better than yours. Her favorite of the Guardians is probably Sandy, who is deaf. He deals with dreams and healing, the specifics of which Elsa doesn’t understand yet. She likes that he doesn’t let his inability to communicate affect his personality. He’s funny and charming and at five foot two, absolutely adorable.

She can’t help but smile at the thought of the group. How can Jack be friends with so many people? It’s not like a mere association, an acquaintance ship. He cares for each of them deeply. He understands them better than Elsa probably understands herself.

For that, she envies him. No, not only that. It’s his magic. His ability to control the cold is a gift rather than a curse. People look at him and see hope. His magic is fun and free. Just like the man himself. He is cool in the same way Elsa is cold.

She can hear the bit of the prophecy she knows ringing in her ear: fear will be her enemy; she the enemy with ice to the heart and magic beautiful and but dark.

Elsa Arendelle is the enemy. Maybe even the enemy that the guardians have to beat. Her magic has the power to kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. She can feel her hands freezing up.

Conceal, don’t feel. She doesn’t want the future to come true and perhaps it won’t if she tries to stop it. Elsa isn’t the kind of person who believes in set fates, destiny, a path that you must take. She doesn’t believe in God. How could she believe in something that has made her a monster?

She tries to push the thoughts aside, tries to remember the warmth of dinner. The casual chatter, the food, Jack’s smile, how everything felt full for once. Full and warm and alive.

She can’t, though. Everything is hollow and cold and dead.

Elsa Arendelle is not the sort of girl who gets so lost in her thoughts and ideas that she is not aware of where she is going, but tonight, All Hallow’s Eve, seems to be different.
He scares her without even meaning to. That’s the real magic of Jack Frost, pranking unintentionally, naturally.

“Jack!” She tries to catch her breath, “You shouldn’t sneak up on people like that!”

“I’d hardly call saying hello and waving before poking your shoulder sneaking up on you.” Jack looks down at her. She doesn’t wear heels for patrol and the lack of added height forces her to look up at him.

“Sorry, I must have been caught up in my thoughts.”

“Wow, I am just that see-through, aren’t I?” He laughs and brushes his arm against hers as they walk. Immediately, Elsa feels a rush of warmth flood her body. She can’t tell if it’s the laugh or the human contact.

“No, no. I promise it’s very difficult to miss you, Jack Frost.” She gives him a smile.

He stops to think. It’s odd seeing him think before speaking. She’s grown accustomed in the last week to his ability to respond naturally, impeccably without so much as a moment of consideration. “It must have been something rather big then, to distract you.”

Elsa shrugs and immediately regrets it. She hates shrugs, how casual and impolite they always seem. While Elsa believes in the importance of Action opposed to Words, there’s something about exchanging a well-crafted sentence for an easy movement of the body that is inherently cheap.

“I apologize but don’t really want to talk about it,” Elsa amends.

Jack balances maturity with immaturity like a practiced tightrope walker. Instead of childishly pestering her about the taboo subject, he shifts his tone from easygoing to sincere. “You don’t have to.”

“So why aren’t you at that party? I heard Hufflepuff is throwing a... real rager,” She says, pronouncing the last three syllables as precisely and slowly as possible.
“I thought I might convince you to come” --he sees the disbelief in her wide eyes-- “after you finish rounds, of course.”

“It’ll be an hour,” she says. “You know that.”

“Well, what’s wrong with spending an hour keeping you company.” He has a goofy grin that makes Elsa think twice.

He likes her. Romantically. She doesn’t know much about romance or romantic feelings but there’s something about his eagerness to be around her, the way he regards her, that makes her sure that this is it.

Now, does she like him? He’s attractive physically, of course, especially when there’s a bit of color in his cheeks. He’s also lean and tall. And he’s gregarious and genial. He makes her smile, enjoy moments rather than just experience them.

“Okay then, let’s get going.”

The cold blonde knows nothing of romance. She’s had sex, once, at a party with a stranger just to see what it was like, and it wasn’t really much of anything to her. Certainly not something worth the dedication of so many songs. Even then, romance is as foreign to Elsa as she still feels in this country. Something she should feel comfortable with but isn’t entirely.

He is her first friend. This is all she understands. He is the kind of person who understands people better than they understand themselves. If she does like him, he will probably know before she does.

For now, she enjoys the walk. Enjoys how the evening feels so very full. Like the creepy dark halls are actually aglow.

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Wendy is at a party. A real party, not a pranking party organised by Peter and attended by the Lost Boys. The kind of party he was always too cool to go to. What kind of thirteen-year-old already has a grasp of what they’re too cool for?
No, Wendy isn’t here to spend her time thinking about him. It’s weird, though, trying to figure out who she is without the guy who’s sort of defined her persona for at least a year, maybe two, possibly three.

In the last two weeks and four days, Wendy Darling has learned quite a few things about herself. First, she likes being alone. When you’re with Peter Pan, there isn’t time to be alone. It’s always some Lost Boy or Peter himself impishly eager for your attention. Now, there’s just Wendy and whoever she wants to be with on her own terms. Next, she likes schedules and order. Spontaneity is fun, yes, but it’s so relieving to know her schedule will work out however she plans. No more wondering if she’ll get enough sleep or finish her homework on time due to whatever activity the random Peter Pan develops. Speaking of schedules- she likes having a normal sleep schedule! The kind thirteen-year-olds are supposed to have! Sleeping around ten or eleven and waking up around eight. It’s refreshing not to wake up at four because Peter had a nightmare.

Thinking about his nightmares always gives Wendy a start. Is it wrong that she left this boy to deal with all that crap by himself? Is he a bad person because he found it funny to hurt people? Was their whole friendship - relationship toxic? Was he really truly dreadful? Will they ever be friends again?

It’s remarkable how one’s perception can change so quickly. Immediately she wonders if she was only ever attracted to him because he was dangerous and different and a form of rebellion against her strict mother. Maybe he was just the embodiment of the childhood she wasn’t ready to abandon quite yet.

Yet, watching older students drinking and dancing in the Hufflepuff common room, she wonders if she’s still not ready to abandon it yet. It’s awkward standing there, sipping water while the whole room feels tipsy.

“Hey,” it’s Honey Lemon, “You okay, dear?”

Honey Lemon is everything part of Wendy wants to be. She’s intelligent and kind and so put together but fun all at the same time. Her sense of style is both completely unique and in tune with current fashion trends. She sounds so mature and cool but also relatable and nurturing.

“Yeah, I just feel kind of weird. It’s my first party,” Wendy admits shyly.

There is Wendy Darling who has never gone to a party before and Wendy Darling who has kissed Peter Pan like no thirteen-year-old should kiss. The Wendy who wants to be this lovely woman talking to her right now and the Wendy who thinks she’s too vanilla, too nice, too normal.
“Aww,” it’s a bit patronising but Wendy lets it slide, “I remember my first party. We’d snuck into one to see what it was like and barely lasted an hour before the teenager ambiance scared us off. We didn’t feel like we belonged - very awkward.”

She laughs. It’s a pretty laugh, loud and real - like her personality. “I’m glad I went, though. You have to feel awkward at your first party before you feel comfortable at your fifth.”

“Fifth?”

“Growing up is a gradual process. It’s years of awkwardness and insecurity and mistakes and creating the person you want to be. It takes time to feel comfortable in your own skin, let alone around other people.”

Wendy’s heart warms. She takes a deep breath and smiles back at the larger than life, Spanish Genius Barbie in front of her. Eventually, she’ll be something like her. Eventually. For now, there isn’t that sort of pressure.

“Thanks, Honey,” Wendy pauses. “Do you think I did the right thing? With Peter, I mean.”

“Did you do what felt right at the time?”

“Yeah.”

“Then it was the right thing. It’s hard to judge decisions until events have unfolded and even then you can only really say ‘that turned out well’ or ‘that had unfortunate consequences.’”

Wendy must look confused because she continues, “Okay, have you taken Muggle Studies?”

Wendy nods.

“It’s like the American Revolution. Because it ended well and the Yanks won we can judge it to be the right decision, but there’s an alternate universe where the Yanks lose and everyone reflects on
it as poor planning, poor timing, poor strategy.”

“Oh, so you mean there’s a bit of luck involved in how things turn out.”

“Exactly. It doesn’t change the fact that the ideals behind the revolution were good, though, does it?”

“I suppose not.”

“So regardless of what happens with Peter in the future. Regardless of the consequences, so long as you feel good about your decision and your intentions are pure, we can say that it was a good thing to do, yeah?”

Wendy can feel herself relax a bit more. “Yeah.”

Then, she thinks of something else. “Sorry, I’m sure you want to get back to your friends, but I have another question.”

“No worries, go for it!”

“Am I being selfish? Leaving the boys and Peter. They all look at me as a sort of mum. A lot of them are orphans and I feel responsible for them.”

“Oh, Wendy,” Honey’s tone walks the line between compassionate concern and pity, “You have no obligation to be anyone’s mother. You’re only thirteen, for God’s sake. It’s not selfish to take time for yourself or even to put your needs over other people’s. You have to help yourself before you can help others. Besides, from what I hear, you needed time away from all of them, not just Peter.”

“Thank you,” Wendy gives the older girl a hug.

“You’re welcome.”

Hiro is really lucky to have someone like her in his life. Really he’s lucky to have all of them. His
brother Tadashi, all around great guy. Cool, daring Gogo. Neat freak Wasabi. Chill and fun Fred. They’re all so nice. They talk to Wendy like she’s one of them, not some thirteen-year-old Hiro’s just started to bring to things.

She’s always been his friend but they rarely hung out. Being Peter’s friend is a full-time job.

“Is it just me or is it really hot in here?” Hiro asks.

“It’s all the warm bodies,” Wendy says in reply.

“I feel stuffy,” he complains, “Why did we come here again?”

“Because it’s my first party,” Wendy smiles, “C’mon, let’s enjoy it.”

She drags him onto the dance floor and persuades him to sway and jump to the songs. He even dances with her during a slow one and Wendy wonders again why she doesn’t like this guy. This totally nice, funny, intelligent fourteen-year-old. Don’t normal people prefer guys like him? No, it’s a common theme in literature and pop culture that girls like bad boys, isn’t it? But in real life, bad boys are bad and good guys are the ones you end up with. So why is it that she imagined dancing with Peter at the Welcoming Ball?

You can’t control who you like. She shakes it off and enjoys what she has now. A nice friend who respects boundaries and likes talking about nerdy things like magical theory and robots. A cool group of seventh years who give really good advice and can help with homework. Free time to read and write and think and study however she likes. Being Independent Wendy Darling for Halloween.

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Eugene Fitzherbert is not Flynn Rider for Halloween. He spends enough time pretending to be Flynn on a regular day. Tonight he is Batman, the second-coolest guy he heard stories about growing up.

“You sure you’re okay with leaving the party early, Eugene?” His Catwoman asks. Rapunzel looks really cute with cat ears in her long blonde hair. He kind of misses the spiky brown tufts that magically disappeared over the summer but he loves Blondie regardless of her hairstyle.
“Yeah, I’d rather be cuddling with you than drunk on the dance floor any day.”

If Flynn had been told he’d tell a girl this in a year last year he would have laughed. Really hard. Flynn Rider didn’t cuddle. Not even after having sex with a girl. Nope, no cuddling. Honestly, if Flynn saw how Eugene acted nowadays he’d call him whipped - and not in the good way.

Rapunzel smiles at him, one of her beautiful perfect smiles and he grins stupidly back. Yep, totally completely whipped and very happy about it.

He used to think love was a sham. That girls brainwashed poor bastards into doing what they said. He swore he’d never get tied down to any girl ever, a promise he actually made to Naveen while high once.

But that was before he ended up in the tower of some thirteen-year-old girl who could fight with frying pans. Before the kind of adventure that makes you rethink your life choices. Before he fell for naive charms and sweet smiles and creativity in its purest form.

He knows he sounds like a lovesick bastard, but he really doesn’t care anymore because, for the first time, he feels totally happy with himself. He tries in school. He only drinks occasionally and never to get hammered. He’s done with thieving. Done with meaningless sex.

He feels happier with Rapunzel sitting under the covers reading a book out loud to him than he ever did orgasming with a random girl or staying up all night partying. He thinks domestic living is The Answer. The end-all truth - the key to happiness - but he’s not so narrow-minded to think that’s what it is for everyone.

“Eugene, are you listening?” Rapunzel frowns.

“Sorry, babe, I got lost in my thoughts.”

“What were you thinking about?”

“How much I love this moment. Us sitting here.”
“Aww, that’s sweet, love.” Frown upside down in less than a minute.

“Actually, I know we said no presents except for big anniversaries after we passed a year but I know you made me something and I also know you love surprises, so… here.”

He’s still second thinking it. Maybe it’s too cheesy, maybe it’s weird to give this to her on Halloween.

“Eugene!” Oh no, she’s freaking out. “I’m only fourteen! We can’t get mar--”

“No, Blondie,” he sighs in relief and mentally slaps himself for not seeing this coming, “I’m not proposing. It’s a promise ring. It’s supposed to signify how committed I am to you and my intentions to marry you eventually - definitely not anytime in the near future.”

“Oh!” Rapunzel lights up like the sun, “That’s such a beautiful idea, and the ring is gorgeous. Thank you!”

“It also sometimes signifies the commitment to not having sex till marriage,” he continues, his hand inadvertently flying up to his hair, “I know you say you don’t feel pressured or uncomfortable, but I thought maybe people would bother you less about it if you had this.”

“I don’t care what other people do or think or say,” Rapunzel declares, “I just care about you and what we’ve talked about. I do think it’s a cute little thing for us though, a purity ring for a demi and an ace.”

He smiles, “Definitely. But not as cute as you are.”

“You are the cheesiest guy ever.” She laughs, “Behind all that black clothing is this total softie.”

“Yeah and behind all your pastel dresses is a total badass.”

“Aww, we’re the cutest couple, aren’t we?”
“I dunno, I can think of a couple couples that could give us a run for our money.”

“I can’t. Not even the Queen of England and her Phillip are as cute as us.” She makes a pleased sort of look that makes Eugene sure that it was right for her to dress up like a cat.

“Ooh, now the thing I made for you! I have it with me, actually,” she says quickly. Then she reaches into the bag she brought for their “sleepover.”

“I was going to give it to you tomorrow, so it wouldn’t technically break the no gift rule, but I’m totally cool with giving it to you now.”

It’s a painting as usual. And as usual, he’s stunned. It’s him. With the nose done right! Unlike that missing persons poster that had it completely wrong.

“You know how much I love inside jokes.” He admires it. It’s not an ordinary painting actually.

“I decided to combine my love of painting with my love of Charms! It’s not like the usual paintings in the castle that move around and stuff, but he alternates between smoldering and looking normal.”

“I love it.” And he does. “I love you.” And he does.

“I love you, too.” And she does.

“Best Halloween ever.” And it is.

“Even better than the one where you dyed the other Professor Thatch’s hair white?”

“Loads better.”

“Hey, I’m actually tired, you want to go to bed?”
She nods.

Like the gentleman he’s learned to be, he closes his eyes as she changes into a purple tank top with a white bunny on it and matching white shorts with carrots. Even if he experienced sexual attraction, he didn’t think he’d find such a whimsically cute outfit sexy.

He kisses her goodnight slowly. The benefit of having a history as a “manhoe” is he’s a good kisser. Rapunzel does this cute thing where she smiles in her kisses. It’s adorable.

Her wraps his arms around her and they fall asleep to the memorised song of each other’s breathing. Rapunzel first, as always, with Eugene following after admiring her sleeping figure. How sweet and pretty and perfect his girlfriend is, how lucky he is to have her in his arms like this. To be with someone on a night he’d always ended feeling alone.

Chapter End Notes

Aww, don't you just love Flynn and Rapunzel? I think they're the cutest :3 Let me know in a comment who your favourite ship is so far.
Kudos/Comments/Subscriptions/Bookmarks are like Hershey's kisses: they're super sweet and I can never get enough of 'em :) Stay tuned for chapter 12 because the games are really going to begin!
Chapter 12: Players, On Your Mark (Round 1)

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Okay, so I'm...FINALLY back. I'm sorry about the wait BUT I have a long list of excuses: I had a national competition, my laptop charger broke and I didn't get a new one for a couple weeks, I got stuck in writer's block etc. Anywho, I'm back. I'm writing every day again and this chapter is over 9,000 words :) I hope that it was worth the wait. I'm not making any promises but I really hope I get the next one out within a couple weeks. I will be heading to college in August and while I do think I can find time to write, more than ever school will be my greatest priority so if I do disappear later on for a while, be patient with me, please. Thank you so much for all your support. We're almost at a hundred kudos which is amazing! If you're new to the story please leave kudos if you liked it. Also, I really love hearing your comments so please comment as well. Anyway, on to the chapter! Enjoy! (updated 5/24/18 with minor edits)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The Gaston Chasseur is a player. He plays Quidditch as a Beater. He plays for the Hogwarts team in the Victory game. He plays every person he meets with his rugged charisma.

And he plays women. Oh, he plays women and they love it. Except, apparently, Belle. What a fucking bitch. Seducing him like that while fucking around with The Beast. Slag. She’s probably only with him because she’s into kinky shite.

It blows because even when he’s getting blown by the bimbette he brought home after the party, he’s imagining that the blonde hair he sees is actually brown and that it’s Belle on her knees, naked in front of him, submissive.

It doesn’t matter. He’ll wear her down. He’s Gaston. Everyone loves him. Girls want him. Guys want to be him. There’s no way she can resist. Especially not when he wins the Victory Games.

And he’s going to destroy the competition. How could he not? No one can match him in what’s important: strength, size, and strategy. He’s the oldest man on any team and, based on LeFou’s report on popular betting pools, an early favourite to take home the 75,000 galleons.

The money isn’t his motivation, but it is a nice bonus. What he truly cares about is the honor and glory and fame. There’s a reason that hat screamed Gryffindor when he was eleven.

“Gaston,” LeFou says outside the door.

He sighs a mix of annoyance and pleasure.

“Keep going,” he directs Laura…or is it Claudia? They all look the same.

She picks up the pace and in a few minutes, Gaston is ready for LeFou.

The bimbette takes Gaston’s shirt and kisses him goodbye as the shorter man enters the dormitory.

“Goodbye, Paula,” LeFou calls. Oh, Paula. They all fucking look the same. It’s a wonder they aren’t triplets.

“I have no idea how you keep track of them,” Gaston admits as he pulls on a tight white muscle shirt.

“Well, Paula has a bit of green in her eyes and Claudia has a mole under her right eye and Laura’s nose is completely different.”

Gaston shrugs. “So what do you have for me today?”

“Well here are your boots, I shined them. You have to be down in thirty minutes for the games so I brought your breakfast up.”

Eggs, sausages, biscuits and a large glass of milk to wash it all down.

Gaston gives the little guy a nod of approval.
“Have you heard whether or not Belle will be watching?” He asks as he takes a big bite out of the sausage.

“Sorry, man, it sounds like she won’t.” LeFou bumbles.

“Probably too busy with the Beast’s dick down her throat.” He laughs dryly.

“Oh, Gaston. Why do you even want her? She’s so weird.”

“She’s the most beautiful girl in Hogwarts.”

“So?”

“So that makes her the best.”

“Well—“

“And don’t I deserve the best?”

“Well, I suppose…”

“So that’s that, isn’t it?”

LeFou sighs a bit too loudly for someone so small. “For now, we need to focus on the Games.”

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Mulan needs to focus on the Games. Not on Shang. But it’s hard when he’s looking right at her. And she’s not even daydreaming.

He’s actually, somehow smiling at her. Granted, it’s a teeny tiny half smile but he even meets her eyes. “You’ve all improved immensely…” Mulan is so caught up in that one moment she doesn’t process what he says next.

A part of her wants to believe he means the words only for her, but it applies to everyone standing in the stinky old locker room; they’ve all come far in the last few weeks. Still, he didn’t smile at everyone, just her. She can barely contain her blush. Ugh, why does he have to be so cute?

Focus, Mulan. He finally respects you. Drooling over him won’t help you. If anything, Gaston might give you a hard time for being “gay.” Besides you need to win the games. For honor and glory. For your family. For the sake of feminism, and proving arseholes--like that self-important Captain Gaston, who doesn’t even care enough to get down in time to give a fucking two-minute speech--wrong.

I have to win.

As they walk toward the crowds, she says a quiet prayer.
Hi God, it’s Mulan. Well, I’m kinda Ping right now, but you know that. I’m not sure if you’re listening or even if you’re real, but if you are: please help me do well today. Please help me win. Thank you for all the cool things you’ve given me. I love Mushu and I’m so grateful to be on this team. Thanks for keeping Grandma, Mom and Dad healthy. Please help Dad with his knee pain. He puts on a brave face but it really does hurt a lot. Also, thanks for introducing me to Shang. I know I probably have no chance with him but I’d appreciate anything I can get. Thanks, God. Oh, and if there is such a thing as hellfire can you please help me be a good enough person to avoid it. Awesome, bye. Or should I say Amen? … Amen.

Yeah, not exactly a traditional prayer but she’s not religious in a traditional way. Mulan wasn’t raised practicing anything but Chinese superstitions, but, like any young teen, she started questioning her purpose and the world and all after enough years alive on this Earth. Her thirteen-year-old quest for meaning in life resulted in her own brand of agnosticism. Her logical side says she only believes in God because she has to; a world without a kind, omnipotent being looking after you is an impossibly scary world. Especially now, it’s nice to have something to hold on to.

As they make their way through halls and out the doors to the bleachers of people, Mulan glances at the rest of her teammates. They buzz with anxious energy, like a swarm of bees festering in a beehive, eager to make their honey and willing to bite anything that gets in the way.

Mulan listens to Headmaster Mouse as he officially welcomes everyone to the first round of the fifth Victory Games.

“As you all know, Hogwarts has hosted the Victory Games every seven years since the turn of the century to commemorate the victory over Voldemort and his Death Eaters. We are excited to welcome Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and the Durmstrang Institute to Hogwarts for a year of friendly-” he pauses for laughter “competition. I wish every competitor the best of luck. Winning these dangerous games warrants honor and glory as well as a seventy-five thousand galleon prize. This year, like the great Harry Potter himself, they will face challenges based on Horcruxes. The first round is Nagi, the beast. In this round, each team must work together to defeat a variety of beasts. As always, the weakest member of each team, as determined by our panel of judges, will be eliminated at the end of the round. The team that wins will be awarded a point as well as a minor advantage in the next round but will not escape the loss of a member. Now, who’s ready to see the Beasts?!”

The crowd cheers. Mulan gulps. What kind of monsters could these people have obtained? They probably have access to every (legal?) creature in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them and based on what she heard about previous games the organizing panel is never afraid of going too all out. Well, no; that’s not exactly true. They can’t use anything that could seriously attack children, so no erklings. They can’t give Durmstrang or Beauxbatons an advantage, so definitely no dragons or winged horses. It’s unlikely they’d bring in anything endangered, holy to a particular culture, or rated XXXXX… Right?!

It turns out that they’re not meant to find out what Beasts they’ll be facing till the round actually
begins and all the competitors are ushered into the arena, away from the ravenous crowds of students and reporters. Far away from the reaches of the Headmasters Sonorus charm. Mulan breathes a sigh of relief.

It felt like the cameras were pointed directly at her even though she knows, realistically, they couldn’t have been. For a moment she curses the Callaghans of the world, all the witches, and wizards that developed the integration of magic to this point. They are going to tape everything, even interviews with the students that made it far enough—supposedly top three for every school. Ugh, if she somehow makes it that far she has to deal with that too.

But again, that is only if she makes it far enough. The Hogwarts team waits for a few minutes in a corner of the arena. Based on the towering shrubbery it seems like they’ll be entering some sort of maze. From where they are, she can’t see the other teams but she can imagine them. The muscular Durmstrang students clad in leathery brown armour tease each other. The diverse cast from Beauxbâtons looking miraculously uniform in paper-white, skin-tight suits mirror elegant statues. Then there’s the Hogwarts team, an awkward bunch of athletic guys making small talk.

“So,” A voice jolts Mulan awake, “is Mulan your cousin?”

It’s Flynn. How is someone so cool talking to her? About her, boring old Mulan?

“How do you know who I-err- how do you know her?” She blurts out in response. “And- oh, right, yes she’s my cousin.”

“My girlfriend was talking about how she was thinking about asking her to be partners with her on the next Charms assignment. I’m supposed to find out if you think she’d like that.”

Why would Rapunzel have to ask--

“Punzie’s not sure if Mulan would want to. I mean she rarely works or talks with anyone so--”

Oh right, because Mulan is so socially inept that she seems standoffish. Fuck.

“Oh, she’s just a bit shy,” Mulan says, aiming for casual and falling short. “She was homeschooled before Hogwarts and hasn’t really figured out how to make friends.”
“So why don’t you hang out with her?”

“Ah, she said it’s embarrassing to always be with your cousin, you know?” She shrugs and grins widely. And immediately slaps herself internally. Why is she so awkward?

“Right,” Flynn looks unconvinced, “Well Punzie was homeschooled too, so she probably has stuff in common with Mulan. I’ll tell her to go ahead and ask?”

“Yeah, definitely.”

Rapunzel. Rapunzel maybe might want to be friends with her! Ahh! She seems so nice and cool - and obviously smart and creative with all her paintings and questions in class. To be fair, Mulan doesn’t have any friends, so it’s not like she could really be picky, but still.

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“Rapunzel’ll be cheering you on, yeah?”

“I don’t know if I’ll be able to hear her this far away, but yeah she has my lucky scarf and everything.”

“That’s sweet.”

“Thanks. Most guys would say I’m whipped.”

“They’re all just jealous you have such a stable relationship.” She says it like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. Because it is.

“Uh, okay.” Dang it. She must have sounded like such a girl.

“It looks like we’re going to start. Good luck.” Mulan nods slightly as she turns to face the entrance to the maze.
“Good luck to you, too.”

The official announcer of the event is one of Headmaster Mouse’s old friends, Donald Fauntleroy. A veteran of the war, Mr. Fauntleroy works as a Quidditch announcer nowadays, quacking remarks on players and their plays. Quacking nearly literally, his squeaky voice has earned him the nickname “Donald Duck.”

To untrained ears, his speech is indecipherable- a series of lisped squeaks- but most of the crowd and the players have heard him on the radio or at a game. His voice is something to shake one’s head at and grin like “Oh, that Donald Duck.”

Mulan, for one, has not heard him on the radio or at a game, namely because she never really got into Quidditch. At least, not English Quidditch. Chinese Quidditch is something else entirely. Much faster, with way more cool broom tricks - who said Chinese Olympians were the only flexible ones? One of her favorite memories is watching last year’s National Championship with her family over bowls of spicy ramen, bags of sunflower seeds, and packets of Hello Panda. Another is going shopping with her mother in Chinatown. Yelling in Mandarin, Cantonese, and very, very broken English. That was her training. When you can understand FOB broken English, you can understand nearly everything.

“Ladies and Gentleman, welcome again to the fifth ever Victoryyyyy Gaaaaaames!” Mr. Fauntleroy squeaks, “As you can see, our teams are here and ready to compete. In the far back, we have the Beauxbatons Academy of Magic.” A roar of cheers. Mulan guesses they’re showing their faces on a jumbo screen or something and instantly straightens. “To the left, we have the Durmstrang Institute.” A mix of cheering and squealing - undoubtedly over the gorgeous Jack Frost. “And to the right, we have our home team, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!” Mulan feels invigorated by the screaming. Who said teens nowadays aren’t into school spirit?

“Now, as Headmaster Mouse explained, all these teams will be facing terrifying beasts like the nefarious Nagi.” A hush comes over the crowd. “They’ll face these beasts as they make their way from their respective corners to the center of the arena. Whichever team reaches the center and defeats the most dangerous beast first will win the first point of the Games!”

“Is everyone ready?”

To immense applause, Mr. Fauntleroy shouts, “Players on your mark, get set, go!”

Mulan sprints into the thick of the shrubs. The first thing she notices is that it’s not a maze, there’s
a clear path to the middle. The second is that there’s something gray and scaly beneath her feet.

“Owwww!” Someone - it sounds like LeFou- screams.

His foot has caught on fire. Tadashi points his wand and shouts *aguamenti!* before most of the members of the Hogwarts team have even figured out why LeFou was screaming.

Mulan scours the ground for more of Ashwinder eggs. She notices something glowing and casts *glacius* right on time. Then she sees another- oh! and another- and the process repeats till she’s cast the spell ten times nearly and she can hear Mr. Fauntleroy noting that it seems Hogwarts has passed the first challenge.

“Are there any more?” Shang looks directly at her.

Her eyes widen at the shock of his voice. “No.” She shakes her head.

“Good job. Let’s keep going.”

As she lunges to keep up with him she can’t help but grin with intense pride. HE SAID GOOD JOB! TO PING! OTHERWISE KNOWN AS MULAN FUCKING FA! Oh, and she did figure out the first challenge. No biggie there.

The second comes and goes without Mulan doing much of anything except feeling painfully aware of her sore muscles and hungry stomach (why didn’t she eat more than a measly banana?). She stands with the crowd while Shang and John argue over strategy. It feels more like an alpha male showdown than a real debate. Eventually, Shang being the compromising, understanding leader he is, nods to Phillip, and he joins John in an attack.

Phillip and John creep up to a giant, ugly Blast-ended Skrewt and aim a series of impediment jinxes towards it, the spells hitting its underside after only a few minutes. Mulan gapes in a mix of horror and awe.

Shang shakes his head. “Are you okay?”
Speed always comes with a price. For Phillip, it’s a giant burn on his back.

He doesn’t seem remotely fazed by the hole in his gear and the bright red swelter. He just keeps on running. Mulan thinks it has less to do with heroism and more to do with the fact that the faster they finish the round, the sooner he sees his girlfriend. To be that in love…

Mulan knows Mr. Faulteroy is still rapidly updating the crowds but she can’t focus on anything he’s saying. She can feel the blood in her ears and the beginning of sweat droplets on her forehead. She’s glad Shang pushed them so hard during training because there is no way she could have had the endurance to keep sprinting after five minutes in August. As if on cue, it starts to rain. Mulan can hear thunder. She looks up. It’s a thunderbird. A real, live thunderbird.

*Wow.*

Any other circumstance she would have stopped and stared at it in awe but there’s not time now. There’s no way they can let Durmstrang or Beauxbatons beat them.

When they first reach the pool, the group assumes it’s another puddle, formed from the thunderbird’s storm. That’s not the case, though. One step in and the monster - a vicious, grey scaly monkey sort of creature - has his webbed hands aimed at Gaston’s neck.

“What do we do, give it a banana?” Gaston asks after leaping far, far away from the puddle. Mulan has a feeling this is his idea of both a joke and a legitimate idea. What a meathead.

“Kappas prefer human blood.” Mulan gulps, putting a creepy name to a creepy face.

“Kappas,” Yao says, “We learned about those last year in defense but we spent, like, a day on ‘em.”

“If we get some cucumbers and inscribe our names on them we can pass safely. The problem is, I don’t think we know a place that definitely has enough cucumbers for fourteen people,” Mulan responds, and suddenly everyone is looking at her. What? She reads.

“Does anyone go down to the Kitchens a lot?” She asks.
Chien-Po raises his hand.

“Do you remember what the inside of a fridge looks like? Do you know where they keep the cucumbers?”

In response, Chien Po accios two cucumbers.

“I was going for fourteen.” He frowns. Mulan pats him on the shoulder.

“How do we defeat it?” Shang asks.

“We have to make the water get out of the bowl in its head.”

As if they don’t believe her, a couple people turn to see if his head really does have a depression and of course they see it, full to the brim with water.

“I read a legend that the Japanese bow to it to trick it into spilling the water which kills it,” Mulan explains.

“He jumps a bit at the call out and Mulan empathizes. It’s always awkward to have your ethnicity brought up like that, especially by guys like Gaston. It’s interesting though, she wouldn’t have expected visible discomfort from someone like Tadashi Hamada, the glorious head boy. Now that she thinks about it though she’s always seen slight discomfort creeping on his face when he’s in the spotlight. Huh, the head boy doesn’t like being looked at. Who would have guessed?

“Half,” his voice hangs with a hint of uncertainty.

“Eh, and Chinese is close enough.” Gaston shrugs. “Shang and Tadashi, go in and bow to it.”

The group looks contemplative and vaguely uncomfortable. Is this racist or actually a good idea? Okay, the part where he said Chinese is close enough is probably racist.
Mulan inscribes their names in the cucumbers Chien-Po hands her. They march into the pond. It’s fairly large, so wide that they can’t go around it, but very shallow.

Tadashi and Shang bow but all the Kappa does is bear its sharp teeth. Shite.

The demon doesn’t seem inclined to eat them, so they hurry out to the other side.

“Think of something else!” Shang shouts.

The water is still pouring down. With her clothes soaked, Mulan is freezing and aching (physically and mentally) to go back to the common room to warm up by the fire. Fire! There’s a good chance this won’t work, but it’s better than nothing.

She aims for the head of the water demon. “Incendio.”

The water in its depression evaporates and Mulan takes the plunge and runs through the pond.

When she reaches the other side she turns around. The kappa isn’t dead - she remembered wrong, they’re only weakened. It doesn’t matter though because the weakened kappa isn’t able to stop any of her teammates.

One more beast done, and this time it was all her! (Mostly her.)

“That was brilliant!” Ling yells and Yao claps Mulan on her back.

She grins, “Thanks.”

They walk on for a few minutes before Shang makes them pick up the pace again. Running in the rain sucks. Mulan is glad it wasn’t heavy enough to refill the cup head thing of the Kappa because that would have killed her plan - and consequently her. They weren’t kidding when they said this competition would be dangerous.
“What’s that?” Jim Hawkins points at what looks to be an orange and black striped three headed dragon.

“A Hydra?” Hercules asks excitedly. How can someone be excited at the prospect of a hydra?

“It’s a Runespoor,” He corrects himself. “Great, these are a lot easier to defeat, though it would be easier with a sword at hand.”

“Hey, ugly!” he shouts. Three heads turn to him.

“Aren’t you guys sick of his hissing?”

The middle and left heads settle as if they can understand him and are listening. Mulan thought they only got Parseltongue.

“Wouldn’t it be better to make plans that weren’t constantly turned apart? Or to dream without being nagged?”

They hiss in reply.

“All you gotta do is kill him, then it’s whatever you want whenever you want it.”

Like a miracle, the two start attacking the right one.

Maybe they’re supposed to go around it while it hurts itself?

Mulan starts to walk but Hercules stops her. “Not yet.”

He’s right. Apparently biting off your third head isn’t a long or arduous task.

Mulan racks her mind to remember. Runespoor. Africa. Three heads. The right head.
Oh, right (haha, right right). It’s the head that criticizes the others.

Once the right head is out of the way, Hercules confounds the left head - the planner - and the beast has a tranquil look come about him. The middle head is in control - the dreamer.

It doesn’t move at all, just smiles lazily. The team follows Hercules example, casually strolling around it.

“You’ve fought one of those before?” Mulan asks him.

“No, but I spent the summer in Greece doing these tasks to prove to my Greek relatives I’ve got the makings of a hero. I had to kill a hydra. and I remember my uncle telling me the closest he got to a hydra was a runespoor.”

A hydra! A NINE HEADED SERPENT! He killed one! HOW EVEN?

*How am I going to beat people this impressive?*

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

Jasmine takes a sip of her hot chocolate sans marshmallows. So far, she’s impressed by Ping Fa, Hercules Clements, and Henry “Hiccup” Haddock. And maybe Ali Ababua.

That magic carpet ride was incredible - beyond words, jaw dropping, eye opening. The night sky and the Irish countryside and a boy pretending to be a man. The problem is she has a crush on the boy himself, not the man he's pretending to be. Then again, is there really that much of a difference between the two?

She talked to Ali till twilight, listened to him in the raw light of the moon. He was raised Muslim but he doesn’t really believe anymore - at least not that God is as benevolent as they say or into meddling in the lives of average people. He hates olives. He secretly loves learning - even about Muggle subjects like mathematics and science. His favorite class is defense. He likes cats and dogs for different reasons. Cats are calm and lower maintenance. Dogs are friendly and adventurous. He hates swimming but doesn’t mind heights.
That stuff can't all be made up. But some things clearly are: his dad’s an oil sheik and his company has branches all over Europe, he's traveled a lot, he has tons of servants to do chores for him, he's here to observe the games for “moral support,” he speaks French. Okay, actually, he might speak French.

The thing is, she likes the guy she got to know. Especially now that he's dropped most of the arrogant jerk part of his persona.

“Hey, beautiful.” Maybe not all of it.

He's back with a box of licorice wands.

“What did I miss?” He settles in his seat and looks at her right in the eyes. It’s a weird thing to like, but Jasmine loves good eye contact. It’s something missing at Hogwarts. Teenagers don’t put much stock in that sort of thing - not like businessmen or old money witches and wizards.

Jasmine keeps her tone professional, “Nothing, Hogwarts is still behind Durmstrang, with your team catching up.” Catching up is sugarcoating it. Even with the popular blonde boy (not Frost, he’s on Durmstrang’s team) and the resourceful Asian girl, they are significantly behind the other two teams.

“Ah, I’m sure Adrien will pull through. He always does. Him and Marionette --

Ils sont miraculeux. ” He offers her a wand. So he can speak French.

She raises an eyebrow, “Gelatin-free?”

“Ah, right,” he winces. “Damn.”

Jasmine gives him a look.

“Wow, I am really failing at this dating a good girl thing aren’t I?” He laughs at himself, shaking his head.
“Who said we were dating?”

“I just did.”

Jasmine rolls her eyes. Okay, maybe he’s still a player. “So what, are you better with bad girls?”

“I’d say I’m better at turning good girls into bad girls.” He gives a smirk so easy that it’s either very well practiced or entirely natural.

“Well, I refuse to be turned into anything. I thought I made it clear when I ranted about how much I didn’t like everyone trying to make me into something I’m not.”

Knowing that he’s still the Aladdin she talked to at King’s Cross, she expects him to sound accusatory in his response but he’s just curious and a bit surprised, “So you don’t think you’re the Disney It girl on the inside?”

“You know about the Disney Society?” It’s a redundant question. His best friend is Merida DunBroch. Jasmine has done her research.

“Who doesn’t? Besides you’re an It girl to the Muggles too.” He must have done his research too.

Jasmine pauses to think, then carefully says, “The worst part of being made into someone is you don’t know where the real you stops and the image you begins. I’m not sure if I love makeup because of fond memories with my mother or if it’s something I’ve said so much that I finally believe it myself.” She’s never really talked about this with anyone but Ariel. Even then, it was in the safety of a late night. Ariel was half asleep, half the pressing firecracker she is awake.

“So, it’s like when people’s expectations of yourself seem to sort of become who you are.” He gets it. Jasmine wonders if that’s what his whole bitter orphan teen rant came from. Or maybe why he wears a leather jacket in the Muggle world. The world expects someone like him to be unhappy and scary. It sounds like he isn’t too unhappy - at least not at school. His friend group has been compared to the Marauders. He’s fairly popular, and, according to Ariel’s sources, always ready with an easy smile.
“Is that right, Mr. Bad Boy Player Man?”

He laughs, “That the best you could come up with?”

“I’m not good at insults. Remember, I am a ‘good girl.’” Jasmine smiles. Something about it makes Ali grin a bit bigger. His dimples are cute.

“I’m not sure if I am who I am because I want to be like this or because I think it’s what everyone else wants from me or if I shift how I act to fit what they think I should be.”

“I, for one, do not think you should be a player.”

“Ah, you want me to settle down with you,” how does he twist all her words?! “but you like the whole bad boy thing, don’t you?”

“You could never convince me you’re a true rascal. Maybe someone with too much money and a desire to rebel against it.” She gives him a knowing look she hopes is condescending in a funny way.

“Now you’re just psychoanalysing yourself.” He’s always turning the tables. The nerve!

“I don’t rebel against my family’s fortune, I use it for good. I’m one of the most well-known philanthropists in London and that’s not including all the anonymous donations.” Jasmine defends herself. It’s weak to get defensive but this is one of her passions.

“Because you’re guilty you have so much?”

“Guilt is too negative of a word. I know I’m privileged. It doesn’t mean I have everything easy. I don’t like the lifestyle very much.” She has a troubled relationship with the money guilt and being a socialite.

“I love it,” he gives another easy grin. There’s something about his playful smile that makes her believe what she’s heard about him getting out of trouble easy.
“So you’re a fake bad boy.” She concludes without much evidence. “And presumably the whole player thing is also fake?” The truth would be appreciated.

“So sorry, sweetheart.” According to Ariel, Aladdin has never been in a relationship. He’s a good actor, though. Maybe he got all his awkward out at that dance.

“Well,” Jasmine clears her throat, “I feel the need to inform you that there is no way I’ll have sex with you before marriage. And absolutely no way I’ll fall in love with a player.”

“Game on, Jaz.”

There’s something so infuriating about Ali. The kind of infuriating you undress and make out with. Maybe she really does like this guy. Both these guys. Ali the charming douchebag (forgive me God but we both know he is) and Al, the brooding softie.

“You know what I’m known as here?”

“The hottest girl in school?” He winks. He’s really having fun with his persona.

“No I think that’s between Belle Dumas and Snow White. Maybe Aurora too.” She gets back on track. “No, I’m untouchable.”

He raises an eyebrow.

“I’ve never had a boyfriend because I’m not allowed to date anyone my dad doesn’t approve of. This is almost irrelevant because everyone here is too intimidated by me or too scared of Jafar to ask me out.”

“So I was your first date?”

“Mhm.”
“Aren’t you supposed to have chaperones on your dates as a Muslim? Something about preserving your virtue and avoiding the influence of Satan?”

“I think Genie and the Carpet count.”

“Oh, but do they?” he teases.

“I would never kiss you in front of a blue being who impersonates pop culture entities.”

“So you’ve thought about kissing me?”

“I did not imply that.” He’s so annoying. “Anyway, if Jafar doesn’t accuse you of toying with dark magic, you still have to pass my father’s inspection.”

“C’mon, I’m the son of an oil sheik.” Not.

“And what are your own merits? The last five guys my dad introduced to me had already graduated top of their class from whatever school and were knee deep in internships or starting their own companies.”

“I am a straight O student, thank you very much.” He pauses. “So does that mean you do want to go out with me?”

“Huh?”

“You wouldn’t be bringing all of this up unless you did.”

“How many girls have you actually slept with?”

“None.” She wouldn’t have cared if it were twenty so long as it were the truth. At least he’s not lying about this to seem more impressive.
"Are you a feminist?" It might be silly, but Jasmine promised herself she’d never date someone who doesn't identify as a feminist.

"Totally. Equal pay for equal work and boo Taliban."

"Seriously." She gives him a look. He makes her do that a lot. Even more than Ariel does.

"One hundred percent. I wasn’t lying when I said I agreed with your politics.” A part of her wants to rant about how feminism shouldn’t be a political issue but instead she moves on to the next point on her boyfriend checklist.

"Are you willing to reconsider God?"

"I’d reconsider anything for you."

She tries to suppress a smile. “That’s so cheesy. Like clog your arteries cheesy”

"Seriously, though, I'll be open-minded if you're open-minded to kissing and stuff.” He raises his eyebrows suggestively.

"Maybe not the ‘and stuff.” This is probably a bad idea but this is what she’s wanted for the past month or so, even if the circumstances aren’t ideal. “Fine, yes. Let’s go out.”

What does she have to lose anyway? Besides, it will be interesting to see if he’s going to tell her the truth at any point.

"Ground rules, though!” she says quickly as he puts his arm around her.

"All ears.”

"We cannot be alone together.”
“Lame, but okay.”

“No more of this stupid player stuff because it’s just going to make me want to break up with you.”

He sighs, “Game off, then. It would have been more fun my way, though.”

“And lastly.” She looks into his large brown eyes with her own, and in a low steely voice whispers, “You always tell the truth.”

“Okay, scary lady. No lies here.”

She snuggles into his body. Mostly for warmth, a little bit because it’s comfortable.

“Anything you want to tell me?” Her voice is airy but serious, somehow at the same time.

“I think you’re lovely.”

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

“I think you need to tell me what happened.” Esmeralda says as she adjusts her hair in the restroom. The mirror is older, but it works. She gets all the flyaways to behave again.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Babe, it’s been over a week,” she presses as she reapplyes her signature dark red lipstick. “You’ve had time to grieve, now I need details. At least an explanation.”

“I haven’t talked to him yet.”

“What?”

“I haven’t said anything to him since the dance. I’ve avoided him this whole week,” Pocahontas confesses.
“Why?” Esmeralda’s voice is calm, like the voice of a teacher who knows the answer but is waiting for you to say it yourself.

“I’m not sure who he even is, and I don’t want to know. I don’t want to hear him.” Pocahontas is made of blood and bones - not mushy gushy feelings and tears, but her voice breaks uncharacteristically. In all the years Esme has known her she’s never cried, but it sounds like she’s choking up.

Nakoma is usually the hugger of their group - all sugar, spice, and everything nice, but somehow, in this restroom by the Quidditch pitch, Esmeralda finds herself wrapping her arms around her best friend.

To Polka Dot's credit, she still doesn’t cry. It’s not in her nature. Like it’s not in Esme’s.

“I slept with the enemy. I thought I was in love with him.” It’s also not in her nature to catch feelings like that.

“Hey, it’s okay. You haven’t lived till you’ve had your heart broken.”

“He didn’t break my heart, I did. I let my hormones take over, and I just excused--”

“You didn’t do anything wrong. You had a fling with a guy who doesn’t share your values, so what?”

“It wasn’t a fling though. It wasn’t just a guy I fucked, it was a guy I liked. I thought he was sweet and a good guy… ugh. How could I be so stupid?”

“I’m sorry, Pocahontas.” And she is. Even if she doesn’t understand. Esmeralda is the queen of no attachment flings. She’s been closer to an STD than real lasting feelings. She wears the scarlet letter with pride.

And her solution to icky feelings is always the same, “We need to get you laid.”
“I’m not in the mood.”

“No, it’s perfect. A rebound guy. No attachments sex, you’ll feel better in no time.” She honestly believes it.

“I can’t.”

If she were Nakoma, well, she wouldn’t even be suggesting sex, but anyway she’d totally press the issue further. But she’s not Nakoma. “Fine, then, let’s find me a guy. Maybe one of the players?” She smiles at the prospect of a new conquest.

“If it means you won’t make me find a guy, I’d welcome the distraction.”

“Great!” Esmeralda links arms with her droopy friend and drags her back to the stands.

“You guys missed so much,” Nakoma whisper-shouts. She’s waiting for them from her seat on the other side of Pocahontas, as usual. “Durmstrang pulled ahead with the--”

“Shh!” Esmeralda interrupts, “You can recap later, I wanna see what’s happening now.”

Donald Duck announces that every team has gotten past the troll and no team seems to have an advantage against the wampus cat.

“A wampus cat?!” There’s the outrage they’ve missed. Pocahontas is back! The passionate fury in her voice is endearing. “They imported a wampus cat from America?! How dare they! How dare they remove it from its habitat and subject it to torture for our entertainment! That’s so offensive, I am going to--” She starts to get up from her seat. Everyone around them has already begun to stare.

Esmeralda and Nakoma pull her back like they have for years. She’s right, of course but always a bit much in reaction.

“Why don’t you write a letter?” Nakoma suggests calmly, “You can express all your feelings and present it to the headmaster or to one of the coordinators.”
“A letter?” Pocahontas steams, “Oh no, they are getting a whole speech. I was mad when I saw the thunderbird, but a wampus cat!”

“Mmm,” Esmeralda interrupts, “Hate to interrupt the rant, but who is that hottie subduing it?”

As if in answer the Duck booms, “And Phoebus Carter has managed to put it to sleep! What a feat! Hogwarts wins the round!”

And this Phoebus dude has won a chance with Esmeralda. Well, to be fair, a night. No guy gets a real chance with her.

“You like him?” Quasi taps her on the shoulder.

She turns to her right. “Oh, uhm. I’m intrigued maybe. But you know me, I’ll be sick of him within a couple days.” Sexual attraction is a fickle friend.

He nods and visibly relaxes. Maybe Pocahontas has a point about him having a crush on her. Shite, what is she going to say? How can she let him down easy? Might as well get it over with sooner rather than later.

“Quasi,” she rips off the bandage, “I don’t want you to get the wrong idea about our relationship.” Direct and to the point. “I’m not interested in you romantically. You’re one of my best friends, but I don’t think I’ll ever see you as anything else.”

“What-- I don’t--Wait, are you sure?”

She pats him on the arm, “I’m sorry, love. I’m sure.”

“Is it because of --”

“There is nothing wrong with you,” she assures firmly. “If anything, there’s something wrong with me.”
“You just like to have fun. Nothing wrong with that.” Oh, Quasimodo. She just broke his heart, and he’s still trying to protect her feelings. She loves that about him. He’s such a good person.

“We’ll find you someone else,” Esmeralda nods like it’s a done deal.

He mutters in reply, “No one like you.”

She can’t tell if he means the girl can’t be like her or that there is no one out there like her. Whichever is fine. In fact, both better be right. She doesn’t want him to end up with someone like her - a floozy. He’s just not made for that kind of relationship. He’s like Nakoma and Kocoum (who are almost officially Nakoma and Kocoum) very domestically-oriented and shite.

She squeezes his ginormous hand. The world hasn’t ended with the truth in the air. The sky is still crazy blue - even by the arena where it was storming. The grass is green. The sun shines on. It’ll take him a while to realize it - at least that’s what she’s heard. He will get over it though.

“Let’s go.” She jumps up. “We won the first round, so there’s definitely going to be a killer party.”

“No,” Nakoma protests, dragging her back into her seat. “We have to wait to see who’s getting kicked out.”

Esmeralda rolls her eyes and tries to find Phoebus in the crowd. It’s harder than finding Waldo in one of those picture books, and she nearly gives up when she realizes he was injured. Duh. Medical emergency and stuff. She was a bit caught up in her friendship emergency to process.

Finally the results come out. Rose Lavillant out for Beauxbatons. Fred Skeggsson out for Durmstrang. LeFou Butler out for Hogwarts. Esmeralda Zima out of the fucking stadium at last!

“Not to burst your bubble,” Pocahontas says, bursting Esmeralda's bubble, “but it's like… lunchtime. And every player is either tired as hell or injured. There's no way the party is starting anytime soon.”

“Well then, I can just visit Phoebus in the hospital wing.”
“There’s no way Master Sweet is going to let you anywhere near a Victory Games player,” Unlike Pocahontas, Nakoma enjoys bursting Esmeralda’s bubbles.

“I’ll say I’m his girlfriend and I have to know if he’s okay.” But she’s not quite as good at it.

“I’ll check on Kocoum, then.”

“Ah, because you are his girlfriend.”

Nakoma blushes. For some reason, it makes Esmeralda think of cherry blossoms blooming, all delicate, pretty and intimately alive. Soft and shy, commonplace beauty you don’t take for granted. Nakoma blushes like blooming blossoms and Esmeralda gets glints in her eyes that make them look like emeralds - bright and hard and eccentric, green like American money, spur of the moment grandeur and fun. It’s no wonder they clash really, no wonder at all.

Pocahontas excuses herself, “I need some time alone.”

Nakoma, being her flowery gentle self, tries to insist she can stay behind with her, but Pocahontas shakes her head. Her silky hair sways as she walks away, like a flowing river. She’s the river that shapes the stones and waters the flowers without asking for anything in return. Maybe this metaphor is trying too hard. Ugh, there’s a reason Esme hasn’t tried to do the poetry stuff Pocahontas likes.

They get to the doors of the Hospital Wing when the grandfather clock chimes one, and Quasi says he remembered he has to finish up correcting an essay for Potions.

“Are you just going to let him go like that?” Nakoma sounds angry. Maybe she’s not quite cherry blossoms. Thorny roses instead?

“You know, he’s a really great person. He’s nice and funny and he thinks the world of you and you barely give him the time of day.”

“Fuck off.” Esmeralda glares. “You have no right to say anything to me about my friend. I’ve been his best friend for seven fucking years. I’m the one that stood up to his creepy arsehole foster dad -
who, by the way, tried to make a move on me - and made sure he could attend Hogwarts. You think I’m just a shallow slut? That I don’t want him because he’s ugly? No fucking way, princess. I don’t like him because I don’t like him. Just like Pocahontas didn’t like Kocoum because she just didn’t. You think I don’t realize how awesome he is? I love him so much there’s no way I’d let him end up with someone like me. He deserves better.”

Emerald cuts rose stem.

Nakoma shuts her judgmental face up. The guilt on her face dissipates when she gets to the foot of Kocoum’s bed though. Then she’s back to cherry cheeriness.

Kocoum is basically better. There’s really no reason for him to still be in the hospital wing, in Esmeralda’s opinion, but she’s not the licensed healer. Maybe concussions take forever to recover from for real.

Phoebus isn’t better. He’s also not particularly handsome. His nose is too big and his golden blond hair is kind of awkward with his skintone. His hair is also cut horribly - what kind of guy has bangs? Handsomeness aside, he is hot. Hotness is a different thing altogether. At least for Esmeralda.

From what she can tell other girls tend to have the two concepts intertwined. They also tend to have types. A particular sort of look. For her, a guy is sexy or he isn’t. There’s no method to the madness. Another reason people tend to think she’s a slut. She has no standards.

In Phoebus the sexiness comes from his bone structure and his tall stocky build. Maybe also his long eyelashes and thick lips.

He opens an eye, “Am I dreaming or is the Esmeralda checking me out?”

She smiles, “Not a dream, but your body definitely is, mmm. If Master Sweet asks, the Esmeralda is your beloved girlfriend.”

“To what do I owe the honor of a visit from you?” He opens the other eye too.

“Call me typical, but I find guys fighting big cats and coming out alive a real turn-on.”
“Well, if getting clawed by a cat earned your attention it just might have been worth it.”

“My **attention** is always worth it.” She makes a show of looking him up and down again and down and grins wickedly. “How long are you stuck here?”

“You’re in luck. Sweet said I should be okay to return to dinner. No broken bones. The wampus seemed to only have done surface damage.”

“So you want to spend the night with me, then, as a reward for winning the round,” Esmeralda licks her lips a bit.

“I usually have dinner with a girl before I undress her.”

“Who said you had to undress me?”

“I’m not looking for a one night stand.” He winces as he stands up. “I’ve had a bit of a crush on you for a while.”

“Because I’m beautiful?” She raises an eyebrow. A lot of guys think they like her. And then she screws them, and boom, emotions out of their systems.

“Because you disarmed me in fourth year without even trying when you thought I was going to rat you out for sneaking out.”

“I’ve disarmed a lot of guys,” Esmeralda tries to remember. “But I definitely don’t remember you.”

“I was smaller and chubbier.”

“Me too.”

Esmeralda still has a bit of extra meat on her bones, a touch of a tummy. Not that she cares. She
doesn’t have a wicked fast metabolism like all the other stick figure girls, but she is two cup sizes larger.

“So you have a thing for a dominant woman. I’ll keep that in mind tonight.” She winks shamelessly. She does everything shamelessly.

“I have a thing for outspoken girls that can dance like no one else is watching.”

“Oh, can’t help you there. I dance like everyone can’t keep their eyes off me”

She flirts with him like this for a good ten minutes before Master Sweet interrupts and suggests she grab Phoebus some lunch while he attends to his dressings. Like the dutiful girlfriend she’s pretending to be, she returns with a shitton of sausage and biscuits and mashed potatoes with gravy. He fawns over her like she’s already blown him when he sees the platter.

He eats like a male teenage athlete, which is to say, A LOT. Luckily, Esmeralda predicted this appetite and brought enough for maybe four meals. She gets one. He devours the other three.

In between moaning about how good the food is (sheesh, a guy doesn’t eat for 5 hours and he starts moaning over food) he talks to her about losing weight and working out and why he wants to win the games. No sexy talk at all. It’s weird just listening. She’s so used to being the one listened to in these situations.

Quasi comes around an hour later and she braces herself. Phoebus is attractive, but if he so much as looks at her best friend judgmentally, she’s over him. She underestimated him though: he doesn’t blink twice. Later, Quasimodo will tell her that Phoebus offered to step aside for him - so he could have a shot with her - and her stone cold heart will melt a little bit at the thought.

She leaves him when Sweet recommends he take a nap. It’s about four. Plenty of time to prep for partytime. Pocahontas is eating vegan ice cream and reading Nakoma’s chick lit.

“Oh, I’m so going to feel guilty about going out while you’re having a pity party.”

“Don’t. I mean, I blew off you and Nakoma like fifty million times while I was ‘in love.’” Pocahontas puts air quotes around love like she doesn’t believe in the concept itself, not just like she wasn’t in it.
Esmeralda sits down at the vanity and wipes off her old makeup.

“So you’re sure you don’t want to go? I’m probably going to get Phoebus in bed tonight but I think it might be harder than usual.”

“Hey, wasn’t he the guy you slept with when I slept with John in the Astronomy tower?”

“I was considering him, but some other dude cornered me.”

“Ah, that makes more sense. I couldn’t imagine you screwing the same guy twice in a single month.”

“I know, me neither,” Esmeralda laughs.

“Do you think you might be aromantic or something?” she asks casually.

It’s not the first time Esmeralda’s wondered, to be honest. “I think I’m straight. I mean, I had crushes on guys as a kid and stuff.” She pauses. “What about you, you’re all pro BLT sandwich community, but I’ve only seen you with guys?”

Pocahontas glares at her. That girl cannot take a joke. “If you don’t identify with one of the letters you can’t joke about it.”

Esmeralda groans. “Okay, okay! But it’s not like you can correct me when you don’t identify as anything.”

“I can totally correct you if I know other people find it offensive. But you’re right, I’m straight as an arrow, unfortunately,” Pocahontas sighs, “Why are guys such jerks?”

“I dunno babe, I think maybe this time, you’re being the jerk. I mean, not talking to him for like 9 days after he’s tried so hard to explain?”
“He went out with me on false pretenses.”

“Still. I think you should at least talk.” She slathers on primer. “And you know, when I suggest talking, there’s a problem.”

Pocahontas changes the subject, “So why is Phoebus going to be harder than usual?”

“He wants a relationship.” Now onto foundation.

That sends Polka Dots into a fit of laughter, exactly as intended. Esmeralda laughs along.

“So, are you going to seduce him?” Her best friend manages to ask once she calms down.

“What do you think?” Esme pulls out the outfit she plans on wearing tonight. She’ll finish the makeup after modeling it for Pocahontas.

“Wow, you are cruel.” The dress caresses her body like a desperate lover.

“I just thought it was pretty.” she says, mock-innocently. The dress is pretty the way Marilyn Monroe was “pretty.” A skintight bodycon dress with a zipper that pulls all the way down. Esmeralda pulls the zipper down lower than most would be comfortable, showing off most of her boobs.

“Wow, the player is pulling out all the stops,” Pocahontas says, noticing the fancy black lingerie. Perfect, that means Phoebus will too.

“I play to win.” She sounds obnoxiously overconfident but who cares? It’s true. There’s no way Phoebus is going to be able to resist her looking like this. He’s not going to believe his pretty blue eyes.

Pocahontas can’t believe herself. She had compromised her morals, her integrity for what? A pretty
She takes a swig from a beer bottle. Esmeralda is out with Phoebus, who came by to get her for dinner about three bottles ago. He knows John from the games. He's perfect white teeth. He's handsome and average in the way of looking kind of odd. A somewhat awkward, large nose and a cheesy haircut. Yet, he makes it look attractive merely through how he carries himself.

Hope he's not against everything Esme is for. Maybe he'll turn out to be some religious jerk who makes fun of Quasi. But no, there wasn’t a spark of evil in his eyes. He is genuine in the way a child is, naturally and unknowingly, unfamiliar with the alternative to honesty.

She thought John had been like that.

She takes a huge gulp from the bottle.

Fuck him. Fuck guys. Fuck capitalism and nationalism and greed and idiotic infatuation.

Maybe he had been like that. Memory is a tricky thing. Sure, now, it's easy to see every smile of his as false charming, every word out of his mouth a lie, but surely it wasn't all untruthful. The problem is she doesn't know where the lies begin and the truths end.

Truth: he likes the Kooks. Truth: he plays Quidditch. False: he's into social justice. False: he thinks the Forbidden Forest is fun.

He likes me. He disagrees with his parents. He cares about the environment. He isn't conservative. Where's Veritaserum when you need it?

She knows when she met him, she felt a connection. A sense of real. It was exciting being so different. Tantalizing to feel like what they were doing was wrong. Maybe she didn't like him, just the idea of him. White boy rebellion. Her dad didn't mind the clothing, the music, the concerts, the hippie personality; maybe this was the only way she could rebel. Maybe it was her subconscious solution. Or maybe it was basic, you want what you can't have. You hate the idea of Kocoum, so you fall for his foil.

She closes her eyes and she can see him smiling. She can hear the softness in his voice when he said she was beautiful. She can taste his lips, chocolate pudding after dinner, white wine late at night, minty fresh in the morning. His scent. Fancy rich boy cologne, probably the sort tested on animals.

He hunts for fun. All the Smiths do. He has someone buy him new clothes every week. Wore that suit once, can't wear it again. Who cares if it's another twenty hours of work for children in China?

He has a sister who he loves. He thinks his mother looks as pretty as she did in her wedding portraits, without the Botox. His father is an idea, an enigma, the sort of person you shouldn't form an opinion on because you don't know them well enough to but you do because a couple hunting trips and the occasional smile is enough for a ten year old to idolize.

Pocahontas sighs. She's mad at herself more than him. Mad at her emotions for betraying her.

There's a knock at the door. Nakoma, home from her almost-date with Kocoum so soon?
Then, a male voice comes through the door.

"Hi, I'm Jonathan James Smith the Second. I don't give a shit about politics. I don't understand sexuality well enough to comprehend gender fluidity and demisexuality. I thought we lived in a post racial society. I would never consider going vegan. I love meat. I hunt. I'm Christian. I used to idolize my dad and now I'm just confused."

Oh, god. Pocahontas chugs the rest of her beer. She needs to be buzzed for this.

"I didn't think nature was all that anything till you made me look at it with fresh eyes. I never thought I'd want to break the mold I was born in but you make me reconsider. I love your laugh. I love the way you give me a hard time. I think you're amazing and I'm not in love with you but I think I could be."

Pocahontas opens the door.

Chapter End Notes

THEN WHAT? Well, you'll have to wait to find out. I'm planning on next chapter being Tinkerbell, Ella, and Merida, but I'm aching to get back to Briar/Aurora (I think of her as Briar but I know most people consider her Aurora ¯\_(ツ)_/¯) so she'll probably be added as well. I think I have been gravitating towards adding more points of view in each chapter and making the chapters longer. What do you guys think about this? Who would you like an update on? Who are your favorite characters? Let me know in the comments! I thrive on your support <3
Chapter 13: Hiding Places

Chapter Summary

Tinkerbell talks to Terrence. Phillip worries about Aurora. Ella is brave. Snow makes a friend. Merida gets a makeover. Rapunzel attends a slumber party.

Chapter Notes

Hello, Hello! This chapter will be a bit different from the others in terms of structure. It made more sense to do it this way for me in terms of effective storytelling; I hope you agree. If you pay attention to detail you'll see that we are officially over halfway done (in terms of chapter count) with this fic! I finally took the time to plan a legit outline and I'm fairly sure regardless of changes to that outline I'll keep it at 27, because it is one of my favorite numbers :) I'm going to try to write a few chapters in advance the next few weeks, but I won't be publishing them as soon as they're done as I want to have a few ready in case college is so hectic I don't have time to write (I hope not because I love writing for this fic). Also, I have to credit punziella for inspiring a bit of this chapter with this pic (hope the link works but if not just search her up on tumblr and I'm sure you'll recognize the pic when you get to it): http://punziella.tumblr.com/post/63464417717/if-rapunzel-was-in-a-horror-movie-shed-end-up . Anywho as always, thank you guys so much for your support! I got a notification for 5 guest kudos in one day and I kinda flipped my shit. I adore feedback in any form...kind of like carbs, except you can never have enough feedback ;) (Comment and give kudos, you lovely reader you) (not that I'm desperate) (I swear I'm just trying to be funny here) (edited 5/25/18, lol I thought Grumpy was Angry)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Tinkerbell Zimmerman has never felt so young and so old. Peter Pan looks at her like he does all the lost boys. No, it’s worse. He treats her like she’s his younger sister, always doling out painfully platonic compliments. He makes her feel like a little girl playing dress up when he comments on her pearl earrings or jokes about her looking stuffy with her hair always in a bun.

She wants him to notice her lipgloss because he wants to kiss her, not because she’s stained her teacup with it. She aches for him to look at her differently, her heart yearns for it more than her stomach yearns to finish dinner. That feeling isn’t childish. Children don’t suffer from broken hearts or care about unrequited love.

She’s eleven years old and he makes her feel five and fifteen at once. All she wants is to be thirteen, like her.

He stares at her every day from their table. It’s the only time of day when he really sees any of them now that he’s on good behavior, and he wastes it staring at Wendy Darling. It’s utterly infuriating to watch him moon over her perfect hair and perfect figure and perfect face. Tink wants to strangle that perfect girl in her perfect little dorm room with her own hands. Her face burns like a bug bite. The anger is so intense and raw and new. Grown up anger.

She has to leave dinner early every day to escape it. She sprints up the stairs and climbs up to the roof via a method that can’t be safe with the intent of screaming at the sky for hours. She plans on punching the air with all the might her of her tiny fury.

When she finally gets up there though, all she can do is cry. Every day it’s the same ugly sobs. It’s not all because of Peter. It’s because she’s a Ravenclaw. It’s because she’s clumsy. It’s because none of her inventions are actually working like she designed them. It’s because she keeps missing out on all the inside jokes her Hufflepuff friends have. It’s because it feels like everyone is in perfect pairs, even Clank and Bubble. It’s - it’s - it’s --
“Tinkerbell?”

It’s because she’s herself. 32 kgs and 140 cms of blubbery mess. Her bun is half undone. Her face is red and blotchy from crying. She can feel her eyes getting puffy. She can feel herself falling apart and sinking to the ground.

She puts her head in her hand as she sits down cross legged and tries to breathe, to calm down, to stop sobbing.

“Tinkerbell? Hey?”

It’s not a voice in her head. It’s a boy.

“I don’t know if you know me, uhm, I’m Terrence.”

He waves and gives an awkward smile. His smile would be nice but it’s difficult to smile normally when the recipient of your smile is ugly-crying.

“Oh,” She takes a deep breath, “Hi-” sniffle “- Terrence.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I just had a bad day, I’m actually on my way out.” She fumbles to get up, but he sits down next to her and puts a hand on her shoulder.

“First year is hard,” he says. “I know about this place only because I came up here to cry my fair share of times last year.”

Despite this news, Tinkerbell can’t bear to look at him right in the eyes.

“I was really homesick. See, I have a big family, four sisters - I’m the baby, actually. Felicity
graduated last year.” His voice is calm and steady and she can feel her breathing slow to a normal rate. Her eyes stop spilling streams of salty tears down her cheeks.

“All my sisters live at home or nearby and I’ve always had them around. My parents spoiled me with attention since I was the youngest. It was hard to adjust to only getting a letter or two a day rather than all that constant affirmation. It was worse because they all thought I’d be a Gryffindor. All my sisters were, and my mum, too. My dad’s a Muggle. I think he blames himself for making me soft.”

Tink cannot imagine not wanting to be a Hufflepuff.

He laughs. She must have said the thought outloud.

“Interhouse unity and all has helped, but we’re still considered the sissy house.”

“I’d give anything to be a sissy, then.” Tink sighs. It would fix sooo many of her problems.

“I’m sure most people would do anything for that mind of yours.”

She gives him a quizzical look.

“You’re always inventing things - I’ve heard that the professors think you’re the new Hiro.”

“What is up with that bloke? Why does everyone know about him?” Tink bursts out. Hiro Hamada is a legend, but she’s never heard the legend.

“Oh he’s just amazing. He’s smarter than most seventh years. The Muggles had him tested as a kid and he got into MENSA - basically a club for geniuses. He’s already taken uni classes in engineering and is doing a lot of research and development in magical technology.”

“Oh.” She pauses. “And you think I’m comparable to him?”

“You’re definitely better than me at Charms.” He laughs.
“I’m sure you’re better than me at functioning as a human. I think that’s another nice quirk about being a Ravenclaw. Extra awkwardness.”

“I dunno, the head boy this year is a Ravenclaw - he’s actually Hiro’s older brother - and he’s very suave.”

“I was crying because of Peter Pan,” she blurts out. She doesn’t know why she says it. It just felt like the right time. The right person. “I’ve talked to my friends about it but they don’t get it. He’s in love with Wendy Darling.” She wonders if she’s whining. Iridessa says she has a tendency to whine.

“Isn’t she also in your house?”

“Unfortunately, he doesn’t have a thing for all Ravenclaws, just her.”

“So, what? You’re in love with him?” If she’s not mistaken, he says the l word without even a twinge of mockery.

“That’s the worst part, actually. I’m not. I don’t know if I’m old enough to process romantic love like that. I mean Fawn and Silvermist are definitely in love - maybe he’s just not the right person - but I’ve wanted him to be my boyfriend forever.”

He pats her shoulder. “Guys are jerks.”

She finally looks at him, really looks at him. He’s cute. Blonde hair and warm eyes. He’s tan and a bit on the shorter side for a guy. He smiles like it’s the most natural thing in the world. Something about it makes her smile back.

“I don’t think you’re a jerk.”

“I try. My mother says I’m a true gentleman.” He starts to get up, “Which is why I’m going to escort you back to your room before you miss curfew.”
“It’s pretty here, though.”

It is. It’s not quite dark yet. The sunset from the rooftop is magnificent.

“We’ve got time,” she adds. Her curfew is earlier than his (stupid rules. It’s like they want to brand first years as babies), but they definitely have a decent amount of time till 9.

He sits back down. “Do you want my cloak, at least?”

She feels very eleven. Like they’re recreating a scene from a movie about teenagers but they’re kids. When teenagers do things, it’s so intentional, it seems. Terrence isn’t wrapping her up in his cloak because he expects a kiss for it. He’s just doing what he was raised to do.

She puts her head on his shoulder. “You’re a good bloke. We should be friends.”

“I’d like that.” He squeezes her hand sweetly.

“Have you seen me around up here before?”

“I’ve seen you leave dinner in a huff and head in this general direction so I had a sneaking suspicion, you know?”

“I didn’t think anyone noticed me.”

“I think I was the only one.”

Tinkerbell lean into him. “Tell me about your sisters.”

He does. Felicity - the one that just graduated - is going to France for a year to travel. She might get a job as a translator for the French ministry because she knows oodles of languages. She’s the tallest of all the kids - almost as tall as their dad. Margaret is a year older and lives at home still. She has a Muggle boyfriend and is taking classes at the uni near their house - never was very good at magic, but she’s apparently great at computer science, which is what their dad studies there.
Genevieve is two years older than Marge and is getting married in the spring. She and her fiancé live in the country, but close enough to come home for a family meal once a week. Clara is the oldest, and all the kids think she was meant to be the boy because her full name is Clarence, which rhymes very well with Terrence. She’s twenty four, works for the Prophet, and already has two kids - Maisie and Lacy (they’re twins). Everyone jokes that she inherited the family curse. She’ll have to have five kids of her own if she wants a son.

He loves all his sisters equally and for different reasons. Clara because she’s like a second mum and nearly a living angel. She makes the best pastries and has a knack for listening, just like him, except she’s louder - the kind of person who was practically made to host parties. Gen because she’s quiet like he is and doesn’t mind if he comes over for tea without updating her about anything happening in his life. She has such a gentle nature and has always loved animals; in fact, her house in the country is kind of a small farm. Marge because she’ll show him video games and teach him arithmetic because who knows if he’ll want to work in the magical world. She’s very confident and secure about herself. Plus, she sings almost as well as Clara cooks. Felicity because she’s his opposite in nearly every way and babies him the least. She switches languages when she gets angry and is always getting cool tattoos of her favorite words.

Tinkerbell feels so relaxed.

“You wanna head back in?”

Her yawn was audible. Darn.

“Okay.”

He helps her up and walks her back to Ravenclaw tower.

“You should show me how one of these things works sometime.” He says as he glances around the room. He doesn’t come in, but he doesn’t have to to see her contraptions.

“None of them work properly.” She sighs. Once she started sketching designs, she thought maybe they were right about her being a Ravenclaw. She’s curious and likes making things. But she keeps failing.

“Maybe you should ask for help instead of hiding out all the time. You don’t have to do everything alone.”
Tinkerbell isn’t the sort to ask for help, though. It’s a pride thing. Her mum said she potty trained herself and taught herself how to read using audiobooks because even as a toddler, she didn’t want to depend on anyone.

“Who would I even ask?” She hesitates. The question itself is a bit of a concession, a confession of her defeat. Maybe it’s okay to concede sometimes. She is only eleven…

“Maybe ask Wendy to introduce you to Hiro?”

She scowls. Nope, not conceding to her. Not yet.

“Or not. It was just a thought.”

“Sorry, I don’t really like her.”

He laughs. “I think that’s very clear. Were you the one who tried to charm her hair blue?”

“It didn’t work, so it’s not like I -- whoever did it -- really did anything wrong.”

“Sure, Tink.”

She sticks out her tongue. Then she smiles, because this is really nice. Very very really nice. If she had a camera she’d take a picture. If she had words she’d write a poem. Anything to capture the way the moment warms up the cold stone room.

He smiles back at her, then waves.

“Goodnight.”

The door closes and Tinkerbell changes into her nightgown, brushes her teeth, and blows out the candle. Her face still feels stiff and her eyes burn a bit but everything feels better.
He’s like a candle in the dark. Just bright enough to warm her up and light the way, not so big or loud as to start a fire and burn her down.

Maybe she does have the words. She falls asleep speaking poems she’ll never repeat, imperfect, impermanent poems about candles and butter and hiding places.


7:12 AM - 3 November 2028 - Ella Chapman and Snow White’s Dormitory

Ella wakes up humming. She’s had the song from the dance stuck in her head for over a week, and it doesn’t seem like it’ll ever leave. Not that she wants it to. She wants to hold on to every last memory of the night - at least, every good one. Especially since she doesn’t have any keepsakes. Her mask fell as she dashed out from the ball and it doesn’t seem like anyone has found it.

“ELLA! BRING US BREAKFAST IN BED!”

Why is Anastasia’s room so close to hers? It sucks that she’s in the same house, but come on. Same hall? Really? What’s worse is that these walls are thin.

Ella groans. Sometimes she wonders if it’s worth it to put up with all of them. She could probably manage money without her inheritance.

She turns to apologize to Snow and then remembers. Snow slept at Merida’s last night. She probably slept with Merida too. Wow, what a change. Virginal tease to aromantic friend with benefits.

The willful blonde forces herself to get out of bed and runs down to grab some oatmeal with fresh fruit for herself and some oranges for Anastasia and Drizella. They’re on another diet which means less food to carry and more attitude to deal with.

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“Henry is looking for the girl who dropped the mask!”

“Oh my god, it was totally me, I can finally tell him!”

“Drizella, you said you wanted to kill whoever that girl was--”

“Shut up. I said I’d kill anyone who tried to say it was her instead of me.”

“I think I hear someone coming, shh. We don’t want anyone else getting funny ideas about stealing Henry.”

.o.O.o.

Henry Charming is looking for her.

.o.O.o.

“Here is your breakfast.” She feels like a maid in a hotel. “Need anything else?”

“For you to get your ugly face out of my sister’s room.” Drizella growls.

So original.

.o.O.o.

8:03 - 3 November 2028 - The Hospital Wing

“Good morning, sleepyhead.” Aurora. She’s here! Outside of her room, for once.
Phillip pecks her lips. “Hey, what are you doing up so early?”

“It’s not like I was sleeping, anyway.”

He sighs. No, of course not. It’d be obvious, even if he wasn’t the one waking up multiple times in the night to handle her nightmares.

Phillip can’t help but find her stunning, but she looks like a wilted flower with those bags under her eyes and her skin so pasty.

“He said you’re okay, but I need to hear it from you.” She grasps both his hands tightly. “Tell me you’re okay.”

“I’m fine. I was just being stupid.” He wanted to get back to her so badly he got a burn on the right side of his back.

“It was like a nightmare come true.”

“I heard you didn’t take it well.” She had three panic attacks and nearly tore her own hair out.

“I’m sorry,” she sighs, “I was trying to be better.”

“Hey, no need to be sorry. I’m proud of you for making it out of the room,” he grins. “You think you can make it to class today?”

“I’m actually not feeling well.”

It’s hard to tell if she’s purposefully lying or if it’s true. She barely sleeps or eats anymore and that’s bound to make anyone feel sick, but at the same time she’s vehemently against returning to school work. It’s hard to reconcile his nerdy best friend who loved school more than anything with his girlfriend who can’t stand the idea of even reading.

Master Sweet says she’s anxious about the other students, considering what happened with
Millicent, and probably overwhelmed by the idea of studying again.

Phillip nods.

“What about you? Are you going to go? First class is in half an hour.” Her airy voice lacks the uptight tone he’s accustomed to. Briar’s nagging was the only reason he finished any of his homework and the reason why he managed to pass Transfiguration.

“I’ll be fine. I’ve already missed a whole day.” There weren’t any classes on Wednesday on account of the Games, but he slept through most of Thursday, only waking up long enough to take some potions and get that update on Aurora.

He makes her eat a whole banana in front of him before he makes his way to Potions. It’s horrible and wonderful to be away from her. He loves her so much he can’t bear being without her, but seeing her tortured like this is equally unbearable. Catch 22.

.o.O.o.

8: 50 - 3 November 2028 - History of Magic

From the Parchment of Ella Chapman

Glad you’re well enough to come to class today! Do you think Snow and I can stop by for dinner? <3 Ella

Today seems like a good day, considering Aurora was able to get out of bed. 5 sound good?

Tell Florian he doesn’t have to avoid me now that he’s dating a guy. I don’t think I turned him gay or something stupid like that. - Snow

.o.O.o.

Phillip shakes his head. Their friend group has been a bit split lately. He doesn’t think Florian and Snow have spoken much at all since the ball where he apparently danced with Max Kante. He and
Florian hasn’t talked much about it. Most of his conversations with everyone focus on Briar nowadays.

Florian promises to sit with everyone at breakfast tomorrow, maybe introduce them to Max, who isn’t his boyfriend but will potentially become his boyfriend.

It’s nice that something is sorting itself out in Phillip's mess of a life.

.o.O.o.

12: 03 - 3 November 2028 - The Great Hall

Classes weren’t horrid. Today is just history, potions, Muggle studies, and defense. It was nice to escape from the grim reality of life and just focus on past events and get the components right in that potion and read Muggle literature. Phillip has lunch with the rest of the team members today. Normally, he’s with Aurora and Florian, but Shang insisted on eating together at least once a week for team building. Everyone commends him for bouncing back so fast from the injury. Tadashi inquires about Aurora discreetly.

“She’s getting better.” It’s a half lie. It’s true, technically, she is slowly improving. Eating more, sleeping more, cooperating with the suggestions of health workers more. But “getting better” is too hopeful. It makes it seem better than it is.

He breezes through the defense lesson. DADA has always been the one class he could daydream in without his grades consequently suffering. He’s wondering if any of it is worth it. DADA. The Victory Games. The whole wanting to be an Auror like Dad.

“Hello, love,” he pipes when he returns to the suite he and Aurora now share.

She lights up a bit - like a flickering candle holding the flame for a moment before dying out.

“I’ve missed you.” She hugs him. She gives great hugs - instant happiness kind of hugs.

“I’ve missed you too.”
He sets his books down on the desk. He’s behind on a lot of homework still, and it doesn’t seem likely that he’ll ever manage to catch up.

“Can you hold me for a moment?” Aurora loves displays of affection, less for the romance and more because they make her feel safer.

“Yes, of course.”

She doesn’t say anything but the way she clings onto him says enough.

“You know, I’ve been thinking,” he broaches the topic carefully, “Maybe I should drop out of the Games. I don’t think i really want to compete anymore.”

“If that’s what you want.”

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4:28 - 3 November 2028 - the Hogwarts Kitchen

“Thank you so much, Happy.” Snow smiles brightly, “This looks perfect.”

The house elf blushes. “Happy will do anything for Snow White and her friends.”

“You mean we’ll all do anything for her, you credit stealing ninny,” Grumpy interrupts, “Grumpy hopes you’ll tell Phillip he wasn’t awful.”

Snow smiles, that’s certainly a compliment coming from Grumpy.

“Of course.” She gives them both a quick hug.
Ella grabs the platter the house elves prepared.

“You’re so short, it actually looks like you’re hugging a wizard,” she snickers.

“Oh, come on, I’m at least twenty centimeters taller than them.” Snow holds the door open for her friend with her left hand. Her right holds a jug of milk.

They hurry out the passageway.

“Fine, it looks like you’re hugging a first year.”

“Stop lording your height over me, you giant.” Snow sticks out her tongue.

“Okay, so, don’t be disappointed in me…” Ella starts.

“-- El, there’s no way I’d ever be disappointed in you.”

“I earwigged on some gossip--”

“-- Just kidding. Gossip is the absolute--”

“On Henry! He’s looking for the girl from last night who’s me but he doesn’t know it’s me and what if he finds out it’s me--”

“-- Breathe, Ella.” Snow shakes her head, “If you’re worried about anything, you should be worried about some other girl fitting the mask and him not finding out it was you.”

“Could that happen?” Snow can see the panic in Ella’s eyes.

“No, the mask was literally magicked specially for your face. You have no reason to have your knickers in a twist.”
“How about Drizzy killing me for stealing her crush?”

“Okay, that *might* be a valid concern,” Snow concedes, “But I can just ask Merida to beat her up. You know she’s ripped beneath all those sweatshirts.”

“I do not need to know anything about what goes on beneath her clothes, Snow.”

“Yeah, sorry… You know what we really should be concerned about?” Snow bites her lip.

“Aurora?” Ella asks despite the answer being obvious.

“She hasn’t been to class in weeks! I can’t even believe this is the same person. There must be something we can do.”

“Sweet said we just need to act cheery and all. You know, be our normal selves.”

.o.O.o.

5:00 - 3 November 2028 - Aurora Stefan’s Suite

“Hey, Rosey.” Ella opens the door quietly. “We brought your favourite. Butternut soup!”

She never used to like it before. *Briar* didn’t like it. *Aurora* does. It’s the only meal she can get halfway through.

They brought up a more filling meal for Phillip. Dinner rolls and fried chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy and green beans. Phillip might have bags under his eyes now, but he still appreciates the same kind of food. He looks relieved to see them.

“Hey, love,” he says to Aurora, “Look, it’s Snow and Ella.”
Her purple eyes look a bit glazed and she blinks a few times before turning to see them.

“Oh, hello.” She was always quiet, but now it takes utter silence to hear what she’s saying. “I hear you’re going to be Princess Charming any day now.”

“She likes it when I keep her updates on school happenings,” Phillip explains.

Her voice is far away, “You should stand up to your stepmother. When you died,” she doesn’t freak out at the thought of it, which is good, “You regretted that you never did. You have to live your life, Ella. While you still have it.”

Ella gapes a bit at her frankness. Briar was frank too, but in a different way, in a less mature way. Sometimes Ella wonders if that “year” long dream really aged their friend.

Phillip takes the tray from Snow and places it on Aurora’s lap. She sips a spoonful of soup and smiles. Ella hopes she can eat the whole thing. She’s so thin and frail nowadays, eating shitty soup would be so much better than nothing.

“I hear you like them a bit younger.” Apparently, now it’s Snow’s turn.

“Merida is cool.”

“But you don’t love her?”

“Not romantically.”

Aurora looks at Phillip and grasps his hand. “I cannot imagine that.”

Ella gives Snow a sympathetic look. She knows Aurora didn’t mean to be offensive, but little comments like that can sometimes hurt.

Snow brushes it off and goes to open the curtains in the room. Ella sweeps up a bit, and they all grab chairs near their sick friend. They’ve adjusted to this. Ella remembers Sweet’s plea for
normalcy around Aurora and finds a way to talk about nothing with Snow and Phillip as they eat.

“I’m sorry I worried so much yesterday.” Aurora interrupts randomly.

“You’re fine, darling.” There’s something so heartbreaking about the way he says darling.

“I want you to go to practice tonight.” He hasn’t been to any sort of practice in like a week.

“I can’t leave you.” Her daymares tend to get particularly bad as the night settles. She has this recurring feeling that Millicent is here, watching her and waiting for the right moment to pop out of the shadows. Ella hasn’t seen it a ton since Phillip is the one who lives with her, but what she has been around for is tragic. There’s nothing in the world that’ll be able to erase the sound of Aurora’s silent sobs from Ella’s brain.

“I can come with you. We can all go watch.” Aurora nods to Snow and Ella.

“Oh, yeah,” Snow agrees, “Of course.”

“Uh, well you’re all obviously welcome to come. We start at seven and go till midnight, but you don’t have to be there the whole time.”

Aurora pushes her finished plate aside, “Sounds like a plan, then.”

“Thank you for having a meal with me.” Her head spins back to Ella and Snow, “But Master Sweet is coming with my supplements in a few minutes.”

Snow and Ella take the hint and leave the room at the top of the tower.

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5:45 - 3 November 2028 - Aurora Stefan’s Suite
As soon as they leave, Aurora looks directly into Phillip’s eyes. Her violet eyes look even more intense with the emptiness in the rest of her face.

“I can’t live my life sobbing every time you go. Sweet says I need to start spending time away from you so I don’t become attached long-term -- in an unhealthy way.” Her voice is still airy, but the logic, it sounds so *Briar*.

“I don’t think that’s--”

“Well, I think it is. Besides, all you’ve ever wanted is to win. Your father and mother want to see you at your best. I want to see you try your best - and not get hurt because you’re distracted.” She fingers the scar on his back. “You have to go back to living your life. We can’t go on like this; it’s not healthy.”

“You told me a couple days ago you couldn’t bear to have me leave the room for another minute.”

“I wasn’t thinking then.”

“I’m thinking now, and I know we have to do this. I’ve stayed hidden away in this tower for too long, now. We both need to get out.”

Master Sweet comes in without so much as a knock.

“Getting out *would* do you both some good.” He says as he adds a bag to her IV. “I’ve been waiting for you to suggest it. I think the meds are finally kicking in.”

That’s fairly impossible, considering the fact that she definitely doesn’t swallow any of the pills Phillip makes her take. He saw the stash stuffed in a tissue in the trash.

“I want to watch Phillip practice tonight,” she tells Master Sweet.

“I really do think I’m feeling better. Phillip. I ate all my meals today and I think I want to help you with your homework. Maybe I can go back to class on Monday.”
She smiles brightly. It’s like someone changed the light bulb. She glows with positivity.

Phillip is shocked, but he lets her guide him through an essay for charms after the healer leaves. She hasn’t forgotten how to nitpick grammar or anything academic whatsoever. It’s nice to have her hovering over him again, something he never thought he’d want.

This is probably just a really good day. Phillip doesn’t expect much to amount from it. She’ll wake up tomorrow and change her mind about watching him train and going back to class. But right now, she’s here.

6:02 - 3 November 2028 - Ella Chapman and Snow White’s Dormitory

GET YOUR ASS OVER TO MY ROOM TO SHINE MY SHOES. BRING YOUR LITTLE FRIEND IF YOU NEED COMPANY. - Drizella Tremaine.

Ella sighs and turns to Snow. “You wanna come?”

“I’m not letting you in the dungeon without me.”

6:18 - 3 November 2028 - Drizella Tremaine’s Closet

“I’m sorry I didn’t see this coming.” Ella sits on the carpeted floor of the walk-in closet.

“Don’t apologize to me. It’s their fault.” Snow grits her teeth. “On the bright side, neither of them is smart enough to make Polyjuice Potion.”

Ella whimpers, “He’s probably already been to our room.”

Snow rubs circles in her back. “Hey, I’m sure there’s a way out of here. It’ll be okay.”
But it won’t. Nothing will. She’s not the heroine of any story. She isn’t Merida or any other Gryffindor girl. She learned to be patient, not brave. Methodical, not impulsive.

A mouse scurries under the girl's feet. Instead of panicking, Ella calms. There are a lot of mice and rats in her room at home. Despite all the charms and traps, they've always managed to find a home in the walls. When she first moved into the servants quarters in the estate, they freaked her out. And then she remembered how Sara Crewe was kind to the mice family living in her room and resolved to be so herself.

She felt connected to them. Over the years, Snow, Briar, and Ella had learned to communicate with animals remarkably. It was just another talent to add to the list for Briar, but for Snow and Ella, this was one of the few remarkable things about them, magic-wise.

“Hello,” Ella says. She knows she doesn't have speak to the woodland creatures for them to understand, moreso feel or think, but right now talking seems like a good way to calm down.

According to Briar, there's no fathomable way for them to actually comprehend— because of science and all, but science says *wingardium leviosa* shouldn't work, so Ella doesn't put much stock in it. (Briar used to insist it was more complicated than that. Ella misses her insisting.)

The mouse is one she recognizes, actually. She named him Gus after Augustus, the emperor. His buddy Jaq must be nearby. They’re so closely bonded, Ella sometimes wonders if they’re wizards under a curse, but Snow says they’d tell her immediately if that were the case.

Ella explains their predicament. As she guessed, going over the events that brought them here aloud is cathartic. It also sparks an idea.

“Would you guys mind looking for a key and trying to open the door? We’ve been locked in, and no spell works.”

The mice start scurrying at the word ‘key.’ Ella think-shouts that it’s probably with ‘the mean girl’ or on a desk in the room. She’s impressed by her little friends’ bravery. Drizzy’s cat, Lucifer (who’s literally named after the devil) loves hunting and is definitely in the room somewhere.

“They really love you,” Snow says.
“You know, bravery is born from kindness.”

Florian was brave because Snow was kind. Phillip was brave because Aurora was kind.

“And kindness is a sort of bravery itself.”

In that case, Ella’s had courage her whole life.

Within minutes Jaq and Gus return with a key through a little hole in the wall. Ella isn’t sure if the charm will allow them to leave, even if the key opens the door but it’s worth a shot. She tells them exactly how to open the door. It takes them a few tries and a couple close calls with that damned cat, but finally, it swings open.

It occurs to Ella that Drizzy could have lied about the door being charmed. Or at least misled them on the complexity of the spell. There’s not any time to dwell, though. Ella can hear Henry and her stepsisters in the other room.

He’s there with Duke, his best friend. Ella isn’t sure what his real name is or even if his nickname is his last name or a reference to the relationship between dukes and princes. What she does know is that Duke’s a nice guy with a good heart, even though he has a slight snobbish streak.

He notices her walk in first. Drizella is in the middle of insisting that it fits, despite her face clearly not conforming to the mold of the mask.

“What about her?” Duke asks.

“That’s no one,” Drizzy rushes to assure. “She’s just, uhm, Cinders, our personal maid.”

Sadly, that’s not too far off from the truth.

“Doubtful.” It was a lame lie considering Ella is wearing her school uniform.

“I’m not your maid!” It comes out too late and very flustered, but it feels good to defy Drizella in front of people she cares about.
“You’re Ella, right?” Duke asks. “You have potions with Henry and saved his arse that one year by actually following the instructions.”

Henry laughs at the memory. “I was thirteen, and I still thought potions should be like baking or cooking. You know, ‘instructions are just a guideline’?”

He turns his attention toward Ella, “Do you want to try?”

She blushes.

Shite, Drizella and Anastasia are literally right there. They’ll kill her if it fits.

But she’ll never feel like she’s living if she’s always cowering before her stepfamily in fear.

She nods.

Duke promptly removes the mask from her stepsister’s face and places it on hers.

And it fits. Perfectly. Just like that night.

“IT’s you!” Henry lights up. “I can’t believe it! This is great!”

“I - uh,” She stutters. She still can’t talk to him like a normal person. And it’s hard to say anything with Drizella glaring at her like she’s imagining ripping her throat out.

“I think she means, that night was a mistake. You see, she was grounded, and her stepmum - my mum- would murder her for dating before graduating from Hogwarts. Education is so important to her.”

“Is that why you’re failing History?” Snow pipes.

“Is that why she said the only reason either of you are here is so you can ‘snatch up a good match’?” Ella’s heart beats so loudly she swears everyone can hear it.
Drizella has never looked more ugly. “There is no way Mother will let you get a hand on that inheritance if you betray us like this.”

Anastasia cowers behind her sister.

Duke is baffled. “Your stepmother has been threatening you with your inheritance?”

Ella nods like it’s the most normal thing in the world. Because, it kind of is. It really is.

“That’s illegal in so many ways.” He’s quite angry for someone with little vested interest in Ella. Or maybe he does have vested interest now that she… might end up dating his best friend.

“Is it really?” Ella asks, turning her back on Drizella to face him.

“How old are you?” he asks.

“I’ll be seventeen in a month.”

“So why do you think you have to wait till after Hogwarts for your inheritance?”

“Lady Tremaine said it was in the will and that she’s in charge of enforcing it since she was named the executor.”

“Have you actually ever seen the will?”

“No.” So it could all be one huge fucking lie.

“I doubt there’s any way she has any real control over your inheritance, or that your dad would withhold it from you when you came of age.”
Anastasia steps forward, wringing her hands. “I can’t take it anymore! Duke is right! The will thing is a lie. The whole house is yours, and you were supposed to get like a thousand galleons of your money to spend a year on school stuff and personal items. Mum’s been investing it in petrol and mani pedis. Please please please don’t take away my things!”

Drizella looks ready to murder her sister.

Ella feels ready to hug her.

“Well, that was quite a revelation. Duke, any thoughts on Ella suing them ooor…?” Snow asks.

“She probably could if she wanted to. I’m sure my dad would be willing to help out - he’s a top notch lawyer.” Duke says more to Snow than to Ella, “I’m sure we could get a team together to --”

“I don’t know if I want to bother with that. I’d rather put the past in the past and move on. Maybe just ask your dad to help me get my fair share of the money, if it wouldn’t be too much trouble?”

Henry takes her hand, “No trouble at all. I can arrange it.”

And then everything kind of hits her. The reality of the moment. They escaped from the closet Drizella hid them in. The mask fit Ella perfectly. Anastasia admitted that Ella has rightful access to her father's money and Lady Tremaine has no way of keeping it from her. She can be with Henry.

Her mouth opens in delayed shock.

“A lot to take in?” He asks.

Snow and Duke are going over the details. They’ve put a silencing charm on Drizzy and Anastasia is trying to calm her down. It doesn’t feel like any of them are really there, though.

“Yes.” It’s like everything good happening at once. Now, if only the universe could fix her best friend.
“You’re a good dancer.”

She smiles. “Is that all you have to say to me?”

“Oh yeah, also, I think it’s rude to run out on a date without saying goodbye.”

“Sorry about that.”

“I’m sorry I never noticed you before. I was bloody mad for not realizing it was you right away.”

“That’s not your fault. I’ve barely spoken to you in the last six years because of my crush.”

“Oh, you had a crush on me?”

“Yes, me and every other teenage witch at Hogwarts.”

He grins and shakes his head. “Well, to hell with the rest of them. I only want you.”

Is this a dream?

“Well, if you can feel this, it definitely isn’t.”

She must have asked out loud. And now he’s kissing her. Yep, way too real to be a dream. His lips are warm and soft and so very, very real.

“Get a room,” Snow laughs.

“Oh, I plan too,” Henry says, his voice so low only she can hear it.
Ella smiles stupidly and squeezes his hand.

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8:13 - 3 November 2028 - The Quidditch Pitch

Merida’s hand wanders away from Snow’s waist, closer to her arse. Watching the Hogwarts Team train is riveting and all but she doesn’t exactly want to support the sexist bastards that told her she couldn’t compete.

To Snow White’s credit, her expression doesn’t change one bit.

She speaks in a murmur without moving her eyes away from the field, “I said we could sneak off after an hour.”

“You mean I have to wait sixty minutes before I get to remove your knickers?”

“Yes, we’re here for moral support,” Snow snaps, her eyes wandering to her right, where Aurora is listening to Ella and Henry gush about each other.

“Is she okay now?” Merida whispers. Aurora used to scare her, back when she was Briar. Merida thought she was crazy for taking school so seriously. Now Merida thinks she’s crazy for talking to herself and snapping out of reality.

“I’m holding out hope.”

Aurora laughs lightly at something Ella says.

Snow jumps in, “Ella, you’ve got to give yourself some more credit. You handled Drizella like the bitch she is.”

It’s so fucking weird to hear Snow White cuss. Then again, Merida’s done some unspeakable things to Snow, so a few bad words shouldn’t be disturbing.
“Oh, look! Phillip!” Aurora stands up, “Go Phillip!!”

“She reminds me of Rapunzel,” Merida whispers again to Snow.

“NICE, PHILLY!” Snow cheers, grinning wickedly. Phillip probably doesn’t appreciate the sissy nickname and Snow definitely knows it. He doesn’t seem that bothered though, seeing as he’s just disarmed Shang.

“Who’s Rapunzel?” She asks after turning back to Merida.

“Fourth Year, Ravenclaw, dating Flynn,” Merida begins.

Not ringing any bells.

“She’s got this massively long blonde hair --”

“Oh her!” Everyone knows Punzie even if they don’t know Punzie.

“Are you friends with her?” Snow asks.

“I don’t befriend girls very easily. She’s a little too sunshine for me.”

Snow frowns. “You’re friends with me.”

“Mm, nope,” Merida slips her hand beneath Snow’s long cloak and toys with the lace on her shirt. “I’m friendly with you.”

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Merida is so much more than “friendly” with Snow in the girl’s locker room.

“There are we in here again?” Snow asks between kisses.

“Because I’ve had a lot of fantasies involving this place.”

“Well I guess fantasy is reality now,” Snow pushes Merida against a bench, “though this place is definitely not clean.”

“Dirty is funner,” Merida sticks out her tongue. “Besides, Audrey said she needed a break from us, remember?”

The gryffindor's roommate said she needed at least a day of sleep without noise canceling headphones.

“She’s in the other room, how much could she even hear,” Snow whines as she kisses Merida’s neck.

“Well, not that I’m complaining, but you are loud.”

“Says the screamer.”

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Snow wakes up in her own bed for once. She tumbled back in around two last night and she’s definitely overslept.

“Do you think Henry is going to expect sex from me?”
“What?” Snow moans groggily.

“Well, it seems like everyone our age is having sex and I’m just not sure if I’m ready, but what if he has like… needs?”

“Ella,” Snow yawns out, “I’m sure Henry isn’t going to pressure you into sex. He’s a good boy.”

“Yes, and you were a ‘good girl’. Now, you’re doing the walk of shame back in at two in the morning.”

“You heard that?”

“You’re also still in the same robes from last night.”

“Right,” Snow sits up. “Well I don’t think having a sex life makes me a bad girl.”

“I thought we were going to save ourselves for marriage.”

“Babes,” Snow grabs ahold of Ella’s hands, “I’m probably not ever getting married. There’s nothing for me to save myself for. I’m sure Aurora is still going to wait.”

“You don’t think she’ll go through like, sex therapy?”

“What the fuck,” Snow laughs, “No.”

“Okay, that’s good. Oh by the way, you’re expected for brunch in an hour and a half. We’re all going to Puddifoot’s.”

“Who’s we?”

“Me, Henry, You, Merida, Phillip, Aurora, Florian, and Max.”
“Florian and Max,” Snow nods appraisingly, “Good. I need to meet this kid. Florian shouldn’t be led on by anyone else.”

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11:04 - 4 November 2028 - Merida DunBroch’s Dormitory

“You sure we’re not friends?” Snow asks as she does Merida’s makeup in her room. “Because this is what friends do. They get ready together.”

“Nope.”

Snow sighs and makes conversation about the happenings of her life - the chattery things, not the fact that her fucking stepmother is probably planning another way to kill her.

“I think you’d like Rapunzel,” Merida interrupts at some point. “She’s all sunshiny like you.”

Yep, thinking about your possible murder is very sunshiny.

“Flynn tried to get me to be girly with her and her little friends a while ago. I’m sure Al will want to push it now that he’s dating one of her friends too.”

“Maybe we should have a slumber party or something.”

“Not into the idea of sleeping with you without sleeping with you. Besides, I tried that with Punzie once. Well it was just a sleepover. Mum liked the idea since she’s friends with Lady Corona and I wanted to catch up with Flynn.”

“Mhm?” She’s messing with Merida’s hair now. Heaven forbid she makes it look managed or something.

“Well, I hung out with Flynn all day, and at night, we all watched a horror movie. And, wow .”
“She couldn’t handle the horror?”

“Nope. She sympathized with the murderer.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Apparently, she befriended this gang during her little adventure last year… I don’t know.”

“Sounds pretty badass. Maybe you should give her a second chance?”

“Maybe.”

“Speaking of badass, I’m done. Open your eyes!” Snow squeals.

Merida looks sexy in Snow’s opinion. Smokey eyes and black eyeliner. Contoured cheeks. Cherry lipstick.

“Damn.”

“Now let me dress you up!”

It’s so not fair how much clothes Merida has. She wears the same five plaid shirts, two pairs of ripped jeans, and combat boots on repeat even though her mother has filled her closets with Dolce and Gabbana, Stella McCartney, and Chanel.

Snow pulls out a pair of Doc Martens, a pair of bright blue Armani jeans with chunky suspenders, and a faux leather tank top. Merida changes right in front of her, complaining about the tank top being too tight.

“That top fits perfectly and you know it. Now everyone can see those tats,” Snow grins. Merida has two black birds on her collarbone and somehow, her shirts always cover them.
“Help yourself to anything in the closet, I know you’re itching to try something on.”

Snow has thirty minutes before she’s late, so she grabs the first red dress she sees - an Alexander Wang mini dress that probably costs over a hundred euros - and pairs it with some classic black high heels. Then she grabs a faux leather jacket to complete the look.

“So, is ‘edgy’ the theme here?”

“Yep,” Snow speeds through her own makeup routine, “You like it?”

“Yeah, just maybe tone it down next time, I feel a bit like a model.”

“Most girls would love that feeling, babe.” Snow grins. “And ha- there’s going to be a next time, which means you and I had fun doing an activity together that interested both of us, which means we’re definitely friends.”

“I’m still not painting your nails at some sleepover.” Merida rolls her eyes and adjusts her nose ring.

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9:28 - 10 November 2028 - Jasmine Agrabah and Ariel Triton’s Dormitory

“I can’t believe I’m painting your nails at a sleepover,” Merida groans, “I don’t even know how to do this.”

Snow White laughs, “That’s why we have nail polish remover. I didn’t hear you complaining when I painted your nails black.”

“Oh hey, Punzie,” Merida acknowledges Rapunzel.

Snow turns her head, “Oh, so you’re the famous Rapunzel. I’m a big fan of the hair and the art.”
“Thanks,” Rapunzel loves that, above everything else. the people here think of her as the artist. “Mind if I steal her for a bit? I have a friend I think she’d get along really well with.”

“Go ahead, she could use some more friends and she’s totally killing my left hand.”

Rapunzel laughs. Sure enough Snow White’s fingers look like they’ve endured genocide. The red nail polish is everywhere.

It feels weird to be introducing Merida to someone, especially since they aren’t really friends, but come on, Ariel is a redhead who loves rock music and girls. That’s enough similarities to warrant introduction.

“Dude, I love that band!” Ariel doesn’t wait for an introduction. Rapunzel should have known she wouldn’t.

Rapunzel grins, “I’m just going to go. Have fun.” They aren’t listening, already caught up in a conversation about My Chemical Romance. Flynn has an MCR t-shirt that Rapunzel likes to steal and she’s liked the few songs that she’s heard, but she definitely has nothing to contribute to this conversation.

“Hey!” Rapunzel turns around.

It’s Mulan. “Thanks so much for inviting me to this party, it’s great.”

“You’re welcome! I love your PJs, are they real silk?”

“Yep, the good kind of Made in China.” Mulan laughs. “So are we going to gush about guys and braid each other’s hair because I’m not sure if I could handle yours?” Mulan has a way of making everything she says sound cool and collected. Maybe it’s an introvert thing?

“Don’t worry, I barely can, but I can totally do something with yours. Oh, I’ll grab Jasmine and we can do a circle! She’s had her hands at these long locks before.”
They find Jasmine by the drinks - Snow brought them up from the kitchen. Nothing alcoholic, thank goodness. Flynn said she and her friends actually like drinking quite a lot for good girls.

“Hey Rapunzel. And hi, Pascal!” Jasmine pets the chameleon on Rapunzel’s shoulder. Pascal has always had a soft spot for Jasmine.

“Woah, he was not there a second ago,” Mulan notes. “It’s so cool that you have a chameleon for a pet.”

“You are Mulan right?” And another introduction Rapunzel doesn’t have to make. “You’re in the Disney Society?”

“Oh, yeah, although the last time I went to an event, I kind of made a fool of myself.”

Jasmine winces, “Ah, yes. Tea for Two. I think it might have been better if you’d chosen another venue to call out Gaston. Don’t worry though, everyone’s forgotten about it by now. You were right, anyway. He’s an utter imbecile.”

“What did you do?” Rapunzel asks.

“I kind of blew up at him and spilled tea all over him for his misogyny.”

“I heard he purposefully didn’t allow women on the Hogwarts team,” Jasmine adds.

“Oooh, I’m sure Merida wasn’t happy about that.”

“Well, me and Merida both, then,” Mulan frowns, “It was totally unfair.”

“Well, your cousin is certainly holding up.” Jasmine tactfully changes the subject. Rapunzel asked her about it once, and she said she has learned how recognize which topics will upset a person and how to turn things around.

“Oh yeah, Ping’s doing great, I think.” Mulan brightens and blushes. Aww, family supporting
“Do you think he’s got a shot?”

“I think he fares better than Flynn,” Jasmine answers without directly answering, “Sorry, Rapunzel.”

“Oh, Eugene just wants to prove to my dad he’s ‘worthy of me’ or something.”

“What is it about guys and proving their worth?” Jasmine rolls her eyes. “Oh, you came here for something, yes?”

“Right! Braiding circle, aaaand let’s have some milkshakes, yum!”

Rapunzel makes a caramel and butterscotch one. Jasmine, vanilla with crushed almonds. Mulan nearly opts out of one before Rapunzel says there’re ingredients for dairy free ones if she’s got a lactose problem. She makes a strawberry one. After washing their hands they sit on the floor and start working on each other’s hair.

“Ooh Mulan, I wish my hair was this silky.” Rapunzel sighs.

“Jasmine’s hair is much silkier than mine, I’m sure.”

“Yes, but mine is certainly thicker. So remember how we were talking about guys trying to prove their worth?”

“Yeah?” Rapunzel nods combing through Mulan’s hair some more.

“Wait, you know Aladdin, right?” Jasmine asks Mulan.

“Vaguely,” Mulan answers, “I heard he got expelled?”

“He’s Eugene’s friend,” Rapunzel explains, “He’s definitely being framed for that dark artifact thing.”
“Well anyway, I liked him,” Jasmine continues.

Rapunzel squeals a little.

“But he’s lying to me about who he is now. He’s pretending to be a Beauxbatons student named Ali.”

“Wow, couldn’t kill him to be more creative with the name.” Mulan snorts.

“Yeah, I know, and it’s so obviously him. He’s just pretending to be this guy so he’ll seem more impressive. Ugh, it’s so stupid.”

“And yet you’re still going out with him.” Ariel joins the circle, taking Jasmine’s hair and letting Mulan work on hers.

“I just want to see if he’ll tell me the truth.”

“Do you like him as Ali?” Mulan asks.

“Yeah, he’s arrogant and obnoxiously flirtatious but he’s romantic and funny.”

“But you still don’t know if any of that is even him,” Ariel chimes in.

“I can vouch that he is funny and really smart and nice.” Rapunzel likes talking to him about classes and he’s always been interested in her art.

“Please, Blondie, you’ve vaguely known him for like a year.” Ariel shakes her head.

“Well, he seems nice to me.”
“I just don’t get this obsession with impressing me. What is it with boys, why do they think lying about who they are is the right answer.”

“Well, sometimes you need to lie about who you are. Like Aladdin wouldn’t be allowed on school grounds if he told the truth.” Mulan notes. Go Mulan! On the right team.

“It’s not like I’m going to report him. I’m dating him!”

“So it’s official?” Rapunzel smiles, “That’s so great. You should double date with me and Eugene!”

“Woah woah woah woah woah,” Ariel interrupts, “You’ve agreed to be his girlfriend before even kissing him?”

“Uhh…”

“Oh my god, you sneaky bitch.” Ariel pulls on Jasmine’s hair.

“Ow! Ariel! Language!” Rapunzel smiles; their relationship sometimes seems so mother-daughter-y.

“You didn’t tell me! Spill! How was your first kiss!”

“Well, before I spill, you should know it was only yesterday, so I haven’t kept the information from you for too long.”

“You should have told me immediately.”

“Sorry, then.”

Rapunzel can’t take it, “Well what happened?”

“He was walking me home from a date - we went on another carpet ride - and we got to my door
and he was really sweet, said something about how the stars could never hold a candle to me and just quickly pecked my lips before saying goodnight.”

“Awwww!!” Rapunzel squeals.

Merida sits down next to Jasmine, “So Al finally kissed you?”

And then she realizes, “Oh fuck, I wasn’t supposed to call him that was I?”

Everyone laughs.

“Don’t worry, I knew. And it was totally appropriate timing and an appropriate kiss.”

“Appropriate, please, if it didn’t leave you wanting to rip his shirt off, then it sucked.”

Jasmine doesn’t say anything, which totally means she’s blushing.

“Okay, can we please talk about someone else now? Mulan, who do you like?”

“Okay, this is such an impossible crush, but I’m so so so into Shang.”

Merida nods approvingly. “I’m only into birds, but I can see the appeal.”

Mulan nearly moans, “He’s so fucking gorgeous. Ugh, those abs and that hair !”

The other girls minus Merida, giggle and squeal. They keep going, talking about current crushes and new crushes and favorite athletes and movies and books. Rapunzel loves the energy, how half these people don’t know each other at all, and yet BOOM. Instant bonding. The power of the sleepover.

.o.O.o.
Snow walks over to the window for some fresh air. A gust of November wind hits her in the face. She keeps forgetting that the weather is changing. And then she sees a bird, a raven. It flies right to her open finger. There’s a note on its right foot.

_Hogwarts is a bad hiding place._

Regina La Rue White.

Chapter End Notes

Dun Dun Dun. I'm liking these shocker endings more and more it seems. Thanks for reading :) Let me know what you think :D and I'll hopefully see you all very soon <3
Chapter 14: What Isn't There (Round 2)

Chapter Summary

Aurora can't sleep. The Beast studies (with) Belle. Tiana's got it bad for Naveen. Shang works with Ping in the second round of the Victory Games.

Chapter Notes

Oh my God, I meant to post this like a month ago! I'm so sorry for the long wait guys! This has been ready since early August._. I just got really swamped with getting ready for college and freshman orientation and starting college and homesickness and joining clubs and doing assignments. I think I've Finally adjusted...? Hopefully, I'll get back into writing regularly soon. Till then I have I think at least one other prewritten chapter that I'll post within the next 30 days. ]

As always a million thank yous to Crystal, my beautiful beta, for putting up with me and editing/revising. ALSO THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR BREAKING 100 (103 as of posting this) KUDOS!!! I'm so so grateful for all your support! I love you all so much <3 especially those of you that comment! Agh, comments are so great! Even when they're something small, my heart melts a bit. And when they're long, analytical reviews I just can't. I swear I fangirl over your fangirling XD. Anyway I loved writing this chapter, especially the first pov aaaand I really hope you enjoy!

TW: PTSD symptoms, Homophobia/struggling with sexual identity. (minor edits 5/25/18)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The world was rose-colored for Briar Rose. The world was endless intrigue and infinite possibilities. The world was ultimately kind and hopeful, despite all its faults.

Silly, silly, silly Briar Rose. The world is grey. Sometimes it seems like it’s always been grey and always will be grey. Grey on grey on grey. A muddled puddle of gross goopy grey.

*I’m going crazy. Crazy Crazy Crazy.*

Everyone thinks so. Ella, Snow, Master Sweet.

Phillip. Rose-colored Phillip.

He looks so peaceful when he sleeps. Deep, blissful, uninterrupted sleep.

*“It would be so easy for me to just take him.”*

Millicent. Millicent. Millicent. The haunting voice could belong to no other.

Oh little Rose, I’m going to tie him up and take him away. I’m going to cut him up piece by piece by piece and make you watch.

She isn’t here. She isn’t here.
Aurora turns on the lamp on her bedside table and takes a deep breath. She. Isn’t. Here.

Coffee. She needs coffee.

Briar Rose liked tea. Aurora lives on coffee. No, Briar Rose was alive. Aurora exists. Aurora is awake and alert and attentive because of coffee.


Millicent liked to creep in and creep her out.


It’s three in the morning. A record. Aurora slept for three hours straight.

Millicent says three's a lucky number. Three. Three. Three.

Triple the luck.

Millicent calls herself Maleficent in the dreams. She has horns and green tinted skin. Briar called her Millicent to remember it wasn’t real. It was only a dream. Aurora calls her Millicent because they are one and the same. The girl is the monster, the monster is the girl.

“Aurora, what are you doing up so late?” Flora.

Evidently Aurora isn’t the master of silent steps yet. One day she’ll slither through the halls without anyone sensing.

“Oh, I thought a quick walk might tire me out.” Aurora smiles reassuringly.
“Would you like me to make you some chamomile?” The old witch sees the expression on her non-niece’s face. “Perhaps some warm milk?”

Aurora gives in. She hasn’t spoken to any of her un-Aunts since waking. She hasn’t wanted to. But it’s easier to let things happen than to resist.

**Resistance is futile.**

“Sure.”

Flora’s room drudges up Briar from the depths of Aurora’s soul. This was a safe place.

Millicent says nowhere is safe anymore. She’s stronger than Flora.

No one is stronger than Flora.

**I am stronger than everyone.**

“Aurora? Did you hear me?”

“Oh, sorry, no.”

“Would you like some honey in your milk?”

“Sure.”

Honey is made by bees. Millicent could send bees.

“Can’t you hear them now? The buzzing.”

Aurora can feel the bees. They’re biting her. They’re crawling all over her skin. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

She sips the milk.

“I’m so sorry, my love.”

“I’m not your love.” Briar says, matter of fact. “If you’d loved me, you wouldn’t have sent me away.”

“If she had really loved you, you wouldn’t be broken. Imagine what she’d be like if she was broken, Princess Aurora. Can’t you see her skin cracking? Can’t you see the blood dripping out.”

Drip. Drip. Drip. Aurora sees the blood.

Flora looks like she’s going to die. “I’ve never regretted anything more.” Flora looks like she’s going to cry.

Silly, silly, silly Flora. No one can hear your crying. No one can hear you dying.

Flora was lying. Lying liars let little loves lose life.

“I don’t know if it’s a good idea for me to be here. I have class tomorrow. I should go.” Aurora stands up.

Her voice is soft and deliberate. Almost patronizingly so. “Aurora, I know what you’re going through.”

“You know what I’m going through?” Aurora snaps. “You see the world crumbling before you every second of the day? You hear a psychopath taunting you in your mind? You can’t sleep
because in your dreams, she’s the one with the control? You have to pretend to be okay? No, that’s me. That’s me, me, me because all you could think about was you, you, you.”

She heads for the door, letting the teacup slip out of her fingers. Flora catches it with a spell.

“Your mother wants to see you. Merriweather misses you - and so does Fauna.” Fragile Flora frets.

“I don’t have a mother.”

Mothers protect their children. Leah Stefan let others do the protecting.

.o.O.o.

“Did you sleep okay?”

“Oh, yes.”

“No dreams?”

“No dreams.” Millicent sliced up Flora and filled her with bees. Bloody, bloody, bloody bees. Buzzbuzzbuzz.

“That’s great. That’s really great.” Phillip touches her hair lightly, “Do you think we can go downstairs for breakfast today, love?”

Love. Love. Love.

“Sure, as long as you aren’t late for practice.” Aurora smiles.

Aurora chews and swallows oatmeal with blueberries and a banana. Aurora chugs three cups of coffee.
Phillip eats a bagel with cream cheese and toast with jam. Phillip enjoys orange juice.

“Are you sure you want to have that much caffeine?” He asks with a frown.

Philly’s all grown up. He used to always talk with food in his mouth. Now, he waits till after swallowing.

“Oh, I’ve always had lots of caffeine in my system. All that tea.” Liar. Liar. Liar. Body’s on fire.

Aurora’s all grown up. She used to tell the truth. Now she paints each withering word white before it escapes her mouth.

“Okay, I’m going to go to practice.” He gets up and gives her a hug. For a few seconds she feels whole.

“I will go to the library, I think.” Another once safe space she used to love.

.Belle loves the library. The Beast will never understand why. No, as Belle says, it’s important to qualify what you’re saying: he’ll never fully understand because he’s not a reader. He can see how it could be nice to be around so many books when you have the patience to read them, even though he certainly doesn’t. Belle has a lot of patience.

“Adam.” She calls him Adam now. “Let’s focus, okay?”

The clever Ravenclaw is guiding him through an essay. She decided that it was pointless for him to just sit there and watch her do it. If he was going to be there, then why shouldn’t he try to learn a thing or two? The answer is that learning a thing or two is hard. But there’s no way he’s giving up time with her.

She smells like parchment and vanilla. He could get drunk on that smell alone. High on the
perfume of her body.

She looks like a goddess - Aphrodite, no, Athena. Wisdom before Beauty. He thought she was pretty before, but now he’s certain she’s the most beautiful girl in the whole school - if not in all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Her hair is a beautiful brown - like chocolate and her doe eyes are always full of something - intrigue, anger, laughter.

She sounds amazing. Her voice makes him want to wake up in the mornings. It makes him want to jump up in the air and say it’s a beautiful day, even though it’s been pouring all week -- she doesn’t mind. Belle loves the rain. Belle loves hot chocolate. Belle loves books and kittens and overly large sweaters and candles and Muggle poetry and obscure music from fifty years ago. Belle loves feminism and debates and fighting for what’s right and every colour under the sun.

(Belle doesn’t love the Beast. Or Adam, for that matter.)

The Beast wishes he could describe what she tastes like. Her lips always make him think of peaches, but he knows they wouldn’t taste like that. He yearns to touch her - even just grasp her hand.

He muddles through the essay, which turns out to be the first draft, as it’s more scratch outs than legible words.

Belle has developed a degree of patience for him. She’s nice because she wants to be and not because he has control over her through her father. He doesn’t deserve her niceness. He’s still ransoming Maurice - forcing her to be his friend. He hasn’t changed outside of changing in front of her. Her perception of him has changed. She sees him as broken, hurt, unfairly treated. She can forgive a tortured beast more easily than a man who tortures.

It’s odd. He always thought that if she knew, if anyone knew, they’d exile him, loathe him, want to kill him. He should have known, though. Belle champions outcasts and weirdos; he wouldn’t be an exception to the rule. For Belle, there are no exceptions. Things are either yes or no, good or bad. Period.

“Oh, look, it’s the Beast and his whore.” Gaston, that fucking bastard.

“Ignore them, Adam.” Belle grits her teeth. For Belle, emotions aren’t clothes you buy and change and throw away, they’re skin. She can’t control them whether she wants to or not. Her cheeks flush
The Beast has no control over his emotions either. Or his actions for that matter. Not really. There is not think, just do - badly.

He starts to stand up but Belle pulls on his shirt.

“He won’t stop if he knows it’ll rile you up.”

He sits back down.

“Is spreading your legs included in the tutoring package, or does he pay extra for it? Because I’d like to know your price.” Gaston grins.

The Beast wants to pummel him. How can he talk to Belle like that? How can he talk to women like that? How can he talk to people like that?

“Excuse me.” Elsa Arendelle voices his thoughts. “You have no right to talk to a girl like that. Or anyone, for that matter.” She grabs a pink piece of paper from her hand and writes something on it, “You have an hour-long detention for harassment and I will be escorting you to Professor Kida Thatch’s office to discuss the matter.”

“What?”

Elsa glares pointedly, “Mr. Chasseur, do not make me drag you there myself. I have quite a lot of work to complete, and there is simply no time for dawdling.”

The Beast doesn’t understand why Gaston listens to her, but he does. He follows her out of the library. It’s kind of funny, this big huge guy afraid of a tiny Ravenclaw. In some weird warped way, it’s kind of like the Beast with Belle.

“I always knew I liked her.” Belle smiles.
“It’s nice when the Snow Queen is on your side, isn’t it?” Jack Frost pops up from the table Elsa had left. “Do you guys know why they call her that?”

Belle shakes her head, then amends, “Well, I’ve heard something about her having royal blood and I think people see her as a bit cold, so…”

Frost doesn’t hesitate before asking his follow up question, “And why do they call you the Beast?”

The Beast doesn’t answer. Instead, the stands up, walks right up to the pretty boy and growls over his face. Frost is fairly tall, but the Beast towers over everyone. 206 centimeters of pure scary.

“Oh.” Unfazed, just a bit disappointed, “I was hoping for something more interesting.”

Belle giggles and the Beast can’t help but smile at the sound.

“Well, that’s all I wanted to know. Good luck with the homework.” He waves goodbye and returns to his seat. Weird bloke, that Jack.

“Does the nickname bother you?” Belle asks once he’s left.


“Did you really just get it from being big and scary, or does someone else know?”

“No one else knows. Except Mouse, and that’s only because he’s headmaster. I got the nickname from Quidditch.” After he went into “beast mode,” as they say, and nearly destroyed Jim Hawkins a few years back.

“You haven’t gone to practice, are you still banned?” She could ask questions for hours. In anyone else, this attribute would be annoying. But with Belle, it’s perfect; a surefire way for the conversation to continue.
“Yes,” he lies. The truth is, it’s pointless to play when all the best members are on the Victory Games team and people don’t bother to even watch Quidditch much anymore. Especially pointless since he can’t focus on drills with her always on his mind.

A part of him wants to scream he likes her. (Maybe loves her.) The other, more reasonable part of him knows this would be idiotic. The little peace they have would be ruined. She’d reject him immediately. How could she not? She’s beautiful and good hearted. He’s covered in scary scars and is undeniably mean. She’s smart. He’s dumb. She’s polite. He’s rude.

There’s nothing there that intersects. No middle ground.

“Well, that’s unfortunate,” she says. “Hey, would you mind finishing up somewhere else? I really want to grab a snack before Ancient Runes.”

“Sure.”

He carries her books for her and she leads him along, chattering about a new book she just started and already adores.

This feels like having a girlfriend. Except it’s not. If Belle was his girlfriend… if Belle was his girlfriend, the world would explode. It’d mess up the fucking cosmic balance of the universe. He doesn’t deserve her. He doesn’t deserve the the kissing and hand holding and tender “I love you’s. Hell, he doesn’t even deserve the anxiety of planning dates or the pain of fighting or the privilege of having his heart broken by her.

“Do you like hot chocolate?” She asks when they reach the Great Hall, “I think it tastes wonderful with cinnamon rolls.”

“It’s good. Kind of like churros y chocolate .” He was obsessed with churros as a kid. And chocolate. He was obsessed with every simple pleasure under the sky.

“Is that Spanish?”

“Yeah.”
“Have you ever been to Spain?”

“A few times, when i was younger.” Before he turned into a wolf once a month. When his family was actually a family and not his arsehole father and the maid that pretends she doesn’t think he’s an abomination.

“That’s amazing. Hogwarts is the farthest I’ve been from the disappointment that is my hometown.”

“You should travel sometime. You’d love Madrid and you definitely need to see Paris.” He imagines taking her there, walking in the crowded streets and with a box of macaroons in one hand and her hand in the other.

“My father.” Is sick. Is in debt. Is in trouble. Maybe even half because of the Beast. It must be hard not to have such a lovely person around in your life.

“Right.”

“Besides, I don’t have the money, anyway,” she sighs. “I’d have to work for at least a year before saving up.”

“You never told me what you wanted to work in.” She could be anything.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’m not particularly sure if I want a wizarding job. I’d love to just write and travel. Write about my adventures traveling.” She lets herself enjoy the thought. “But since it’s unlikely I’d make money from that, I’ll probably waitress.”

“What about uni?” The Beast has never considered it, but Belle, she seems the Oxford type.

“Not likely. Oh, look at the time. We better go to class. Well, I mean, I better go.” Her voice is light, but he notes the slight bit of tension. Fuck. He hates that he’s oblivious to money matters.

“No, I’m going too. I’ll walk you to Ancient Runes.”
She smiles at him and his brain goes fuzzy. It’s like he’s sick, the same way he feels before turning but softer and much happier. He’s just so fucking happy around her.

Before she goes into the classroom, she gives his hand a squeeze and whispers *good luck*. He memorizes the feeling of her delicate fingers and closes his eyes.

Belle believes in infinite parallel universes. The Beast can’t fathom that. If there are infinite parallel universes, then there’s one in which he isn’t the Beast, just Adam, a spoiled kid who met the right girl and stopped arsing around with his life. He can’t imagine that, a life unmarred by self inflicted wounds.

\[.o.*o.O.o*.o.\]

Naveen is a self inflicted wound that Tiana has given up on treating. She just lets him fester, a gaping hole in her heart, eating away away at her emotional flesh. It rots with every thought.

*I should have known better.*

*He’s a massive flirt!*

*One dance doesn’t mean anything. Especially not when you’re cursed into frogs.*

Ugh.

It wasn’t that hard to be transformed back into their normal selves. Mama Odie wanted to say some mumbo jumbo about them having to find the answer within themselves and true love’s kiss, but when Professor Thatch walked in with a question for the old Divination teacher, she was able to fix it in a second with just a flick of her wand. Tiana still can’t figure out how. Was it Atlantian magic?

Naveen was so happy to be human again, he nearly jumped for joy. She could tell he was only restraining himself because he wanted to revel in the fact that he no longer felt physically compelled to hop every few minutes.

He relished in his humanity by twirling Tiana around, moving his fingers away from each other, pinching his warm skin, “Oh it’s great to be me again! Wonderfully handsome me!”
She laughed at him but she found herself agreeing. Whatever feelings she’d developed for him when they were frogs seemed to double at the sight of his human form. She let herself admit it. He was undeniably attractive.

And he knew it too. The first thing he did when they left Mama Odie’s hut - the teacher refused to have a normal classroom and instead taught from steaming hut at the edge of the Forest - was rush up to his bedroom to “properly admire himself.” Tiana ventured back into her room herself for a nice hot shower. It felt so good to run her fingers through her black hair. She’d complained about its unruliness hundreds of times but she’d sorely missed it. She’d take her troublesome locks over slimy skin on her head any day.

She entered the Hufflepuff common room fifteen minutes later to a real scene. Naveen exposing his butler as a fraud. Lottie looked like she was going to vomit when she saw that the guy she thought she was in love with was actually a creepy old man. It was just like that time she tried dating online.

Afterwards, he pulled Lottie aside and…

asked her out.

Tiana doesn’t know what she thought he’d do instead. Tell her he wasn’t interested anymore? Ask for advice on how to win Tiana’s heart?

Ridiculous. He was a flirt. He flirted with anyone. She wasn’t special to him in any way, shape, or form.

But he was special to her. Over tutoring sessions and an adventure as amphibians, he’d become special to her.

She’d started to like his easy, cocky smiles. She’d started to find him funny rather than rude. She’d wanted him to kiss her.

She still wanted him to kiss her.

None of it made sense. They always said feelings didn’t make sense, but Tiana always thought she’d find someone who made sense for her. A nice hardworking man with a sense of responsibility to match hers. Instead, her heart somersaults every time she sees him in the hall, holding Lottie’s hand. Instead, she’s weighed down by the guilt of crushing on her best friend’s
“amazing beau.”

The curvy blonde never misses an opportunity to gush about Naveen. He’s just so sweet. He buys her flowers and plays her music on that cute little ukulele. He showers her with affection because “being turned into a frog made him realize what was important.”

Lottie thinks he meant love.

Tiana thinks he means money. What men will do for money is absolutely disgusting.

She confronts him one day during study session, her voice as cold and hard as the late November wind, “I know you’re only dating Lottie because she’s rich, and I’m not even going to bother trying to tell you not to, but if you cheat on my best friend, I swear to God I will kick you where it hurts.” Something about having this crush has made her meaner to him. Or maybe it’s his apparent rejection that has directed the change.

“Relax, Tiana,” he smiles, “I have changed. I am devoted to one woman only. Besides, it’s good if I end up marrying Charlotte. I can pay you back for that kiss, help you purchase your restaurant.”

“I don’t want your sugar mama money.” Is it mean to refer to your best friend as a sugar mama? It must be. She frowns at herself, no use blaming Lottie for something she can’t control. It’s not her fault she’s gorgeous and rich. Tiana loves her because of how sweet she is despite her great fortune.

He falters. “Right, I am sorry.”

She thinks he actually is. Maybe for all of it. For leading her on. For pretending like it never happened. He hasn’t mentioned the dance or any of the spilled secrets from their little adventure.

Sometimes she catches herself wondering if it was just a bizarre dream. It couldn’t have been, though. Professor Thatch calls her Tadpole now in Ancient Runes.

.o.O.o.
“You should wear your hair down more, it looks lovely like this.”

“You look stunning in white.”

“Of course you got an O, you’re the smartest witch in Hogwarts.”

“How was your mother’s birthday? Did she like the necklace you bought her?”

His fingers brush up against her. He plays with her hair when he’s bored. He lingers after tutoring sessions are over. He watches her walk away.

He stares in her eyes when she’s talking, like he really sees her.

This is how he plays the game. This is how he makes her wonder. This is how he drives her crazy.

“Tiana, I didn’t know you had a phone, I want your number.”

.o.O.o.

From Tiana Rose’s iPhone: 12:01AM

Hey Tiana, I know this isn’t school related but I can’t sleeeeeep. And how am I supposed to help you with that?

I noticed you made cookies…

Naveen, I am selling those at the Games.

Okay, I’ll buy a dozen. Right now. Chocolate chip.

Didn’t your parents cut you off?

They felt bad about Lawrence

aaaand thanks to you my grades are up :D :D :D
I can’t believe you’re happy to just be passing.

*Hey got an E on my last exam in Herbology*

Good job. I guess you’re not just a pretty face.

*You think my face is pretty?*

It’ll be 4 galleons and 3 sickles for a dozen cookies.

*Sheesh. No discount for a pretty face?*

*Tiana?*

*I was kidding, I’ll pay full price. Just bring milk too.*

*Like to my room.*

*Tiaaananaa??*

*I’m on my way.*

.o.O.o.

“I’m charging you with delivery costs and extra for making me sneak out,” Tiana says when he opens his door to let her in.

“Oh, come on, isn’t it thrilling to be alone with me in my room so late at night?” He wiggles his eyebrows mock suggestively.

Yes. “I could get in a lot of trouble.”

“That’s part of why it’s so thrilling. The other part is, of course, seeing me shirtless.”

So. Hot. How does someone who doesn’t lift a single finger have abs?
“They’re nice, right? My trainer back home will be so proud.”

“You, uh, work out?” She manages avert her eyes long enough to choke out a response.

“Of course. Don’t you? I can’t imagine you keep such a nice figure otherwise, considering the food you cook.” He thinks her figure is nice. She has such a nice figure. That diction can’t have been on accident. Wording is always purposeful. If anyone knows that it’s Tiana Rose, the meticulous analyzer.

“I don’t have time between work and tutoring and school.”

“Then you’re just blessed with a good metabolism.”

“I don’t eat a dozen cookies a day.” Judgement has become a defense mechanism. Maybe it’s always been a defense mechanism and she just didn’t realize it till now.

“Ah, but you will have one with me? Come on.”

He motions to the left of him on his bed. She can’t believe she’s doing this, but she sits down next to him.

“I like your nightgown.” It was intentional and not intentional. Normally she sleeps in t-shirts, but today, she thought she’d try on this white slip thing.

“Lottie gave it to me.” What is she doing here? She’s on his bed.

“Of course, you’d never buy yourself something nice.”

How is he so calm? She can feel goosebumps sprouting all over her arms. He’s too close. He smells too good.

“Oh, you are cold, come under the covers.” It’d almost be an innocent request if it wasn’t so late, if she hadn’t imagined wrestling under covers with him, if they weren’t so alone.
“I’m fine.” It’s the beginning of December. She’s in the dungeon wearing practically nothing. Alone. With. Naveen.

“Where’s Flynn?” He maybe a Maldonia, but he has a roommate like everyone else. Flynn would want her to leave. As soon as possible so he can sleep enough to perform well tomorrow.

“With Rapunzel.” Damn.

“Wow, this school really sucks at maintaining that no girls in boys room and no boys in girls room rule.” She should bring up strengthening the wards at the next prefect meeting.

“Yes, it does.” He’s moved even closer to her. So close she can hear his breathing.

“Your cookies are simply divine.” He dips a chocolate chip cookie in milk and bites it with his eyes closed. He enjoys it with such enthusiasm that she can feel her cheeks burning. Why does he have to do everything so passionately? Her dirty mind can think of something else his tongue could enjoy fervently.

Then, she remembers Lottie, asleep in their bedroom, oblivious. If Tiana told her about this, she wouldn’t even bat an eye, just compliment her on her “carbolicious” baking. Because Lottie trusts her.

“I should go, it’s late.”

“Oh no, please stay, maybe read from one of my textbooks. You know that always puts me to sleep.”

Right. That’s why she’s here. He can’t sleep. She’s awake because of all the baking. That’s it.

He falls asleep within a few pages, but his arms grab ahold of her legs like they’re a stuffed animal, so she can’t get out. (Not that she really wants to. He’s almost caressing her.)

She stays there for a minute and imagines what it’d be like if he did like her, if he magically broke up with Lottie and she was okay with it all. Tiana wouldn’t care about her duties as a prefect -
she’d sleep here with him every damn night and really appreciate that he sleeps shirtless.

Ugh. She can’t do this. Drooling over him while he’s awake is lame, but drooling over him while he’s asleep is utterly pathetic. Besides, Charlotte. She can’t fantasize over her best friend’s boyfriend.

She wrestles out of his tight grip and hurries out.

It must be wishful thinking but she swears she heard him murmur, “Stay.”

.o.O.o.

Shang knows it’s wishful thinking to expect his father to be in the crowd rooting for him. He knows that there’s no way the General would come all the way down to Hogwarts just to watch his son in one of the preliminary rounds of a competition he’s expected to at least place in. He knows there’s no way the Chinese auror would even be vocally or visibly supportive if he was here. He’d just stare at him with that unnerving expression. His resting “I’m not impressed, I have more important places to be, you can do better” face.

“My dad’s not in the crowd either.” Ping notices Shang searching the crowd for a face he doesn’t even want to find. “My mum either. She hates this sort of stuff. You know, too violent.” He rolls his eyes.

“Mine died when I was seven.” Shang has found that it’s easier to just bring that up as soon as you can.

You can get the:

“Oh, my gosh, I’m so sorry.” Out of the way. Though, usually it’s the girls who say “oh my gosh.” Not the guys. At least not the straight ones…

More evidence to add to the mounting list. Reason #18 Why Fa Ping is Probably Gay: he says “oh my gosh.”
Reason #1 is Shang’s favourite: he stared at my abs while I gave my first speech.

The fourth year still steals glances at Shang’s body when he thinks no one is looking. Definitely a bit gay.

“I’m sure she’s here in spirit.”

Shang nods because he believes it. He has this hair tie with a bit of jade in it that used to be hers and he always feels like she’s watching when he wears it. He doesn’t wear it all the time, she doesn’t need to see everything. But he gets superstitious when it comes to important things. It’s like a good luck charm. *(Reason #34 Why I’m Probably Kind of Gay: I enjoy wearing something that’s definitely girly.)*

“You nervous?” Ping asks.

Shang gives him a look. He hopes it’s not too condescending, just enough to make Ping feel like he was wrong to even wonder that.

Of course, Shang is nervous. It’s the Victory Games. He’s terrified.


Shang hides the beginning of a smile as Ping fumbles with his words.

*Reason #302 Why I’m Probably Kind of Gay: I think Ping is adorable.*

Maybe a bit more than adorable even. He’s cute. Not cute in a, if he were a girl I’d bang her kind of way - which is how Gaston seems to rank male attractiveness. He’s cute in a, sometimes I want to kiss him softly, even though he’s a guy kind of way.

Ugh. Shang is definitely a bit gay.

Objectively, he knows that homophobia is wrong. Objectively, he knows it’s okay to be gay and all
that. Objectively, he knows it’s 2028.

Emotionally, though when he thinks about guys like that - even in an innocent sense, when he wonders about that kind of sex, when even thinks of his long list of reasons, he feels sick.

He knows he’s terrible for thinking this but it’s just how he was raised: homosexuality is unnatural. Homosexuality is a disease. Homosexuality is so shameful that we can’t even talk about it.

We can’t even admit it’s real.

The General is very Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell on this, and many, many other matters. He’s traditional. The Li men didn’t move to London from Beijing till The General was well into his 40s and he still hasn’t adapted to western style thinking. China hasn’t adapted fully yet even with the legalization of gay marriage.

“Calm down, Ping. I don’t think you’re an idiot.” The smile manages to worm its way to his lips.

Ping takes “not an idiot” as a compliment, evidently. He grins so wide, Shang almost makes this instant alone another Reason Why Fa Ping is Probably Gay, but he already has excessive smiling as one, so there isn’t real justification.

Shang knows he should probably say dissexual or something when it comes to these lists. (Bisexual? That sounds more familiar.)

Shang definitely isn’t fully gay. He’s liked girls. He’s attracted to girls. The biggest relief in his life was the first time he was aroused by breasts on the cover of a magazine. He was thirteen. Even if it didn’t mean he didn’t still want to hold his best friend’s hand, it was something to hold on to.

Wanting to kiss Ping makes him a creep, right? It’s not like he wants to do anything more than kiss him and even then it’s half because he wants to find out if the boy’s lips are naturally that pink or if he’s wearing makeup. Nope. Pathetic excuses. It’s clearly creepy. It’s creepy to want to kiss guys in general, but a fourteen year old who’s mostly been annoying? Definitely creepy.

Yet another thing to suppress. Yippie.
Donald Fauntleroy begins announcing the object of this round to the players. A welcome distraction from Shang’s disturbing thoughts.

“You will be hunting Horcruxes, just as Albus Dumbledore, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Harry Potter himself did. Model copies of the horcruxes have been placed throughout the new arena in particular nooks and crannies. When you enter the arena you will see a box immediately in front of you. In the box is a riddle that contains all the clues you need to locate the horcruxes. There are three sets of six of the items. A random item has been chosen to remain singular. Only the team that finds it will be able to claim victory in this round. You have one hour beginning in ten, nine…”

Shang stands up straighter, the adrenaline already making rounds through his veins.

When the announcer shouts “GO!” Shang is, as expected, at the front of the Hogwarts team, leading way to the box.

Immediately, he memorizes the riddle.

The cup is in the wash,

The diadem is hidden in ash,

The locket will be found up high,

The boy who lived is where he died,

The ring is up in the air, but the diary isn’t there,

The snake devours what it can take.

Utter rubbish.

“That makes no sense at all.” Gaston grumbles, and for once Shang agrees with the meathead.
“They couldn’t have bothered with more detail?” Hercules frowns.

“It’s like they stayed up late writing this and just wanted to be done with it. I bet it only makes sense when you know exactly where everything is,” Flynn Rider complains.

“I’ll take up high.” Jim Hawkins volunteers. “Accio Legacy 400.”

“Take someone with you,” Shang orders.

Flynn joins him on the broom in an instant. (Why is it that no one wonders if he’s gay for sharing a broom with a guy?) (Right, he has a girlfriend.) (Maybe Shang should get a girlfriend…)

“I bet they mean some sort of water source for the wash,” Ping notes.

Gaston declares that the strongest swimmers should go. Gaston always finds away to produce the image of a man in control, even when he doesn’t understand going on.

Evidently, splitting up is the obvious course of action. Shang appreciates the efficiency, but a part of him itches to take a minute to really analyze. If he’s being honest, his anxiety demands he take control of the situation. He resists. There’s a fine line between being a leader and unnecessarily dictating. (Cough, Gaston, cough.)

People claim the items they have hunches on, till there’s only Ping and Shang left with the last two. The diary and snake.

Ping stumbles through his thoughts on what they should do. He shouldn't be so nervous. He's smart. Maybe smarter than Shang when it comes to riddles.

Shang interrupts, “I think your first thought was right. We should look for the snake first. Snakes eat spiders right?”

“Yeah, so we ‘follow the spiders?’” Ping suggests.
“Is that a reference to something?” Shang is horrible when it comes to allusions, especially to popular culture. It’s not his fault his father never let him watch television or listen to “foul” western music. Not that this stops people from finding him boring.

“It’s what Hagrid told Harry Potter to do. To find the acromantula. I read about that somewhere.”

Shang nods. “We should walk toward the Forbidden Forest. I have a feeling that’s what they want to see.”

“Right, it’s also less snowy.”

The entire arena is blanketed with snow. Sheets of ice mark another hazard. Shang swears it was autumn only a minute ago. Time moves faster when you’re training. Every day becomes a blur of running and lifting and studying. Shang has devoted an entire semester to this. He has to win.

The arena is larger than it was for the first round. It’s not really an arena at all. They’ve merely blocked off a section of the grounds. Shang and Mulan walk to the right, where the Forbidden Forest begins.

Ping taps his fingers against his side, plays with loose strands of his hair. He must have had coffee this morning. Fa Ping has enough nervous energy without caffeine.

Shang does not fidget or make conversation or acknowledge Ping’s existence in any other way. His eyes stay trained on the ground as he hunts for even the smallest spider.

It takes a good five minutes before Ping breaks the silence with a startling shout, “There!”

He points to a what looks like a black dot, a speck of dirt on white snow. Except this speck has eight legs and is moving right into the Forest.

They’ve been walking along the border this whole time. It seems it’s time to actually go in.
Li Shang is terrified of the Forbidden Forest. He’s scared of a lot of things. When he was eleven, he was mortified by the sorting ceremony. His family didn’t have a history of producing Gryffindors, but the expectation was still there. Shang thought his immediate cowardice and calculated persona would land him in Slytherin, but the old sorting hat said bravery wasn’t not having fear, but persisting despite it.

He always thinks about that moment when he has to do something like this.

He plunges into the forest with a bit of a jog, leaving Ping a few paces behind him.

It’s dark. That’s the first thing he notices about the forest. The trees are so tall they block the feeble rays of the winter sun without much effort.

When he was five, his father threw away his night light. He spent a year seeing monsters in the dark. Now he can move in blackness without so much as a second thought.

But they need light to see the spiders. “Lumos.”

His wand emits a warm glow. There are more spiders now, a whole clutter walking in line down what looks like a small valley.

They follow slowly. The ground feels slippery with the mix of mud and snow. Shang is thankful for their leather boots.

“So that’s where they live,” Ping wavers. At the bottom of the valley is a burrow, teeming with arachnids.

“Come on.” Against better judgement, Shang holds out his hand. He rationalizes that Ping is on a ledge and this will help him catch his footing better. Their hands are gloved anyway. It’s not like they’re going to hold hands for more than a second.

Ping’s hands are dainty. Like a girl’s. He wonders if they’re soft, too. Queer guys tend to be better at moisturizing properly.
He snaps out of the thought when Ping releases his hand. Shang decides to walk closer. With every step, more spiders come to view. He forces himself to stay calm. They won’t bite if he doesn’t bother them.

Guarding the burrow are two tarantulas. Two large venomous spiders. Shang gulps and points his wand inside. There isn’t a snake like he expected, but the diary. A small plastic book. He reaches his hand in and grabs it. Not in the air apparently means in a hole in the ground.

Ping grins. “One down, one more to go.”

Shang shakes his head. “Where would Nagini be?”

“Well, it looks like the spiders are returning from every direction but that one.” Ping points deeper into the forest.

“How long has it been?”

“I’m guessing thirty...maybe forty minutes?”

“Good.”

The trudge through the snow, looking for a sign or a hint. Something.

Ping sees it first.

“Oh, Shang. Don’t look to your left.”

The seventh year deputy captain freezes. “What’s there?”

He can feel it gripping his left leg before Ping even explains. “A very large snake. He looks like he’s going to bite.”
A plastic diary but a live snake. Great.

Shang doesn’t dare move his leg.

“You don’t happen to speak Parseltongue, do you?” The squeezing increases. He can feel the loss of circulation in his legs.

Ping shakes his head. “I have an idea, though,” and shouts, “Piertotum Locomotor!”

There’s no way it can work. Ping is only a fourth year. What could he possibly animate anyway?

And then he feels it. His cloak is tugging him aloft, slowly but surely moving him away.

“Are you okay?” Ping asks.

“I’ll be fine.” The snake does not like being in the air. It coils further up Shang’s leg.

Ping nods and points his wand ahead. Then he begins to sprint.

Shang feels a pang of pride. At the beginning of training Ping couldn’t run half this fast.

Then he feels a sharp pang of pain.

The snake is biting him. He bites his lip to keep from screaming and he can feel blood.

“Just a bit further!” Ping shouts.

They burst into bright sunlight.

Shang can’t keep himself from screeching.
His last thought is that he hopes they’ll let them bring back the two items before rushing him to medical attention. Then the world fades to black

.o.O.o.

He wakes up in the Hospital Wing.

“You could have died.” He makes out the voice of the nurse. Master Sweet. He grumbles about how wrong it is to send teenagers to hunt snakes. “This damn school is dangerous enough without these Games.”

“What happened with the round?” He has to know if it was worth it.

“We won.” Ping answers.

Oh. Good.

“Winning isn’t worth your life,” the large man snaps. “You’re lucky Ping was able to get you to me in time. One more minute and you could have been paralyzed.”

“Shang!”

He’d know that voice anywhere.

“Father?”

“Is he alright? Is my son alright?”

Does snake venom make you hallucinate or is the General really here?
“He’s fine. This young man saved his life.”

“Despite the circumstance, I’m honored to meet you.” Ping’s Mandarin is good, if somewhat accented.

His father nods and thanks him. As if on cue, the doctor and the boy leave.

“You were incredibly brave.” The General paces around Shang’s bed. He stops. “Perhaps too brave.”

“I’m sorry.” He doesn’t even know what for, but he is.

His father raises his hand. “No. You did nothing wrong. You were fully committed. You brought me great honour. I’m proud to call you my son.” He pauses. “But in the future, take care to mind your health. I do not wish to bury a hero.”

Shang conceals his shock. This is the most emotionally open the man has been in years.

The moment passes too soon for his liking.

“I have to return to my assignment. Good luck.”

He turns his back and walks away.

Shang tries not to think of what isn’t there.

“I love you too,” he whispers to no one.

Chapter End Notes

So, what’d you think? Let me know how you're feeling about these characters, who
you're interested to learn more about/revisit, what you think might happen (not that I'll
tell you if you're right). Also, please comment if you want the next chapter posted
sooner or later. Sooner would be within 2 weeks, later would be in 4ish. [Pros to
sooner are that, obviously you'll wait less for the chapter. Con is that could mean
waiting longer for the next one. Pros to later are you'll most likely get a chapter each
month spaced out the same. Con is there's a chance I'll develop a great writing
schedule and have the later chapters ready earlier (lol fat chance, honestly) so the
spacing out ends up being pointless...]

Chapter 15: Before We Break...

Chapter Summary

Ariel gets revenge. John enjoys the present. Naveen has a realization. Meg meets Hercules.

Chapter Notes

Me rambling: So. This is way overdue. Like... it's been done for months. I added a few edits but like...I have no excuse honestly. I guess the idea of posting this made me sad because I didn't have time to work on it? Can't really psychoanalyze past me, but I can say I'm really sorry guys! You're fantastic and you deserve consistent updates. And I deserve to put time towards writing for fun. First semester of college..happened. I'd say college is better than high school probably (not that my grades are). I'm really into debate and I've made friends :)

Okay relevant stuff: This chapter is a bit more shallow imo. I hope you enjoy regardless. Let me know what you think by giving kudos or leaving comments! Thanks so much for your continued support. (Minor edits 5/25/18 - okay fam I'm gonna start writing again)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Ariel Triton collapses on her bed, a wave of red crashing into her worn-out pillow in the dim glow of the late afternoon. She’s tired. She’s always tired. Hoping for some fucking peace, she gives into the fatigue. Instead of the serene dark of sleep, she sees blue. Bright blue nostalgia.

The Aegean. The sea - that once embraced her, filled her with its energy, claimed her as an extension of itself - has imprisoned her. She’s in a cage at the center of Triton’s court, facing trial for witchcraft. She opens her mouth to scream. For what? For a second chance? For mercy? In terror? She doesn’t know because no sound comes out. She strains to breathe. *Why can’t she breathe?* She kicks. *Why is she kicking?* She’s human. No gills. No tail. They don’t have to execute her.

She’s drowning.

Ariel wakes up gasping for air. It’s the same dream she’s had for the last month. Every time she so much as catnaps she’s there. Drowning. Trapped in the place she once called home.

She sits up and forces down a glass of saltwater.

She tries to talk herself up. Ariel Triton isn’t the kind of girl who stays trapped for long. She’s a beast, isn’t she? A dangerous beast, like the ones “heroes” like Flynn face in the games. She reminds herself that she escaped. Escaped from her father’s unreasonable rules. Escaped from a life at court. Escaped from persecution as a witch. There’s nothing they can do to her here.

She can’t help but remember:

The sirens of Greece loathe wizards. Humans with magic are pompous bigots. More dangerous than the beasts they hunt with their magic. Ariel grew up fearing magic. Her mother had died because of a wizard - that’s what they said anyway. No one dared tell the little princess the details. They just filled her mind with warnings. *Stay away from the coast. Don’t talk to humans. Their artifacts could curse you. Don’t venture too far from the castle - the sea witch could get you.*

The sea witch was a legend meant to scare young merchildren into behaving. Supposedly, she had
been the cousin of a princess many ages ago. She was the fastest swimmer in the sea, the best jeweler, the most skilled hippocampus trainer, but she was shunned for lacking the one talent sirens held above all others: music. Her voice was hard and leathery. She couldn’t carry a single tune. Every teacher who tried to coax melodies out of her quit. She couldn’t even properly hum the simplest mermish lullaby.

Despite her horrendous voice, she was adept at compelling. Most sirens were not blessed with the ancient talent and those who were had been forbidden from practicing due to agreements between merpeople and wizards. Their sweet songs were harmless to other merpeople, so they were still free to sing. The Sea Witch was different. She could hypnotize anything without so much opening her mouth. She had all the powers of the sea and more. When she tried to compel the princess to forfeiting her crown, she was banished from the court.

She lived on the outskirts of civilization, plotting revenge. She was the cause of every natural disaster, the reason why merpeople who left the safety of the court were never again found. Supposedly, she could change her face. Supposedly, she could bring light to a room with a single raspy word. Supposedly, she had magic.

The merpeople believed that was what made her so evil. This was why, Ariel’s bouts of power worried them. When she was four, ten sculptures shattered while Ariel had a tantrum. When she was five, after her mother had been found dead, there was an earthquake in the courtyard where Ariel had been playing. When she was eight, her sister lost her voice for a week after teasing Ariel. Ariel heard the servants whispering despite the efforts of her father and eldest sisters. They thought she carried the unholy power of mortal magic. They were afraid of the little mermaid princess that swam so quickly through the halls of the gated castle.

Ariel had loathed the rumors. She suppressed the feelings bubbling under the surface of her skin and scales. She played with her sisters and her pets. She sang sweet and swam swiftly. She imagined a life away from rules and rumors and rigidity. She daydreamed of solid ground. Running through the green earth. Dancing with friends. She hoarded trinkets: gadgets and gizmos aplenty, whoisits and whatsisits galore, and at least twenty thingamabobs. It was fun to organize them, speculate on their purposes, imagine the wondrous lives of the good people that had lost these treasures. In her cave of wonders, she could forget about what the servants believed about her.

When Ariel turned eleven, she found out they were right. She had stormed out of the castle after her father had and had come across a pair of humans, breathing underwater. They introduced themselves as Headmaster Mickey Mouse and Professor Jane Porter. They were wizards. Instead of running in terror as she had been told to if she ever came across a wizard, she had listened to them. They explained that somehow Ariel had wizard powers. Had she known her mother? Yes, her mother was certainly a mermaid - tail and all for sure. Then perhaps her father. They pieced together the real story of the “evil” wizard researcher. He had been her mother’s secret lover. It was the only explanation for Ariel’s powers. She wasn’t a true mermaid or a true siren. A half breed. If anyone were to know of her existence she’d be killed. The court would have her hanged for her mere existence and her father who really wasn’t her father would have condoned it. The
wizarding world would not be much kinder if the news were public. The Headmaster offered eleven year old Ariel protection at Hogwarts. He also offered to help her forget. He could let her return to her life without this knowledge. It would be difficult to mask her powers, but the title of princess would surely keep her protected.

Without hesitation, Ariel had chosen to escape. It wasn’t in her nature to bow to fear and accept blissful ignorance. She’d left everything she knew for the prospect of something different, something better. She’d always yearned to walk on land. and now she knew why. She gave up being the Little Mermaid, stowed the story away into the depths of her subconsciousness.

She’s embraced being the kind of beastly girl that lives in the moment. Immerses herself in what is happening right now. But right now she’s trapped. And the bizarre reality of her past whirrs around in her mind like a hurricane.

But in the eye she remembers. Ariel is the Little Mermaid, the same girl that escaped - that did the brave thing. She’ll be okay.

.o.O.o.

“Hey, aren’t you coming to karaoke night?” Jasmine asks.

It’s been an hour since her nap and she still feels tired. Ariel shakes her head. “My throat feels sore.”

“You might want to check that out with Master Sweet, love. You look a bit peaky. ” Jasmine frowns. “This has been going on for a while, right?”

Ever since Vanessa started stealing Ariel’s voice. She’s been pretty good at hiding it - at least keeping up the pretense that she’s fine. But it’s harder with your roommate/best friend. “Yes.”

“I still think you should come. Maybe Erica will be there.”

Ariel rolls her eyes. “Oh yes, of course, all I want is to see my crush canoodling with her girlfriend for an hour.”
“Oh, right.” Jasmine gives Ariel a hug. “I’m sorry.”

Ariel feels something hard against her chest. A necklace. “New?” She asks Jasmine as she pulls away from the hug, rubbing the imprint on her neck.

“Oh, I forgot I was wearing it.”

Only Jasmine could forget she’s wearing a sapphire pendant. (And Ariel is the princess here?)

“A gift from Ali.”

Ariel shakes her head, “When will he tell you the truth?” And then she remembers, that after so many years of friendship she still hasn’t told Jasmine her own secret. Shit.

“I’m hoping he does before he comes home with me?”

“He’s joining us over the break?”

“Yeah, he wants to meet my dad now that we’re ‘official.’”

“Bold move.” Ariel fixates at her friend’s new piece of jewelry. It reminds her of the necklace Vanessa was wearing at the ball. The necklace she’s always wearing when she’s singing…

“You know what, I think I should go with you guys.”

.o.O.o.

Ariel has done karaoke before. Mermaids - or at least, the sirens of Greece - believe that the voice is sacred. Yes, it’s meant to be shared, just not in such a “maudlin” way. It’s hard, even for attention-seeking Ariel, to abandon the customs so natural to her as keeping your skin bare so the sea can embrace you.
It hurts so fucking much to hear her voice rippling through the speakers of the Gryffindor common room. Her voice - Vanessa’s pretty plump lips - cheesy, poppy Jinx lyrics. It’s hellish.

She’s sitting in the back of the room with Jasmine, Ali, Flynn, and Rapunzel.

“Sorry for crashing your double date.” Ariel sips her soda awkwardly.

“Oh yeah, you’re totally ruining the romantic ambiance of the room.”

Ariel perks up, “Blondie, are you using _sarcasm_?”

She must look really pathetic because Flynn doesn’t even raise an eyebrow at the nickname.

“Proud of me?” Rapunzel grins. She’s adorable.

“Fuck yeah.” Ariel’s glimmer of a smile lasts for two seconds.

And then Vanessa begins a rendition of a Whitney Houston song. Ariel is going to have laryngitis for a month if that bitch keeps going like this.

“She sounds just like you,” Jasmine shudders. “It’s creepy.”

Ariel can’t say anything. Or write anything. Or explain in anyway. When they say unbreakable, they mean unbreakable.

“It’s like she’s taking everything from you. First Erica, now your voice…” Rapunzel frowns empathetically. An idea is forming in Ariel's head.

“Ariel’s voice is much better,” Jasmine says defensively. “You should get up there yourself.”

Ariel shakes her head and points to her throat.
“Oh right, sorry. I forgot you had that sore throat.”

They sit and listen for a few more minutes. Ariel goes over the plan a few times in her head. Then she takes a deep breath.

“I know I’m being petty, but I want to take something from her if you’re down to help.” She vowed not to tell anyone about Ursula’s plan, but there was nothing in the pact to keep her from taking revenge on Vanessa.

.o.O.o.

“Oh my gosh, Vanessaaaaaaaaa.” Ariel knows she and Blondie have had their differences, but she really loves her right now.

Rapunzel’s art of choice may be painting, but she could really have a future in acting if she wanted. Her first role is as a clumsy, bubbly drunk and so far she’s quite convincing.

“I loooooooooooooooove your necklace!! Can I try it on?!?!?”

Flynn comes up behind her, “Sorry, she thought a glass of sherry was butterbeer. You mind just letting her look at your necklace for a just a second?”

The crowd boos. Vanessa is supposed to be starting another song. She clasps the necklace tightly and glares at Rapunzel. “No.”

“But it’s so pretty, I want it!” Rapunzel mimics a bratty child. Damn. She’s enjoying this too much. She grabs the necklace by the shell, pushing Vanessa forward.

“Stop that! You’re going to break it.” Erica cries from the front of the little crowd.

Oh Erica, she better.
“Is it real gold?” Rapunzel squeezes hard, and sure enough the necklace breaks into a hundred tiny pieces.

Relief washes over Ariel.

“YOU BITCH. YOU DRUNK LITTLE BIMBO, GET AWAY FROM ME.”

Flynn grabs Rapunzel and takes far away from the rabid singer.

Not that she’s a singer anymore. Finally.

“Nobody calls my friend a bitch and gets away with it.” Ariel walks up to the makeshift stage and grabs the mic from Vanessa.

She’s done the brave thing so many times she can’t even tell if she’s overcoming fear anymore. She feels a jolt she labels as excitement. She’s all confidence. Beastly bitch armed and fully fucking loaded:

“I challenge you to a sing off. Winner apologizes.”

And now she’s trapped. No one can say no to a sing off, not at karaoke night in front of so many people.

Ever the devoted girlfriend, Erica gives a thumbs up and cheers, “Whoo! You’ve got this, babe!”

(It’s like Ursula has her under some sort of spell. Ariel wouldn’t be surprised if she did.)

Ariel reclaims her voice. It rings loud and clear through the speakers. Her voice, not Vanessa or Ursula’s or anyone else’s. She lets the melody of the lullaby she sang to Erica take her away from the moment. She relishes the feeling of the familiar words in her mouth.

“She stole my voice!” Vanessa shouts angrily.
“YOU MEAN YOU STOLE HERS.” Ariel can hear pure fury from what has to be Jasmine’s voice.

She opens her eyes. Before she can even look for Jaz in the little crowd, she meets Erica’s gaze. Agape, her crush steps forward, shaking her head as if she can’t believe it or, as Punzie would probably prefer, as if Ariel singing has broken that spell and she’s no longer under Ursula’s control.

Ariel nods as she keeps singing.

“Yes. Yes. Yes.” Vanessa claps dryly as Ariel finishes the verse.

The mic stops working.

“She saved your pathetic, pointless life, Erica. Run to your little fish.” Vanessa pulls out her wand and hits Ariel with a spell she’s never heard before.

Ariel feels her legs go numb, they’re tightening.

*How is she doing this? How is this happening? How?*

Within seconds, Ariel is on the ground, her tail fully transformed for the first time in a month.

“That’s how she saved you. She’s a *mermaid.*”

And Ursula Heks is a metamorphmagus. Ariel seems to be the only one more concerned with this bit of information. A metamorphmagus with a talent for persuasion…

--“*Since when are mermaids wizards?*”

--“*How did she hide those?*”

--”*Am I drunk or does that bird have a fucking tail?*”
The voices are deafening.

Ariel feels trapped. It’s like her dream inverted. And instead drowning she’s suffocating. Ariel becomes keenly aware of how hot and dry the room is. Her temple throbs maybe from the yelling, maybe from lack of water.

“Are you okay?” Rapunzel’s voice sounds like it’s a mile away.

No.

.o.O.o.

The Little Mermaid wakes up to cold.

“Ah good. You’re ali--awake. You’re awake.” Sweets glances at his watch. “Now that I know you’re okay, I have to check on another patient. I’ll be back in an hour. In the meantime, your friends have some questions.”

Shite.

“I was going to yell at you.” Jasmine simmers. A scowl contorts her normally serene face into something scary. “But Rapunzel spent the last hour convincing me that you must have a really good explanation for why you didn’t tell me the truth.”

“I do.” Ariel imagined how this conversation would go a hundred times. Never once did she think it would happen like this. The transformation before the story.

“You should sit down.” She’s surprised to see that Erica’s there too and her heart hitches. Well, might as well establish foundation of honesty before getting into a relationship her.

The shaky words stumble out. “I lied about my parents going traveling often, and growing up in a beach town. I was born in the Grecian mermaid court. My mother was the queen and my father…”
my real father was apparently a wizard conducting research on our court…”

“You could have told me.”

“I was going to. -- Okay yeah I’m sorry I should have told you sooner.”

Jasmine glares at her for a solid fifty seconds.

“So this is your period?”

“Yep.”

“You’re so lucky. I can’t believe I prayed for your pain to be eased.”

“The thought totally counted.”

Jasmine pauses, “Are they going to kick you out?”

.o.O.o.

“Enough people believe they were just seeing things.” The headmaster says the next day. It’s the second time Ariel has been in his office in her four years here. Hopefully, it’ll be the last.

“So I can stay?”

“That was never even a question. Of course you will stay. You’re under our protection.”

Ariel relaxes. Then tenses again. “Will I- will I ever transform again?”
She trembles.

“I won’t pretend to fully comprehend Ursula’s magic. I think your theory that she was your ancient Sea Witch has some merits, and if it’s true, then her power is beyond our ability to analyze.”

When Ursula disappeared yesterday, she disappeared for good. Evaporated into thin air like Millicent had.

Ariel puts away her panic. (I’ll never swim like that again. I’ll never be able to go back. I’m broken. I’m only half of what I was.)

“Is something bigger happening? There’ve been a lot of weird things happening.”

The headmaster purses his lips. He looks like he’s aged a couple of years in the last few months. Poor dude. “I have contacted the ministry. We are investigating the peculiar happenings. You have nothing to worry about. We overcame Voldemort - we can overcome anything.”

Ariel chooses to believe him.

“You should focus on taking care of yourself. Study for your examinations. Enjoy your Christmas.”

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

It’s the last night before winter break. John Smith should be packing, arranging his tasteful gifts into the his expensive leather suitcase and organizing the revision he has to finish before January rolls around.

Instead, John is getting drunk in the Gryffindor common room. Why not? It’s the annual Houses Party - the biggest fucking blowout of the year. It’s worth the massive hangover and the panic of packing last minute.

He grabs a full bottle of firewhiskey and finds himself a lonely corner in the lively room. Normally, John would be in the center of a circle, laughing his arse off at some crude joke a mate made.
Normally, the thought of going home wouldn’t fill him with dread.

He takes a swig from the bottle. Going home means Mum making a fuss over him by making the servants fuss over him. It means stuffy dinner parties with black tie dress codes. It means silk shirts and cashmere sweaters. It means having long “talks” about his academic progress and future goals with his father in that massive office. Going home means the annual hunting trip. It means skiing in the Swiss Alps. It means waking up at five in the morning to the sound of Jenny and Martin squealing over all the presents Father Christmas brought. Going home is like returning to a different world. A world where a meal without meat isn’t a meal at all. A world where meals begin and end with saying grace. A world where gold truly is only a letter away from God. A world of careless luxury, conservative politics, and cutthroat capitalism.

His world.

The world he’s always fit right into.

John Smith dreads going back and remembering why he loved it so much. He loved all of it. Feeling important when his father talks to him about a future he doesn’t want. Feeling in sync when everyone holds hands at the table and thanks the Lord for a wonderful meal. Being able to have a piece of bacon without imagining cute little piglets getting slaughtered.

He loves this world too. The world of Muggle rock bands and thrifted t-shirts. The world of undisturbed wilderness- the cry of wolves howling at the blue corn moon, the voices of the mountains, the colors of the wind. The world of activism and political correctness. Pocahontas’s world is beautiful without having to try.

Just like she is herself.

He takes downs the equivalent of three shots. Pocahontas. What would she say if he told her the truth? The whole truth.

As if she read his mind, she appears in front of him. “Woah, what’s up with all the drinking?”

“Thinking about the future.” Not a full lie.

“Mm,” she squeezes his hand. “Yeah that makes me want a shot too.”
She dangles her empty shot glass. He hands over the bottle. She takes the burn of the firewhiskey like a pro, without so much as a grimace. There’s a reason she teases him for preferring wine.

“Okay, a couple more of those and I think I might be able to get through this conversation.”

Every minute they spend together is agonizing. All he wants is kiss her lips, to feel her body beneath him, to whisper sweet nothings in her ear, to tell her he loves her.

He’s not sure if this is true love. True love is meant to last. What he and Pocahontas has is a fire facing a storm, burning bright and colorful before burning out. When it’s all over they’ll be charred sticks, used up coal and kindling. Less of what they once were.

She does something shocking then. She kisses him.

“I’ve wanted to do that for a while.” They’d agreed to be friends after a long discussion weeks ago. Today was when they were meant to revisit the idea of something more.

“Me too.” He wants to stay in this moment a little longer, but time keeps moving.

“I’m up for trying again, if you are.” It’s hard for her in the same way it is for him. He’s different from her in the fundamental sense of being. He believes in different things. He’s just the sort of guy her father would hate.

Why did they have to be cursed with the same sense of humor, the same stubbornness, same reckless bravery? Why does he feel this sort of magnetic attraction towards her? Why are they so right if they’re so wrong for each other?

It’s hard to say no to the present. Going on dates, having sex, waking up to each other.

“I am too, but.” It’s hard to say yes to something amazing you can’t have forever.

He knows she’s expecting him to bring up his family, her family, the three hundred fifty other
reasons why they can’t be together.

Instead, he offers a new one, “I’ve been offered a quidditch contract with the Woollongong Warriors.”

“That’s amazing!” She hugs him.

He notes the precise moment when her expression slumps, when her long eyes widen with realization, when her mouth opens ever so slightly in shock, “You mean in Australia?”

He nods. Australia. A whole other continent. The thought of it tantalizes his adventurous side - how amazing would it be to explore the wild outback, how cool would it be to surf Pacific waves, to see what’s left of the coral reefs.

This is the other reason he dreads going home. It’ll be the last time he’s welcomed back if he takes the job instead of the internship his father has lined up.

“If we’re going to be anything it’s not - it can’t be forever.” A painful realization he came to after trying to find some way, some possibility.

She could follow him to Australia - No. That’s not something she wants. Besides, she has to finish up school and after that - well, there’s no way she’d leave her dad.

He could wait till another team offers him a position - fat chance. John’s not even the best seventh year player, let alone the best player in the school. There’s too much talent. This chance with the Warriors is the best offer he’ll get.

He could just do something else in London. - He could never face his dad or find work in this town after “betraying” him.

“Yeah, I always figured as much.” She laces her hands in his.

“It’s okay.” If she says it enough he might believe it.
She kisses him slowly. “This is enough.”

He lets her lead him to his bedroom. He undresses her slowly, savouring the revelation of each bit of skin. He’s missed this. It’s not the same. It never can be again. The casual carelessness, the luxury of time is gone. Each moment together will be spent trying too hard to make it last, trying to hard to make what they do have enough.

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This will never be enough. No matter how hard he tries, it won’t be enough. The thought hits Naveen like the bludger Flynn charmed to follow him in third year, expected and brutally painful.

He can’t dance with Charlotte while Tiana sits in a corner all alone. He can’t pretend not to notice how gorgeous she looks, even in her usual school uniform and her hair a mess. Pretending like he’s happy will never be enough to make him actually happy.

How easy it is to fall in love with someone who likes you, “warts and all.”

What is he doing? He can’t tell if he’s more mad at himself for ruining his initial plan to get rich easily or for keeping up with that plan despite his feelings for Tiana.

Tiana Morrison Rose. He can’t keep his eyes off her. She looks so sad. Both in the pathetic sense and in the sense of the emotion. It’s his fault. He’s done this to her, hasn’t he? She deserves so much better.

Naveen Maldonia isn’t a good person. He charms the pants off girls, sometimes two at the same time, and leaves them calling the day after, the week after, even the month after. He deletes their messages without so much as a second thought. He doesn’t care much for anyone but himself.

Tiana is the pinnacle of selflessness. All the great parts of Hufflepuff rolled into one sunny person. And she finally likes him. She sees him as someone worth her respect. She laughs at his jokes and blushes when he flirts with her. She’ll even light up with that dazzling smile when he does something right. He’d do anything to make her smile like that…
What is he doing? He loves Tiana. He loves her! He’d do anything for her. She doesn’t want him to go after Charlotte’s money. He doesn’t want to use someone like that. Especially not someone like Lottie. What the fuck is wrong with him?!

“Sugar, you okay?” She giggles. “You look like a thousand light bulbs went off in your mind.”

He considers blurting out the truth right now, but she deserves privacy. And to be sober.

For a Southern girl with a penchant for being able to hold her liquor, she got drunk fast tonight.

“I’m alright, but I think you may have had a bit too much to drink.”

He escorts his blonde friend back to her room before the clock strikes nine. She wobbles in her heels the whole way and continues to flirt with him even as she faded into sleep, offering him a night he won’t forget.

When he exits her room, he’s relieved for a multitude of reasons. She was a handful. He hasn’t slept with her. He can say that he hadn’t really used Lottie. Sure, he planned to marry her - he was romancing her on false pretences - but he hadn’t so much kissed her for more than a minute, let alone undressed her.

Okay, that sounds stupid even in his head. There’s nothing redeeming about what he’s doing, except that he’s going to stop. He’ll tell Lottie the truth tomorrow. He’ll tell Tiana the truth...now.

Naveen scours the room before he finds her. She’s sporting her semi-permanent scowl. He might be imagining it, but it loosens when he sees her.

“Where’s Lottie?” She asks.

“She had a few too many drinks. I took her to bed.”

He winces at the implication. “I mean, I escorted her to her room. She’s surely fast asleep.”
“I’ll make sure to whip her up a hangover cure,” Tiana sighs.

“What about you, you are not going to enjoy a glass?”

She shakes her head, “I’ve seen too many drunkards on my side of town to ever consider it.”

“TELL HER, NAVEEN,” a voice screams inside him. Now’s a good as time as ever.

“Well, fuddy duddy, why don’t you at least have a dance, no?” He grins and offers his hand. He’s a sodding wimp.

She shakes her head with a smile and accepts.

It’s innocent enough, one fast paced dance, but then the music slows. An old lady croons. The DJ, whoever it is, calls out that this is for the lovebirds.

Tiana tries to politely decline, but Naveen stops her.

“Just one dance,” he whispers in her ear. He wants this to last for as long as it can before she’s yelling at him for trying to manipulate her best friend. (Selfish as ever.)

He holds her close and guides her around the room. It’s like that night, but much more graceful since they’re human now.

He restrains from kissing her right there in front of everyone.

He has to tell her the truth first. And Charlotte. He’s cheated on girls before - even with best friends, and it’s never ended pretty. Everyone ends up hurt. He doesn’t want to hurt these girls. He actually cares about them. (Is this how Flynn felt when he met Rapunzel? No wonder the bastard’s gone without sex this long.)

“I think I’m going to go on a walk. It’s hot in here.” Her cheeks are flushed maroon, but he guesses that’s more because of him than it is because of temperature of the room. (He’s going to get used to
that blushing. She’s going to want to sleep with him, right?)

“I’ll accompany you.” (Yeah, there’s no way she can be that much of a prude... ) (Or can she?)

The corridor outside the common room is significantly cooler.

Tiana shivers.

“Would you like my coat?” Maldonias are nothing if not polite.

“No, I’m fine.”

He lets his hands brush up against hers. As they turn the corner he sees a professor headed their way. Fuck. He pulls her into an enclave to avoid getting caught.

“What are you doing?!” She hisses. Her eyes are wide. Her lip quivers.

“No. You’re dating my best friend.”

“Tiana, I wasn’t--” But it’s too late, she’s storming angrily away from him.

Shit.

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Shit. Just because she’s a girl, Hades seems to think she’s the one that should do all the persuading. Bull fucking shit. “Persuade.” Meg is not going to sleep with a guy just so Hades can drudge up support from another demonic arsehole for his doomsday plan.

And yet. There she is. In the lap of rich boy extraordinaire Jafar. She can’t tell if this guy is better or worse than Shadow. Poor bastard’s probably halfway to hell by now if the rumors are true. Better they aren’t. Hades would be pissed as fuck if he missed out on a sixteen year old voodoo master.
Jafar’s eyes linger on her chest and Meg is sure that has nothing to do with the words on her shirt. Gross. Definitely worse. What’s up with these fake religious perverts? First Frodo’s creepy obsession with Esmeralda (don’t ask how Meg knows, it’s her fucking job to steal secrets; of course she knows). And now Jafar is pulling her dangerously close.

“I swear, Jafar. Put me down or I'll…”

“Whoo! I like 'em fiery!” He’s drunk. Come on! The most sober asshole in the whole school gets drunk the one night he needs to be sober. Fuck. Hades is going to kill her.

Not if Jafar doesn’t squeeze her to death first. “You don't know what you're--”


“Step aside.” Jafar says steely. The rage in his expression makes up for the lack of volume in his voice.

“Pardon me, my good, uh, uh, sir. I'll have to ask you to release that young--”

“Step aside, junior.” Meg doesn’t need this now.

“Lady.” Hotshot finishes, looking surprised. “But you... Are-Aren't you a damsel in distress?”

“I'm a damsel. I'm in distress. I can handle this. Have a nice day.”

“Uh... Ma'am, I'm afraid you may be too close to the situation to realize…”

Jafar grabs his wand and hits the Butting-in Butt (He’s gone nice glutes, can’t blame a girl for noticing) with a silent jinx that leaves him slammed against the wall.

“Wand. Right, right. Rule number fifteen: a hero is only as good as his weapon!” He’s got to be drunk too, rambling to himself like this. Note to self: leave parties before midnight. By two, everyone who’s left has had way too much firewhiskey.

Wonderboy drives the message home by headbutting Jafar so hard he flings Meg to the side. She lands in the bowl of spiked punch.

“Oh, gee, miss. I'm, I'm really sorry.”

“Oh.” She raises an eyebrow as tires to clean up herself up. Great, now she smells all fruity. Like a cocktail.
“That was dumb.”

She doesn’t dignify that with a response.

“Are you, uh, all right, Miss, uh…” He calls her “miss.” This means he’s either a lot younger than he looks or nervous as fuck to be talking to a girl.

“Megara. My friends call me Meg. At least they would if I had any friends.”

He’s just staring at her. Definitely doesn’t get out much. “So did they give you a name along with all those rippling pectorals?”

“Uh, uh, uh, I'm, um, uh…”

“Uh, uh... - Are you always this articulate?” she teases.

“Hercules. My... My name is Hercules.”

Oh so he is younger than he looks. He’s the kid who’s bound to win the Victory Games…

“Herc... Huh. I think I prefer Wonderboy.”

“So, uh, uh... How-how-how’d you get mixed up with the, uh…” Can he get a single word out without stuttering? Maybe Meg’s hotter than she thinks she is.

“Pinhead Jafar? Well, you know how men are. They think "No" means "Yes" and "Get lost" means ‘Take me. I'm yours.’

He looks lost. Wow. Fourteen year olds nowadays. “Don't worry. Mummy can explain it to you when you get home tomorrow.”

Meg sighs. “Well, thanks for everything, Herc. It's been a real slice.”

“Wait! Um, can I walk you back to your room?” He’s so hopeful and lovestruck. It’s cute on someone so big and beefy.

“I'll be alright. I'm a big tough girl. I tie my own sandals and everything.” She graces him with a half smile. “Bye-bye, Wonderboy.”

As she walks back to the dungeon to meet Hades for her update, she can’t help but really smile. Sure she’s fucked for not getting Jafar to agree to talk to Hades about his scheme, but it’s not like her “boss” can mess with her while she’s on vacation. And when she gets back…
Well, if Hercules is going to stick around things are going to be interesting, to say the least.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comment what you think/what you want more of. Next chapter is supposed to be Belle, Tiana, Anna and Ariel on holiday break, but knowing me the character focus might change since I haven't looked at this in a while. Lots of love, E. A. Grace <3
Chapter 16: There May be Something There

Chapter Summary

Tiana talks to her mother. Lottie finds out. Anna has Hans come over for dinner with Elsa. Belle and Adam get to know each other. Christmas comes for everyone.

Chapter Notes

I HAVE RETURNED. AT LAST. I was busy...for six months. Sorry, guys. I've been dealing with a lot. I took 17 credits last semester and I'm addressing some mental health issues. Anyway, thank you so much for sticking with this story. I hope you enjoy this chapter. If you do please give kudos/write me a comment. I love the feedback <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There May Be Something There…
“OH! Tia, this is gonna be our best Christmas vacation yet!” Lottie shrieks as they make their way to the Portkey.

“Yes, I know.” Tiana gives her a smile. It’s more worn than usual, a little less real, but hopefully real enough that she won’t notice. Tiana doesn’t know how long she can keep the secret. If Lottie asks, she’ll just tell her. And it’ll break her heart if not their friendship.

Naveen has Lottie’s bags. He’s quiet. He’s been quiet all morning. Good. The less she has to hear from him the better.

She should have just trusted her gut. She knew he was – he was such a – how could have thought otherwise even for a minute – that slimy little.

No, she can’t look angry. She has to control this. She thinks about seeing her mama again.

Mama. She’ll know what to do. She always has. She always will. She’s Mama after all.

Tiana’s mother will always claim that Tia wasn’t the kinda girl that needed a mama. Not in the way other girls did. She had a natural sort of independent discipline. “I can’t take credit for those manners, those were all you. And I can’t take credit for that heart of yours either – that was your father’s.”

But there was something about Tiana that was her mama’s. Her endurance. Her mother put herself back together again when the love of her life died. She handled every curveball life threw at her – even the ones that should have made her strike out.

Tiana knows what Mama would have to say about this: Forget him. Cheaters are worthless. Scum. There’s nothing to sort out here except – except how to tell Lottie.

What a conundrum. She tells Lottie and possibly hurts their friendship over a boy OR she doesn’t tell Lottie and allows her to stay with a fucking CHEATER.

(If she tells Lottie he tried to kiss her does she have to tell her she kind of wanted him to?)
Tiana resolves to have a heart to heart with Lottie as soon as they’re alone together. She deserves to know – everything.

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When they arrive at the La Bouffe Mansion, everyone is there to greet them.

“OH BIG DADDY—“ she refuses to stop calling him that despite modern, err, implications.

“—I’VE MISSED YOU!” Charlotte shrieks.

She nearly strangles him with her hug.

Tiana smiles at her mother who gives the same smile back. What are we going to do with her?

“I’ve missed you,” Tia whispers into her mother’s hair as they embrace.

“Oh, I’ve missed you too.”

Her mother feels… more fragile that she’d like. She seems smaller… not just skinnier but actually… and her hair – has it always been that gray?

“Stop looking at me like I’m old.”

Still quick as a whip though.

“I’m not, Mama,” she smiles sheepishly, “I’m just noticing how pretty your dress is.”
“Why thank you, I made it myself.” Her mother gives her a light laugh. Of course she made it herself, she’s a seamstress.

“You girls come on to the dining room and catch us up on your lives – and this handsome young man.”

“I am Naveen Maldonia. It is a pleasure to meet your acquaintance, Mrs. Rose.” Naveen kisses her hand.

Tiana glares at him.

“You do not have to acquaint yourself with him,” she grumbles under her breath.

Her mother is the only one who seems to have heard. She raises an eyebrow.

Their dinner consists of Lottie prattling about classes and gossip and Naveen, Naveen pretending like he’s not a cheating arsehole, and Tiana gritting her teeth while answering a few questions here and there about her studies.

After dinner, Tiana tries to find a way to be alone with Lottie. She offers to help unpack – of course the maid will do it. She asks if Lottie wants to go on a walk to recuperate from the apparition – ridiculous since Portkeys don’t really take the wind out of you once you’ve done it a few times (besides Naveen offered to join them).

Lottie insists that she is fine. All she wants to do is go out on the town.

Mama suggests that she and Tiana get home before that can happen.

“What is wrong with you?” Eudora asks as soon as she’s in the car.

“It’s a really long story.”

“It’s rush hour – it’ll be a really long drive.”
Tiana sighs and takes it from the top. “You know that aggravating boy that always makes fun of me for being poor and studious…?”

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“Oh baby, I’m sorry.” Eudora says as she parks their car in front of the house. “That must’ve been awful.”

“I’m fine.” Tiana brushes it off. “I’m just worried about Charlotte.”

“Tiana, I am your mother. You can talk to me about these things.”

“OH, I hate him so much, Mama. He drives me absolutely nuts and what I hate most about him is I can’t even completely hate him – a part of me thinks there must be some other explanation. A part of me still wants to like him. It’s disgusting.”

“Well, if this Naveen is as nice as you said he was – maybe there is an explanation?” She unlocks the door. What happened to her mom definitely siding against Naveen?

“He can be nice, but he has a Reputation with women.” Tiana takes off her coat.

“You know you tend to judge things on the spot, right?” Eudora takes off her boots.

Tiana uncoils her scarf. “This is not one of those times, I’m sure of it.”

“And you tend to be so stubborn you can’t possibly see another point of view.” Her mother gives her a pointed look before she walks to the kitchen to make some coffee.

“Mama.” Tiana follows her into the tiny room. Before continuing her thought she takes a few seconds to appreciate this.
She’s home. This is her kitchen. Her father’s kitchen.

She smiles. “I’m really happy to be back.”

“Oh, baby come here,” Her mother wraps her in for a hug, longer than the one they had at Lottie’s. For some reason, this one makes her want to cry.

There’s something special about seeing your mother for the first time in months. Seeing her just when you need her the most makes you well up with love.

Eudora helps Tiana unpack the “old fashioned way.” She always calls it that. As if Muggles just haven’t caught up with the times.

After she’s got her things sorted, they crawl in their well-loved couch in cozy blankets and put on Hidden Figures – Tiana’s favorite childhood movie.

The smell of her mother and the safety of being curled up to her overwhelms the strength of the coffee Tiana drank. She falls asleep peacefully on the couch.

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She wakes up with a crick in her neck. Of course.

Her alarm blares in her bedroom.

If she wanted to work she could probably go to Duke’s. Ugh.


She decides to call Lottie and invite her to breakfast together.
“Why has Tiana gone back to hating you?” Lottie asks Naveen the moment they are alone in the guest bedroom.

“What?” Acting all surprised. He knows exactly what she’s talking about.

“I may be blonde but I ain’t a fool. Out with it.”

“She thinks I tried to kiss her.” WITH MY BEST FRIEND, REALLY NAVEEN? WHAT THE HELL?

“She thinks?” The venom in her voice makes the snake himself flinch. Good.

“We were talking in the corridor outside the hallway and I saw a professor heading toward us so I rushed her into an enclave.”

“So why would she assume you were trying to kiss her.” Her hands are on her hips.

“I had been flirting,” he admits.

“More so than usual?” Lottie raises an eyebrow. Lottie’s flirtatious herself. Heck, Naveen’s flirty nature was one of the things she’d first liked about him. She understands being a flirt. (Though she still gives that french girl the stank eye whenever she sees her in the halls.)

“No, I do not think so.” Of course he doesn’t think so. But it’s not crazy to think he’s wrong.

“The thing is, though, Charlotte...”

He sighs. “You should sit down for this.”

Wordlessly, she moves to sit on the bed.
“I’m a very bad person. I think I always have been. Particularly when it comes to my selfishness.” He swallows. “I’ve never liked you romantically, Charlotte. I wish I did, but well, when we first started dating it was my plan to marry you for all of this.” He gestures to the whole room, one she’d helped renovate.

“For my money?” Her voice is small. Of course. It’s always been about her money. It’ll always be about her money. With everyone but Tia.

He looks her right in the eye. “I’m so sorry, Charlotte. I know there’s nothing I can do to make up for it, but I truly regret it. What I did was reprehensible, revolting really.”

“Stop saying my name.” Tears roll down her face. She storms out to her room. He follows her but she slams the door on his stupid guilty pretty boy face.

She can’t stop sobbing. Now she understands all the country songs. Boys are no good. This is so, so, so much worse than wondering if he liked her or thinking he wouldn’t ask her out after all. Ugh.

It takes two Taylor Swift albums before she’s finally breathing normally again and three songs from her #Feminism playlist before she can face him. She washes off her mascara (she never wears waterproof because come on that stuff isn’t as dark and never comes off), blows her nose, then opens the door.

He’s sitting outside, still waiting.

“Why did you even tell me this now? Why not just keep manipulating me?” She asks softly.

“Being around Tiana has made me a better person, I think.”

She nods. “I thought so. She makes me a better person too, I think.”

She sits down next to him, “You know before you asked me out she tried to get me to say yes to Travis. You know him?”
He shakes his head.

“He’s real sweet. Another ‘puffie. Not exactly a looker but he’d probably do anything for me.”

“You deserve someone who’d do anything for you.”

“I know.” She looks straight ahead. “You’re a real ass.”

“Yeah.”

“Like the absolute worst.”

“I am.”

“I’m really mad at you.”

“You have every right to be, I’m really mad at -”

“No. You don’t talk anymore. I’m talking.”

He shuts his piehole.

“I really shouldn’t forgive you. I shouldn’t even think about forgiving you. But unlike Tia, I
actually believe in the good Lord, who’s birthday we’re gonna celebrate. And he was all about
forgiveness. And I’m honestly impressed you actually owned up to your mistake and waited all
this time for me. And the truth is you didn’t really break my heart. I mean did I doubt myself? Yes.
Am I going to have to work through some trust issues? Yeah. Did I lose a little faith in humanity?
Absolutely.”

She’s losing her train of thought. “I had a point here. Right, You didn’t really break my heart
because I don’t think I ever really gave it to you, you know? I never loved you, I loved the idea of
you. I’m so mad at you for using me, but I think maybe I was using you too.” She sighs.
“What do you mean?”

“I’ve always wanted to be a princess,” Lottie admits. “I wished for it about a million times when I was a kid and when I got to Hogwarts and met you, I thought my wish was coming true.”

“You were only interested in me because of my noble lineage?”

She cringes. “We’re both awful people aren’t we?”

“I am much worse.”

“Oh, agreed. That’s why we need Tiana. You know, when I was listening to my girl Taylor I was thinking about you and her and… I know you said the flirting wasn’t too much, but do you think maybe the feelings were?”

He owes her an explanation.

“You’re right. I like Tiana. I don’t know what it is but I really like her. She’s so infuriating and smart and kind.”

“She’s the best.” She smiles.

“But I’ll never deserve her.”

Lottie looks up at him appraisingly. “You could – I think. If you really tried.”

“Thank you.”

“Friends then?”
“Friends who are going through a real rough patch.” Lottie compromises.

“Fair.”

“Wanna drink?”

She has whiskey hidden in her closet.

“Of course.”

They take a couple shots each.

She lays back on the bed. “Fuck you.”

He lies down next to her. “I’m so sorry.”

She’ll let him apologize a million times if he really wants to be forgiven.

“Just don’t hurt her, okay? The world’s hurt her enough.”

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Lottie arrives at Duke’s with Naveen.

Tiana glowers at him. What is he doing here? Why is she always with him?

Lottie approaches her booth.
“Sit,” she commands Naveen.

Tiana begins to protest, but Lottie cuts her off.


She turns to Tiana, “And you, missy, just listen.”

“I expect this to be civil,” she says before sauntering off to a table on the other side of the café.

What the hell is actually happening right now?

“What did you tell her?” she asks immediately. He’s had to have expected her telling on him. That’s what this is. He’s lied to Lottie and made it seem like Tiana’s done something. The fucking nerve of this –

“I told her the truth.”

Her eyes widen.

“There are a few things you have wrong.”

I doubt it.

“I wasn’t intending to kiss you last night. I saw a professor and I didn’t want us to get in trouble.”

Tiana is skeptical.

“I swear.” He’s a good liar. She wonders how many times those words have gotten him out of trouble. “I wouldn’t do that to Lottie. Or you.”
She raises an eyebrow.

“I know there was a time where I would have without hesitation, but your high and mighty morality has worn off on me. And just the idea of it makes me feel… icky.”

“Icky?”

“I was a very icky person.” He pauses. “Sorry, I’m getting side tracked. The truth is I never liked Lottie, I just wanted her money. I was originally planning on marrying her so I’d be able to enjoy my lavish lifestyle forever. I was going to tell you and tell her and apologize before we left but I just couldn’t get the nerve. I’m a coward.”

“You pig.” Tiana would say a lot worse but she would rather not get kicked out and Lottie said to stay civil. Besides is she really surprised? She knew this about him. That’s why kept telling Lottie she deserved better - Oh Lottie. She fawned over him for like three years. Oh no. Ugh, this fucking tosser hurt the most innocent, earnest girl in the world.

“Yes. I was – am absolutely loathsome. I know that now. I’m so, so sorry. I will do whatever it takes to make it up to you both. I want to be better than I was. Please, please give me a chance to make amends.” His big brown eyes plead and his lip quivers. His hands are clasped like he’s begging. He is begging. Who would have thought after all these years of petty insults Naveen Maldonia would apologize to Tiana Rose?

“And I’m sorry for how I treated you before. God, I was such a wanker. You’re more than a stick-in-the-mud waitress. You’re strong and kind and serious - but in a get-the-job done kind of way, and you never give up. You’re just so persistent and hardworking. You honestly inspire me.” He gives her a shy smile and bites his bottom lip.

Tiana has heard enough.

She calmly walks up to Charlotte. “I heard his spiel, can we go now?”

Lottie looks apologetic. “Yeah, of course.”
“How are you not mad at him?” Tiana says as she takes a big spoonful of ice cream.

They’re on Lottie’s bed sharing a big tub of chocolate chocolate chip.

“Well,” Lottie says. “I am. I don’t know, it’s weird. I’m mad at what Naveen did, but like, I sympathize with the person he’s trying to be.”

“He can’t just do that, you know?”

“No, I don’t know.”

“Say he’s changed. It’s bullshit.”

“Maybe he has.”

“I’m still not convinced he has a heart after what he did to you.”

“Well, I think there’s something there.”

“.o.*o.O.o*.o.

“There’s someone at the door!” Gerda announces as she goes to answer it.

“IT’S HIM! IT’S HANS!! OMG.” Anna rushes to the door. It’s been forever since she’s seen him. A WHOLE WEEK.

BUT NOW HE’S HERE. AHHH. HE’S HERE.

He has a bouquet of flowers in his hand for her.
“Lilies! You remembered they’re my favorite!”

“Of course.” He hands them to her.

“These are gorgeous.” Anna takes a breath, “I’ll get a vase. Please come in. Gerda can take your coat.”

She nearly trips over herself as she rushes to the kitchen.

“Slow down.” Elsa warns her.

“Look at these flowers though, Elsa!”

“They’re lovely.”

“Hans remembered lilies are my favorite.”

“You shouldn’t be shocked by this Anna, this a basic fact about you.”

“I bet you didn’t know what my favorite flower was.”

“You love Jinx ‘unironically.’ Your favorite color is yellow, even though you almost never wear it because you think it looks ‘obnoxious’ on you - which it doesn’t. You like Herbology and History of Magic because ‘history can’t hurt people and neither can plants.’ You still got an outstanding in Defense Against the Dark Arts because it comes naturally for you, like it did for Dad. And your favorite flower is the lily because Mother smelled like lillies.”

Anna quiets. “I actually… I didn’t know why I liked them.”

She inhales deeply. Mum smelled like this? She tries to imagine their mother, but all she can come up with is the portrait hanging in the hall. Her real face is fuzzy in her mind.
“I’m sorry, Elsa.”

“It’s fine, Anna.”

“I just want you to give him a chance!”

Then, she whispers, “I’m totally in love with him!”

“I allowed you to bring him to dinner. This is me giving him a chance.”

“I mean, like, a real one. Like try to get to know him. Pleeease,” Anna pouts, “for meee?”

Her older sister sighs in a noncommittal way, but follows her to the parlor with the wine and a few glasses.

Weird. Elsa hates underage drinking. Like, she doesn’t even let Anna drink champagne at ministry events.

“Would you like a glass?” Elsa asks Hans.

“No, I wouldn’t want to drink around Anna.”

Oh, it was totally a test! Not cool. At least he passed.

Anna curls up next to him on the couch. “See, he’s totally a good influence.”

Hans smiles at her. Anna beams.

Then he turns to Elsa, “I’m not one for games, so let’s cut to the chase. What will it take for you to
trust me?”

Anna is a bit surprised by his frankness.

Elsa is not. Or at least she doesn’t seem to be phased at all. She takes a sip of her wine and says coolly, “Nothing.”

From an objective point of view, Anna can’t help but acknowledge that that was so badass and a total power movie, but like what the heck? Nothing?

“Please, Miss Arendelle.”

“Mister Westergård, you were forthright with me, so I will be the same with you: this is my baby sister. I can’t trust you but I can, for her sake, tolerate you so long as you don’t hurt her.”

Hans nods. “That’s fair.”

He stands up. “Why don’t we have dinner?”

Wow, another power move.

Why did Anna think it was a good idea to bring the two most powerful people in her life to the same place?

Thankfully, the rest of the night goes okay. They both make an effort - for Anna’s sake - and omitting a few more snarky remarks, they’re civil.

After dinner, Anna walks Hans outside.

“Thank you so much for dealing with my sister.”
“Oh it was no trouble at all.” He smiles, “Nothing can stop me when it comes to you.”

“Aww. That’s so sweet!”

“So are, I bet, your lips after all that chocolate.” And he does it!

He kisses her! AGAIN! AAAAAHHHHHHHHH!

And he’s opening his mouth. OMG. French Kissing. AHH! It’s happening! Okay, calm, she’s practiced this.

It’s so, so good. He snogs her thoroughly for a good three minutes (!!!). Then, “Happy Holidays, my love.”

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Dear Diary,

It’s the first time I haven’t gone home for the holidays. My first Christmas without Papa. It should be more horrible than this, I’m sure. It’s not, though. It’s actually more sweet than bitter and it’s not like totally bitter but good because of the bitterness like dark chocolate, it’s more like when there’s so much creamer in coffee it tastes sweet. Unnaturally sweet.

Adam’s home is gorgeous. It’s this huge castle -- not Hogwarts size but close. It’s done in an old French style, according to Cogsworth (I explained the whole talking clock thing right? Last entry along with the werewolf stuff?? If not: Cogsworth is a clock, Lumiere is a candelabra, Adam is a werewolf.)

My room is lovely. Cogsworth says it has the most natural light of all the guest bedrooms. Lumiere says Adam had it redesigned for me. I’ve scraped off a bit of the wallpaper and stuck it to this page. Honestly I feel a bit bad because it’s so pretty, but it’s just a small bit from behind the wardrobe (sidenote: she talks too. Often without stopping to breathe. Though, I guess she probably doesn’t have to breathe?). Oh, the wardrobe has so many beautiful dresses. Adam bought me couture(?!). My favorite is this off-the-shoulder yellow gown.
But there’s more than just the superficial things. Adam isn’t a jerk anymore. It’s odd when I remember how he used to act because he’s so different now. He hangs on my every word and he bites his tongue (probably literally) and clenches his fists instead of fighting people like that bastard, Gaston. And he talks to me like… like he cares about what I have to say. He carries my stuff and talks about university like it’s someplace I should be.

It’s so. I just. But he. He has Papa under a contract. I have to be here. This is supposed to be awful and he’s supposed to be terrible. It’s so messy like this. I don’t know.

Speaking of him. He’s calling. I have to go.

I’ll write soon,

Belle Dumas

He’s outside her room waiting. She lets her frustration evaporate.

“Hello.” She smiles. “How are you?”

He beams, “I’m doing well. I’d like to show you something before lunch - if you don’t mind!”

He sounds so excited that even if she did mind, she’s sure she’d go along with it. “Of course!”

He offers her his arm and says in a snooty voice, “This way, Mademoiselle.”

“Why merci, Monsieur!” She laughs. It’s an on going joke they’ve had the last couple days. Mostly to poke fun at the formal furnishings of the mansion. When she first saw the beautiful but vastly traditional interior, she remarked that she could only imagine really rich, really old, really conservative French people living here. (She’s not exactly wrong if what she’s heard about Adam’s dad is true.)

He leads her down the stars and through some corridors she hasn’t seen yet. They reach huge wooden double doors.
“What you’re about to see is going to take your breath away!” He says in lieu of an introduction. Then, he opens them with a flourish.

Belle gasps.

It’s a library. The most stunning library she’s ever seen. (It’s sacrilege but true. She hopes Mister Robert will forgive her.)

It reminds her, of course, of the Hogwarts library. But while the Hogwarts library is academic, this library is recreational. Where the Hogwarts library is prim and proper, this library is bursting with a sort of chaotic energy, books in stacks on the ground and on tables. While the Hogwarts library has every book a curious young witch could need, this library looks as though it has every book a young woman may need as well. Morrison. Shelley. Atwood. Austen. Brontë. Plath. Dickinson. Woolf. Beautiful hardcovers already arranged at the nearest table.

“Wow.”

“Do you like it?”

“Yes very much.”

“It’s yours!”

“Adam! Oh my gosh, thank you!”

Which one of them is blushing more now?

“But you can’t mean it’s mine. This is your home.”

He mumbles something.
“What?”

“Oh, well, at least for the year, can it be your home too?”

He sounds so shy - so earnest when he asks. He asks like it's her decision. Belle decides that maybe then it is.

“My cottage is my home.”

Their days are busy. Adam shows her the gardens, the trails, the hills. They play like children - snowball fights, inside jokes, merciless teasing. They are awkward. Belle muses that maybe it only feels like they’re playing and not “hanging out” because neither of them have done this sort of thing before.

“What was your childhood like?” She asks him one lazy morning in the sunroom. They’ve build a blanket fort (Read: Belle designed a blanket fort. Adam put one together.) She’s reading a French version of A Little Princess, her head resting on his leg. When she was a little girl her adventure was reading about other little girls’ adventures.

Adam doesn’t like to talk about himself very much - maybe this is why he’s arranged so many activities - to avoid thinking or talking about his problems.

She looks up into his eyes.

He’s happy. In this moment, with the sun on his face, bathing him in a warm yellow light. His sleepy eyes are lighter in this light. Belle realizes they’re brown actually, not black. And they’re covered by long lashes. She never noticed how pretty they were. His long hair is pulled up into a bun and it accentuates his angular face. (He’s beautiful, actually) (A monster in the darkness of the night, an angel in the light of day.) (Maybe.)

He looks up from his book. He doesn’t look down at her, instead his eyes are fixed at some point in the distance.

“I was spoiled. A brat.” He admits. “I was raised by maids who I was allowed to boss around. I was really beautiful - they said. My mother was a model - did you know that?”
“No.”

“She ran off with her photographer. I think I was eight.”

On impulse she squeezes his hand. They’re so large, he probably barely felt the pressure.

“My father was around only a bit more than he is now.”

“He’s around now?”

“He’ll be back for Christmas, but I doubt he’ll bother us. He has friends in town and all.”

“Do you remember who turned you?”

“It was a woman… “

He frowns and lets out the tiniest sigh.

“I’m sorry.” She squeezes his hand again, this time she lets her hand rest on his.

He closes his eyes and whispers, “I don’t think she was a werewolf though. I-I think this is a curse.”

Belle doubts that.

“It’s only a curse if you let it be.”

This is only a punishment when she let it be. It’s not a punishment.
Another day he takes her ice skating. They’re both horrible at skating- his large figure making balancing difficult, her lack of experience. They cling to each other and somehow avoid falling too much. It’s nice actually -even if they're not moving so much. She appreciates just being there on top of the glistening water, warm from his body heat.

The first time he cries in front of her - really cries, he’s reading *Frankenstein*. He looks much younger when he cries, his own age for once. She hugs him tight and wipes away his tears.

On the eve of Christmas Eve, she helps him throw a surprise party for his staff. It’s the sweetest sentiment. Cogsworth looks truly shocked at the selflessness and everyone assumes she put the idea in his head but it really wasn’t her. He’s becoming a better person.

When she wakes up the next morning, the yellow dress is on her dressing table. She’s surprised. Normally, the clothes are more winter appropriate and casual. There’s a note in his messy scrawl. “For tonight.”

They watch Christmas movies all day in the family room. The fire warms the room enough, but they still snuggle up on the couch. A part of her mind cannot fathom this. When did they get so comfortable? Another part of her brain doesn’t feel - it’s all mushy. There isn’t any sun on his face today, but he’s still beautiful.

She falls asleep to the sound of his breathing and the American accents on television.

When she wakes up, he’s gone.

“Time to get ready, love,” Mrs. Potts chirps.

It’s later than she thought. With the help of the gabby wardrobe, she turns herself into a magazine cover. No that’s not right. She’s too awkward for a magazine cover. Well, this is the closest she’ll ever get to Vogue. She even has makeup on.

Lumiere and Cogsworth lead her to a pair of double doors she’s never seen. They open with a flourish to a ballroom. Adam is there in a tux. He looks amazing… is *he* wearing makeup?

“Wow.”
She smiles shyly. “What is this?”

“Remember what you said when I asked why you hadn’t gone to the dance?”

“I don’t mind dancing, I actually love dancing, just not with so many people and all that alcohol - Oh. Oh my gosh, you remembered.”

“Introverts deserve balls too. You deserve a ball.”

The enchanted orchestra begins to play a pretty tune. Mrs. Potts sings.

Adam asks her for her hand. He’s graceful for a Beater. She steps on his toes more than vice versa. It’s the kind of dance she thinks Elizabeth Bennett would have had all jumps and swirls. But then the music slows. And he pulls her in even closer.

“You can have one present tonight - anything you want.” He whispers into her ear. His deep voice there gives her goosebumps. His lips are so close.

(This is still his way of saying I love you.)

“Today has been lovely - amazing. I--”

And she knows how he wants her to end this. *I don’t want anything, I just want to be here with you.* But if he’s really learned to be selfless, he’ll understand.

Her heart aches. “I want to go home - I want to see my Papa.”

He pulls away. “Oh, of course.” He swallows and pulls out a mirror.

“Take this. Tell it where you want to go and it’ll take you there.”
“But before you go—” He stares into her and her heart aches for a different reason. “Promise me, you’ll come back.”

“I promise.”

(Or maybe this is his way of saying I love you.)

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Christmas comes for everyone.

Christmas vacation sometimes means vacationing on Christmas.

Christmas comes for the Fa family in China. It comes for Mulan in the form of endless buffets and red qipaos and “church” services. It comes as biting her tongue when her cherished relatives give her backhanded compliments about her muscular arms and praying for her own sort of salvation: that no one watches the Victory Games. That no ones finds out that there’s a boy named Ping who is claiming to be a member of the family. It comes flashy and quiet and empty all at once. Like the wine she’s not only allowed to drink, but encouraged to enjoy.

Christmas comes to Snow in Scotland with Merida. It comes as charming Lady Eleanor and playing with Merida’s little monster brothers. It comes as riding across the Scottish countryside on a horse. It comes as learning how to arch. (It comes as anxiety: because she’s out there watching her. She’s out there.)

It comes for Flynn as dinner with Rapunzel and her fancy relatives. Rapunzel is technically royalty. Her mother is a princess, part of the royal house of Arendelle in the Norwegian ministry. Her scary cousin is queen, and her other cousin is also a princess. (do not ask Flynn to explain the difference between the Muggle Norway and magical Norway in terms of this monarchy stuff because he can’t). Her father is the President of Corona, a tiny island near Germany that abolished its monarchy only to vote for the would-have-been king for president. Christmas dinner is a seven course meal prepared by the chefs of the President’s Mansion (read: Castle). Christmas ends with a very awkward conversation with Rapunzel’s father about boundaries, the revelation of the promise ring, and a solemn oath of his love.

This year, for a lucky few, Christmas festivities mark the celebration of freedom.
Christmas comes for Ariel as a breath of fresh air. As pretty dresses and great wine and excellent cake. It comes as kissing and snogging and shagging. It comes as getting high on a boat - as promised - and explaining to Erica’s dad why she can’t eat the wonderful meal he’s making. Instead of cooking her lobster he gives it to her as a pet. She names him Sebastian.

Christmas comes to Ella Chapman, alone at last. It comes as caroling and having dinner with Henry’s parents and coming Home. To her new old bedroom, not the attic. To a silent house that she keeps clean for herself. To a place where she is finally in charge of herself.

Christmas comes to Tinkerbell the way it should for an eleven year old. It comes as waking up bright and early for presents. It comes as a giant breakfast and her mother letting her meet up with the girls. It comes as being able to laugh and enjoy the moment without her heart aching for a boy that doesn’t like her.

The Christmas season brings change.

Christmas comes for Jasmine Agrabah as a charity gala. It comes as another reminder that the world likes her better with her hair in waves down her back than pinned inside a hijab. Christmas comes as introducing her father formally to Ali. It comes as Jafar whispering threats and lewd comments in her ear. Telling her that he won’t have to take care of the street rat himself, their world will eat him alive. Christmas comes as scheduling A levels and researching business schools while her father asks if Ali will be the man she chooses, because someone needs to take over Agrabah Industries - he’s ready to retire.

Christmas comes to Aurora Stefan and ends with a voicemail:

*Hi, this is Briar - I mean Aurora. No I mean Briar. My name is Briar Rose and I was told to call you months ago to arrange counseling but I didn’t think it would help. Today I had three panic attacks and I can’t even enjoy the bloody happiest time of the year - I need help. Please call me back. I know it’s Christmas but whenever you can.*

Christmas comes to Pocahontas as a final clean break. “I can’t just be with you until you leave. I love you but at some point it hurts more to keep going knowing we have an expiration date. I want to end this on my own terms.” It comes as exchanging gifts with her girlfriends and watching Esmeralda fall in love, muttering, “He won’t sleep with me and I don’t want to sleep with anyone else: What is this madness?!”
Forgiveness is a Christmas miracle.

Christmas comes to Maurice Dumas with his beloved daughter. It comes as cooking baked ham with spiced apples like his mother used to make and reading A Christmas Carol. It comes as a letter from Adam Haddaway, absolving him, and Belle by extension, of his debt.

Christmas comes to Naveen as a second chance. It comes as Tiana passing the bread and making small talk instead of continuing to ignore him. It comes as her wearing his present, a necklace, as a white flag. It comes to Naveen as an angry phone call from his parents, who demand to know why he couldn’t find a Portkey back to England.

It comes to Peter Pan as a present from each of his professors. Each one has a note remarking on how proud they are of him. The best Christmas present is from Minnie: Neverland. Christmas comes to Peter as playing with his favorite kids in his favorite place in the world. It comes as snowball fights and snow angels. Christmas comes as a card from Wendy Darling: Happy Christmas, Peter. Hope you’re well.

Christmas comes and under the tree there is something there for everyone.

Chapter End Notes

What do you think? I'm thinking the next chapter will center around the boys in the Games but who knows? I might change the outline. Again, please give kudos/leave comments :)


Chapter 17: Locked Out

Chapter Summary

Briar regains control. Hercules stresses out about the Games. Tadashi gets a break. Ling takes charge. And as a bonus, we finally get to see Marinette's point of view.

Chapter Notes

Hey, look I'm back. I got a hurrication because of Hurricane Florence and I finally finished this chapter. Don't worry I'm fine! I just had to evacuate from my school...which didn't even get hit after the change in her path. Anyway: enjoy, give kudos, leave a comment and wait another who knows how long for me to update again. Btw, in the interest of getting this out sooner, the chapter is not betaed. Let me know if you find mistakes. TW: mental health issues + gender dysphoria + wrong pronouns used for a trans person + mention of self harm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER XVII

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Locked Out...
“It’s like… I’m locked out of my mind. She has the key and she won’t give it back and I can’t think straight.”

“Aurora--”

“It’s Briar.”

“Right, I’m sorry. What does she want?”

“To hurt me.”

“How can she hurt you? She’s not here is she?”

She is. Her vicious face.

“You don’t see her, but I do. She’s always here.”

“Briar, she’s not here.”

“Okay.” She takes a few minutes to do the breathing exercises she was taught. Inhale through the nose. Exhale through the mouth.

It helps more that she’d like to admit but not nearly as much as they’d have her believe.

She’s not there. She’s not there. She’s not there.

“Okay.”

“So if she’s not here, how can she hurt you?”
“By making me see all these horrible things. Like she did when she put me to sleep.”

“Briar. She’s been caught. They’re holding her in Azkaban. We’ve discussed this.” Arabella says in her soft, patient voice. “I think watching her trial will help you.”

“I never want to see her again!” The heavy feeling in her chest becomes unbearable. She can feel the room getting hot. Her clothes feel itchy. Fuck. She shouted. She’s not supposed to shout.

Arabella has her hand on her back, soothing her before she even realizes she’s sobbing. She’s rocking back and forth and clutching her toy for dear life. What has she become?

It takes a longer than she would like but not nearly as long as it took a month ago. Her breathing steadies.

“I-I’m s-s-sorry.” She’s still shaking. Goddamnit.

“You don’t have to apologize.”

“O-okay.”

She takes another moment.

“I don’t think I can face her.”

The therapist takes a second before responding, “You face her everyday in your mind.”

“I face my nightmares. It’s not really her. It can’t be. She’s locked up in prison and I’m here.”

Arabella nods and Briar can see the smile she’s fighting. This is the conclusion she’s supposed to come to, of course. Of course. She knows it. She can rationalize that these are hallucinations. That her mind is sick. That there is no way Maleficent can still reach her.

“She broke me.” She says it simply because it’s true. She’s like a shattered china doll trying to put
her pieces together again. There’s no way to come back to what she was before. No way. She’s just a creepy doll, missing an eye and an arm.

“You’re not broken,” Arabella insists, before the session is over.

“You’re not broken,” Master Sweet says as he watches her swallow the pills.

“You’re not broken,” Phillip assures her.

“I can’t tell if you’re saying that for me or for yourself.”

He laughs. “You sound more like yourself everyday, you know?”

“That’s my point though. I sounded different. I feel like I’m constantly fighting to feel somewhat normal.”

“Briar, you went through hell. It’s a miracle you’re not more fucked up.” He laughs.

She laughs with him. “Finally! Thank you for acknowledging it! I’m fucked up! I talk to myself and I think in threes and I can’t sleep without potions and even then I have nightmares that wake me up in the middle of the night and leave me shaking. I get panic attacks all the time and I’m still hallucinating.”

“But love, it’s getting better.”

He kisses her and she immerses herself in him. There are some glorious moments when she really feels like herself. He’s right. She couldn’t say that before. A month ago she thought the old Briar was long dead and gone.

“Thank you.”

“I’ll always be here for you.” He holds her tight. “You know, they say New Years predicts the rest of your year.”
“Who you’re with at midnight is who you’ll be with for the rest of the year.”

And she’s here with him. “Okay, I think I’m ready to go back. I wanna see the cannon on the telly with everyone.”

She smiles and kisses him one more time before letting him put her on his shoulders and carry her back to Ella’s lounge.

Everyone cheers when they see her. How different is this year from the last. Last year was Aunts that were aunts and only a few friends left at Hogwarts. This year they’re celebrating like the adults they deserve to be.

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He’s ready for this. Whatever this is. He might not be the oldest, strongest, or smartest, but fuck it if he isn’t the best prepared. His stepmother came up with an insane training program. His dad, his uncles, his cousins - the whole family helped him get into shape. They even got him a real coach.

He’s ready for this.

This is his workout mantra. It honestly makes him more stressed, but it’s not like he can control it, or make it stop. He used to play his music really loud to drown out the thoughts, but Tadashi said he’d go deaf. So now he just deals with it.

“You have the weight of the world on your shoulders.” His great uncle Atlas had said, “I’m not jealous of this opportunity.”

Uncle Atlas actually tells it to you straight. Dad talks about the Games like he’s already won. Hera even smiled at him when he finished “Basic Training.” They all think this is something so simple and straightforward, like milking a goat on the farm or casting a protection charm. They think it’s an honor, like fighting in Dumbledore’s Army against Voldemort.

The thought chills him. At least my life isn’t on the line.

It very well feels like it, with all this pressure. If he loses will his family be able to handle it? Will
he even be welcome home? They can’t kill him… can they?

He tries to focus on the physical reality of the moment. He’s in a lot of fucking pain from these reps and he’s so looking forward to that ice bath. He can barely feel his legs and his arms ache.

It’s amazing.

“Hey, Herc, what are you still doing down here?”

It’s Ling, one of the fourth years.

“Just finishing up.”

Ling stares at him. Hercules glances down. He’s drenched in sweat, muscles literally bulging. Ling either thinks he looks gross or is showing off.

“Gonna hit the showers, actually.”

Ling takes a step back and nods. “See you at dinner?”

“Yeah, bro.”

It’s a shorter workout than he was going for but tomorrow is the next round, so he might as well stop early. Maybe this one will actually be physical and not another mental thing. Don’t get him wrong, he doesn’t hate the magic stuff or the riddles - it’s just not his strong suit. Not that he really has any strong suits.

Okay, no. No negativity spiral. He’s just going to get in the ice bath and think about something not related to the Games.

Classes --NOPE. Nope. Nope. He’s this close to failing Hist. He does not need to think about all the revising he’s not actually going to do.
Parties… he hasn’t been to one since the blowout before the break. He hasn’t seen Megara since then either. And it’s not like he hasn’t been looking for her. How could he not be? She’s so beautiful and clever and sarcastic and sexy.

He gulps. Great, definitely not thinking about the Games now. Just Meg in that pretty dress at the party.

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He looks for her again at dinner to no avail. Maybe she doesn’t eat. That would explain why she’s so skinny. If he ever does see her again, he’s going to discreetly find out. She could just be one of those naturally skinny girls too.

“Hey, Herc! You ready for tomorrow?” Shang asks. He’s spotted Hercules on his way out.

“Yeah, definitely. Hey random question, do you know someone named Megara?” Hercules asks, “She’s really skinny, dark hair--”

“Sarcastic, skips class, with a resting you know what face? Yeah. Why, what’s up?”

“I met her a while ago and I haven’t seen her around, just wanted to know if you knew if she was okay?”

“Oh, she doesn’t really get out much, except to do whatever it is Hades wants. She’s probably fine.”

“Right, okay.”

So she has a boyfriend. Damn. He finishes his second helping of dinner with an uncharacteristic pouty frown on his face. Why are the beautiful, mysterious ones always in relationships? Who even is this Hades?

He likes feeding the internal drama. It’s weird maybe, but worrying about a minor crush that’s way out of his league is a lot nicer than having to worry about tomorrow.
His thoughts summon her. He’s walking down to the Dungeon to hang out with some of the guys before tomorrow. Flynn says it’ll be good “team building” but it’s probably more an excuse to get pissed. He’s not planning on staying too long, he wasn’t even going to go, but he thought he might as well not miss out on everything. But anyway, he’s walking down the stairs when he spots someone in a dark corner of the Slytherin commons. And by the time he reaches the bottom of the stairwell he’s like 90% sure it’s her.

Yeah. It’s her. Same thick dark hair. Same huge eyes. Same skinny yet curvy body.

She’s beautiful. He can’t help but stare for a moment.

She raises an eyebrow at him, “What are you doing down here, Wonderboy?”

“Visiting a friend. What about you?”

“I’m a Slytherin,” She says slowly, like he’s slow.

“No, I mean, uh, here. Like in the commons.”

“A girl can’t just hang out?”

She’s the only one just hanging out. The rest of the freezing room is empty. The fireplace isn’t even lit.

She sighs, “You caught me, I’m locked out.”

“Oh no! Do you need me to find a prefect?”

“No, no, Herc. This isn’t that kind of lockout situation. My roommate, uh, kicked me out for a couple hours.”

“Oh.” He says before he fully gets it. Sexiled. That makes sense.
“You only have one roommate?”

“Yeah Ursula. But having them is like have twenty roommates, you know? They’re a lot.”

“Right.” They pronouns. Right.

“I hope you never have the displeasure of meeting her.”

“Ouch.” They/her?

“Yeah.”

Now what does he say…? “So dinner was good right? I liked how they did the mashed potatoes.”

“I don’t really eat dinner here so I wouldn’t know.”

Her phone buzzes. “Oh, great,” she hesitates for the briefest moment-- “one of my friends is letting me stay with him till Urs gives me the all clear.”

She doesn’t really give him the chance to respond as she turns toward the boy dormitories. He’s heading that way too, but he doesn’t want to seem like he’s following her, so he just watches her saunter off.

She turns back half way through the room “It was nice to see you again, Wonderboy. Good luck tomorrow.” She gives him a smile that would almost be described as sweet.

“You too!” He calls back. Ugh, why is he such a dork?

.o.*o.O.o*.o.
In his most natural state, Tadashi Hamada is a total dork. Right now in the Head Boy room, in the middle of a three way tickle fight, he’s definitely his dorkiest self.

“Stop! Stop!” Hiro belts out. “I can’t breathe.”

Tadashi and Honey let out their last laughs as they collapse on the bed.

Hiro groans, “You always gang up on me.”

“What am I supposed to do?”

“You’re supposed to help me get her, Duh.” Hiro complains. His dark hair is a mess and he looks so boyish and young in this moment. He can’t believe his little brother is fourteen already.

“Oh, really?” Honey raises an eyebrow.

Hiro rolls his eyes. “Oh right, if you do that, she won’t talk to you for a week and you’ll be all sad.”

“Please I’ve never not talked to Tadashi for longer than an hour!” Honey protests.

“Yeah, because he makes sure he doesn’t do anything that could possibly make you mad at him.”

This is true. Definitely true. Honey being mad at him - or even disappointed, might be his boggart.

“Oh, and you wouldn’t worry about Wendy not talking to you?” Tadashi teases.

“Wendy is a friend. F-r-i-e-n-d. We’re not gross like you two.”

“Aww, we are pretty gross aren’t we,” Honey clutches his hand and pecks his mouth.
“Ewww, please wait till I’m out of the room before you start shagging please.”

And Hiro makes a dramatic exit, as always, fake gagging in disgust.

Tadashi looks up at Honey. “Well, he’s gone now.”

“Shut up you dork, we just had a tickle fight with your little brother.”

“But we have a round tomorrow.”

“And I will congratulate you when you win, love.” She smirks.

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go back to my dorm room before the head boy gets me in trouble for breaking curfew.”

“I don’t think he’ll mind if you stay here.”

“Not taking the chance.”

Tadashi pouts.

Honey laughs and grants him a long goodnight kiss. “I love you doofus.”

“I love you too.”

.o.O.o.

Tadashi Hamada is utterly serious in his least natural state. Which would be on the Victory Games field surrounded by alpha men. He sighs.
The nervousness in his belly doesn’t settle after the announcement about the details of the round. In fact, his stomach just drops.

“Round Three is based on Salazar Slytherin’s famous Locket! Not only will the teams be Lock-et in a room they must escape, but in order to escape they must solve puzzles to unlock a replicate of the Locket. The longer it takes our heroes to unlock the locket, the more irritable, angry, and resentful they’ll become.”

Well that’s just great. The absolute perfect situation.

Tadashi isn’t one to get resentful or irritated. He’s known for being reasonable, calm, and easygoing, so he hopes the locket magic won’t mess up his concentration in solving whatever puzzle they have to solve to get out of the room.

The room is more of a basement. Lit by candlelight, without any windows. It already feels claustrophobic.

He doesn’t feel the effects right away when he takes a crack at the locket. It’s confusing. It hurts to look at for more than a few minutes and if he’s being honest, he has no idea what the puzzle even is, let alone how to solve it.

It’s frustrating. Not like a piece of a robot he can dismantle to understand why it’s not working right. Not like a charm he just has to review. And there’s no one here to really help. Five minutes in and Gaston is already a useless, bumbling baboon barking about how it’s too hot and everyone is so useless.

There is no way they’re going to solve this puzzle. Not with everyone already getting ready to throw hands.

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Ping always has the answer. It’s infuriating really. Ling has no idea how he’s gotten on the Hogwarts Victory Games team but seeing Ping just reminds him of what he should be. He should be the smart one guiding people through challenges without explicitly leading. He should be the underdog everyone seems to be rooting for. He should be the pretty boy. Their names even rhyme. Two sides of a fucking coin. The shiny lucky heads and the grimy tails.
Rationally, Ling knows that this resentment, this jealousy, is because of the locket. But emotionally, he’s not processing that. He just feels it. White hot burning up inside of him, demanding that he do something for once, rather than just watch by the sidelines.

He pushes Ping. “Why do you get to make all the decisions?”

“I’m not making the decisions! Shang is!”

“HEY, I’m the captain!” Gaston butts in, taking a second to stop fighting with the other boys.

Ping ignores him. Ling ignores him too. “Everyone knows you’re the one masterminding his decisions!”

“Well if you have an original thought feel free to contribute!”

“Are you calling me a freeloader?”

“You’re calling you a freeloader, you oaf. Now move!”

Ping returns to working on the lock. He’s stumped.

Ling laughs. “It’s charmed you know.”

Shang stops ogling over Ping long enough to gape at him.

“How do you know it’s charmed.”

“It’s obvious to anyone who’s taken an advanced charms class.” He’s exaggerating. He only knows because he has a sense for charms, the kind of sense you’re born with naturally.

Ping steps aside to let him have a go at it. He steps suspiciously close to Shang.
“You know your crush is really obvious.” He mutters under his breath. Just loud enough for Shang and Ping to hear. If they’re listening.

They don’t make a verbal reaction, and Ling is too busy to working on breaking the charm to turn and gauge their expressions. If he had to guess, Shang has gone white and Ping has gone red. Both of them think they’re so clever with their secrets. Ping is clearly gay and if Shang doesn’t go both ways then Ling’s gaydar is completely broken.

It’s hard to focus on the charm with all the background noise. He works without much avail for a few minutes then, in probably the loudest voice he’s ever used he screams, “Everyone shut up!”

The sheer shock factor of Ling barking orders is enough to make some people stop.

Gaston marches over to him. “Why should I listen to you, you scrawny nobody?”

It’s a punch to the nonexistent ego. He takes a deep breath. The room wants him to fight Shang. To call him an idiot that couldn’t break this charm if his life depended on it. To call him a myopic, repugnant, flaccid stain on humanity. A bundle of muscles without a single working brain cell to direct it.

Before he can though, Ping is jumping in front of him. “Because, he’s going to get us out of this room before we want to kill each other any more!”

“Oh shut it! Your just as bad as your cousin!”

Evidently even the great and powerful Ping can’t stop him. Ling casts a silencing charm.

In ten minutes, he’s done. Now they can actually work on the lock without it confusing them.

Tadashi, who’s just been watching him takes over.

He doesn’t wear his anger on his sleeve like the rest of them. Instead it simmers inside of him.
“These ungrateful hooligans can thank me for another won challenge.”

“Or not. Since they don’t seem to have a shred of decency. They all take me for granted. But where would they be without me?”

He stops suddenly. Fuck. Tadashi too?

This challenge is going to take forever.

Luckily, he can trick these idiots. “I bet no one is smart enough to solve the puzzle.”

Four buffoons line up to take their chances. They suck at teamwork right now. Everyone trying to solve it individually, arguing over what goes where and why. It’s frustrating just to watch. The energy surrounding them reeks of rotten eggs.

When they finish, Jim, Shang, Phillip and Phoebus argue about who should get credit for it.

“You can all split the credit,” Ping shouts.

He gets to work, commanding that Chien Po - who’s so chilled out by his Tai Chi or whatever that he doesn’t seem even moderately affected by the power of the locket- to take care of anyone trying to fight. By take care, he must mean hold them each in one hand and demand they apologize, because that’s what the half-giant is doing. He’s so damn happy too. It’s so annoying.

What’s more annoying how Ping looks solving the next portion of the lock. He’s so soft looking. A classic flower boy. If he wanted to he could pass as a girl. He’d look great in a dress with that tiny waist. Probably good with makeup too.

Ling wants that. To look like that. He’s only worn a dress once, on a dare, and even though it looked so wrong it felt so right. He’s played with his mother’s makeup and jewelry when she wasn’t home enough times, cringed at being called a boy, a man, a guy enough times, fantasized about female bodies - not just what it would be like to touch one, but to have one enough times, hated himself enough times to know he’s really a she.
Not a Ling but a Leah. He doesn’t dare think it though. He’s so terrified someone will hear these thoughts swirling in his mind. He could get good at Occlumency, but since he can’t even clear his mind long enough to meditate, he doesn’t think it’s worth the effort. It’s easier to just not think about the secret that’s tearing him up inside.

Each time he uses the word him to describe himself is like another cut on his body. Not like the ones he used to make with the razor he didn’t need to shave. He hasn’t made those cuts in a while. A mental cut. His brain in searing pain.

It’s paranoia thinking a legimins would care enough about him to read his mind. He knows it’s paranoia. He’s been to enough therapists. The one time his father caught him in the bathtub with a pool of bloody water surrounding him and the razor in his hand had lasting repercussions. His dad blames his anxiety and depression on the magic world. “That power is driving him crazy!” His mom blames it on the imbalance of chemicals in his mind. The farmer and the doctor. The muggle and the squib.

It nearly destroyed their marriage, trying to agree on how to deal with his mental health issues. But even when his mom finally got him medicated, the antidepressants didn’t really help.

Unsurprising. Yeah, he has a chemical imbalance, but more than that he has dysphoria. His therapist at home insists that it would be fine if he came out as trans.

Naive man.

The next part of the puzzle unlocks. Ling doesn’t get a good look at it though. Something catches him - all of them.

Next thing he knows, he’s in the arena.

He knows they’ve lost before the announcement. Beauxbatons looks too smug. They suck at everything except apparently teamwork.

It feels so good to have his mind back. Or at least as back as it can be, but he’s terrified he’ll be the one they eliminate. Who else?
But it’s not him. It’s Gaston and Yao. Maybe this game isn’t all about physical strength.

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This game is all about teamwork. Or at least this round was. Marinette is so relieved they’ve finally won something. She doesn’t want to let the team know, but she was getting really frustrated about coming in second and third.

“Congratulations, Captain,” Adrien gives her a hug. It’s so nice to hear his familiar voice speaking their familiar language. There is way too much English at this school and they haven’t had a moment alone since this before the round. She’s so relieved they found each other before bedtime.

Marinette smiles as she leans in for a kiss.

Sometimes she still can’t believe she’s dating Adrien Agreste. How did she become the luckiest girl in all of Paris?

“Thanks, Kitty. You weren’t too bad yourself.”

“I’m not too bad at charms I guess, but there’s no way we would have finished so quickly without your command of the room.”

Marinette beams - like she always does when he compliments her. “Stop, anyone could have.”

“Nope, just you, Ladybug.”

The nicknames are a reference to their animagi. A black cat and a ladybug, the two sides of luck.

Adrien takes her hand as they walk up to the rooms they’ve been given in a corner of the castle that was specially prepared for guests of the games.

“You know,” Adrien says, “I still don’t see how you weren’t affected by the locket’s magic. Don’t tell me you’re just that positive, because I know you, Mari.”
“I don’t know, maybe it’s just luck.” She actually has absolutely no idea. There are a lot of things that bother her in this world and while she’s good at checking her temper she still feels the anger or frustration she’s trying to control.

But during the round, she had some sort of insane focus and she just knew what they needed to do to complete the challenge.

Sometimes she gets like that, but it’s always after she’s turned into her ladybug form. Maybe there’s something about being nonhuman that helps you clear your mind. In this case, though it was completely random. She explains it to all of this to Adrien as they meander up a flight of stairs.

“ Weird,” Adrien says, “I was so sure we’d finally get to see you kill Chloe.”

“Oh hush, you know I’ve never even contemplated killing her.”

“Maybe not since she became Queen Bee, but fifth year? You were definitely near there a few times.”

“Because she was so self absorbed and rude and downright mean!”

Adrien laughs. “See where was that energy during the last round?”

“I don’t know! Maybe I’m just so amazing that I was able to keep it in till now.”

He laughs and kisses her cheek. “I can see that, bugaboo.”

They reach Adrien’s door a moment later.

Marinette sighs. She hates saying goodbye. It’s not that she’s not used to it. Beauxbatons is really strict when it comes to boys in girl rooms and vice versa. She’s never heard of a single account of people managing to break the rule without getting caught. Though it seems it happens here very often.
Adrien checks his pockets. Then his messenger bag. Then his pockets again.

He gets that panicked Adrien look. It’s the oddest expression to see on him. He’s always so calm and collected.

“You lost your key?”

“Locked out twice in a day, I guess,” He jokes.

“Well, we could get someone to unlock it for you…” Marinette suggests.

“Or, we could finally have the pillowfort sleepover we’ve talked about.” Adrien gets all excited. “I bet there aren’t even charms in your room.”

Her Marinette bites lip, “What if we get caught by Headmaster Damocles?”

“I bet he’s out drinking with the other headmasters. Besides he was so happy we won today, I’m sure he wouldn’t mind.”

She’s nervous. It’s not like they haven’t ever shared a room before. He’s come to visit her over the summers and her parents let him up in her room after a long, embarrassing talk about birth control and responsible sex. But, there’s something about this unplanned, surprise situation that makes her stomach flip.

Marinette wants this though. So much that she doesn’t say a single word when she spies his key in the back pocket of his jeans.

Chapter End Notes

pls send kudos and leave comments. pls. pls. pls. tyvm. :)
Chapter 18: Snow Falls

Chapter Summary

Snow Falls. Mulan tries to stay in the Games. Gaston goes after the Beast. Elsa reveals a secret to Jack.

Chapter Notes

So, not going to lie, I lost stamina and motivation when it came to this story, but this summer I thought I'd respond to some comments, I had forgotten about and felt a burst of affection for my life(so far)'s work. It feels wrong to leave this without a satisfying conclusion, so I'm going to try to finish the best I can. This is a bit shorter than I think I was writing earlier, but hopefully you still like it. Thanks for supporting this story for so long! TW: homophobic word use

See the end of the chapter for more notes
There is something beautiful about snow. Pale, glistening, delicate. She’s honored to be named for it. Her mother loved snow. She died when Snow was six years old. Everyone says only. Only six years with your mother. Snow doesn’t like to think of it as only. She doesn’t like thinking of it at all.


Snow, that’s everything. Snowball fights, snow angels, hot chocolate in the winter. Snowmen. All things that were traditions. Would have been traditions, if she’d had more time.

A night out in the snow at Hogwarts is Snow’s tradition. She goes out every year, all wrapped up and lays down in the snow, lets it cover her eyelids, her cheeks, and her coat. It’s cold and wet but beautiful. The moon shines, majestic and full tonight, making it even more beautiful.

This year, maybe because of the thoughts of her mother, maybe because of all the drama, all the stress, she lets herself. The snow hides her tears as it melts on her face. Soon this will all be over. No more snow.

She gets up once it starts feeling too much. The best part of this tradition is the shower, the fuzzy socks, the seeing the elves and eating whatever meal. Tonight it’d be a late supper. She’s looking forward to soup. Butternut squash with a bit of pepper.

She takes weary, lingering steps. Something about this, she wants it to last longer than it will. And then, she finds herself falling. She finds herself bleeding. Red like her lips.

She will remark later that she should have ran inside. She should have known to expect the worst. She will remark later that it was foolish of her to continue this tradition. She shouldn’t have underestimated what her stepmother was capable of.

But now she’s in critical condition. If a muggle, then certainly dead. She is lucky someone has heard the gunshot and will rush to her side. She is lucky that she will wake up. Though she doesn’t know this now as she falls into a dead sleep.

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A girl is dead. The people directing the games don’t seem to give a shit about that. She hasn’t been declared dead, but a fucking bullet to her head? There’s no cure. Nothing magical that can fix this that Mulan is aware of. Not that Mulan is aware of much when it comes to ways to resurrect the dead or people like Snow White.

All she knows is the games go on even in the midst of the worst storm anyone’s seen at Hogwarts in years. There will be a triathlon. At the end of this triathlon, the team will go from ten to five. Can she make it to the top five? In a triathlon in a blizzard.

She’s played a good game, but there’s a very small chance this will work out in her favor and she’s accepted it. Her life is already a lot better than it was. She hasn’t been discovered. She sort of, kind of, has friends, as Mulan, and definitely has friends as Ping. Her dragon is still alive. She’s doing something right, for once in her life.
And then there’s beautiful, gorgeous, amazing, brilliant, fit as fuck Li Shang. She has exactly two theories. 1) He thinks she’s a solid team member if a bit insane. 2) He’s gay for Ping. If she had to bet the odds are not in the favor of 2. Mulan has a habit of overanalyzing. There’s no way that those glances or the teasing really mean more than anything. But the things that Ling said under his breath during round 3…

It doesn’t matter. If Shang is gay for Ping, then… nothing. Mulan isn’t Ping. Yes, there are parts of her that are very much Ping. There parts of her that really like being a guy and doing this team thing, but she’s Mulan.

It feels weird now saying that. Looking at her reflection. It doesn’t ever feel like it shows who she is inside. It’s a lie to say she isn’t Ping. She is. She’s Ping and Mulan. Not that she can be both.

Today, she has to be Ping. The best version of her awkward cousin that doesn’t actually exist has to be out there on that field crushing it.

What’s annoying about this event is they have no idea what’s actually involved. They’ve known about the triathlon being the name of the fourth round for a while. They know it’s got something to do with the ring. That’s it. And with that, they’ve been hitting the athletics part of training extra fucking hard this last month.

Donald Duck announces that this is event is running, swimming, and flying, in that order. Essentially, if Ping is going to make it into the final five, it’s going to be a come back in the last round. Her size makes for fast flying but rather slow running. No amount of training is going to get her to beat Philip’s natural speed of 320 meters per minute. She's not assuming the worst, she’s being realistic.

She starts at a jogging pace, picking it up. It’s 2000 meters straight, no laps to the Black Lake. She refuses to give up out of exhaustion from pushing too hard, something that happened at a practice once, or to trip, something that’s happened at practice multiple times. The whole time she’s behind between Astrid and Chloé, until the end where she starts losing it. There’s snow in her eyes and the harsh wind is against her.

She enters the lake one of the slowest of the whole group - Hogwarts, Beauxbaton, and Durmstrang, but that just pushes her to swim faster. The black lake is freezing but they’ve been equipped with wetsuits that make it bearable. She’s not thinking, just pushing herself as hard as possible. Some of the boys didn’t pace themselves. She can tell she’s in the middle. Chloé gets disqualified for cheating half way through the swim.

When she makes it to her broom she’s got a shot. It’s between her and John Smith for the last spot going into round five. Philip is at the head, followed by Jack Frost, and Marinette Dupain-Cheng. Their names are being announced as they compete first place overall.

If Mulan loses now - if Ping loses - it will be okay. She’s proud of herself for getting this far. The wind is against her, but she just keeps going.

“And making it in at the last possible second is Ping Fa!”

She hears the Duck quack out her name but it seems impossible. She swears that John was ahead of her.

He looks just as shocked, but claps her on the back, “Congrats.”

It’s her, Tadashi, Hercules, Philip and of course Shang.
Shang walks up to Ping.

“I’m proud of you.” He says.

His hands are on her shoulders and he’s staring right into her eyes.

‘Thanks.” She fights the urge to pull strands of her loose hair behind her ears.

She’s grinning.

Merlin, she really likes him. And he thinks she’s a boy.

She wants very badly right now to tell him.

To explain what she’s doing and why. It feels wrong to keep sharing these moments with him. Honestly, the fact that her whole friendship with any of the guys is based in lies is getting to her.

Maybe in the next round. Soon. Eventually.

For now, it’s time to celebrate - Yao says he’s going to smuggle them all mead.

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A small get together turns into a full blown party pretty quickly at a school like Hogwarts.

And Mulan as Ping is very very drunk. She’s playing truth or dare with the gang (she has a gang!). So far she’s told them the most embarrassing story of her life - not the thing with Gaston. This was much worse: the time when she was 13 and got her clothes stolen after going swimming and had to wait for three hours with a teacher for her parents to come pick her up from school. The part that makes the story really embarrassing slash traumatic is the fact that everyone saw this video of her covering her nonexistent boobs until the principle made the girl responsible delete it, citing anti bullying and anti child pornography laws. Didn’t stop everyone from calling her a boy. The version of this she told was that her balls hadn’t exactly dropped yet, which might have truly been the equivalent.

She’s also been dared to go on a shots competition with Ling (he won with six shots). And to ask out a pretty girl (the girl was Jasmine, who she’d hung out with a few times as herself. And she and her boyfriend seemed to take it well. They were very sober and very sweet together).

Those were the little leagues. When Yao got dared to expose himself, the truth or dare game had expanded. Now there’s a whole group of people she barely knows sitting in a circle with a beer bottle at the center.

“Shang truth or dare,” asks some hufflepuff boy.

“Dare.” Shang says without hesitation. He looks good, his perfect hair a bit tousled. He’s definitely
had a couple of drinks too, but doesn’t seem nearly as gone as most people two hours into a party.

“Alright hot shot. I dare you to kiss whoever this bottle lands on.”

The drunken circle cheers.

The bottle points to Mulan.

Ping turns redder, if that’s possible. Her Asian flush is very real.

“Ew no!” Shang looks disgusted.

“Okay Florian, I know you’re a fag but our captain here isn’t. Make him do something else.” Yao says.

And suddenly, Mulan really doesn’t want to play anymore. She gets up and walks away.

She finds a corridor in the room that’s empty and sits down with a glass of water. She chugs the water, trying and failing to not cry. She’s misread everything. Shang is very much not into Ping and it wouldn’t make a difference if he was because she’s MULAN. She’s living a lie and it’s going to backfire sooner or later. Why did she think she was cut out for any of this?

“Hey, I’ve been looking for you.” She looks up. It’s Shang.

“I’m sorry about what happened earlier.”

“It’s fine.”

“It’s really not.”

He pulls her up. “It’s not okay for people to respond like that.”
Oh. He thinks she’s all upset because Yao said the word fag. Honestly, that was upsetting.

She’s staring into his sad eyes. How is he this beautiful?

And suddenly he’s kissing her. It’s a needy long kiss. And when it’s over he says fuck and walks away.

She wants to chase after him but she just starts crying. Stupid drunkenness.

“You okay?” It’s Rapunzel.

“Oh hi.”

“I didn’t mean to see that, I’ve been looking for Flynn.”

“Oh.”

“You look like you need a hug.”

And maybe it’s because Rapunzel is so nice. Maybe it’s the fact that she’s just kissed Shang and he looked like he regretted it. Maybe it’s because she’s so tired of keeping it all in. Maybe it’s just because she’s drunk as hell after five shots of firewhisky. But she whimpers and tells Rapunzel everything.

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The truth always comes out in the end, no matter how messy it is or how messy the end is. Belle realizes this in the worst of circumstances.

Since being back at Hogwarts, she hasn’t seen Adam. He hasn’t sought her out and she hasn’t reached out. There have been a lot of rumors swirling around about werewolves and the Beast’s
accidents. And now it’s all come to the surface it seems.

“We have to kill that fucker before he kills us!” A drunk and angry Gaston shouts. He’s leading a group of his goons down to the dungeon.

Apparently someone heard a wolf howling from his quarters. Belle isn’t sure if Gaston thinks the Beast is a werewolf or if he thinks there’s a wolf loose or what, but he’s charging forward and it’s a full moon tonight…

“Gaston, you’re drunk. Please.”

“No you don’t understand Belle! He’s dangerous. He’s going to mangle you!”

“Stop.”

He pushes her aside. Someone must have gotten him the password to the common room because he barrels through no problem.

“I say we kill the Beast once and for all!”

His little crowd roars in approval. They stumble in pursuit. Belle is able to get ahead, weaving through the crowd. Being sober is a real advantage.

The Beast is in his chains and she runs to him. “Oh Adam.”

“She don’t you see what he is!”

She guards him from the crowd. “You can’t do this!”

“He’s a threat to all of us! Avada Kedavra!” Gaston shouts.
She watches the life leave his eyes as he slumps to the ground. She sobs.

“I-I loved him.”

And in that moment a miracle happens.

He transforms back into his human form. Unscarred, no bruises. Just Adam.

“I love you too.” He mumbles, beginning to rise.

“Okay am I so drunk that I’m hallucinating or did he come back from the dead?” Someone asks.

Adam isn’t looking at them, he’s just staring into Belle’s teary eyes. His giant hands envelop her own. “I was cursed a few years ago by this witch. I acted like a beast so she made me one and the spell would only break if I was good enough to earn someone’s love.”

“Wow.” Belle’s wide eyes widen. The shock making it difficult to process the fact that he’s alive and human again.

The crowd backs off. Even Gaston. Evidently there’s no reason to kill the exact same person if he’s no longer a werewolf. Lots of speciesism to address later but for now, it’s good.

.o.O.o.

They’re sitting in his bed a bit later and the shock has worn off. It’s a lot to process. The rapid admission of emotions, his near death, and then this impossible broken curse. She’s asked a million questions about the magic behind the curse and the woman who did it, everything. All the information helps her process it fully.

They’re now cuddled up over his covers. His arms around her.

“Now that you’ve asked your fair share of questions, I have one for you. Why didn’t you come back?”
Belle sighs burrowing her head into his warm chest.

She’s gone through this same question a hundred times in her own head. When the break ended she’d just felt this panic at the thought of seeing him again. Figuring out what they were now. Her own feelings. She was usually better than this, but in that panic she hadn’t gone to meet him at any of their regular places at their regular times on the first day. And the second. And by the end of the first week it had felt like she’d made the decision. And she could never quite admit the reason why.

She’d been a coward. And honestly kind of a jerk.

“To be fair,” Adam responds, “I was the jerk first.”

It’s strange how they’d ended up together. Maybe even creepy. If she’d heard of a girl falling in love with someone who she owed a debt to and had this major power imbalance with, she probably would have called Stockholm Syndrome. At the very least she would have said this was problematic as hell.

But now there is no imbalance to worry about. The debt is forgiven. His secret is no longer a concern. Everything is finally simple.

“And I kiss you?” He asks.

And she smiles, nodding, “Please do.”

The kiss is soft and it almost seems like he’s pulling away but she wants this to last longer. She wants more. He hesitates. She comes to the realization that it’s possible he’s never done anything like this before.

Somehow that makes it even more intimate.

She guides him through open mouth kissing, sucking his lower and upper lips. French kissing, which he enjoys. She can feel him relax, getting into the swing of it.
“I really love you, Belle.”

“Mmm, I love you too.” She kisses his neck.

They spend the rest of the night murmuring sweet somethings in each other’s ears and exploring their bodies slowly.

.o.O.o.

Dear Diary,

A lot has happened in the last few hours. It’s insane. First, Gaston tried to kill Adam. I tried to stop him but you know there’s a huge imbalance in our physical capabilities, about as severe as the imbalance in our mental abilities. He cast the killing curse and I lost it, I admitted that I loved him. And then instead of dying he went back to his human form. No scars or bruises.

Adam says he was cursed with lycanthropy by a powerful witch, for his surly behavior and awful attitude. The condition to be free of it was to be good enough that someone would fall in love with him. Honestly, don’t see how romantic love is a measure of personal growth in a person, but I guess the witch was antiquated or a romantic.

Anyway, as I’ve detailed before, human form Adam is really hot. And I finally got a chance to kiss him (his lips are very soft) after everything settled down. (No worries, we didn’t have sex. Though we are sleeping together tonight. He’s actually already snoring as we speak, err, as I write, I guess). I’m not sure what happens now, but I’m full of warmth and hope.

Love,

Belle

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

In another side of the castle, Jack Frost too is feeling warm and hopeful. It’s been a great day. He’s still in the games despite the massive cut (Durmstrang is down to himself, North, Astrid, Hiccup,
and Shan Yu). He stopped by a great party going in Gryffindor Tower and got to taste some excellent homebrewed mead. And now, he’s heading up to Elsa’s room to surprise her with a trip outside.

He knocks on her door. She answers it promptly. Her hair is done in an uncharacteristically loose braid. She’s already in her nightgown - a very thin piece of clothing that is mildly distracting.

“C’mon Els it’s only ten thirty.” He protests before she gets the chance to pull a “I’m going to bed, Jack” on him.

She sighs, but the twitch of her lips betrays her annoyed facade. She’s happy he’s here. She lets him into her sitting room.

“I’m guessing we’re going out?”

He knows it’s a slip of the tongue but boy does he wish it were true. To be officially dating this stunning woman would be spectacular.

“...side.” She finishes the word like there hadn’t been this tiny pause.

He nods.

“I’ll go and get dressed then, stay here.” She struts back into her bedroom.

Elsa is the first person he’s ever had a serious interest in. He’s dated a few girls before, not nearly as many as the gossip columns have speculated, but no one special. Elsa is more than just beautiful - though that is why he'd first noticed her, he'll admit. She kept his interest because of how different she was from him. She’s so reserved. It feels so rewarding to learn more about her. She’s so serious on the outside that every laugh he gets out of her is a treat. It’s interesting figuring out how her mind works and analyzing her well hidden feelings. He has plenty of close friends, but there’s no one he’d rather spend time with than Elsa Arendelle.

She comes out of her room with her hair back it’s classic bun and a fashionable coat over a sweater and slacks. She looks ready to strike a pose like a model in one of those fashion shows Pippa watches on Youtube.
He grins, “Alright, so, I thought we could enjoy snow on foot today.”

They’ve gone on a few broom rides since returning from winter holidays - it was torture not seeing her for weeks and cemented the fact that he had fallen incredibly hard for her - but Elsa had not been super keen on being out in the snow.

“Oh, I was looking forward to a broom ride.”

“Imagine you saying that in the beginning of the year.” He laughs. She actually likes these rides. She hasn’t clung to him since the first time, but still wraps her arms around him securely.

“Yes, congratulations Jack, I can enjoy a ride with you from time to time. I suppose you can celebrate this victory.”

“And I think the best way to celebrate would be to build a snowman or make snow angels.” He doesn’t bring up snowball fights because it’s super unlikely she’d agree to that.

He’s gotten good at reading her expressions. This one, her eyebrows barely furrowed and her pursed lips a straight line always arises when she’s nervous.

“I, uh, haven’t made a snowman in years, Jack. I’m not sure if I remember how.”

“I can help! You said you loved playing in the snow as a kid.”

“Yes, as a child. I’m an adult now.”

He rolls his eyes and says, “Adults have fun as much as kids can.” He grabs her hand. “Let’s go.”

He doesn’t let go of her hand even as she acquiesces, and walks alongside him. Basically, they’re holding hands. Except, she’s wearing her ever-present gloves, so he’s not touching her skin directly. She doesn’t let go though. They’ve been having moments like these that cross the friendship line and it’s both thrilling and terrifying. He really likes her.
When they get outside, he starts working on the base of their snowman, he obnoxiously narrates step by step, making her chuckle. She doesn’t really help, but seems to be okay watching him work. He doesn’t know why she’s nervous, but he’s already pushed her to come out, so he’s not going to push her to participate.

It surprises him when she kneels down and starts on her own ball, for the snowman’s middle. Her ball is nearly perfectly spherical, sculpted with Elsa’s trademark precision.

“And the student has become the teacher.” He says as she places her slightly smaller mound of snow on top of his.

“Please, I’m always the teacher.” Her sassiness is so fun.

“Hey, I’ve helped with too many arithmancy problems to be smeared like this.”

“Alright that’s fair Mr. Frost, now, shall we finish off the head?”

He has a ball of snow roll up for them with his frosty magic. Like he hopes she would, she smiles at the small feat.

He places the the head on the snowman and instructs Elsa to find some stones for eyes and buttons, as well as a couple of sticks for hands.

“I brought this guy for the nose.” He pulls out a carrot from his jacket pocket.

“How did you know I would agree to this?”

“If you didn’t, I’d just have light snack.”

The finished product is excellent. “What do we want to name him Els?”

“I don’t know. Does he have to have a name?”
“Let’s go with Frosty. Very classic.”

“Isn’t that name of the snowman that came alive?”

“Yeah, Pippa loves him.”

He lays down in the fresh snow near the snowman and starts to make an angel. “Join me.”

“No thank you.”

“That’s fair, an angel making an angel might be a bit too cliche.” He says, his eyes closed, still laying with his arms stretched out.

“Comparing a girl to an angel, now that’s cliche.”

He pops up carefully, so as not to ruin his creation. “Oh how you wound me.”

“You’re so silly.”

“Hey I can be serious.”

He comes close to her then, very close and her eyes widen a tiny bit, but she doesn’t back away.

Her mistake. He throws a snowball in her neck.

“OH YOU ARSE.” She’s laughing though and rushes to make one to get her back.

They get into a very serious snowball fight. So serious, that Elsa’s whole face goes red AND she loses her gloves, halfway into. Finally Jack surrenders, falling back into the snow.
“You win, you win!”

She gets one more snow ball to land on him before running over.

“Congratulations, Snow Queen, I think you’ve defended your title.”

He makes her a crown out of ice in that moment. “Here is your prize.”

She lets him crown her.

“How could I have forgotten that you’re actually a queen, not an angel.”

He comes closer. This might be the moment to kiss her --

“Actually Jack,” She hesitates, “I am… a real queen.”

He laughs even though it’s not a funny joke - even taken as a deadpan.

“No, I’m being very serious. I’m the reigning monarch of the Norwegian magical community.”

His mouth opens involuntarily, but he closes it. “I guess that explains your regal air.”

“I just want you to know that I’m not someone easy to be with, romantically, I mean I’m always busy with my governmental duties, despite the fact that the MP and ministry does more of the actual lawmaking, and I have very many obligations --”

He smiles, “I think I have an obligation to shut you up now. I like you a lot Elsa. You’re not going to scare me off.”
He kisses her to a backdrop of falling snow in the light of a full moon.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Kudos & comments are really appreciated. Have a <3 and a ( : : ) from me and a wonderful day. ps songs for this chapter are: The Fall by Imagine Dragons (what a perfect title for this chapter), when the party's over by Billie Eilish (some Mulan angst), Work Song by Hozier (for Belle and the Beast), Creep by Radiohead (just for the cheesy angel comment)
Chapter 19: This is Love

Chapter Summary

Peter apologizes to Wendy. Naveen helps Tiana at work. Esmeralda and Phoebus get a hotel room. Anna isn't ready.

Chapter Notes

WARNING! This chapter has a scene that makes even me uncomfortable with an older guy pressuring a younger girl into sex. If you don't want to read it, you don't need to to understand the story. Also just know that I fully disapprove and am not supporting this kind of behavior at all. YOU DON'T OWE A MAN ANYTHING! (Similar aggressive sidenote: I am very pro Esmeralda's sensuality/hypersexuality. There is no slutshaming in this house!)

Okay, so, besides that icky part of the chapter this one's really sweet/cute. (Catch me using the sweetness as a foil to the assholery.) I hope you like it. Please leave kudos and comments (I reply to each one and I love your support!!) and read the endnotes for some me fangirling over my own characters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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 ...

This is Love...
The last time he’d heard from her had been a Christmas card in the Post. That was over a month ago. They’ve made eye contact in corridors, but he hasn’t pulled her over or written a note. She deserves more than a barely legible apology or an improvised speech in a crowded public place. Wendy deserves something romantic.

*Eww*, the thought of romance still triggers a gag reflex in Peter, but he’s getting better at suppressing it. He hasn’t exactly had the chance to talk to anyone about his problems. There isn’t anyone to talk to. All of his friends are younger than him in age and it’s too awkward to ask a professor for advice, even someone as cool as the groundskeeper - Tarzan. His problems are much too deep and personal for him to feel comfortable talking about them with anyone. Even thinking about them for too long makes him feel all sweaty and gross. But he has thought about them. His abandonment issues and trouble with authority might have *something* to do with being abandoned at an age old enough to understand what he’d lost, but young enough not to have learned anything from it. He can’t deal with growing up because the narrative he’s built for himself about himself is about being young. It’s really all he knows, being a kid surrounded by kids.

And it’s not like he wants to stop being himself. He just...has to stop hurting people. Like Wendy. He’s starting to accept that you can’t scheme your way to the things you want. You have to work for them. The effort he’s put in his magical education has certainly paid off. Hopefully this romantic effort will too.

He doesn’t have any money, so it’s not like he could buy her a gift. But he’s made her a present and he’s practiced a well thought out apology, and even planned some activities, if she does forgive him.

She’s sitting with Eilonwy and Taran at a small table in the Great Hall. He approaches cautiously.

“Hey, I was wondering if I could talk to you in private.”

“Sure, Peter.” Her smile is polite, but it’s a smile.

She follows him outside. It’s awkward, this silence, but he thinks the speech will be better in the alcove he found.

When they get there, he starts talking, slowly.
“I’ve asked you here, so I can apologize. Are you open to an apology?”

She nods and takes a seat on the stone bench. She looks so pretty against the ivy covered walls.

“So, well, I was really immature, obviously. I know what I did was wrong. The prank was way too mean and I’m relieved everyone impacted is okay now. And I was really dismissive of both your feelings and my own feelings for you. I’ve done a lot of self reflection since we stopped talking and I know it’s not an excuse, but it’s hard for me to believe that growing up is such a good thing when adults do shit like leave their kid at an arcade and ever come back. I also don’t understand relationships and love very well, I mean platonic and romantic ones, since I’ve been on my own for so long…”

“Obviously, again, that isn’t an excuse. I take full responsibility for hurting you and giving you mixed signals. And I want to be better. I know I’ll never deserve someone as lovely as you, but I hope I can be forgiven.”

“Wow. That was unexpected.” Wendy pauses. “So what do you want from me, exactly?”

“Forgiveness.” He furrows his brows. “I thought I said that a few times, I might have gotten the words wrong, sorry.”

“No I get that, but like what’s your best case scenario here.”

“You ignore common sense and snog me?”

She laughs. It’s wonderful to hear her laugh again.

“Well Peter, I think I can forgive you, if you’re really serious.”

“I am. I really am. I haven’t pranked in months and I have all Os and--”

She hugs him.
It shocks him for a moment, but then he hugs her back.

“I’ve missed you.” She says into his chest. “But you can’t do that again. If you’re with me you’re with me okay. Like boyfriend girlfriend, date to the dance—”

“Valentine.” He interrupts her and pulls away from the hug to grab his present for her. It’s a birdhouse he whittled out of some wood he found in the forest (fine he’s back to breaking some rules, but everyone breaks that rule). And there’s a card.

Wendy smiles again, this time the smile meets her shining eyes. “Did you write me a heartfelt letter, Peter Pan? In cursive? Wow, I’m shocked.”

“I had Minnie help me with the lettering.” He’s so relieved she likes it.

“‘Dear Wendybird,’” She reads, “‘I built you a home, but you’re always free to fly away when you want. I think you are clever and fun and exciting and beautiful and kind and I could go on forever but this card is only so big’.—Aww that is so sweet— ‘I like you so much. Will you be my valentine? Love, Peter.”

He thinks he’s blushing, which is totally awkward because again, he’s Peter Pan. All of this is very uncharacteristic and difficult but she looks so happy that it was definitely worth it.

She kisses him on the cheek. “I cannot believe this is the same boy that said—”

“Because, I’m not. I told you, I’m going to be better.”

Wendy beams.

“I actually thought that we could go to Hogsmeade if you want. We could hold hands and walk around. And maybe get some ice cream? Like a first official date.”

“I swear I’m dreaming.”
“Impossible, we aren’t furiously making out. If this were a dream, you know I’d be shirtless.” He says to get her to laugh again.

It works, “Yep, not a dream. Dream Peter would be a total gentleman.”

“Well, I can’t change my whole personality for you.” He smirks. “I’m still Peter Pan.”

“Well can the infamous Peter stand to hold hands in public?”

He laces his fingers with hers without further comment, but his smirk shifts into a genuine smile.

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Madam Pudifoot’s is a good gig. Lottie loves it, all the frills and lace in the decor. She comes by for tea whenever Tiana’s working. And while Tiana isn’t a huge fan of the tea shop’s decor, she enjoys making tea and biscuits in the morning most days. This is the first real job she’s had at Hogwarts that’s close to what she wants to do with her life. She’s getting closer and closer - pretty soon that shop in Diagon Alley is going to be hers.

Today that’s the only thought keeping her going. Madam Pudifoot’s on Valentine’s day is crazy. She’s been here since the early morning helping her boss get everything decorated and ready and now she’s busy zipping from table to table fulfilling orders and giving refills.

The bell at the door chimes. It’s Naveen. He waves her over. She rolls her eyes at him and finishes pouring a bubbly hufflepuff some rose tea, before coming over.

“What do you want? If you’re ordering you need to come to the register and my coworker will take your order.”

He shakes his head. “I wanted to offer my services. To help.”
“You want to wait tables?”

“Whatever it is you need, just let me know.” He gives her a tentative grin.

He’s been trying things like this since Christmas. Trying to make amends. He paid her for the tutoring sessions. He keeps offering to do random favors like getting her room made over or helping her with work.

And until now she’s been refusing. She’s not exactly the most forgiving kind of person. And what Naveen did. Ugh. But her shift’s until six and an extra pair of hands would be a godsend.

“No pay necessary. And I’ll do whatever you say.” He says, “I’m a quick learner, when I want to be.”

“Okay go to the broom closet,” She points to the door, “and grab a mop - table three had a spill.”

Naveen is pretty good at following Tiana’s very detailed instructions and honestly seems thrilled that she’s letting him help her out. The hours pass without spectacle, nor much talking.

“Now that your shift is over,” He says at six, “would you like to get dinner? I do not wish to push, but if you’re open, I would love to treat you.”

“I don’t want to be treated.” She says firmly. She’s not letting him try to romance her here. And there’s no point on spending money when their meals at the castle are delicious anyway, she finishes her sentence, “But you can join me at my table at Hogwarts.”

“Great.”

They walk together along the trail back to the Castle in silence.

He abruptly stops a few minutes in. “Tiana, I will apologize forever if you will allow me too.” He says, “I am so sorry for hurting you and Charlotte. For my selfishness. I promise you, I will be better. I have been better.”
The last sentence is shakey, like he doesn’t know if he has the right to say that he’s improved.

To be fair, he has. He’s been nothing short of a gentleman, if you excuse a bit of harmless pranking with his friends. He’s been courteous and helpful and balanced being repentant with being respectful of her space.

She decides then and there, possibly against her better (bitter?) judgement, “I’ll give you a second chance.”

He spins her in a circle, catching her totally off guard, “Ashidanza! Thank you, Tiana.”

She smiles, her heart retracing the steps it’d taken a few months ago. He’s still charming with his earnest expressions. She hopes he will keep this good streak going. She doesn’t know if she can stand another betrayal - if he fucks up again, she won’t just lose her trust in him, but probably people generally. She wants to believe that he can be more than the person he was, that there’s good in him piercing through the self interest that pushed him on a path of hedonism. That there’s good in everyone. So she does. She opens herself up again.

They sit in the dining hall for hours, catching up. Naveen is so easy to talk to, so charismatic. Falling for him is as easy as the first time. Easier, even, now that their banter is truly harmless. He compliments her with every blink of his long lashes.

“You’re more stunning than the evening star.”

“Your deserts are much better, truly divine.”

“You’ve inspired me, Tiana!”

“Your voice is lovelier than the song birds.”

“You look so beautiful tonight.”

She would think it insincere flattery if it were anyone else on any other day. But Naveen on Valentine’s day is expected to be cheesy and gushy. But his eyes shine with a vulnerability she’s never seen in a man before. She never imagined in their years of shallow bickering that he’d ever sweet talk her like this or confide in her as he has.

“May I walk you to your room?” Little things, like asking before doing.
“To my room, yes.” She makes it clear she’s not inviting him inside.

“I would very much like to kiss your lips.” He says, “But I have not earned it yet. Will you allow me to kiss your lovely hand.”

She laughs and gives him her right hand. He kisses it solemnly. “Fairwell, Tiana.”

So over dramatic. Tiana laughs.

“Goodnight, Naveen.” she says, closing the door.

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“So I’m assuming you have plans with Phoebus?” Pocahontas says as she folds some laundry on her bed.

Esmeralda fumes. “Polka Dots, I fucking swear I’m going to die if we don’t have sex tonight. DIE!”

Nakoma laughs, “Oh come on, don’t be so dramatic.”

“I haven’t had sex in MONTHS. He keeps wanting to wait and take things slow and make it special. I haven’t even seen his penis.”

“Do you think there’s something wrong with it?” Pocahontas looks pensive. “Not that there’d be anything wrong with there being something wrong, it’s just, honestly kind of weird that he’s been dating you for over three months and hasn’t been tempted at all.”

“Maybe he’s religious,” Nakoma clutches her cross pendant.

“It’s neither of those things,” Esmeralda says. After a beat she admits, “I asked.”
“He is a virgin though,” The hypersexual teen reveals. “He hasn’t had any serious relationship. I mean his parents set him up with this girl named Fleur-de-Lys, but it did not end well. She totally cheated on him.”

“Ouch.”

“I guess I understand why he’s wanted to take it slow.” Pocahontas says, “He wants his first time to be romantic and special and with someone who’s not cheating on him.”

“It’s romantic.” Nakoma declares, “Like me and Kocoum saving ourselves for marriage.”

“Okay, you and Kocoum not having sex has way more to do with how awkward you are than Jesus.” Esmeralda quipps, “But I guess I won’t drop dead if we don’t have sex tonight. But I will take a long shower.”

“Eww.”

“Oh please, I know you masturbate, I caught you last year.”

“What?”

“Yeah I came back late from a hookup and I heard you.”

Nakoma turns bright red. “Why did you have to bring that up?!”

“You tried to shame me first.”

“Okay chill, guys.” Pocahontas the mediator decides to step in. “Pleasuring yourself is totally normal and a really weird thing to be arguing about.”

She moves aside her pie of fresh clothing and plops into bed. “Why can’t you two bond over having lovely boyfriends to spend Valentine’s day with?”
“Aw, I’m sorry, love.” Nakoma comes closer to her.

“I’m not. Bitch, you’ve had like a month to get over John. It’s time for you to move on. You’re too pretty to be wallowing over being single.” Esmeralda says.

Pocahontas sighs. “I’m sorry. Honestly I’m fine with being single. It just sucks today. And yeah I could start dating, but I’m really not interested in anyone.”

“Just promise me you won’t wallow in bed while we’re on our dates today.” Esmeralda says as she begins to apply makeup to her face. “I can’t have a good time knowing you’re sad.”

“Well, I hope you and Phoebus have a very good time and you’re not thinking about me during it.” Pocahontas winks.

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Esmeralda is not thinking about her best friend at all during this date. Phoebus isn’t doing the lame Madame Pudifoot’s thing. They’re actually going out to drinks in the nearby muggle town, which is much more her speed.

“How did you find out about this place?” She asks over a pint. They’re in this posh looking pub.

“I’m actually from this town. Hang out here a lot over the summer.”

“That’s great.” She smiles.

“Hey, listen, I know you said you were fine about getting axed from the games, but I wanted to say I’m sorry.” She reaches for his hand. “Sorry like I’m sympathetic, I hope you don’t feel bad because you shouldn’t.”

There’s something about this boy that leaves her flustered when she talks.

“I’m seriously fine, Esme. I’m not like Phillip with the whole pursuit of glory thing. I really only
joined the games to get attention from fit girls.” He winks.

“Well you have my attention.” She guides her feet up his ankle.

“I know, and I’ve been thinking about that.” He clears his throat. “I thought it might be nice if we spent a night in a hotel.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I booked us a room. I hope that’s okay.”

“That is so sweet.”

Esmeralda, the resident slut of Hogwarts, has had sex pretty much everywhere. In a car, in the woods, in the bathroom, in a closet, in a classroom… but never in a nice hotel room.

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And this hotel room is nice.

“Woah.”

The room is large, decked out with a fancy telly, stocked minibar, and decorated in a really sleek, modern fashion.

She plops down on the king sized bed. The comforter on the bed is so soft when she lies down. Nothing like the itchy fabric used by the motels she’s stayed at.

“Wait a second, are you rich? Are you like John Smith and some sort of oil tycoon?”

“My father’s a pretty senior member of the British Army, but we’re nowhere near Smith level well
off.” He blushed.

He doesn’t act rich. His clothes are perfectly normal. He had an awful, definitely not done by a fancy hairdresser haircut, that he’d thankfully let her fix. (Esmeralda has been cutting her own hair her whole life, basically.)

He’s never mentioned vacations, or really much about his family at all. Like her, he’s an only child, except unlike her, he actually has present parents. He still writes home weekly - which is extra cute, now that Esmeralda knows they live close enough for him to visit. She is confident they respond to the letters.

The Carters are nothing like her family. Her aunt and uncle like to gamble away the money they get for her care. Her mother is in rehab. She’s never met her father, and knows nothing about him other than the fact that he’s Romani.

“You’re so normal,” She sighs. “Like this is so normal and nice.”

“What prompted that?” He comes and sits next to her on the side of the bed.

“I don’t know, I guess this room and seeing the town you live in. It’s so pleasant. You’re totally well-adjusted and have no trust issues or just issues in general.”

He nods, but says, “Hey, please don’t feel sad. I didn’t want to make you feel bad, bringing you here.”

“No you’re not making me sad. I’m perfectly happy being not normal, it makes me interesting, you know? And come on, I would not be into your beard if I didn’t have my daddy issues.”

She laughs, trying to turn this into a joke. He doesn’t let her.

He hugs her sweetly, both of his strong arms around her. “I know I can’t make up for your family issues, but I’m here.”

He kisses her shoulder. “I love you.”
The words catch her off guard. Not that she hasn’t thought them herself, felt them creeping up her throat when he did something silly or sweet or just so him. She’s just not used to them. It’s not like she doesn’t trust them or doesn’t trust him. She does. Pocahontas and her dad say they love her with the utmost sincerity. Phoebus is probably the second most trustworthy person she knows (first place goes to Quasi). It’s just that this whole thing. Her being loved and loving a guy. It’s uncharted territory. Kind of terrifying.

But she’s a Gryffindor and she faces what she fears. “I love you too.”

She kisses him, her right hand caressing his cheek, her left putting her hand under his shirt.

He kisses her deeper. Their tongues move quickly. She loves when they kiss like this, but hates how every other time it’s left her thirsty for more. Today though, she thinks he will let her take off his shirt when she slips her hands under it. When he does she moves both her hands to his back and explores to muscles. She pushes him down and gets on top of him. He’s hard. She grins and takes off her shirt. She’s wearing this deep emerald green corset underneath her blouse. The corset is very sexy, kind of like victorian era meets string bikini. Leaves very little to the imagination and makes her feel very confident.

“Wow.”

“Mmm.” she smiles and gets back to kissing him. Then she gets annoyed that he’s still wearing trousers. Off those go. Then off his socks. Off his boxer. Off her skirt. Off her corset. Off her thong.

The sex is the best she’s ever had. Not because of his skill or size, but because it’s with someone she really loves.

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

Anna really loves Hans, but she’s not ready. She feels awful. Here they are making out in his dormitory room on Valentine’s day with candles and rose petals and she just can’t.

He’s taken her shirt off. Taken his shirt off.
She’s sitting in his lap with her legs around his torso and this is lovely, though she’s filled with butterflies, when he goes for her bra. Her boobs aren’t exactly her favorite part of her body. They just came in last year and they’re still tiny, but she lets him cup them, kiss them. It’s all a lot to take in. When he tries for her skirt though-

“Stop.” She breathes, “I mean, can we not?”

She’s so nervous.

He sighs. “Anna we’ve been dating for months, I know you’re a virgin, but come on. It’s fucking valentine’s day.”

“I know and I thought I’d be ready by now, but I just.”

He looks angry which makes this so much worse.

“Just go. I’m going to finish on my own.”

She nods, tears welling up in her eyes.

“I can’t wait forever, you know.”

“I know.” She whimpers, “Soon, I promise.”

.o.O.o.

She takes a long shower. Washing away the tears that have sprung up. He’s left a mark on her breast that makes her feel claimed. She touches herself and tries to imagine him touching her, but it’s just too much and she starts crying again.

Anna wishes she could talk to Elsa about this. She bets Elsa knows all about sex. She’s probably having it with Jack Frost. She desperately wants to understand how it works. How to be good and not freak out.
But Elsa would just hate Hans more if she knew. She thinks of her as a baby and not a sexually autonomous teenager. So she turns to magazines for advice instead, spending the night reading about oral sex.

Chapter End Notes

AHH poor Anna! :( But as a Darling Pan shipper I'm so proud of my baby Peter. And I'm also proud of Naveen. I hope you agree that I handled the redemption arcs okay.
Chapter 20: Those That Can't Do

Chapter Summary

A look into the lives of some of the Hogwarts professors.

Chapter Notes

So,, Am I still writing this fic? Honestly, I don't even know anymore. I just kind of felt like writing a chapter today so I did. Do I expect myself to write another chapter anytime soon, not really? But it's possible...especially if ya'll, ya know, send some lovely kudos and comments my way ;) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Those Who Can’t Do...

There’s a pile of papers at the desk of Jane Porter. Essays by her dedicated fourth years on various fiery creatures - those that either lived in fire or emitted it in some way. The essays are three parchment pages each and at this point in the year Professor Porter already has an idea of how they’re going to look. Ariel will likely get an E, marks off for going on some odd tangent. Kristoff usually does quite well on papers, but he’s struggled with this unit, which is to say got scared off
by nearly every creature they’ve discussed and thus been distracted during her lectures. When Professor Porter asked him about it he said that he’s more of a cold creature kind of guy. (He knows so much about leucrota that if Jane wasn’t sure of her extensive records on the animals in the forbidden forest, she would have guessed he’d met one before). His paper will probably get an A this time around. She’s worried he might not continue to pursue an O.W.L. in Care of Magical Creatures, which would be a shame since he really is talented when it comes to the creatures that can’t burn him.

Rapunzel will of course get an O, as will Mulan, they’re tied for highest marks in their class. Both of them have magical creatures as well - Mulan has confided in her that she has a Dragon Fireball hatchling at home (Jane is almost certain, based on her questions that this baby dragon is not at home nor a pet she has at her parent’s approval, but since no one has been harmed and Mulan is one of the most capable students she knows, she hasn’t said anything about it to anyone but the headmaster - who agreed that it wasn’t cause for much concern.) Rapunzel has a moke which she’d apparently befriended while living in a Tower (Professor Porter was one of Rapunzel’s first confidants after coming to Hogwarts so she knows far too much about what that dreaded Gothel did to her).

There are papers from other students too, but Professor Porter would be lying if she said these three weren’t her favorite. She has said that lie at the start of every term. Well technically, her promise was that favoritism would not affect anyone’s grade in the class, so creeping wouldn’t benefit anyone - which is true. She’s never marked anyone up just because she liked them or marked anyone down for being disagreeable - the fact that Jafar has never gotten less than an E in her class is a testament to that. She always saves her favorites’ papers for last - as sort of a treat to end the evening with so it’s unlikely she’ll get to them tonight. She picks up her quill, dips it in red ink and begins with Art Framagucci’s paper.

She doesn’t notice how long she’s been grading until Tarzan comes into the hut.

“Please tell me you at least ate something.”

Her habit of getting lost in her work is something she’s picked up from her father and something that translates as much into paperwork as it does just wild African adventures.

She smiles sheepishly. “I’ve had tea.”

He groans and heads to the kitchen to get some stew started. Sometimes Jane completely forgets that her husband hasn’t always been apart of British civilization- like when he cooks for them. It’s particularly remarkable, not because African people are uncivilized (that’s a notion we’ve thankfully left in the 19th century), but because he was literally raised outside of civilization with gorillas and diricawls and the first Fwooper Jane had ever seen. They’d lived out there for five
years, Jane doing magizoologist research and teaching Tarzan magic, before they’d been recruited by Headmaster Mouse. Jane likes to think that they were asked to come to Hogwarts because of her reputation in magizoology, but she knows that it’s mostly because Tarzan is remarkable with even the most dangerous of magical creatures, having living as more of a creature than wizard for most of his life.

She does get to the papers of Mulan, Kristoff, and Rapunzel before eating. Kristoff did his paper on Fire Dwelling Salamanders - the only creature he wasn’t terrified of. It’s a well written piece, but a bit short and honestly too easy for a fourth year, so he does get an A. Mulan writes about Ashwinders, like many of the other students. But unlike the other students she definitely referenced more than simply the required reading. This is a N.E.W.T level paper, really, especially considering the fact that Mulan wrote in the tiniest font possible to get it under the length requirement. Professor Porter decides that after this paper she definitely has to enforce a minimum font size for her preOWL students. The O.W.Ls do have a minimum font but usually it’s not an issue for anyone, especially fourth years to meet it. Still, she gives Mulan an O, because she hasn’t enforced the font size before and it really is a marvelous paper. Rapunzel gets an O on her paper on Blast-Ended Skrewts and Ariel’s paper on fire crabs is good enough for an O. The Professor doesn’t take off for her paragraph detailing the different kinds of jewels a fire crab can have (mostly because, unlike last time, the tangent doesn’t take up half a page of parchment).

“Okay it’s ready, come.”

He slurps his soup, a habit he refuses to drop, and chews with his mouth open, a habit he still hasn’t figured out how to drop, but unlike twenty year old Jane, thirty year old Jane doesn’t care much about table manners anymore.

They talk about their students, the games, the visiting schools and after a long winding conversation on Tarzan’s conversations with the Drumstrang students on dragons, Jane decides it’s time to just get it out.

“I have something important to tell you.”

She grins. “I went to see Master Sweet and it’s official, I’m pregnant.”

He picks her up and spins her around in his arms. “That’s incredible!”

He drops her back down as quickly as he grabbed her. “Wait, is it bad for me to spins you now that you’re with child?”
“No, I’m quite alright, my love. Sweet just gave me some potions and told me that my body will make its limitations quite clear as I balloon up.”

“Oh this is just wonderful.” He kisses her deeply with such love that she melts.

.o.*o.O.o*.o.

“Oh that’s wonderful!” Bud exclaims.

Right there on the screen is his wedding to his wife, Lucille.

He has been mentoring Lewis on something of a new version of a Pensieve. That’s the easiest way of explaining the invention. It’s not quite as charm crazy as pensieves normally are, but instead works sort of like legilimency. The device, what Lewis calls a memory scanner, combines magic and machinery to allow the wearer to access any memory they had, even ones trapped in their own subconsciousness, details unimportant enough to be clear.

For the test of this device, Lewis had separately questioned Bud and Lucille on the details of their wedding, important questions and trivial ones. They both couldn’t exactly remember certain details, but now it was all there, as if it was yesterday.

“So, you said you couldn’t remember if Professor Robinson’s brother made a toast at the reception. According to the memory scanner, he did. Now, Professor Robinson, does this speech sound like the one your brother gave?”

He nods. “I only remembered the joke about the first day I brought Lucille home, but he said the joke exactly as I remember.”

“Well, there definitely has to be more testing, and I probably should ask Professor Fauna to make sure the charms stuck, but I think this is promising!” The kid exclaims.

“It’s incredible!” Lucille corrects him.

“Your parents must be so proud of you.” Bud smiles. “I sure am.”
“Oh, well, you see, I don’t have any parents. I was dropped off at an orphanage when I was a baby…”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay. Hogwarts is so much better than the orphanage. My roommate was starting to get tired of me experimenting in our room, but now I can experiment in the lab whenever I want! And before you tested it, I checked my memory of the day I was dropped off. My mom didn’t seem like she wanted to let me go, you know? I could tell she was crying, which means she loved me.”

“Of course she loved you, how could she not, you’re a great kid and I’m sure you were one adorable baby.” Lucille assures him.

“Well, it’s nice to know for sure. And I also saw that she apparated, which means she was magical too.” He grins then pauses for a moment before saying, “I was thinking about trying to find her, if no one adopts me anytime soon. I don’t have much to go off of but you know, it might be worthwhile to try.”

“Well, as long as you-”

“I know, I shouldn’t get my hopes up. It’s just that every time I’ve had adoption interviews something crazy has happened - usually bottled up magic related stuff, but this summer it wasn’t even that.” He sighs.

Lucille wraps him into a hug. “Oh Lewis, I’m sure you’ll be adopted soon.”

Bud smiles, “Listen, it’s getting pretty late. Isn’t it past your curfew. I’ll write you a pass and you can head back up to your tower.”

Lewis nods and takes the slip. Once he’s out of the room Lucille turns to him, “Can we?”

“I was hoping you’d ask.”
They’re going to adopt Lewis.

While some Professors are gaining children, it feels to Flora like she’s lost a child.

Briar Rose is still not talking to her, despite being truly on the mend. She dropped Herbology at the start of the spring term. The Headmaster had told her she’d asked to reduce her course load to focus on healing, but Flora knows this is because Briar hates her now.

She watches her from afar, cheering on Philip in the fourth round of the game, dining with her friends in the Great Hall, going on strolls on the grounds, and she wishes it were enough but it isn’t. She’s never had a child of her own. She’d always thought one day she’d fall in love, but it never happened. Fauna’s husband passed in the last Wizarding War, before they had kids. Merryweather’s girlfriend has talked about adopting, but they have yet to be engaged. It doesn’t seem like there will ever be a child in her life the way there was with Briar.

When she’d agreed to watch the baby, she’d never expected to believe her own lie. But at some point she did. She saw Briar Rose as her own. She cared for her the way she imagined a mother would, brushing her hair and helping her with schoolwork, making her tea when she was stressed. Losing her is more painful than anything she’s ever endured and she is alone in her grief.

Her sisters are still in communication with Briar. They say she calls them the unAunts, and though she doesn’t talk to them the way she used to, she hasn’t dropped their classes. She says hello when they pass each other. Clearly, Briar still blames her.

And she has ever right to. They had the closest bond. It was her responsibility more than anyone else, Merryweather, Fauna, even Leah.

She’s awake now still, in the dead of night, crying when she hears a knock at the door.

“Professor Flora.” It’s Minnie. “We’re having an emergency meeting.”

“Now what is this meeting about?” Kida demands. “Is another child hurt?”
“No, not yet, at least.” Headmaster Mouse sighs. “I know I haven’t been as transparent as you all would have liked.”

“You damn well haven’t!” Kida is outraged. “I cannot believe that after not one, but two attempted murders you haven’t said anything. You’re worse than Dumbledoor!”

She knows she should keep her voice down, that she needs to treat the Headmaster with respect, but by fucking Merlin, he lost the right to respect a long time ago. She would have personally fought Michael Mouse if Snow had died, but she was saved by a combination of muggle and magical medicine. A few charms to slow the damage and surgery.

“You have every right to be upset with me. I’ve called this meeting to explain at least what we think we know now. We being me and the aurors assigned to Hogwarts.”

He motions to the two wizards standing to the right of their desks.

“Hello, I’m Moana and this is my partner Maui. I’ll get right to the chase, we originally thought the major incidences of threats to the students were isolated matters. However, in the last few months--”

“--We’ve gotten intel, after questioning Millicent, on this group of dark magic users. They’re not confirmed to be related to deatheaters, but they’re also not confirmed to not be deatheaters--” Maui interrupts.

Glaring, Moana cuts him off and continues. “They’re deeply underground and as far as we know have small numbers, but we have reason to believe that they could be targeting these students for a reason. And, there is more than a small chance this has to do with the Guardian’s Prophecy.”

“I’d like to help with this investigation.”

Moana nods. “Actually we were hoping you all would. You’re all experts in your fields and while we have aurors of different talents in our department, there is some evidence that requires greater expertise.”
Moana nods at Maui and he says, “We expect this to stay completely underwraps. The official stance of the ministry is that the incidences were random and that with us here there’s no way anything else can happen. If anyone finds out, there’s likely to be hysteria and worse these dark magic users will go deeper into hiding, making it impossible for us to catch them.”

Sometimes, Kida wishes she had become an auror. They say those who can’t do, teach, but she could do. She got Os in all the necessary classes - even passed the extra exam the British Ministry required since she was a citizen of Atlantis. She had just thought she could make a greater impact by shaping minds. Now those minds she’s supposed to be shaping are at risk.

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUNNN. Did you think this story wasn't going to have some big boss villain? Well, honestly, I didn't either because I originally scrapped that idea to make the story more fluffy but it's back on now. A couple apologies 1)Sorry this chapter was so short, it was supposed to be a sort of bonus chapter since we don't usually see these POVs. and 2) I know I spoiled to y'all that Snow would be okay in writing the shooting scene but I can't believe I didn't address it in the Valentine's day chapter - super sorry that I left y'all hanging for like a year.

End Notes

I hope you enjoyed. Please give kudos/comments. :) Disclaimer: Characters and settings belong to their respective owners. I'm just interpreting them in different ways.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!