**Chapter 59**

**Wars of Light and Darkness**

**The First Battle of Hogsmeade Part I**

*People tended to mock the fact the Exchequer based its hierarchy on something like chess at the beginning. But pause and consider this point: even the weakest Knight of the Exchequer would be considered a Dark Lord or a Dark Lady if he was in command of a separate organisation.*

*And they are twelve of them.*

*Do you still want to laugh?*

Extract from *The Rise of Darkness*, Chapter 6, by Gilderoy Lockhart

“*The problem with legends is when they stop being ones. Sometimes the best stories are those you are sure they can’t be real*,” words attributed to Alexandra Potter, 1994.

**31 October 1993, Hogsmeade, Scotland**

“Now I feel really protected,” Alexandra murmured to Morag once their carriage stopped at Hogsmeade and they were able to leave the Thestrals and their transport behind.

“I know, right? You would think that after the Dementors, the replacements would have some competence and some brains...”

The travel from the castle to the village had taken nearly half an hour. For some reason which boggled the mind, the Ministry – in the all-knowing and benevolent figure of Cornelius Fudge – had decided to place Forest Trolls at diverse key emplacements around Hogwarts, with only five Aurors for oversight.

“This isn’t that bad, Alexandra,” Susan told her, her long red hair flowing in the fierce autumn wind.

“It’s exactly that bad, Susan,” the Basilisk-Slayer corrected her, “and you know it. Forests Trolls are a bit more intelligent than Mountain Trolls, but they’re also far less magically resistant. I could wipe out the sixty of them if I really felt like it...any big bad wizard attacking Hogwarts or Hogsmeade for real would remove them in a few minutes.”

And the less said about the Aurors, the better. There had been rumours that the training of the police force of Wizarding Britain had to lower its standards after the Battle of Azkaban, but seeing the new faces patrolling and controlling their authorisations, the Hogwarts students had a very good idea that this was more than mere gossip. These new trainees looked...weak and untrained. And Alexandra thought it was a generous judgement.

“Okay, let’s forget the Ministry incompetence.” There was no point wasting one’s breath on facts you couldn’t change, right? “We’ll see you later, Morag, Hermione.”

“Don’t forget the time to come back to the carriage, lovebirds!” The fact Morag had shouted the ‘advice’ meant of course there were plenty of whistles and giggles following them for the next minute.

For once, Alexandra didn’t care. She gave her hand to Susan and they fled towards the south-eastern quarter of Hogsmeade before columns of students arrived to comment on their relationship. It was not a long walk, and in less than ten minutes they were in the little house she had rented for the day – many older students did it too, she had checked.

The ambiance inside was a bit old-fashioned, but once Susan pushed her against the wall and began to kiss her, it was definitely a third or a fourth-level preoccupation. They hydra in her chest hissed in satisfaction but the Potter Heiress didn’t need her inner animal to continue what she was doing.

They interrupted briefly their kissing an hour later to grab the picnic she had owl-mailed five days ago from the nearest food store before returning, drinking a bottle of Butterbeer, eating, laughing and then returning to kissing.

The Scottish wind was howling against the old windows and the old house, but it was warm inside and on the blanket on the ground the two witches had their lips stuck and their hands joined for a long, long time.

And then, as she was petting Susan’s hair, her hearing caught something more. These were human voices, speaking in a tongue which was definitely not English. Now normally she would take it as proof her senses had been enormously bolstered by her first Animagus experiments, but somehow she didn’t believe that was the case in this instance. The place she had chosen for her date with Susan was no monk’s monastery in the middle of nowhere, but it was not on the main street of Hogsmeade either.

“Susan.” Her tone convinced the Hufflepuff to stop the kissing session. “I think we have a problem...”

The house exploded in light and Alexandra screamed the shield incantation but it was too late. The walls began to burn.

“Your wand! Take your wand and get out!”

One Bombarda on the door and they rushed out, eyes suffering under the terrible light. It was not the brilliance of Lumos, it was a different sensation...like you were faced with something implacable, something terrible...

A flying creature looking like a parody of an angel and a gargoyle tried to slam into them. Alexandra was fastest than the monster, though.

“SECARE!”

Whatever this thing was, it was overconfident and the second after, it was decapitated by her overpowered Cutting spell.

“Alex, what are?”

“I don’t know! SECARE!” Because of course there was more than one of these things. “SECARE! BOMBARDA! CONFRINGO!”

“LOCOMOTOR MORTIS! REDUCTO! REDUCTO!” Susan soon joined her effort to Alexandra’s and in half a minute the creatures attacking them were dying like huge flies smashed around.

“ACCIO FRAGARACH!” Alexandra roared, cursing herself for not having taken the precaution to take the enchanted sword today. It was bloody Samhain, she should have known something wrong was going to happen...but who was crazy enough to attack a village full of children. Now the sword was in her bedroom and was going to need time to arrive, assuming her Accio was powerful enough to summon it. “BOMBARDA! FULGUR! SECARE!”

The battle was almost won when she saw something like a mini-sun rise over their heads.

“SUSAN! RUN!”

It likely saved their lives. The shockwave threw them on the ground and the grass and the nearby houses were burning in...light. It was like someone had combined the rapidity of fire and the strength of the sun in a sort of golden lava.

And of course the last creatures shrieked and tried to finish them while they were stunned...an extraordinarily bad idea as Fragarach slammed into her hand and her first strike divided the lead attacker into two neat parts. Five strikes later, all the monsters were dead, their yellow blood soiling the earth and expressions of surprise and pain frozen on their ugly faces.

“These are Nephilim!” Susan gasped.

“Nephi-what?”

“Nephilim, they are XXXX creatures living in hordes of a thousand or more. They are trackers, creatures used by the Light Wizards of old to track and kill Dark Wizards...what are they doing here?”

“Doing the job they were bred to do in ancient times, it looks like,” Alexandra replied gloomily before beginning to run in the direction of Hogsmeade’s main street. “Let’s get out of here. There’s a powerful Light mage somewhere to launch that sort of spell, and I prefer Professor Flitwick or another adult to deal with him.”

Inside, she was seething and the hydra was sharing her point of view. What was the problem with these people? Unless she had forgotten something, she had killed no ‘Light’ wizard or anyone who could be considered ‘innocent’. And they had gall to ruin her first date...

The third fire-light explosion bombarded an empty patch of land to the west. Good. Whatever long-distance spell or artefact was used, it was one which had apparently relied on the Nephilim for accuracy.

The street of Hogsmeade was normality itself when Susan and she reached it. It was full of students laughing, joking, comparing their purchases and even a few laughing at the Hufflepuff-Ravenclaw duo arriving dishevelled...before they realised the yellow fluid soaking the blade of Fragarach was certainly not honey or syrup.

“Do you see a Professor?” The raven-haired witch demanded. “We need to warn them. We need to evacuate Hogsmeade and return to the castle...”

Something slammed into her back and she was thrown on the ground. But Flitwick’s advice to never stand immobile or let your enemy exploit the first blow was firmly stuck in her mind and by the time a hand tried to seize her cloak, she was already pivoting and a powerful kick was the answer her attacker received.

The man stumbled, and Alexandra had the opportunity to watch him. For a second, she felt really stupid...it was obviously not the Nephilim Master or any powerful Sorcerer wanting to kill her. To be honest, the man stank as if he had not bathed in the last ten years and looked like a destitute vagabond.

Only for a second. Because as she looked at his face, the incredibly inaccurate photos of the *Daily Prophet* reminded her definitely someone...and the man in front of her had some of the traits she was finding on her visage every morning when she regarded a mirror.

“Alex, as amusing as it is to see you kick a vagabond, he must be drunk and we have...”

“Susan. It’s my father.”

This put an astonished expression on her girlfriend’s lips. Another time, she would have savoured it, but this was not them time.

“I was wondering if you were going to remember me...” the voice was...awful. Maybe ten years ago it had been pleasant for the ears, but now the pronunciation, the elocution, the tone...everything was wrong.

“I don’t.” She was prompt to disappoint him. “But the *Daily Prophet* and the other legitimate newspapers of the British Isles published enough photos to give me a hint or two.”

Speaking of which, she was evidently not the only one to have made the connection between the ‘vagabond’ and the Azkaban fugitive.

“We need to speak...”

“I’m all ears.” Alexandra replied coldly. “For twelve years, you abandoned me. What’s your answer?”

“There are...”

Suddenly she had a horrible suspicion. It was a terrible, horrible suspicion, and it gave her a feeling of absolute despair. They were just attacked by a mysterious force controlling Nephilim and James Potter was intercepting them on the great street of Hogsmeade, despite the risks?

It had to be a coincidence. But coincidences like this were so unlikely...

“Please tell me you aren’t working with the damned people who just tried to assassinate me...” She pointed Fragarach directly towards his heart, her hand trembling as fury and disgust burned in her body. “Please tell me you didn’t abandon me once more...”

“I didn’t know!” James Potter babbled like a lunatic. “I didn’t know! They promised me! They promised me there were rituals you could take which would purify you...the prophecy! The prophecy must not be fulfilled!”

There were whispers at Hogwarts and across the Wizarding World nobody really survived Azkaban. It was said in dark murmurs the people who were authorised to leave the island-prison had nothing in common with the ones which had entered it in chains. And as she looked in the rolling and crazy eyes of the man who had long ago sired her, Alexandra knew they were right.

Perhaps James Potter had managed to fight better the effects of the Dementor aura. But ‘better’ was obviously not ‘good’, and as the former Azkaban inmate babbled before cackling and beginning his conversation by trying to watch her shoes, it was evident most of his sanity had broken years before his escape.

“He’s attracting too much of a crowd,” Susan declared. “We must move him before someone from the Ministry calls the Dementors.”

And then the first problem they had fled from manifested itself. In an instant, the crowd went from excited to terrified, and the roofs of several Hogsmeade houses burned in golden flames. Forty feet behind the mumbling James Potter a tall man in grey-white robes Apparated, followed by twenty other wand-wielding men and women...and by the way the Light was surrounding them, singing with them, Alexandra had no doubts these were their would-be killers of a few minutes ago.

The Hogsmeade students screamed and ran away, especially as one of the new grey-white attackers threw an incendiary spell over them which began to demolish half of the nearby Herbology shop.

More Nephilim arrived, shrieking and screaming in the sky.

“Susan. Take my father and go.” She kept her eyes on the advancing grey-white robed figures.

“You can’t fight them all together. It’s suicide!”

Oh, she certainly could. If she was ready to bring out the war spells, she could do it. Something that was impossible if Susan stood nearby to be electrocuted.

“The Professors are certainly on their way. Take James Potter with you and go! I will deal with them...”

Her last affirmation had been more shouted than stated, and the leader, a grey-bearded man with a staff in his hand pulsating with silver-gold lights, was prompt to chuckle.

“Deal with us. My, my. I knew the Champions of the Dark were arrogant, but you seem to beat them all at thirteen years old, Morrigan’s dark spawn.”

Well...they knew. Alexandra didn’t know how, but they knew. She felt something relax around her wrists. The magic of the Unbreakable Vow sworn one year ago was dissipating. There were too many people in the know for the secret to remain a secret now.

“Maybe arrogance is my sin.” She gave these mysterious enemies a smirk. “I’m still better than you, no? Obviously, arrogant or not, I suppose cowardice is yours. Obviously, throwing a hundred Nephilim and twenty-plus Light wizards at a thirteen years-old witch is totally a measured and courageous solution. Especially since I have absolutely not wronged you in any way.”

“Dark Champions dirty this earth by their very existence. You are a defiler of souls who needs to be eradicated.”

“Oh, you’re one of those.” Seriously, was the leader unable to feel how the earth and the air were shrieking at his presence? His aura and his magic were pure, yes, but they were burning everything without distinction. Alexandra raised Fragarach in challenge. “Shall we begin?”

“Yes, we shall...”

Before her enemy had uttered one more word, she was already behind the group and slashing one in the back. A scream of agony, and there went down the first Light wizard. The Nephilim horde descended like a tide of monsters upon Hogsmeade...

And suddenly the explosions began. Unlike the first attacks of the day, those bombardments were not Light magic. It was suffocating, acid...powerful Dark Magic, and the skies darkened as the Nephilim burned.

Alexandra pointed her wand towards the sky and mentally called the new bond she had with the ravens. And the black birds answered, flocking in a large formation from the Forbidden Forest. In a few seconds, hundreds of aerial duels began.

“It looks like the odds are getting more equilibrated,” the Basilisk-Slayer whispered before teleporting to a roof and beginning her first war spell of the day. “Thurisaz and Haglaz, hear my call. Coalesce, grow, burn, destroy, pour the lightning rain upon my enemies! GUNGNIR!”

The Light wizards realised too late what she was going to do...in fact if she was not missing something, they had been busy putting anti-Apparition wards over the entire battlefield while she began to focus on her battle-spell.

The twinge she felt as the columns of green-emerald lightning began to pour from her wand confirmed it. No one would be able to flee by magical means unless the temporary wards were neutralised.

Since they took the equivalent of half the power of a Fulmen Imperator at short range the next second, it was more a problem for them than for her.

Alexandra didn’t stay in one place to see the effects of her magic, but the hydra senses allowed her to smell the awful odour of roasted human meat. At least half a dozen enemies were down and would never be a problem again...but that left all the others. She had to jump to another roof, as the previous one was struck by so many golden rays it disintegrated tile, wood, and stone.

For the next ten seconds, she fled on the roofs, knowing very well how easy a target she presented to these Light fanatics. And still no trace of the Professors, damn it. Seeing a ladder on the side of a building, she used a Wingardium Leviosa and half-jumped on it to descend and go back to the street level before continuing running.

Unfortunately, when she turned back into the principal street, three of the enemies were already there.

“It’s over, Champion of the Morrigan!”

Unlike these imbeciles, she didn’t waste her breath in petty insults or good words. Her two words didn’t waste any of the time she had left.

“FULMEN IMPERATOR!”

Without the runic sequence, the Lightning-based attack was a bit less powerful than it should be. But since the battle against the Slytherins months ago, she was more powerful.

Her three enemies conjured white-gold shields when they saw her attack coming and one even had the gall to chuckle.

One second later they screamed in agony as the shields failed and lightning tore into their flesh. A fourth wizard which was rushing behind them managed to get away from the core of her assault...only to look at her in stupefaction as she rushed him and impaled him with Fragarach.

“It was not supposed to be like this...” the man managed to articulate before she removed Fragarach from his torso and decapitated him.

“That’s what you get when you decide to attack the day of my first date.” The Potter Heiress growled without a twinge of sympathy. For some reason, these so-righteous people had decided killing her was acceptable. Fine with her, but they didn’t have a right to complain when she sent them to their afterlife.

The noise of footsteps on the ground told her the rest were here well before she raised her eyes to the other end of the street. Sure enough, they were still five or six wizards, led by the sceptre-wielding one who looked like the leader.

“Surrender and repent, Dark Champion,” the offer was voiced, “and you will be...”

“Oh shut up, you fool. Unless you don’t know how to count, more than half of your little army is already dead. I think the odds are going in my favour...”

“Do they?”

The grey-white robes flew away and the leading figure began to shine like a second sun.

*Oh, shit. He’s a Light Champion*.

“I beseech you Thurisaz, Kenaz, Thurisaz, Ur, Thurisaz, Odala! Rise the maelstrom, burn the sky and smite the ice! MJOLLNIR!”

She would not have used this sort of war-spell if she hadn’t another choice. It was going to hurt her reserves...three times the power of a Fulmen Imperator, by her most optimistic estimation.

Emerald lightning bathed the street and the hydra inside her roared-hissed in pleasure...and yet at this moment she knew it was not going to be enough.

A lance of light was thrown.

For a second everything was white.

When she was able to see again, this was a world of pain. The street, which had been...not normal, but per the norms of the Wizarding World, was completely shredded. And while several enemies were lying dead on the ground, the Light Champion was shining like a mini-star, two other robed figures behind him.

“You are a threat which needs to be eliminated,” the voice thundered, inhuman and merciless.

“You...are...”damn her throat hurt...and her ribs hurt too. “Look at what you’ve done. You will have a bounty on your head by tomorrow...”

“No, he won’t.”

Alexandra blinked as she slowly stood on her legs in the middle of what certainly had been the Zonko’s shop of Hogsmeade a few minutes ago.

The new figure had come from nowhere. Alexandra was pretty sure he had not Apparated or any teleportation methods. There would have been a warning sign. Yet with all the debris, the golden flames burning and the devastation, anything not using a flying broom would have taken too long to arrive.

And yet the newcomer was here. Outwardly, he looked almost like the Light wizards, wearing a white robe and several golden decorations.

It was the only common point they had. Alexandra transformed her eyes into those of the hydra and what she saw scared her and forced to abandon her observation after a mere glimpse. There was an ocean of darkness, blood and nightmares hiding under this white robe.

“What the hell are you?”

“I am the Knight Priest.” And a sort of chess piece in form of a knight was conjured above his head, burning in dark flames.

*Exchequer*.

“I was taking a stroll nearby today, and I was surprised to see the agitation in this small Wizarding village.”

“Your presence is unwanted here, abomination.” The Light Champion it seemed was really unhappy about the presence of the Dark Wizard. “Leave and we will forget to hunt you today.”

The Knight Priest burst into an insane cackle.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! A Champion of the Light hunting me, with nothing more in support than his Apprentice and an average Hit-Wizard. A Champion of the Light hunting me, when you weren’t even able to notice I was killing your patrols and your Nephilim around the village. A Champion of Light who saw most of his force destroyed by an underage witch.”

The Dark Wizard shrugged and made a mocking gesture.

“Yes, yes, I really tremble in my boots and shiver in fear.”

“Your presence here will not go unnoticed. Doubtlessly Albus Dumbledore is on his way.”

“Correct,” the Exchequer wizard seemed relatively unconcerned. “But that’s why my companion is looking to intercept him the moment he arrives.”

The darkness-shrouded mage turned his attention towards her.

“Leave, Champion of the Morrigan. This is not your fight. Though your battle was remarkable, this is not a duel you can win.”

Alexandra grimaced, but knew better than to protest. Even standing on her legs right now was difficult and her war-spells had tired her. The problem was, the anti-Apparition wards were still active...

*Lady Morrigan, if you hear me, now would be a good time for a sort of miraculous exit*...

The scream of rage from the Light Champion was terrifying as a sort of ancient gate materialised two feet on the right.

“Don’t let her escape! Kill her!”

Alexandra opened the magical door and was getting through when she heard his dark opponent’s answer...

“You should be more worried about your fate, Knight of the Army of Light...”

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Morag had know the ‘Halloween days’ at Hogwarts had a slight tendency to turn catastrophic these last years, but there was ‘bad’ and there was the current situation.

Sorcery illuminated the sky. Hogsmeade was burning. And columns of villagers and students were running towards the gates of the castle in a magnificent display of cowardice.

If a tenth of the crowd fleeing in panic away from the local settlement would have turned and fought, it was entirely possible they could have forced the monsters currently fighting in the distance to find another battleground for their impressive duel.

But they didn’t and by the bloody chaos the exodus was creating, most of the Professors were tied down protecting the cowards from Nephilim attacks.

As a result, the devastating duel continued between the white-robed Dark Wizard and the grey-robed Light Wizard.

It was...humbling.

 Earth was torn apart and the debris animated in hundreds of monsters only to be burned down and become a horde of screaming flames. Birds and creatures killed and died by the dozens in the sky. The flames were doused by an ocean of ice and thrown back dripping in venom and curses. The curses were vanished in a chorus of explosions and incantations – most of them she was sure were worth ten years at Azkaban for the simple deed of knowing them.

It was Light against Dark, and the two Lord-level wizards weren’t toying around. Each magician was hurling spells as fast they as they could. The very air was aflame with the power they were pouring into their incantations.

“I know Lords of magic are far above the common wizard, but come on, this is ridiculous...” Fred Weasley commented with a trembling voice as the Dark Wizard conjured a thousand-plus black spears, tracing five blood incantations in the very air and throwing the final result in the direction of his opponent.

“I don’t know who those two are, but we can safely say they are the equivalent of Light and Dark Lords.”

If they weren’t, Morag wasn’t sure who would qualify.

“Alexandra’s father has been sent away?” She demanded as tree-sized roots emerged from the earth to form an army of dryad-like things and they were instantly burned in black flames.

“Yes,” George replied, “for all the good it will probably do. Susan Bones is convinced he has a bad case of ‘Azkaban fever’, and since she’s the niece of a DMLE Director, I think she knows what she’s talking about.”

Morag scowled and she knew Hermione was making an even more disgusted face. ‘Azkaban fever’ was the little name the Ministry in its infinite wisdom had found for the mental and physical effects a former Azkaban inmate manifested when he was released from the dark island.

Contrary what the name implied, it was not a fever or even a disease or a combination of diseases. It was the after-effects of being exposed to a Dementor for a long period without a Patronus or any magical protection. They varied enormously from person to person, but in general folly, massive loss of memories, lack of emotion control, spasms, and split personalities were some of the common symptoms exhibited by the former prisoners.

Morag had not had the heart to tell Alexandra. Her friend already loathed the Ministry’s procedures far too much since she had experienced the effects of the Dementors’ aura. She had not had the heart to tell her that her father was probably gone mentally and physically. Oh, the man could probably hold scrutiny in a conversation for a few minutes at first, but the madness episodes would arrive with greater and greater frequency. Perhaps Alexandra already had her doubts on the subject beforehand. She was sure they were going to know the final answer soon.

In the end, there was probably nothing they could do for James Potter. It was not a question of gold or resources. It was just that no Mind-Healer had ever been able to mend the mind-scars inflicted by the Dementors if you spent more than a couple of months continuously in Azkaban. If you were an exceptional Occlumens or a vampire, you might be able to prevent the damage from happening in the first place. Bellatrix Black-Lestrange had apparently done it, if the continental newspapers could be trusted. James Potter had obviously not that kind of talent, and his mental sanity had likely severely decreased since his escape in the summer.

“We will do what we can for him...but apart from a healing coma and many, many Potions, there’s not a lot we will able to do with him. And even then, a lot of former prisoners’ bodies fail before one year after their release from Azkaban.”

“It’s not enough for the Ministry to condemn you to a sentence in hell...they ensure you don’t live long after your sentence is over.” Fudge was really lucky to not be around, because Morag could make a safe bet Hermione would have killed him on the spot for upholding the Ministry directives. “I don’t see Alexandra fighting anywhere.”

“I suppose she apparated away before Hogsmeade went up in flames. There were only two Light Wizards left when the big bad Dark Lord made his entrance.”

“I love your confidence, Morag, but you don’t think...”

“No.” She was not going to think about this terrible possibility. “No, she’s still alive. Alexandra killed two Basilisks, a bunch of Light criminals aren’t going to be enough to overwhelm her.”

Except the damned Light Lord, obviously. This one was five heads above the rest.

But no, Alexandra had already escaped. Surely she was regaining strength before returning to Hogsmeade and making sure the storm was over.

And the storm was not decreasing in intensity.

Screaming in a dark tongue of guttural sounds, the Dark Mage which had to be a member of the Exchequer raised his hands without even using a wand and created more darkness and burning scorpions from his surroundings.

Darkness coalesced, and the sky darkened. Flashes of Dark magic echoed across the entire valley.

“This is going to hurt...” Susan whispered, and Morag realised the Hufflepuff had come back while they watched the cataclysm unfolding.

But it didn’t stop the judgement from coming true.

In a cruel word of command, the Dark Lord ordered the darkness to drown the world into an ocean of evil and night.

And the darkness obeyed. Malevolence extinguished the day, and from the depths of the shadows, reality fell against the conjured black forces.

The Light Lord hurled golden flames and swords of the purest light, but while they cut, there was always one more wave of curses and Dark Magic coming behind the banished attack. Slowly but surely, the duel was turning in favour of the Dark Wizard.

 And then there was a column of fire, blazing with light as it approached Hogsmeade.

“Dumbledore is here,” the Twins said in a single voice.

“Looks like it,” Morag said in a less than enthusiastic voice. “I wonder where he was for the last hour? It isn’t like we are his students...oh wait...”

“Well, he’s here,” Nigel spoke in relief. “And while this Dark Lord is dangerous, surely he isn’t powerful enough to fight two Light Lords at the same time...”

The former Gryffindor had not finished his sentence when a lone figure appeared less than ten feet away from the Hogwarts Headmaster.

Morag cast a long-view spell and instantly knew the identity of the man now opposing the Chief Warlock.

They had seen it enough this summer in the newspapers.

“We have stayed far too long here. Run to Hogwarts and don’t look back.”

“I don’t see...”

“Hermione, that is Gellert Grindelwald.”

There was a large silence and then the Exiled all began to run as two of the most powerful wizards of this century prepared to battle.

“I’m really beginning to hate this Halloween...”

**31 October 1993, Pandemonium, the realm between life and death**

This was a strange place.

The moment she had passed the door, this had been her first reaction.

At first there had been a white area of nothingness. Sometimes, there were white walls and white stairs, but they led absolutely nowhere.

This was a bit strange, even by Hogwarts standards.

It had been when she had thought to change the decoration that this weird realm had begun to change in turn. Grass had begun to replace the cold white ground. The space over her head had started to look like a true sky.

Her wand in one hand, Fragarach in the other, Alexandra continued to walk as the realm changed and more magical phenomena appeared in front of her eyes. Her footsteps were leaving red bloody prints on the fresh grass, no matter most of the blood hadn’t been there to her best knowledge when she crossed the threshold.

The ravens were multiplying around her, she could feel them. Every twenty breaths or so, one new black bird materialised on her shoulders like it had always been there.

Her walk continued. She didn’t know how long it lasted. Her watch had stopped functioning, and while there was a sky, it was a grey mass of clouds now, like the dark weather seconds before a thunderstorm.

Yes, it was definitely a strange place, indeed.

Alexandra had a good idea where she was now, especially as human-like ghosts began to pop in and pop out by the hundreds their faces showing surprise, anger, hate, contentment, relief, or exhaustion.

This was the antechamber of Death. It was a realm which was only accessible when the veil between the two dimensions was at its thinnest, which was, by the way, on the day of Samhain.

Many names had been given to it in esoteric books and philosophical discourses. The Place of Last Judgement, the Battlefield’s Last Vision, and several hundred others, depending on the religious culture and the pantheon wizards and witches there venerated.

The name found in the books she had been able to read had designated it as Pandemonium. A place which was...a gateway. Not truly death. Not truly life. Not a capital of a hell or a paradise. It was a realm where time and the normal rules didn’t apply.

The scenes began to change with every step after this acknowledgement.

Soon she was walking on a gigantic battlefield. Or rather the aftermath of one. The fighting had stopped there an eternity ago, but thousands of corpses remained. No, make that tens of thousands of corpses.

As far her green eyes could see – and with the hydra helping her with her improved vision, her sight had nothing to worry about being outranged by Legolas – this was a gigantic graveyard. Even if she was pessimistic, there were more dead people on this sad war ground than a modern city had of inhabitants.

The majority of the dead were humans, but they were far from the only ones. It was not difficult to see the corpses of the goblins. The giants, though she had never seen one before, were impossible to miss. Dragons were there too, wings full of holes and spears in their throats. Pegasi and other super winged horses were lying butchered, hacked into pieces, frozen into an eternal moment of agony. Nephilim were covering the red-black grass in tiny mountains.

There were many other races, some she had seen in historical books, others she hadn’t the slightest idea what they were called.

It might have been a metaphor from the Morrigan, a representation of all the battlefields from the very beginning of magic to this day.

It wasn’t.

The banners were the final statement. Bloodied, lying on the ground, burned, defiled, there still were thousands and two great emblems were repeated countless times. The first was a great cross, a crown and seven stars, all golden on a white field. The second was a black dragon and a silver sword on a red field.

These were the banners of Arthur and Mordred, that no mortal wizard or non-wizard had dared retake on shield or flag in the last thousand years.

And so this battlefield could only be the aftermath-memory of one place.

It was the battlefield of Camlann.

And damn, the legends had, if anything, underestimated the scale of the massacre.

Watching the mangled carcass of an unknown species of white dragon, Alexandra saw the scaled flying creature had been...half-devoured. What sort of monster could do this?

As she went near the centre of the battlefield, the ghosts were impossible to miss. Unlike the previous ones she had seen or those of Hogwarts, these ones didn’t move, but they certainly could glare and send her – or was it the entire realm? – loathing expressions. They were trapped in some black-tar substance, and were throbbing like they were tortured. An impression more than justified by the fact they all had a raven perched on their heads.

She found them a few breaths later. A circle of black birds was surrounding the two bodies, but even if they hadn’t been, there would have been no way to miss who they were.

One wore golden armour and a massive crown with seven diamonds. The other wore black and gold.

Their blades, spears and equipment were broken, but as she touched them, they revealed to be shadows. Fragarach and Excalibur had not stayed in this realm after Camlann, though in one case it had been rather obvious.

Arthur looked like a grand old king in that golden armour and golden weapons. He looked absolutely regal, despite his wounds. And yet there was something wrong she could feel...an itch which was more than confirmed when she removed the golden helmet. A curse-mark was half-devouring his left cheek. It had the form of a curled snake, and while she was far from a specialist, she was going to bet Arthur would not have had long to live if the Battle of Camlann hadn’t happened.

But it was when she removed Mordred’s helmet she had her greatest surprise of the day, and given all the events so far, this was certainly not a small claim.

Alexandra had expected to see a cruel face, one the picture of evil itself. Instead it was like she faced a mirror.

Oh, it was not completely perfect...the nose was a bit longer than hers, the teeth had not the advantage of toothbrush and other modern inventions, and the hair of course was far wilder. But the green eyes, however dead, had been the livid green or hers and though they were not identical, Alexandra could have passed as her sister. An older sister, because this was the corpse of a young woman of eighteen-nineteen years old, not thirteen like her.

Mordred was obviously a girl, of this there was no doubt. Any happiness she would have felt at seeing Binns and the other History ‘Professors’ being so obviously in the wrong were tempered by the fact...Mordred was looking just like her!

“What in the name of Sauron?” she shouted.

Her scream echoed on the silent battlefield and the ravens croaked before rising in a dark cloud...then they began to merge into a female figure.

The sheer amount of power unconsciously brought her to her knees. It was not like the Light Champion or the Knight Priest.

No, those two may very well have been ants compared to this power. A sensation of warmth followed by cold flowed over her skin and then she was there.

She was tall...taller than Hagrid, for sure. Her hairs were changing colours between shades of red and black at every second. Her robe was one second made of leaves, the other it looked like a Hogwarts uniform. The details were constantly on the change, but there were some consistent points. Darkness was flowing in and out like she was a dark aster...and her eyes were the same shade as Alexandra’s.

 “**Mordred should have been your predecessor, Alexandra**,” the voice was coming from everywhere and nowhere at once.

“But she died, right?” It was not really a question. “She died at Camlann...”

**“It is not what had been decided**.” The ravens were arriving and pouring into the Goddess as each word was uttered. “**The prophecy was not fulfilled. The Light damaged the balance. The Battle of Camlann was not a bleeding followed by a renewal. It was an unprecedented massacre and everybody...lost**.”

The sky was changing over the battlefield. Where before a thunderstorm could be gazed at, it was an eclipse shining malevolently which replaced it.

“**Arthur and Myrddin, in their arrogance, obtained exactly what they sought: over a thousand years of Light domination. The Old Ways faded, the One God they had decided to worship taking the ascendant and it burned bright, terribly bright**.”

Something like a sphere of crystal appeared in the right hand of the Morrigan.

“**But in their arrogance they never considered the cost**,” the green eyes were so powerful Alexandra thought they were piercing her soul and her most intimate secrets. “**To truly shine, the Light must rest every night to return at dawn more brilliant than ever. Light spells need to recharge eventually. Unity needs real enemies to face lest it crumble on inaction. Victory needs an enemy or the allies of yesterday will rapidly turn on each other**.”

“The Light needs the Darkness...otherwise how will the humans know they walk into the Light?”

The Morrigan smiled...to be honest, Alexandra thought this was the most terrible smile she had ever seen.

“**Precisely, my Champion. In their haste to unite in a single invincible entity, the Light Powers didn’t think what would come after their final triumph. Life, Wisdom, Innocence, Unity, Order and Judgement...they pushed Fate on their side once again, but the price was terrible**.”

Suddenly they were not in the middle of a battlefield anymore, but in front of a sort of...small lake, with light-infused figures surrounding it and by the loud arguments that were heard, the general sound was anger...something which was maybe explained by the white waters of the lake had almost disappeared and now were one feet or two away from disappearing entirely.

“**Each battle from now on they are fighting, each victory is accelerating the final collapse of the Light. And with the Light dimming**...”

The Goddess didn’t finish the sentence but it wasn’t that difficult to guess.

“Death, Chaos, Desire, War, Confusion, and Corruption will soon have free reign. The Dark will have its victory, and since the Light has never learned to adapt in a thousand years...”

“**It will be a reign of darkness the likes of which has never been in human history**,” the Morrigan confirmed her hypothesis. “**Already the Light Champions are a dying breed. The Chosen of the Archangel Michael you faced at Hogsmeade wasted a lot of strength in his attempts to kill you, and while he may not die against his new opponent, he will give only embers to his successor...assuming you leave her the choice**.”

Alexandra frowned in incomprehension. What choice?

“**The girl tried to follow you into my domain when you opened the door to Pandemonium, my Champion. In this realm, only my Champion can find the way...and since it is only accessible during the day of Samhain, the living souls who haven’t found their way back when the conjunction is over will be trapped forever in its depths, their souls mine to devour, if other dangers do not take them first.**”

Alexandra didn’t laugh...she was in front of a true Goddess, after all, but she couldn’t fail to be a bit sarcastic.

“Why should I save a witch...a Light witch who arrived today at Hogsmeade to murder me while I have absolutely no idea who she is?”

“**You might be thankful one day...death is permanent, but it is not without mercy**.”

“I will...I will consider it.”

She had no reason to go against the wishes of the Morrigan, but it wasn’t exactly like giving second chances had worked against Ardoch.

“**Good**.” And they were back on the battlefield of Camlann, though most of the crows were gone and two Archway-portals were now swirling with green-blue energy.

“**The Archway on the left will lead you to the Light witch and the return path to Hogsmeade. The Archway on the right has the same final destination...but it will take you to several strongholds before**.”

“Strongholds which might interest me?” The Morrigan didn’t answer. “Goddess, about the Exchequer...”

“**Some Dark Champions join them. Some Champions choose to oppose them. What you will decide is ultimately your choice. Just be sure when you make your decision to weigh carefully the advantages and the drawbacks. Once you will move with or against them, there will be no return possible. The Knight Priest is only one of the lesser terrors the Avatar of Darkness can unleash on this world**.”

“The Queen is Morgana La Fay, she was once your Champion.”

“**Yes**,” damn it, Alexandra had really hoped she was wrong, “**but Morgana is the bastardised form of her name the Light wizards gave her decades after Camlann. Her name has always been Morgane Rys’Ygraine Avalon and it will stay that way until she accepts to return to me a last time**.”

“She has done...terrible things.”

“**Morgane is the weapon her enemies enjoyed forging with their atrocities and crimes**,” the red-haired Goddess chided her. “**Don’t be too prompt judging her before you hear the full story**.”

Green eyes containing the very power of Death stared at her.

“**I don’t choose my Champions on a whim...and so far, all have been truly exceptional. Many did terrible things, assuredly, but they were also exceptional**.”

And in a flick of fingers, the Goddess burst apart in a million ravens and other black birds and for a second the sounds they made drowned everything else. Yet the Potter Heiress had no difficulty hearing the whisper of the Celtic deity.

“**Your road will have hardships and moments of joy...will you choose wisdom or the Power of Kings**?”

Then the ravens disappeared and Alexandra stood, giving a last glance at Arthur and Mordred’s souvenirs before moving on to the Archways.

“The choice should not be that difficult...”

**31 October 1993, Hogsmeade, Scotland**

The moment he heard the familiar ‘pop’ of Apparition, Albus Dumbledore knew for certain the opponent his enemies had chosen to give him today.

The hairs were paler and brittle, the visage more tormented, the eyes were darker, but there was no glamour, no illusion. It truly was him.

“Gellert.”

“Albus.”

As much as he wanted a long conversation with his former lover, there was no time for it. Hogsmeade was burning in the distance, and though he hadn’t cast extensive sensory Charms on himself, he would have to be on death’s door to not feel the titanic duel taking place in what had been the week-end favourite destination of his students.

“Let me pass, Gellert. I must preserve Hogsmeade and ensure all my students are safe and secure.”

“Oh, they are,” Gellert was quick to answer before laughing at his astonished expression. “Oh, Albus! You didn’t believe I came to this...backward hamlet to slaughter a few hundred brats, did you?”

Gellert chuckled but not for long; his laughter ended in a series of violent coughs.

“No, Albus. I came here because my...handler...wanted to crush the Army of Light’s wizards, in the unlikely case they proved idiotic enough to go on a murder spree on Samhain. We have no interest in killing children who aren’t even capable to know which side of their wand is the correct one.”

“The Army of Light does not kill innocent witches and wizards, Gellert. They are the successors of Merlin’s great work...”

“Spare me the Light-driven propaganda, Albus.” The former Dark Lord said while removing his black cloak. “The Army of Light is very much like the Exchequer in that they kill anyone they feel represent a danger to their precious Light. And don’t think I am not aware of the little accords you signed with them in the last decades.”

“I did what I had to do, Gellert. And you aren’t in a position to criticise my choice of allies. You went back to the Exchequer, didn’t you?”

This had been one of the Dark Organisations he had feared might be convinced to participate in the Nurmengard break-out. After today, the likelihood was near-certain. The Army of Light and these Dark monsters hated each other...

“I went back? Albus, no one is going back to the Exchequer once he has tried to leave it of his own free will. I am not the master in the relationship, I am the servant...”

No, this wasn’t possible...yes, Gellert had been their student once, but surely with his formidable abilities he had to be in high favour...

“While I am in far better health than I was in my prison-fortress, I am still a prisoner in all but name,” the once genius of Durmstrang bared his teeth in a parody of a smile. “Blood rituals keep me alive, but I have no doubt that the slightest hesitation to obey a command will kill me. And these are just the most evident measures I know they have ready to neutralise me. I am not free, Albus. I have never been free since 1945.”

“Then let me...”

“No, Albus.” And just like a Charm had been cast, all amusement was gone. The geniality was gone, and the dark began to seep in his former lover’s aura. “It is too late. I wanted it badly when I lost our duel.”

The words shouldn’t hurt. But they did nonetheless.

“I wanted to die. But you didn’t give me peace. I begged you, I implored you. I asked for death. I did not wish to endure this long torment. Maybe it was cowardly of me, but I wanted to escape it and pass away. Let the Powers judge my soul. But I feared the long decades of imprisonment, the long ravage of the elements, the cold, and the privations on my magic and my body.”

“I loved you. I couldn’t kill you.”

“You and your seven-damned soft ideals,” Gellert scoffed. “Look at you. You were the most promising wizard of the last thirty generations, Albus! You could have been great. You could have done great things, whether you chose the Light or the Dark! But...look at you...you are flying from one political arena to another...where is the Alchemist, the Transfiguration Expert, the formidable Inventor I grew to love?”

“They grew wiser and decided they wanted a more peaceful world.”

“In this case, I think you need to stop dreaming. The Exchequer is coming, Albus. I don’t know when or where, but I know they are coming. And they won’t make the mistakes I made.” Grindelwald removed the last surplus accessories not necessary for a formal duel and Albus imitated him. “It is time for me to regain my throne and my wand...or die trying.”

“As long as I live, I will make sure they will meet their defeat and abject failures on every path. And you will not win. The wand is mine, and your throne burned at Berlin.”

“We will see.”

An Entrail-Expelling Curse began the duel and immediately the Hogwarts Headmaster parried it with one of his most powerful shields while with his wandless hand moulding the earth into animated animals.

Once again, he hardened his heart and mustered all his strength. Only one wizard was going to leave this battlefield alive today, and he couldn’t afford to die.

Not today.

Not if there was a new war against the Dark coming.

**31 October 1993, The Himalayan Redoubt**

It was cold. It was dark. But it was the cold which was the most unpleasant issue when she left Pandemonium. While Hogsmeade was not and would never be a tropical island, wherever she had arrived was making it look like a summer holiday.

It didn’t help she had left a lot of clothes in the burning house, and now that the adrenalin was stopping, there weren’t many other things to consider apart her body temperature.

Thus the first thing Alexandra did was cast the maximum of Warming Charms around her. Only when she was sure she was not going to freeze she stopped using her wand for her comfort and used a powerful Lumos to watch her surroundings.

She was...not in England anymore. Indeed, there was a very high probability she was not anywhere near the British Isles. Sure, Scotland had mountains but they were tiny and insignificant compared to the gigantic things towering above. In the darkness it was difficult to see a kilometre away, but everywhere she pointed her wand there was snow, mountains, and ice.

Inversely, the stones of the fortress she had just invited herself into were not unknown. Not so many months had passed that she had forgotten Brise-Roc and goblin-style fortresses.

Sadly, it looked like this one had been abandoned, and not yesterday.

Taking great care to not glide on the ice and the snow covering the ground, her strides were slow and more than once she was forced to use Fragarach to not stumble.

It was only when she descended four ancient stairs and arrived in a large hall that she felt its power.

It was...it was enticing and at the same time awful.

It was burning and wrathful.

And as she avoided two half-demolished walls and a goblin statue which had seen better days, it was revealed as a sword. It was a sword and it was currently embedded into an anvil-shaped stone.

There was no natural light to illuminate the ruins, but as she cancelled her Lumos, the small courtyard where the stone had been placed was still illuminated.

Alexandra whistled as she realised why the Morrigan had made her come here.

The snow was lighter in this area, but she still had to wear her light gloves to remove the snowflakes from the surface of the stone.

For a second, she prayed it was just a joke, that she would not find anything.

But as the snow was removed, fiery gold letters were revealed and began to change giving her the same message, first in Latin, then in Old Gaelic and at last in English.

It was a message famous and infamous across the ages, a challenge and the accomplishment of a quest in one.

**WHOSO PULLETH THIS SWORD OUT OF THIS STONE AND ANVIL IS RIGHTWISE LORD BORN OF ALL BRITANNIA**

**Author’s note**: the second part of the Battle of Hogsmeade and the events of Samhain 1993 will be updated next month. The tentative title is *Wars of Future Pasts*.

Legends walk again in this world, and it’s not a good time to be mortal...

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