Flowers of Flesh, Blood and Stardust

by misakikinomoto

Summary

For there to be betrayal, there would have to have been trust first.

And Astrid had trusted him for years- and regardless of his betrayal and the pain he had caused her, she trusted him still.

When Walburga gets Astrid pregnant with a forbidden spell, Astrid is determined to do this on her own and not involve Sirius Black. No matter how much she has grown to hate him.

After all, she would rather die because she betrayed their families than live because she intentionally hurt him.

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A story about love, forgiveness, guilt and recovery.

Notes

Hey guys,
This is a fic I started a while back. I know I haven't been too active, but I really have not had
the time. I'm currently in my second year of my MBA, and I will probably only get busier till I graduate. I am writing on the side, but editing and typing has not been happening.

This fic was written back when I was going through a particularly dark point in my head space, and well. You will see the outcome of that. Due to how dark this fic is, I am struggling to write it when I am in a normal headspace, so I don't think you can really expect regular updates till I manage to get to the lighter part of the fic where the recovery actually begins.

I hope you like the fic because I know it may not be everyone's cup of tea. Its increadibly dark, more than a little non-con. And I personally felt like it fit considering the time period the fic is set in and the looming war ahead.

The fic is set in their sixth year, and may actually proceed to what happens after the pregnancy and the war itself. I let the fic create itself, so I'm not too sure on that front. There may be occasional side stories every now and then if I feel up to it.

Additionally, I have a number of mixes for the characters involved in the fic that have been up for some time on my 8tracks account: http://8tracks.com/holding-out-for-a-hero/collections/the-star-child-universe

Anyway, I hope you like it and look forward to seeing what you guys think!
“Oh, for heaven’s sake,” said the older woman, cleaning the young girl up, “Astrid, it may be just a meeting for you, but you could at least try to look presentable.

The young girl shrugged disinterestedly. Her name was Astrid Arundell. She was a 16 year old witch, and she was incredibly bored and annoyed with her mother.

And Sirius Flipping Black.

Don’t even get her started on that boy.

She barely managed to contain her fury as she followed her mother into the Black home, shuddering briefly at the memories she had of this place. No matter how many times she had come here, having grown up here for the better part of her life, nothing could prepare her for the darkness the home radiated.

It wasn’t just darkness she could feel, but sadness, pain and suffering.

“Astrid,” said a deceptively warm voice, and she turned, her eyes meeting the dark eyes of Walburga Black.

Astrid painted a polite smile on her face as she greeted the older woman, but was dreading this entire meeting.

Walburga had always blamed Astrid for everything her son did, and made sure she knew it.

In the beginning, Astrid had believed her, had tried to tell Black that he shouldn’t do certain things.

Instead of listening, Black had laughed at her, hexed her and left her behind. Left her in the hands of his obviously deranged and abusive mother.

She pulled away from her thoughts of pain and hatred, and watched as her mother left the room. She was under no delusion that her mother loved her. She was merely a tool for her accession in the ranks of pureblood society. Her marriage to Black would assure her mother of a continuous supply of money and fame while the Blacks would finally be linked to the Arundell family, a family whose nobility had been a wet dream of every pureblood mother.

“As you’re well aware, Astrid,” said Walburga, a cruel smile forming on her face. “Sirius has run away from home. And I know the perfect way to keep him in line.”

Astrid opened her mouth to say something, but all that came was a scream before everything faded to black.

Astrid opened her eyes, absolutely confused and terrified. She panicked for a moment in the unfamiliar room before realizing it was the Hospital Ward.

“Ah, Ms. Arundell,” said a calm, kind voice, “I see you’re finally awake.”

"Professor?" she said, shakily. Her voice seemed weird. "What am I doing at school?"

"Mister Regulus Black happened to find you in his house and immediately brought you here. Can
you tell us what exactly happened, Ms. Arundell?” Professor Dumbledore said kindly, smiling at the younger woman. However, the concerned look on his face made her feel incredibly uncomfortable.

What exactly had Walburga done?

"Is Reg ok?" she asked instead worried that the younger boy would be forced to face Walburga's rage.

“I’m sure he’s alright,” said Dumbledore, patiently.

Astrid looked at her hands, unsure how to tell the Headmaster what exactly had happened.

“Where do you want me to start, Professor? Its a longer story than you think,” she said quietly, glancing up at the older man to see concern and worry flicker on his face.

“Start wherever you are comfortable starting. Madam Pomfrey is on her way, so we have some time.”

Astrid looked back at her hands.

“Then I'll try to make it as concise as possible. I’ve been betrothed to Sirius Black since I was born. I am an asset to the Black family and it ensures that my mother has access to their money. However, neither Black nor I are interested in getting married. Black has continuously defied his mother, and instead of facing the consequences, he escapes. I’m always the person who has to deal with the consequences of his action.”

Dumbledore looked confused, and then horrified at what she was alluded to.

“In short, I was punished for every time he stepped out of line. Of course, he has no idea, and I’d like to keep it that way. Since Sirius has escaped his mother’s grip now, she saw fit to do whatever it is she did to me.”

“Miss Arundell, as you saying your mother...left you with this woman?”

Astrid shrugged.

“Its nothing new.”

There was a brief silence, before Dumbledore sighed.

“What was the last thing you remember her saying?”

Astrid frowned slightly. “Sirius has run away from home. And I know the perfect way to keep him in line. I have no clue what that means though.”

Just as she said that, Madam Pomfrey burst in, still in her normal clothes. Evidently, she had been called back to Hogwarts much earlier than expected.

“Headmaster? What’s…” she started, before looking at Astrid. Astrid had no clue what she looked like, but there was a horrified look on her face as she looked at her, and she couldn’t help the attempt at making herself smaller.

“Oh, Ms. Arundell, what’s happened?”

Pomfrey was more worried when both the Headmaster and the girl said they weren’t sure what had happened, and she brandished her wand, dread filling her gut as she looked at the girl.
Astrid sat quietly, not reacting as Pomfrey did her preliminary checks.

“I...I have no idea what’s happened. All I can tell is that some very dark magic has been cast.”

Astrid looked up, her calm facade slowly cracking.

“Am I...Am I going to die?”

Pomfrey hurriedly assured her that no, she was not going to die because of whatever Walburga Black had done.

“Oh god,” said Astrid, suddenly covering her mouth as she heaved. Pomfrey immediately conjured a pail for her to puke in.

“Oh dear,” said Pomfrey, glancing worriedly at the Headmaster.

“How many tests would you need to do, Madam Pomfrey?”

“In all honesty, Headmaster, since we have no clue what curse has been cast, I have no idea.”

Astrid was about to heave again when a large barn owl flew into the Hospital Wing through the open window. It dropped a letter into Dumbledore’s waiting hands.

“That’s Reg’s owl,” said Astrid, shakily as she continued to puke her guts out.

*Headmaster,*

*I’m sure Astrid is already safe with you, and unfortunately, this is the last thing I can do to ensure Astrid’s safety. Sirius has left our household, and it has gotten to the point that my mother has blasted his name off the family tree. However, Astrid has always been expected to keep my wandering brother in line, and my mother decided to punish her in a way that would—in her eyes—make Sirius see the light and come back home, and hopefully marry Astrid.*

*Astrid, your mother will probably be sending you a letter as well, and it is going to tell you that you are expected to come home with Sirius, or not at all.*

*My mother decided that making Astrid pregnant would mean that Sirius would come back home, and since Astrid and Sirius coming within 5 feet of each other without fighting is a miracle, she resorted to desperate measures.*

*You’ll find that my mother had placed a very dark...curse, of sorts, on Astrid, using Sirius’ hair and ensuring that any pregnancy detection spell would say that Sirius is the father. I am not privy to the details, and in giving you these details, I am risking quite a lot, but this is not at all fair to Astrid, and I wanted to make sure she was safe with you.*

*Please take care of her, and tell her that I am very sorry we couldn’t stop this from happening. I’ve already sent a letter to Andy informing her of what has happened as well as your Grandmother.*

*Regulus.*

Astrid stared at Dumbledore’s face in horror, while Pomfrey gasped when she realized what the woman had done.

With shaky hands, Pomfrey raised her wand.

“*Repertum Gravida,*” she said, and Astrid let out a sob as she saw the words form.
Detection of pregnancy: positive.

“Paternitus,” she whispered, and Astrid couldn’t help the tears flowing down her face as the names formed over her stomach.


Neither adult could move towards her as she broke down, sobbing in frustration.

“Miss Arundell, you have to tell him,” said McGonagall, who had come in the moment she heard that there was a possible disaster happening in Hogwarts.

“With all due respect, Professor, I’d really rather not. Isn’t there a second option?” said Astrid. Her voice was hoarse from crying and her eyes were puffy, but beyond that, you couldn’t really tell that something was wrong.

McGonagall sighed.

“Surely there is someone you trust, Astrid,” she said, not unkindly. She probably knew exactly what Astrid went through, but she never asked because she never wanted to make Astrid voice out what she didn’t want to.

Astrid was quiet, her eyes closed for a moment. Her mind was filled with a smart, sassy redhead and a small smile formed on her face regardless of the stress and the knowledge that this year was going to be horrible.

“Lily Evans. I trust Lily.”

McGonagall couldn’t suppress the surprised look on her face. Astrid not only came from a very stereotypical, muggle-hating pureblood family, but spent most of her time with Slytherins.

Astrid let out an amused, wry snort.

“I may hang out with muggle-hating purebloods, Professor, but that’s only to keep up appearances. Lily and I have been friends since second year, and we’ve been studying together for just as long.”

McGonagall smiled, because it made her hope that maybe there were other people who were different too. Sometimes, when she watched her students, she couldn’t help the sadness that filled her. They would all inevitably be forced into the upcoming war with You-Know-Who, and to see someone who seemed like one of the orthodox purebloods stand up and think for herself…

“We’ll have to make arrangements for you, of course. Given that Mister Black has run away, I suppose the other purebloods will…” said McGonagall, looking up at the girl with a sad look.

“Doesn’t help that I’m carrying his spawn,” she said, looking incredibly tired. “I’d appreciate it if I could have a room of my own, away from everyone else.”

“I’ll make it so that Miss Evans has easy access to it,” said McGonagall, unsure how she could help this little girl.

Astrid nodded, moving to get up, when McGonagall stopped her.
“Astrid,” she said, softly. “You know that you don’t have to do this alone, right?”

Astrid smiled.

“But, Professor. I’m not going to be alone. I have Lily, right?” she said, smiling, though it didn’t reach her eyes.

McGonagall nodded, even though that wasn’t at all what she had meant, and they both knew it.

Astrid left the office, moving quietly towards the Kitchens. She would go and sleep in the Hospital Wing, and with a small pang of sadness, she realized she wouldn’t be able to ride the train this year.

As she tickled the pear, a tear slipped down her cheek and she realized that she was truly alone now. She couldn’t pretend anymore, couldn’t hide behind her pureblood status any longer.

She was alone, pregnant and she had no clue how to deal with any of this. She sank to her knees inside the kitchen, shakily asking one of the elves for some hot chocolate.

As the warm drink was pressed into her waiting hands, all she could do was say two words without breaking down completely.

“Thank you.”

“Oh come on, Astrid,” said the other teen mockingly, grinning as she looked up at him. “Aw, look! She reacts!”

Astrid just looked at Sirius blankly, refusing to give him the pleasure of knowing how much she hated him right now.

“I heard my mother sent you another ‘token of her regards’, Astrid. What did your kissass self do now?” he said, cackling.

Walburga’s ‘token of regard’ was basically a session of being crucio’d. Sirius had gone and fought with the Slytherins, and naturally, Cissy had gone and complained to her mother immediately.

Of course, Astrid couldn’t tell Sirius that. She didn’t know why, but she couldn’t. She hated him so much, wanted him to hurt, to cry.

Sirius was still taunting her, but Astrid had learnt very early on to just ignore the boy.

“Come on, Padfoot,” said Remus, quietly, looking at her apologetically. “Leave her be. We have work to do.”

Astrid sent out a silent thanks to the other teen.

As they both moved away from her, she could hear Sirius’ voice reach her.

“Merlin, that’s the girl my mum wanted me to get married to? She’s a fucking weirdo.” Remus looked back at her, and the look of horror on his face when he realized she could still hear them made her look back down at her book.

She could hear every single disparaging remark towards her until they were out of sight, and she closed her eyes tightly to keep the tears from falling.

Astrid was still clutching the mug that used to be filled with hot chocolate. The warmth had disappeared and she took deep breaths as she thought of what happened after the entire scene. Lily
had been watching the entire thing and she had stormed up to Astrid, her flaming red hair looking like fire, as she demanded as to why she allowed Sirius to treat her like shit.

Astrid had tried to explain to Lily how she really couldn’t do anything, without telling her about how Walburga punished her. Naturally, that had been a failure, and Lily had decided to protect her as much as she could without alerting any of the other purebloods.

It had warmed her heart to realize that, regardless of everything, there was one person in the castle who cared enough to do that for her.

Over the next year or so, she and Lily had become very close. She knew of her history with Sirius, about the entire situation with her mum and even her strained relationship with her grandmother.

It wasn’t that it was natural for her to depend on Lily in a situation like this. It was that Lily was the only one Astrid had at this point.

She sighed to herself, handing the empty mug to a house elf and left the kitchen to make her way back to the Hospital Wing.

She had known that eventually, Sirius would leave his family and run away. Unlike him, she didn’t have that liberty. Or rather, she hadn’t had it back then. Now her mother’s ultimatum meant that she had a means for escape.

She just wished that she didn’t have to let go of everything just to do that.

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It wasn’t long before the students came back from summer break, chattering away like there wasn’t a war brewing beyond the castle walls.

Astrid watched them from her room in the west wing of the school. All the students were happily chattering away, and she couldn’t help the annoyance brewing inside her.

She turned around and made her way to her private common room, where she had asked one of the elves to keep her food.

She didn’t feel like going down and facing...the other purebloods. She wasn’t yet strong enough to do that, wasn’t yet in a state to deal with them after the shock of the pregnancy. McGonagall and Dumbledore had already told her that they would bring Lily to her so she didn’t have to leave the room without someone to help her out in general.

It had been barely three days since she came here, and her mother had sent her multiple howlers in an attempt to get her to “reconcile” with Sirius, though Astrid made no attempt to even respond to them.

The final correspondence had come this morning. It was a simple letter telling Astrid that if she did not respond to this letter with a statement that she would do as she was told, she would be disowned as well.

Astrid stared at the food, not particularly hungry at all. She had always known this would end up happening, but she couldn’t help but think- was she really that disposable? Didn’t her mother love her at all?
She snorted. Her mother, as her grandmother always said, was a money-hungry gold digger of the first order. Nothing was more important to her than money. Not anymore, at least.

“Astrid!” came a voice, and she turned, smiling slightly as she took in the sight of the redhead at the portrait hole.

“Lily,” she said getting up and letting the girl hug her.

“McGonagall just told me what happened. Why didn’t you tell me that horrid woman was doing this stuff to you? You should have stayed with me!”

Astrid let out a shake laugh that was more sad than amused.

“I...I didn’t know that was an option,” she said, quietly.

Lily pulled back, looking so angry for a moment that Astrid was about to take a step back.

“I don’t know which Lily you’ve been friends with all this time, but I expect my best friend to actually tell me when shit is happening so I can help her!”

“Now, Ms. Evans. I’m sure Ms. Arundell would have told you if she could,” said McGonagall’s voice from the portrait hole. “If you’re both okay with it, I can shift you here so you’re both together.”

Astrid knew she looked really hopeful, so she tried to suppress the hope.

“Of course, Professor! I can’t leave her here alone!”

Astrid opened her mouth to tell Lily she didn’t have to do this, but the look Lily leveled at her made her close her mouth immediately. Lily was going to do this regardless of what she thought.

When McGonagall left the room quietly, Lily turned towards Astrid, reaching out slowly to touch her cheek gently.

“Why didn’t you tell me, Astrid,” she said, moving closer to her.

Astrid flinched slightly and Lily immediately shifted back.

“Sorry,” said Astrid, tears filling her eyes.

“No,” said Lily, shaking her head. “I can’t believe I hadn’t noticed. I would have tried to stop it, you could have stayed with me. You don’t have to go through this alone.”

Astrid blinked as she vaguely remembered McGonagall’s words.

“I...I’m not alone anymore, right?” Astrid said, shakily. “That’s all that matters?”

Lily smiled, and Astrid moved forward to hug her tightly.

“We’re going to figure this out, Astrid. Don’t worry.”

Astrid couldn’t help but love Lily for not even asking her if she wanted to tell Sirius.

“But I only want one thing, okay? Astrid, I need you to tell me if something like this happens again. Best friends tell each other things.”
Astrid nodded, a small smile on her face.

“I...I’m not used to having an actual friend, so it’ll be hard sometimes. But I’ll try.”

“What about those Slytherins?” asked Lily, frowning.

“Other than Reg and Andy, I don’t really think what we had was friendship.”

Lily looked so sad for a moment that Astrid opened her mouth to apologize.

“Don’t apologize for something you haven’t done. Stop saying sorry,” said Lily, though her eyes blazed with temper. “I swear to god, if I could get my hands on that woman, I would tear her apart.”

“My mother told me that unless I come home with Sirius, I can’t come home at all,” Astrid said, and Lily’s eyes widened slightly.

“How could she…? Wait, does...does Black know what his mother does to you?”

Astrid snorted.

“Of course not. That boy can’t see anything beyond his own ego and inflated self-worth. And in all honesty, I don’t want to...I don’t want to see what would happen if he did know.”

Lily sighed, her face suddenly infinitely sad.

“I wish this didn’t happen to you,” she said quietly. “But it has, and I’ll do everything I can to help you and the little Star Child.”

Astrid couldn’t help the laughter that bubbled out of her and Lily smiled, relieved as she saw what was the first time Astrid had felt this light in weeks.

“Astrid? Are you ready?” Lily called from their common room, already ready for breakfast.

“Do I have to go?” she whined back, even though she was ready as well.

“You can’t hide here forever, Astrid. Come on, you can sit with me,” she said, smiling, but Astrid still didn’t look convinced.

“I...I don’t know if your old roomies would be okay with that…”

“Oh, they can go fuck themselves. Didn’t like them much, in all honesty. I prefer people with substance.”

Astrid snorted, tucking her brown hair behind her ear.

“Okay,” she said, softly and allowed Lily to take her by her hand and guide her to the Great Hall.

“Have you figured out what you can’t eat?” Lily asked, softly. Astrid was roughly two to three weeks along and her nausea hadn’t yet started.

“Well, apparently its a bit early for my morning sickness to start at all, according to Pomfrey. It should start soon though.”
Lily nodded. They walked into the Great Hall and everything was silent. Astrid didn’t stop, and Lily couldn’t help but feel amazed at how easily she walked without even looking at anyone but Lily.

“You okay?” she whispered, worried.

“I’m fine,” Astrid said, smiling weakly.

“Blood traitor. Of course you’d follow that pathetic Black,” hissed one of the Ravenclaws, and Astrid’s lips curled into a smirk.

“Why thank you, Phillip. How’s your mother? I heard she ran off with a muggle-born?” she said, cheerfully and the boy immediately shut up, resorting to glaring at her.

Lily pulled her to an empty seat, but looked like she was trying her hardest not to laugh.

“What?” said Astrid, quietly. “Why are you laughing?”

“Its just...you handled that so well.”

Astrid shrugged. “Its quite normal. Keeping up with what everyone’s families are up to helps keep them in line and makes them leave me alone. Its usually easier with the Slytherins since we’ve all been around each other for so long.”

“But you can’t do the same to Black?” said Lily softly.

Astrid gave her a small, shaky smile.

“Its not the same there.”

Lily frowned, but wisely said nothing. Sirius Black was not something Astrid liked talking about. She could fight with him, but the anguish on her face after was heartbreaking at best.

“Lily-flower!” called a voice, and Lily let out a groan as James Potter was heading straight towards them. Right behind him was an amused looking Remus Lupin, a slightly sleepy Peter Pettigrew and an even more amused Sirius Black.

The smirk of amusement on his face faded into a snarl when he saw Astrid sitting next to Lily.

“Astrid,” he growled, glaring at her and even James froze in his bid to capture Lily’s attention.

“Sirius,” Astrid said, not looking up.

“So how was your summer, Astrid? Did my mother do you any more favours?” he snarled. “Been a good girl, have you?”

Lily got up in a fit of rage, only to have Astrid pull her back.

“Lily, no. He’s not worth it,” she hissed. James had moved back to safety the moment Lily had gotten up, her eyes flashing in rage.

Lily smiled sadly at her, pulling Astrid’s arm off her.

“But you are,” she said. One moment Lily was smiling at Astrid and the next, her fist was colliding with Sirius Black’s face, a deafening but incredibly satisfying crunch echoing through the hall.

“She won’t do anything to you, even if you treat her like shit all the time. I thought it was about time
I should show this stupid school what happens when you mess with Lily Evan’s best friend,” Lily huffed, and sat back down gracefully, as if she hadn’t just attacked a guy for insulting someone.

“Lily!” Astrid said, and Lily smirked to herself.

In all of this, Astrid had completely forgotten about the pregnancy and being sad.

Sirius groaned, holding his face.

“Oh, stand up, you big baby,” said Astrid, glaring at the boy. “Episkey!”

“Why did you have to do that?” said Lily, glaring at the boy’s fixed nose like it honestly offended her.

“Because it was the right thing to do,” said Astrid, suddenly withdrawing again, no doubt remembering Sirius’ statement of being a “good girl”.

Lily reached out to touch her, but Sirius opened his mouth again.

“Since when are you friends with this bitch anyway?” Sirius said, glaring at Astrid like he thought she would ruin Lily.

“Since second year. It’s not like you bothered to ask,” said Lily, because Astrid seemed to be quivering again.

“Padfoot, come on,” said Remus, giving Astrid a slightly worried look. “I’m hungry and we have McGonagall first hour.”

Sirius gave Astrid one last glare before he turned and stormed off towards a set of empty seats. James gave Lily a wink before nodding at Astrid awkwardly.

“I’m sorry,” said Remus softly, as Pettigrew ran after the two. “For what happened with your mum. I heard some of the Slytherins talking about it. That’s got to be tough.”

Astrid looked up, surprised, but her eyes were filled with unshed tears.

“I...I’m happy. I don’t need people like that in my life,” she replied, quietly, though her hands quivered as she reached out for a muffin.

Remus reached out and dropped it on her plate.

“Well, if you need someone other than Lily to talk to,” he said, shrugging. “I’m a good listener. And...I’ll try getting Padfoot to stop.”

“You’ve tried for years, Remus,” said Astrid, a small sad smile on her face. “I think we all need to acknowledge that it’s not going to change.”

Remus sighed, but nodded and ran off to his friends.

Lily stabbed her food angrily.

“Why do you let him do that?” she asked.

Astrid bit into her muffin and chewed slowly before answering, like she was trying to formulate the answer.
“It’s...difficult. When I was younger, we used to be friends, you know? I don’t know what happened, but when he was sorted into Gryffindor, he decided he hated me. I didn’t know how to react then and I still don’t, because regardless of how well I know him, I can’t open my mouth and say the words that would hurt him most.”

Lily sighed.

“You want to head to the Hospital Wing before going to class?” she asked, letting it slide. She still didn’t really understand the dynamic that the two had, but now that Astrid was finally trying to open up, she might actually learn about it.

“I don’t think I’ll need to. I have a decent supply of potions for now. We can go straight to class,” Astrid said, smiling at Lily before grabbing an apple. A part of her was incredibly grateful that they were both in their Sixth Year, because it meant that they could be together for most of the day, since they had the same subjects.

“And you know, it would be nice for you to befriend Remus. He’s a nice boy,” said Lily, as they both got up, ignoring the jeers they got as they passed.

“You’re so lucky none of the teachers saw that,” Astrid grumbled, ignoring the statement, and Lily rolled her eyes.

“Astrid,” she said, as they finally escaped the Great Hall, “We need to figure out what we’re going to do about all of this. It’s not going to be easy to hide it after a while.”

Astrid nodded, looking incredibly old and sad for a moment.

“Let’s just get through the classes for now,” she said, quietly. “We’ll figure that out after.”

Lily sighed, but went along with it, knowing fully well that if Astrid didn’t want to talk about it, it would do no good for either of them for Lily to force the issue.
September, 1976

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the long wait. I'm doing my MBA, so I have my last internship going on. I haven't had time to write much of anything, but I do hope to write more of this fic. The only problem is that I need to draw a lot of dark thoughts and it's a little hard to write at a stretch.

I'm definitely not going to abandon this fic, but it will take some time. Sirius will find out about the pregnancy soon and the drama will actually start now. The healing, based on the plan in my head, should also start for both of them very soon. I know that a lot of people keep saying that teen pregnancy and Hogwarts allowing them to stay in the castle seems unlikely, but in my head right now, with the war and Astrid's personal situation, it is only natural that they allow her to stay. For one this, it isn't a natural conception so she was impregnated by dark magic, so to speak. That's how I see the logic behind all of this.

Anyway, I hope I do get time to write more! I hope you like this chapter!

“Welcome to sixth year Transfiguration,” said McGonagall, addressing the room of 15 students. There were 6 Gryffindors (the Marauders, Lily, and Mary Macdonald), 3 Slytherins (Severus Snape, Riley Higgs, and Albert Runcorn), 4 Ravenclaws (Astrid, Felicity Corner, Alfred Moore, and Fred Johnson), and 2 Hufflepuffs (Lyla Murphy and Daniel Taylor).

“As you all know, your sixth and seventh year are crucial and if you are in this class, it means you have managed to achieve the grade required for this class. Congratulations to all of you. Your journey has just begun.”

Astrid was seated next to Lily in one of the middle benches. The Marauders were sitting not too far away from them, but not far enough that they didn’t hear Runcorn turn around and hiss at Astrid, “I heard your mum finally kicked you out, Arundell. Oh, how the mighty fall.”

“What?” said Sirius loudly. It was loud enough that McGonagall turned and glared at Sirius.

“Mr. Black, I don’t care why. Detention.”

Sirius gaped at the older woman and then turned to Astrid, unable to say a word.
“Oh, you didn’t know?” said Runcorn. “Arundell got kicked out not too long after you ran off to the Potters.”

McGonagall glanced back.

“Mr. Runcorn, was there something you’d like to share with the class?”

Runcorn shook his head, though he had a small smug expression on his face. Beneath the table, Lily gave Astrid’s hand a squeeze.

“Now, Ms. Arundell. Would you mind explaining the types of human transfiguration?”

“There are three main types,” started Astrid, her voice slightly shaky, when Snape turned and said, “No, there are two.”

Astrid shook her head, and Sirius barked.

“Oh, you have something to say, Snivellus?”

Astrid breathed in deeply.

“As I was saying before Severus and Sirius interrupted me, there are three types- Animagi, Metamorphagi and Werewolves. The difference between the three is that a Metamorphagus can choose to take any form he or she wishes, without rigorous training. It is a skill people are born with. Human Transfiguration can be used to essentially replicate the natural abilities of Metamorphagi, allowing the practitioner or the subject to take on an entirely different form or make various individual changes to their appearance, such as growing or changing the colour of one's hair or taking on individual animal body parts. A werewolf may be considered part of this category as it is a process of transformation, though it is important to note that the transformation is in no way on purpose or by choice.”

“Thank you, Ms. Arundell. Ten points to Ravenclaw. Now, this year and next year, we will be solely focusing on this aspect of Transfiguration. At the end of all this, you might even be able to register yourselves as Animagi.”
Forty minutes later, as they were all making their way out, Sirius caught up with them.

“What did Runcorn mean?” Sirius said, grabbing Astrid’s hand.

“Padfoot…” said Remus, moving forward.

Lily beat him to it, wrenching Sirius’ arm off her. “Don’t touch her.”

“Stay out of this, Evans. Don’t butt your pretty little nose in our business,” he snarled, ignoring James’ hiss at him.

“Its not actually any of your business either, Sirius,” said Astrid, her voice strong. Something strange happened on Sirius’ face for a split second before it disappeared, but Lily caught it.

“Of course it is,” said Sirius, waving his hand flippantly.

“Its my mother. Not yours, remember?”

“Oh, and what did my mother have to say about this development?” hissed Sirius, leaning forward so their faces were close.

“Well, naturally my mother followed your mum’s lead. Walburga gave me an ultimatum because she can’t fucking handle her own son. And you know what?” she snarled, as Sirius stepped back, his eyes widening at the sound of her swearing.

“I’m happy! I’m happy I don’t have to fucking deal with your stupidity. I don’t have to deal with the consequences of your actions, I don’t have to fucking answer for you!”

Neither of them noticed that they were catching the attention of the other students.

“No one asked you to!” yelled Sirius.
Lily reached for her wand to force the two apart, but she didn’t have to.

Astrid’s entire posture displayed her internal withdrawal.

“No one gave me a choice,” she said, quietly, before turning and hurrying away, Lily running after her.

“Mate, you know, this should make you happy,” said James, placing his hand on Sirius’ shoulder. “I mean, if there’s no one after the two of you to get married, you don’t have to talk to her right?”

Sirius didn’t respond, staring after Astrid. Remus moved forward to look at Sirius, and was surprised to see guilt.

“Yeah,” Sirius said, covering it up with a grin. “You’re right, Prongs!”

Neither James or Remus were fooled, and even Peter seemed sceptical. Peter was the first to go along with it.

“Yeah! Come on, we have Potions now right?”

Sirius nodded and they all set off in the same direction as Lily and Astrid, while James and Remus exchanged concerned looks.

What was wrong with Sirius?

When Astrid and Sirius first met, they were only 4 and 5 years old. Little Astrid had gazed at him behind the legs of her father, her wide, brown eyes glued on him. Younger Sirius had been almost a year older than her, and at the time, they hadn’t really understood what she was supposed to be for him.

There were words like “marriage” and “terms and conditions” thrown around, but all the two of them understood was that they were supposed to grow up and stay together and take care of kids.
At four years, everything had been perfect. Sirius had a playmate to lord over who was not his baby brother- who, at the age of 2, was quite boring to play with- and not his older sisters who all insisted to tittering about together like an all-female trio. Bella, at 12, was the leader of their little gang with Cissy, who was then 8, and Andy, who was 10. They had found little, innocent Astrid the most adorable creature in the world, and Bella insisted on telling her all about the “big kid school” called Hogwarts.

Sirius hadn’t liked that very much, because his mother had brought Astrid over as his playmate and no one else’s.

As they grew up, the two became friends and then suddenly started getting awkward around each other when they realized that they were supposed to be married to one another. Astrid didn’t know why her parents were forcing her to marry Sirius, and when her father disappeared and her mother started insisting that she start getting used to the idea, she started pulling away.

Sirius hadn’t even thought about it it much until they both left for Hogwarts and James Potter asked him if Astrid was his girlfriend. Astrid had been dragged away by Andy at the time, and Sirius was left to his own devices. Sirius hadn’t even realized how weird his relationship with Astrid was before that moment, and that was the moment he started hating it.

He realized how much he felt like his freedom was being crushed. When he was sorted into Gryffindor, he was happy to be with James and his two new friends, Remus and Peter. Astrid had stumbled towards the hat before him and had been sorted into Ravenclaw. The awkward look of confusion on her face had made him think of his smothering mother who had insisted that Sirius only get into Slytherin.

So Sirius decided that maybe if he was absolutely horrible to Astrid, she’d go away. In the beginning, Astrid had just looked at Sirius with her big brown eyes, absolutely confused and shaken at the harsh words coming out of his mouth.

Slowly, she started to just stand there and take it, quietly looking at her feet with a resigned look. Andy had always given him disapproving glares, but she was too busy running off with Ted Tonks to really do anything about it. Cissy tended to speak to her, but as she too grew up, Astrid started roaming the halls alone more often than not.

When Regulus had finally joined Hogwarts, Andy had already left, with Cissy in her final year. At that point, Astrid had grown used to being alone, interacting with the Slytherins when spoken to, quietly taking Sirius’ harsh words.
Sirius had slowly lost interest in the whole “Get Rid Of Astrid” plan, though he couldn’t seem to stop the way he treated her. Regulus, at 11 years of age, had walked right up to Sirius and called him out on it, angry that the girl he considered his big sister was being treated like this.

It was then that Sirius got his first reaction from Astrid. The moment Sirius pulled out his wand at the words “You’re supposed to be a Black! You’re ruining our name!”, Astrid had pulled out her own, leaping to Reg’s defence.

“He’s a first year, Sirius! And your brother at that! What were you thinking?” she yelled at him, but all Sirius could do was glare at her angrily.

That was when he found his first reason to hate her- she thought he was a disappointment to the “family honour”.

As the next 3 years passed, Sirius had accumulated a list of reasons for hating Astrid. He had a tendency to pull it out every time Remus scolded him or James shook his head in exasperation.

1. Astrid thinks I’m a disappointment to the “family name”.
2. Astrid thinks that muggleborns are filth. (by association with the Slytherins)
3. Astrid is a know-it-all.
4. Astrid sucks up to my mum.
5. Astrid has stupidly big brown eyes.
6. Astrid annoys me.
7. Astrid talks to Snivellus.

Okay, so Remus thought all his reasons were stupid, but Sirius usually logged off the moment Remus started demolishing the reasoning behind the list.

At some level, his weird thing with Astrid had become something that was a kind of grounding. It was the one thing he had in his life that...was constant.

Which was probably why the very thought of not having Astrid in his life anymore...it shook him.

It was at this moment, the moment that James made him realize that they no longer had a requirement to interact...
It was only now that he realized that he needed Astrid in his life.

And for some weird reason, all he could see in his head was 11 year old Astrid running towards him, a wide smile on her face as she said, “I’m so proud of you!”

And the look of confusion, hurt and something else entirely on her face when he yelled at her and hurt her.

Now, all Sirius could think was, “Are you still proud of who I am and what I’ve done?”

“Technically,” said Astrid from her couch as she read notes from her discussion with Madame Pomfrey, “Pomfrey says that nausea and the general cravings will all start in my 4th or 5th week. The level of nausea differs from person to person, but I should have cravings.”

Lily was sitting on the floor with a book in hand, nodding.

“Has she said anything about what we should take precautions for?”

“Not really? She just told me about the stages, what to mentally prepare myself for, etc. The first and third trimesters are the worst but the second is apparently the best because its the least...painful? Once I start bloating, I need to be careful with the baby bump, need to make sure I take the right meds, etc.”

Lily nodded again, pulling out a parchment of her own.

“Well, I did my own research, and there’s a list of stuff you can’t eat and drink when you’re pregnant. We’re not sure about whether the spell Walburga did actually protects the child. You can’t have anything with raw meat of any kind, including uncooked eggs like cookie dough, no unpasteurized cheeses, prepared salads from the stores- especially if they contain eggs, chicken, ham, or seafood- buffet or picnic food that’s been sitting out for two or more hours- one hour on a hot day-stuffing cooked inside a bird, unless heated to 165° F, raw sprouts or any unwashed produce, especially lettuce and cabbage. And obviously no unpasteurized milk, alcohol and coffee.”

“That...that was a very specific list,” said Astrid, torn between amusement and shock at the length of the list.
“Its a pregnancy. Its like potions. One wrong ingredient can ruin everything.”

Astrid just grinned, shaking her head in amusement.

They were both quiet for a moment, when Lily finally spoke up.

“Astrid, can I ask you something?”

“You just did,” said Astrid, grinning at Lily, who merely threw a cushion at her.

“How...how do you deal with it?”

Astrid looked confused for a moment, tilting her head slightly.

“Deal with what?”

“Everything. Like, the pureblood issues, Sirius, classes, the pregnancy. You’re so strong...”

Astrid laughed.

“I’m not strong, Lily. I’m constantly on the brink of breaking and the only thing keeping me together is the fact that I have a person growing in me, and you. That is literally all that is tethering me to this planet. Its just that...I feel like I have something to look forward to. All that I had in my future before this was my impending wedding to Sirius Black, after which the boy would have probably run off to hide somewhere with James. Now I’m no longer tethered to my mother’s commands, I can do whatever I want. I can go and do what I want, become a Potion’s Master if I wish, and no one can tell me otherwise. Its just...I feel free now.”

Lily was quiet, staring at Astrid sadly.

“I think that regardless of the fact that you’re on the brink of breaking, you’re still holding on.
Whatever the reasons may be, Astrid, you’re still strong, just because you are holding on.”

Astrid looked away staring at her fingers.

“Astrid, look at me,” Lily said, moving to her so she could cup her face in her hands. “You are twice the woman you think you are. You are stronger than any girl or boy in this castle, and it’s incredibly sad that you’ve not even realized it. But this is one of the few things I’m going to ask you to take as the truth- you are ruddy brilliant.”

Astrid let out a choked laugh, leaning towards Lily so she was engulfed in the redhead’s embrace.

“You okay?” Lily whispered, even though they were in an empty room.

“Yeah. I just didn’t realize how much I needed to hear that,” Astrid replied, with a small smile.

“Astrid, are you sure...are you sure I’m enough? I don’t mind, I love helping. But...are you sure you don’t want to tell someone else?”

“Like who?” said Astrid with a sigh. “You’re the only one I trust.”

“Remus?”

Astrid sighed.

“At the end of the day, Lily, he’s Sirius’ friend first. I’m not going to get in the way of that.”

Lily let her finger brush against Astrid’s pale cheek slowly.

“You’re too good for your own good,” she said, with a small smile. “Come on, let’s work on some homework.”
Astrid smiled slightly and turned to her work before pausing.

"Lily, can I...um. Can I ask you a question?" She said, and Lily hummed in response.

"Why...why do you hate James? Like, earlier it was because of Severus, right? Why do you still hate him?"

Lily didn’t answer for a moment too long, and Astrid immediately felt stupid.

“Sorry,” Astrid said quickly, worried she had offended Lily.

“No, no. Its fine,” Lily said, but she didn’t answer the question till later that night when they were both in bed.

“Astrid?” Lily whispered, and Astrid hummed a bit, turning so she could look at the redhead.

“I’m used to hating him. I don’t know how else to respond to his arrogance.”

Astrid laughed softly from her bed.

“You’d be surprised at how not arrogant he is, Lily,” she said, and refused to say anything else after that.

When Astrid was 11, her parents separated. Well, not exactly. Her mother was still an Arundell, but her father left their little family. She had no idea where her father was today, but as far as she knew, to her mother and grandmother he was as good as dead.

All she knew was that when she was 10, something just...changed in her happy family. There were more fights, more arguments, and Astrid found herself either at the Black’s or in her room, trying her hardest to be quiet.
It was when she was 11 that her parents split and she officially became Walburga’s scapegoat for when Sirius stepped out of line in school. She hadn’t understood what was happening, all she knew was that Walburga was hurting her.

When Astrid was 12, she finally understood her role in the entire scheme of things. She was to be Walburga’s scapegoat and means to the Arundell name, her mother’s instrument towards a larger bank account, her grandmother’s worst disappointment.

Sirius hated her for reasons unknown to her, but at that point she had started to wonder if something was actually wrong with her.

She was sitting in an abandoned hallway one evening with a book open in her lap. Cissy had gone off to do her own thing, and Andy was somewhere with some of her friends, so she was sitting alone.

She had never managed to get along with the girls and guys of her house, because they made her very uncomfortable and they tended to be mean.

It was here that 12 year old James Potter had found her.

“Arundell! What are you doing all alone in a corridor?”

Astrid had looked up, worried that Sirius wouldn’t be far behind, but James had just gone ahead and seated himself in front of her.

“Sirius is in the dorms, don’t worry.”

Astrid looked back at her book, unsure of what the boy wanted.

“Are you okay?” James asked, after a short silence. Astrid’s head shot up in surprise.

“I...no one’s ever asked me that before,” she whispered, her voice hoarse from disuse.
“No one?” said James, looking confused. “Don’t you have friends?”

Astrid shook her head.

“I...I hang out with Sirius’ sisters when they’re free but I usually keep to myself.”

James looked rather confused at her admission. Astrid panicked for a moment. Here was James Potter being relatively nice to her and she had gone and ruined it like she ruined everything else.

“Hey, hey! Don’t cry!” said James, flailing a little. “I dunno what to do when girls start crying!”

Astrid let out a laugh, and he seemed genuinely startled at the sound, like it hadn’t occurred to him that she could laugh.

“Why would I cry?”

“Because I’m an insensitive twat?” said James, with a shrug, but she could tell he was quoting someone and it had hurt him.

“You really like her, don’t you?” she replied, with a small smile at him, and his ears turned slightly pink, knowing exactly who she was talking about.

“She’s brilliant,” he said, shrugging.

“She is,” Astrid agreed, easily, and he looked surprised again.

Astrid cursed herself, looking down at her book again.

“But she’s a muggleborn. Don’t you hate them? That’s what Sirius said.”

“Sirius needs to actually ask me stuff instead of making assumptions,” snapped Astrid, angrily. “Lily
Evans is a lovely girl who is going to grow up to be one of the best witches of our age. Her blood doesn’t affect that.”

James grinned brightly at that and sighed dreamily. After a moment, he shook like he was trying to get water out of his head and shrugged.

“Hey, you never answered my question,” he said, “Are you okay?”

Astrid smiled at the Gryffindor and replied honestly.

“I am now.”

After that moment, James took to nodding at her in the corridor, while Sirius never seemed to notice. He was never overtly friendly, respecting the fact that Astrid wanted to keep to herself as much as possible, but he was still kind.

It was because Astrid had seen this side of James Potter— the side that cared about the people around him, the side that saw people for who they were— that made her question Lily’s hate for James.

Astrid wished that Lily could see that side of James, but it seemed as if James’ pratty side just came out naturally around Lily, like he wanted to impress her. But the thing was, Lily didn’t want to be impressed to begin with.

And so Astrid had watched the whole thing escalate over the years. Originally, Lily had based her hate on Severus and James’ fights, but finally, it got to the point that even that ended.

Astrid couldn’t really ask Lily about it, not when it could potentially ruin their friendship, so she shut up about it even though she disagreed.

But now, since she was trying to be more open with Lily, she wondered if she could show Lily the James she refused to see.

The next day, Sirius woke up to see that James and Remus were already up.
“Seriously Prongs?” he said, his voice slightly muffled as he rolled around his bed, relishing the final few seconds before Remus pulled him out.

“The first week isn’t even finished yet,” said Remus, disapprovingly. “Guys, Lily expects me to keep you guys in line, at least now, since I’m a prefect.”

Sirius rolled his eyes before something occurred to him.

“Hey, since when has Astrid been her friend?” he said.

“Well, we all knew she didn’t hate Lily at all. I mean, back in second year, she said as much,” said James, with a shrug.

“What?” said Sirius, for some reason feeling rather angry.

“You do know that she can interact with Gryffindors other than you right?” said Remus, as usual too insightful for his own good.

“Shut up,” said Sirius, glaring at the boy’s back. “Since when have you been on her side?”

“I’m on the side of logic and facts,” said Remus, and Sirius threw a pillow at him.

“Of course you’d say that,” grumbled Sirius, finally getting out of bed.

Peter yawned as he exited the bathroom. “Loo’s free,” he said, rubbing his eyes in an attempt to get rid of the sleep.

Sirius went to the loo to do his normal morning routine, but couldn’t help but think about what the others had said. He was incredibly angry with her for talking to his friends, but that made zero sense. Why was he feeling possessive of his friends?
Sirius shook the thought out of his head. He was out of that life now, had left it behind when he left his family.

And no one had to know that he was worried for her except him.

*I’m happy! I’m happy I don’t have to fucking deal with your stupidity. I don’t have to deal with the consequences of your actions, I don’t have to fucking answer for you!*

He had been hurt by what she said, but he couldn’t deny that she spoke the truth. He did have a tendency to do some stupid things. But what he didn’t understand was why she had to ‘deal with the consequences’.

*No one gave me a choice.*

Sirius had known Astrid long enough to know that that was her running away from a topic, running away from something in order to protect her secrets. She used to do it when they were younger too.

For some reason, he didn’t like the idea of her hiding something from him. He had to concede that he had no right to that anymore, but…

If she had let him claim up and down that she was a muggleborn hater, what else was she hiding from him?

Sirius had always had a love-hate relationship with mysteries. He hated them but he loved solving them, so naturally his immediate response to the fact that Astrid had secrets was deciding that he was going to figure it all out.

He came out of the bathroom, ready to go down, a small smirk on his face. Remus could tell from the look on Sirius’ face that he had a plan, and that never meant anything good.

James didn’t really notice because he was too busy ruffling his own hair to get it to look artfully tussled.

“Hey, you reckon Evans will say yes today?”
Sirius glanced at Peter and rolled his eyes, making the smaller boy snigger.

Remus just shook his head, looking mildly amused, and Sirius let himself formulate how he was going to get Astrid to tell him what was happening with her, since she seemed to be a better actress than he gave her credit for.

Peter was chatting with Remus about something from Defense and James was busy trying to look presentable as they all made their way to the Great Hall.

Suddenly, they heard some voices and some yelling in the distance.

“Stop it! Are you crazy!?” yelled Lily’s voice and suddenly they were sprinting towards the voice.

Astrid was shaking behind Lily, her grip on her wand tightening as if she was about to raise it in their defense.

In front of them were two Ravenclaws.

“Run off to hide behind a prefect, Arundell? Spineless piece of shit,” taunted one, casting a spell at random that Lily managed to block with a shielding spell.

“Bugger off!” yelled a voice, and all the Marauders turned to see Regulus Black, running straight to Astrid. Astrid looked incredibly confused and her face immediately settled to a look of nonchalance when she saw Sirius as well.

Sirius let out an aborted growl. He looked like he was about to grab Astrid, but it seemed more of pulling her away from his brother than away from danger.

Remus glanced at Sirius, his surprise evident on his face as he immediately glanced at James who looked just as confused at Sirius’ reaction.

For someone who appeared and claimed to hate Astrid, Sirius seemed furious, though neither of the
two boys could tell whether it was because the Ravenclaws were attacking Astrid or because his little brother was now standing in front of Astrid, his hand on her arm, whispering furiously to her.

Sirius wasn’t usually reserved and it was the first time in the past six years that either boy had even noticed Sirius suddenly refrain from reacting to something the way he was now. As Lily shoo’d the two Ravenclaws, threatening to send them to Flitwick, Sirius’ eyes merely glanced at the two for a moment- a moment that was long enough to send the two running- and then went back to glaring at Astrid’s hand, which was currently on Regulus’ arm, squeezing slightly.

His hands were clenching and unclenching though his face seemed impassive.

It made them wonder how often Sirius held back when it came to showing his emotions around Astrid, and how often the three of them had overlooked it. Peter was looking at Regulus with a mix of worry and disdain- probably because he didn’t like the way Sirius had completely tensed up.

Peter was the kind of boy who was incredibly quiet and shy. It had taken him a while to even get comfortable with the three of them. It had been Sirius who had been the one to get him to open up, and he was closest to Sirius, as a result of that.

So Peter instinctively knew that Regulus was making Sirius feel angry and he was the one to open his mouth and say something.

“What the hell was that?”

Everyone turned to look at Peter, and Astrid’s hand fell off Regulus’ arm as he turned, his eyes narrowing at the sight of his older brother.

“Sirius.”

“Reg,” said Sirius easily, but the air seemed to suddenly be charged with something else.

Not fear.

It was something that made Remus, James and Peter step back and Lily seemed to be torn between
moving away from the position she had taken further away from them in hurrying the two Ravenclaws away and moving between the two boys and Astrid.

Astrid, however, didn’t react like any of them. She immediately moved to keep the two apart.

“Move, Astrid,” growled Sirius, moving forward.

“No,” said Astrid evenly, “The two of you need to stop right now. We have two prefects here.”

“Bugger them,” said Regulus angrily, “My lovely brother and I have a chat we need to have.”

Astrid turned around to look at Reg with an abnormal amount of fear and betrayal, and Regulus shook his head.

“I’m furious with him, Astrid. How long are you going to stand between us? How long are you going to allow him to believe that you were my mother’s little princess, when in reality, all you ever were was a glorified whipping boy to that vile woman?” yelled Regulus, but when Astrid whimpered softly, he reached out to apologize.


“Sirius!” Astrid yelled, in alarm, trying to stop what was happening.

“Astrid,” said Regulus. “Calm down.”

Astrid seemed to be freaking out, tears rolling down her face. Sirius made another aborted move to reach out to her, and this time, everyone but Astrid noticed.

“Stop fighting!” she said, her voice hoarse and watery. “Stop!”

Lily finally moved forward.
“Astrid, honey. I think we need to go to the Hospital Wing. If you want, we can take Regulus with us.”

“Like hell you will,” growled Sirius, sidestepping a distracted Astrid to get to his brother. “What in Merlin’s left saggy buttock are you talking about.”

Remus looked at the alarmed and worried expression of Astrid’s face and realized that it wasn’t fear of what Sirius was going to do to Regulus. She knew as well as any of them that Sirius wouldn’t hurt his brother. But instead, she seemed genuinely horrified at Sirius finding out about...her being Walburga’s whipping boy.

He felt horror take over him as he realized why Astrid had always shied away from people, why she seemed so quiet and withdrawn.


Regulus snorted darkly as Astrid shook her head.

“Why touch her when you have magic?” drawled Regulus, his dark eyes filled with rage on Astrid’s behalf.

The actual implication of those statements dawned on all of them, and Lily let out a horrified gasp as she reached out to Astrid. Astrid seemed to be trying her best not to flinch, and Lily, being the one who was around Astrid the most these days, seemed to immediately back off.

Peter stood frozen stiff, looking at the girl with an odd sense of awe.

“She did all that to you, I don’t even want to imagine it, for how many years?” Peter asked, and again, it wasn’t Astrid who answered- mainly because she was too busy trying to rub the tears off her face- but Regulus.

“Since she was 11. Since her parents split. When you were off gallivanting across Hogwarts with your little band of merry men, Astrid was busy dealing with repercussions of your stupidity. I had to listen to her screaming, begging Mother to…” growled Regulus, but suddenly his voice was cut off.
Astrid had pulled her wand out, an entirely new expression on her face.

“I told you to keep it a secret,” she said, calmly. “I trusted you.”

The way she said it was quiet, but something about the words and the genuine sense of betrayal in her voice made it sound like she was yelling. Regulus looked alarmed for a moment, and then frantically tried to say something, but the spell she had casted prevented him from doing so.

Astrid met Sirius’ broken gaze dead on, and said, “I guess all the Blacks are the same, then.”

And without another word, she turned and glided away from them towards the Hospital Wing. Lily ran behind her, only glancing back once to look at Sirius, who hadn’t moved at all.
Sorry for the delay, guys. I'm doing the last internship of my MBA (as I may have told some of you in the comments) and this is the last week before I go back to Uni for my last term. This would mean that I won't have a update next week, though I am hoping that I will get time after that to write since my report is close to completion.

That aside, I don't know how many of you know this, but I also make mixes for my stories as I write them. This fic has been in works for quite some time since I have difficulty writing dark stories without letting it affect my own mental health. I made these in December two years ago. I hope you like them. It should also give you a little insight on all the characters as well.

Feel free to follow me there since you get a quick update and sneak peek into all the fics I am writing or have ideas for and may have started. I always make the mix first to help me articulate the mood and the story line.

http://8tracks.com/holding-out-for-a-hero/collections/the-star-child-universe

That aside, I hope you all have a safe and lovely Holidays (whatever they may be)! Let me know what you guys think of this chapter and where it may take the characters!

Astrid met Regulus about a week after she met Sirius. At the time he was just a baby- in her eyes at least. Astrid had found the little boy adorable, looking up at her with sharp, mistrustful eyes.

Whenever Sirius was off moping somewhere because Astrid didn’t do something he wanted her to do, she would go sit with Regulus in the nursery. After a while, the mistrust turned into a quiet affection, and he started following her around when Sirius wasn’t there.

As they both grew older, they got closer, and Regulus’ quiet affection became a kind of brotherly love. They both liked to be quiet and stay in the background. They did what they were told and didn’t get into trouble. Sirius had always been a little mischievous, though he didn’t seem to have much of an issue with doing as he was told.

As the three grew up, something in their dynamic changed. Sirius became more broody and distant. Astrid came to the Black house more frequently, but always looked guilty, looking at everything with an odd fear in her eyes. Regulus finally realized what his mother and father intended for their two sons, realized that they were expected to join the Dark Lord, a Black’s greatest aim and the greatest gift that could be given.
That was when it all really began. The moment that Regulus realized what his mother really was- a monster. He came in right after the second or third session. His mother wasn’t there anymore, but Astrid was, her 11 year old body lying on the carpet of their private room, her eyes worryingly vacant.

Regulus had panicked, called a house elf to get her to her little guest room, where he tried to get her to snap out of it. Astrid never told him what had happened, but as it became a more frequent occurrence, he put two and two together.

His mother was torturing Astrid, because Sirius couldn’t just pretend to listen to his mother and just had to step out of line. Astrid silently took it, her eyes scarily vacant afterwards. Regulus tried to get Astrid to talk to him about it, but she always seemed to brush his concern off. As time passed, Astrid stopped seeming absolutely vacant post-session, and started looking...resigned.

Regulus couldn’t help but hate his brother for doing this to her, for not realizing what was happening in his own house, and his hatred only ran deeper when he realized that Sirius was absolutely horrible to Astrid at school.

Finally, he cornered his brother, yelling at him for being such a git, but then, all of a sudden, Astrid appeared, stepping in front of him when Sirius pulled out his wand. Suddenly, the quiet, resigned, lifeless person Astrid had become disappeared and the old Astrid, the one with life and joy and hope in her, appeared again.

But just like that, the moment Sirius stormed off, Astrid went back to the lifeless person she had become, and Regulus realized with an odd sense of disappointment and an overwhelming sadness that even now, Sirius was the only person who could put Astrid back together again.

Regulus had always wanted to help her the way she had helped him. He wanted to give something back for all she had done.

While his mother had taught him to be a certain way, Astrid had taught him things that his mother could never teach him. His mother taught him to hate, to follow, to torture, to be cruel. Astrid taught him to love people beyond everything, taught him to not worship like a dog at the shrine of his mother's lies. She taught him a different meaning of Family Before All Else, and for that, he was willing to give up his life to protect her.

Regulus had seen Astrid fall apart and pretend to be fine again and again. He'd seen her love Sirius, and had seen it go to waste. He wanted to be the one who fixed her, but he knew that wasn't who he was. There was only one person who could do that, because even now, Astrid was too in love to let
it go. Only Sirius could put her back together, and so, all Regulus could do was hope.

Regulus knew, when Astrid was finally out of his mother’s clutches and pregnant because of Sirius’ stupidity, he was going to have words with his brother. Obviously, he would never tell him about the pregnancy, but his brother needed to see what he had done to Astrid, how badly he had hurt her.

Astrid would deny up and down that she was in love with Sirius, and maybe she wasn’t, but no one could deny that she did, in fact, love him, in one way or another. Regulus knew, given that Sirius and Astrid had “History”, it was only natural that for them to genuinely feel something for each other, they just needed to sort out their issues.

But that didn’t stop him from hoping. So he was okay with it if Astrid was angry with him. At the end of the day, his path was chosen for him, and he had come to terms with that. All he really wanted, though, was for Astrid to be happy, whole and lively again.

Even if it meant that she stopped talking to him and ran into his older brother’s arms.

It had been a week or two since Sirius had found out about Walburga, and he had been constantly trying to get to Astrid to talk to him. However, Astrid had been completely AWOL except for in classes. The moment the bell rang, she would bolt, Lily with her, before Sirius could even hope to find her.

Even using the map didn’t help, because by the time he managed to figure out where she was, she would have moved elsewhere. It got more difficult when he realized that she had, for some reason, been given her own room, where she stayed with Lily.

Sirius was, naturally, in a very bad mood in the days after that realization. James usually managed to distract him with the help of Peter, but Remus was more worried about Astrid, who appeared to be looking weaker and weaker as the days passed.

Lily could be seen constantly following her, a worried look on her face, while Astrid looked mildly annoyed. Remus was worried for her, all he ever heard her say anymore was “I’m fine”.

From what he heard from people she was really sick. Apparently she had some horrible bug, but it wasn’t contagious. It was suspicious to say the least, but Remus just couldn’t escape his friends without a questioning, given Sirius’ guilt-driven bad mood.
He had heard the boy whimpering in his sleep, calling out for Astrid, begging Walburga to stop hurting her. It broke Remus’ heart, as this was what they had been spiraling towards for a long time. He hadn’t noticed how much this thing with Astrid affected Sirius, because truth be told, the boy was very good at hiding the things he didn’t want people to know.

He knew that none of the other boys knew of Sirius’ nightmares, and he would just wake up in a worse mood than the previous day, almost as if he could remember the dream. Remus couldn’t ask Sirius about them, especially if he couldn’t remember them. He knew what it felt like to dream of the most traumatic thing to happen, to dream of the people around you dying.

Remus knew that Astrid had gone through things he couldn’t even dream of. Sirius didn’t speak about his family a lot, but when he did, it was usually about how his family was involved in very dark things. Remus didn’t want to think about the reality that Astrid lived in, though her general resigned nature when Sirius spewed out harsh words at her suddenly made sense.

Occasionally, she would respond with an angry retort but that was rarely in her own defence and usually in Regulus’ defence. Now that he actually thought about it, he realized that Sirius’ own expression changed slightly when Astrid responded angrily to him, almost as if he was seeing something he had not seen in a long time.

It made him wonder what astrid was like as the child Sirius had known.

The thought made his heart hurt a little, and he shook his head minutely to get it out. When he finally got out of his own head, he realized he was in a corridor he had never seen. For a moment, he was worried. The map was with Sirius, who had been checking and watching it in a manner that was almost desperate. He was about to turn around and walk away when he heard Astrid’s voice down the hall.

“Lily, I’m fine!”

“Astrid, you’ve not been able to eat anything for two days! Stop trying to convince me that you’re fine!”

They came into sight as they walked around the corner and Lily seemed to freeze at the sight of Remus.
“R-Remus,” she stammered, looking slightly shifty.

Astrid looked at him, and he smiled at her, walking towards them.

“I accidently ended up on this corridor. I have no clue where to go from here,” he said, with a laugh. He could tell that he might have just heard something he wasn’t supposed to hear.

“How much of that did you hear?” Astrid said, calmly, and suddenly Remus could see the pureblood in her, the part of her that had been heavily influenced by the hands of the expectations placed on her. It was odd, seeing that side of her, the side that immediately got to business.

“Just that you’ve not been able to eat for two days,” said Remus honestly. “You feeling alright?”

“I’m fine,” she replied, her defences still up, but the way her body swayed slightly said something else entirely.

“Astrid,” started Lily, reaching out.

“I’m fine,” Astrid said loudly enough for it to sound almost frantic- like she was trying to convince herself and possibly her own body- but that was exactly when her body gave up on her.

Remus immediately caught her, thanking the stars for his reflexes.

“Astrid?” said Lily, her voice high with panic.

“Don’t worry, we’ll take her to the Hospital Wing. Madame Pomfrey will help her out,” said Remus soothingly as he lifted Astrid into his arms.

Lily looked far more worried than would be considered normal when a friend fainted from fatigue. Remus immediately guessed that there was something more to this entire thing than either girl was letting him know.

From what he could tell, this could not possibly be just a bug, because if it was, Pomfrey would have forced Astrid to stay in the Wing, considering how bad it apparently was. No one would allow such
a bug-if it was even a bug-to venture beyond the walls of the Hospital Wing.

However, Remus decided to keep to himself. Astrid evidently did not want him to find out-which he had no doubt had everything to do with the fact that he was one of Sirius’ best friends.

Sometimes, Remus thought that Astrid was too much of a kind soul to be able to function in a world like theirs. Then, of course, he had to remind himself that there was only one man she would be like this with, and that was Sirius Black.

Sirius was the only one Astrid would literally give up her life for, regardless of how much she tried to deny it with her actions and her words. And the sad part was, Remus had the feeling that neither of them really recognized that fact. It was something both Sirius and Astrid took for granted in a way, but not consciously. Instead, it seems almost as if they were drawn together like two magnets trying to pull away.

Remus looked at the weak body of the girl in his arms, then at the red haired girl panicking by his side as they finally entered the Hospital Wing, a small sigh escaping him.

There weren’t many things that terrified Sirius. His mother terrified him, but it wasn’t the woman herself that scared him but the world she stood for. So, it was easy to say that Sirius wasn’t scared of many things at all, just very real-world things that could result in the deaths of his loved ones.

Which was why, when Remus ran to him, telling him that Astrid was in the Hospital Wing, that Remus had to carry her there, the fear flooding inside him was the fear of losing her. His imagination had run rampant for the past few days, Regulus’ words echoing in his mind like taunts and jeers.

It wasn’t until he had sprinted all the way to the Hospital Wing, disregarding the calls from his friends, straight to Astrid’s bed, that he realized what his boggart was-the sight of Astrid on one of the beds, her skin pale, her whole body glowing as Pomfrey tried to heal whatever had happened to her.

“What are you doing here?” Lily said, her tear stained face cold and angry, like this was all his fault.

Sirius was starting to believe that it all was.
“Remus told me Astrid was here,” he said, stopping himself from reaching towards the unconscious girl.

Lily watched his movement, an odd, confused look in her eyes, but it was gone before Sirius could ask.

“You don’t deserve to even look at her, after what your idiocy put her through,” said Lily, her eyes hard. Before Sirius could open his mouth to agree with her, a new voice pitched in.

“What happened isn’t Sirius’ fault, Evans. This is all the fault of Walburga Black, who, being the delusional bat she is, thought it was okay to hurt Astrid that way. I’m not agreeing with what she did, I’m not defending Padfoot’s treatment of Astrid in school, but I think it’s important to acknowledge that it wasn’t Sirius who hurt her,” said James calmly, walking into the room.

Lily looked at James, a dry, dark smirk on her face as if she was taunting him for not knowing something.

“She still refuses to talk about it properly. She just makes vague statements that allude to what happened but never actually speaks about it,” Lily said, and suddenly Sirius could see the dark circles under her eyes, the tiredness that radiated off her.

“She always did that. Whenever Reg or I asked her something that she didn’t actually want to answer, she’d make a vague statement that seemed like an answer. Its her way of letting you think you know everything, but keeping everything to herself at the same time.”

Remus, who had just arrived, placed a hand on Sirius’ shoulder.

“Call Regulus,” said Sirius, quietly, his shoulders sagging in defeat. “He’s the one she’ll want to see when she wakes up.”

Lily stared at the boy, a sad look on her face, and whispered to herself, “If only you knew.”

Suddenly Madam Pomfrey appeared, rushing out of her room. She saw the boys and shooed them out, though Remus could tell that it was completely out of respect to Astrid's wishes.
“Mommy please,” sobbed Astrid, clawing at the door, trying to get her mother’s attention. Tears streamed down her face, desperate hiccups making it harder for her to breathe.

“I’m sorry,” she sobbed, though she had no idea why her mother was locking her up in the Punishment room. She hated the punishment room. Ever since she was a child, she had been locked in the room whenever she did something her mother didn’t approve of. When her father was around, that issue wasn’t there because he would keep her safe, but when he left, when she was 11, it had gotten worse.

She didn’t know what she had done. She had kept up pretenses, played nice with all the purebloods who were horrible to her at school, even danced with Regulus. Sirius had disappeared once he got to the house, so she couldn’t try to convince him to dance with her.

“Please,” she whispered, sliding to the ground as her sobs echoed in the dark room. “Help me, please.”

Her throat had started to close up- both out of fright at the ever-constant stream of tears rolling down her face. She hated the dark, hated the way it made her feel, hated the fear that coiled inside her stomach like a snake ready to pounce.

“Please,” she rasped, holding her knees towards her, her fingers holding onto the torn fabric of her dress, dry sobs echoing in the room.

It was never her. She knew that her mother loved the fame, the fortune, the parties. She loved those aspects of her life, but Astrid was a curse. A blight. She was a worthless piece of shit, always the second wanted, always never enough, always stupid, always clumsy.

She was a combination of always and never, a combination of everything her mother hated and despised. She was everything that disappointed her grandmother. She was everything that repulsed Sirius.

She was never enough.

She was disposable, she knew that. She knew that if her mother could get rid of her in a more permanent manner, she would. In fact, she probably wanted to. But considering that Astrid was the key to the Black fortune, there was really no reason for her to act on her desires in that arena.
She curled up into a small ball on the floor, tears still leaking out of her eyes, heart jackrabbing in her chest.

“Help me,” she whispered, “Please. Help me.”

Suddenly, Astrid felt like she was physically pulled out of the memory and into reality.

“Are you okay?” asked Lily, her pale, worried face hovering above her. “And don’t say you’re fine.”

“I’m ok,” Astrid whispered, echoes of the Punishment Room following her still.

She glanced to her right, and her eyes focused on Sirius who was sitting on the bed next to hers. Remus, Peter and James were all standing and looking at her with various levels of relief.

“How do you feel?” asked James. “We tried to get Regulus here, but he couldn’t come.”

“It’s not a good idea for him to be seen interacting with me,” said Astrid, quietly.

“I’ll see if I can get him here,” Sirius said, moving from his seat, but not looking at her even once.

“Don’t. At this point, your mother will already have spies everywhere and she’s definitely watching both of us,” said Astrid, her eyes emptily staring at her shaking fingers with a sort of detached resignation.

“Astrid,” said Lily, quietly.

“Tell them,” Astrid said, interrupting her. “It’s gone on long enough and if they are going to keep getting involved, regardless of our attempts to keep them out, Mrs. Black will definitely use it against me.”
Lily let out a soft gasp, and Sirius turned, her eyes angry.

“What has my bloody mother done now? What game is she playing now?”

“She wants you back. And I’m merely a means to get what she wants,” said Astrid, her eyes still watched her fingers, the phantom feeling of the wall giving away under her nails still echoing in her mind.

“Astrid,” said Madam Pomfrey, her concerned face suddenly coming into view. “I have some medicines to give you. How are you feeling now?”

“Like I got hit by a curse,” said Astrid, honest for once. “Could you please take the boys inside your office and inform them of the situation? You would be able to explain it better than me and Lily.”

Pomfrey paused, looking at the younger girl with a sense of confusion and sadness. She could see the younger girl struggling to stay sitting up, her fingers were quivering but other than that, there was no sign of her discomfort or her worry. She was about to make her lay back down when Sirius suddenly said, “You shouldn’t be sitting up in the state you’re in. Put your head down.”

Pomfrey was surprised because it was well known amongst the staff that Sirius Black and Astrid Arundell were not on good terms. But was that really the case? To have noticed that Astrid was tired, you would have had to been either a medically trained individual...or someone very close to her. It couldn’t have been because of the time they had known each other...but because Sirius spent time watching the girl.

And that honestly broke her heart.

“Of course, Ms. Arundell,” she said, realizing she had not yet answered the girl. “If you’re sure.”

“I am.”

Sirius glanced at Astrid once, and Lily was surprised to see a strange expression close to regret and guilt flash over his features before he followed his friends to Pomfrey’s office.
“Have a seat, boys,” she said, kindly, though her smile did not reach her eyes.

Sirius took a moment to sit down, before saying, “What did my mother do to her?”

Pomfrey’s stared at Sirius, surprised he had figured that much out so quickly.

“We found out exactly how Walburga Black treated her a little while back,” said Remus, quietly.

Pomfrey looked confused, before realization dawned on her face when James quietly said, “She used to crucio her.”

“Dear me,” said Pomfrey, breathless at the inhumanity of it all. “I hadn’t even checked for damage due to abuse.”

“You mean we’re not here because she’s dying?” said Sirius, looking up, hope suddenly in his eyes. He had obviously assumed the worst right away.

“Heavens no! Not if I have anything to say about it! Mr. Black, over the summer, your mother cast a very, very dark spell on Miss Arundell. She used your DNA to essentially...impregnate her. It’s not a reversible spell.”

“What?” said Remus, after a moment of pause. “I thought magic couldn’t create anything out of nothingness.”

“There are some dark spells that can do that, but it comes at a cost,” said Sirius, quietly. “I’ve never heard of this spell though.”

“Neither have we,” said Pomfrey. “But we did the paternity spell. It is undoubtedly yours, Mr. Black.”

Sirius stared at her for a moment, a strange expression on his face.

“Sirius,” said James, quietly.
“What do we do?” asked Sirius, his voice hoarse.

“What do you mean?”

“What does she need?” he asked, running his hand over his face, looking exhausted suddenly. “How do I make sure Astrid is okay?”

“I don’t know, dear. But I have a feeling you already do,” said Pomfrey, kindly, before summoning a house elf for some hot chocolate for the boys.

“You’ll be fine,” said Pomfrey, before she left to help Astrid.

After all, Sirius had not once asked how to get rid of the baby. All he had wanted to know was how to help make Astrid whole again, how to keep her safe. Sirius Black would do right by her, and that was all that mattered in Pomfrey’s mind at that moment, because there were so few people willing to do right by the Arundell girl. She needed people who cared about her, and she had no doubt that these boys would do the trick.
Chapter Notes

I am so so so sorry for the delay on this fic. I have been writing it, I have a beta again and life just kept getting in the way.

But there is no excuse.

I have 30k written, but I want to get to a particular point in the story- namely the birth-before the next bit. But yes, I have a lot written, I am almost at the month of the birth itself and I will try very very hard to be regular. Many of you lovely readers have reminded me in the comments and I am so glad that people like this story. I am putting a lot of effort into making this sensitive to the multitude of issues it addresses and I hope you have noticed that- but if not, I just need to work harder at it.

Thank you for reading and thank you for waiting. It means a lot.

I love you guyss.

Sirius could hear Madam Pomfrey fuss over Astrid in the other room, but he couldn’t move. He was frozen in horror, imagining his mother’s gleeful look as she attacked Astrid, the screams of his childhood friend echoing in his mind.

Never in his wildest dreams had he thought his mother would use dark magic to impregnate Astrid.

“For her to have used that spell,” said Sirius, quietly. “She must have been very desperate. It’s very dark magic - it is linked with the life force of the person who casts it. My mother has truly gone insane.”

“What?” said James, though Sirius could tell from his voice that reality was crashing down on him.

“My mother has linked her life with the child inside Astrid. When the child is born, my mother will die. She used the two things she hoped would bring me back: the girl I spent most of my childhood revolving around and the woman that gave birth to me. She’s sending a message.”

“What on earth could she possibly be trying to say?” said Remus, looking slightly green.

“I have to choose Astrid- who is a symbol of the life I could have - or my mother- who is a symbol
of what my life used to be. Though, I’m quite confused as to what she is trying to pull, given I would choose Astrid immediately.”

“I think I can answer that, Mr. Black,” said a calm, but sad voice from behind, causing the boys to turn around and see Dumbledore standing at the door. His face looked grave, his eyes not twinkling as they were wont to do.

“Your mother is sending you a warning. By siding with Astrid, you will enter a world of danger and responsibility that you have not had to face before this. But if you choose your mother, you will go back to the dark world you grew up in, with everything you could ever want given to you, and no need to work for it,” he said, walking in and taking a seat across them. “She is telling you that if you choose the wrong person, you will end up on the wrong side of the war.”

“She can’t be serious!” said Sirius, angrily. “Why in the world would I side with You-Know-Who?”

“Because of the child growing inside Astrid,” said Remus, realizing what a masterstroke this really was. “Your unborn child is still growing inside Astrid. If you chose to side with what you really believe in, they would both be in danger. That is what she means. She knew you would want to protect both of them, to keep them from harm.”

The room fell into silence, and Sirius stared blankly at the wall across him.

“You can’t actually be thinking about this,” said a voice from the door, and they turned to look at Astrid.

“Miss Arundell! You need to be sitting down, you’re far too weak right now! I still need to do a few more checks on you before you can go!” Pomfrey scolded, her voice carrying over to them from the hospital wing behind Astrid.

“I’ll be right back, Madame Pomfrey. Let me have my say.”

Pomfrey went quiet but stood behind her, just in case.

“Sirius Black, you will not go back to that house. Do you understand me? I don’t care what weird thought you managed to get into your head, but I’ve not suffered this long to have you crawl back to that woman with your tail between your legs.”
Everyone stared at the brown haired girl, her curls bouncing as she angrily scolded the boy. This was an Astrid none of them had seen before—except Sirius, who was looking at her like he had seen a ghost.

“And I don’t like this nonsense about protecting me. You know I can protect myself just fine, or have you all forgotten I’m the reigning champion of the Duel Club, and I’ve yet to get anything below an O in my DADA classes. And thanks to my mother, I’ve become very good at warding charms. So don’t tell me that you want to become a Death Eater to protect me and the Star Child. I will whack you on the head with the hardest object I can find.”

Sirius gave her a watery smile. “Star Child?”

“It’s what Lily calls them,” said Astrid, the sudden bout of righteous anger gone, and her body seeming to cave into itself once she had her say.

“You’re pregnant,” said Sirius, softly.

“Yes,” said Astrid, quietly. “I am.”

“I’m going to be a father.”

“You are.”

“We’re going to be a family,” said Sirius, reverently as he got up and moved towards the girl.

Suddenly tears started falling from Astrid’s eyes, but she didn’t sob or make a single noise. It was almost as if she wasn’t even aware of the tears.

“We are,” she said softly, blinking once, twice, before smiling at her feet. “We’re going to be a family.”

As Sirius stopped just short of touching her, the others looked away, unable to peek in at this private
“I can ask my mom for some of her old stuff from when she was having me,” said James. “I know that she needed to use things to hide the bump back in the day.”

Astrid looked up, startled, almost as if she had forgotten that Sirius, Remus and James had come to her rooms, Peter having gone somewhere.

“That would be great,” she said, softly, smiling at James. “Thank you.”

James grinned, gently ruffling her hair. Sirius stared at them, confused, and so did Lily. The only person not confused about Astrid’s being comfortable with James was Remus. Astrid would flinch when someone touched her without her realizing they were going to, but James didn’t get that reaction.

Sirius felt a little jealous, even though he knew very well that he had no right to feel that way, given how he had treated the girl over the years. He would do anything to take it all back. If it was possible to turn back time and fix everything, to stop his mother and prevent Astrid’s pain, he would do it at a drop of a hat. He didn’t have a time turner though, so all he could do was do everything in his power to protect the girl in front of him.

Sometimes, he really wished he was more like Prongs and Moony. They were good at comforting people. They didn’t destroy everything they touched. But he could only be himself, brokenness and all.

Lily was watching the duo curiously, almost as if she was trying to figure out what they were. James was gently running his fingers through Astrid’s hair and Astrid, slowly but surely, was melting under the touch, like the touch-starved child that she was. It broke her heart that Astrid was like this, like she wasn’t sure if the affection people gave her was real or not. It broke her heart that the only one she felt no doubt about it with was James, not her or Sirius. Perhaps this was why she had told her that James wasn’t actually as arrogant as she thought.

Almost as if he knew she was watching, James looked up, his eyes meeting Lily’s. She had never seen that look on his face before. She was used to the goofy, silly James Potter who ran after her, irritating her at every possible moment. This James was quite, protective, and every bit of the man that Astrid had said he had become.
Without her consent, her heart skipped a beat, regardless of how inappropriate the timing was. This was the man Astrid had tried to hint at. She looked away, turning to Sirius instead.

“So what’s the plan?” she asked. “Astrid and I have worked out what to do in terms of health and her entire pregnancy cycle.”

“Lily could write a book on it, given the amount of research she’s done,” said Astrid with a smile at Lily, but didn’t move as James continued to gently massage her scalp.

“That’s our Evans, alright,” said James, with a chuckle.

“I’ll have to ask Reg to find out what the spell was,” said Sirius, raising a hand to stop Astrid’s protest. “Reg is smart. He can easily manipulate our mother and protect himself.”

“He’s just a boy,” said Astrid, shuddering at the thought.

“And you’re just a girl, Astrid. We don’t know what that spell can do or if she has altered it in any way. We can’t risk losing you,” said Remus, shaking his head.

“Astrid,” said Sirius, quietly. “Reg knows how to take care of himself. And he will never forgive himself if you die on his watch.”

The unsaid And neither would I, was loud and clear.

Astrid nodded, her eyes on Sirius. For a moment, the other teens felt like they were looking at an Astrid they only saw during Dueling tournaments, an Astrid who was much stronger than she looked, an Astrid who meant business.

“Alright. Let him know. But he needs to be careful. Slytherin is filled with spies that even he doesn’t know of.”

“And you do?” asked Remus, curiously.
Astrid’s lips quirked up in an amused smirk.

“Of course. I made a promise with Sirius that we’d leave all this behind us before we came to Hogwarts. He chose to go about it like a bumbling baboon, as you Gryffies tend to. I went about it in a well-planned Ravenclaw manner and systematically cut ties in the least suspicious manner possible. Unfortunately I didn’t exactly plan for Walburga and my mother’s insanity.”

Sirius stared at her before a small, cautious smile formed on his face.

“First thing was to keep the spies as far from Sirius as possible. Andy helped quite a bit with that, given that she already had her eye on Ted at that time. Plus, while Slytherin’s seems to be really good at subtlety in the eyes of their non-Slytherin peers, they’re really not if you know them.”

Lily smiled at that, glancing at Astrid, who seemed to be staring at the spot between her and Sirius with a small frown, completely unaware that James had paused in his endeavour to give her a head massage.

Sirius got up suddenly and walked out, startling Astrid out of her thoughts.

“Sirius?” she said, confused. “Where are you going?”

“Just for a walk. I’ll be back in a bit.”

Astrid leaned back into James and the couch again, frowning.

“It’s too much for him,” she said, quietly. “This is why I wanted to keep you guys out of it.”

“He needs to grow up,” said Lily, harshly. “We’re moving towards a war, and his family will be involved. You know that, I know that, and even he knows that. If he hurts you again, I will kill him.”

“Sirius,” said Remus, calmly, though it sounded more like he was reprimanding Lily for her words. “Is very protective of those he loves and cares about. You would be a fool to not realize that Astrid,
regardless of how he has treated her over the years, has always had a special place in his heart. To him, this feels like a failure on his part to protect her.”

“And to find out that she was better at protecting him than he was at protecting her is just as heavy a blow,” said James, with a small sad smile at the top of Astrid’s head. “I’ve lost count of the number of times we’ve pranked Slytherins and Ravenclaws for no apparent reason, only to find out they had done something to Astrid. All of Sirius’ pranks were aimed at people who hurt you.”

Astrid stared at them in horror, tears in her eyes. She had never hoped that Sirius would feel the same protectiveness, the same affection that she had for him. After all, she was useless and worthless, wasn’t she?

“We’re boys,” said James with a chuckle, kissing the top of her head gently. “We’re always going to find it hard to tell you girls how we feel, and we’re always going to turn into idiots around you. It doesn’t excuse how he has treated you- he isn’t excusing his horrid behaviour, and neither should you. But you should know, he does care about you.”

“But he’s hurting,” said Astrid, her eyes wide, tears in her eyes.

“And so are you,” said Remus gently, leaning forward from where he was sitting. “Give yourselves a chance to heal. Nothing gets fixed overnight.”

Astrid nodded, wide eyed at the kindness of the people around her, not used to having so many people care about her own well being when, for years, everyone had put Sirius’ well being over her own- both in their own heads and hers.

It was a strange and almost heady realization- that these people cared about her regardless of whatever else had and would happen.

She had never had that before.
Hey!

So I finished writing the last bit of the fic. I need to work out some things, add some extra stuff here and there, and edit it, but for the most part, the first book is done.

I originally was planning to have this specific fic range from the conception to the death of Harry’s parents, but then I realized the feel of this fic sort of goes away. This "book" was meant to be the darker time of Astrid’s life with/around Sirius. The next book will be more fluffy and will be set post the graduation of the Marauders and Lily.

I am thinking of having that span from 1978 to 1981. The story after that is already underway and well into Harry's first year. So this series will go on for a while, I think.

But I wanted your opinions! I was weighing the option of having the next fic be a saga where you follow them through the entirety of the 3-4 years till October 31st and the option of having the next fic be like a series of snapshots into their life together in a world at war- their friendships, their relationships, them raising the Star Child together...

Let me know what you guys think of the two options!

“Are you quite sure about this?” asked Lily, looking at their packed bags.

It had been two months since the boys had found out and having someone else to help had done wonders for Astrid’s health. Lily suspected that Astrid had not had so many people care for her in a very long time (which was heartbreaking to say the least), but she allowed the boys to feel useful and let them care for her without much of a fuss.

Astrid and Sirius were still walking around each other as if they were walking on eggshells, and Sirius could often be seen watching the girl with a look of guilt in his eyes. Lily could tell that the boy had grown up, had realized in the face of responsibility and tragedy that he could not continue to treat Astrid the way he had. He was obviously coming to terms with what an asshole he had been.

Astrid seemed to swing between wanting to put the boy out of his misery without a thought to her own needs and making sure he felt guilty.

James was usually her go to person if she needed physical comfort, and even Lily at times. However, when she started vomiting more frequently, it surprised them all when the only person she would allow in was Remus. He roamed the halls looking incredibly proud of himself on those days. Astrid
wasn’t comfortable with Peter touching her for some reason so he usually ended up rushing to get her pillows when she needed them.

Of late, however, Astrid seemed to be getting more energy, seemed happier and the nausea had slowly started fading away. From what James’ mother had told them, being a Healer at Mungo’s, 14 weeks was a good time for Astrid to start her exercises and had suggested she come stay with the Potters for the Holidays.

Lily was not happy about being separated from Astrid, and even though James had asked her if she wanted to join as well, she knew she would have to go back to meet her parents. However, she understood the benefits of having Astrid at the Potter’s, where she would have continuous access to a fully trained medical professional.

“I’m sure,” said Astrid, looking at the luggage as well. “It will be my first time going to a house that isn’t the Black’s.”

“Why do you sound like you will miss it?” asked Lily, frowning. Over the past month, she had realized that Astrid implied more than she outright said, and it was necessary to understand quickly what she wanted.

“I won’t miss Walburga or my mother. But I will miss Narcissa and Bella, though they would bring their husbands with them. I will miss Kreacher, who always took the time to make me my favorite pastries for Christmas. I will miss those moments, but I am glad I am not going to be going there this time.”

“I understand your closeness with Narcissa, but I can’t fathom how you’re close to Bellatrix.”

Astrid smiled to herself.

“No one really does,” she replied, leaving it at that. Bella was a little mad, for sure. And yet, Astrid couldn’t find it in her to fear her or hate her. Bella had always cared for her. Walburga Black would never lay a finger on her body when Bella was around to notice it.

Lily left it at that, grabbing hold of her bags, and Astrid picked up her own.

“There you two are!” said James, brightly, grinning. “Astrid, give those to us. Penny, our house elf,
already popped in to take mine and Sirius’.”

“Thank you,” she said, smiling at both of them. Sirius nodded and smiled back slightly, taking the bigger trunk from her.

“You still sure you can’t turn up, Evans?” asked James, taking the other trunk and throwing an arm casually around her shoulder. She let it stay there, making Astrid look down at the floor, smirking, and Sirius look surprised and concerned for their mental health. Lily noticed Astrid gently taking Sirius’ free hand and pulling him ahead so they could have some privacy.

The look of cautious joy and worry on Sirius’ face broke her heart.

“Yes,” said Lily, answering Potter’s question. “My parents want me home so I can meet my sister’s boyfriend. I think the real reason is because they’re getting fed up of dealing with him alone.”

James laughed brightly. “The one you described as a walrus?”

“The very same! I don’t know what Petunia is thinking! How could she even think of dating him?”

James stiffened slightly but relaxed, making Lily feel really worried for a moment. Had she said the wrong thing?

“Maybe she’s doing it to annoy you?” asked James, lightly.

“Ugh, I don’t want to talk about those two anymore,” said Lily, with a small huff. “I’m going to have to deal with them the entire Holiday.”

“We could talk about Astrid and Sirius,” said James, with a sad smile. “They’re getting better, but Sirius constantly looks like he’s been crucio’d when he looks at her.”

“I don’t think she’s truly angry with him,” Lily said. “She doesn’t blame him for the action of his mother. She does blame him for how he treated her over the past years, but I think she just wants to know why. Why did he treat her the way he did?”
“I don’t think any of us know the answer to that, to be honest.”

“Really?” asked Lily, skeptically.

“Remus might, but that would be more in terms of theories than anything else.”

“And Astrid would hate it if you forced the answer out of Sirius against his will. She wants to hear it from him.”

“Sometimes I look at Astrid and wonder how in the world someone that good can even exist,” said James sadly. “All alone, the only one standing, and it only made her kind.”

“Its honestly heartbreaking, isn’t it?” said Lily, unable to keep the affection from her voice.

“Sometimes I want to grab a time-turner and kill Walburga Black in her sleep,” said James, his voice rough and deep with anger. “And that dratted mother of hers.”

“And I’d help you,” said Lily, warmly, and James looked at her in both awe and surprise at the sudden warmth in her voice, but she didn’t take it back. Instead, she just smiled at him and made sure they caught up with Astrid and Sirius.

Lily was pleasantly surprised when James didn’t push her for anything, didn’t make a fool of himself. Instead, he seemed to realize that both of them were prioritizing their best friends instead.

Maybe Astrid was right, maybe she only saw one part of James.

“Hey guys,” said Remus, waving at them as they finally made it to the station. “Come on! We won’t get a place to sit otherwise!”

Lily laughed brightly, draping herself over Astrid gently, making the other girl laugh as well. Her hand was still in Sirius’, almost as if neither teen realized it. None of them commented on it, smiling secretly at each other.
“Yeah, yeah, Remmie,” said Sirius, with a roll of his eyes. “Hold your horses, we’re coming!”

“How many times have I told you not to call me that?” grumbled Remus, helping them bring in Lily’s and Astrid’s luggage into the first empty compartment they could find.

“Honestly?” said Sirius with a charming grin. “I’ve lost count at this point. Why do you ask?”

Remus huffed in annoyance, making Astrid giggle, sitting next to him carefully. Sirius sat across them and James and Lily sat next to him, leaving space for Peter if he ever showed up. Astrid had taken the place next to the window, and was staring out at it, obviously lost in her own thoughts.

The cabin was silent for a while, none of them willing to break the peace that had settled over them for the first time in months.

“Lily,” said Astrid, quietly. “You’re going to be alone for the hols.”

“Yeah?” said Lily, unsure of where this was going.

“Promise me you’ll be careful,” she said, her eyes still staring out the window. “The Death Eaters are all running around right now.”

“If you see anything suspicious,” said James, seriously. “Come straight to us. Your house is connected by floo right?”

“Yeah,” said Lily, quietly. “My parents let me get it connected last summer.”

“The minute you see something strange, send your parents and sister to safety and come straight to Potter manor. No wizard in their right mind would want to try and break into the manor.”

“What about my parents and sister?” asked Lily. “I can’t just leave them there.”
“There are a number of Arundell mansions that my grandmother has entrusted to me and only me. Feel free to use one of them as a safe-house if you must,” said Astrid, confused as to why this was a problem.

“Your grandmother gave you part of the estates?” asked Sirius, surprised. Usually, such a thing was done when the heir to a family reached 17, but Astrid made it sound like she had the estates for quite some time.

“Well, when father disappeared and was pronounced dead- given that he was missing for quite a while and no one found him or his body- the estates and the trust was supposed to be with my mother. But grandmother always hated her and changed the wills without my mother’s knowledge. So I got part of the estates and the trust fund back in third or fourth year.”

“Does your grandmother know yet?” asked Remus. “About all of this and the Star Baby?”

“I’ve not written to her and she hasn’t written to me. She doesn’t like me because of my mother but at the same time, she likes me quite a bit more than she like my mum. If news hasn’t already reached her, it will soon, given that James’ mum needed me to list an actual adult as my point of contact that wasn’t a professor.”

“How do you think she will react?” asked James, worried slightly. Astrid didn’t need more stress than she already had in her life.

“I’m not sure. We’re not very close, given that mum wouldn’t really let me meet her. She kept telling me I had disappointed my grandmother somehow and that she didn’t want to meet me.”

The compartment was quiet again, Astrid having finally looked away from the window and was leaning against Remus, who was absent-mindedly massaging her head. Astrid, once she had realized the others would touch her, behaved like a touch-starved child more often than not. She would often end up curled against James’ chest, sprawled over Lily’s lap or leaning against Remus, who would always pull her closer like he, too, needed the reminder of physical touch every once in a while.

The only person Astrid wouldn’t touch like that was Sirius. Sure, Lily had noticed that she would often sit closer to Sirius than a normal person would. She would also sometimes brush past him just so, ending up with her hand brushing against his or a shoulder against another. Those touches were subtle, careful, almost like she was checking if it was safe to do.

“Don’t worry,” said Remus, warmly. “It’ll all work out.”
Astrid nodded, her eyes slowly closing and Remus let her fall asleep, glancing at Sirius, who was carefully watching the girl, almost as if he didn’t have the right to.

Remus suddenly felt guilty for having his best friend’s ex-fiance leaning against him the way she was, but Sirius made eye contact with him and smiled, almost like he was telling him it was ok.

Sirius, Remus realized suddenly, couldn’t deny the girl her small pleasures- the pleasure of having someone care about her, the pleasure of having someone gently run their fingers through her hair.

He would not be able to do that- not now and maybe even not ever- and he had accepted that. He didn’t think that he deserved that happiness, and yet, he continued to hover over Astrid like a guard dog of some sort, waiting to taking out his irritation, frustration and sadness out on whoever looked at her wrong.

Sirius, having realized what a bully he had been over the years to the one person who simply never stopped caring about him, had woken up and grown up overnight. He had decided to himself that, while he didn’t deserve a woman as good as Astrid, he was going to damn well make sure that she would get someone who did.

Remus found himself agreeing to that unspoken and hidden purpose and vowed to himself that he would help Sirius make sure Astrid, regardless of the situation, would be happy.

Merlin knew she deserved it.

Lily waved at them, her eyes worried as she hugged Astrid tightly, but let her go simply because she knew James would take good care of her.

“We’ll keep her safe,” said James, placing his hand on her shoulder in a manner that was oddly friendly and very similar to the way that James would touch Sirius or Remus.

Lily’s eyes welled up and she launched herself at him, hugging him tightly.

“Please,” she said into his ear. “Please keep her safe. I’ve failed her as a friend once, I simply cannot
do it again.”

James’ hands hesitantly wrapped around her and pulled her close.

“Of course,” he said, calmly, almost as if he was certain nothing wrong would be allowed to happen. “Whoever wants to get to her will have to come through me and Sirius, who, as we all know, will probably patrol outside her room in an effort to keep her safe.”

Lily snorted wetly, and nodded, moving away, but James’ arms didn’t let her get far.

“You too,” he said gruffly. “It’s dangerous to be on the muggle side of Britain right now. You need to stay safe too.”

Lily nodded. “I’ve got the address to the safehouse Astrid mentioned and I’ll get to your place the minute something looks off.”

Finally, James let her go, his eyes incredibly serious, and nodded.

They were adults, Lily realized suddenly, as she watched James walk towards Astrid and Sirius. All three of them were grown up, mature and were ready to take on the world outside the walls of Hogwarts already, even though they were only 6th years.

Somehow, the two people she had never expected to grow up and act like an adult were the two people to grow up first. Astrid looked over at her and smiled- a smile that genuinely reached her eyes, and Lily waved at her, trying to hide the tears in her eyes as she watched the rare smile on her best friend’s face.

“She’s worried about you,” said James, wrapping an arm casually around Astrid.

“I know,” said Astrid softly. “I wish she wasn’t.”

“She loves you,” said Sirius, quietly. “Of course she’s worried.”
The pleased sort of smile on Astrid’s face at this declaration made James pull her closer. She was always surprised when someone said that anyone loved her, almost as if she genuinely didn’t think something like that was possible.

They fell silent, the sort of silence that was comfortable and warm. Sirius was pushing the cart forward, Astrid’s trunk carefully placed on top of his own. James was doing the same, with one arm protectively draped around Astrid, who was carrying the smallest packages.

As they made their way to the end of King’s Cross, an elderly duo waved at them. James laughed brightly and sprinted towards them, managing somehow to pull Astrid with him. Sirius followed with a laugh.

“Mum, Dad!” said James, brightly hugged both of them.

“We missed you too, James,” said Mr. Potter with a warm chuckle. “Hello, boy. You’ve gotten taller somehow.”

Sirius grinned impishly.

“Can’t do anything about the fact that everyone around me is short, Dad.”

“And you must be Astrid,” said Mrs. Potter warmly, moving forward to pull her into a hug as well, when Astrid froze, her eyes wide. Sirius had immediately put himself between them, startling both the women.

“Sorry,” said Sirius, easily. “But she doesn’t do well with sudden affection.”

Astrid nodded, nervously.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you though,” she said, awkwardly.

“We’ve heard so much about you! Come along then! We should probably get to the mansion quickly,” said Mr. Potter with a smile.
“Oh that’s right!” said Mrs. Potter brightly. “You must all be tired! I have some lemonade ready for all of you at home!”

Astrid still seemed nervous and like she was second guessing her decision as James and his father took the two carts and pushed them towards the exit. Sirius put a gently hand on her back, startling her.

“It’s okay,” said Sirius. “Mum and Dad wanted to help. When we told them to find out if they could tell us about some safe healers, Mum insisted you come over so she could help you herself. They’re the good sort.”

Astrid nodded and shuffled closer to him, and Sirius cautiously wrapping his arm around her waist so that he had pulled her into a sort of side hug. Ahead of them, James was excitedly telling his parents all about the stuff going on at school and what they were doing in Quidditch.

If Astrid was coming to him for reassurance, Sirius sure as hell would make sure he gave it to her.

He wasn’t like Remus who could pull her in with kind and gentle eyes. He wasn’t like James who could pull her in with the brotherly charm. He wasn’t like Lily, who was kind, generous and naturally maternal.

He couldn’t be any of them. He could only be himself- broken, ruthlessly honest and unnecessarily defensive Sirius Black.

Sometimes, even he could be of use to someone like Astrid Arundell.

He intended on holding those moment close to his heart like the precious gems they were.

When they had all finished their lemonade, Mr. Potter had taken the two boys back to look at the changes he had made to the Quidditch Pitch out back. Mrs. Potter stayed and smiled carefully at Astrid, who looked more and more anguished as Sirius and James walked away.

“We won’t hurt you,” said Mrs. Potter calmly.
Astrid looked at her surprised and alarmed.

“I understand that you’re nervous around us. I know there are things that have happened to you beyond what the boys have told me or even know themselves,” she said and slowly, the younger woman’s body seemed to curl in on itself, like she was trying to make herself smaller. “But I’m not going to ask you to tell me. Should you feel safe enough to do so, feel free. I’m always here to listen. We can, if you would prefer, keep this out of that part of your life and focus on what will soon be your life.”

Astrid nodded, her body language still screaming fear and hesitance but relaxing nonetheless.

“I know it may mean nothing from me, a woman you barely even know, but what your mother and Sirius’ mother did was wrong on so many levels. I know you know that, but I feel like I need to say it nonetheless. They made both of you feel worthless. But Astrid, honey, you are far more than your mother thought you could be. James tells me you’re brilliant at Potions! Sirius mentioned once you wanted to be a Potions master. Apparently you’re also quite gifted at charms, given the plans the boys have made to use your help in their pranks.”

“Sweetheart, you are so much more than anyone can ever tell you. You’re going to be a mother soon. Let me tell you, it is one of the most magical things in the world- more so than anything we could ever do with a wand or some potions. But that doesn’t define you either. You are Astrid Arundell, and you can be whatever in the world you want to be.”

Astrid’s eyes had gotten watery halfway through Mrs. Potter’s tirade and by the end of it, she was silently sobbing. It was the quiet, hiccuping crying of a child would cry when they that knew no one cared to check in on them and that them making noise would mean punishment.

“You’ve probably held it all in for so long,” said Mrs. Potter, standing up and letting Astrid fling her arms around her. “Let it all out, honey. Let it all out.”

“I’m sorry,” she whimpered against the older woman’s belly. “But please don’t tell the boys.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Potter, matter of factly. “That lot has the emotional capacity of a teaspoon. This is going to be a lady’s thing. Come on then. Let’s get you all freshened up and then we can have a spot of tea. Chamomile tea always helped me when I had James.”
Astrid couldn’t help the soft laugh at the lofty tone and nodded, following the older woman to the bathroom so she could freshen up.

Once they were both settled in the living room, the loud laughter of Mister Potter and her classmates muted but still audible, Astrid opened her mouth.

“I’m not good at talking about myself. I’m not sure how to do that,” she said, quietly. “I appreciate the offer, but I don’t think I’m ready to talk about what happened in my old house and what happened in Walburga’s house. I don’t know if I’ll ever be ready.”

Mrs. Potter nodded, almost as if she had expected this.

“What do you want to talk about?” asked Mrs. Potter.

“Have you contacted my grandmother?” asked Astrid, not wanting to talk about what she wanted or who she had become under the heavy hands of Walburga Black and her mother.

“Yes, and she has responded as well. I wanted to wait till we were alone to give it to you,” said Mrs. Potter. “One minute, let me just find it.”

Astrid watched as Mrs. Potter flicked her wand and pulled out a thick envelope that she had obviously hidden in a drawer in the kitchen.

With shaking hands, she opened the letter, pulling out the parchment.

Dear Astrid,

It has come to my attention that perhaps my decision to leave you with your mother was idiotic at best. I should have taken you away from her the first chance I got, but looking at your face and remembering the betrayal of your father was simply too much to bear.

I realize my mistake now. Had I rescued you from that vile woman, perhaps you would not be in the state you are in today.
I have so much to tell you, so much to talk about, but after years of not having seen you, I’m not sure I have the right. I should have made the effort to step forward but I let my ego make my decisions for me and I am truly repent that. You should not have to be an adult so soon.

I have already started discussions with Dumbledore of how to handle your pregnancy. You, of course, may not be able to attend your 7th year given you will have to take care of your child. He has agreed to let you take the NEWT year from home.

Perhaps a change of scene and some time away from everyone is what you need. Be it in my own home or that of Andromeda Tonks, who I remember left that vile family after her marriage and was always kind to you when your father was still around.

I realize I have sat and made plans, that you may very well not want me to do so. But I thought you might want to be able to enjoy your time with your friends without worrying about your future.

You are still young, Astrid. You are still a child. You shouldn’t have to deal with all of this, and I am truly sorry that you do. I will do everything in my power to let you do whatever it is you want to do with your life.

Regards,

Isolde Arundell

Astrid stared at the parchment, confused. She had never even thought to assume that her Grandmother would want to help out.

Did mother lie about this as well?

Her mother had taken away so much from her, but couldn’t let her have this one thing?

“Would you like to meet her, dear?” asked Mrs. Potter, carefully watching the younger woman’s face to see if she needed to call James.
“Yes,” said Astrid, quietly. “I’d like to meet her. Preferable with James and Sirius nearby, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Potter, smiling and got up to get the tea she had set out earlier and some parchment to write on.

Astrid gratefully took the tea from her hands and sipped on it slowly, as Mrs. Potter wrote the letter.

“We could very well have her come here, sweetheart,” said Mrs. Potter, pausing in her letter writing. “I certainly wouldn’t mind.”

“I wouldn’t want to be a nuisance,” said Astrid quietly, though it was quite clear from the way her shoulders relaxed that she appreciated the idea and liked it quite a bit.

“It wouldn’t be a bother, dear. You’re part of the family. Of course your grandmother can come here to meet you. It would be a safe space for you.”

Astrid smiled a slow smile.

“Thank you, Mrs. Potter. I truly appreciate it.”

Mrs. Potter smiled gently.

“Please, dear. Call me Euphemia.”

The two sat there in silence after that, sipping on their tea, listening to the sounds of Sirius and James getting up to some sort of mischief outside.

“How are you?” asked Sirius, from the door to her room. He was dressed in muggle clothes- jeans, a white shirt and a leather jacket. It was an odd contrast to how she was dressed, in a baggy, flowy white nightdress that hid her baby bump quite well.
Astrid smiled, sitting on her bed and patted the space next to him. He cautiously walked in, his eyes on her, as if he wasn’t sure he was allowed in. Astrid’s eyes were bright, but there were dark circles under her eyes, her face looking slightly gaunt.

“Tired, but apparently that is to be expected,” said Astrid, watching as Sirius sat down, keeping an arms length distance between them.

Astrid looked at him, sadly, noting his tired and cautious eyes, the way he didn’t touch her, the way he didn’t make eye contact.

Guilt, she thought, tilting her head slightly. He was feeling guilty.

James had, over the past few days, taken to touching her baby bump, ever since she had taken his hand and put it there. Sirius would watch, a small smile on his face, but never made a move to touch her in any way.

She reached out, keeping her eyes on Sirius, who was watching her hand. Gently, she took his hand and put it on her visible baby bump. His mouth parted and his breath hitched.

It felt different, Astrid realized. Having Sirius’ hand on her stomach felt very different to how James’ hand had felt.

“You shouldn’t,” said Sirius softly. “You shouldn’t feel like you need to include me, Astrid. I’ve been horrible to you. I’ve hurt you a lot. You shouldn’t feel the need to…”

Astrid smiled.

“I’ve not forgiven you for what you’ve done,” she said, calmly. “But this child is as much yours and she is mine. You may not care for me, but you should care for her.”

“Why can’t I care for both of you?”
“Sirius, we mustn’t pretend that our history has vanished because of her. It’s not healthy for either of us,” she said, her hand still holding his against her stomach. His fingers twitched as though he wanted to caress her skin, but he had stopped himself from doing so.

His eyes looked incredibly sad for a moment before he shut down any emotion he may have had.

“You always act like you know me better than I do. Sometimes - most of the time - you’re right. This time, though, you couldn’t be more off the mark,” he said, his voice like the calm before the storm. He seemed angry, but he pulled his hand away with gentleness that contradicted his anger. He left her room in a huff, leaving Astrid confused and bewildered.

She put her hand where his had been and tears welled up in her eyes.

The part of her that had always loved Sirius desperately wanted him to hold her in his arms the way he had when they were younger, to have him brightly chatter to her about some inane idea he had.

But the part of her that had grown up knowing he would never feel the same quietly held her in place. She couldn’t put herself in that position again. She couldn’t be someone he needed to worry about because she needed to separate herself from him.

She couldn’t let him care for her - even in the capacity of a man whose child she was carrying - because her love-starved heart simply wouldn’t be able to take it. She would want more, she would always want more.

She couldn’t let herself go like that again, she couldn’t let there be any opening for anyone to take advantage of.

Who knew when Walburga and her mother were watching?

James watched as Astrid fretfully smoothed her dress as she looked in the mirror. Her grandmother was finally coming to the house, and Astrid was really nervous. Sirius was as well, but he did a good job hiding it from everyone.
“You’ll be fine,” said James, and he felt a rush of affection when Astrid turned to him, wide eyed as if she was begging for reassurance. “Remember, she wants to meet you, she knows she was in the wrong. She wouldn’t bother coming all the way here if she wanted to tell you to get lost.”

Astrid nodded, breathing in deeply before nodding again.

“Yes, my grandmother, the one I remember, was never one to waste time or mince words. She would not come here and simply give me hope if she didn’t mean something by it.”

“Exactly,” said James, though he was actually wondering what the fuck was wrong with Astrid’s family and their weird thing for functionality.

Astrid nodded at her reflection again, as Mrs. Potter called for them as their guest had arrived.

“Here goes nothing,” said Astrid, mostly to herself, and James watched as Astrid went through a sudden transformation before his very eyes. Her shoulders were no longer slumped, her eyes were focused and careful, her posture changing entirely. Her pure blood training immediately came into focus.

Sirius walked in without knocking and paused, waiting for Astrid.

“Ready?” Said Sirius, calmly, his eyes just as alert as Astrid, as if he was preparing himself for battle.

“Of course,” said Astrid, with a smile. “Grandmother is waiting for us.”

James had never heard that phrase sound more like a death knell.

“Astrid,” said a calm, collected voice and James turned into the hall to see a tall woman, her face ageless in a way but her eyes serious and war-worn. James wasn’t sure what he had expected, but this woman was not it. Perhaps he had merely expected her to look as old as Dumbledore, even though he knew that was a silly thought.

“Grandmother,” said Astrid, staying where she was standing. Normally, grandmothers and grandchildren should hug, but it was clear that it would not happen in this case.
“Black,” the woman said, her mouth curling into a look of scorn.

“It’s good to see you again, Grandmother,” he said, his lips curling into one of scorn. “Glad to know you suddenly decided to give a shit about your grandchild.”

“Sirius,” James hissed, but he was ignore by the trio.

“I’ve heard you’re no better,” Astrid’s grandmother said, her fists clenched.

“I was a child terrified by the fact that his entire life had been decided for him, realizing that not all families had their children betrothed at birth. I was a child. What was your excuse?” asked Sirius, his eyes focused on her. “Because you may say now that you want her back, want to give her a loving home, but I refuse to let her go to you if you can’t promise you won’t leave her. I’ve caused her enough pain. I don’t want to see her in any more.”

The mood in the room had changed and Astrid’s grandmother nodded, her eyes looking at him like she respected him for the first time.

“I intend on naming her as my heir, and with it, she will be able to live a life away from all of this if she so chooses, and no one would dare harm an Arundell,” said the elderly woman, a flash of quicksilver in her eyes.

“For the curse of Arundell would be upon them,” Astrid quietly said, her eyes focused on her grandmother.

“The curse?” asked James, confused.

“Anyone who harms an Arundell will be hit with a curse that will drive them insane, drive them to kill all those they love, and the person will spend every second till their death lost in a spiral of madness,” said Sirius. “It was the reason Walburga wanted Astrid to be a Black, because her birthright would mean that the Blacks would be unstoppable.”

“It would mean you can escape all of this, you can maybe even help me run the company, if you were so inclined and spend time alone, healing, with the child.”
“I think,” said Astrid, her voice calm and gentle. “It would be better for us to get to know each other again- grandmother to granddaughter. We have been apart for a long time. We have time, and we can make the decision when the birth date is closer. We...we shouldn’t rush anything.”

“Alright,” said Astrid’s grandmother quietly. “We can maybe go for coffee today, if Mrs. Potter is okay with it.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Potter with a smile. “No need to ask. I only hope that both of you will be happy.”

“Your...guard-dog can come along,” continued the elderly woman, eying Sirius with disdain.

“Which one?” asked Astrid, a small smirk on his face. “The one whose child i’m carrying or the one who has been hovering over me like I’m going to give birth right here and now?”

“I take offence to that,” said James, lightly. “I’ve always been more of a….regal stag.”

“Sure,” drawled Astrid, but her grandmother chuckled.

“I am glad you have found a family,” she said, softly.

Astrid smiled hesitantly and nodded, James gently squeezing her hand.

It took them another 15 minutes to leave the Potter household and go to a nearby wizarding coffeeshop, Astrid wearing Sirius’ large leather jacket and James’ scarf, Sirius hovering over her shoulder as the two teens followed Astrid’s grandmother.

They settled near the window, the snow falling outside, covering the landscape outside. The table was quiet compared to the rest of the shop, where the patrons chattered away.

“It is futile for me to say that if I had truly known what your mothers were doing, I would have rescued Astrid long ago,” said Astrid’s grandmother quietly. “I can only try to atone for my wrong-
doing. I hope you will allow an old woman that.”

Astrid watched her carefully, expressionless.

“You are providing me a way out and yourself an heir.”

The woman hesitated and then finally nodded.

“After all,” continued Astrid. “There is nothing like a free lunch, correct Grandmother? You always told me that when I was younger.”

“I could easily let one of your cousins inherit the title. But at the end of the day, you were always my favorite granddaughter- regardless of my issues with your father and mother. You were always different,” she said, softly, looking out of the window, her eyes glazed as if she was looking at something they could not see. “Part of my action is fueled by guilt. The other is fueled by clear favoritism.”

“My father had always been an Arundell. That was his defining feature,” said Astrid, quietly, nodding in thanks as Sirius silently poured her a cup of chamomile tea. “My mother’s defining life event was being the mother to an Arundell. That is their only relation to me. That is what you are talking about, correct?”

The older woman smiled tiredly and nodded.

“We are more than our names. We are people built in the fire and chaos of our lives, and we must stand strong in the face of any adversary that comes at us. It would do both of you well to remember that. It will be more important than anything in the world around us today.”

Astrid stared thoughtfully at her tea.

“You are telling me that my mother does not define me. My pregnancy was not a choice, but who I become because of it is what will make me the woman I will be tomorrow,” she said, after a few minutes.
Astrid’s grandmother chuckled.

“I always forget that you are a Ravenclaw, not a Gryffindor. You have that look in your eyes, you know. The one a Gryffindor gets when they’re going to do something without thinking it through. Your father used to have the same look in his eyes. I do think, however, that you may be more of my granddaughter than you are his daughter.”

“Is that a bad thing, all said and done?”

“I surely hope not,” said the woman, with a smile. “And Astrid, if we are to go forward with this, please call me Isolde. We will be more than grandmother and granddaughter. We will be partners of the largest potions firm in the wizarding firm. We must act the part.”

Astrid’s lips curled into a smile, amused and intrigued.

“Of course, Isolde,” she said, “What exactly are your plans?”

Sirius was quiet when they got back to the house. He hadn’t said anything during Astrid’s check up, just helped Euphemia with the workouts and helped Astrid get back to her room after dinner.

“What’s wrong?” asked James, frowning slightly. He would have thought the proceedings of the meeting would have made Sirius happy. Astrid was sorted now for the next year, Sirius didn’t really have to do much (though James figured he wanted to be more involved).

“I thought we had more time,” said Sirius. “But she’s already almost 6 months in. We don’t...The Star Child will be born in May, we’re already planning for her future and...I guess I thought we had more time.”

“To get used to the idea of having a child?”

“To get used to the idea of us being co-parents, the idea of us as a family unit, however that unit might function.”
James was quiet for a moment, staring into the fireplace.

“Does she want that? To be a unit with you?”

“She’s willing to do it to ensure that the child has a father. She doesn’t want me, per say,” said Sirius, sadly. “James, I don’t know what to do.”

“Remember how, when you first came here, Dad talked to you about the idea of a therapist? The muggle kind?”

Sirius nodded.

“I think you should go for it,” said James, quietly. “Hear me out. I think that Astrid needs her own time and space to collect herself, to become herself again and move past the abuse. You didn’t exactly have an easy time of it either, though clearly not as bad. Maybe, you could prepare yourself for the future, whenever it is she is ready for you to be part of her unit- as you and not as a father to her child- by making sure you’re in the right headspace to provide the love and care for both the child and Astrid.”

Sirius was quiet, staring at the fire, and then nodded.

“Fine,” said Sirius. “I’ll do it. I’ll talk to Dad and work out when I can go before the term starts so I can figure out if it is really going to work out for me.”

James reached over and squeezed his hand gently before letting go, staring at the fire as well.

“We’ll have to figure out how to keep her safe when we go back to Hogwarts. These glamours can’t be good for her.”

“Mum is teaching her some good ones, right? The ones she used when she was pregnant?”

“Yeah,” said James, with a shrug. “But I would feel better if we had one that would also protect her from hexes and the like.”
Sirius was watching James with hooded eyes, tired all of a sudden.

“Am I a bad person?” asked Sirius quietly. “Answer it as a third person, not as my best friend.”

James didn’t answer for a moment, his lips pursed and eyes staring at the wall in front of him before he spoke.

“I think,” he said, quietly. “That it’s sort of obvious to anyone that watches you that your heart is in the right place. You’re a bit of an asshole, a bit of a git, but you wear your heart on your sleeve and no amount of your pureblood training could erase that. You love so fiercely that sometimes it hurts the people around you.”

Sirius was watching him, seeming to know there was more to come.

“You love like a man possessed, and you protect what is yours with a ferocity that is frightening sometimes. But Astrid isn’t like me or Remus. She is yours in a way that we could never be, and I think that it frightened you in some way. She was yours no matter what you did, no matter what you said, and it...it made you take it for granted. She is yours to protect but you couldn’t protect her from yourself. You took it for granted that she would give in when the time came, but she isn’t. And you don’t know if that is a good thing or a bad thing, because you know your heart would break regardless of which of the two she chose to go ahead with.”

Sirius clenched his eyes shut, refusing to let the tears fall as his best friend quietly said all the things he would never say out loud, the things he refused to see in himself. James had always been oddly observant.

“Despite the pain it is causing you, however, you’re proud of her. She is walking ahead with her head held high and you can’t take your eyes off of her. She’s broken but she’s so beautiful as she puts herself together with careful and trembling hands that you can’t look away even if you tried. And it’s like looking into the sun- looking into the future part of you thinks you could easily have if she chose to simply give in and forgive you, the happiness of having a family that wouldn’t hurt you. But it hurts you just as much to look at her and think of her just laying down and thinking of Britain because she used to be different, before. She used to be someone different, and I don’t know who she was back then, but I can see the lost look in your eyes when she doesn’t behave like she usually does, the brightness in your eyes when you see her fire up and be someone you never thought you would see again.”
“She just looks too tired, James. And...and I can’t do anything to help, because every time I look at
her, I manage to hurt her and I can’t do that anymore. To protect myself from... from myself, I hurt
her so much, not even noticing what my mother was up to, leaving her to deal with the repercussions
of my actions like the child I am. I couldn’t protect anyone if I wanted to- she’s the one who always
stands in the way of harm to protect people, and I run from the thought of it.” Sirius said, his eyes
still closed, his head resting on the back of the couch.

“You can’t cry over spilt milk,” said James, gently. “You can’t undo what has happened, you can
only choose to learn from it and become stronger. That’s the path she has chosen.”

“And if I ever want to catch up with her, that will have to be the path I take as well.”

“Don’t take it to be with her. Take it to be yourself.”

With those words, James stood up and left Sirius to his own thoughts. He knew the look on his face-
it was the look of someone who needed time to gather their thoughts and emotions.

Hopefully Sirius would find his way home- one way or the other.

Sirius was shaking slightly by the time he reached the office of the therapist that James’ father had
suggested to him. Given that he was still in school and it simply wasn’t safe for him to keep leaving
school for his sessions, Sirius had opted to take the option of what was called writing therapy. The
therapist was a muggle who had married a witch and because of that, they had managed to develop a
method to ensure that people were able to have their sessions even when they could not physically
come.

The therapist apparently had some kind of notebook that allowed them to converse with one other
through writing- which meant Sirius would find it easier to talk about his feelings because there was
an obvious difference between writing something down and saying it out loud.

There were only two therapists in the world using this method- mainly because the process of
developing the books was pricey and incredibly difficult.

“Welcome, Sirius,” said an elderly man, who had opened the door with a small smile, and was
watching him carefully. “Thank you for choosing to take this journey.”
Part of Sirius genuinely wanted to say he wasn’t making the journey for him, but he kept his mouth shut.

“Come on in,” he said, his eyes twinkling slightly. “I’m Dr. Hailwood, and I’ll be working with you from now on. Have a seat in my room and we can discuss the details of what this would entail and mean for you.”

“Thank you,” said Sirius, quietly as he stepped inside and took off his coat and sat down in a comfortable seat opposite Dr. Hailwood.

The room looked like any muggle office wood, though with really nice wood panelling and a lot of pictures on the wall in a way that made it feel more lived in than any of the pictures Sirius had seen.

“So Sirius, I’ll explain how this works and what would be expected from your end. Basically this is us just talking about anything and everything you want to talk about. The book that you will be using in Hogwarts will be similar- you basically tell me about anything you want to talk about, based on the timings we will set out for you. We’ll plan it around your classes, and I suggest you keep it after your classes, at a time you can be alone after as well.”

“Like a pen pal,” said Sirius, nodding.

“Exactly. This will only be as useful as you make it. You tell me whatever you are up to talking about. The more open you are to discussing things with me, the more I will be able to understand and listen, and the more you will get out.”

Sirius nodded.

“So how long will it take to fix me?”

Dr. Hailwood eyed him like he had said something particularly interesting, but clearly decided to discuss it later.

“This isn’t a medication, Sirius. It’s a process. It is based entirely on you and how you feel. You may feel you can cut down your sessions in a month or a year or even 5-6 years. Maybe you will always need to have the sessions. It doesn’t work like a treatment in the medical field- the human mind is incredibly intricate and a fascinating thing. You decide what you need and want and I try to help.”
Sirius nodded looking at the window.

“Are we going to start the sessions now?”

“If you want to?”

“Yeah,” said Sirius, quietly. “Yeah, I want to start now.”

Dr. Hailwood nodded and sat quietly, watching Sirius.

“Um...Am I supposed to start?”

“We can start with whatever you want to.”

Sirius stared out of the window for a moment.

“Where would you like me to start? My batshit crazy mother? The girl I was engaged to as a child who I treated like shit for so long that I have no chance with her, who is now pregnant because my mother did a dark spell that got her pregnant with my DNA? My brother who I have more or less abandoned in my effort to leave my mother’s clutches? My cousin sister who is weirdly infatuated with the girl I was engaged to?”

Dr. Hailwood just watched him, calmly, no reaction to his outburst.

“We will start wherever you want to, wherever you can.”

Sirius closed his eyes and started talking about his cousins and his little brother and bright, energetic and dazzling Astrid Arundell.
Astrid stared at the mirror in front of her. It was now all over the castle that Astrid was pregnant with Sirius’ child. Some knew the circumstances (mainly Slytherins) and others didn’t, but the fact of the matter was that she was pregnant and everyone knew it.

Perhaps it was only natural that is would get out eventually, given that Astrid had gotten quite large at this point.

She touched her stomach gently, wondering at how big it was at 6 months. She had just three months to go, before her little baby was out. Her feet, ankles and knees were already hurting, but she didn’t want to make a big deal of it, so she dealt with it quietly.

Sirius and James had started hovering over her like both of them were the father of the child in her, like they were scared she would fall or hurt herself or give birth when they were sleeping.

Pomfrey had already given her a new diet and Remus and Lily had taken over that, creating a schedule with amusing efficiency, which a rotation of who had to watch her and when.

“Six months, now,” said a gentle voice behind her.

“Regulus!” said Astrid, smiling brightly at him, moving carefully to hug him. “Are you okay?”
“Astrid,” he said, gently, letting her kiss him on the cheek before smiling sadly. “I...I just wanted to see you one last time.”

“What?” said Astrid, her heart speeding up. “What do you mean?”

“Mother plans to give me to the Dark Lord during the summer. I can’t...I can’t let you get pulled into it, so I need to distance myself- truly distance myself- now instead of later.”

“Reg!” said Astrid, tearing up. “You can’t! You’re too young and you shouldn’t have to!”

“She’s right,” said a calm voice, making both of them stiffen up.

“Sirius,” said Regulus, quietly, watching Astrid’s face.

“You don’t have to,” said Sirius. “You can go to Dumbledore right now, ask him for help.”

“I’m...I’m not you, Sirius,” said Regulus, his eyes shiny as he turned around to look at the serious face of his brother. “I’m... I’m not brave enough to leave, to walk away. What will I do? I can’t come back to hogwarts like you did- I am a Slytherin, they’ll murder me in my sleep.”

“Please, Reg, listen to us! You... you can come with me! You can come with me and help me take care of the Star Baby while these guys finish up their 7th year! All you have to do is finish your OWLs and then you can come with me and finish your studies via home tutoring through me and whoever else I can catch hold of!”

“Reg,” said Sirius, his voice heavy, his eyes not betraying anything beyond worry for his brother, though Regulus knew he was hurting from the invitation extended to Regulus to take care of his niece. “Listen. I will take you to Dumbledore, you will tell him everything and we will solve this. You are not going to join Him. Do you hear me?”

“Are you laying claim on your Big Brother rights?” asked Regulus, with a watery snort, making the two older teens chuckle wetly at the reminder of their childhood, when Sirius used to use the term to lord over Regulus constantly.
“Yes,” said Sirius, reaching out and tugging the younger male into a hug. “I’m using that card if I have to. Come on, let’s get there quick. Astrid, Remus is on his way up for your next meal.”

Then, Sirius made eye contact with Astrid and motioned for her to join.

The trio was still hugging each other tightly, ignoring the tears falling from their cheeks, when Remus walked in with Astrid’s food, stopping suddenly staring that the three.

“Okay,” said Regulus, quietly. “Let’s go.”

Sirius nodded and the two brothers hurried out as Astrid tried to wipe away her tears.

Remus gently pushed her hands out of the way and used the handkerchief he usually kept with him to wipe her tears away.

“Thanks, Remus,” said Astrid, quietly, her hands limp at her side.

“Any time,” said Remus, smiling at her before setting out her meal.

The two were quiet as Astrid ate her meal, even though Astrid was sure he was curious about the scene he had walked in on.

“So were you planning on telling any of us that your feet and ankles were hurting?” Asked Remus, conversationally, his eyes amused as he watched colour flush Astrid’s face, her eyes darting away from him. It was frighteningly charming and it made him smile as he moved to sit next to her.

“Alright, you silly girl, put your legs up,” said Remus, with a gentle laugh as he sat next her, tugging till she place her feet on his lap. “Like that.”

“You don’t have to,” mumbled Astrid, not able to meet his eyes in a way he had noticed she did when they figured something out that she didn’t want them to or when they showed her affection she hadn’t expected.
“I want to,” said Remus, gently, as he pressed into her slightly swollen ankles to help the blood circulation while also filling a glass of water for her. His mother had told him that regular foot massages and a lot of water had helped her when she had been pregnant with him.

“But,” said Astrid, her eyes darting to look at him before she looked away. “They’re...weird.”

“It’s normal,” said Remus, shaking his head. “Look at me Astrid.”

Remus reached out and tucked his index finger under to chin to make her look at him.

“Your ankles aren’t...ungainly or whatever you are thinking,” said Remus. “It’s normal and it happens to all women when they’re pregnant. You just need to drink lots of water, have regular foot massages and keep from putting too much pressure on them. Okay?”

Astrid nodded, and Remus smiled and continued massaging her feet.

He had noticed that Astrid was very confident about a lot of things but when it came to talking about herself or bringing attention to herself, she immediately pulled away. She had gotten better at accepting the affection from them, but she often tried not to do or say anything that would inconvenience them, as if she was worried they would leave her.

“Thanks Remus,” said Astrid, quietly, but it was clearly because of more than just the meal and the massage.

“Like I said,” said Remus gently, watching her. “Any time.”

Astrid looked at him with wide eyes, as if she was trying to understand this statement, when James and Lily stumbled in.

Remus made no move to move Astrid’s feet, going back to massaging them gently. James glanced at his best friend with a curious look on his face but said nothing. Lily clearly noticed from the bright smile on her face but she said nothing either.

“Where’d Sirius go? He said he was coming up here.”
“Something came up,” said Astrid, vaguely. “He’ll be back soon.”

Remus raised an eyebrow at her when the two were looking away, and she smiled innocently at him.

Clearly, Astrid didn’t want it to be common knowledge that Sirius and Regulus were together, though Remus couldn’t figure out why.

He was sure, however, from the calculating light in her eye as she watched the door, clearly waiting for the Black brothers to come back, that she was going to get her way in something, and that they would all know soon enough.

He just hoped it wouldn’t cause any issues for any of them.

Sirius waited outside Dumbledore’s room, his eyes on the door as he leaned against the wall opposite to it.

He was honest enough to know he was hurting and why, but he would never say it out loud- except, perhaps, to the good Doctor.

Astrid had invited his brother to stay with her, help her raise their child, but had never asked Sirius. Regulus had run straight to Astrid at the fact that he was to become a Death Eater. Clearly the two had a bond that Sirius could never truly be part of and that hurt him in so many ways.

He had failed Astrid so thoroughly. He had clearly failed his brother as well.

Why was it that he always failed the people around him, ignoring the way they were hurting, ignoring the way he felt about them?

James told him he was a man who was good but cared only for those he loved. Remus said he was a good man. And yet, he felt like he was neither, because he couldn’t even protect Astrid and Reg, two people he loved till the end of the Earth, who he had abandoned to protect himself.
What did that make him?

Regulus opened the door and nodded at him, moving to the side so Sirius could enter as well.

“Ah, Sirius, have a seat. Regulus and I were just discussing what our possible avenues are.”

Sirius nodded, taking a seat without looking at Regulus.

“Regulus told me that Ms. Arundell offered to take him with her when she left for her seventh year at her grandmother’s place, but I have advised him against that. At least, not in the beginning.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sirius, frowning. “Isolde has the best security in the wizarding world.”

“But it is also exactly where your mother would expect him to go. Instead, I was suggesting that he go to stay with Andromeda and Ted Tonks. They have a daughter of their own that they could use some help with, and your mother would never suspect that Regulus would go to Andromeda of all people.”

Sirius nodded, watching the old man watch both of them with twinkling eyes.

“That makes sense. And when would you take Regulus away?”

“Right after his O.W.Ls,” said Dumbledore seriously. “Only the three of us can know of this.”

“And Astrid?”

“Astrid has different things to worry about,” said Dumbledore quietly. “I have been looking into her situation and what Walburga did to her. That discussion, however, is for a future date, but be assured I am making all the necessary arrangements.”

Sirius watched the man for a moment and then nodded.
“You’re okay with this, Reg?”

“Yeah,” said Regulus quietly.

They left the office and were walking in the shadows to avoid detection when Regulus sighed.

“Why are you doing this, Sirius. What are you getting out of helping me?”

“Regardless of our differences, Reg, you’re still my little brother. I couldn’t protect Astrid from Mother because I didn’t see, but I can help you and keep you safe.”

“You shouldn’t have to,” said Regulus, quietly. “You know that Mother will make your life hell.”

“It will be well worth it,” said Sirius. “I’m not too worried about it. Both of you will be safely hidden away.”

“I don’t like it,” said Regulus, urgently. “What will Astrid do if you’re gone? What will she and the child do?”

“They’ll have you,” said Sirius, turning around, a strange, intense look in his eyes. “They’ll have you, Remus, James and Lily. That is all that they need.”

“Sirius,” said Regulus, his voice soft and sad. “If you think that any of us will be able to replace you in Astrid’s life, you clearly haven’t been watching her properly.”

“And you have?” Sirius said, refusing to believe this.

“I have. My whole life.”

And Sirius, whose heart broke for his brother when he realized that Regulus loved Astrid with all his heart, and was ready to let her go to his brother, had nothing to say in return except pull Reg into a tight hug.
“I’m sorry,” said Sirius, and he meant about more than Astrid and not understanding his brother.

“It’s okay,” said Regulus, quietly, hugging him back tightly, like he was scared of losing his brother again.

And somehow, it suddenly felt like it was going to be.
Astrid touched her belly gently, seated in her bed as she reread her Charm’s essay. This whole thing had started off incredibly bad and she had never felt so alone in her life. But somehow, the child in her womb had helped her make a family, to pull back the two boys she had loved with all her heart.

Dumbledore had told her that it was better for her to not come to classes since there seemed to be a serious rise of attacks by Slytherins and purebloods around the castle that all the professors were trying to counter, but being pregnant would make her a great target for them.

Suddenly, she heard a sound out in the hall. Lily was supposed to be in class right now- Potions mostly- and all the boys were with her too. Who in the world would have managed to get into her room right now?

Holding her wand tightly, her hand curled against her pregnant belly, she slowly moved downstairs and froze when she saw a Raven sitting on the sofa, its beady eyes on her. It looked like a normal Raven, and if Astrid didn’t know who it was, she would never have noticed the distinctive white pattern against the bird’s chest that looks like a raven’s face- something that she knew was a distinctive feature of the woman who was in front of her- the silver raven necklace.

“Bellatrix,” Astrid said, calmly and the bird transformed into a human before her very eyes. If Astrid had not seen it happen a million times in front of her, she would have been amazed at the older woman’s skill. “I am not going back.”

“I’m not here to take you back,” said Bellatrix, adjusting the silver raven necklace and her curly hair. “I’m here to see if you were alright. I’ve not been able to get away from… Rodolphus.”

The manner in which Bella said her husband’s name gave Astrid the answer to her next question- which was to ask if she was doing better in her married life.

“I am well.”
“My brother is taking care of you?”

“He is. He and all his friends.”

Bella nodded before moving slowly towards her.

“Come here,” said Astrid gently and Bella moved quickly into her arms, relaxing as Astrid tightly hugged her.

No tears were shed between them but the way Bella carefully hugged her as tightly as she could was telling.

“What has he done?”

“You know that he sleeps with other women?” asked Bella, matter-of-factly. “I don’t really care because I don’t love him, but it is infuriating that he does it so blatantly.”

“He’s an asshole, Bella.”

“He is,” said the older woman with a chuckle as she took a seat. “So was Sirius. But at least Sirius has some redeeming qualities.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Astrid, looking away.

“Don’t you?”

Bella watched her with a sad smile on her face as she gently touched the raven necklace that always hung around her neck. Astrid had given it to her before her marriage, a hope that her childhood friend would find happiness somewhere, and if not happiness, then at least strength.

“Before our marriages, you told both Cissy and myself that sometimes we end up where we are
because the universe has a plan. While my mother is clearly a life-ruiner for people beyond her own family as well, can’t you see what the universe is trying to say?”

“I’m not ready to see it yet,” said Astrid, simply. “I’ve been hurt too many times to go into this with no concerns.”

“And he’s hurt you too many times to want to.”

Astrid didn’t say anything but she couldn’t deny that Bella was right. She had seen the way he kept his distance, touching her only when needed or when she initiated it. He kept an eye on her but never came close, almost as if he was worried she would break- not because she was weak, but because he was scared of what he was capable of.

How could she not notice when she, herself, was watching him as well?

“What will you do when the child is born?” Bella asked and then flinched as she realized that Astrid couldn’t answer this question, just in case her mother found out by forcing Bella.

“I’ll be somewhere safe,” said Astrid, quietly, reaching out and holding her hand. “Somewhere your mother and my mother cannot find me, somewhere I can go and recover and be myself again- where I can learn who I am and what I am capable of.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t help,” said Bella, tears in her eyes.

“You didn’t know,” said Astrid gently.

“I’m sorry I didn’t realize in time to prevent this.”

“Somehow,” said Astrid, finally admitting it out loud. “This entire debacle has brought me more joy than pain.”

Bella smiled a watery smile at her, reaching out and cupping her face.
“I wish things were different,” said Bella, and Astrid smiled sadly, knowing she was referring to the
day she had kissed Astrid in the dark, the day before her wedding. The kiss had been salty and
desperate and lost- all feelings Astrid understood, feeling the tears from Bella’s eyes touch her own.
Astrid had let it happen before pulling away and hugging the older girl, knowing what this was, what
Bella was trusting her with.

The next day, a stone-faced Bella walked down the aisle, shoving down her emotions and hiding her
sexuality once again, to maintain the image of a perfect pureblood.

“I wish you were free,” said Astrid, quietly, and Bella chuckled lightly.

“I wish we were both free,” she replied with a sigh. “No magic, no pureblood families, nothing. Just
two girls against the world, out there exploring everything the world has to offer.”

The two sat in silence, holding each other, letting the tears flow freely.

Sirius stared at the book in front of him, his curtains closed around him for privacy. Part of him
wasn’t sure if he was ready for this, but he was doing this for a reason- he wanted to find himself, he
wanted to be happy, he wanted to be a person who would feel like they could be around their child
one day.

How could he be that person if he was the way he was now?

He picked up a quill and started writing.

_Sometimes I feel like maybe I’m not as important in her life as I want to be. The rational part of me
knows that it is only natural, that she spent a long time with my brother as her only friend, her only
ally in a world that was dark and horrifying._

_But I still want her to look at me and see a man who can be there for her. I feel guilty for feeling this
way, knowing I have caused her so much harm in the past and deserve nothing from her._

_Today she asked my brother to join her when she leaves to raise our child. She’s never asked that of
me, has never even looked like she thought of it actively. She has made it clear that she wants me to
be a part of the child’s life, but has never said outright that she wants me there, has never invited me_
to that part of her life, her future.

Sirius watched as his neatly written words slowly faded into the paper of the book, and a reply came almost immediately.

Why do you feel like she needs to invite you in?

Sirius frowned for a moment, thinking about it before carefully writing down his thoughts.

She hasn’t had any say in anything for so long and this child we are going to have had been forced on her without her consent. It feels like she was raped in a way, given the lack of consent. It feels like sexual abuse to me, and it makes me want to puke that my mother physically, mentally, verbally and sexually assaulted her while I was off being who I wanted to be with no care for what repercussions would have to be faced.

I feel like it’s the only thing I can give her - a choice.

Sirius stared at the sheet for a moment, pausing before continuing to write.

I know she knows that I am trying. She knows I feel guilty but picked up on the fact that I don’t want her to forgive me till I have truly earned it. I have taken her for granted for so long that she shouldn’t let me in if I am going to do that again.

But I still feel let down when she doesn’t look at me the way she looks at Remus or James.

Sirius put his quill down, a sharp sigh on his lips at finally confessing it.

He pointed his wand at the book, which would signal to Doc that he was done with the session, and put it away as quickly as he could.

He had been trying very hard to communicate more but the Doc had made it very clear that pushing himself like that simply wasn’t healthy.
But it was infuriating that he wasn’t feeling better- it was disappointing that he kept stopping, that he was finding it so difficult to open up about these things. All of these things he wrote in the book were things he had never told anyone, refusing to let people know how he felt.

His family had never spoken about feelings and so he rarely knew how to say what he felt. It wasn’t that he felt that it was weak- rather, he felt like he had no right to burden other with something like that.

How was he supposed to do this? How was he supposed to become the man he wanted- no, needed- to be when his child was born?

He opened his curtains and checked what the other boys were doing- all of them were fast asleep, and he could hear Peter snoring loudly from his bed. The boy hadn’t hung out with them for a while, but Sirius couldn’t bring himself to care given his own mental state and the child that was going to be delivered in merely three month.

What would they do? How would they manage the distance? How could he be a good father from so far away? What would happen to Regulus?

This year had gone so wrong in so many ways and his entire world had been turned upside down.

All he could do was hope that he would end up right side up soon enough.

Severus Snape sat in a hidden corridor, waiting for his only protector in the castle. Not that she had been able to protect him this year, but that wasn’t her fault.

“Severus!” said a female voice he instantly recognize. He got up immediately, and smiled at the girl in front of him.

“Astrid,” he said, moving forward and hugging her tightly.

“Are you okay?” she asked, her arms wrapped around him gently. He knew she didn’t like physical contact much, and neither did he.
“Yeah,” said Severus, a serious look on his face. How could he tell her that Sirius Black had sent him to his death because he had irritated the boy? How could he tell her that Remus Lupin, the boy who hovered over her, taking care of her every need, was a werewolf?

He couldn’t do that to her. Her heart would break right in front of him.

“I just missed you,” he said, with a small smile, and Astrid smiled brightly at him.

“I missed you too,” she said. “I’m sorry I’ve not been around for a while now. I shouldn’t treat my closest friend like that.”

“Closer than Lily?”

“Lily...Lily is a Gryffindor and a muggle-born. She’s idealistic. You’ve seen the world very similar to how I see it. Lily is what I need right now, to set me right and help me heal. You’re what I need if I need to talk.”

Severus nodded, transfiguring a random book that was lying in the hallway into a chair for Astrid.

“How have you been?” asked Astrid. “You usually don’t ask to meet me.”

“They want me to become a Death Eater.”

“What??” Astrid said, loudly and Severus shushed her harshly.

“And I am thinking I will join them.”

“No, Severus, you can’t be serious!”

“I am,” said Severus, holding her hand gently. “Listen to me, Astrid. I will never be able to find what I want if I decide to join the Light. I will have power- the power to protect you and Lily.”
Astrid had started crying and Severus leaned forward and pulled her into his arms.

“You would do the same thing if you were in my position, Astrid,” he said. “You would protect your loved ones if it was the last thing you did.”

Andromeda sat in her living room, letter in hand. Somewhere else in the house, Nymphadora was wailing as Ted tried to soothe her.

_Dear Andromeda,_

_I know you left everything behind when you married Ted Tonks, but your brothers need you. Sirius and Astrid are having a child. Your mother caused this with a very dark spell and Astrid will soon give birth. Regulus will be forced to join the ranks of the death eaters if he does not escape your mother’s clutches as soon as possible._

_I hope you understand why I am asking this of you._

_Please take Regulus in and hide him. Your house will have all the protections that you could possibly need and no one would ever suspect he would flee and come to you._

_I hope you will do the right thing._

_Sincerely,_

_Albus Dumbledore_

“That manipulative bastard,” said Andy, with a sigh, taking off her gold rimmed glasses. Her mother had made it very clear that Andy was to never come near them again- and now she was watching her aunt break apart her own family.

Sirius had always been on of her favorite cousins. Regulus had always seemed more sulky, quiet and likely to follow his mother’s orders. He was always around Astrid, though, so perhaps the control in this case was with a different woman entirely.
Astrid had always been the baby of their family— for the three sisters at least. It didn’t matter that they were not related. Narcissa showered her with food, Bella followed her around like a protective mother hen and Andy showered her with the only physical affection the girl might have ever known.

Astrid had taken all of it with a smile that reached her eyes, brightening her whole face. She had seen the way the young girl had collapsed in on herself when Sirius started pushing her away while her home turned into a battleground with the departure of her father.

It broke her heart that these children had to grow up so soon— or perhaps, somewhere around the time that she stopped paying attention, they had already grown up.

“What’s wrong?” asked a soft voice that, even today, had her heart melting. She looked up to see Ted with Nymphadora in his arms. The little child was fast asleep, her hair a bright purple today.

“We may have a permanent guest soon,” she said, only realizing that her cheeks were wet. “My brother Regulus needs a place to hide so that he isn’t forced to become a Death Eater.”

Ted’s eyes were wide is surprise and worry.

“You aunt would do that to her son?”

“My mother did,” said Andy with a sad smile. “Had my sister married off to death eaters and had them join the cause. I don’t know if they have the mark, but it is a strong possibility.”

“Not you though,” said Ted, kissing her gently on the head.

“I don’t want to think about the person I could have been if I hadn’t met you, Ted,” said Andy, leaning back to kiss him. “You forget, I went through the same brainwashing they did.”

“But love found a way,” said Ted, with a smile.

“Yes,” said Andy, with a soft smile. “Yes, it did.”
She just wished her siblings had had the same luck. She wished they could find the same love that she had, the same joy she had felt when she had first held Nymphadora in her arms, the reverence she felt towards her husband, the love of her life.

She just wished things were different.
May 1977

Chapter Notes

Come flail at me on Tumblr at misakikinomoto.tumblr.com!

Lily circled around Astrid’s bed at the Hospital wing nervously, biting her nails. Astrid was pale, her hand on her stomach, sweat dripping down her forehead.

Three days prior, Regulus had come through with information on the spell. The basis of the spell was apparently *pur sang*, and in latin, that meant pure blood. Sirius and Astrid were both purebloods, and they had spent two days trying to work out how to get Astrid’s system to work against the spell.

It had taken Lily two days to work out that her blood- given she was a muggle born- could act as a counter to curse. A halfblood like Remus wouldn’t have any effect because he was still very close to pure.

Dumbledore and McGonagall had worked very hard to work out how to transfer the blood in a manner that made their magic mingle.

“I don’t think it will be an issue,” Dumbledore had said in the end. “Blood shed may just be blood, but blood shared is blood shared with love. The transfusion will not be an issue.”

Lily had stared at the older man for a minute, and then just moved on. She had learnt early on that, often times, it was good to ignore Dumbledore when he was being weird and eclectic and just take the part of the statement that answered your question (if any) and move on.

Her blood had been taken out and was now being slowly transferred to Astrid. James gently wrapped his arm around her, and it was only then she realized she was crying.

She wished Astrid wasn’t in so much pain.

She wished Remus wasn’t sitting on the bed next to her, pale as a sheet.
She wished Sirius wasn’t looking like he was about to cry, his hand tightly gripping Astrid’s as the other girl tried to push.

Finally, the transfusion was done and all they could do was wait.

Astrid gasped loudly, her eyes rolling back to show only white as her back arched up. Her whole body was glowing—almost like a dark smoke was enveloping her but there was lighting behind that smoke.

Suddenly, with a bloodcurdling scream, Astrid fell back on the mattress with a loud thud and the dark energy around her shattered into a million particles, dissipating into the air.

The room was silent for a moment, before Sirius turned to Madame Pomfrey, panicked.

“Is she okay? What happened?” he asked, the fear clear in his eyes.

Pomfrey moved forward to touch the girl, confirming she was alive.

“Alright, honey,” said Pomfrey, gently. “I know you can do this. Push!”

Astrid opened her eyes and looked at Pomfrey blankly, confused, before she did as she was told.

“The baby’s crowning!” said Pomfrey, grinning at the girl. “Just one more push, sweetheart.”

Astrid scrunched up her face, gripping Sirius’ hand tightly, and pushed one last time, before fainting.

“The baby is out!” said Pomfrey, smiling at Sirius. “Congrats, you’re the father of a healthy girl!”

“Put her in the bubble,” said Sirius, emptily. There were tears in his eyes. He wouldn’t even be able to hold his daughter for the first time.
Remus and Sirius had discussed this with Dumbledore- the suspicion that the dark matter could latch on to the defenseless child. They hadn’t told Astrid, because they needed to do this after she was unconscious from the birth.

She would never have let them otherwise.

“Are you absolutely sure, Mr. Black?”

“Yes,” he said, quietly, reaching out to take Astrid’s hand and gently kissing the back of it like he was saying goodbye. “Do it.”

Pomfrey nodded, glanced at McGonagall, who had just arrived, and pulled out her wand.

Astrid may never forgive Sirius for this, but if it saved their baby, he would do it a hundred times over.

The bubble had been a tentative idea in Remus’ mind- an idea based on a muggle invention. Remus had spent a long time thinking about Astrid’s birth, well before anyone else had realized the complications that could occur.

He didn’t know much about the spell used on Astrid but he knew that complications or issues with the mother could sometimes go to the child as well- whether it be a muggle or a witch. This wasn’t just physiological issues too- often spells or curses passed down families like the one that promised pain and misfortune to anyone that harmed an Arundell.

So it was highly possible that the spell Walburga would also go to the Star Child.

There needed to be a way to keep the child in a magical stasis where nothing external could affect her. That was when the idea of a magical incubator came to his mind. Muggles had come up with it to protect prematurely born babies who needed to be kept warm and away from germs. If a magical equivalent could be created to allow the child to stay in stasis to give them time to remove all possible effects of the curse, then the child could be protected.

When Remus discussed the same with Dumbledore, the old man had found the idea appealing and they had spent many days and nights researching possible ways to keep the child in a bubble where
she could not age and the curse could not affect her— it would keep her inside as if she was still in her mother’s womb but had stopped growing post 9 months.

It had taken a lot of time and experiments and many, many dead animals to get to where they were now— confident that it would work.

The only thing Remus was worried about was that Astrid would never forgive him.

When Astrid finally opened her eyes, shit truly hit the fan. She had cried and screamed at Remus and Sirius, who could only keep their eyes on the floor as she begged someone to let her baby out of the bubble.

Lily had pulled the sobbing girl into her arms, letting her scream and cry and wail as much as she needed to.

Lily knew this was the right thing to do. Sirius and Remus had done the right thing— this would ensure that the child would be safe.

“Your baby is alive and well, Astrid,” said James gently, once the crying was over and Lily had moved to the side. “She’s a healthy, beautiful baby girl and you know we need to make sure that none of Walburga’s magic stays around to hurt her.”

Astrid had nodded emptily, and James smiled sadly.

“She’ll be out soon,” he said, patting her head gently and kissing the crown. “And when she does, she’ll be healthy and so will you. What do you want to name her?”

“Seren Joan Arundell-Black,” said Astrid, softly, looking at the two men who had struggled to meet her eyes.

Both of them were now looking at her with tears in their eyes, at the honour of having their names attached to the child.
“Godparents?” asked Pomfrey, trying to break the tension.

“James and Remus from my side,” said Sirius, without a doubt.

“Lily and Severus Snape.”

Sirius stared at her, a scowl on his face, but Astrid stood her ground, glaring back.

“I didn’t know you were friends with Severus,” said Lily, carefully.

“There are a lot of people I am close to, but we have no need to showcase it,” said Astrid.

*After all, Severus Snape was becoming a Death Eater to protect her, Lily and Seren. How could she pretend they weren’t friends when he was risking his life for them?*

It was obvious to all of them that the decision to keep Astrid out of the loop about the bubble was something the girl would not and could not forgive.

Lily nodded, looking away, unable to figure out how to reconnect with her friend.

“Ms. Arundell,” said Dumbledore, a soft smile of his face. “Your grandmother is here to take you home.”

“Of course,” said Astrid, with a nod.

“She needs a night of rest, Albus!” Pomfrey chided the older man, who merely nodded.

“She will be waiting in Hogsmeade then,” he said. “Let me know when you get discharged, dear.”

A dull, heavy silence filled the room after he left.
Astrid was leaving.

And none of her four friends knew what to do, now that she would be gone.
Epilogue: May 5th, 1978

Chapter Notes

This fic has been a labour of years of tears and sadness. When I started this fic, I was feeling like shit and needed a way to get my emotions out. I was constantly doubting my self worth and felt like I was nothing for the longest time.

Perhaps why this fic has taken as long as it has.

While it isn't long in terms of words (compared to a lot of other fics on this site), it was one of the most emotionally taxing fics I have ever written.

I know many of you have waited patiently for me to write this story, and your patience and kind words have kept me going. I have turned to this fic whenever I needed to let out my sadness and feelings, because I have never been good at saying out loud.

Thank you to all the women involved in the making of this- all the women because I seem to acquire only female betas, without even meaning to. Thank you to Eddie, to Bee, to Nams and Carmen. All of you have held my hand throughout this journey, and I am incredibly grateful for your involvement and kind words.

The sequel to this fic is underway and so is the third installment- I'm writing them parallel to one another to ensure I have a flow in sequence of events.

I'll be posting those only after I finish working out if I will be able to apply to my PhD this year or if I will have to do it next year, so I hope you will all find the wait worth it when I do post the other installment.

Again, thank you for your patience and kind words- they have brought light into my days, even when I felt like there was no light to be found.

I hope you all find something that lights up your day the way you have lit up mine.

Astrid stood at the balcony of the large villa Isolde owned, staring out at the estate. The ends of her long floral dress moved in the wind. Behind her, Seren floated in a bubble, motionless but alive.

Over the past few months, she had recovered- both mentally and physically- from the year that had passed. There was a content air around her as she roamed the estate and helped Isolde run the business. She had even raised the possibility of having a muggle branch so they could be profitable in both worlds.

It had taken her a long time to work out how to forgive her friends, but she had finally gotten around to it, sending letter to all of them- even Sirius and Remus.
“Ah, Astrid dear,” called Isolde, and Astrid looked down, smiling at her grandmother. “Are you ready for breakfast, love? Dumbledore will be around by around 10 am, said he had something to discuss with you.”

“I’ll be right down, Isolde.”

Dumbledore has personally been coming over to check on Seren and see if she could leave the bubble. It had been a year- a year and 3 weeks to be exact- since Seren had been put in the bubble. All her friends would be studying for their NEWTS, which would start in the first week of June.

Astrid gently touched the bubble, a small smile on her face, before leaving the room for breakfast.

It had become a bit of a daily ritual for them. Isolde and Astrid would have breakfast together, discuss life and everything they may not have told each other. No business talk was allowed at the table.

It had taken Astrid a long, long time to know what to say and work out how to participate, but Isolde had been patient and had no problem running the entire conversation alone if she had to. It had been weird, having someone who understood what you were saying and knew how to push and when to ask. Lily had been amazing, but her need to fix Astrid was something that had often colored their discussions.

Astrid didn’t mind- she enjoyed feeling loved in that way, feeling like the people around her cared enough to want to try to fix her, even if she wasn’t theirs to fix. It was nice, however, to have that variety in types of people around her- Lily was a mother-hen and Isolde was a cool, calm and collected grandmother who knew Astrid didn’t need more mother figures in her life.

It had taken her a long time, however, to get to where she was now. Long, tearful therapy sessions had become the norm for her in the last year. They were getting shorter now, but she had grown to depend on them in many ways.

“How come Professor Dumbledore is coming so early? Doesn’t he usually come on Sundays?” asked Astrid, as she took her seat across Isolde.

“He said he wanted to discuss something with you. I won’t be able to stay too long- I’ll stay for Seren’s check up and then I’ll have to rush for a meeting.”
“You need me there?” asked Astrid. Astrid had been shadowing her grandmother long enough to know how to handle any meeting they may have to go to.

“No, love. You have tea with Dumbledore.”

“Alright,” said Astrid, with a smile.

“Ah,” said a male voice from the living room, as footsteps approached the dining room. “I do apologize, I appear to be quite early.”

“Professor!” said Astrid, with a bright smile at him. “Will you join us for breakfast?”

Dumbledore smiling kindly at the girl, happy she was finally moving towards finding her own happiness.

“No, dear, I wanted to check of Seren. I have a feeling we can let her out of the bubble today.”

“How apt,” said Isolde, with a joy-filled smile. “On the day she was born.”

“Yes,” said Dumbledore, “I will have to do some quick checks first, but before I do that, we will have to have a long discussion, Astrid.”

Astrid nodded, her eyes concerned.

“Voldemort has been slowly becoming more and more powerful. He must be stopped. And to do that, I have formed a group of able bodies and quick minded wizards- the Order of the Phoenix,” Dumbledore said, removing his gloved, with a serious look on his face.

“You don’t mean to-”

“Yes, Isolde,” said Dumbledore, his bright blue eyes focused on Astrid. “I intend to ask Astrid to join me in this battle.”
To be Continued in The Forbidden Fruit (Tastes So Sweet)

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