**Chapter 75**

**Chaos Preliminary**

**Bloody Beltane Part II**

**1 May 1994, somewhere in Ireland**

One of the many good points when you were a Hydra Animagus was undoubtedly the fact the Potter Heiress didn’t need to light some torches or bring any other source of light into the obscurity of darkness when she wanted to read something.

It was not one of the things which made the multi-headed legendary creature so infamous, but Hydras had perfect night vision, and as such Alexandra could read a fantasy book with nothing but the light of the stars to provide some illumination.

The Champion of Death could have begun the ritual she had prepared by now. Night had fallen, and aside from a few birds which were heard in the distance, her senses didn’t allow her to feel anything save the repelling wards long-dead wizards had emplaced around this location where two Ley Lines converged.

And since the Exiled had taken every precaution they could think of for her activities to stay secret on this night of Beltane, there shouldn’t be any problem.

But after the Battle of Hogsmeade, Alexandra had decided a maximum of prudence was needed. And so every twenty pages read, she cast a few more spells and verified she was still the only witch breathing in this ancient monument dedicated to the Old Ways.

Once she reached the one hundred and twenty-sixth page of her fantasy book though, the future Lady of House Potter closed her book and abandoned her improvised seat on the very old stones.

Not three seconds later, a white fire burst into existence one hundred feet away from her.

“It’s not paranoia if they’re out to get you,” the Morrigan’s Champion whispered to herself before removing her cloak and drawing Fragarach.

As if to prove her words were true, a terrible bombardment of lethal spells followed two seconds later. Alexandra heard savage incantations in long-forgotten languages being voiced by foreign tongues. The air rippled and the earth itself shook as lethal magic tried to end her life.

It was a bad idea for them. She spoke three words in Futhark.

“Naudiz, Odala, Mannaz!”

The power of the Ley lines began to soar and protect her and the ancient stones – honesty compelled her to admit she thought more about the former than the latter.

This was a night of Sabbat and – in theory – neutrality between the Light and the Dark. As long as she poured her magic in a defensive fashion and refused to engage, her body and soul’s integrity were safe.

The wizards of the Army of the Light – and with those white robes, it had to be the Light fanatics – realised after several minutes their attacks were useless and the barrage of Light incantations stopped.

Alexandra was seeing and smelling four humans, all male.

Unfortunately, they weren’t the main source of trouble. Honestly, as far as she was able to smell and magically sense, these four Light wizards were rather weak compared to her. Normally, these enemies should have emptied nearly all their magical cores with all the powerful and deadly attacks like the ones they had conjured into existence.

The reason why they weren’t half-collapsing in exhaustion was white and began to fly over the heads of the beings it gave magical support to.

Alexandra had seen the Headmaster’s pet a few times when it gave the Defeater of Grindelwald some important letters in the Great Hall, so recognising the bird for what it was did not require an OWL in Care of Magical Creatures.

It was a white phoenix.

“And they say the Dark is cheating.” If the Hydras were powerful beyond any non-magical animal, what was going to be said about Phoenixes? The Light birds could Apparate at will through most wards in bursts of flames – the white fire preceding the arrival of the Army of Light was certainly this mark. They had great and unlimited powers of regeneration, they could lift gigantic weights, mind-heal someone or provide great emotional support, and their tears were an antidote to most poisons.

“Destroy her wards!”

Alexandra narrowed her eyes as a new storm of white fire came and in less time than it took to say it, the first line of contingencies she had activated fell down.

It was a giant mistake on the Army of Light’s part.

“Incendio Curtana!” It was a very simple fire spell which created a wall of flames where the caster wanted. It would take less than twenty seconds for any wizard to bring it down. But it was between the wizards and the white phoenix, and as the shouts of water-based spells resonated, Alexandra sprinted and, using all her strength, struck with Fragarach.

The white phoenix of the Army Light was decapitated and immediately began to consume itself in white fire.

“One down,” the Basilisk-Slayer commented. “Run or die, Light mages. Your pet will be unable to save you for several hours.”

“We are the Knights of the Light, and we swore to bring your evil down!” Three major lethal spells, two gold and one silver, missed her by a large margin.

“Death it is then. FULMEN IMPERATOR!”

“Fool! We have talismans against lightning! We have-“

Her war spell hit the man who had started to mock her and the mediocre wizard promptly screamed in agony. Apparently, whatever power their ‘anti-lightning talismans’ had, it was completely useless against her magical power. And this was despite the fact she had not wasted her time reciting the runic activation of the Imperial Thunder.

Alexandra waited five seconds before relinquishing the incantation. The three white-robed mages were all dead and roasted by this point. Some parts were still twitching, but unless the Army of Light had the ability to resurrect their members, these people were not going to play any further part in assassination attempts.

Glancing aside, Alexandra smiled before kicking the tiny bird which had emerged from the pile of white ashes, levitating the tiny phoenix before banishing it in the darkness out of the site of the Old Ways. The white phoenix was going to be a big problem for the future, but tonight it was out of the game.

“You can stop hiding,” Alexandra raised her eyes to watch the stars as the fourth member of the Army Light stayed at good distance away from her wand’s reach. Now that the Phoenix couldn’t provide any magical cover, the essence of the survivor was eminently recognisable. “I know you are there.”

The words weren’t out her mouth when she heard the noises of more wizards Apparating in every direction. To her surprise, there weren’t many of them.

Since the previous battle had more or less sunk the opportunity to end this night without violence, Alexandra saw no need to stay in the darkness and threw a few more fire spells on prepared wooden pikes, allowing her to observe the people surrounding her without keeping her eyes in Hydra mode.

After a couple of seconds, she was heavily tempted to snigger.

Four men. Four wizards. All of them were known to her. All of them smelled like animals to her.

“James Potter. Sirius Black. Remus Lupin. And Peter Pettigrew.” The Champion of Death slowly presented each of the men arriving wand in hand to join her father. “I wasn’t aware the Marauders’ grand reunion was supposed to happen here tonight.”

Seriously, her presence here was supposed to be a secret. How in the name of Sauron did they know these coordinates?

“Be quiet, Dark Witch,” Sirius Black coughed, before spitting blood. Night or no night, his health seemed pretty bad. The Lord of House Black was sweating and his skin seemed more livid than the last occasions she had met him. “Discard your wand, you’re under arrest.”

“For what?” Alexandra raised an eyebrow, making absolutely no movement to obey this farcical order.

“For being a Dark Witch. For crimes against the Light. For cursing me with a Dark Blood Curse. Professor Dumbledore explained everything to me, *Black Witch*.”“

Alexandra sighed. Truly her ‘godfather’ was really a massive disappointment in everything that mattered.

“I have not cursed you, be it by blood, darkness, or any magical means at my disposal,” Alexandra replied in a bored tone, having a good idea who had done the deed. Bellatrix Black-Lestrange was still at large somewhere and the former lieutenant of Voldemort was a far more experienced Dark Lady-in-being than herself. The more interesting question was how she had done the deed without suffering any untoward consequences from it, since Sirius Black was nominally the Lord of her House. Oh well, something to discover after Beltane. “And any crimes I have committed against the organisations worshipping the ground the Phoenixes are shitting upon are retaliatory strikes against their assassination attempts.”

Alexandra smiled at the man who should have been her guardian, very glad he had not educated her at any moment of her life.

“But by your narrow-minded and pathetic definitions, yes, I am a Black Witch, being the Champion of the Morrigan. I am the Sword of Death in this world, and I walked through the realm of Pandemonium, mourning for the lives lost of Camlann and a thousand other battlefields. I have stood on the ruined battlefields of the Ancient Age, and I have witnessed the carnage of the Rise of the Dark. I am the Basilisk-Slayer, the Lightning and the Poison, the last wind at the end of the path.”

Needless to say, revealing this meant she was going to have to kill them. It was out of the question to leave witnesses when they had such a confession to let others watch in a Pensieve.

Wordlessly, Alexandra made green flames burn on Fragarach’s metal.

“Is there anything more you want to accuse me of before I send you into swallow graves?”

“Hey!” Peter Pettigrew exclaimed. “I am not with them! I only came here because this one,” the rat Animagus pointed to Remus Lupin, “is wanted dead by my bosses. I have no wish to challenge you, Heiress Potter!”

“Traitor!” When they were in DADA class, Remus Lupin looked like an inoffensive and kind teacher. Tonight, he was the complete opposite of this image. Plenty of silver weapons were everywhere on his well-made armour, and his face was extremely threatening. “So that’s the new friends you made during the war? You betrayed us to the vampires!”

“Betray you? That’s rich coming from someone who has been licking the hand of Dumbledore and revealing each and every secret we ever told each other!”

Despite everything which had happened so far, to her knowledge Pettigrew wasn’t a Light wizard – his use of the Killing Curse last year had been a nice help but hardly ‘Light material’ – Alexandra was shocked by how fast the situation unravelled between him and Remus Lupin.

Insults and accusations flew between the two. And after one betrayal accusation too many, Remus Lupin threw a silver weapon.

The explosion of violence was devastating, and explosive incantations were voiced. Lupin charged the Animagus employed by the vampires, but Pettigrew was not an inexperienced wizard, sprinting to put the maximum of distance between him and his enemy, and targeting Dumbledore’s agent with slow but powerful Charms.

“Two Galleons on Pettigrew,” Alexandra lightly commented before transfiguring the skin of her left arm into scales and parrying the ray of light which had come from Sirius Black’s wand as an afterthought. “If I were you, I would not exhaust myself like that, Lord Black.”

“Shut up, Black Witch!” The loathing would have been a bit impressive, if the other key supporter of Dumbledore among the ancient Marauders didn’t begin to cough violently right after. Three seconds later, the coughs were followed by small trickles of blood running down his nose. Thanks to her Hydra-boosted senses, Alexandra knew this wasn’t the only part of the body which had begun to bleed.

Whatever Blood Ritual had been cast on this night of Beltane, it was incredibly effective. Already Sirius Black was standing only by virtue of sheer hate and a monumental effort of will.

“I don’t know which ritual you are on the receiving end of, but I was told by some Slytherins that a lot of them are dependent on the internal resistance of your core. In other words, the faster you deplete it, the worse the curse-ritual is going to be.” Alexandra should have felt joy at Sirius Black finally getting his come-uppance, but truthfully, seeing him like this...she felt nothing.

The Hydra Animagus breathed out loudly to mark her disapproval.

“Not that I care about your survival,” Alexandra ignored the hateful glare sent her way, “but you should Apparate as soon as possible to Saint Mungo’s. Or if you’re not healthy enough to do so, find somewhere to Floo or be sold a Portkey. Because if you don’t go to the Healers, even that fraud of Trelawney will be able to accurately predict that your demise will arrive before the next dawn.”

“If you are killed before then, the curse will be broken! You are responsible for this forbidden Dark Ritual!”

Alexandra was now feeling annoyance rising in her, and her inner animal hissed, trying to incite her to strike down the oath-breaker who dared refuse the truth of her sentences.

“Gryffindors,” a single word on her lips which described better than a thousand expressions the failings of an entire generation. The Potter Heiress slightly turned her head to give a look or two to her genitor. “And hello to you, *father*. What a surprise to see you accompanying the hired killers of the Army of Light tonight. For a man supposed to be dying from poison or mental illness, you’re looking rather healthy, in my opinion.”

“There are elixirs using Phoenix’s tears which are capable of true miracles. And the Great Archmage has returned. He helped me. He revealed to me the horrible truth of what you and the other Champions of Darkness are.”

“And what am I?” Alexandra asked, for once interested by something that wasn’t the ramble of a Light bigot.

“You are the dark blades the King of the Exchequer will use to user in a new era of darkness upon this world. You must be eliminated.”

Alexandra rolled her eyes. Okay, it might be true...but with reasoning like this, was it any surprise several Dark Champions were going to stand with the Exchequer? Horace Slughorn had been in the right: for the promise of security and comfort, many hunted aspirant Dark Lords were ready to do a lot of things to live several decades and not get cut down in their teenage years.

The wand of the man who had never been a father to her was pointed in front of her heart as Sirius Black tried to cast a new spell but fell on his knees and began to scream.

“You came with Sirius Black tonight.”

“I revealed the full truth to him. He forgave me, and I forgave him.”

The thirteen-year-old witch smiled in an expression she didn’t pour any joy into.

“And that’s why I will never forgive you.”

The wand was raised to be targeted at her upper chest.

“House Potter will do its duty and prevent the rise of the Dark.” James Potter muttered in a tone so ironclad the Ravenclaw witch knew the sorry excuse for a wizard had been seriously brainwashed before coming here. “I can always sire more children to save our line.”

“There’s a little detail you have neglected, idiot.” Alexandra replied. “You aren’t the Lord of House Potter anymore. You are nothing, just a failed wretch, a prisoner with no home, gold, or assets. The Goblins will not give you a single Knut, whether you are dead or alive. I certainly didn’t leave you anything in my will, and if you are arrested in a street, it’s the Dementor’s Kiss for you.”

“The Army of Light will reveal my innocence once all the proofs of your culpability are revealed to the world.” Silently, Alexandra shifted her arms and most of her torso into a mass of scales. It was difficult to not change further and stay immobile, but it provided her with some nice armour.

“No.”

Impossibly, the white phoenix reappeared into a burst of white fire to land on her genitor’s shoulder.

“Witness the miraculous power of Archmage Ra before you depart this world. SOLEM DEARRRRGGGHGH!”

The spell never came. A jet of black light struck the white phoenix, and suddenly there was no bird, no white fire, nothing. Alexandra breathed erratically, as eyes, nose, mouth, and more senses were all assaulted like they were facing the night.

James Potter fell screaming, as part of his shoulder and more of his body were devoured by the black flames.

“I warned you, James.” The voice was feminine, and one heartbeat later, the raven-haired witch was able to associate it with a figure in long red robes. A figure which, despite having most of her traits hidden behind a red hood, had impossibly brilliant green eyes flaming like a hundred Killing Curses. “I warned you that if you raised your wand and tried to cast a single spell against Alexandra, I would make sure the rest of your life was a torture beyond imagination.”

“M-Mom?”

The agent of the Army of Light – also known incidentally as James Potter – screamed louder as part of his right arm was crushed by an invisible grip and several fingers were severed from the hand, generating an odour of blood and horrid sickness.

The impossibly green eyes, so familiar compared to hers, stared at her.

“We will speak later. Do what you have to do.”

Alexandra examined the situation. Her failure of a genitor was writhing and tortured on the ground. Sirius Black was bleeding and moaning in pain, and did not look like he was going to stay conscious for long. Many feet away, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew were venting their excesses of anger and nonexistent friendship in battle. The three corpses of the Army of Light were still on the ground and were well and truly dead.

As much as she didn’t want to leave, her presence here would not do anything, unless she was ready to kill James Potter or Sirius Black in cold blood...and for several reasons, the Potter Heiress didn’t want to do it.

“Yes, we will speak later...mother. You’d better be here when I come back.”

The Morrigan’s Champion turned around and walked back into the circle of stones. The instant after, the air felt lighter and her entire surroundings began to burn in green flames. The presence of the ravens and the Morrigan became familiar not ten seconds after that.

“Ur. Getal. Oir. Uath. Luis. Gort. Edhadh.” Seven Ogham Glyphs, fuelled by the death of three Oath-breakers. It was a simple ritual, born of sacrificed life, and it was incredibly powerful, answering to laws which had been old when the world was young. The flames went higher. Magic poured in the circle of ancestral stones.

A Goddess answered.

**The Shores of Aether**

It was a dream. At least Neville really, really hoped it was a dream, because he didn’t remember travelling to a place like this.

The Boy-Who-Lived remembered the preliminary. He had glimpses of the long hours spent partying in Gryffindor’s Tower. The future Lord Longbottom remembered Fred and George spiking the drinks and doing plenty of mischief...

That was it! It had to be some dream pranking of the Twin Terrors! They had been unable to qualify themselves for the Tournament, and now they were giving everyone a vengeance of pranking while everyone was unconscious!

Yes, it was a very reasonable assumption – no one had forgotten the talking frogs of last month or the enchanted sweets of April.

But Neville still didn’t know how to stop this weird dream.

And weird was the exact word he wanted to use. This was what made him doubt it was a prank, honestly. Because if Fred and George had plunged him into an entirely unreal dream of their own imagination, Neville would have imagined a demented and distorted parody of Hogwarts where spreading chaos and breaking rules saw you being rewarded with points, while the rule-abiding teacher pets were the dunces.

Instead he was walking in the streets of a dead city. There was nothing living, and certainly nothing funny. On the left, about half a mile away, there was a black-coloured sea. The fact that there were no waves, no tides, nor any fishes present had discouraged him from going swimming.

The young Gryffindor had preferred exploring the city. It had appeared more welcoming from the inside. After what felt like hours and nothing to show for his efforts, Neville’s opinion had changed. Now he just wanted this dream, this vision, or whatever had brought him here to end.

“Where’s the damn exit? What’s the goal of this prank?”

There were ruined houses everywhere, yes, what was he supposed to learn or understand from it? From the fissures and the crumbling edifices, strange white trees had grown and spread their roots. But the trees had no leaves, and while they stood tall, the pureblood boy was ill-at-ease wherever he went too close to them. It was like he was supposed to feel kinship to these trees, but his stomach rebelled against them.

“Fred! George! Stop this!”

But the red-haired twins didn’t reply. Nobody replied.

There was nothing else to do but keep exploring the streets and the parks of the city, which must have been a truly great population centre once upon a time. Neville had long listened to Seamus and Dean describing the great Muggle cities, and though he had always thought they exaggerated a bit, this place had to beat Muggle London. As far as he could see, there were abandoned houses and white trees emerging from the roofs, the stables and the gardens.

“Is there someone alive in there?”

The question wasn’t answered, but the landscape began to change. All around him the small houses began to disappear to be replaced by great palaces and what looked like gigantic pillars of marble. The statues of knight were removed and damaged representations of griffins and dragons were at every corner.

Suddenly there was fog covering the dark sea, and a spire of crystal materialised itself. Neville ran to it, somehow knowing it was important to reach it as fast as possible.

The youngest Seeker in a century ran, bypassing avenues of white statues of marble dragons, before walking as he had to climb up tall white stairs. The spire’s upper part was missing, the Longbottom teenager looked around at that moment, and saw the white stairs were more often than not cracked and showing enormous signs of neglect.

When he reached the summit, a perfect square of white whose perfection was marred by a sinister fissure awaited him, and Neville finally saw a large gate burning with a maelstrom of white energy. And someone was waiting near it. But it was not the Weasley Twins. It wasn’t even a Gryffindor.

“Potter? What are you doing here?”

For a second, Neville regretted his outburst. It was certainly a dream, and as such the Ravenclaw witch wasn’t going to answer him.

But just as the thought arrived in his head, burning green eyes turned to meet his, and somehow, the Boy-Who-Lived knew with absolute certainty it was the Basilisk-Slayer in front of him, and not an illusion.

“Longbottom. You took your time coming here.”

The Boy-Who-Lived didn’t take a step to come closer to her. He might not be the brightest student Hogwarts ever had, he was not the magical peer of Professor Dumbledore, but he didn’t think the red stains on Potter’s skin and clothes – it was more difficult to say they were the same on the latter, as she wore black from head to toe – could be mistaken for tomato juice.

And in her hands, was the terrible sword she had used to slay the two Basilisks last year. Half of the blade was red with blood.

“Where are we?” Neville asked her, trying very hard to not sound nervous.

“Shouldn’t I ask you that question?” the Ravenclaw Champion seemed to find his words very amusing for some reason. “We are in Fate’s domain, you know.”

“Fate?”

“You are the Champion of Fate since this afternoon and the last preliminary, in case you haven’t realised.” The green eyes watched him like a Hippogriff looked at a rabbit before her mouth twitched. “Your Power and the Headmaster haven’t informed you of this detail?”

“No, he didn’t...we had...we have a meeting tomorrow. He only told me that you weren’t to be trusted. Since you are the Champion of Death and all of that.”

Neville had expected the Ravenclaw to shout or to curse the Headmaster. Instead the black-haired girl just shrugged and rolled her shoulders.

“I have the same advice for you where he is concerned. Don’t trust him.”

“Professor Dumbledore is the greatest wizard in the world!”

A snort was the not-very-impressed reaction of the Potter Heiress.

“That he is powerful and skilled, I won’t deny. But the greatest?” The green-eyed Champion of Death clicked her fingers negligently. “Dumbledore isn’t immortal and has badly neglected many fields of magic during his long tenure at Hogwarts. He is a Master of Transfiguration, an Alchemist of talent, and a renowned researcher on many topics. But he is far, far from flawless.”

“Prove it!”

Alexandra Potter simply raised her magical sword in a parody of salute.

“This sword is Fragarach, the Sword of Truth, the Slayer of Kings and the Doom of Arthur. It was forged by Morgana La Fay, and given powers by her hand to withstand the might of Excalibur. It is a weapon Dumbledore is incapable of replicating, if his legislation against non-wand magical foci is to be respected.”

“Yes, and what? Morgana La Fay is dead! She died thousands of years ago!”

“One thousand and five hundred years ago, give or take,” the calm in Potter’s voice made him shiver. “And the problem is that she didn’t stay dead. I hope you were attentive when Professor Rincewind was speaking of the *Vampiri Romani*.”

“You met her.”

“I had the dubious honour, yes.” The Ravenclaw Champion grimaced. “If you see a female ivory-skinned vampire who has an ugly scar on her visage, I advise you to get the hell away from her as fast as humanly possible. Run, Apparate, and if you’re wise, flee to another continent.”

Neville didn’t know how to react to this ‘advice’.

“Some Gryffindors would say those are the actions of a coward.”

Alexandra Potter laughed hysterically. He wasn’t aware that what he had said was funny.

“Yes, I suppose the alumni of your House and the Heirs of Godric would say something like that. Now heed my words, Champion of Fate.”

The tone changed from ironic to a cold and no-nonsense edge.

“You have killed one anchor of Voldemort during the last preliminary, so my patron sent me here to tell you only one remains until you have truly vanquished the psychopath who calls himself Tom Riddle.”

“The snake was one anchor?” Neville was suddenly very glad someone else had been witness of this strange phenomenon.

“It was. Though ‘anchor’ is maybe the wrong term to employ. The proper term of Dark Magic is ‘Horcrux’. But despite Dumbledore’s inaction, you won’t have to hunt them one by one. The Dark Lords and the Dark Ladies of the Exchequer have done your job for you.”

“Why would they do something so...Light-serving?”

“If you don’t truly vanquish the Dark Lord Fate and the prophecies wanted you to bring an end to, you will stay nonetheless the Champion of Fate...and a target for all other Dark Lords. A win-win situation for them, I’m sure you will agree. You are too weak, and Dumbledore is long past his prime.”

“Dumbledore is ten times the wizard you will ever be, and I am a Longbottom of Ancient heart. We have stayed true to our vows and I am not weak!”

Two other portals appeared in brilliant flashes of light. From them, two teenagers emerged, and judging by the groan of Potter, they weren’t allies of hers.

“I have other business to attend to, oh great supporter of Dumbledore.”

“Scared, Potter?”

The green eyes flashed and for a second Neville thought he had gone too far.

“We are in a realm of the Light. I have delivered my message, and I see no reason to stay and speak with Delacour. The last time we met, she tried to kill me.” White teeth were bared at him. “And if I were you, I would prepare seriously for the upcoming Tournament. You are not ready for it right now.”

“And you are going to say you are?”

A gate was summoned from the ground, this one swirling not with white energy, but a maelstrom of green and dark. Unlike the other magical gates, it appeared to be intensely more powerful, so much it was dolorous.

“I’m not, but I’m taking steps to remedy to it. Oh, and a last piece of advice. Whatever the Army of Light offers, I suggest you say no politely. It isn’t worth it.”

“You don’t know that.”

“My father fell for their lies, and you are a Gryffindor.”

The silver sword returned to its scabbard and Alexandra Potter disappeared. Neville swallowed heavily before turning to meet with the older boy and girl who, he could tell, were other Champions of Light.

**Pandemonium**

Alexandra’s wish was not to leave Longbottom alone with two Champions of Light, but practically there had been little she could do against it. The moment Delacour and the Italian-looking wizard had arrived, the entity governing the realm beyond the edge of reality had given her a significant mental blast of ‘depart immediately’.

Even if she had been willing to ignore it however, the Potter Heiress didn’t know what she could have done. She had not lied to the Boy-Who-Lived; whatever the name you gave to this pocket dimension, Death held no sway here. It was Fate which controlled everything, and Fate was Light, for all the good it seemed to have done. In these conditions, facing two or three Champions of Light was just foolhardy and a stupid deed worthy of Crabbe and Goyle. One-on-one, these Champions of Light were no match for her, why would she try to fight them together in a realm which gave them a massive advantage?

The appearance of Fate’s domain was both incredibly amusing and appalling, on the other hand. Alexandra knew the Light was weakening, but seeing the ruins of it had really sunk the point home. Fate was not Life, obviously, but a symbiotic connection existed between the two Light Powers. There should have been some parts of the other Light powers represented too. Instead, there was just neglect and a decaying thing. The Light had chased away the Dark from here an eternity ago, but whatever ‘victory’ they had won had faded away by now.

And Longbottom’s ignorance...granted the Morrigan wasn’t a deity which gave her each and every piece of information in existence to her, but the Aspect of Death she was empowered by was a notable presence on Sabbat nights, Samhain or no Samhain. The Boy-Who-Lived seemed to have no input from his patron Power. In fact, it appeared he didn’t even know what Power he was the Champion of, never mind the Aspect and the other possibilities it gave him!

The Exchequer’s actions had borne fruit. Fate was still a Light Power, but it was not a brilliant faction, eager to enforce the tyranny of the Army of Light. It was a rusted, decaying corpse, maintained into stillness and a comatose state by rituals made centuries ago.

Alexandra sighed. Longbottom’s role in the coming months promised to be horrible. The ‘Chosen One’ of House Gryffindor was a Light wizard, and if the hints the Morrigan had given her were any indication, he looked like a magnificent scapegoat to be sacrificed on the altar of the Exchequer’s victory.

His inability to understand that the embers of Fate had made sure he was among the qualified students for the European Magical Tournament made the Ravenclaw Champion fear the worst. The issue that the last Horcrux of Voldemort was stuck on his forehead and had not been purged before today was very, very bad.

That she had not been able to detect it until now without the Goddess’ help was understandable. Alexandra was rarely two feet away from the Boy-Who-Lived. In class or outside, she had stayed far away from him this last year as her connection to Death became more and more powerful. But for Dumbledore to not realise something was wrong?

For goodness’ sake, all the books explaining the events of the Fall of Voldemort told how the Dark Lord had left a lightning scar before being disintegrated. Surely the Defeater of Grindelwald must have realised what was inside the scar, he was sufficiently versed in DADA to recognise something reeking of Dark Soul Magic! Keeping something so corrupted close to a child’s mind was asking for a disaster!

But Dumbledore had not freed the Boy-Who-Lived from this burden. And now, Neville Longbottom...

The Basilisk-Slayer grimaced, before shrugging. Well, it was not the end of the world. After Samhain, Alexandra had spoken with Morag, and her Irish friend had agreed it was likely the seven Champions of the Light would be mortal enemies when the real troubles began. At least now that Longbottom was one, she could safely say there was one Light Wizard inherently less dangerous than herself if he decided to join the Army of Light and the ‘all Dark Champions must die’ fan club.

Dumbledore knowing she was the Champion of Death was a major complication, but let’s be honest, the old Headmaster was an enemy before that, and it wasn’t like he could do much against her. The enmity between the two of them was well-known, and any accusation without solid evidence would be treated as an attempt to muddy the political waters.

Nonetheless, she was going to be persona non grata among the Light-affiliated Houses of Britain. And the Order of the Phoenix and the other bigots following the grey beard now knew part of her capabilities and godly support. It was another drawback against her.

“They are truly a bunch of fools.”

Tonight, James Potter and many of his ‘Light friends’ had violated the truce of Beltane. And this already had ugly consequences...for them.

By all rights, Alexandra should not be able to access Pandemonium on Beltane. The truce between the Light and the Dark forbid it.

But the rules had been broken, deaths had invigorated the Morrigan and negated the seasonal decline of the Dark.

Already, all around the planet, Alexandra could hear the plots and battles the Exchequer was feeding like wood plunged into an inferno.

The Dark was rising everywhere. The secrets she wanted protected would be until next Samhain, and many things she had not understood were now whispered into her ears.

Perhaps most importantly, the heads of the Hydra were now all hissing and pouring their energy into her heart and lungs.

Tonight, Alexandra was a Lady of Magic in raw power, if not in title.

And after not being able to release her frustration in the morning preliminary, the Potter Heiress was more than willing to unleash it now in the service of the Morrigan.

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*The second day of May 1994 marked my first encounter with the infamous Lyudmila Romanov, self-proclaimed Dark Queen, second-in-line to the Russian Throne, Durmstrang student, and by her own admission, Champion of Chaos.*

*The next years would lead me to the conclusion there are far worse things in this world than this Dark Lady, but at the time, I was quite ready to swear the exact opposite on my honour and life...*

Extract from The Rise of Darkness, Chapter 12, by Gilderoy Lockhart.

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**2 May 1994, sixty kilometres south of the Galapagos Islands**

Their prison, he had repeated a hundred times, was a paradise created by Dark Wizards.

Now it was the antechamber of hell.

The warnings had been there, but Gilderoy, like many wizards, had expected an attack by the Army of Light or the Trinity. By the Statue of Liberty, it was what some of the werecobras serving as wardens had expected!

But unless the fanatics worshipping the ‘Good’ deities had suddenly converted to the Dark, this ruthless slaughter was not their style.

“RUN!” the former DADA teacher exclaimed as Heinrich Sturmwald tried to rescue a shrieking werewolf being swallowed by some abomination from a shadowy hell. “RUN! RUN AWAY!”

“RUNNING WON’T SAVE US!” the German curse-breaker shouted, using one of the halberds he had stolen from a partially eaten corpse to fend off something looking like a hybrid of a goat and a shadow demon. “WE NEED TO FIND WANDS AND FIGHT BACK!”

“AND WHERE DO YOU WANT TO FIND WANDS IN THIS HELL?”

For a reason which had everything to do with being ‘prisoners’ in a ‘prison’, the Exchequer had maximised all precautions that the witches and wizards detained on the island never kept a wand or another type of magical focus in their possession.

It was known that extremely powerful wizards and witches could cast spells and battle for minutes without a wand. But Lockhart wasn’t among their number, and neither were his companions.

“COVER! TAKE COVER IN THE HOUSES!” The popular British author shouted when he saw the skies darken again. Heinrich Sturmwald managed to reach his position under a roof which was missing many walls and a door, and it was just in time.

“What is that?” Dudley Dursley asked, his partially transformed hands red with the blood of a Light wizard which had become utterly mad and tried to strangle him. The roof was beginning to fume and holes appeared despite the Charms and the enchantments supposed to prevent exactly that.

“Acid rain...” the German commented sinisterly. “Someone has thrown an extremely powerful Acid Rain Curse over the island.”

“This is Lord-level, no?” Gilderoy swallowed heavily, his heart and most of his organs dancing in fear.

“It is.”

That was not what he wanted to hear, obviously.

Fortunately, the acid rain and the shadowy creatures which had attacked vanished after some moments of terror, and the group of three was able to leave the very low safety of the collapsing hut without being burned by acid or eaten by monsters.

It was a spectacle of nightmares. There were screams of the dying resonating everywhere, and numerous dark fires had spread all over the island. The ocean, the tempting and so-blue ocean, was a sea of red and black, with dozens of corpses floating at the surface, and many shark-like predators arriving for the feasting.

Everything had become a battlefield. There were corpses everywhere, prisoners and wardens were killed with no regard for if they belonged to the Exchequer or one of their hereditary enemies.

“Army of Light survivors coming our way,” Heinrich Sturmwald muttered, and indeed coming out of a location which had been guarded previously by the skinchangers, came people marching in column and showing none of the astonishment most prisoners had on their faces. They wore no uniform, and did not have a flag or emblems woven onto their clothes, but no one could mistake them for any other organised battalion.

“We must-“

The universe once again exploded in violence. The sand burned in black flames. The trees were broken. The world itself unravelled and reality screamed. Up was down, down was up, and everything hurt.

It couldn’t have taken more than five seconds. But when it was over, over one-third of the Army of Light’s members were on their knees, vomiting the content of their stomachs, and Gilderoy Lockhart shamelessly acknowledged he was not far from following them. And he had not been the focus of this magical attack.

“That’s right. On your knees, all of you.”

The voice had no accent that was easy to recognise, but it took only a few words to feel the arrogance, and though the spy was always careful with that word, the evil conveyed by the sentences.

Gilderoy stood, but he was paralysed by fear.

Something had taken human form in front of the Army of Light ex-prisoners. Something that Gilderoy’s heart, head, and every sense he had ever used in his life insisted was not human and never had been, despite its humanoid appearance.

The appearance of the young woman, while beautiful with long blonde hair and a rather audacious purple-black robe showing a disturbing amount of cleavage, was nothing compared to the aura of sheer terror and evil which surrounded her.

“We will never kneel to you, Chaos spawn.”

“Really?”

The tone was mocking, derisive of all bravery, and one second later the Light wizards and witches screamed like they were subjected to a most atrocious torture...which was unfortunately not far from the truth. Several began to bleed like they were cut by a hundred knives. Others saw their chests cut open and their intestines spill out. Legs and arms were severed. Bodies were butchered. Fanatics which had sworn their lives to each other became raving mad and butchered their closest ally with Imperiused-ecstatic expressions of glee.

One by one, the tortured victims were forced to kneel, with or without legs. One by one, their deaths were particularly horrifying and the methods of demise were so awful Gilderoy knew he would have nightmares about them for the rest of his life, if he survived this slaughter. In less than a minute, there were only four or five Light survivors, and all of them were horribly wounded.

“Truly, the servants of Merlin and Ra are not fit to shine my boots.”

“Easy to say...when you have a wand...and we haven’t.”

“You want me to stop using my wand? I see.”

And before Lockhart’s eyes, the wand was indeed placed back into a holster, and black smoke began to pour out of the hands’ palms of the demonic-looking woman.

The screams after that were louder, as the skin of the enemies of the Dark were subjected to something dissolving their flesh and burning them at the same time.

After long minutes, the screams ended. The Army of Light had lost all its operatives. And as cruel eyes turned towards them, Gilderoy realised their trio was indeed the sole survivors of the massacre on this beach.

“Run, weaklings. Run, and maybe if you’re fast enough, I will spare you.”

“You won’t,” retorted Heinrich.

“You’re right,” the Dark Lady chuckled, and everything in her seemed to create more fear and terror. “I won’t. You see, it’s all about sending a message.”

“Are you sure it’s rather not about satisfying your murderous urges?”

The terror effect was somehow broken, and as Lockhart watched the owner of the new voice, he felt hope for the first time since the attack had been unleashed against their prison.

“Alexandra!”

“Hello, cousin.”

The ex-DADA teacher didn’t know how it was possible, but the Ravenclaw student had indeed arrived.

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If it wasn’t for the threat of the Queen of the Exchequer, Alexandra would abandon any idea of participating in the European Magical Tournament tomorrow.

There were some things worth fighting in this life. Now that she had seen the result of one of her rampages, it was evident Lyudmila Romanov wasn’t one of them.

The title of ‘Dark Queen’ was totally deserved, not that there had ever been a lot of doubts on the subject. Werecobras, werewolves, Light wizards, dangerous creatures, goblins, and Dark wizards, the Durmstrang girl had not made exceptions or privileges. She had butchered them all, the only notable differences being if the agonies inflicted were slow or long.

Alexandra had had no problems believing the Russian witch was dangerous. A Champion of the Dark wasn’t defenceless and weak.

But she had underestimated the madness burning in these green eyes. The green shade wasn’t similar to her irises, which were burning like green flames. Now that her powers were active, Lyudmila’s eyes were small orbs linked to a green abyss. There was something waiting behind this face. Something that was best left asleep.

And Dumbledore wanted the Hogwarts Champions to fight her in front of tens of thousands of spectators?

This was just madness incarnate.

“Your presence here is unanticipated.” For once, the words rang like the truth. But it was still difficult to make the difference with the Dark Queen.

“So is yours. But you have no room to complain.”

“Yes...I burned the destiny of so many souls tonight, both Light and Dark. I shattered thousands of plans of the Twin Fossils. And I loved it.”

“Twin Fossils?” Lyudmila Romanov was completely mad. Insulting the two most powerful wizards to ever have lived...

“I’m sorry, does my lack of respect for the Egyptian old fools surprise you?”

“No.” Given how many subordinates of both organisations the Champion of Chaos had slaughtered in the last twenty-four hours, reverence and politeness weren’t to be expected on the Dark Queen’s side.

“Good. Now remove yourself from my island and let me finish what I’ve started. I’ve decided to sacrifice all these souls to my patron, and there are a few bodies which are still breathing.”

Alexandra was sure the taunt’s only goal was to achieve one reaction from her. A reaction she was forced to voice, because as much as how at one point she had wanted her cousin dead, he seemed to have become slimmer and less of a waste of space.

And unlike the Army of Light prisoners, the people left alive had only committed one crime, and it was to oppose the Exchequer. Therefore it was out of the question to let Romanov torture them to death.

“No.”

“You are not powerful enough to duel me. Nor,” an icy and deranged malicious expression formed on her aristocratic cheeks, “can you face me in your Animagus form. You smell like magical snakes, but it won’t give you any opening against me.”

Alexandra wasn’t going to reveal to the psychopath in front of her that her inner animal was a Hydra, but there was such a thing as overconfidence.

“For all you know, I could be a Basilisk. And the venom of those snakes will kill you in less than a minute, and I’m not including the lethal gaze into the equation.”

“But dear, I am entirely immune to all the weapons of the Basilisk.”

A click of her fingers – without any wand – and Lyudmila’s clothes disappeared. There was no time to gasp at this display of nudity, though. In two heartbeats, the human shape twisted and disappeared in a maelstrom of darkness before getting larger. And larger. And larger.

When it ended, there was nothing human-shaped anymore in front of them.

What had replaced the blonde-haired human was a monstrous wolf the size of one of London’s traditional red buses.

The beast had fangs longer than her arm, and from them fell drops of purple poison. The paws, the muscles, the head, everything seemed to be built for massacre and violence.

It was, indeed, an Animagus form able to counter any poison, venom or lethal substance ever developed by snakes. And it had a name, one forever immortalised in apocalyptic sagas.

“Fenrir.”

In mythology, it was the giant wolf which swallowed Odin at Ragnarok. It was a beast which terrified even the immortal Vanir and Aesir. It was the monstrous progeny of the God of Loki, and only that being of discord was able to ‘bless’ someone with such a terrible power. It was one of the deadliest wizard-killers, and the mere mention of it was bringer of untold tragedies and catastrophes. It was technically a XXXXXX-class creature, because there wasn’t one with seven ‘X’s.

It had no weakness and no hero had ever been able to claim having killed one.

It was the Herald of Ragnarok.

Lyudmila Romanov was a Champion of Loki and a Fenrir Animagus, may all the Powers of the Dark and the Light save them.

“Dudley? Curse-breaker Sturmwald? Professor Lockhart?”

“Yes, Miss Potter?”

“There is a gate not far behind me. Run to it. RUN TO IT NOW! DEPULSO!”

Thank her academic curriculum that she had perfected the spell a few months ago instead of her fourth year. A terrible storm erupted from her wand, generating a push which might have killed normal wizards several times over.

 As it was, even by pouring a monumental amount of magic into it, Alexandra was barely able to push the giant lupine body across half the beach.

And then the Champion of the Morrigan followed her own advice.

She ran for her life.

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Lyudmila grunted as she returned to her human form. Becoming Fenrir brought her a lot of pleasure, but leaving the fur and all the attributes of her wolf form behind did not.

Each transformation allowed her to increase her control and make the transition easier, but there was a difference between ‘easier’ and ‘no pain at all’.

Wandlessly, the scion of the Imperial House of Romanov conjured her clothes and conjured two more acid rains on the rest of the island-prison. The Champion of Death and three men had escaped her, but these would be the only survivors.

Lyudmila had not lied when she had said a message needed to be sent. And before the arrival of Alexandra Potter, her intention had been to leave a mountain of corpses, not terrorised wizards.

Dawn was near, but shadows began to crawl across the wrecks and the ruination she had visited upon the Exchequer’s base.

“**The gates of Pandemonium are opened**.”

Lyudmila smiled.

“Yes, Lord Loki. As you predicted, the Light is unable to enforce its own rules anymore upon reality.”

By all rights, the Morrigan’s Champion could not have opened a single gate into Pandemonium before next Samhain. Beltane was not a Sabbat taking its source of power from the thinning of the veil between living and dead. Death shouldn’t be in the ascendant, Light should be.

“**Yes...after millennia of domination, the ancient rules are crumbling. The old certainties have faded while they were sleeping on their laurels. And the gates of Nieflheim are finally opened**.”

“No Champion of Light came tonight.”

“**Well, if they didn’t come to you, you will have to go to them, no**?” The Aspect of Chaos laughed. “**If they want their demise to happen in front of tens of thousands of spectators, please oblige them**. **Do not kill the Champion of Death too early though, I want to know what sort of plans she has in her sleeves**.”

Lyudmila shook her head.

“She isn’t a true Champion. She speaks the words and accomplishes the will of her patron, but her magic is strictly limited to elemental war spells. She hasn’t the aura of a minor Dark Mage!”

To be sure, Alexandra Potter was more dangerous than any Champion of the Light and half of the Dark, but it didn’t make her an acceptable opponent the moment when Lyudmila began to use her true skills.

“**For now. For now**.” Loki chuckled for absolutely no reason. Lyudmila didn’t react. “**You will have challengers by November**.”

The divine presence faded away and the Dark Queen of Durmstrang breathed out.

“Fine...let’s go murder another secret base before the night is out. Do I raid a Dark or a Light one this time?”

**2 May 1994, somewhere in Ireland**

“Peter, please...”

The last of the Pettigrew drank a Blood-Replenishing Potion and a Pepper-Up Potion before answering.

“Yes, Remus?”

“Please free me and help me escape.” The voice of his former best friend was dejected and as close to begging as one could possibly come to. Of course, when you were chained up by silver chains to a stone covered in blood-red runes, the situation wasn’t that good for you.

“In case you haven’t noticed, I am in somewhat of a bad state, courtesy of your spells,” Peter replied, not moving a step from the position where he was giving himself first-aid healing. “You had cornered me when our duel stopped, and I am in no position to fight another duel anymore. And I have no wish to challenge a Dark Lady.”

The black-robed woman who had arrived shortly after Alexandra Potter’s disappearance in a gigantic pyre of green flames had neutralised Remus with a disconcerting facility before engaging in a long exchange with the red-robed woman who had to be Lily Evans.

As a result, Peter was closer to Remus than the two Dark Witches. He had his emergency Portkey to Sherwood. The agent of the Shadow Blades had a wand, and despite the new wards preventing most forms of Apparition, was reasonably sure he could escape with the Gryffindor werewolf.

There were several problems with that, however. First above all, the Portkey he had around his neck would send him to Sherwood. If he went with Lupin in tow, he might as well ring the dinner bell for all the vampires of Britain, because there was zero chance Agnes and the other vampires would spare him a long agony, sucking his blood and mangling his flesh until they estimated themselves satisfied. Since Remus had killed dozens of vampires, maybe hundreds, there would be no pity or short execution. The second reason why it would be idiotic to deprive the black-clothed figure of her prisoner was rather obvious. Peter had no idea what her relationship with the Shadow Blades was, and pissing off someone likely one hundred times more powerful than you did not sound like a smart idea. Third, Remus had done his best to kill him.

“Just tell me Remus. What reason do you have to be so loyal to the cause of the Light, the Order of the Phoenix, and Dumbledore?”

The older-looking man looked at him like he was completely crazy.

“Everything I have, I owe to Professor Dumbledore. I went to Hogwarts thanks to him. I had jobs thanks to him. It was because of his support I am not in a European preserve like too many werewolves who did support Greyback.”

Peter sighed.

“And have you not ever wondered why you were the only werewolf this proposal was ever made to? Because I assure you, there were far more kids than one in Britain cursed with lycanthropism during the 70s.”

“You know very well how bad the laws and the prejudice against werewolves are. Dumbledore hasn’t been able to overturn this legislation.”

“Yes, he has failed to do so,” Peter acknowledged. “But have you looked at his voting record for the rest of the near-human or non-human creatures? Succubi? He pushed for twenty years at Azkaban if any one of them was stupid enough to set a foot in Britain. Vampires? If it’s not you, they’re hunted the moment the Ministry finds evidence of their presence. Trolls? Unless they’re under the control of Gringotts, their clans are nearly extinct. Giants? There aren’t any left on the Isles now, they’ve all been killed or exiled to continental reserves. Let’s face it, Remus, aside from the werewolves, Dumbledore is one of the biggest movers in anti-creature legislation. There’s a reason so many of them fought with the last Dark Lord, and it wasn’t because of the Lord of the Death Eaters’ charming personality.”

“I know what you’re trying to do,” Remus stated in a stubborn tone Peter knew very well. “You’re trying to turn me against Dumbledore. It won’t work.”

Peter raised his eyes to watch the starry sky, which was already paling severely. Dawn would not be long in coming now.

“Remus, at the risk of breaking your ego, you burned all your bridges with the Dark the moment you began your long successful career as a vampire hunter. I am not trying to turn you against the Order of Phoenix. I am just trying to find a good reason why you are going to die here, poor, friendless, and your demise ignored by everyone.”

“The Order of the Phoenix will come.” And the worst part was that Remus absolutely believed it. It wasn’t the desperate hope of a cornered man, the delusional werewolf truly believed it.

“They’d better hurry, then.” Peter took one more healing Potion and cast two pain-reducing Charms on himself. The relief was instantaneous. “I think Sirius has only a few minutes left.”

James has disappeared while he duelled Remus, but apparently whatever was to be done to ‘Lord Black’, it didn’t involve moving him to another location immediately. And if he was chained like Remus, it was due to the fact the dying Marauder wouldn’t be able to stand on his own.

“It’s absolutely cruel and abominable.”

“What did you expect from Bellatrix? I will remind you, neither you nor I were involved in some of the pranks James and Sirius engineered without our approval, and this is likely the only reason why we’re not ritually tortured with him.”

“Nothing excuses using magic in such an odious manner.”

Peter Pettigrew stayed silent. If Remus wasn’t able to realise that Sirius betrayed everyone and everything around him during his life, it was not his job to educate him. And besides, aside from going to Saint Mungo’s or killing the one who had cursed him – and it was not Alexandra Potter, that much Peter was certain about – the fate of the son of Orion and Walburga Black was sealed. His blood running out of his body had turned black, and every part of his skin was twitching as the skin’s colour turned green-grey. From time to time, Sirius was screaming about nonexistent creatures before falling unconscious again.

And then the black-robed figure disappeared in a fluid move of Apparition.

Slowly, the red-robed female vampire approached them and removed her hood, revealing she was indeed Lily Evans...or at least what was left of her now that she had transitioned from living to creature of the night. One thing was sure, the green eyes were even more terrifying and impressive now than they had been when the red-haired Gryffindor roared in fury after one infuriating prank.

“Peter. Leave. What is going to happen here, I want no living witness save my daughter and I.” The words were almost worth their weight in gold, as green flames began to engulf the central stones of the ancient Celtic site.

“Of course.”

Before the last of the Pettigrew activated his Portkey, he had the opportunity to see the eyes of Sirius explode and new screams of agony arrive to his ears. He didn’t try to watch Remus again. They weren’t the Marauders anymore.

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There were fewer Marauders when she returned, and those who were left were truly in a bad shape. Sirius Black looked like a corpse-in-being – something confirmed by the Power of Death. Remus Lupin had been seriously wounded, he had an ugly mark on the cheek, part of his armour was gone, large lacerations had drawn blood on his upper chest, his arms, and his legs, providing unpleasant additions to older scars.

Alexandra didn’t watch them for long. Her attention was on the female vampire clad in red waiting for her outside the green fires provoked by her arrival.

“Mother.”

And it was her. Alexandra had seen enough photos to recognise her instantly. The vampire transformation had altered skin and many facial traits, but it was a sort of magnification of existing traits, not an alteration which left the person unrecognisable. Her eyes, to use the most striking example, were burning in green fire like they were magical jewels.

“Alexandra. You are beautiful now that you’re all grown-up.” A noise that could have been a sigh or another expression of regret crossed her lips. “Thirteen years...I wish I could have been here to see you before today.”

“As I was told from several people and witnesses, you weren’t exactly able to watch over me,” Alexandra extended her right hand covered in scales, and her mother touched it with a soft but powerful hold. The contact was...icy. The skin had the smoothness of a statue carved by a master, but it also shared the warmth of a lifeless work.

“Something that I will always regret,” her hand was released, and Lily took two steps back. “My apologies, Alexandra. I wish I could control myself better, but...your clothes have plenty of human blood on it.”

Alexandra grimaced internally. Her night of Beltane had been less bloody than the carnage of Samhain, but there had been plenty of deaths nonetheless.

“As long as we keep a safe distance, speaking to each other is fine, right?”

“It is,” the red-haired vampire who had given her birth over a decade ago answered. “Though the Queen placed conditions about anything I might say to you.”

The mere mention of the far older Vampiri Romani which had once been known as the half-sister of King Arthur put Alexandra instantly on edge.

“Conditions?” the Champion of the Morrigan repeated prudently.

“Obviously, I, on my part, have not been given permission to tell you any secret which might include the Exchequer, the European Magical Tournament, and other important information.”

Alexandra smiled sadly.

“No offence, mother, but after tonight, I have a whole host of other problems which do not include anything the teachers of the Scuola Regina and the Exchequer have planned for us next school year. Did you know Lyudmila Romanov was a Fenrir Animagus?”

“No,” Lily replied without emotional shock or any surprise on her face. “I wasn’t. But I knew she was Loki’s Champion. And the infernal trickster is known to give one out of three transfiguration capabilities to the wizards and witches who manage to rise high in his favour.”

Alexandra wasn’t a specialist in Nordic mythology, but she knew the three names. They were kind of infamous, and in the Wizarding world, they were rarely printed openly, like most authors genuinely feared attracting the attention of something or someone.

“Fenrir, Jormungandr, and Hel.”

“Precisely.” Two sets of green eyes met each other. “As you are still alive and in good health, I see you’ve done the wise thing and fled.”

“I did,” Alexandra confirmed. “It will be more problematic to do it at the Tournament, and that’s what worries me.”

“Me too,” her surprise must have been a bit too evident, because her mother made a sound akin to a chuckle. “I care for you Alexandra, despite my...unique needs. You are my blood, my legacy, my daughter...you are everything I have left in this world. And I can’t be happy at the idea you facing a Champion of Chaos, who, according to every source of information at my disposal, is really a crazy maniac even by the standards of their ilk.”

“There are several awful rumours about her,” the Basilisk-Slayer said cautiously.

“For the moment, assume each and every one of them is true,” was the shilling retort. “So promise me, Alexandra, don’t try to challenge her until the next Tournament.”

“I promise. I don’t even want to challenge her during the Tournament, really. Unfortunately, I don’t think I will have the choice to avoid her while we’re in the same school and participating in the same trials.”

They spoke of lighter subjects after that. Of the colours she preferred, the clubs she enjoyed supporting, and many more issues of minor significance. Alexandra vetoed the girlfriend discussion before it could go far, and as retaliation her mother refused to give any clues as to whether she was single or in a relationship right now.

It was a far too short conversation. Minute after minute, dawn drew closer, and for all the Potter Heiress was able to recognise an enchanted ring on one hand of the red-haired vampire, she for one had to return to Hogwarts before her absence raised suspicion.

“What will happen to the four Marauders now?” Alexandra asked as the wards fell one by one without any special efforts by Lily’s wand. She had wanted to say ‘what would happen to James Potter?’, but she preferred putting all the Gryffindors in the same bag.

“Well, obviously I let Peter Pettigrew escape,” the red-haired vampire-witch enumerated thoughtfully. “He’s working for the Shadow Blades, but his true allegiance is money. He could be really useful to you in years to come. Sirius Black is no longer a problem. I think he succumbed while we were talking.”

There was a red flash from the red-robed witch’s wand, and a blade decapitated the former Lord of House Black, and Alexandra felt the soul depart away from its mortal shell. The ‘godfather’ had not expired for long, clearly.

“And with it House Black’s brief foray into the Light ends.” Yes, Leo Black was supposed to be the Heir, but given the intelligence Sirius had shown all his life, Alexandra was ready to bet something spectacular was going to upset the balance. Assuming it was not craziness, Bellatrix Black must have had a reason for cursing him like she did. “James Potter?”

“He won’t have any opportunity to hurt you again, Alexandra. I’m going to take care of him.” Alexandra knew what it meant. She opened her mouth, before closing it without a single word uttered. It wasn’t like she had not warned her genitor – calling him ‘father’ felt completely inappropriate, since after her first birthday, the man had not behaved like a parent or devoted relative.

“And Remus Lupin is a gift for you,” her mother finished by the silver-chained Marauder waiting not far from them.

“A gift?” Alexandra thought she could be forgiven if she was a bit incredulous. “A gift for what? He’s a Dumbledore-man through and through. If I gave him the chance, he would run back to the grey-bearded leader of the Order of the Phoenix and tell him everything.”

“Werewolves’ vitality can be extracted with the appropriate spells by many exceptional individuals.”

Alexandra grimaced.

“It is the Queen’s gift, isn’t it?” Lily had not told her it was her gift, an easy mistake to make, really. And since she didn’t receive an answer in the next five seconds, the answer had to be ‘yes’.

It went without saying that casting a spell like that on a human being was worth a direct ticket for Azkaban if the Ministry could pin it on you. Alexandra could have cared less – being a Black Witch was definitely a sentence for life – but the spell to achieve such results had to be very Dark Magic, and not ‘borderline grey’ or ‘immensely destructive and grey’ like the war elemental spells she regularly used.

It was tempting. But Remus Lupin, for all his flaws as a Dumbledore worshipper, had not done anything to her personally. In fact, his presence in her life was really an accumulation of nothingness.

It didn’t make him a good person. But she was not going to use a spell against him that she was pretty sure was going to provoke incredible suffering. ‘Extracting vitality’ was rarely done painlessly with Dark Magic.

“No, you can tell her thank you for the gift, but I won’t do it.”

“It’s your choice, daughter.” The wand of her mother was pointed right between the eyes of the werewolf.

“Lily, please...I know James was-“

This was the worst thing Remus Lupin could have called out of a million possible choices.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!”

And in the green flash empowered by Death Magic, Hogwarts lost another Hogwarts DADA Professor.

**Author’s note**: And thus the saga of three-quarters of the Marauders ends on Beltane.

I think many people asked what could be more dangerous than a Hydra Animagus long ago. Now here’s the beginning of an answer...

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