**Chapter 106**

**Once and Future King**

**16 February 1995, Houses of Parliament, Westminster Palace, London**

"Consider your challenge accepted."

They shouldn't have been able to hear the voice from here.

Yet they did.

Many shivered, or outright shouted in anger.

And in a lot of eyes, there was a great amount of fear.

The Prime Minister didn't blame them at all.

He knew magic existed, but his main exposition to it had been a cretin of wizard barging into his office and acting in an incredibly patronising manner, before disappearing and never to be seen again. Well, that and several secret offices confirming in private several hours after that no, the whole affair wasn't a joke or an elaborate hoax.

There was nothing private or secret about what was happening here.

It was happening on Westminster Bridge, right next door, there were hundreds of thousands of witnesses, and the participants weren't interested in transforming a teacup into a gerbil.

"What do we do?"

"Nothing," the Prime Minister replied in a whisper. "For now, we wait and see. Given how...limited our knowledge about this...this magic is, watching the capabilities of these...magicians is certainly the most prudent course."

At least they could watch it from here, without going outside. The moment the agitation had begun, countless cameras had been pointed at Westminster Bridge.

This must be one event which was going to be witnessed by millions...both inside and outside the United Kingdom.

"They certainly look very young, these magicians."

That was a good point.

The first actor – the one who had shouted his challenge so loud that the entirety of London had heard him – couldn't be older than eighteen. He was black-haired, broad-shouldered, but there was something...incredibly childish about him. But at least he looked like an adult.

His opponent was far younger, that much wasn't in question. If the magician girl had celebrated her sixteenth birthday, the Prime Minister was ready to sell several bridges...don't ask him where they were located or what kind of problems might await nearby.

She was terribly young, and yet the flashing green eyes and her stern expression made sure she looked older than she really was.

"Since you are the one who issued the challenge," the female 'duellist' declared, as an enormous snowy owl landed on her shoulder, "it is my right to decide the weapons to fight it. Every foci we brought here is authorised, be it wand, sword, or prank items. The duelling platform is the bridge of Westminster. Spectators are urged to get away from it immediately. No outside intervention is authorised. If you try to cheat that way, I will make sure your allies will be sent screaming to Pandemonium."

"Don't think that I need everyone to kill you," the young man snarled, showing an expression that the Prime Minister really, really didn't like to see on any face so young. "That leaves me to decide the stakes. It is to the death. And the winner shall claim the throne of Britannia!"

The young magician girl clicked her fingers, and as she did, lightning illuminated the sky.

"I thought I told you at Venice, Black. True power does not derive from a farcical aquatic ceremony!"

For the first time in many hours, dozens of men and women laughed in the Palace of Westminster.

The irony behind it, alas, seems to have passed way over the head of her enemy.

"You! You were the Black Knight!"

"And throwing many of you in the Grand Canal...'twas but a flesh wound."

This brought more chuckles and sounds of hilarity. Well, at least one of the two had a good sense of humour...

"You were laughing far less when the greatest mage in existence cut your arm off and humiliated you!"

Now that was...a curious statement. The female teenager had both her arms, and if she was wounded, she was hiding it well. Unlike her enemy, whose hands were constantly bleeding...

"Ra is not the greatest wizard of tales and legends," the green-eyed girl commented with a large smile. "That role solely belongs to Gandalf the Grey, praise the *Lord of the Rings*."

"Damn right," the Prime Minister heard a man of the Labour Party nod on his right.

"Gandalf who?"

Quite evidently, some books and movies weren't exactly mandatory material wherever these magicians lived...

"For people who pretend to be protecting the non-magical society from magical threats, you know very little about it," the green-eyed magician told her enemy. "Though apart from your fanatical brainwashing, there isn't a lot left to salvage. The Light failed, and you are a symbol of everything that is wrong with it, Black."

"Don't call me by that name!" the young man hissed in anger. "I have ascended beyond that name! I am Galahad now! I am the Once and Future King! And you are just the latest reincarnation of Mordred who is going to die on this bridge!"

The expression the girl gave him was clearly one reserved for idiots and fools.

"That has to be one of the stupidest things I've ever heard you utter...Black." The black cape she wore was removed, along with several small objects, and directly handed to the white owl, which flew away after being given some petting. "While I am one of the last descendants of Mordred, I am not her, and I've never been her, no matter the few similarities we might have shared."

"Of course you are going to say that! One more excuse to justify your final defeat! And I am Galahad!"

"You are just a parasite," this time the green-eyed girl didn't smile, and her face was absolutely devoid of mercy. "I hope you have enjoyed your life, because it ends here and now."

"Mighty words for someone who is going to be destroyed, body and soul, by Excalibur! I am going to take back my throne, Mordred!"

There was an explosion of light and the male magician attacked.

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

Predictably, the Gryffindor fool charged the moment her provocations were too much for him to handle.

His wand was casting what was certainly a Light war spell, and Excalibur promised nothing but death in his other hand.

It was a ridiculously unsubtle assault.

Alexandra didn't bother raising her sword to counter it.

"Aqua Incarcera."

There was little water on the bridge itself, but the Thames nearby was more than adequate for her needs. And the river was filled with malevolent energy, only too happy to obey her.

Galahad, since he wanted to be known by this name, had been ready to counter a Lightning spell.

In a second, Alexandra had imprisoned him in a large sphere of water, and by the way the Champion of Unity screamed as water entered his mouth, he had not expected that at all.

Bubbles erupted and Excalibur was flailed about, betraying the panic of its wielder.

Alas, the abominable sword was an artefact without equal, and soon enough, the bounds of the water prison began to be destroyed.

Alexandra didn't try to fight it. In fact, she stopped the flow of magic she had poured into the spell entirely.

The spell had been about answering her question, and she had her answer.

"Aqua Odyssea!" The Champion of the Morrigan said, summoning more water as her enemy tore himself out of the prison. "Isaz before, Isaz behind, hear the whispers of the blizzard, answer the prayers of the Jotuns, shiver in the cold! ISAZ!"

Leo Black stumbled out of her first trap...just as she dropped a block of ice upon his head.

"BOMBARDA SOLEM!"

The offensive spell and Excalibur struck again.

But Galahad had been way too slow; for all the 'invincible artefacts' in his possession, the ice block became ice splinters, and at close-quarters, there was no way it could miss the aged body of Leo Black.

One of his arms – the one holding his wand – received several impressive wounds, and the black robe he wore was pulverised.

Blood flowed, and this time it was not the mysterious curse provoked by the Ring. It was truly the Light Champion's blood.

But the Possessed Gryffindor gave her a nasty smirk...and the wounds all closed in the same second.

Alexandra rolled her eyes. She had felt the power call the bastard had urged the Ring to give him. He certainly couldn't do it on his own.

"As you can see your best attacks are just annoyances for me! Now die! ULTIMA SANCTIA INCENDIA!"

It was certainly a lot of power for one spell. It came in the form of golden flames. It was properly cast, and it had properties to incinerate anything conjured by Dark Magic.

Alexandra sighed and she teleported behind her enemy.

Yes, why was she going to stay here and waste her reserves trying to counter something she could easily avoid?

Her eyes widened however, when the follower of Ra didn't cancel his attack, and the onslaught hit the crowd watching the duel.

Many bodies fell along the Thames, and more collapsed, burning in golden flames. A few seconds later, many souls were sent screaming across the Veil.

It was just senseless slaughter...and it made Alexandra very unhappy.

"You are really building yourself an impressive reputation, Black. Reducto!" The spell was easily blocked, but that was anticipated. "Acidum Hasta!"

The curse that the Romans had called the Bitter Spear, unfortunately, didn't prove itself very useful, and Alexandra teleported again to avoid another Light war spell.

"Stop running, coward!"

The anger was too evident in his tone to not exploit it.

"Cowardice, my dear Black?" the Potter Heiress mocked the Archmage's favourite psychopath. "If you consider Apparating and everything based on it cowardice, you should have mentioned it before we began this duel; as long as I stay on this bridge, I am respecting the rules."

"Curse you!"

"Fulgur!" Not too surprisingly, the Knight of the Army of Light reacted like she had offered him a sweet, and tried an anti-Lightning spell...only to understand too late it had been an attempt of hers to bait him. "GLACIAREM DIABOLIS!"

This was the true attack. The Blizzard's Lament erupted from her new Hydra wand, and it shredded everything in its path, conjured into the shape of an enormous wolf. An enormous maw of ice and hellish winter closed upon the body of her enemy...and Excalibur once again cut the attack in two.

"Is that all you can do? My turn, then!"

Galahad disappeared, his posture indicating he had chosen to Apparate...and Alexandra drew her sword and struck, letting her Animagus senses guide her to her target.

The sword broke, of course.

But the Basilisk Slayer had taken that for granted an hour ago.

What she had counted upon had been achieved: a large piece of metal had been embedded in Leo Black's body before the Champion of Unity raged and the metal was propelled back in her direction.

"First blood is mine."

"Ha! Do you think it matters?" The eyes of Ra's follower were really filled with madness, she reflected. "This kind of scratch, I can heal it a million times per day and-"

Alexandra swore that once this duel was over, she was going to borrow a Pensieve, and watch it over and over until she had laughed for a good thirty minutes.

"Yes?" The Champion of Death bared her teeth as Galahad summoned the power of the Ring once more...*and the 'scratch' didn't disappear*. "You were saying, oh, dear third substitute of House Gryffindor?"

"What is this sorcery? The rules said-"

"The rules said we would go into battle with the weapons we have here," Alexandra raised an eyebrow. "You know I am an Animagus. Did you really think that just because Clarent was shattered by your master, I was going to stop using my venom upon my blades?"

And the Queen of the Exchequer had not had a problem with it, seeing as she had allowed Alexandra to drink three esoteric poisons to further bolster this incredible capacity.

The result was quite effective. The wound caused by her blade wasn't large, but it seemed as though black tendrils were busy burrowing themselves into his flesh.

"I am well aware," the Champion of House Ravenclaw continued neutrally, "that if the Grail was within reach, neutralising my poison would be child's play, but that's the problem for you: the Grail isn't here."

"I have Excalibur! I have the Ring of the Niebelungen!"

"Yes, you have," Alexandra chose to let the imbecile have his two seconds where he felt all-powerful and satisfied with himself. "And guess what? The two weren't forged to serve as miraculous cures for everything. They can delay the inevitable...but a delay is the only thing you will have. My venom would have killed you in two minutes maximum. Since you have the artefacts, you are going to take a bit longer to die...unless Ra arrives once again to save your miserable life much like he saved Longbottom's ruined body."

And in the meantime, both the One Ring and Excalibur were going to spend a massive amount of Light magic keeping him alive.

"SOLEM-"

"CREMARE HORRENDUS!" Alexandra shouted, and the Legion's Ashes was unleashed; her enemy having just enough time to conjure a shield and block it.

"I am immune to all Dark Magic, thanks to Excalibur!"

"Somehow I doubt that," as Leo Black's body remained immobile, she conjured a second water prison, and this time she combined it with three other Dark Curses.

"Then you understand nothing! And you have been outmanoeuvred, Black Witch! As we speak, goblins loyal to the Army of Light are storming your vaults! In mere minutes, there will be nothing left of your fortune!"

This was spoken with such ridiculous arrogance...that Alexandra couldn't help but give him a 'you're kidding me, right?' stare.

"Black, I know it is a concept difficult to understand for a Gryffindor like you, but...I never kept the majority of my fortune in the vaults of Gringotts since I've found other alternatives, and since the opening of the Tournament, my gold and most precious treasures are certainly not kept there. That's the first wrong point with the stupidity you said."

"You lie!"

"I do not," the Champion of Death said serenely. "As for my second point...I have made enormous progress in Runes this last year. I took quite a few hours making sure this skill went into increasing the security of my vaults, and no one was informed save my magical guardian. If you really sent goblins to storm my vaults, I hope you promised generous pensions to their families. They are going to need them."

**16 February 1995, Depths of Gringotts Bank, London**

The goblin had been given a name by his clan, but in the last decades, everyone had taken to calling him the Diamond Warlord.

His failures were few and far between, and his raids had grown legendary in their own right.

Of course, the Diamond Warlord had gotten old. Legend or not, time was something no one could fight off for all eternity. But there was always something else to pursue, another contract to complete.

And when the Archmage's argents had announced they wanted him to go after a witch protected by the Zabini, the Diamond Warlord had not hesitated a second. These arrogant wand-wielders believed they could corner the diamond market, despite the goblin nation telling them otherwise?

Not on his watch.

The first step was small and would not be told in the annals of his clans, but he was going to teach all the clans of London that they'd better side with him and the Light, or suffer the consequences.

The next steps would be far more glorious.

Except that in the next minutes, the Diamond Warlord had begun to wonder if he was going to live to see another military operation.

"KEEP YOUR HEADS CALM AND YOUR BLOODLUST IN CHECK!" he roared.

A second later, an enormous construct of pure lightning incinerated over one hundred of his best warriors.

The familiar smell of roasted meat arrived to his nose, and the old goblin grimaced. This was bad, the enchanted armours they had donned were clearly-

"RUN!"

"DO NOT-"

A cascade of a purple-looking liquid materialised over many warriors' heads, and the Diamond Warlord could only watch as many of his best and brightest were promptly liquefied by the cursed liquid.

And naturally in this madness, the legendary bloodlust of the goblin race took over in many minds.

"ATTACK! WE ATTACK! DEATH TO THE OWNER OF THIS VAULT! THE GOBLIN RACE WILL NEVER-"

This time, it was not lightning or acid which stopped the advance cold, but an ungodly amount of fire.

There wasn't enough time to shout a proper Gobbledygook warning before the last metres before the vault itself were transformed into an inferno that nothing but a dragon could have found tolerable, and over twenty goblins became screaming torches.

"WITHDRAW! WITH..." The Diamond Warlord coughed...and felt himself becoming weaker.

The Runes of the vault were shining in bright green lights...how he hated them, those light...this cursed magic that the wand-wielders had always denied his race..

The old goblin vomited.

After several heartbeats, he realised it was his blood he was vomiting.

He was bleeding.

He was bleeding, and several troops were falling, scythed by something his long experience allowed him to recognise...poison.

And the symptoms...

"Withdraw! Someone used a Runic defence that uses a lot of Hydra venom and first-rank Runic Death Wards as the key defence for this vault!"

Why hadn't the Light treasurers hinted something like that was possibly going to be waiting for them? Hydra venom was monstrously expensive, there was no way a young wand-wielder could afford that on her own!

The Diamond Warlord staggered towards the exit, trying not to feel despair over how few of his veterans remained.

And that was then he heard the clangs and the screams. He heard them before he saw them. His vision was diminishing, but he reached the closest junction to see the disaster unfold.

Goblins were fighting other goblins. Dead goblins were emerging from countless tunnels. Poisonous fumes ran everywhere.

The Diamond Warlord had just the time to realise his campaign to loot the vaults belonging to the enemies of the Light had brought doom to the goblin race as a whole before something very heavy and very sharp separated his head from his shoulders.

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

"They are going to need them."

The scowl Galahad made was very much a parody of the expression Leo Black showed when he didn't know the answer to a question in class.

Predictably, the next thing the Champion of Unity did was lash out in a spectacular manner.

Three Light spells were hurled in close succession.

Alexandra teleported once again, before sending a Tickling Charm in his direction.

As the idiot didn't identify it properly, he wasted time and energy raising what had to be a NEWT-level shield.

"Curse you, Mordred! Take this fight seriously!"

"I am taking this fight seriously. Thurisaz." The black-haired witch added five other Runes to her first evocation, and dispersed them around the battlefield. Her opponent parried the first, but failed to see the others which were lying inactive, ready to be triggered. It was one more confirmation Excalibur could only parry the threats which were directly targeting its wielder or what Galahad could perceive as a threat.

"SOLEM SICARIUS!"

And to say some spectators had whispered her lightning war spells in the Coliseum were unnecessary and too dangerous.

Galahad was throwing spells as dangerous right now, but without her control and her accuracy...and without a good idea what he wanted to achieve.

Thank the Morrigan, the crowds had finally understood how bad an idea it was to stay so close to Westminster Bridge. The majority of the men, women, and children there had retreated by several hundreds of metres.

It was good, because whatever Black's attack had been supposed to do, it ended in a rain of fire and light...and the stone and infrastructure that was hit began to *melt*.

"That was dangerous." Alexandra admitted as the Grail-brainwashed wizard Apparated in an attempt to surprise again...and she teleported once more, but not before triggering two Runic traps.

As Galahad had the courtesy to step one, he didn't even have the time to scream before the explosion hit him.

And then Alexandra attacked seriously.

Four more spells, one of them a smoke-filling Charm variant to blind her enemy, and three elemental hexes to sell a convincing spell chain...and her fragile sword stabbed the Light Knight's leg.

The Ravenclaw Champion had to jump away before being able to strike a second time, and then teleport once more, as Excalibur came again for her head.

"I'm going to say it counts as second blood...and it's for me, again."

"We are in a duel to the death! Last blood is the only thing that matters!"

Alexandra feigned a theatrical gasp.

"Are you sure you are Leo Black? That remark sounded almost intelligent..."

"I AM GALAHAD!"

If it wasn't so dangerous, it would be way too funny. For such an ancient soul, Galahad was way too easy to rile up. Alexandra knew from good experience it would have never worked with Professor Flitwick...or any professional duellist.

"Are you sure? I was about to propose you rename yourself the 'Fool of the Rhine'...though 'Fool of the Thames' also sounds appropriate..."

"MAGNA IGNIS! SOLEMN MAGNUS! LUMEN INCARCEROUS!"

As the Queen of the Exchequer had told her, the two artefacts were going to give the Possessed Champion far bigger magical reserves than she had, so Alexandra had decided to go for a strategy of death by a thousand cuts.

So far, Galahad's overpowered attacks proved that her strategy was the good one.

The Light psychopath may have the One Ring and Excalibur, but if you weren't Osiris or Ra, you couldn't throw these army-killing incantations for long. Alexandra knew from deep experience that she couldn't, and it wasn't arrogant to say she was a Lady when it came to raw magical power.

Moreover, Galahad was wounded. The 'scratches', one on the arm, one on the leg, really looked awful, and the last one had not been given more than thirty seconds ago.

It would have been incredibly worse for him if her Animagus form had been a Basilisk, but as it was, Hydra venom was sufficient for the task. With her transfigured eyes, it was clear the poison was spreading in his veins. The sheer power contained by the abominable artefacts was doing all it could to delay the inevitable, but it was no true antidote.

And so Alexandra continued to apply her favourite tactic, teleporting away every time Excalibur came too close, throwing low-powered spells, and launching minor Runic evocations all over the bridge, letting the legendary Gryffindor impulsivity do the rest; half of the time now, Galahad was triggering her traps without any need on her part to lift a single finger.

"EXCALIBUR!" The scream was really powerful...and the Champion of Ravenclaw didn't like that at all. "BY THE WRATH OF THE PENDRAGON LINE, BURN THIS BLACK WITCH!"

This time the light which suffused the blade was bad...no, make it horrifyingly bad.

It was like a counterpart to the Dark Sun had been born.

It was something abominable, power that should never have been granted to mortals; the very power of Innocence and Fate turned to selfish ends.

And Alexandra knew of only one spell which could make an adequate shield against this Light apocalypse.

"FUROREM ECCLESIAL!"

This time there was no attempt to limit her magical power or keep some strength in reserve. If she didn't parry this attack, the Champion of Death knew she was going to die. All her determination, wrath, and refusal to perish because of a stupid artefact that was cheating incarnate poured into the Dark incantation.

It took her less than two seconds to conjure a massive Hydra of pure darkness...which in the next couple of seconds came under attack by an equally gigantic Griffin of flamboyant and sterile Light.

"So this is your Animagus form..."

After discovering Longbottom had been granted the powers of a Nemean Lion, Alexandra had wondered what sort of inner animal 'Leo Black' had been granted after drinking from the Grail.

Well, the young witch had her answer now.

It was rather insulting...for the Griffins.

For what felt like twenty seconds, her protective Dark magic clashed with the Light radiance, and it was a stalemate.

All around them, London seemed to disappear as the elements raged. It began to rain water mixed with blood. The dark clouds were convulsing, and there were more lightning bolts than anyone could properly count.

Many parts of Westminster Bridge were falling into the Thames, and the waters of the river had truly turned a dark crimson.

But for several seconds her Ecclesial spell matched the attack of Excalibur, it was to her advantage. The Hydra of Darkness Alexandra had conjured was hers and only hers. She had not asked for the help of the Morrigan; and while she was sweating, courtesy of having used her power in a smart way, it was an effort she could endure.

It was not so for Galahad and Black's body. It was the power of Excalibur, and it was clear that he had never trained with it before. The wounds she had inflicted upon him widened, and the poison spread in his veins. After all, the One Ring and Excalibur couldn't do two things perfectly at the same time.

And speaking of the Ring...the finger supporting it looked incredibly sick and twisted.

The Curse of the Niebelungen was well and truly active.

"THE LIGHT WILL WIN! YOU CAN'T STOP EXCALIBUR!"

"Be quiet...and die."

Alexandra pushed more magic into her Ecclesial, and the Hydra's heads bit deep into the Griffin's construct, making sure the radiance died with every breath.

"NO! SOLEM-"

And for the first time, Alexandra saw a true opening.

There was no hesitation, no mercy.

"FULMEN IMPERATOR!"

Galahad recognised his mistake, but it came too late.

Excalibur didn't sever the lightning in time, and the fanatical Champion of Unity for the first time took the brunt of one of her war spells.

Alexandra stopped casting the Ecclesial, and released a large breath.

This had not been enough to really tire her, but the Hydra Animagus couldn't truthfully say it had been child's play.

At least-

"Oh you're kidding me..."

The lightning was snuffed out by new lights, and Galahad stood on shaky legs.

"**This duel...is not over**."

His eyes...there was no more reason in them, not that there had been a lot in them when he made his challenge.

The Champion of the Morrigan was going to concede it was impressive he was still able to move, even with all the artefacts and his Griffin Animagus form.

But walking slowly was all Galahad could do right now.

The power he had drawn from the Ring of the Niebelungen had transformed one of his hands into something skeletal.

The injuries she had given him with the Hydra Venom were significantly worse. The aged and improved body the Grail had given him was now bleeding black blood...and no, it wasn't a pun to go with the Black name.

And last but not least, her Fulmen Imperator spell had inflicted terrible damage upon his body. For the first time, his regeneration skills had failed completely. Part of the armour he had worn had melted upon his flesh, merging human skin and wizard-enchanted metal, which had to be really unpleasant, Animagus or not.

The rest of his skin...a good part of the arm holding Excalibur was 'lightly roasted', if the description made any sense. And it was likely the arm which had suffered the least. The other...how Galahad was able to move without screaming in agony was a mystery.

It had destroyed Leo Black's wand.

And yet, Galahad still breathed.

He took a step forwards.

And a lot of blood, red and black, betrayed the sheer effort this simple move had cost him.

"If you weren't such a bastard, Black, I would salute you with my nonexistent hat."

The expression she received for her taunt was a thing of sheer hatred.

"**You are a blight upon creation. You must be eliminated**."

All the Light power left in his body and in the artefacts had to be used to keep him alive now.

"At the risk of saying the obvious...you are dying, Champion of Shattered Glass. No matter what is done, you can't survive these wounds. Using the power of Excalibur like that...yes, it was impressive, but it devoured most of the time you had left on Earth."

For all the suffering, it had to cause him, the dying wizard still made another step forwards.

"**I am going to regain my strength...thanks to a Power you have no counter for**!"

And suddenly Alexandra heard the music...a song which was incredibly beautiful...and which hurt her senses just by existing.

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Galahad could have cried in joy as he saw the Phoenix rush to help him.

He could have cried in joy...but he didn't.

The pain ravaging his body was too powerful.

As it was now, only a monumental effort of will kept him from screaming his pain for the whole world to hear.

It didn't matter.

He may have to grit his teeth and tolerate the pain for a bit longer, but a Phoenix was here.

The Black Witch had mocked him that Ra would not arrive at the last minute, but her insult had proven her undoing.

In the end, he didn't need an Archmage; merely the tears of the holiest magical creature. The tears would heal him, and destroy the venom this abomination had infected him with.

He had just to wait for a few seconds. The Phoenixes were some of Ra's greatest agents, the new power of Light that had risen once the Great Enemy decided to wage his Eternal War.

Death could not touch them. They were the sworn enemies of the Black Wizards and Witches. The Phoenixes could also turn the tide, no matter how many volcanoes the Dark opened to turn Life against Light-

"**MORTALIS NOX**!"

This time, Galahad felt the monstrous magic swirl and Death was unleashed.

There was a breach in creation, and ten thousand ravens croaked mockingly.

The spell was made of utter darkness, with green lightning flashing behind it.

The Phoenix didn't even have time to react as the attack hit true and its feathers of fiery light were devoured by the night.

The Phoenix fell...and soon nothing remained of it.

Nothing...not even ashes.

"I thought I was very clear," the green eyes watched him coldly, and the emotionless stare was truly frightening, "this is a duel between you and me. Your sycophants and allies aren't invited."

"You...you cheated! You summoned the Power of Death!"

"Like you weren't summoning the Power of Unity since the beginning of this duel?"

How? How could she know?

"You really must take me for an imbecile, Black. Did you really think I didn't notice how you tried to purify yourself from the effects of the Niebelungen Curse?"

The Knight of the Army of Light gritted his teeth, and the pain reminded him of the dire situation he was now facing.

It was in fact worse.

The Phoenix had been his salvation, a weapon Mordred should have had no counter against.

"That spell...it shouldn't be able to kill Phoenixes."

"It is the Sovereign Curse of Darkness," the Black Witch corrected, "properly cast, it can do what a Champion wants it to do."

"You...are utterly damned, aren't you? You realise...you have cast an Unforgivable before tens of thousands of witnesses. You will be arrested as soon as this duel is over."

"Whoever is giving orders to the mouth, please stop saying such stupidities. My ears are bleeding from the mountain of nonsensical idiocy."

What? How dare this monster-

"First off, if you had properly followed your Defence against the Dark Arts, you would know the Magic Reaper is not classified as Unforgivable; the spell was thought lost for hundreds of years, and its last single use was Devkins against myself in first year. Since our good Headmaster made sure the Ministry didn't hear of it, the laws didn't change. Therefore one of the most powerful Dark Curses in existence is technically not illegal to cast in Britain."

"Laws can be changed!"

"Maybe," the Black Witch gave him a smile full of fangs and dark joy. "But that brings me to my second point: this duel is still part of the Fourth Task of the European Magical Tournament. And as the Phoenix wasn't part of it, I am authorised to use 'adequate levels of lethal force' against it."

"The Fourth Task is over, Night Queen!"

"Is it? I've yet to hear anything from the Judges. There has been no official ceremony to end it, and the Venetian Carnival's end is still days away. Conclusion: the Carnival is not over, and the Fourth Task continues."

This was just...she couldn't pretend that! It was...it was...

"And the breaches of the Statute of Secrecy?" Galahad took a step forwards, and had to steel himself not to scream. "You are happy to ignore that too?"

"Last time, I checked, I am not the one who turned the Thames red and issued a challenge for a magical duel in the middle of London...moron."

The sheer ridiculousness of the whole affair left him gaping.

"Are you saying...you intend to blame the Light for *everything*?" the rightful King of Britannia hissed.

"Well, you are to blame for *everything*," the Black Witch shrugged. "Don't forget, your Archmage had absolutely no right to intervene during the Fourth Task. Everything which happened can and will be blamed on him...fine, him, and fanatics like you."

"The Archmage is going to slowly kill you. Your torment-"

"-will last an eternity, yes, I know. Please change the tune, I've heard it hundreds of times."

Suddenly, hundreds of swords materialised in the air.

"Now that this little interlude is over and there are no Phoenixes asking for true death, let's continue our duel, Black. Unless you want a few more minutes of rest? You look a bit exhausted..."

The wounds hurt, and the Black Magic surrounding him was blocking more and more of his regeneration abilities.

The Hydra venom...it was killing him...and the rest of his injuries aggravated the problems...his blessed abilities were unable to heal everything.

"I have to use it, then!" The Champion of Unity spat. "IN THE NAME OF THE ROUND TABLE, I CALL YOU BACK! HEAR MY CALL, WARRIORS OF CAMLANN!"

**16 February 1995, Houses of Parliament, Westminster Palace, London**

The Prime Minister had hoped the nightmare was going to end in the next seconds.

It was, with the benefit of hindsight, a naive idea.

The male magician was burned, severely injured, and by all rights, should be nothing but a corpse now.

But he was still alive.

The magician who had already killed hundreds raised his sword, a sword of myths and legends, and reality was torn apart.

Next to Westminster Bridge, the red waters of the Thames were repelled in a gigantic wave as something dark materialised.

The 'something' revealed itself to be an immense island.

"DO YOU RECOGNISE IT, MORDRED? THIS FORTRESS WAS ONCE YOURS, AFTER ALL! THEY CALLED IT AZKABAN, BUT WE BOTH KNOW IT IS A LIE! IT IS CAMLANN! AND NOW, ALL THOSE YOUR TRAITOR OF A MOTHER CURSED ARE MINE TO COMMAND!"

The skies themselves cried, and part of the dark tower they could see collapsed immediately as the waters around it swirled and raged against this violation of all physical laws.

This wasn't what attracted attention.

No, what froze the Prime Minister and most of the people watching this nightmare were the uncountable demons surging towards Westminster Bridge.

Something in a part of his mind screamed that these horrors weren't meant to exist. That their eyes shouldn't be able to see those monsters.

But it was real.

It was real, and the world felt cold...so cold...

One by one, the demons touched the luminous sword.

And one by one, they disappeared, transformed into something else.

Some became brilliant knights in extraordinary silver armour, while others became Giants, or other creatures that no one sane would have believed to be true before today.

In mere seconds, there was an army on Westminster Bridge, where there had been only two magicians. And this army was growing with every second.

But if the man responsible for this insanity expected to create fear in the heart of his opponent, it was a catastrophic failure.

"Is that all?"

"Why, you want more?" the young man laughed, and this was the hilarity of a madman. "All of them! All of those who were cursed are now back with me! They will all serve me! Excalibur will make sure of that!"

"Is that all?"

The calm, bored voice stopped the laughter immediately.

"You stand against the army of Camlann, Mordred!"

"No. I stand against a pathetic remnant of it." The young girl answered. "And I note that once again, the Light has broken all the rules of a formal duel. As such, I can confirm that all of their souls belong to the Morrigan. I thank you in advance for the sacrifice, idiot."

"Vain words!" the black-haired man snarled. "I am transforming Camlann and its army into the Host of Light! You don't have any army left to stop me!"

"Once again, your ignorance is worthy for the ages."

The girl searched for something in her pocket, and then threw it into the Thames, except she threw it on the wrong side of the bridge.

"Unlike you, I believe in contingencies."

There was an enormous geyser.

There was a colossal amount of water bubbling and raging as if more monsters were going to appear.

But what emerged from the crimson river was not a demon or an ancient monster.

It was a ship.

No, it was a warship.

"Knights of the Light, meet the Battleship *HMS Hydra*, formerly part of the High Seas' Imperial German Fleet. You should be honoured; you are the first enemy volunteering to face it. I thank you for your courage, gentlemen."

"This is...impossible..."

It was indeed a battleship. My God, how was it supposed to be here, in the middle of London? In fact, where had magicians even found something like that?

"Admiral Dursley? You may engage the enemy."

And like this nightmare refused to end...

"Hail Hydra!"

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

Alexandra wasn't going to lie.

Watching the aghast expressions of the Camlann Army and their bastard of a Champion was extremely enjoyable.

Yes, it had cost her, personally, uncountable hours of research, an ocean of magical power, and more gold and blood than what was properly reasonable to restore the German Battleships.

But just for the pleasure of seeing their expressions of disbelief, it was worth it.

"Hail Hydra!"

And then there was the best thing: the Army of Light had not seen that coming.

Camlann-Azkaban was a heavily warded prison. There were so many enchantments that if she had tried to hammer its defences, the whole process would likely have lasted hours, assuming she didn't collapse from exhaustion before breaking in.

All of it meant nothing as big guns built to disembowel capital ships of World War One opened fire, and Runic shells with the power to batter into submission modern opponents were hurled at the abomination Galahad wanted Azkaban Prison to become.

The prison was magically tough. The walls and the magic had stood undaunted for centuries; they had to be strong to survive being spatially displaced from Scotland to the North Sea.

It meant nothing when facing the wrath of a Dreadnought.

The first shells caused such a massive wave of destruction that the Light ritual that had started immediately stopped.

The second bombardment threw a significant amount of black stone away into the Thames, and made sure most of the transforming Dementors were instantly disintegrated by overwhelming firepower.

The third salvo launched by the guns was so effective many wards began to buckle, and then the first magical internal explosions began.

They were big, these explosions.

They also rang out loudly, and with them the funeral song of the Light was playing, in a cacophony of screams, shrieks, and annihilation.

One salvo after another, the *HMS Hydra* destroyed what had been the fortress of Camlann, the citadel the Ministry had used as a deplorable and disgusting prison known as Azkaban.

And as the enormous walls collapsed, as the very cells were opened to the skies before being inundated by crimson waters, the Dementors which had not been returned to their former mortal bodies *burned* in Dark Magic.

"Did you know it was going to happen, Morgane of Avalon?" the Potter Heiress murmured.

On the face of it, the Champion of Unity was a spiteful and unpredictable thing.

But the Exchequer was not a young organisation. They knew what happened when the Light wanted to win at all costs. Moreover, Excalibur and Camlann were tied by magical bonds that fifteen hundred years had not been sufficient to erase. And the idea of cursing the warriors who had fled the battlefield was a dangling bell if there ever was one. It had been an insult and perfect bait for the followers of Ra. The Archmage was cunning enough to not fall into this trap. Unfortunately for him, Galahad wasn't.

"Cease fire," the Champion of the Morrigan ordered as more internal explosions resonated, and Azkaban itself disintegrated into a pyre of black flames and dark lightning.

But for all this, Alexandra was really pleased to see the fortress-prison was no more. Magical Britain should never have used this horrible place as a prison; there was needlessly cruel imprisonment, and then there was *that*. Dementors should have been kept far away from any human, not allowed to devour people's emotions and transform criminals into something worse than monsters.

The Exchequer had not done it. It was British wizards and witches who had made that awful decision; and the Wizengamot had approved it.

"Are you sure? There are hundreds of enemies on the bridge..."

"I am sure." Alexandra told Dudley. "The enemy forces have just realised they have...a little problem."

The Light imbued in the goblins, knights, and many other enemies present...it was no more.

And as they had tried to escape Death once again, the Morrigan was really, really not happy with these enemies.

It was easy to spot it when you knew what to look for. First, they lost the radiance which had kept the darkness at bay. Then they began to age. Wrinkles which had not been there seconds ago were becoming visible. Their armour was becoming too heavy for their ageing bodies. The sharp weapons were becoming rusty.

Galahad had gambled everything he had left on a massive miracle, and the *HMS Hydra* had ruined his gambit.

Speaking of the Possessed Gryffindor...well, some of the injuries caused by her lightning spell had healed, the Ravenclaw witch could give him that.

But pushing so much Light magic into desperate gambles had made sure the Hydra venom did even more damage.

And as the Light faltered, the body of Leo Black was breaking apart.

Excalibur, invincible weapon of the Archmage, was still an artefact with no equal...but it was also being used like a cane, for its wielder's legs were shaking badly. With each heartbeat, the last forces of Ra's lackey were abandoning him.

"I am going to deal with them."

"You are going to deal with my army?" the voice of the boy who had been Sirius Black's son was...tainted with folly. "Without your big ship, you are nothing! You are alone!"

The Potter Heiress rolled her eyes.

"Let's stay serious, oh Prince of Fools. You don't have enough for a regiment here. And they have no magic left. There isn't even a single wizard in that crowd. You are the only one who can meet that definition...and you are no longer strong enough to walk, never mind fight."

Alexandra drew her imperfect blade again, and took a fighting stance.

"You broke every oath you ever made, survivors of Camlann. I am Alexandra Potter, and I have seen the graveyard of this dreadful day."

They hesitated. There were two Giants, colossi of flesh, with barbaric armour covered in skull trophies, and many dozens of goblins with axes and halberds. There were knights in heavy enchanted armour, though all the magic had abandoned them, and now remained tarnished protections.

All of them, to the last, were bleeding from their hands, and several were in pain. The Curse of the Niebelungen had bitten deeply into their souls, and those had been severely cursed in the first place.

"KILL HER! KILL HER AND YOU WILL HAVE YOUR SALVATION!"

The words returned some ferocity to their eyes. Bloodlust returned where there had been only fear.

They screamed long-forgotten battle-cries.

"No. There is only Death awaiting you now...last army of the Light."

**16 February 1995, Rome, Italy**

"Your daughter really doesn't think like most witches."

Lilian chuckled. The annoyance wasn't great, but it was there in her Mistress' tone.

"Some might think you are a bit peeved my daughter managed to hide one of her tricks from you."

"Of course, I am," Angelica Sforza admitted with a grimace, which was surprising for those who were used to her cheerful and seductive smiles. "I told the King we had discovered every stratagem and contingency the Champions had ready if the Fourth Task exploded in our faces. That one Champion managed to hide a World War One Dreadnought from us and we only discovered it because she needed a special Portkey to bring it back to London...I am really not happy with this revelation."

The young female vampire chuckled again, baring her teeth before sipping a drink where blood and wine had been combined to form an original tonic.

"Where did she find the Dreadnought in the first place?" the red-haired Enchantress asked, while keeping her eyes on the magical images showing her daughter wading in the blood of her enemies. "I never put much thought into the idea, but I suppose it isn't exactly the kind of thing you purchase at the nearest port."

And yes, wading in the blood of her enemies was done literally in this case.

The troops transformed back from their Dementor curses were slaughtered on Westminster Bridge, as strike after strike, Alexandra dismembered them. Limbs were flying, blades were levitated before being turned on their owners, and a giant received a spear of metal to the eye, screaming before damaging more of the bridge and falling into the Thames.

"Scapa Flow," the Headmistress of the Scuola Regina revealed. "Once our agents found out she had a Dreadnought, it wasn't that difficult to retrace the origin of the warship. That's the good news."

"And the bad news?" Lilian asked as several knights discovered too late that yes, a mere scratch was enough to kill you in a minute if the blade was covered in Hydra venom.

"The bad news is that your daughter has been very busy, and she didn't limit herself to one Dreadnought. There are several warships missing from the seabed of Scapa Flow, and that's the only place we have checked so far. Unless the Queen is able to obtain some answers, we are going to have a need for thousands of agents searching for warships we missed across the Isles and beyond."

"I think," she tried very hard not to chuckle as the second and last Giant fell, impaled by so many blades it couldn't regenerate anymore, "that for all the Dreadnoughts my daughter stole, this '*HMS Hydra*' is the only operational warship she has. Otherwise she wouldn't have asked for some improved Portkey capable of handling enormous masses for emergency transportations. Alexandra would have used another Dreadnought, wherever she hid them."

"That's a good point," Angelica Sforza conceded before wincing.

"What it is?"

"I remember saying a couple of years ago to the Queen herself, that I doubted her ability to find a successor that was suitable. Mainly because we Knights are not so easily impressed, and there were few witches outside of our organisation which had done magical deeds worthy of our attention."

Yes...this past conversation, now that her Enchantress Mistress had proper hindsight, was definitely ironic.

"I have a feeling we aren't the only ones my daughter is impressing as we speak."

With the giants dead, the slaughter of Westminster Bridge had transformed into a methodical bloodbath.

Alexandra was advancing towards the surviving forces of Galahad. It was a ruthless elimination. Hundreds of blades surrounded her daughter, a small forest of steel, and every time there was an opening in the wall of shields and weapons, the improvised projectiles were stabbing and hacking their way through.

When she was in danger, Alexandra Apparated several steps away, easily avoiding the few arrows and other unpleasant surprises, before resuming the massacre.

There had been easily close to a thousand enemies at the beginning; now there couldn't be more than three hundred left breathing.

And Galahad couldn't support his troops anymore. This was extremely enjoyable to watch. The mighty Champion of Unity, who had arrogantly done more to break the Statute of Secrecy than the Exchequer had in the last hours...was using Excalibur like a walking stick, and even then he was forced to remain immobile, as Death came ever closer to him.

"Lily, you daughter is undoubtedly busy *terrifying* most of the non-magical rulers of this world," the Venetian Enchantress commented with evident amusement.

"Is it going to be a problem?"

"It depends...if you want to help Stella Zabini deal with the mountain of parchments she will have to deal with."

The red-haired female vampire winced in turn.

"Assuming the world survives the next days, of course."

"Yes," Angelica Sforza acknowledged, "assuming *that*."

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

The five last men, unlike the others, tried to run.

It certainly had everything to do with the Light compulsion which had broken seconds ago.

If Alexandra had to guess, it had been some sort of Charm empowering the cowards with the fanaticism burning in Galahad's heart.

But all Charms could be overwhelmed if the targets were in severe emotional turmoil, and apparently, these last five warriors of a long-dead age were terrified enough to begin running.

They didn't run for long.

The mad Champion was in the way, and when they tried to go past him, Excalibur was once more wielded in anger.

There were four strikes.

None missed.

The last man fell to his knees, his hands joined in a familiar sign of supplication. He was begging for mercy.

Galahad gave him none.

And as Excalibur drank from Camlann's survivor, Alexandra summoned his soul and sent him to the Morrigan's judgement.

Silence fell on Westminster Bridge.

Okay, maybe not exactly silence. The two Giants had caused a lot of damage when they fell after she struck them down, and many stones were falling from the damaged bridge.

Alexandra didn't know who was responsible for it in the non-magical administration, but clearly they were going to have to spend a lot of money rebuilding this bridge.

This was...a mess, and that was probably the polite way to describe this disaster.

There were corpses and debris everywhere, and her Dreadnought sailing on crimson waters which looked like a hellish river did not improve the painting.

All this Death...it empowered her, but it did not warm her heart.

The bloodbath of today had been neither the Morrigan nor Alexandra's decision.

Many of these oath-breakers could have lived to see another dawn.

But the empty promise Galahad had given them had been too much for them.

That, and many had been deserters of Arthur's army. The Ravenclaw Champion had not seen a single banner of a black dragon or the symbols which were so common among Mordred's.

Alexandra breathed out.

It was not over, alas.

The skies were darker than black ink, as the whole world seemed to end in a spectacle of lightning, fire, and desolation.

The shrieks of the souls dragged to Pandemonium echoed, and many of the living were turned mad by it.

There were waves of magic spreading in an uncontrollable fashion across London and beyond.

It was so bad Alexandra had to give Dudley the command to activate the super-Portkey obtained from the Exchequer a second time. The *HMS Hydra* was most useful away from this folly, not dragged to the bottom of the Thames by the nightmares now manifested by the Curse of the Niebelungen.

The Dreadnought vanished into the shadows, and just like that, there were only two persons still alive on Westminster Bridge.

"It is Camlann all over again, isn't it?"

Her words hadn't been intended for anyone, but Galahad heard them. And predictably, his soul of Gryffindor considered it an insult.

"My reign won't end on such a cruel day, Mordred!"

"Your reign, as you say, has not even begun," the Potter Heiress retorted in a bored tone. "If your coronation happened here and now, I think you would win something just for the performance. Mere minutes with a crown upon your head, and already destined for a shallow grave? That has to be some kind of record!"

"You find it funny? You caused all those deaths! Everything is your fault!"

Was he serious? That was just...raw idiocy at its finest.

"You summoned all those warriors, oh wielder of Excalibur. You. Not me. You were ruthless enough to send them against me, knowing they didn't stand a chance. Don't come complaining now that they are dead. You are not sorry they are dead, oh little butcher serving the Archmage. You are sorry they couldn't kill me."

The expression of hatred, sheer fury, and disgust which appeared on his face told Alexandra she had struck something painful and true.

"Anyway." The Champion of Death raised her blade and her wand in a traditional salute. "I suppose you have one more miracle in reserve. Bringing Azkaban Prison here and transforming it into your perfect citadel of Light was an interesting strategy, but no one sane would have relied upon it working flawlessly. Where is the next miracle, Leo Black?"

"MY NAME IS GALAHAD!"

The shout was hateful, powerful, and everyone in London heard it.

But it was followed by no Charm, Light War-Spell, or any kind of offensive magic.

The Light of Excalibur was nothing but a candle compared to the brilliance it had at the beginning of the duel.

"So you don't have anything better to fight me?" Alexandra shook her head. But it remained important to anger him so that the crazy Champion couldn't make a proper strategy. "I have to say, it is rather...pathetic. Without your toys, I bet any prankster of our fair school would have done a better job than you did."

"**MY REIGN IS NOT OVER**!"

The Knight of the Army of Light charged, and for a few seconds, the Light burned again.

It wasn't powerful, but it was a small bonfire, and as the hand wielding Excalibur was also the one which had the Ring donned upon a finger, it gave an arm some semblance of vitality...at the price of the rest of his body.

Still, he remained a threat.

"**DIE, MORDRED**!"

The radiance created a perfect Light shield, one which would likely be resistant to any Dark or any truly harmful spell she had in her arsenal.

Alexandra frowned...and then in an instant, she chose her next course of action.

"EXPELLIARMUS!"

Her enemy didn't see it coming...and he had no more wand, as it had been incinerated what felt like hours ago.

As such, there was only thing that her Disarmament Charm could go after...Excalibur.

The abomination shaped into a sword flew metres away before colliding with the stones of Westminster Bridge.

"No! He promised! He-"

"SECARE!" Alexandra barked.

This time, she definitely poured too much of her magic into the advanced Severing Curse.

But the green-eyed girl wasn't about to take any chance...

And there was something extremely satisfying about separating Galahad's hands from the rest of his body.

**16 February 1995, Houses of Parliament, Westminster Palace, London**

The darkness began to fade away.

The Prime Minister doubted he was the only one who made sounds of relief as the lightning storms dissipated and the nightmare at long last began to end.

The waters of the Thames were still crimson red, but most of the other...anomalies which had been scaring him were no more. The demons had died or gone missing, and he could only hope it was the first and last time he would see them.

The scale of the damage done to Westminster Bridge and the immediate area next to it had to be seen to be believed, but that could be repaired in time...if everything returned to normal.

If-

The sword of the female magician struck Excalibur.

A section of Westminster Bridge disappeared into a pillar of apocalyptic light.

It was as if an immense fire was born, one that couldn't be extinguished.

For a moment the Prime Minister and every member of his government could swear they saw a horrible maw radiating like a million suns open in the Thames River...and it lasted long enough for it to sound all too real.

Then the maw shrieked and closed...as more sections of the bridges fell into the river.

And suddenly what felt like all the light magic in this world was expelled at once towards the sky.

It was akin to the departure of ten thousand rockets at once, and the thunderous roar which accompanied it increased this perception.

The pillar soared and roared...and then it ended as abruptly as it had begun.

There was silence...only broken by pieces of metal – all that remained of the legendary Excalibur – colliding with the parts of Westminster Bridge which had survived the colossal explosions.

For several seconds, everything was silent.

It was the victor of the duel who broke it.

"I suppose there's some ironic poetry to it. Clarent was broken, and now Excalibur is no more." The magician who had called herself Alexandra Potter gave a grimace as this time, the broken sword in her hand didn't repair itself. "I am seriously going to have to learn how to forge my own weapons. I seem to destroy them way too fast."

Then the black-haired girl teleported to the other side of the bridge, where her dying opponent was trying to crawl away, leaving a trail of dark blood behind him.

"What were you saying about your reign, oh Once and Future King?"

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

Alexandra wasn't going to deny it felt really good to see Galahad crawl away like an enormous slug.

Leo Black had annoyed her for several years, and after the Tournament had begun, he and the soul in control after the Third Task had presented a threat she had taken seriously.

The Potter Heiress felt relief too. Assuredly, Ra didn't need Excalibur to kill her, it just made the odds even more one-sided in his favour, but the Archmage had still destroyed Fragarach with it. And just feeling this Light abomination had been an unpleasant experience. The rules-breaking artefact was destroyed; good riddance was the main thought in her head.

And speaking of artefacts...there was a second Light-infused creation to deal with.

And as important as it was to deal with Black, the Ring took priority.

Alexandra could feel its malevolence; if she didn't act here and now, sometime in the near future, and likely sooner than later, someone was going to wield the Ring and usher in another era of disaster.

Yet as she advanced towards it, the Light magic began to press against her mental defences.

The Ravenclaw Champion raised her Occlumency and used the strength granted by her inner animal...and it was barely sufficient to keep the equivalent of a battering ram at bay.

**Wield me**.

The creation of Ra didn't do subtle. For all her concentration, the Ring was able to send her visions of herself standing triumphant upon a throne of onyx and gold.

"No. My choice is Galadriel's." Thank you, Tolkien, for inventing her. "I refuse your power. I won't be your puppet."

**WIELD ME!**

Sauron and Morgoth damn it, what kind of abomination had Ra forged upon this world?

"No." It was getting harder. "CORVUS CURSOR!"

Conjuration was something she had yet to touch, never mind master, but being the Champion of the Morrigan offered several major advantages.

In a flash, she was able to create a massive raven, one with eyes shining with the power of Death.

Taking great care to seize Black's severed hand, and not to touch the Ring, Alexandra placed the limb and the cursed artefact in its claws as it flew before her.

"Venice may be frozen in time, but it is not going to last. Traditions are important. Send the One Ring to the fire. Make sure it is destroyed and no one else will be able to use its damned power. Send the Ring of the Niebelungen to its doom."

The raven croaked and gave her a human-like nod, before flying away faster than any bird possibly could.

It flew towards the south. Towards the fateful end of a long Quest.

Alexandra sighed in relief...and grinned as suddenly, the waters of the Thames were losing their crimson colour.

Yes, second after second, the curse was fading. The Thames River was not condemned to look like a lake of blood anymore.

Everything was returning to what it should be...save the Dark Sun above her head. That one hadn't gone away, alas...or fortunately. It meant Venice was still frozen, and the Grail hadn't exploded yet.

"Excalibur is dealt with. The One Ring is on its way to Mount Doom. Now I suppose I can deal with you, Black."

Alexandra turned around...but the sight she was greeted with was not the one she had been expecting.

Someone was providing healing to the follower of Ra.

And there was no mistake about the identity of the meddler.

"Dumbledore."

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

Morgane Rys'Ygraine Avalon couldn't help it. She laughed.

"Oh, Dumbledore, you poor meddlesome fool..."

There had always been a possibility the Headmaster of Hogwarts would try to intervene in the duel – that was why there had been several artefacts waiting only for her orders to be triggered at once.

But this meddling at the last minute? When the outcome was already decided no matter what you did?

This was...this was exactly the kind of fiascos Ra was famous for engineering in the last centuries. The Light couldn't lose; therefore the Light wizards intervened any time they wanted to, no matter that their deeds were likely going to turn a bad situation into an unmitigated disaster.

Morgane didn't insult every 'Light Lord's' actions she had the displeasure to witness, but here, really?

The Defeater of Grindelwald wasn't thinking logically. Did he really think Alexandra Potter was going to thank him? If he had thought about it for a second, would the former Supreme Mugwump have enjoyed it if, during the climatic Berlin duel, Albus Dumbledore had to watch as Exchequer Knights treated Grindelwald's injuries?

The answer to these questions, obviously, was 'no' and 'no'.

But beyond that...there was the sheer illogicality of it. Galahad was just dead weight now. His hands were gone, and while good prostheses existed, the Light had never been as good as the Exchequer in that field. Still, first-rate replacements for missing limbs that you could use to channel magic were extremely rare, and produced for extremely wealthy wizards and witches. Ra had the money for that sort of thing...but he was more likely to kill Galahad with his bare hands if he happened to emerge unscathed from the Time-Turner trap.

But let's assume the prostheses could be made and given to Galahad...they wouldn't erase the devastating damage from Hydra venom.

Yes, the pet Phoenix of Dumbledore was right now crying upon his master's orders and countering the worst of the venom's effect...but it was way too late. Hydra venom was a very nasty weapon for a reason; that it killed so quickly was in general considered a mercy, given how painful it would be for its victims otherwise as it destroyed everything inside a wizard's body.

That would have already been a death sentence for any wizard, but Galahad had also drunk from the Grail in this body, meaning his life-expectancy had been cut in half, optimistically. And he had donned the Ring, which wasn't yet destroyed, meaning the Curse was still destroying him, body, mind, and soul.

The shock of Excalibur being destroyed, a weapon he had been tied to magically and spiritually, was just the last blow.

It simply wasn't worth it to save anyone from Death at that point.

"I think it is time for you to intervene," the Queen of the Exchequer didn't turn her head to deliver her 'suggestion'. "Invite the Champion of Chaos to join you."

"Do you want him dead?"

"Oh, I don't think it is going to come to a battle." Morgane smiled. "But if for some reason Dumbledore is stupid enough to want a fateful duel...someone will take care of him while you accomplish your task with the other Champions."

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

"Dumbledore."

Sure enough, it was the leader of the Order of the Phoenix, the Defeater of Grindelwald...and the Headmaster of Hogwarts.

Some part of Alexandra's mind wanted to pretend she was surprised, but she was not.

When it came to the survival of his precious Gryffindors, the silver-bearded wizard was always there, prompt to save the skin of his favourites – in that, he was exactly like Ra, even if both were unlikely to admit the similarities which existed between them.

"What do you think you are doing?" the Potter Heiress glared at the Phoenix, which had just by crying gave another respite to Black. "The duel is not over."

"The duel is over, Miss Potter."

He tried for an authoritarian tone. And of course he tried to intimidate her with power.

It failed.

When you had been on the receiving end of Ra's, everything else seemed unremarkable.

"Who died and made you a referee, Dumbledore? The duel was to be fought to the death. As a certain Potion Master of House Slytherin repeated so often in our classes, are you such a dunderhead that you can't understand simple instructions?"

"There are special circumstances-"

"I bet," Alexandra replied sarcastically, "apparently, whether you are named Galahad or Black, it seems that rules are something that can be ignored as long as you are on the winning side. If there's a rule your favourite has NOT violated during this duel, I have no idea what it is."

"He will be punished."

Alexandra laughed. The four words were just too funny.

"He tried to poison the entire House of Ravenclaw over a year ago, and he had yet to be Possessed by a malevolent Knight of the Round Table. Try again."

"Don't you have any mercy, my dear girl?"

"I can give mercy, yes," the bastard had the gall to smile, "but only for those who deserve it. Whatever the name of this Champion of Unity, he was never deserving of any mercy."

"I said he will be judged for what he did."

"That would be an interesting statement...if I had a reason to trust a single word coming out of your mouth."

"Careful, Miss Potter." The smile was long gone, and the voice was now filled with anger. "You don't want me as an enemy."

"First, it is Heiress Potter." Alexandra rolled her eyes. "And frankly, Professor? Based on your past and present actions, I don't know how you can be something else but an enemy to me."

The old man gaped, though it was brief and rapidly hidden.

What, did he really think she was going to beg for his forgiveness?

"I have heard enough. I am going to take him with me to Saint Mungo's. I don't think even you are willing to storm the hospital to assuage your petty vengeance?"

And as his Phoenix had stabilised the crippled Champion enough, it was likely Galahad was going to live another day...

"I won't. But if you take him away today, I will make sure you will regret it."

With the imminent destruction of the Army of Light and the Trinity, the Order of the Phoenix was the only Light force left on the battlefield. For now, Alexandra hadn't moved against them, but if Dumbledore was willing to be an enemy, they wouldn't live the year.

"You may have won this duel, Black Witch, but I won't let you establish the reign of the Dark over these isles."

"It is amusing," Alexandra smirked, "that you think you are going to be in a position to oppose me or anyone else. Run, Dumbledore. I hope you enjoyed this duel as a spectator, because next time, you will be my opponent."

There was a miniature pyre of Light, and Dumbledore disappeared along with Galahad.

Three seconds later, there were two familiar magical signatures behind her.

"I have to give it to you, Death," Lyudmila Romanov, Champion of Chaos, declared in a fake pious tone. "When it's time to fight, you don't mess around. Nice collateral damage, by the way."

Alexandra snorted.

"I would have preferred killing fewer people and actually killing the bastard." The young witch sighed. "But what is done is done. At least the plan is still feasible. Excalibur is broken."

"Yes," Lucrezia nodded with a satisfied smile. "The first step worked...we can now open the way to the Tomb of Alexander."

**Author's note**:

This is where chapter 106 of The odds were never in my favour ends.

The Quest of the Dark Champions and some of the repercussions of the destruction Galahad unleashed against Alexandra in vain attempts to kill her will continue in chapter 107, whose provisional title is: *The Conqueror's Grave*.

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