**Chapter 60**

**Wars of Future Pasts**

**The First Battle of Hogsmeade Part II**

**31 October 1993, The Himalayan Redoubt**

Closing her eyes and reopening them a heartbeat later did not change the words carved in front of her, indeed they seemed to shine even more.

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

“Excalibur,” Alexandra whispered softly before chuckling a bit when only silence and a cold wind answered.

For a second, the Champion of the Morrigan hesitated. She was sworn to an aspect of Death. It was not a Light Power, in case the battle with these fanatic wizards at Hogsmeade had not made it clear.

On the other hand, it was Excalibur. The Sword in the Stone. Any child, magical or non-magical had heard of the blade and the challenge demanded of every claimant.

Advance and try to pull out the sword of the stone. One attempt was granted for the entirety of one’s life. One chance to claim the greatest weapon forged in a thousand years. One chance to right the wrongs of...

Alexandra blinked. Why had she even been thinking about this? There was something wrong...

Taking a large breath, the Ravenclaw third-year slowly changed her eyes to those of her inner animal for the second time of the day – or was it night?

For the second time, she regretted it and turned back to her human’s eyes as soon as she could.

“Well, I think it is official, Merlin was completely barmy...”

Watching the aura of the Exchequer Knight had been bad enough. The Dark Wizard had committed so many atrocities and crimes his powers were tainted by blood, darkness and agony. Even without the full senses of a hydra, Alexandra had been able to tell there was something utterly wrong with the man. Assuming it was a man, of course. Voice and body stance could be faked – Polyjuice Potion was one of the many possibilities affordable to any criminal and illusions could be useful disguises for a powerful magical being. But yes, the self-proclaimed Knight Priest was surrounded by a cloak of sheer evil and unpleasant feelings.

He – or she – was still human, however. Excalibur was not.

The sword was shining in the penumbra at this very moment. But this was far, far from the complete truth. When she had seen it through the hydra’s senses, there had only been a blinding source of light directed at her eyes. It was like a sun had been imprisoned into metal. It was not the work of a mortal smith. Hell, it was not even the work of ten thousand Master-Smiths and a hundred Enchanters. The legendary sword was a Shard. It was Shard of a Light Power’s Essence.

May the Valar have mercy on this grey world. Who could be so arrogant to play with what was for all intent and purposes the power of a God?

Alexandra congratulated herself not touching the hilt of Excalibur and took several steps back. Suddenly, being a Champion of the Morrigan in the same location as this weapon of mass destruction was not sounding clever at all.

Excalibur was a Shard, and the thirteen years-old witch knew deep in her bones it would be far scarier than anything the old tales of the Grail Quest proclaimed. Oh, Excalibur would cut steel, all right. Alexandra suspected it would do it in less time it took her to say it, by the way. But the blade would cut everything else too. It did not truly belong to this reality. It was not supposed to obey the same rules, and as a result it didn’t.

No wonder the Light was weakening, with such an anchor into this world. The sheer cost in rituals and souls to maintain this weapon in the first place had to be phenomenal.

“At least the rumours Arthur was a Squib and a Light Champion appear to be true,” the Potter Heiress spoke to herself as she turned around and began to step on the first stones where she had come from. “I don’t see how anyone with a magical core can hold this thing for several seconds without the Shard claiming years of life and magic in return...”

And any claimant would need to be pure to be judged worthy by the sword. Not knowing the aspect which had given away the power, she could only hazard a few guesses, but if something of Order or Judgement had been the contractor, the demand placed on any Champion would not be gentle at all.

Alexandra was at this point of her reflexions when an invisible wall stopped her walk back to the Pandemonium portal.

A warm wind blew, the snow for a second was no more and even half-sheathed in its stone, Excalibur began to shine four or five times the illumination it gave until now. The air smelled different. The air was different. There was a feeling...her hydra shrieked in anger and Alexandra drew by reflex Fragarach.

“This is not funny.”

“**You can turn back**.” The voice came from nowhere and everywhere. “**You can return to the Light**.”

It was like a choir of professional singers had decided to unite their talent. But there was something frightening behind it. It was a powerful voice, but it was not, it couldn’t be, *human*. It was far too much like the Morrigan, except there was no sign of a Power materialising before her.

“Yes, yes I’m sure all I need to do is to take the sword and stay quiet when your little shard rapes my mind, my body, and my soul.” It wouldn’t be necessarily in this order, but Alexandra knew that whatever remained of her in the aftermath...it would not be her.

“**The Light has to triumph. The reign of darkness must never come**.”

“Congratulations,” it was perhaps not good to insult the Light Powers, but the green-eyed witch couldn’t resist. “You won. Dumbledore demolished Grindelwald. Neville Longbottom destroyed Voldemort. You have played your cards well. I mean, a baby destroying a mighty Dark Lord? It’s an astonishing victory...”

“**See what your childish defiance will cost this world**.”

And they showed her...something. It was like Samhain, but far, far less pleasant. It was like a bombardment of images and videos in one minute or two. It gave her a painful headache, but it was almost an afterthought compared to the message. She saw Europe and the British Isles burn. She saw millions of Inferi assault vast cities, an army of dead the nuclear bombs couldn’t even slow down. She saw Summons greater than the Salamander of Brise-Roc assault London and reduce it to nothing but ashes and cinders.

It was the end of the world, and from the abyss which opened, a terrible silhouette emerged, a figure shrouded in darkness. Alexandra didn’t need a confirmation to know this was the King of the Exchequer.

Eventually the visions ended and Alexandra shook her head.

“**Now take Excalibur and lead the Light to victory**.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence but I have to respectfully decline.” Alexandra giggled. This was too good to not quote one of her favourite book, in the end. “And now at last it comes.” She recited with a smirk. “You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!”

The words of Galadriel were prophetic beyond Tolkien’s grave, no?

“I will not submit to the decrees of old things who have led humanity to the edge of abyss. I will not be the puppet of an invincible sword. I may lose. My magic may fade. But I am and I will remain Alexandra Potter.”

“**You make a grave mistake**.” The voices were so angry this was sounding like a disorderly ruckus to her ears.

“Free will or slavery? I don’t think so. BEGONE!” The Champion of Morrigan channelled a Fulgur in her wand and slammed the floor with it.

The air became glacial again. The perfume and the things which had filled her senses were gone.

And slowly appearing from a secret passage, an old goblin clapped his hands.

“You are worthy.”

Alexandra glared at him. The stand-off against these beings was very unpleasant and she wasn’t in the mood anymore to make jokes.

“Thank you for your non-existent assistance, goblin,” Alexandra commented.

The small creature shrugged before taking a series of stairs which had all the particularity to let him at least fifty feet away from Excalibur. Judging there was no point offering the Powers a second chance to threaten her, Alexandra also moved away from the legendary blade, and she sheathed Fragarach in her scabbard.

At first she had believed the sole living being in this fortress was coming towards her, but it was not the case. Alexandra had to run to catch up with him.

“I have questions,” the green-eyed witch said as the progression led them to stone doors carved in the very mountain.

“I have not the answers,” the old goblin grunted. And he was...well, Alexandra was sure a new adjective would have to be invented to describe the age of the non-human interlocutor. Grimjaw had not the quarter of the age this goblin showed on its wrinkled face. “And we don’t have the time. This fortress was built by the survivors of Camlann to guarantee Excalibur would never be a problem again.”

“I suppose it worked.” Excalibur had never been seen in the last thousand years, and somehow Alexandra doubted anyone could forget its radiance.

“It worked,” the goblin conceded with barely suppressed displeasure while he increased the already fast pace in a long grey corridor. “But this fortress is crumbling and your very presence has broken many magical anchors which were preserving my life and the foundations.”

Apparently the language translator cast centuries ago was still working. Alexandra was speaking in English, but the goblin was not using any dialect she was familiar with.

“What is going to happen to Excalibur then?” she asked.

“It will find a new place to anchor, new weak-willed creatures to tempt with its power.” The tone of the goblin turned thoughtful. “And likely Morgane Rys’Ygraine Avalon will find it and bind several goblin clan-chiefs to the place with her black sorcery to act as guardians.”

“Wait a minute...” Alexandra frowned as they walked in a gigantic hall with the usual immense pillars seen in every goblin building she had visited. “You are saying the Queen imprisoned you here with the sword after Camlann?”

“Yes, she did,” the goblin threw her a suspicious look. “She had not informed you? You are her successor...”

“I’ve never met Morgane in person,” Alexandra retorted, “to the best of my knowledge.” There were alas plenty of ways a witch could alter memories and it was not like she remembered what had happened before she was sent to the Dursleys.

“In this case, let me inform you of the basics,” the old goblin said snidely, “you are in the Redoubt, a place enchanted by Morgane Rys’Ygraine Avalon to contain Excalibur. I and my now deceased cousins were brought here to watch over the sword. A fitting punishment, the Dark Lady affirmed, for we had abandoned Mordred on the battlefield and fled like cravens.”

Columns after columns were seen but the hall never seemed to have an end.

“Goblins are not tempted by the Light or the Dark. Our magic does not work like yours, humans. We prize metal and gold for what you call ‘goblin runes’ and we were denied wands of staffs for too long. We could not be tempted by Excalibur and thus she brought us there.”

At last, the end of the hall came into view. And the structure built long before she was born was worth the eye. It looked like thousands of seats carved in the granite, a silent parliament of stone and silence.

The seats were carved in a hemispheric fashion, and on each one was the statue of a goblin. After a few seconds of observation, Alexandra realised the statues were far too realistic to be true.

“There are all your...cousins, right?”

A loud grunt confirmed she had been right. Honestly, the Ravenclaw in this case would have rather been in the wrong.

“Every night, we are forced to sleep here. Centuries after centuries, more and more didn’t wake up and became fused with stone. I suppose it was the Dark Lady’s last punishment.”

“That sounds incredibly cruel.” Trying to sleep on uncomfortable granite seat-thrones couldn’t be comfortable even if you were a goblin, and always wondering if you were going to rise or be a lifeless statue next morning was a mental torture.

“You never met Her.” The remark was filled with bitterness and a well of anger which sounded long mastered.

“I didn’t,” and she didn’t regret it.

Where the speaker of the assembly should have been, there was no goblin but a sort of altar with a large medieval coffer. It was a very old wooden chest, and it had the looks everyone at Privet Drive or Hogwarts would have thought of ‘treasure’.

A large rumble came at this moment, and the ground shook like there was an earthquake.

“Take what you need and leave,” the goblin grunted. “This fortress is going to be destroyed.”

As this sentence was uttered a Pandemonium gate opened where seconds before the wall had been.

“You could leave with me,” Alexandra proposed as she ran to the top of the altar and seized the massive chest. To her pleasant surprise, it weighted absolutely nothing. School books were more arduous to transport than that, it had to be subjected to many hundred Rune-based Charms...

The goblin’s eyes widened in something like surprise...and then an infernal cloud darkened the halls, the ground shook violently and the old goblin was catapulted on the empty granite seat which had so far remained unoccupied.

“I...thank...you for the offer...but as you can see...the curses of Morgane...are still active...” the legs were turning to stone inch by inch, while the goblin was still alive.

“Your name?”

“I am...Ragnok...”

“Ragnok. I will remember it.” She grabbed the treasure chest more firmly and ran towards the portal, as the fortress which had stood for centuries fell apart, collapsing under a storm of dark magic and destroyed foundations.

**31 October 1993, Durmstrang**

Unlike many academies and schools of Europe, Durmstrang had no Houses to sort its students into at the beginning of their schooling. This was a tradition the Nordic school had never manifested the wish to emulate.

The British wizards decided in a typical short-sighted manner to sort their young charges with an ancient heirloom of their Founders, obviously disregarding the point that at ten years old, a wizard or a witch was just a kid and unlikely to know what he really wanted to make of his or her life.

Beauxbatons had taken a more intelligent approach: the children were asked the three artistic pursuits they wanted to study during their first-year and the Professors divided their new students by these choices.

There were rumours certain other schools used Animagus-revealing Potions, flying trials or colour affinities to decide the placement in the Houses of the academy they were going to live in for long months.

Astrid Sverre thought all these methods were flawed. When she saw Durmstrang for the first time, there already was something like six or seven or her fellow year mates she couldn’t stand. If they had gone to the same House – and dorms – with her, there would have been a murder before the month was out. If they had been placed on different Houses, the enmity would have become an inter-House problem.

No, the first witches and wizards who had built Durmstrang had made the smart decision to forego Houses entirely. Students were assigned their wings by year, alphabetical order and friendship – or for more the more politically-minded alumni, their alliances. That way if you didn’t like someone, you may have some classes with her or him, but you were free to ignore him the rest of the time. And feuds stayed strictly on a personal basis. Durmstrang was the Institute, above the petty feuds and the weekly quarrels.

Of course, there was a system to group together students having common inclinations: the Guilds. But no one was forced to become a member and no invitation could be delivered by older students until someone had spent three years in the halls of the institution.

Guild membership remained a sign of prestige and influence no matter the times. Any member could officially invite someone to join, but the Guildmaster – or the Guildmistress – had to give their formal approval. The Ancient – most of the time a former guild member preparing for a Mastery at Durmstrang – could veto the introduction of new members. It was rarely done, and the Ancient had to give good reasons for its refusal, but it happened.

As a result, more than half of the students graduating from Durmstrang never entered a Guild. The activities in the Guild were purely extracurricular work, so you were always supposed to juggle between guilder responsibilities and the academic course. There were also exactly nineteen Guilds in existence, and membership rarely went over twenty witches and wizards. The Quidditch Guild, to give the most popular example, was constantly buried under the application proposals but tradition and sheer elitism had always limited its effectives to fourteen members, no more, no less. Many complained, but since they had always two or three players supervised by their national teams’ managers, the complaints went nowhere.

Despite these high requirements, the invitations, no matter the Guild it came from were highly prized and sought for. Three invitations opening at the same time? Over sixty students, including her, had come to see the conditions of the challenge imposed by the Guildmistress.

So now they were waiting, in their day-to-day brown-black uniform, waiting to see what trial was going to be asked of them as skull-shaped torches levitated above their heads provided some light and warmth in the encroaching darkness.

There was no pop, no warning sign.

They were watching the empty frozen land bordering the Durmstrang glacier and then suddenly she was there.

“Good afternoon,” Lyudmila Romanov, Guildmistress of the Monster-Hunter Guild of Durmstrang, known as the Dark Queen for most of the Durmstrang students and teachers, began. Her voice was not purring, but it was close, and her light green eyes sparkled with excitement. “I will not waste time. If you are here, you think you are ready to be part of my Guild.”

The evil smile the Dark Queen gave them made everyone shiver uncomfortably.

“I disagree. But it’s possible there are in your group new talents. And these talents will be needed if we are to win next year.”

There was no whisper or more sentences said, but plenty of students nodded. By now, unless you lived as a hermit in some African desert, you were aware the European Magic Tournament was coming next year and at Durmstrang the unofficial competition to secure a place was raging in the classrooms and the corridors.

“It’s going to be a bloodbath, of course. Albus Dumbledore may have given a nice speech about international cooperation and all this worthless qualities everyone is supposed to embody. I say he is wrong. I say it is time for the wand to remind the quill we are mightier.”

“Nice speech. How many hours did you take to prepare it?”

Most of the students assembled, candidates and guilders openly gaped at the audacity of someone interrupting Lyudmila. Many stopped breathing. Whoever had spoken, he or she was going to get a nice trip to the hospital...if he or she was lucky.

But it was not one of the Durmstrang students who walked calmly out of nowhere. It was her cousin, Alexandra Potter.

It had been over a year she had not seen the girl, but Astrid knew it was her. The British witch was taller and her clothes were in tatters, but she was generating an aura of danger and there was no need to be an adult to know the sword on her back was seriously bad news.

“Death,” Lyudmila gave her a smile, a genuine one as far as Astrid could tell. “You look like you are coming out of a battle.”

“Chaos,” the younger girl replied. “It is the case. A lot of Light wizards have tried to kill me...again.”

The inflexion on the last word was more annoyed than terrified or angered.

“I hope you’re not coming to say we must unite in face of this monstrous injustice. I don’t do charity work.”

“I came to say that the Light is about to lose a Champion tonight and there are forces in motion pushing to gather all of us. A storm is coming and it will be a world-ending one.”

“Consider me warned.” Lyudmila Romanov wasn’t smiling anymore, but she didn’t look particularly concerned. “But are you sure you should give me this information freely? I could betray you...”

“Betrayal implies I trust you a few seconds. Goodbye Lyudmila Romanov, we will see each other soon.” And her cousin disappeared. Except the footprints in the snow, it was like she had never been there in the first place.

“All right!” Lyudmila clapped in her hands, stopping the whispers and the low-key conversations commenting this unexpected event. “The interlude is over. It’s time for the challenge! There’s a big Ice Wyrm coming in our direction from the north, but instead of fighting it here with the wards at our back, I thought it was more fun to make an invitation-hunt. The witch or the wizard who kill this XXXXX beast will join my Guild! Try not to die and may the best challenger win!”

**31 October 1993, Hogwarts, Scotland**

Without Leo and Ron to prank some unsuspecting Slytherins in the village, Neville’s visit at Hogsmeade had taken less than two hours, travel included. Zonko was still closed. His school supplies like the ink and the parchment rolls were going to last him until January or February at their current rate of use. Only Honeydukes was an obligatory visit, and while making your choice on sweets was a difficult choice, it did not take long, especially as his pocket money levels had not yet recovered the bleeding his grandmother had given it last summer.

Then he had come back to the castle with Dean and Seamus. Maybe they had not been the first students to come back, but they had certainly been in the top ten. Given the ugly weather brought by the autumn winds, there was no point staying outside and it had been with a certain relief the Gryffindor boys had returned to the Tower and their common room.

As far as he was concerned, it was far more interesting to exchange jokes and stories in front of the large chimney than trying to find an empty chair at the Three Broomsticks; half of the drinks proposed in the pub could not be drunk by third-year students and by noon it was absolutely crowded. Plus that way he would avoid Cormac McLaggen’s insistent baiting. The older Gryffindor and his cohorts for the last ten-fifteen days had appeared to only live to defend the honour of House Gryffindor and assure everyone willing to listen to them they were the victims of a great conspiracy.

It was a pile of absurdities. Neville knew it. Ron, Leo and he had done the very things they were accused from, though by sheer blind luck he had managed to escape the net closing on the rest of the New Marauders. But he couldn’t exactly explain in the corridors he was wrong...the young wizard knew Snape and the Slytherins would pounce on him at the first sign they could suspend him too.

Thus along with Thelma Holmes and Fay Dunbar, they had come back earlier from Hogsmeade and were playing a few games until it was time to leave for the Halloween celebrations in the evening.

It was the only reason they were now free to observe from the windows of Gryffindor Tower the catastrophic battle unfolding in and around the village of Hogsmeade.

If someone had told him that tomorrow morning Lord-level wizards would decide to settle once for all their rivalry at Hogsmeade, Neville would have said the Seer it would be better to stop the Firewhiskey.

But now the sky was burning, there were spells tearing the earth and the water of the Black Lake was levitated and then animated in gigantic Transfigurations. It was indeed a battle the likes which were rarely seen...and everybody in the Common Room, including him, were paralysed by the titanic display.

This was not the beating he had routinely inflicted to Draco Malfoy. It was not the mock battles this madman of Professor Rincewind loved to give the third-years against XXX ICW-labelled creatures. It was not the carnage Alexandra Potter had left on her path when massacring two Basilisks. No, this was way above that.

They may very well be ants compared to the wizards fighting in the distance.

Cataclysmic explosions were cast, blocked by powerful shields no student knew the name of. Mountain-sized elemental projections fought each other. And the Dark Arts clouded everything, generating poison, dark flames and shrieking creatures.

This was the level someone like...someone like Voldemort fought. This was the danger Dark Lords represented.

“Our Headmaster has the advantage, I think,” Dean declared as they watched the duel with their telescopes pointed on Professor Dumbledore and his opponent. “This Grindelwald is bad news all right, but he’s staying far too much on the defensive and he’s slowing down.”

Dean Thomas chuckled next to him.

“Really don’t see why the Europeans are so scared of him. He is fighting like a brute...”

“Dean, I agree this Dark Lord isn’t a wand expert, but...he spent over forty years in prison. And I’m sure he could wipe our entire year in one minute.”

Any of the spell currently launched by their Headmaster the Dark Lord of Nurmengard would be the death of someone, they were just too dangerous for any outcome to be possible. Neville winced as Grindelwald conjured a hellhound of pure darkness and made it clash with a water stallion. The shockwave was colossal...but the two old wizards didn’t even slow down and continued an infernal rhythm of attacks and counter-attacks.

And by the beard of Merlin, they were *fast*.

Neville considered himself a good chain-caster in third-year, his top record was fifty-six spells in one minute and he thought he was the best of the thirteen and fourteen years-old in the castle, if one didn’t count the Exiled Queen of course. What the Basilisk-Slayer of Ravenclaw thought possible or not, she kept it to herself and her circle of friends.

Professor Dumbledore was leaving his best top casting speed in the dust without trying. His wand was twirling, stabbing, charming, protecting and hundreds of more acts he was not sure he fully understood what was going on.

“You’re right. Grindelwald is slowing down.” But by Morgana, if this was how the man fought after forty years of prison, deprivations and not fully recovered, Neville was sure he never wanted to see what the Dark Lord was capable at the might of his power.

“He is really casting nasty Dark spells,” Thelma said as something...something with a lot of tentacles and what looked like an orb of acid were conjured, immediately smashed by a fire spell of their Headmaster. “Where did he learn them in the first place?”

“Durmstrang to start with,” Neville absently answered, keeping his right eye watching the duel on his telescope. “And during his rise, he pillaged through hundreds of pureblood libraries before trying them on Muggles and his wizard enemies.”

“Scary Dark Lord,” Dean whistled before grimacing. “I don’t see the light show of the second duel anymore.”

Neville removed his eye from the telescope to look at Hogsmeade and unfortunately Dean was right. Unlike the first duel continuing between Professor Dumbledore and Grindelwald, they didn’t know the identity of the participants, just that it was a dangerous Dark Wizard against a Light Wizard. He hoped the latter was going to triumph...the Dark practitioner was sheer evil and even the Headmaster was going to be hard pressed if he had to fight against two enemies.

“What is that?” asked Seamus.

“What are you talking about?”

The next instant a beacon of darkness devastated a section west of Hogsmeade and in a flash of pure darkness, the second Dark Wizard Apparated fifty feet behind Grindelwald.

“No, damn it!”

But the newcomer didn’t engage to help the Dark Lord Grindelwald. No, he stood there unconcerned in his white robes – and why by Merlin’s socks did a Dark Mage choose to wear white robes, by the way – and the duel between Professor Dumbledore and his Dark opponent continued.

It was Percy who summed up very well what they were all thinking in the Common Room.

“What sort of game are these Dark Wizards playing?”

**31 October 1993, Pandemonium**

Pandemonium was a strange location...if a realm between dimensions could be qualified by such a mundane noun as a location.

It was also dangerous. Not for her – being a Champion of the Morrigan had its perks – but in the last hours she had met quite a number of corpses and these were not the souvenirs of a legendary battlefield but true flesh and bones bodies of dead humans. Many looked like they were the sort of adventurers trying to break in a secure location. Others looked like they had been at the wrong place at the wrong time. All had ravens circling around them.

The notion of time was inexistent in this dimension. In fact, Alexandra was certain the moment she had appeared near the Durmstrang students had been before the moment she talked to the old goblin and saw Excalibur. It had been the reverse order from her point of view, but the magic of Death didn’t care.

This didn’t mean there weren’t any laws in this realm, far from it. First there were the entrances and the exits, which could be divided into two categories. The first were sort of archways which stayed open for the entire duration of Samhain. The Ravenclaw girl could only make hypotheses, but she was ready to bet a hundred Galleons these gates were the prototypes of the true Archway of Death. The second category consisted in portals shivering into existence for a few seconds before collapsing. There were thousands flickering in every direction, and only she could open one reliably and not die the next second.

This was not a holiday resort, but there were advantages to walk here. For one, all the pain and the wounds she had taken at Hogsmeade had been removed. By the White Tower, some of the scars and marks she had taken in the last two years had been removed too. She had received new clothes to replace the ones which had been burned and destroyed by the successive battles. A new black outfit, black boots and new black gloves had been some of the objects waiting for her at several corners of her travels.

In exchange, the journey had been so far anything but peaceful. Durmstrang had been the first stop and devoid of violence, but it had been an exception. The second had brought her somewhere in Africa where she had killed a beast looking like a gigantic black rhinoceros spitting flames. The third had been somewhere in Asia, and forced her to kill a horde of deranged flesh-eating monkeys. And it had continued like this five more times. As she gazed on the other side of each portal, the Morrigan had explained to her why these monsters had to die. Villages razed. The contamination of tens of thousands men by a new virus would lead to the collapse of civilisation in that region. The attention of power-hungry politicians would turn towards resources best left unexploited.

It had not been orders. Alexandra strongly suspected now the Morrigan didn’t function like this. It was more like...pointed suggestions. She was free to ignore them, at the cost of thousands of lives.

It was in hindsight incredibly ironic the Dark promoted free will while the Light demanded eternal obedience.

Now that there weren’t more portals opening in front of her, the Potter Heiress used the opportunity to replay in her head the conversation she had with Lyudmila Romanov. She was thankful for her patron to have given her the chance to see the older girl in a more...neutral atmosphere. Astrid’s warning had, somehow, underestimated the danger posed by this Dark Witch. Lyudmila Romanov was a predator and not a small one. Her stance and the sheer charisma she radiated could make her the next Dark Lord Grindelwald if she really wanted. Power-wise, the Romanov girl was Lady-level minimum. Assuming most of the seventh-years at Hogwarts fought together against her, there was a high likelihood they would be pulverised in a couple of minutes.

And she was a Champion of Chaos.

Alexandra didn’t know the deity who had chosen Lyudmila Romanov, but frankly by this point it didn’t matter. Chaos was not known to allow weak Gods, Goddesses and Demons to rise in the divine hierarchy. Chaos was very bad news.

And Dumbledore and whoever had pushed for a Tournament next year had invited this super-predator in the game.

Anybody who thought this was the worst idea of the century please raise your hands in the air.

The last portal was not an ephemeral one. She felt it several heartbeats before it came in view. It was like the one she had sent the ‘Camlann treasure chest’ through near Hogsmeade to await her return. And no, for the moment she had not tried to see what was inside. Alexandra was courageous, not suicidal. The chest had been left by Morgana La Fay over a thousand years ago, she was not going to open it without the assurance of her guardian and several Curse-Breakers that it was not going to explode in her face when she unlocked it.

As she was a couple of steps away, the portal details became more evident. For one the columns on either side were covered in Egyptian hieroglyphs. For two, it was incredibly large. Most portals were barely human sized, but this one looked like it had been built with dragon or giant’s dimensions in mind.

“**The Light Apprentice who tried to kill you left my realm there**.”

Oh yes, a few hours of death and adventures were not enough to let her forget this enemy.

“**She thought herself clever to escape the fat awaiting her and this portal is never closed on Samhain**.”

Alexandra touched the edge of the veil agitating the portal and gritted her teeth. Ordinarily, there was no one waiting on the other side of the Pandemonium portals. The most evident reason was that with ephemeral gateways it wasn’t possible to post guards everywhere in the world. The second and obvious truth was that most people had forgotten the Old Ways, wizards and non-wizards alike.

Judging by the massive number of guards waiting on the other side, this portal had not been forgotten.

Alexandra swore before asking the question she knew beforehand she wasn’t going to like.

“Where does this portal leads to?”

“**It leads to New Philae, Upper Egypt. It is one of the palace-temples Morgane uses for her personal activities**.”

Alexandra could not help but place her head in her hands and sob at the stupidity of the world. By trying to escape her, her enemy had just run straight into one of the Exchequer’s fortresses.

“If I try to pass this gate, I am going to have a large battle on my hands, Goddess. I can beat the guards. I can’t beat the Queen...”

The ‘Knight Priest’ was a Dark Lord in anything but name. Hogsmeade had made that clear. Many portals she had walked nearby had showed her how powerful the Dark Wizard was...along with assurances her girlfriend and all her friends were safe.

“**It will not be necessary**.”

“If you say so...” Her voice failed to muster much conviction.

**31 October 1993, New Philae, Egypt**

The moment she was out of Pandemonium the hydra in her reacted more violently than it ever had.

A deep loud hiss came out of her lips before Alexandra was able to restore control and had she been given a mirror at that very moment, the Potter Heiress knew she would see the irises of a snake, not a human.

The Exchequer guards were even more surprised than she was. The hiss plunged them into a visible panic and they prostrated themselves in fear on the ground.

The hydra made sounds of satisfaction...its domination had been recognised by the lesser snakes.

And this was then Alexandra realised how many men and women had recognised her inner animal as the alpha predator. There had to be over a thousand persons here...and each and every one was an Animagus, a weresnake or a cursed skinchanger.

By the Fields of Pelennor, the Exchequer had an army of venomous auxiliaries here, and they weren’t armed with spears and swords. In their hands the men prostrating had pistols and modern guns. And not the kind of eighteenth century rifles or the personal weapons of pirates and obsolete stuff wielded by outlaws. No, she had seen sometimes soldiers wield similar weapons when Dudley was interested in some violent military ‘documentary’ or video game.

The real question was if the Exchequer had managed to buy or produce real artillery and more voluminous weapons like tanks, and what were the chances the answer was negative?

A wizard in sandy robes which had been some three hundred feet away from the portal when she came out rushed towards her and his wand was already in hand.

“I am Alexandra Potter. I humbly request an audience with the Queen of Exchequer Morgane Rys’Ygraine Avalon.”

The other wizard, seeing she had made no sign to draw her sword or cast a spell, stopped at mid-duelling distance, gave her a displeased look but did not initiate hostilities. His hairs were grey and he looked incredibly old. The power which rippled off him in waves however was not something to joke about. Alexandra thought she had a bit more raw power than him...but not by that much, and obviously the wizard was old. He may have forgotten more magical knowledge in his life than she had learned in all her life.

“As it happens, the Queen has no pressing appointment today.” This sort of statement rang a lot of bells and was suspicious in its own right. “Follow me, Champion of the Morrigan and release the hold you have on our guards, please.”

Mentally, Alexandra gave a caress to the hydra and a new hiss, less commanding, came to her lips. The weresnake guards shook like they had all been in a bad dream before rising. Many looked at her with emotions on their visages which ranged from anger to fear.

The moment of initial contact no longer at risk to be a bloodbath, Alexandra had the opportunity to sightsee the surroundings. And it was worth the detour. Whoever had been in charge of the remodelling had gone over the top. The Egyptian palace complex had been restored to the magnificence it had enjoyed while Egypt was dominating everything from Syria to Nubia. East of the palace the great Nile was flowing. Obelisks and Great Gates were everywhere, shining with thousands of hieroglyphs. They were thousands of runes, and all had been fully magically charged.

These were powerful defences, and even just beginning the study of Ancient Runes, the Ravenclaw third-year knew there was no way she could storm this place and hope to live. Worse for her ego, these were obviously the internal defences; there were higher walls and watchtowers in a vast circle encircling the complexes she could see.

Hogwarts was lightly defended compared to this fortress. The streets were bathed in magic, and the markets were bursting with enchanted objects. And from the fisherman to the guards, nine out of ten people registered as some sort of snake skinchanger. The only ones who didn’t were the men and women in robes...and the wizards and witches of the Exchequer, in grey and black robes, smelled like Animagi or *other*.

It took less than ten minutes for the Exchequer mage to designate an avenue with a move of his arm and stand watch behind her as she walked in a mosaic-filled corridor – best to not wonder how many galleons the decoration was worth.

The avenue ended with some marble stairs like Hogwarts and a Great Hall-sized room. But unlike at Hogwarts, this vast place was not used for dinners. Not for those of humans. There was large garden with exotic trees – exotic for her, this was Egypt. There were several great fountains, with structures of Antiquity hoplites and sorcerers standing in triumph.

All of this would not have been out of the ordinary for the court of a Pharaoh.

The gigantic pool and the Basilisk-sized crocodile swimming in it were not corresponding to any definition of normalcy Alexandra was aware of.

And then there was the woman with the clothes of an ancient Egyptian Queen plunging from time to time her right hand in the waters, unafraid of the prehistoric monster.

“My scaly companion has already eaten today. He will not cause any problem.” The hydra hissed in disapproval but Alexandra walked down the stairs and marched into the ancient garden.

And for the first time, the woman turned her head and Alexandra saw the Queen of the Exchequer face to face.

The Dark Witch could have been considered pretty if one sword blow hadn’t disfigured half of her face. There was no need to ask what had caused the wound. Excalibur. Alexandra was already impressed Morgana La Fay could have survived more than a few seconds. A Shard of a Light Power was supposed to be the end, no second chance, resurrection or whatever miraculous ‘this will leave a minor scar’.

But then, as her skin tone was closer to ivory and her mouth was filled with the teeth of a shark, it was obvious Morgana La Fay, Isis or whatever name she had chosen was not human anymore.

Her eyes were the same livid green as hers, but their brilliance was several times magnified. And her long black hairs were like a river of onyx. Interestingly, while there were some similarities with the body of Mordred, it was not exactly the resemblance between a mother and a daughter. And she was so shrouded in darkness it gave her shivers.

“*Vampiri Romani*,” it was an affirmation, not a question. It should have been impossible, because vampires of any kind could not tolerate the sun over their heads...it was not terribly warm, but it was a cloudless sky and far hotter than Scotland’s climate.

Her interlocutor laughed and it was a sound which managed to be at the same time melodious and full of danger.

“I must admit, this is the first time someone has begun a conversation with me like that.” The massive saurian’s head went out of the water and her hydra hissed in anger until it disappeared in the depths of the pool. “And in general the identification is incorrect.”

“Our DADA Professor is crazy but a bit competent this year,” Alexandra commented neutrally, feeling ill-at-ease standing here with such a powerful – and infamous – Dark Sorceress. Morgana seemed to have noticed it, because two garden chairs were conjured without a sound or even a gesture.

Alexandra sat with relief...she didn’t know how many miles she had run or walked today, but it was not a small number.

“I am aware,” the Queen of the Exchequer made a nod to someone she couldn’t see. “The Butcher of Dresden has caused us some...issues during the Grindelwald War.”

The second after, two guards emerged from behind some trees, dragging a witch in chains.

Even by her limited knowledge of fashion and beauty magazines, Alexandra took less than five seconds to recognise her. It was difficult to not remember someone who was regularly in the French mode magazine *Vogue*. Platinum hairs, check. Shining blue eyes, check. Perfect skin, check. A pair of breasts which had no right to exist without cosmetic surgery, check.

“Fleur Delacour...” the Potter Heiress chuckled while looking at the half-destroyed attire. “I must admit, when the Morrigan told me killing you was not the best option...I did not think one of the assassins was the eldest daughter of the French Minister. You’re a bad, bad girl. Is your father informed you’re participating in murderous raids in foreign countries?”

The platinum-haired French witch glared at her, but bound and gagged as she was, sending her looks promising a thousand years of torture was all she could do.

“Oh, I doubt the French Minister of Magic is aware of his daughter’s activities. By all reports we have on him, he is a man taking his duties seriously.” The Exchequer sorceress looked incredibly amused...Alexandra didn’t know if it was a good or a bad thing.

“It looks like his daughter has fallen with a bad crowd, then.” The Potter Heiress declared half-seriously.

“This is more common than many parents want to admit. Organisations like the Army of Light are recruiting heavily among the most Light-oriented academies and Beauxbatons is a prime target for their recruiting efforts.”

“Maybe she will find her way back to a less violent life,” one could always hope, no?

“Oh, I sincerely would not count on this, Champion of the Morrigan.” Despite all the protection granted by the hydra, the other green eyes were hypnotic and she had to switch her gaze to the garden and the exotic flora. “Fleur Delacour is now a Light Champion. Her predecessor died a few minutes ago.”

Ten points for her to not have fought the Knight Priest then. The Light Champion had been about to kill her, and the Knight had handled him alone...of course, Alexandra had thinned the rank of followers surrounding him but still. It was hard to believe they would have been problematic to the Dark Wizard.

“What do you intend to do about her?” She didn’t care about a lot about her, but if the daughter of the Minister disappeared like she had never existed, there were going to be country-wide investigations.

“For the moment, I am hesitating between the dressage whip and the discipline stick...after that a Beauxbatons teacher will likely find her in the boy’s quarters engaged in some adventurous positions with attractive young men who are alas already betrothed.”

Alexandra blinked. And if she grinned in the next seconds, she would refuse to admit it in public or even in private. Fleur Delacour, on the other hand, was red like a tomato.

“Ah, err...okay. I was thinking...”

“That I and my subordinates were going to take our time eat the entrails of this Veela hybrid? Or that we were going to sacrifice her soul and body in a dark and evil ritual at midnight?”

Alexandra coughed in embarrassment.

“Err...yes.”

There was no explosion, the Queen of the Exchequer just sighed, which since she didn’t need to regularly breathe, was more theatrical than a human reflex.

“Killing Miss Delacour, as tempting as it might be, would bring enough political complications I don’t need at the moment. And killing a new Light Champion just ensures another will pick the torch minutes later. They are annoying cockroaches like that.”

By the glare Fleur Delacour glared at the infamous half-sister of King Arthur, the French witch really didn’t appreciate being associated with cockroaches.

“And sacrificing her would be a waste of resources. There’s much I don’t know about Veela hybrids. Should I desire her death, she will be dissected alive first.”

All...all right...Alexandra was brutally reminded this was THE Morgana La Fay in front of her. A Dark Witch which had been so terrible and so powerful she was one of five Dark Ladies the British Wizarding World had not managed to forget the shadow cast by her reign of darkness.

“Take the Veela away,” ordered the Queen of the Exchequer to her guards. “Prepare her for five strikes of the dressage whip and a Portkey for Aquitaine, France.”

The skinchanger guards nodded and dragged the young Light Champion away, leaving Alexandra alone with her host.

And the gaze she was subjected to...Alexandra didn’t like it all.

“You did well managing to reach this nexus of Pandemonium,” Morgana declared conversationally.

“Let’s not pretend you haven’t been able to twist the events in your favour for my travel here, Lady Morgane.” Alexandra tried her best ‘respectful but firm’ tone. “Fleur Delacour is nothing to you.”

“You are right,” the Dark Lady admitted. “I have slain hundreds of narrow-minded Light fools like her across the centuries. But there has only been a single potential Champion of the Morrigan who lived long enough to be contracted by the Goddess in the last millennium and she’s in front of me right now. The others...the Army of Light has made a specialty of murdering and assassinating those who are too young to fight back.”

“That the Light is filled with arrogant fanatics doesn’t make your methods acceptable.”

The Queen of the Exchequer stopped moving; her face was a marble statue only marred by the sword wound left by Excalibur.

“The Exchequer was not created to be acceptable. It was built on the blood of innocents, forged in the greatest of betrayals and destined to usher a new reign of darkness. This organisation gathered powerful wizard and witches of the Dark, because the weak and the incompetent are culled before they reached adulthood. Remember that, young Champion.”

The mouth opened, revealing again the long and dangerous fangs in a smile that was not, could not be human.

“You enthralled Ginny Weasley. You have kidnapped Lyre’s father.”

“I admit I did the first one,” the Queen acknowledged. “You needed a reward for your killing of the two Basilisks, and the soul of the girl sings in darkness. She may be useful to your designs. And no, we didn’t kidnap your friend’s father. The Army of Light did. Believe it or not, I see no great need to kidnap a brain-dead person for my personal amusement. It is not my philosophy.”

“I know your philosophy, thank you very much. I was at Brise-Roc, I saw your Summon kill thousands of goblins with my own eyes.”

For the first time, Alexandra saw she had managed to catch off guard the female vampire. It didn’t last long, not more than a couple of seconds, but it had been there.

“So you are the survivor we never managed to identify. Impressive, very impressive...” the green eyes turned to watch something invisible in the trees before refocusing on her. “Your mother is not going to be happy we almost killed you...”

“Leave my mother out of this!” Alexandra snarled. “She died for me...”

“And in a few hours, unless there are complications, she will be resurrected by one of my Knights,” Morgana interrupted her.

“What?”

“Your mother will be resurrected in a few hours,” the Dark Witch repeated calmly. “Normally, it shouldn’t have taken years. But your mother was a young Apprentice and the Knight teaching her had a lot of difficulties convincing her to create a form of immortality insurance...and even then Lilian Potter chose the Portraits of Ruin and several things went wrong the night she died.”

No, no, no.

No...that couldn’t be true...

“What should I think there is any truth in your revelation?”

“The goblins of Gringotts have blood ward-alerts. The moment your mother is back among the living, they will know it.”

“And I suppose there are going to be conditions if I want to see her again,” Alexandra added bitterly.

Morgana’s face was more marble or any sculpted stone than flesh, and she showed no emotion whatsoever.

“You are wrong on a certain number of points. For the moment, no matter the conditions, I will not allow you to see her. You see, the body of your mother was completely destroyed and only her blood was saved. As such, we will have to give her a body of *Vampiri Romani* similar to mine.”

In the distance, several birds singed but Alexandra was in no mood to admire their thrills.

“Your Animagus transformation is certainly not enough advanced for me to take the risk to put you in the same room with an uncontrollable vampire. I will not let a Champion of the Morrigan die when the outcome is easily predictable.”

Oh course, she knew. The skinchangers at the gate had certainly been more for confirmation than anything else.

“Letters?” The Potter Heiress tried – probably in vain – not to sound too pleading.

“Letters can be arranged.”

There was a long period of silence. The crocodile underneath the waters was sometimes resurfacing to watch them. The sun continued to shine. And the Dark Lady - who had killed the Powers only knew millions of men and women - was here, staying immobile but smelling darkness like she had been born with it.

“You are a remarkable young witch. Few can boast half of your victories in their entire life, and you’ve yet to reach your fourteenth birthday.”

“Err...thank you.” What do you say to the Queen of Darkness when she compliments you?

“But your skills, as impressive as they are, will not save you. You attract too much attention and not just from our organisation. The Army of Light, the descendants of the Knights of the Round Table, will try to end you.”

Surely Alexandra couldn’t be that big a target when there were many Dark Lords and Dark Ladies plotting in liberty?

“I will not make it easy for them.”

The vampire laughed.

“No, I suppose you won’t.” There was a glint in these green eyes the young Ravenclaw didn’t enjoy at all. “Win the inter-school Tournament which will take place at the Scuola Regina next year, and I will consider you worthy to become my Apprentice.”

Wait, wait...WHAT?

“I am...I did not intend to participate in your Tournament! I’m not interested jumping in whatever trap you have prepared for the Light and Dumbledore!”

“You will.” The Queen of the Exchequer did not radiate darkness, conjured demons or cackled in evil laughter. But there was no missing the steel in her voice. “Do not misunderstand. I have extremely interesting good reasons to keep you alive. Your mother has the potential to become a Knight, and you are the first Champion of the Morrigan in a thousand years. But I will not let you spread unwanted chaos where our plans are near completion.

You will participate in the European Magical Tournament or by May I will come to the plains of Camlann once again and raze Hogwarts to its foundations with my army.”

Alexandra shivered and not just because of the death threat.

She had the answer to one of her questions...and the worst part was that it had been staring her in the face since she had entered Pandemonium.

Why had the Founders called their school Hogwarts?

They had called it Hogwarts because it was better to call your bastion in a funny way rather than to keep the ancient name.

Camlann.

“And assuming I choose to participate?” The hydra which formed the core of her animal essence was furious at the idea of a submission, but Alexandra had to be realistic. One Knight, just one, was powerful enough to cause a massacre if he felt like it. On this day of Samhain, the Queen of the Exchequer could have easily sent him with three or four thousand skinchangers and the orders to use their guns on the Hogwarts students. She had chosen not to, but there would not have been a lot Alexandra could do against this sort of firepower. Even assuming she was bullet-proof, the rest of the witches and wizards certainly weren’t and two thousand rifles alone would outnumber the teachers and the students more than three-to-one. Ultimately, the walls of Hogwarts would turn red. There were just not enough living defenders, especially if the were-beings were protected by a few waves of Inferi in the vanguard.

Morgana La Fay raised an eyebrow. At least she didn’t smirk.

“Your mother would be quite close I think to visit. I could also make arrangements for some excellent tutors to become available for you and give you temporary access to one of my personal libraries.”

“Sometimes I wish people do not try to bribe me with books just because I’m a Ravenclaw, Lady Morgane.”

“I am the second highest-ranking figure of the Cult of Osiris, Champion of the Morrigan. I inherited the libraries of my predecessors, which include the first magical Codex written in the Library of Alexandria. I have enough rare books to bribe every historian and lore-searcher wizard on this planet.”

Evidently, seen like that...

“I...I want to think about it.”

“There will be a ball at the beginning of December where many students of the four European schools will be invited. I will be there. You have until then to decide.”

There was nothing more to say and Alexandra had to stay calm to not run in a sprint out of this garden. Wasn’t there a limit to the number of bad news and world-shattering revelations one could receive in a day?

**31 October 1993, Hogsmeade, Scotland**

In hindsight, Gellert Grindelwald was forced to admit, relying on the Elder Wand had been a grave mistake.

The Elder Wand, contrary to what was rumoured, was not an invincible stick. There was no denying it improved by several orders your battle-skills, but it was not invincible. Wizards who wielded could and had been beaten with it. And as history had proved countless times, when someone cut your throat in your sleep, whether your wand was in elder wood or in oak was not going to prevent your demise.

The Elder Wand was a solution of facility. By the numerous Arithmantic calculations and research programs he had directed when he went on to conquer the continent, he had been able to make a certain number of educated hypotheses.

The Elder Wand, for all its formidable power, did in reality three major things. The first, and the one every ambitious wizard wanted to wield it, was to channel the maximum magical capacity from a wizard’s core without any transfer loss. It was prodigious...and it created an immediate symbiotic connection with its new user, ensuring the new Master of the Elder Wand would never be able to use any other wand to its full potential.

The second aspect of the Elder Wand, which was also prized, was manipulation of probability. Every time a wizard cast a spell, the wand somehow estimated the likelihood of the spell accomplishing what it was supposed to do and increased it to near-certainty. Missing your target became almost impossible. Failing to learn a spell on your first try with the Elder Wand was a hint you had no talent for this magical branch. The drawback, of course, was that every wand from that point was going to be unwieldy and as receptive and efficient as a piece of drifted wood.

The third aspect was the cruellest. The moment one’s fingers touched the Elder Wand knowing what it was and desiring it for its power, the mind and the soul desired above everything touching the wand and possessing it. It had seemed a good bargain when he reigned at Berlin. It had felt like a torture as he waited in his cell at Nurmengard.

The Elder Wand was in a way his greatest pride and his greatest failure.

It was his hubris and one of the forces he had devoted his life to.

It was somehow fitting he was going to die against someone wielding it.

In hindsight, it was anything but a surprise. The Exchequer had recovered the extensive research he had compiled on time-manipulation and the Medallions of Chronos he had stolen from an arrogant pureblood Greek family. He was not really useful for their plans, and cheap pawns were made to be sacrificed.

Besides, the blood rituals which had restored his health were not eternal. Already in the last days he had felt their effects decrease. The leash would be tightening once again, new blood rituals would be proposed, in exchange for his abilities and the few secret stashes the Rooks had not managed to discover in forty years of searches.

If he was to die, better to die here than at the hands of Osiris, Master of Darkness.

Maybe the Elder Wand could have protected him again from the ravages of time.

But without a compatible wand, he was weak and his magic was a pathetic rock-launcher when in the 1940s it had been a fountain of enchantments and artifices so beautiful the daylight was faltering against him.

Dark Curses he would have been able to cast with both eyes closed were now exhausting him.

But the worst part was his emotions. Before his imprisonment, he had attained full control of himself. When he felt wrath, his wrath answered and the earth trembled. When he hated someone, the deadliest curses were flowing on his lips. He had swallowed darkness, subdued it and then gave a taste of it to his enemies.

Now, now...what he felt was...dim. Dim and feeble.

His ambitions had turned to ash. Yes, he had toppled the old order but a new one had replaced it. Yes, his name was feared but had many students of the Institute tried to follow on his steps? No, when a new Dark Lord had risen they had all gone to lick the boots of the insane Hoxcrux-master idiot.

Gellert Grindelwald was an old man now. He was in a world that wasn’t his. He should have died at Berlin but his opponent hadn’t given him the chance.

He was the Dark Lord of Nurmengard. He would not die in a cold cell, struggling to eat the prisoner’s meal thrown on the icy floor.

The barrage of spells increased in intensity. A Griffon of light shredded his lance of darkness and fire. Ethereal horses charged the shadows and trampled them. His shields failed one after the another.

There was some joy at duelling once again like this. There was also disappointment. Albus had changed somewhat his style, but his improvements over forty years were few and far between. His former lover was with the legendary focus above the Knights he had trained with, but not overwhelming so. Osiris and Isis were far more dangerous...and ultimately this meant the Dark was going to win.

One way or another.

He saw too late the ice spike and the deflection was done too late.

It pierced his left shoulder.

From that point he could no longer attack, just try to delay the unavoidable.

Knight Priest was gone. Hundreds of wizards were Apparating dozens of feet away.

“This is over,” Albus said.

“For me, it is,” Gellert agreed. “But do not believe my death is the end of the peril to come.”

“I know.”

“Let’s finish this,” the fallen Dark Lord grimaced, fighting desperately not to faint as the pain grew unbearable.

“I can’t...”

And for the first time in his life, Gellert outright broke an oath he had made to the Exchequer.

The price for this was going to be awful...a Necrosis Curse spreading through his entire body...but hopefully it was worth it.

Wasn’t it?

Two words, just two words.

Albus’ visage was one of horror but as the Exchequer curse began its terrible work, a grey-violet ray struck him in the chest and Gellert Grindelwald knew no more.

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“Ariana lives.”

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Alexandra felt completely exhausted when she left Pandemonium for what was hopefully the last time this evening.

“Hey,” the raven-haired girl said awkwardly. “I’m back.”

A red missile collided with her the second after.

“Kiss me Alexandra Potter before I strangle you.”

Alexandra kissed Susan.

And for a long, long time, everything else was forgotten.