**Chapter 76**

**The Beltane Legacy**

**2 May 1994, Hogwarts, Scotland**

Albus had never been very concerned about any of his teachers being impersonated by Dark Wizards in his school. For all the wonders of Polyjuice and several appearance-altering Potions, most of these methods were horribly toxic on the long-term, and required very specific ingredients which would have alerted Severus and any brewer having two cells to rub together there was a witch or a wizard who wasn’t who he pretended to be.

There were obviously complicated rituals and rare incantations allowing oneself to steal another wizard’s identity, some of them taking their sources into the darkest eras of history, but none of those would be able to go near without the Hogwarts’ wards without ringing dozens of alarm. And once again, none of the rituals he had been able to read in the confiscated libraries of ambitious Dark Lords lasted months, or if they did, the consequences for the body were nauseating and quite lethal.

To violate some of the most fundamental laws of magic, there was always a price, and the one exacted for usurpation of appearance was quite a steep one.

The DADA course remained a large concern every year, clearly, as the curse of Tom Riddle continued to humiliate, hurt, or send to Saint Mungo’s wards the wizards and the witches applying for the job. And some of these failures and shady characters had been Dark Wizards. Yet the very fact they applied for DADA in these circumstances allowed Albus to keep an eye on them, and acquire more information on potential and current enemies. If someone wanted to spy upon him using one of the two positions opening every year, the Headmaster was going to let them have their delusions. The Defeater of Grindelwald didn’t know for sure if it was the curse feeling the ill intentions of the applicant or some other magical factor, but the darkest souls were never leaving Hogwarts in good health.

But impersonating a teacher who was not a DADA Professor for months? Albus had found it unlikely at best. A lot of the wizards and witches teaching in his school had been there for years, and the slightest mistake during a teacher’s meeting or at the Great Table when they met each other at breakfast or dinner would alert him and the entire staff.

In theory, Polyjuice and Legilimency could allow you to impersonate someone, but truly masquerading as another wizard was an incredibly difficult feat which could collapse at any moment. If the Dark Wizard was too powerful compared to his victim, he would stand out and be discovered. If a spell of Dark Magic was cast, the alarms would wake him up and arresting the key suspect would be an affair of minutes.

But watching the immobile corpse of a woman who was the perfect twin of Professor Aurora Sinistra, Albus was forced to recognise that in this instance, he had been utterly wrong.

There had been a spy under his nose, and he had completely failed to notice it.

“Fascinating,” the Defeater of Grindelwald said to Severus who was waiting by his side, “no matter how many spells I cast, the diagnostics tell me this body is the real deal and was alive until a few minutes ago.”

Fortunately, the imposter had required Aurora Sinistra for her memories, or so he supposed, and as such had imprisoned her in an improvised prison south of Hogsmeade. With his Professor of Astronomy now in the Hospital Wing, Albus was certain the spy was in front of him, the dark spells wielded with devastating accuracy when the impersonator tried to escape solidified to certain this judgement.

“Any idea how this was done, Severus?”

“None, Headmaster,” the younger Professor answered. “I know some Potions which might transform the body for long periods of time, but Polyjuice or its modified variants need to be taken regularly, and there was absolutely no sign the fake Sinistra ever ordered Potion ingredients. And while I read some questionable books, I have never heard of anything allowing you to become a perfect body double for the entire length of a school year.”

Yes, it quite the mystery, because the not-Aurora imposter had stayed at Hogwarts during the Winters Holidays. So whatever had been done, it had obviously lasted more than six months without interruption, and it didn’t end with the death of the person subjected to it.

It was truly a dangerous piece of magic, and one which had to be neutralised at all costs.

“We will keep the fact the woman who taught Astronomy for the better part of this year wasn’t the real Astronomy Professor under wraps.”

“Headmaster,” the tone for this single word told Albus that his Potions Professor didn’t agree at all with this reasoning, “this being, since we don’t even know it was a woman, a man, or something else, behaved like Aurora ever did and we trusted her like she was the original one! From September to May, she had access to a considerable quantity of information the imbeciles like Quirrell, Lockhart or Rincewind could only dream to have! We need to bring professional investigators of the DMLE here and now, and see how bad we are compromised!”

“No. The Order of the Phoenix will deal with this security breach.”

Severus scoffed.

“This isn’t a breach. It is a city-sized failure of intelligence, and with the Astronomy office devoid of any intelligence we can use, no one in this school, not even you, has any guess how much trouble the fake Aurora has created while we weren’t looking. The imposter might have created dozens of enchantments which will activate in a decade, placed Compulsions and Imperius-like spells into the minds of our students, and we didn’t know the first thing about it yesterday!”

“But at least thanks to young Neville and his rising star, we have been able to neutralise this spy and we know for whom it was working.” Albus threw a pointed look at the Potions Master. “Along with other important information of the Champions of the Dark.”

The stony expression of the Head of House Slytherin would have made a troll proud.

“How funny the information of the Boy-Who-Lived is trusted like his words are Merlin’s when plenty of spies are widely distrusted day after day.”

“Neville Longbottom is the Champion of Fate now, Severus, and thus he is more important than you and I.”

“In this case, why send him to the European Magical Tournament?” His spy sent him a disapproving expression and his voice could have melted half of the ice in the vicinity of the North Pole. “Your ‘Chosen One’ is going to end into a grave when Geoffrey Hooper is removed from the competition.”

“You mean ‘if’.”

“I mean ‘when’, Headmaster.” The eyes of the Slytherin alumni were pools of darkness. “The rumours of past exploits of Lyudmila Romanov have begun to spread across Europe, and it is a certainty she will be a huge threat for all the Hogwarts Champions.”

“She is dangerous, yes. But she is no Grindelwald.” Albus had known Gellert better than most, and the Russian witch was less powerful than him at the same age.

“No,” Severus agreed. “She’s worse. If Diggory, Hooper, or Warrington is directly opposed to her in the First Task, given their current ineptitude of these dunderheads, we are going to organise at least one funeral after it.”

“I noticed you didn’t include our local Black Witch with them.”

“Alexandra Potter has proved at Hogsmeade and against the Basilisks she won’t be easy to get rid of.”

“I could go arrest her.” In fact, since young Neville had revealed him there was a Champion of Death in his castle, the temptation was getting more insistent.

“And under what pretext are you going to arrest her?” Severus’ tone was definitely sarcastic now. “You have the word of a White Mage that she’s a Black Mage. In other words, someone who would be thrown in Azkaban if the Ministry discovered the truth accuses another Azkaban-worthy criminal. And that definitely assumes you can arrest her.”

“I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts, and I defeated Grindelwald twice.” There was no amusement as he watched Severus. “Be careful about your allegiances my boy. Oath or no oath, I kept you out of Azkaban.”

“I remember perfectly every detail of the last days, thanks to my Occlumency,” replied humourlessly the Potions Master. “But I was not referring to magical prowess. As the situation in Britain currently stands, you are in a precarious position, with many Lords and Ladies like the Malfoys searching for a pretext to remove you from the Chief Warlock position. Trying to arrest a student when you have zero authority in the DMLE would see Zabini and others leading the charge to remove you before the day is over.”

It took a monumental effort of will to not tighten his fists and to avoid lashing out. Severus was right, damn it. Merlin’s beard, this was exactly why he had not begun any overt actions immediately after the preliminary.

“An acceptable reason to not act out in precipitation indeed,” Albus Dumbledore spoke before changing the subject. “What do you make of Sirius’ last confusing message?”

This time the lips of his Head of Slytherin twisted into something which could not be described as anything but ‘evil smirk’. More than a decade had passed, but the hate between Sirius and Severus had reached new levels of antagonism. Before a word could be uttered, the gargoyle guarding his quarters let pass a visitor he had not been expecting this morning or today.

“Headmaster!” Hestia Jones shouted as she slammed open his door and nearly knocked off Severus’ chair. “We have a terrible problem!”

**2 May 1994, Ministry of Magic, London, England**

Ludovic Bagman moaned in satisfaction as his body fell in the very comfortable armchair of his office. Truly this purchase had been one of his best investments when he took the job over a decade ago.

The Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports smiled, and for the first time in weeks, it was truly a genuine one. He had been pursued by warmongering goblins, kidnapped by cruel and spiteful vampires, humiliated like never before, and more in debt than he ever was in a long career of bets and gambles, but at the end, he was still there, alive and solvable.

Truthfully, it had a bit too close from the precipice several times. If the bloodsuckers had wanted to siphon his life away and leave him a corpse on the doorstep of the Ministry, they could have done it. If the Ministry Department Heads had not considerable files worth of nasty ugly secrets far worse than him, the former Beater of the Wimbourne Wasps would have been fired long before yesterday. And if he had bet on the wrong person during the last Hogwarts Preliminary, his financial situation would have ceased to become critical to turn up desperate and past the point of no-return.

But once again, when things became dicey, his luck had not abandoned him.

“Praise Lady Alexandra Potter, Victor of the Preliminaries,” the blonde-haired wizard whispered, raising a toast of Firewhiskey to an imaginary crowd.

Ludo had bet a lot on the ultimate triumph of the green-eyed witch, and the Ravenclaw Champion had not disappointed. Many wizards and witches, greed overwhelming their senses, had laughed and telling him he was making a terrible mistake. That after the dreadful scores of the Potions Preliminary, victory was going to go to Cedric Diggory of Hufflepuff.

Their mockeries and sly expressions had disappeared and replaced by ugly grimaces now.

Honestly, Ludovic Bagman had nothing against Cedric Diggory. Quite the contrary, in fact. The tall teenager held a lot of promises for a Quidditch player and as a man if he managed to not get the prejudices and the boasting attitude of his father. The Hufflepuff had no weaknesses, had mastered the curriculum of his first five years at Hogwarts, and was a prime candidate for Head Boy and earning himself the first place in his year’s NEWTs.

But that was where the problems arrived. The charm and confident boy had no weaknesses, but he had no obvious strengths either. So far, the Hufflepuff Champion had not spent hundreds of hours on a subdivision of the Magical Arts, with the result he would receive the applauses of all his teachers but never disintegrate any academic records; sheer excellence and extraordinary achievements were not what the Heir of House Diggory was after.

It was too bad for Diggory, really. Ludo was sincere in his praises of the boy when he spoke with dour Crouch. But the Tournament would demand more than ‘good’, and Diggory was alas a bit too predictable.

Unlike Neville Longbottom and Alexandra Potter.

The Head of Department of Magical Games and Sports didn’t know what to think about the former. Like many spectators and judges, Ludo had realised quite quickly that the ridiculous fictional stories about the Boy-Who-Lived were just that, fictional and ridiculous. Augusta Longbottom’s grandson could not conjure a sea of water to extinguish a fire, remove an army of carnivorous plants by his sheer will and a flick of the wand, and the less said about his Potions performance.

The boy was the very opposite of Cedric Diggory, though the comparison was a bit unfair between a third-year and a boy who must be at this very moment preparing for his OWLs. But then at the Tournament, if Geoffrey Hooper was forced to forfeit for one reason or another, the Hufflepuff and the Gryffindor would have to compete the same tasks. There were no handicaps for older Champions, or clues and help for the younger ones. The Italians and Venetians had been quite clear on this.

The man who had been the star player of the Wimbourne Wasps in his young wild years was quite surprised Dumbledore had let his protégé participate in these four tasks with such glaring weaknesses. It had not escape him that the Boy-Who-Lived had zero knowledge of Runes and Arithmancy – a few innocent questions with his Head of House had confirmed the future Longbottom Lord wasn’t taking these electives, and was absolutely a disaster-in-being for Potions.

Someone knocked at his door, interrupting his musings.

“Enter!”

It was one of his least favourite subordinates, Bertha Jorkins. He had tried to transfer the woman out of the Department, seriously she spent more hours gossiping and trading secrets with informants who weren’t his than him reminiscing on his past Quidditch games.

“Mr Bagman, we have received the answer of the Scuola Regina.”

“Ah, yes!”

Unfortunately, the moment he opened the letter, it was evident that at least one instance, his luck had not been able to open some doors.

“Alas it seems that my application to be one of the judges for the European Magical Tournament has been refused.” This had always been a long-shot, with impartial judges required and all of that. “I am among the ten officials chosen to represent Britain during the tasks and the different ceremonies.”

Bertha Jorkins rapidly departed after this declaration and Ludo had no doubt that by the next hour, everyone in the Ministry would be aware of this information.

“Where is she going anyway for her holidays next week anyway?” At first the gossiping woman had intended Albania, but she had rapidly changed her mind after hearing there were some trouble between Albanian border patrols and the so-called ‘nations’ of the Balkans. “Sicily?”

**3 May 1994, Nottingham, England**

Many times during his Hogwarts years, Peter had dreamed about having a splendid Manor like James or Sirius did. The last Pettigrew thought most of the Britain would not have thrown stones if he admitted there had been intense moments of jealousy in his heart when he was a young teenager.

Peter wasn’t a saint, but the way the two pureblood Marauders had continuously boasted about their wealth would have made a Dark Lord governing a small country weep in a crisis of greed, and as the only child of a ruined half-blood couple, his family had continuously experienced money issues.

Learning that the smallest room of one of the Potter or Black Manors contained enough treasures to buy the assets of the Pettigrew family, house and Gringotts’ vaults included...well there had been evenings he had lamented at this injustice.

And if year after year his thoughts had stopped brooding on the subject, Peter had never really forgotten.

And now, as he walked in the fabulous neo-renaissance living room of the Pettigrew Manor, freshly sold out to him by the Shadow Blades for his loyal and good services, the rat Animagus remembered and wondered what a strange world they lived into.

So many things changed in Britain and outside of it. Plenty of facts he and thousands of wizards always took for granted were shaking on their foundations and the Old Order enforced by the ICW and the Ministries may not be for long on this earth.

The fact he was here in a Manor was ample evidence about that. If he had tried to purchase a magnificent edifice like the one he was visiting as owner, the Ministry would have tried to bury him in taxes, furious at the idea a lowly half-blood may claim a pureblood property.

But Nottingham wasn’t on Ministry soil anymore. Thaumaturgy enchantment after thaumaturgy enchantment, the vampires had overwhelmed the weak claims of this abandoned land and claimed it in blood and sacrifice. A small Auror task force had tried to intervene at the eleventh hour, but it had been easily repelled with light losses. The Shadow Blades were in control of the greater part of the Nottinghamshire county and plenty of lands in addition to this, and the only way the Ministry could stop this would be to throw against it dozens of Blood Mages. Unfortunately, as Blood Magic had long ago been declared a Dark Art and completely banned by London, there was really no British-born wizard with qualifications to solve the Ministry’s problem.

“Though in hindsight there is one...” Peter had tried to not look shocked when he had seen Lily Evans again two nights ago, but he didn’t know how successful he had been. The former Head Girl of Gryffindor had changed, and not just because she was a vampire. There had always been a rebellious streak in the redhead’s heart, something which pushed her to explore magics most pureblood wizards were perfectly content to erase all traces of. But in the mere hours he had spoken with her, the new Lily had been extremely different from her former self, and this wasn’t just a question of bloodlust.

The young Muggle-born who sometimes paid lip service to Light propaganda had forever vanished. Now there was a Dark Witch who revelled in her Blood Magic skills and cast high-level enchantments like the spells were her due and her privileges.

“We all changed after more than a decade of separation,” Peter sighed in front of a crystal mirror granting him a perfect reflection of himself in formal dark robes. “But I did not expect our long school friendship would end like this.”

And honestly, Peter really regretted it, this ending. Remus had been the member of their little group he felt the closest to, and their fratricidal duel had hurt in ways where the physical aspect was the lesser injury.

When he had come to the coordinates indicated by the Patronus message, Peter had truly been undecided whether he would complete the contract offered by Agnes Calpurnius. Unfortunately, the werewolf he had once called his best friend had not shared his sentimental weaknesses. Or if he did, they were insignificant compared to Albus Dumbledore’s orders.

If Lily had not intervened at the end, Peter would have likely died that night, either under Remus’ spell or from the wounds suffered during it.

“Was it worth it Remus? Was it worth it James? Was it worth it Sirius?”

Three of the Marauders were dead, assuming that Lily had killed James – Peter was going to be she did, or she was busy torturing him before dealing the final blow. There were a lot of things a Blood Mage could do to keep you alive before your body failed.

They had all believed in Dumbledore. Two pureblood Heirs and a werewolf, convinced raising their wands against the Death Eaters and the other servants of the night were worth all sacrifices.

Now they were dead, alone, friendless, and in the case of two out of three, poor. Remus’ killings of vampires and role as a werewolf spy would not make the history books, and even among the Order of the Phoenix, Peter could name ten wizards and witches who hated the pro-werewolf’s ideology of Dumbledore. James of course would be remembered and vilified as a traitor and an oath-breaker. And Sirius...

The last of the Pettigrew turned his back to the mirror and read for the fifth time the article of the Daily Prophet which had been published this morning.

**REGULUS BACK CONFIRMED ALIVE!**

“You all wanted glory, old friends.” He murmured, remembering the photos where they laughed together. “Was it worth it and destroying your legacy stone by stone until nothing’s left?”

**5 May 1994, Hogwarts, Scotland**

Alexandra had expected the ‘invitation’ from the Headmaster’s office before she stepped a foot inside Hogwarts’ inner grounds, so she wasn’t going to pretend the message she had received at lunch was really a surprise.

No, if there was a surprise, it was that it had taken that long. Today was the fifth of May, four days past the fateful day and night she had lived through – no bad puns intended.

The green-eyed Champion of the Morrigan was taking it as a very positive sign. Assuming Dumbledore was still a rational wizard – something his choice of dressing unfortunately didn’t exactly support – the Headmaster had to deal with the gravest threats to his jobs, his powerbase, his little illegal organisation, and his political allies. In which order this list of preoccupations were placed, Alexandra had no idea, but since she wasn’t a direct threat as long as the man didn’t do something extremely stupid against her, it wasn’t exactly something she had to care about.

For now.

Of course, this was only a short-term view. Her magical guardian had bluntly told her the events of Beltane had burned all the main bridges between Dumbledore and herself. Thanks to Longbottom and no doubt plenty of ‘outstanding Light wizards’, the Defeater of Grindelwald knew she was the Champion of Death, and in the long-term, this could only have two outcomes.

Either Dumbledore was removed from his post of headmaster – by force if necessary – or Alexandra would have to find another school. The European Magical Tournament offered a reprieve of one school year, since not even Dumbledore was arrogant and influential enough to break a truce engineered between the different Ministries of Europe and think he could get away with it.

Lady Stella Zabini had insisted it was far too dangerous for her to remain in a castle where the senior authority would make her mission to ensure she had an accident of the very fatal kind, and that wasn’t even mentioning the legion of potential supporters and a new Champion of Light. Alexandra hadn’t found counter-arguments to negate these points. Even once she would have fully mastered her Animagus form and completed a year or gruelling training for the Tournament, a duel with Albus Dumbledore wasn’t something to treat carelessly.

Alexandra didn’t like the old wizard. But there was no denying the man who had once gathered three of the most prestigious positions of Britain and the ICW in a single body was magically powerful. Academically, the Defeater of Grindelwald had been a genius during his youth, winning scores in OWLs and NEWTs that few had ever managed to replicate in a single course. In one century, Dumbledore had forgotten more about magic than Alexandra had ever learned in three years. There was an ocean of knowledge between them, and her only chance in a duel was to hope to inflict him a lethal wound with Fragarach covered in Lernaean Hydra’s venom, and hope it was enough.

Most of the other poisons she had read about would be neutralised by a competent Alchemist or Phoenix’s tears, and the Headmaster had access to both.

No, any violent confrontation between them was best delayed until she was assured her chances weren’t insignificant, and they had to be on her terms.

Alas, this meant answering positively to this ‘invitation’. At least Professor Flitwick would be with her for this meeting which promised to be nothing short of unpleasant.

But as Fate would have it, once the password had made the great gargoyle move away and they had climbed up the stairs, Alexandra saw the Headmaster’s intention was not to confront her alone. Professor McGonagall was already there, and next to her were Neville Longbottom, Ronald Weasley, and Leo Black. The incompetent Head of Gryffindor – who if rumours had a shred of truth, would not hold the title for much longer – and the Golden Trio freshly qualified for the Tournament were all there. Well, there was them and there was the red-gold majestic Phoenix and the Headmaster of Hogwarts.

One was very difficult to ignore when it began to sing. Alexandra didn’t shiver, or suffered from nausea, since she hadn’t wielded any true magic associated with the Dark Arts, it was all the Morrigan, but the effect was like a growing pressure in the back of her mind. Her inner animal didn’t like it. Hell, she didn’t like it. And her opinion of the Headmaster fell even lower.

Knowing what the old man did, keeping his Light pet inside his office for this meeting was a petty gesture of hostility, an attempt to bully her before a single word was even exchanged.

“Miss Potter, grave tidings have forced me to summon you to my office,” the wizard who failed in every account compared Gandalf began.

Alexandra didn’t answer. She had always intended to say next to nothing since a single word could be too much with a Phoenix-owner, but with the presence of so many witnesses, there was absolutely no way she was going to discuss anything important.

“I speak, of course, about the death of your father, Lord Sirius Black, and Professor Remus Lupin.” The former Supreme Mugwump added when it became clear she wasn’t going to speak. “May I ask where were you on Beltane night, my dear girl?”

“In my bath, of course.”

As his mouth slightly opened before iron-clad control reasserted itself, Alexandra mentally patted herself on the back. Alexandra: 1; Dumbledore: 0.

“Miss Potter suffers regularly from insomnia, Albus,” her Head of House intervened, having decided he might as well have fun to the Gryffindors’ expense. “And baths help her finding sleep at convenient hours. Surely you are aware of this, I sent the paperwork to your office before December for a private room and this explicit purpose written black on white.”

Judging by the expressions of McGonagall and Dumbledore, the paperwork had been approved, but that someone was likely the Deputy Headmistress, not the Headmaster. Hey, when you had too many jobs, there had to be some things like bureaucratic nonsense slipping through the cracks...

“And do you have any witnesses who might confirm this?”

“Professor Flitwick visited me that night,” Alexandra feigned a bored yawn. “I talked with my friends Morag MacDougal and Hermione Granger. Oh, and I also spoke with Cho Chang too.”

There wasn’t a sign of contrariety on Dumbledore’s face. The younger Gryffindors, fortunately, were far less stoic.

“She’s lying!” the Heir of House Black lashed out. “She was killing my father and my godfather on Beltane’s night, she was nowhere near Hogwarts!”

“This is a serious accusation,” Alexandra replied calmly, internally delighting at the lack of composure of the Golden Trio. Ron Weasley looked like he was a word away from trying to attack her. “Heir Black, I hope for your sake you have evidence to back your ridiculous accusations. Otherwise, I will insist you retract them...or explain yourself to my magical guardian’s lawyers. I won’t say no to a few more million Galleons in my bank account.”

“You killed my father!” the black-haired Gryffindor managed to shout before Professor McGonagall shut his mouth with a Silencing Charm.

“I did not.” And the best part, it was the absolute truth. “Headmaster, why was I summoned to your office today? If I am accused of a crime, then it is the DMLE’s prerogative to investigate and punish me. But,” Alexandra turned her head long enough just for show, “I do not see an Auror or any DMLE-accredited wizard or witch in this room.”

“My student brings a good point, Albus,” the former Duellist Champion approved. “Why is Ms Potter here? Criminal affairs outside Hogwarts’ wards are neither the Chief Warlock’s nor the Headmaster’s prerogatives. If you wanted to speak about the duties which are hers now that she is the Ravenclaw Champion, I might understand, but this isn’t the case here.”

“Alexandra,” already Neville Longbottom was in her black book for spilling out everything he knew to the Headmaster, and it was getting worse by the second. Calling her out by her first name like that, one might almost believe they were old friends. “You told me in my dreams-“

“Dreams? What are you talking about?”

The face of the Boy-Who-Lived became confusion. What, did he had really thought she would admit something like that in the presence of McGonagall and Dumbledore?

And once again, it was the truth. For her, it hadn’t been a dream.

“Look I know you feel angry Lord Black didn’t honour his godfather’s vows but we must know what really happened during Beltane’s night.”

“And as I already said, I was taking a long, hot bath,” if half of what she had done was revealed, Dumbledore would either send her to Azkaban before the day was out, or use it as blackmail to make her comply in fear of this terrible fate. No way was she going to confess.

“My girl,” every time Albus Dumbledore said the words, Alexandra imagined how good it would be to decapitate him with Fragarach. “Do you trust me?”

Well, he had asked for the truth.

“No. I never trusted you.” And she took great care not to look anywhere near his eyes.

“Your parents would not have wanted this for you,” the voice of Professor McGonagall sounded genuine in her sadness. But since the woman had never opened her mouth to reveal anything about her father and her mother before now and that her sentence was hilariously wrong for fifty percent of the couple, Alexandra didn’t try to begin a long debate with the Transfiguration Professor.

“Perhaps, but they’re both dead, so I suppose we will never know, won’t we?” the head of James Potter and his mutilated corpse had been discovered in Knockturn Alley by an ‘anonymous source’, according to the *Daily Prophet*. If Rita Skeeter’s quill could be trusted, unlike the lifeless bodies of Lupin and Black next to it, the body of her father had been subjected to a rather horrific torture, and it had been done while he was still alive.

Ah, the truth. It made her fell all virtuous facing the future paragons of the Light.

Alexandra stood from her seat.

“This conversation isn’t over, Ms Potter,” the old Headmaster told her in what had to be the combination of a severe expression and a disapproving tone.

“It is, unless you want me to invite my guardian and her lawyers to the party. And it’s Heiress Potter, *Headmaster*.”

“The Wizengamot is not kind with the accomplices of murdered Lords.”

“Good to know.” The Basilisk-Slayer then promptly ignored him and watched Leo Black in the eyes. “I expect apologies at the Ravenclaw table next dinner, Heir Black.”

“You won’t get them, *Black Witch*!”

Alexandra smiled. Ah, the Gryffindors were so predictable.

“I have Professor Flitwick as my witness to testify you have accused me unfairly of Lord Black’s murder. I think there are a couple of laws from the Wizengamot’s Great Charter which are taking offense to this.”

The Champion of Morrigan then smiled in an even more offensive manner.

“I may be forced to inform the new Black Regent of this problem during the next familial gathering.”

Something told her it was going to be very different from the one which happened during her second year. There was already the issues caused by Lady Cassiopeia’s will, it was going to be fun...for the Dark and the Grey, not so much for the Light.

Yes, Leo Black was the Heir of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Black. But he was too young to take his Lordship, and a Regent had to be named to administer the various estates, vote at the Wizengamot, and all sort of things a Black Lord was supposed to do.

Alexandra didn’t doubt for a second Sirius Black had made a will where he designated either Dumbledore or a member of the Order of the Phoenix as Regent. But according to House Black’s Charter, the Regent had to be a Black, and if the rumours spreading in the Common Rooms rang with the truth, once again the dead Gryffindor wizard had proved he was an idiot.

The Regent would be most likely be Regulus Black, the mysterious brother of the defunct Lord Black suddenly returned from the dead.

If Leo was a friend, Alexandra would have seriously warned him to take his precautions. Most of House Black had really no interest at all in seeing him reach the age of majority. ‘Fortunately’ for the Black Heir, there was a Tournament next year. Potential assassin’s patrons would most likely wait to see if the international competition’s tasks didn’t do the job to save themselves the gold.

“I’m sure it won’t be necessary. There is no need to place such weight upon a few words spoken in anger.”

Alexandra didn’t say a word. Dumbledore had no say in House Black’s politics save those his dogs had chosen him to let him have. If Leo didn’t apologise, her guardian and she would earn more money from House Black, and discredit further the son of her deceased ‘godfather’.

“There will be no second chances for you if you pass this door,” Dumbledore warned her in what had to be a melodramatic tone she had ever heard.

“You have my condolences for your imminent removal of your Chief Warlock’s seat, Headmaster.”

**7 May 1994, somewhere near the Berezina River, Magical Lithuania**

There were days Astrid wished they could kill High Master Karkaroff slowly and painfully, and today looked to be one of them.

The Sverre Heiress knew the preliminaries had to be challenging, but come on! Who in their right mind organised a Task where the main obstacle was one of the infamous Swamp Wyrms? These things were even bigger than the Wyrms the Monster-Hunter Guild fought near their school, and they were far more resistant and had some noise weapon which had made her ears bleed before the correct Charms could be cast. This was a XXXXX-class creature, and it was not one which had been mistakenly assigned to this category like smaller dragons or Cerberuses!

“Roksana!” Astrid screamed to the Necromancer of their group. “Give me thirty seconds!”

“You don’t want a bottle of tsar-grade vodka while you’re at it?” the dark brown-haired witch looked like a drowned rat, as they all did. But the Norwegian teenager wasn’t going to laugh, not when the older Russian was surrounded by five skeleton warriors she had raised from the swamps and had twenty more striking the Wyrm with sabres and swords of another age.

Astrid closed her eyes and placed her right palm on the ground, focusing on the channelling of magic of the Ley Line under her feet. By chance, the nature of this magic was strongly attuned to water, a consequence of running under so many swamps and rivers of the region. If it had been earth or another element, what she intended would be far more difficult.

The noises of the battle unfolding close to her intensified, but Astrid didn’t waste a single glance. Prudently, she recited an incantation of thirty-six Runes, each one harming her lungs and her mouth even more than the last one, straining to catalyse the power she took from the Ley Line, and transforming it into something far more dangerous.

“Is Fimbulvetr!” Her voice was barely above a murmur, but it was her determination and the sheer amount of magic which counted, and at this moment Astrid knew she had drunk deep into a source of raw power.

The Swamp Wyrm was the king of these swamps, an enormous carnivorous swamp creature which feared nothing, not even masters and mistresses of the Dark Arts.

A storm of ice spears and swords struck it like the fist of Ragnarok itself, sending it rolling several metres away. The impenetrable armour was shredded and frozen, and the Wyrm shrieked as much in agony as in outrage, pain and anger overwhelming all its senses.

But its ‘head’ rose again. For all the terrible injuries her attack had delivered upon the creature, it was still moving.

“That was a good try,” Irina Sydorenko recognised in a tone breathing exhaustion as she carried the unconscious Katharina Feuerbach on her back. “Any chance you have something bigger in your sleeves to give him the coup-de-grace?”

“One,” Astrid admitted honestly. “But I can’t use it here, it would be an instant disqualification.”

Even at Durmstrang, there were rituals and some deeds that couldn’t be done in public. Yes, everyone knew you had them in your repertoire of spells, and there was a part of the deterrent which guaranteed a status quo between all the important Houses. But you didn’t use them unless you wanted every government in a radius of a thousand kilometres to fall upon you with special hunters and kill-orders.

“Too bad,” the Ukrainian made an expression which could have been a smile, though with all the mud. “That leaves Plan G.”

“We’re already at G?”

“Yes, and it’s called ‘Get away from this thing!’”

“You won’t hear any complaints from me,” Astrid replied as the skeleton warriors of Vulchanova were broken one by one by an application of sheer force which made Astrid glad her specialties didn’t lie at wand’s point. “Vulchanova! We retreat!”

“Don’t be stupid! Lyudmila is going to arrive any moment now!”

“She isn’t here, and if we stay one of us is going to die!” Katharina was unconscious, courtesy of the Wyrm’s armour nullifying her Alchemy skills, Irina’s blood spells had failed to seriously inconvenience the beast, and the same was true for Necromancy.

“**There is Death. But Chaos is stronger**.”

Night fell upon the battlefield. The Wyrm stopped raging. The air felt wrong, like someone had mixed sulphur, brimstone, and more foul-smelling substances.

The Dark was there. Black tendrils emerged from the swamps. There were dangerous shadows all around them.

The Swamp Wyrm, a XXXXX-class creature which had fought them without a second of hesitation, tried to crawl away, ice spears still stuck all over its armoured body.

Lyudmila Romanov intercepted it before it could escape.

The next seconds were filled with incredible violence, screams and a lot of Wyrm’s vital fluid. It was just a butchery, the Dark Queen doing what four powerful witches had been unable to do.

And when it ended, Lyudmila was bathed in blood and had not a single wound on her body.

The wizard’s voice speaking for the judges as a whole trembled when he announced the victory of the Tsar’s daughter.

Not a single soul among the participants or the audience blamed him.

**9 May 1994, Ministry of Magic, London, England**

Narcissa had not any doubts before beginning this meeting, but Cornelius Fudge was truly an irredeemable imbecile.

Worse, he was not even *her* corrupt imbecile. If he was, at least the Lady of the Most Noble House of Malfoy would have confirmed to her sister that the Galleons spent to buy the loyalty of the British Minister were an excellent investment.

Alas, Cornelius Fudge, like his new toad-looking Secretary and most of his administration, were ready to sell their services to the highest bidder. It didn’t even have to be an important sum; all it mattered was that someone bid a larger sum than the one who had bought his voice previously.

Narcissa didn’t like this. At least during the last war, most of Bagnold’s administration had the courtesy of staying bought once they had given their word. Fudge and many of his senior cronies were turning their cloaks at the first opportunity. *Unreliable* was the most polite way her husband had found to describe the slimy politician in private.

And it wasn’t even touching the main problem. Cornelius Fudge, depending the interlocutor he met, had the disturbing ability to convince himself he was speaking the truth and nothing but the truth, even if mere minutes ago he had been busy stabbing politically in the back and was now forced to change his tune.

Like now.

“My Lady, let me assure House Malfoy has no greater and more steadfast friend than I in the Wizengamot!” blustered the man, who between his latest stunts and his rapidly fading popularity was never going to be re-elected if she had any say in the question.

There were days in the past year where Narcissa had stayed quiet and kept smiling. But today, the plans weren’t to tolerate the lies of Fudge.

“With all due respect, Minister,” the Black-born witch gave a splendid smile before changing abruptly of voice’s tone, “if you are our friend, I dread to think what sort of enemy you would make. Voting to support the investigation of Lord Black’s death and refusing to confirm Regulus Black as a Regent? This is not the behaviour of a friend.”

“I had to.” Fudge was reddening and sweating, and avoided looking at her in the eyes. “Lord Black was such an upstanding member of our community-“

“He wasn’t.” It had been decades since Narcissa had a kind thought about the cousin which had betrayed their House in every manner possible, and it wasn’t because she had loathed Sirius from the very beginning. In fact at first she had thought the boy’s rebellious attempts to throw off the yoke of Walburga Black were incredibly amusing and deserved to be supported. Hell, all of her sisters and many other members of House Black had thought so! Walburga Black had been one of the nastiest and craziest women living on the British Isles, and if anyone save Kreacher had mourned her death, Narcissa had no idea of their identity. “Lord Black trampled on everything which makes us wizards and witches. If he had his way, we would have renounced the entirety of our culture and become Muggles with a wand.”

“There are many members of the Wizengamot who don’t agree with you. However, I can think of a dozen who only ask to have their minds changed.”

Narcissa ignore the pitiful attempt to be rewarded with more Galleons.

“Regulus Black will be confirmed as Regent of House Black next week.”

“You lack the votes to-“

“Four million Galleons.”

Immediately Fudge smiled like he had been announced his birthday was advanced by several months.

“This is extremely generous!”

“You misunderstand. If you do not support this motion, House Malfoy will sue you four million Galleons for your part in the sealing of Lady Cassiopeia’s will.”

“I had nothing to do with that!”

Yes, Fudge had truly an exceptional ability to convince himself he was telling the truth in all circumstances.

“No, Lady Malfoy, be reasonable. The Lords of the different Light factions have spoken well and explained to us how many troubling elements about Lord Black’s death exist. Until we know more, it would be extremely unwise to name a Regent. Besides, Lord Black named Albus Dumbledore in his will.”

“Which just proves how stupid Lord Sirius Black was.” Narcissa said coldly. “Only a Black can be the Regent of our House. There were several exceptions made in our long and distinguished history, but all Regents had always solid blood ties with House Black.”

Something Sirius had been sorely lacking in his circle of associates and allies when he wrote his will. Houses Longbottom and Weasley had teenagers in their midst having a measure of Black blood in their veins, but too few ties to be seriously considered, and besides, their loyalties never went to House Black.

“I don’t understand. You accuse me of doing something unspeakable with Lady Cassiopeia Black’s will, but you are ready to break the written words of your own cousin?”

How good of Fudge to add hypocrisy to his list of sins.

“Minister. I’m almost tempted to let you confirm Albus Dumbledore as Regent for House Black.”

“Really?”

“Really. Do you know how the Malfoy-Weasley feud began?” She gave him one of her splendid smiles again.

“I admit I don’t know the details, no.”

“Then watch in your archives. Specifically the death of Lord Charles Weasley in 1792. I believe the moment he swore the oath, the poor dear lost half of his blood on the Wizengamot’s carpets.”

There were a lot of very powerful heirlooms in the Black’s vaults which activated every time there was a potential usurper trying to seize House Black’s assets. And as much as she wanted Dumbledore to die humiliated and broken, a demise like this might make him a martyr for the Light.

This, evidently, was out of the question.

“Merlin’s beard! What possessed House Black to do something so horrible?”

The very fact Cornelius Fudge was genuinely surprised by this proved he was unfit to be a leader of...well, anything.

“Albus Dumbledore will resign from his position of Chief Warlock, of course.” Narcissa continued. “He will be lucky if he doesn’t have to pay us ten million Galleons by the end of this month.”

“Ten million? This is robbery!”

It went without saying there would be contingencies’ plans to make sure Fudge didn’t run for the position of Minister again. He was an acceptable choice compared to Crouch, but even *Bagman* was a good choice compared to the uncharismatic Director.

And no, she wasn’t going to repeat herself. There were limits to her patience.

“I know you will make the correct choice, Minister.” Or this self-interested politician would fall with his ‘good friend’ Dumbledore.

**14 May 1994, Hills east of Hogsmeade, Scotland**

“For a village which was destroyed six months ago, it doesn’t look so bad.”

“When you have magic, you can rebuild fast,” Alexandra commented.

And the final result wasn’t one she approved, needless to say.

The third-year teenager had not expected much from the Ministry and the people who had ordered to rebuild Hogsmeade. When there was someone like Fudge at the top, you didn’t dream of competence and splendour. The wizards hired by London and the Wizengamot weren’t going to build a white citadel of gleaming marble and splendid towers, a fortified city which would make the admiration of every wizard and witch watching it.

But Alexandra had not imagined the men and the women behind the project would attempt to build a perfect copy of the Hogsmeade-that-was. Yet that was exactly what Dumbledore and many people had pushed for.

Many shops had not reopened so far, but their locations were perfectly identical to where they had been when the Battle of Samhain 1993 was fought.

As a consequence, the Champion of the Morrigan felt she wasn’t exaggerating by telling that Magical Britain was blocked into the past.

Seriously, it was bad enough to refuse to improve the looks of certain alleys or change the disposition of the shops. Many students always complained their schedule during a Hogsmeade’s morning was made by the distance existing between the location they left the Thestral-towed carriages and the places where they wanted to spend their pocket money.

But where the refusal to accept reality was the most glaring were the wards and the other defences. Alexandra wasn’t saying a seven hundred feet-tall wall was necessary to defend the village, but surely a stone wall with proper warding wasn’t much to ask for?

Whatever the motive behind this absolute nonsense, Hogsmeade was returning to the marvellous status quo which had existed before the Army of Light decided to attack her.

Therefore if Lyudmila Romanov, another Light Champion, or any dangerous wizard or witch attacked the village once again, the outcome would be exactly the same as last time.

Hogsmeade would burn.

“It’s about the only thing they can do right.” The Basilisk-Slayer declared with a disapproving expression. “Do you imagine the villagers stopping a bus-sized wolf?

“If it’s okay with you, I prefer not imagining it.” Dudley shivered. “Every time I remember this...this monster, I have nightmares about it.”

“Metaphorically or literally?” the green-eyed witch asked curiously. “It’s important to know, so little is known about the Champions of Loki apart from their tendency to be utterly insane maniacs, psychopaths, sociopaths, and creating tricks which amuse no one but them.”

“Literally, I think,” the now-wererat teenager told her. “You didn’t feel this...aura of dread.”

“No,” the Potter Heiress admitted. “But there are several powers a Champion is naturally immune to when they are generated by another Champion.”

Obviously, this was going to make any attempt to remove the Dark Queen from being a threat to her life a major problem. If the simple action of being in her presence was enough to terrify every wizard nearby, the only people who would be able to fight her without drawbacks were going to be the Champions of both sides and extremely powerful Dark and Light wizards of Lord-level might. And for the latter, Alexandra wasn’t so certain there wouldn’t be any drawback.

“Anyway thanks for the notice. It will be valuable when I have to face her.”

“I want to tell you you’re crazy, cousin,” Dudley replied. “But well...Lockhart told me how big and dangerous were the two snakes you killed last year. The Champion of Chaos shouldn’t be too much trouble for you.”

“As much as it’s pleasant to hear you sing my praises,” Alexandra smirked. “I am afraid it won’t be so simple. The Basilisks were XXXXX-class Dark Creatures. They were very dangerous wizard-killers, beasts created of Dark Magic, and certainly not lightweights by any means. But they were beasts, easy to enrage and predict the moves. The main threat came from their eyes. Fighting this Fenrir Animagus will be far more complicated, since what it lacks in raw power, it more than compensates with intelligence and viciousness.”

No, surviving the Dark Queen of Durmstrang was already going to be a full-time job. The Russian terror had been a Champion for far longer than her and had three additional years of education, which didn’t include listening to Binns’ lectures or incompetent DADA teachers.

Alexandra sighed and drew an ordinary watch from her pocket.

“Your Portkey for London, James and Piers are awaiting you at the agreed meeting point. They have prepared several boltholes for you. And no, I don’t know where they are. Plausible deniability and all of that.”

Thanks to the Hydra, the green-eyed Ravenclaw should be able to drink Veritaserum a cauldron of Veritaserum and still have the mental fortitude to blabber lies, and Legilimency was similarly blocked since her thoughts would be a mix of English and Parseltongue. But in a world where your enemies had Seers to locate you – thanks for confirming that, Knights of the Army of Light – it was best to not take any chances.

“This country is really racist where skinchangers are concerned, no?”

“’Racist’ is I think too weak a word.” Following the realisation there was now a vampire enclave in the very heart of England and they couldn’t do anything about it, the *Daily Prophet* had been extremely heavy on the anti-creature propaganda, and it did not take a genius to know who were the wizards and witches giving the orders behind the scenes. “Good luck cousin, we will see each other again this summer.”

One moment later, and Dudley Dursley was gone. Alexandra giggled, realising right now it was certainly by far the most cordial conversation she’d ever had with her cousin. It was as surprising as Dudley not being fat anymore.

It was almost enough for the next time to propose he made a visit to Zabini Manor...and no, that was a bad idea. With all these anti-wererat laws passed, all it would take was one wrong person to have Ministry personnel storming the Zabini’s property. If these were just the usual incompetent idiots, she might be able to fight them, but there was also the shadow of Dumbledore hanging above her. The Headmaster could very well join forces with the DMLE and try to ‘help’ if she was stupid to give him an opportunity.

The same was true for Lockhart and Sturmwald, which was why the two of them were already outside of Britain, specifically America and Germany, where they would inform their contacts, friends, and associates of what had happened during their imprisonment and the Romanov raid. What conclusions certain governments would take from this, Alexandra didn’t know, she had just asked her contribution and her skills were left in the dark, no bad pun intended.

Alexandra began her walk back to Hogsmeade at a brisk pace. The landscape was not worth stopping every ten feet, and there were plenty of activities she could do with her friends rather than staying under the cloudy weather.

The Potter Heiress was not far from Honeydukes – which according to the signs on the road, was reopening today – and had saluted some of the villages’ inhabitants when she saw Hannah and Susan accompanied by Hermione and Morag.

What was more problematic was that several people were barring their way, and none of them were people Alexandra was going to call ‘friends’.

“If you know what’s good for you, you will not consort anymore with a murderer,” she was able to hear before the self-righteous Leo Black realised she was here.

“Says the Gryffindor who should still be suspended because he almost killed half of Ravenclaw House!” Morag mocked him, and the pale face of the Black Heir turned an interesting shade of red.

“They did not try to kill the Ravenclaws!” Cormac McLaggen roared, thereby ensuring many students and older wizards and witches listened to every word of this fascinating conversation.

“Are we supposed to be convinced by that?” Alexandra intervened as she arrived at wand’s range of the Gryffindors. “The Lions have a certain history with pranks which went out of control.”

“Shut up, Dark Witch!” a Gryffindor two or three years older than her shouted.

Alexandra rolled her eyes.

“Yes, yes, very mature,” the Potter Heiress rolled her eyes. “Heir Black, I haven’t yet heard your apologies concerning a certain incident in the Headmaster’s office. I hope-“

“I will not apologise! I will never apologise to the *Black Witch* who killed my father!”

There was considerable irony in having a scion of the very family which had helped spread the term with the unhealthy fascination they had for the Dark Arts sounding the charge against it. Alexandra glanced at her surroundings, and knew there were far too many witnesses to let the matter go unanswered.

“Prove it.”

“What?”

“Heir Black, several times already you’ve made grave accusations against me. It’s time to prove them. Have you sent your evidence to the DMLE? Have you instructed your proxy on the Wizengamot to speak about my supposed crimes?”

“This isn’t-“

“This is exactly what it is about, Heir Black.” Morag interrupted him. “But everyone here knows that you didn’t. Your proxy, right now Professor Albus Dumbledore, has not taken the floor and accused anyone for the murder of Lord Sirius Black. And you know exactly why. There’s not a single true piece of truth that your father wasn’t murdered by a half-drunken whore of Knockturn Alley!”

The back-haired and now very enraged Gryffindor drew his wand.

“You’re trying to be expelled, Black?” Susan asked. “Be careful, the Headmaster won’t be able to save you a second time...”

“What game are you playing, Bones? Your parents were on our side! You are a Light witch!”

The eyes of her girlfriend narrowed and a gust of power blew in the street.

“I know very well what my parents did for the Order, Leo Black,” the beautiful redhead hissed with so much intensity Alexandra wondered for a thought’s length if Susan wasn’t a snake Animagus in disguise. “I know the sacrifices which were made. I also know how my House wasn’t rewarded for them after the war and my Aunt made sure to tell me how many people escaped justice after delivering insincere apologies. I’m really glad we shifted our allegiance from the Light to the Grey if these are the morality lessons the Order’s members receive every day at your gatherings!”

“House Bones isn’t the only one to have lost someone!” Ron Weasley erupted. “We lost-“

Obviously this was the wrong thing to say when the girl in front of you had been orphaned at the age of one because mother, father and most cousins and relatives had been butchered by the Death Eaters.

Maybe Neville Longbottom would have stopped them, but apparently, whatever the new allegiance of the Boy-Who-Lived, it had not included returning to the companionship of the two other third-year boys.

“You’re blocking the way, and I won’t waste my saliva with you,” the Heiress of House Bones threatened, having drawn her wand and interrupted the Weasley’s tirade. “Return to Hogwarts or go jumping in the Black Lake to see if there aren’t assassins there, for all I care. But we are going to spend a nice Hogsmeade day, and you’re not going to ruin it.”

“You’re consorting with a-“

“I think I can warn you that for each instance you repeat the word in public without backing it up, I will tell my guardian to sue you for an additional million Galleons,” Alexandra whistled innocently before turning to Hermione. “How wealthy House Black must be, to spend millions into increasing my fortune!”

“You won’t have a Knut, murderer!” the Black Heir vociferated, a light of madness in the eyes. By this point, many Gryffindors of his group were trying very hard to disappear in the crowd.

“I don’t think you will have a choice,” Morag taunted him with a false apologetic tone. “The new Regent of House Black may not be very happy with you. I won’t say your position of Heir is in danger...but I’m implying it very strongly.”

Wands were drawn on the side of the five or six Gryffindors, while Susan put back hers in her holster.

Just in time for the Junior DADA teacher, one Professor Sturgis Podmore, to arrive breathing like an elephant or another noisy animal. Really for a Defence expert, the wizard was really not going to duel a Dark Wizard or any dangerous opponent for long with so little muscle and endurance.

“Boys, these wands have no business being pointed at your fellow students!” Alexandra had a feeling this wasn’t what the man had wanted to say, but with so many spectators, Podmore hadn’t the choice. “Put them back in their holsters or your warded pockets, and follow me, I fear I will need to assign detentions. Really, antagonising your fellow third-years while the exams are on the horizon?”

Alexandra felt a small ripple of magic echoing in the air. It was faint, but with no other spells thrown around, she could smell it. It was like a muted scream of anger, a shard of viciousness and trickery. It did not smell like the chaotic powers of the Dark Queen, but it shared some likeness.

Before she had the time to shout a warning or do anything, a flying broom broke the enchanted glass of the showcase where it was kept for the envious eyes of the Hogwarts students and went directly to impale the immobile Professor with a force no object should acquire in so little time.

Alexandra stared mouth wide, plenty of blood having sprinkled on her robes. The Exiled stared, as incredulous as herself. The Gryffindors watched astonished, their hands trying to get rid of the blood they had received on their faces. They were all beyond stupefaction as the teacher began to scream in pain, and collapsed on the ground.

Alexandra’s first reasoned thought was that the curse of the DADA job was truly a fearsome thing, and in no way the deranged rumour some at Hogwarts or outside made it to be.

After that, the entire bloody scene descended into chaos.

**Author’s note**: The curse is alive...

Just to warn the readers, next chapter will be the last one for the third year. It has taken more chapters than I wanted for, but here we are at last...

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