**Chapter 114**

**Return to the Coliseum**

**1 March 1995, Alexandra's Villa, Coliseum Valley, Lands of the Scuola Regina, Magical Republic of Venice**

For once, Alexandra was definitely not the first to wake up.

Though it must be acknowledged that she had ended up going to bed after midnight, and it was after a lot of long-range Apparition, sometimes bringing someone with her.

The green-eyed witch had really needed the six...no, the seven hours of sleep.

Alexandra enjoyed the silence for a few seconds, then threw away the sheet before yawning.

Out of the bedroom, naturally, Atalanta waited on her perch, freshly returned from her hunts and her messenger duties. It was evident that her beautiful owl had waited for her to wake up before enjoying her usual diurnal rest, and so the Ravenclaw Champion offered her some light petting. The grooming of the white feathers and the other attractive parts of her avian partner would wait for another moment of the day.

The perch was moved to the improvised owlery, where Atalanta wouldn't be disturbed for as long as she wanted to sleep, and the Champion of Death went on to find her girlfriend.

She found her on the villa's balcony. It wasn't hard to see why. It had snowed again during the night, and the entire valley had almost disappeared under a white mantle.

The Coliseum had been protected by its enchantments, of course, but the villas on the hills had been redecorated winter-style, and if the Charms had not ensured the temperatures stayed comfortable inside the Champion homes, Alexandra was sure they would have not enjoyed the bite of the cold.

There were some boats on the river, though. There were traces of human activity around the Coliseum too. Not everything was silent and calm, and it was just a prelude to what was coming later today.

"I thought I would have to return and wake you up," Susan said after a rather chaste kiss.

"You almost had to," the Hydra Animagus informed the red-haired Badger. "I'd rather it not be known that one of my key advisors arrived in the morning to find me soundly sleeping."

Susan chuckled.

"I'm sure Lady Zabini would take it in good humour. After taking several compromising photos, of course."

"Of course," Alexandra drawled.

Both witches looked deep in each other's eyes, and both found what they sought in the other's irises.

"So," Susan turned her head to look at the Coliseum again. "Do you think the Judges are going to be as vicious as ever and begin the Fifth Task while everyone is left completely unprepared?"

The former Night Queen raised an eyebrow.

"You really have unpleasant and vicious ideas, my dear Badger."

"And you, my Hydra, have grown used to not answering my questions."

"Oh, yes." She avoided Susan's hand easily. "And to answer your question, no, the Judges are not going to begin the Fifth Task today or even this week."

"You really seem sure of that."

Alexandra shrugged.

"The benefits of being the Lady Protector, Susan, is that I have a lot of information passing through my hands. That or someone allied to me is relaying the news in short order. And because of that, I know that there are unresolved problems concerning the number of spectators who will be present for the next Task."

"The number of spectators? Not how much of a bloodbath it could be?"

The Champion of the Morrigan gave an ironic smile.

"That part has been already solved. The Judges and the personnel involved agreed to honour the not-so-polite requests of magical and non-magical governments of the Italian peninsula. The lethality of the Tasks is going to be enormously decreased."

"Wow. Just like that?"

"Define 'just like that'," the Basilisk-Slayer snorted. "As one of the swords who made sure plenty of Champions died in a very unlamented manner, I am very well aware the Tasks were dangerous, but a lot of deaths are due to the Champions themselves."

"True," The Hufflepuff substitute conceded. "Still, I seem to remember a certain Cockatrice during the First Task, to name just one bloody example."

"It wasn't like we weren't informed of the risks...or some Champions weren't warned of the consequences if they tried to kill me."

Frode Falk and his friends had been willing to do anything to end her. That kind of Light bigotry had exploded in their faces and ensured their lives were very short indeed.

"But yes, the Judges seem to have really heeded the warning and lowered the lethality. I don't know what they planned to replace it, but I know the Fifth Task which was supposed to happen this month has been cancelled. They are going to organise something completely new."

"Thus my opinion they may try something surprising." Susan giggled.

"If it was only up to the Judges, I think you may very well be right," Alexandra admitted. "But given the size of the Coliseum, I think Headmistress Sforza wants to recoup some of the financial investment they poured into the stones. And honestly, Susan, it's Wednesday. Most wizard and non-wizard families have other things to do today. Informing them without warning that yes, there is a Task they must attend to...it would risk presenting nothing but empty seats to the world. There are many things you can push for during an inter-school Tournament, but I'm not sure a silent Coliseum is one of them."

"It could generate some...annoyance, yes." Her girlfriend gave her one of her brilliant smiles. "But you don't know what it is about?"

"No, I don't. The arena itself had, well, nothing, last time I checked. The Citadel of the Third Task has long been dismantled, and before this morning, I saw no one working outside. This doesn't mean they aren't working upon it, of course. We both know there is a vast complex right under the arena."

"Yes. And we haven't heard any magical leviathans lately."

Alexandra rolled her eyes sarcastically.

"Susan, we were just mentioning the Judges had to limit the number of wounded. I admit they will want to keep their Tasks spectacular affairs, but bringing Chimeras and other monsters is just asking for a repeat of the First Task. And frankly, it has already been done. Repetition isn't what the public wants."

"By that standard, that means no Runes Duels anymore."

Yes. Or at least, no Task which focused so much on the noble art of Runes.

The same was true about Potions and Alchemy. The brewery processes had been used before, and they wouldn't take centre stage anymore. Was it possible Potions use would be allowed in one of the – possibly – three Tasks which remained? Certainly. Would they spend more hours concocting something before a crowd of tens of thousands? Bloody unlikely.

And as for the Carnival and the Courts, fortunately or unfortunately, that gondola had sailed away on crimson canals.

"We best prepare, Stella Zabini is almost on the doorstep."

It was time to dress up, and then breakfast. It wouldn't do to face the Judges with an empty stomach.

**1 March 1995, Scuola Regina, Magical Republic of Venice**

Cho didn't miss her boyfriend's grimace when Alexandra Potter entered the Breakfast Hall, resplendent in long black robes and some discreet jewellery around her neck and her wrists.

"Smile, Cedric. She isn't going to eat you."

"Easy for you to say. You aren't the one who will descend into the arena with her today."

Cho sighed.

Why, oh why, did boys have to be so dramatic about everything?

"Cedric, be logical for a few seconds. Save for the press and the students of the Scuola Regina, there's no one to fill the Coliseum today. The Judges want all of you to be present because they will tell you something about the Fifth Task, but the competition isn't going to be today. The Artificers and the Enchanters are good, but not so good as to replace an empty arena with grand decor like they did during the Third Task."

"Fine, there won't be any Task today. But the Champions are still going to be there-"

Cho made a silent nod and turned her head towards a table about twenty metres away. It was the scene where the Champion of Ravenclaw was busy making small talk with Angelina Johnson and Blaise Zabini while filling her plate and her glass.

The ambiance was very relaxed, with MacDougal laughing at something the new Gryffindor Champion had just said.

"I suppose we won't see her inviting Montague to her table," everyone had limits, and Montague would be a serious one, "but you don't see anyone preparing knives for the Task announcement."

Viktor Krum had finished eating and was seemingly participating in a debate which included Eleonora da Riva of all people. Romeo Malatesti was trying to humour several Durmstrang students, and if the chuckles were any indication, he was succeeding.

"Now that we have established that there is nothing to worry about from the Tournament for today or the rest of the week, will you tell me what is bothering you this morning?"

Cedric grimaced again.

"Fine...my father lost his job. Bones fired him yesterday."

The Ravenclaw student was absolutely unsurprised by that revelation. The only surprise was, essentially, that it had taken so many days. Alexandra Potter and Amelia Bones must not have wanted to appear too radical in their internal policy shifts.

"Err...yes. And?"

"And? I'm sure Potter was involved!"

"Does this certainty come from your father's words?"

Cedric's eyes narrowed.

"She told you."

"She didn't," Cho replied truthfully. "The Lady Protector has better things to do than informing me hour after hour of what politics she wants from the Ministry of Magic."

If there was someone in this school with the influence to have that sort of privilege, it was Susan Bones, and it was because she was in a unique position, being the future Lady Bones, the liaison with the Minister, the girlfriend of the Lady Protector, and a confident.

Cho Chang did not have that kind of access, and to be honest, she didn't want it.

"Then how?" Hufflepuffs were rarely in very bad moods, but when they were, it was better to not dance around the subject for too long.

"Your father made it loud and clear that as long as he would be a senior official anywhere in the Ministry, he would make it his mission to 'put the creatures in their rightful places', Cedric," the Alchemy student explained patiently. "And anyone who does not have a one hundred-percent pure human ancestry is a creature. With the Ministry and the Wizengamot opening their doors to Leprechauns and other species, was it such a surprise that his positions were going to make him unpopular?"

"He's fighting against the dangers threatening Wizarding society!"

Yes, one could almost hear the words his father had repeated over and over, both in front of journalists of the *Daily Prophet* and other people.

"Did he crush a Centaur Uprising recently?"

"I'm not joking, Cho."

"Do you hear me laughing?" Her tone and her expression must have been sufficient to give a hint or two about her true feelings. "Seriously, Cedric. The old Department for the Control and Regulation of Magical Creatures was never the shield of the Ministry. That's the DMLE's job. If anything, they were the ones to be involved in more or less every Goblin Rebellion from the very start, if you can trust Binns' and Tiroflan's ramblings on anything."

The last descendant of the Imperial Magical line of China paused for a few seconds to collect her thoughts.

"And besides, when the time came, it was the Lady Protector who dealt the fatal blow to the vampires."

Sure, it was gossiped in the corridors that the Dark Queen had participated in the slaughter, but two witches against an entire coven plus hundreds of skinchangers was the kind of battles legends were made of.

In this case, it was a dark legend, of course.

"I...I am not going to let her ruin my father's legacy. We Diggory's have always stood for the principles of the Light!"

Fortunately, he didn't shout it across the hall. Unfortunately, it was still above the level of the conversations playing out, and many heads turned in their table's direction.

"Please stop repeating your father's words." Cho threw her napkin on the table and stood out of her chair. "I will wait for you when you will leave for the arena."

And deep inside, the fifth-year girl was suddenly wondering if things had not been too perfect before in their relationship. The bedroom activities had been fun, and Cedric had been supportive of her wishes to learn Alchemy. But family and politics...here things were very much the opposite of perfection.

Cho didn't like Amos Diggory. And she may need to have a conversation with Alexandra Potter after all, because he didn't sound like the kind of man who would end up accepting his dismissal from the Ministry in a dignified and tolerant manner...

**1 March 1995, the Coliseum, Magical Republic of Venice**

Alexandra wasn't going to lie: the moment she led the Hogwarts Champions onto the sands of the arena, her attention, like everyone else's, went to the Scoreboard.

It wasn't that she was unaware of her own performance or that of everyone else: the Judges had published it after the Masked Ball which officially ended the Fourth Task, and there were other ways since to find out a sum-up of the big challenges where so many Champions had died.

But there were other preoccupations, other affairs, and many other things to care about.

Now, in this empty arena, there was nothing else.

The Scoreboard gave you the blunt and crude truth.

**Champion Rankings of the European Magical Tournament after the Fourth Task:**

**1st: Alexandra Potter – 275 points**

**2nd: Lyudmila Romanov – 269 points**

**3rd: Lucrezia Sforza – 245 points**

**4th: Eleonora da Riva – 177 points**

**5th: Romeo Malatesti – 169 points**

**6th: Viktor Krum – 149 points**

**7th: Henri de Condé – 134 points (suspended)**

**8th: Ambre de Courtois – 132 points**

**9th: Cedric Diggory – 107 points**

**10th: Giovanni Ruspoli – 65 points**

**11th: Fleur Delacour – 60 points**

**12th: Yegor Poliakov – 50 points (deceased)**

**13th: Neville Longbottom – 40 points (suspended)**

**14th: Geoffrey Hooper – 39 points**

**15th: Frode Falk – 35 points (deceased)**

**16th: Armand Coularé de Lafontaine – 24 points**

**17th: Lucas Gauthier – 19 points (deceased)**

**18th: Boris Viipuri – 11 points**

**19th: Karl Schumacher – 3 points (deceased)**

**19th ex-aequo: Graham Montague (not deceased yet), Lorenzo de Medici, Cassius Warrington, and Pyotr Karamnov (all deceased) – 0 Point**

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**School Rankings of the European Magical Tournament after the Third Task:**

**1st: Scuola Regina – 656 points**

**2nd: Durmstrang – 517 points**

**3rd: Hogwarts – 461 points**

**4th: Beauxbatons – 369 points**

"I really feel like the tree trying to hide the whole forest," Alexandra commented to Angelina Johnson marching behind her as they progressed towards the centre of the arena.

"It's true that besides Cedric and you, we don't have any big scorers," the athletic Gryffindor girl answered with some genuine regret.

It was for the best that the dark-skinned girl wasn't looking behind, for Cedric Diggory looked far from pleased to be thrown in the same category as her. Hey, it was not her fault his father was unable to tolerate a world where wizards treated non-wizards with respect. Respect. She didn't ask for him to love the Vampires and the Goblins; Alexandra wanted tolerance and a stop to the imbecilic policies which led to the Aurors taking bloody casualties every time a Ministry idiot provoked a Goblin Uprising. Apparently, it was too much to ask of Amos Diggory. One could only hope the son would begin to stop listening to the nonsense sprouted by the father.

"I hope to change that," Angelina declared.

"I will cheer if you succeed," the Ravenclaw Champion promised, trying not to wince at the disastrous ranking of Hogwarts in the school competition. "It was already bad that the Scuola Regina was leaving us in the dust, but now Durmstrang has overtaken us too, and Beauxbatons is not far behind."

That, of course, was a direct consequence of her being the only Hogwarts Champion to receive the fifty points of bonus awarded at the end of the Fourth Task. Every other school had gotten at least two bonuses, and Durmstrang and the Venetians had been rewarded with three.

"Yeah. Longbottom really screwed us all."

"Understatement of the year, my dear Johnson."

The walk stopped, and in the distance, other Gates opened in a thunderous sound, and the familiar figures of the Judges began to come into view.

"He's in the public, you know," Montague pointed out.

Alexandra giggled.

"Do you really think I care if he hears me?"

"No," the Slytherin Champion admitted. "No, I don't think so."

See? Even Junior Death Eaters could learn to use their brains, if they were granted some vigorous motivation.

"Speaking of public," Angelina cleared her throat. "It feels strange to have so few spectators today. There can't be more than two thousand witches and wizards...and most of them are students from the Scuola Regina."

"And the rest are the journalists," Alexandra nodded. "Moreover, the school gave a free pass for everyone this morning. Or we wouldn't have the students in the first place."

Today was a Wednesday, and there were classes in the morning, much like there were classes at Hogwarts. The Professors wouldn't have liked at all most of the student population skipping their teaching moments.

The Lady Protector studied the occupied stands for a few seconds. Sure enough, there were some familiar faces. Henri de Condé for one, though aside from several Beauxbatons students, it was easy to find out the Succubae and the other Scuola Regina alumni stayed far away from him. The same 'treatment' applied to Neville Longbottom, though in his case, most of the non-Gryffindors behaved the same way.

The Hydra Animagus wasn't going to shed tears about that. Yeah, the two weren't the monsters Ra had been, but the magnitude of their screw-up could have resulted in tens of millions of deaths. And so far, alas, one couldn't really say many signs of genuine contrition had come from the mouth of one Neville Longbottom. Henri de Condé was more often than not healed in a French hospital, so knowledge of what he thought and regretted had not arrived to her ears.

"This is going to be interesting, sure enough," Graham Montague said. "The Judges said yesterday there were going to be new rules, and we have five new Champions for the Fifth Task."

"It's time to give new heads their time to shine," Angelina commented piously.

Alexandra snorted loudly. Aside from the Gryffindor girl – who replaced Neville Longbottom, suspended for an indefinite period of time – there were four more new Champions. Two were from Beauxbatons, one boy and one girl – Gauthier had died by the hand of Ra, and De Condé was suspended. The two others were from Durmstrang, as Frode Falk had met his end in the cells of the Doge Palace, and Poliakov had perished wand in hand against the Archmage of Light. The new Durmstrang Champions who had replaced them reminded her of Karl Schumacher: muscled, arrogant, the touch of the Dark present in their eyes and their magic...and trying their best to stay away from the Dark Queen.

"I admire your enthusiasm," Alexandra drawled.

And then the Judges approached, and the conversations, both outside and inside the arena, ceased abruptly. As there was nothing but white sand covering the arena, there were no distractions.

Magical mirrors lit up, and the familiar flashes of cameras of course came from every direction.

"Welcome," Judge Ben Qassim stepped forwards, today showing them a superb turban of creamy colour. Alexandra didn't know where the man had bought it, but it must have been quite a bargain. It inspired both serenity and dignity in one piece of cloth. "Welcome, Champions!"

His voice was of course magically amplified, and the young public present cheered, clapped its hands, and generally tried to make as much noise as possible. For a couple of heartbeats, you could almost believe you were in a crowded Coliseum about to host a spectacular Task.

The effect didn't last long, though.

"Without further interruption, it is time to reveal to the Champions and the audience the next hurdle in this extraordinary competition! And once again, it has been decided that all the Champions are going to compete at the same time, in this very Coliseum!"

After what had happened at Venice, Alexandra was not going to say she loved the idea. Okay, the problematic Light Champions were out of the game, but the representatives of the Dark remained, and some had proven quite bloodthirsty in the past.

"So far, each Task tested the knowledge and the creativity of the Champions in one of the magical classes every school of Europe takes pride in teaching to its students! The First task made sure your skills in Offensive and Defensive Magic were worthy of a Champion! The Second Task tested your lore and your inventiveness with Runes! The Third Task allowed you to push past the boundaries of your Potions classes! And the Fourth Task was intended to give you time to prove to us how Charms would allow you to hide in plain sight while the Carnival played around you!"

Said like this, it almost sounded logical. Of course, the First and Fourth Task were far more than that. They hadn't been limited to any one type of spell, and the Night Court had used far, far more than Charms **in** their preparations. It was a pity, in a way, that most of their efforts had remained in the shadows, never to be used.

"The Fifth Task will not be following this model!" The Judge decided to demolish their assumptions immediately with the equivalent of a Bombarda. "It will be a test of celerity and eye acuity. It will be a race against time! It will be...A BROOM RACE!"

Alexandra blinked.

He was joking, right?

The admission of the pun...never came.

Okay.

Okay.

It was a broom race. Certainly, it would have magical traps, and some tricks, but that was fine. She was a good flyer, and it wasn't like Lyudmila Romanov or Lucrezia Sforza were World-class players-

Oh.

Alexandra turned her head and watched Viktor Krum.

The Bulgarian looked like someone had just told him his birthday had suddenly been advanced to here and now.

And then he began to laugh...

"Let's see the positive side," Montague said weakly. "We are all Quidditch players here. I'm sure we can-"

"We are going up against Viktor Krum, Montague," the Ravenclaw Champion interrupted. "I don't know about you, but I'm rather sure I don't have the talent to play on a national team."

The Durmstrang Champion laughing was just rubbing the wound with salt by that point...

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It was incredibly funny.

Neville hadn't known it was going to turn that way, but it was worth a good laugh.

Come on, watching fifteen Champions suddenly look at Krum like he was the most dangerous Dark Lord to ever live was funny!

With two words, the Star-Seeker of Durmstrang had suddenly changed from 'serious but not top-scorer Champion' to 'grand favourite of the Fifth Task'!

"YEAH!" To his shock, Neville realised the outburst had come from Ron. "KRUM FOR THE WIN!"

All amusement faded when Neville saw plenty of Scuola Regina, Hogwarts, and even Beauxbatons students succumb to the craziness.

"KRUM! KRUM! IN THE SKIES, THERE IS NO ONE BETTER THAN KRUM!"

Neville facepalmed. Sanity was dead, and about to be buried.

Suddenly, what had felt funny seconds ago felt like you had been punched in the nose.

"Err...they realise he is a Durmstrang Champion, right? The stuff about the Courts and the Kings is over!"

"Tell that to Granger," Geoffrey Hooper told him to his right. "She's busy supporting her boyfriend."

"Her *what*?"

"Oh, you didn't know?" The older Gryffindor smirked. "It was all the rage in the last day of the Venetian Carnival. They weren't really discreet, you know, going to the Masked Ball together..."

"I had..." the former Champion of Fate coughed. "I had more pressing problems to deal with."

Among them, but not limited to, convincing his grandmother to not kill him for everything he'd been involved in.

But in this case, Geoffrey was right. Granger was supporting Krum, and anybody knowing the first thing about her would know it wasn't because she was a Quidditch fanatic like Ron.

"It could be worse, my ugly brother."

Oh great, the Twins had arrived.

"Right you are, my uglier brother. Our lovely Angelina will have her opportunity to make her entrance in favourable circumstances."

"You're late," Neville remarked. "What were you doing?"

"Business is booming these days, Lord Longbottom," one of the two red-haired pranksters, maybe Fred, told him with a large smirk. "GO ANGELINA!"

"HAIL HYDRA! UP RAVENCLAW!" Yeah, that came from McDougal and other Ravenclaws, who had somehow brought a large banner and enchanted it while he wasn't looking. There was of course a monstrous Hydra, a white owl, and the usual birds the Ravenclaws used for their armouries.

The Badgers didn't miss the chance to scream their support for Diggory, of course.

The voices for Graham Montague, on the other hand, were far more discreet...to not employ the term 'non-existent'.

"For once, I think Hogwarts has its chances to do a solid team performance," George said in a very ironic tone. "After all, we have four Champions who have all showed great skills when it comes to broom riding!"

The Twins gave each other a long stare...and exploded in laughter.

Neville sighed.

"Just because our teamwork is horrible isn't a reason to be insulting about it."

"Neville, good old chap!" Fred gasped, as if the older Weasley had suddenly realised his presence. "It isn't that we are mocking the teamwork of the Champions of our fair school!"

"Right you are my brother! We aren't doing anything of the sort!"

Neville glared. It was a logical reaction when looking at their innocent expressions.

"It might be we're questioning the teamwork's very existence!" Fred added with a big grin.

Neville grimaced.

"By the way, we might have to do something about that, Gred. Our noble benefactor the Lady Protector and the lovely Angelina Johnson would greatly benefit from some teamwork, don't you think?"

"Absolutely, Forge, absolutely!" He was pretty much certain it was George who had spoken these words. "On the other hand, screw Diggory. 'Pretty Boy and Perfect Prefect' should learn a lesson in humility or two."

The former Light Champion gave them a surprised look.

"What did Diggory do to you?"

"Many things," 'Fred' gave a malicious smile. "But you are still far too young to learn them, Neville!"

Of all the stupid and annoying things after the Fourth Task, learning that he was still legally a child despite having the looks and the body of an adult had put him in a bad mood.

"And of course, for once there is a Task where I could score high, and it is the one where I am suspended..."

This was the moment one of the Judges chose to request silence once again, and the shrieks of support for Krum progressively died down.

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It seemed that no matter how many times you saved the world, when it came time to broom-riding, it was Viktor Krum who was winning the popularity contest one hundred times out of one hundred.

Meagre consolation, all the other Champions were aware of that too, and if there was something that you could trust about the Durmstrang Champions, it was that they didn't play well together.

It was good, needless to say, because calling Krum a flying demon was underestimating his skill when he rose above the ground.

"Now we assure you, all the Champions will be treated equally."

Alexandra raised her hand.

"Does this mean every Champion will be given the same broom at the beginning of the Task?" the Hydra Animagus asked.

For some reason, it amused two-thirds of the Judges.

"Yes, Champion Potter, everyone will be given the same broom when beginning the Fifth Task."

There was something she was missing...but as long as it didn't involve her having to buy a brand-new Firebolt, Alexandra didn't feel too bad about it. First-class brooms were expensive, and if everyone had tried a 'broom purchase race', this Task could easily have been the most expensive of all.

"Of course, we have amended the rules to suit the...sensibilities of the new public which will watch the Task," the vampiric Judge declared gravely. "Champions are now utterly forbidden to kill each other. And inflicting debilitating and permanent injuries," for some reason, his eyes fell upon her, "will result in significant point penalties."

"Boring," Lyudmila declared not far away.

"Right," one of the new Champions of Durmstrang grunted. "But if we're not supposed to kill each other, what are we supposed to do? Broom riding is the transportation method, you haven't said anything about the circuit where this race will take place!"

"And we won't say anything more about it today, Champion Wolffhart," the Incan witch that was assuredly a Knight of the Exchequer replied curtly. "All we will say about the race itself is that it will begin in this very Coliseum on the morning of the eleventh of March."

Ten days? That wasn't a lot of time to dust off her flying skills.

"There will be no Animagi forms authorised. All the Champions will have to wear armbands blocking their Animagi powers." Alexandra raised an eyebrow, before shrugging. While it would have been a nice boost in terms of vision, Lernaean Hydras couldn't fly. It was best to not fall from her broom, though, because as long as her armband wasn't broken, her internal regeneration powers would be slowed down.

Something that couldn't be said about Fleur Delacour. The Champion of Fire had looked supremely confident before that.

In an instant, it changed from 'I am going to be second behind Krum' to 'royally pissed'.

"This is scandalous!" the Phoenix Animagus didn't screech, but she wasn't far from it.

"This is about equality," one of the male Judges corrected. "We want a broom race, not a contest of who has the most impressive Animagus form!"

That, at least, shut the beak of the Veela hybrid.

"The race will begin at ten o'clock, Champions. As always, you will have one good hour of presentations, ceremonies, and mandatory press interviews. Do not be late."

More Champions asked questions. It was clear the replies were either evasive or outright unhelpful.

Yeah, they were preparing something vicious, all right.

This was going to be fun, Alexandra could already tell.

Fun for the spectators and the Judges, not so for the Champions.

"The eleventh of March is a Saturday, right?" Angelina whispered behind her.

"It is," the Lady Protector murmured.

"You know what it means?"

"I did the first Tasks, Johnson. Of course I know what it means."

It meant they were supposed to cheat outrageously. Again.

**1 March 1995, Scuola Regina, Magical Republic of Venice**

Unusually, Alexandra was late for lunch, and her exhausted expression strongly hinted that it had nothing to do with the minutes lost after the Coliseum where she ran back to her villa to don her normal school robes.

The loud groan when she sat at their table was another strong clue, yes.

"You had a more combative face this morning," Morag told her between two bites of vegetables.

"By a strange *coincidence*," the Champion of House Ravenclaw answered acidly, "Professor Slughorn decided it was time to test how much I had control of my magic when brewing a post-OWL Potion."

"That doesn't sound...too bad?" Hermione tried, and the ex-Gryffindor was rewarded by a glare.

"The test was to do it with an anti-Animagus armband on."

Ouch. Morag winced several times internally. If this was the first time Alexandra used one, and it had to be the first, these things cost a lot of Galleons to make, then-

"It had been over a year since I hadn't damaged a cauldron," the green-eyed witch commented, looking at the eggs and the tomato puree with a murderous glare. "And here I melted two in a couple of hours. I feel like I am a second Longbottom."

Angelina Johnson couldn't help it and began to snicker.

It must be said that she wasn't the only one. The Weasley Twins also participated **in** the general hilarity.

"Yeah, yeah," her friend drawled. "Wait for the moment during your scholarship when a Potions Professor will tell you to brew high-level Potions. But enough about that. Morag?"

"I checked, Alex. But I am sorry to say, if there's a clue somewhere in the Coliseum, it was one beyond my magical abilities to find. Or it is in a section the students don't have free access to."

"And they sealed the Coliseum after the last student departed?"

"Oh, yes," the red-haired Ravenclaw confirmed. "They locked it up, and they didn't skimp on the enchanted metals and the complex wards."

"Excuse me!" Angelina Johnson's face was showing them a combination of surprise and outrage. "You tried to see if it was possible to grab a Tournament Clue immediately?"

Alexandra's expression could be best summed-up as 'duh'.

"Cheating is a tradition of the Tournament we take very seriously," Morag answered in the name of the Exiled, and with absolutely no guilt. "Besides, is it really that much of a problem when the rules don't forbid it? The Judges clearly had no problem with my investigation."

A pity it hadn't worked. They would have gained a large advantage with little effort.

"And the other Champions?"

This time it was Hermione's turn...and yes, she had somehow found the time to make proper notes of the subject.

"The Prussian Champion who looked like a starved predator is Johann Wolffhart," the busy-haired girl started her own exposé. "He's known to be a rather talented Duellist, especially in the field of Curses. And more importantly, he is an above-average Beater."

That was not good. This meant that besides Krum, there was another good flyer among the Durmstrang Champions.

"The second Champion is Ulrich Fuchs. According to my sources," which included one Viktor Krum, Morag was ready to bet her pocket money on this, "he's really, really good at Arithmancy. He wants to work as a Spell-Crafter. Oh, and he is talented in Aztec Blood Runes too."

Given how dark Alexandra's eyes became, this was anything but good news.

"I don't know if he's a good flyer however." Hermione almost apologised. "He never played a single Quidditch game at Durmstrang. And he doesn't seem to have entered selections for other broom-related games."

"I suppose we will make that discovery rather soon," the Ravenclaw Champion grimaced. "On my side, I was able to get the names of the two Beauxbatons Champions from Ambre de Courtois. The boy is Martin Bayard, and he's a king of prodigy when it comes to extreme sports."

The MacDougal Heiress cleared her throat.

"I'm going to give it a try and say the extreme sports involve some kind of risky broom-riding."

"You would be right." Alexandra shook her head. "I know he doesn't look like it, but from the hints I got, even some Scuola Regina students think he's absolutely fearless. Of course, as he was the dedicated substitute of De Condé, so we haven't had the pleasure to face him until this Task."

"And the girl?" Cho Chang asked, for once far away from Cedric Diggory.

"Her name is Eugénie Millet. Her strengths are rumoured to be in Transfiguration and Charms. I didn't have the time to check or investigate for more."

Alexandra shrugged and went on to attack the contents of her plate with visible pleasure.

"Okay." Morag played in her mind everything that had been said during this conversation. "I don't think it changes very much what you said to me when the Judges dismissed everyone."

The great 'Lady Protector' didn't bother replying, which was tantamount to a silent assent.

"Viktor Krum is the legendary favourite of this Task. And we have ten days to avoid him humiliating Hogwarts in a broom race."

**1 March, University of Oxford, Oxford, England**

"Just so you know, Champion Potter, I expect the new trophy room to receive new cups and prizes soon."

Alexandra chuckled.

"It's going to be hard to beat Krum, but I will do my best, Professor. That said, is there a particular reason why you mentioned it? The Judges so far have failed to announce what they offer as prizes before each Task is over."

It was one of the reasons among many why Alexandra and the rest of the Champions part of the Night Court weren't sure what the rewards would be when it came to the Fourth Task. There were rumours and guesses, yes, but no iron-clad confirmation.

The Judges had stayed tight-lipped, and aside from a crystal statue serving as a 'Tournament Clue', one couldn't say that she had received anything for her efforts. It was true that she hadn't been doing it for the money, but still...

"One of ours hosts at the Scuola Regina," Flitwick replied, "may have let it slip that the third 'Cleopatra Egg' would be one of the rewards given to the winners after the Fifth Task."

"Oh?" This was quite something...assuming it was true. "Well, I had no intention to stand aside and let the other Champions win the Task. But..."

"But the others are going to want to beat you, I understand completely," her Head of House nodded. "And the Star-Seeker of Durmstrang is the favourite, both for the Quidditch fans and for his natural abilities when it comes to flying."

"Yes," the Hydra Animagus agreed. "The meagre consolation fifteen Champions have is that it's not about Quidditch. Otherwise, I think we would all have to form a team of fifteen against him to have a chance of catching the Golden Snitch before him."

And no, this wasn't fatalism.

Krum was *that* good.

"Indeed. Now that I am reassured by your eagerness to win the Tournament, what do you think about the University of Oxford?"

"That even the most conservative families would have no problem studying in such a beautiful environment?"

They were now in the 'inner courtyard' of the University, and Alexandra had to acknowledge it, it was an impressive view. The buildings around her felt like arrows trying to climb and stab the sky. Moreover, for someone who had studied several years at Hogwarts, there was something...reassuring about the entire University. Like the non-magical architects had proposed something newer, but inspired by a similar model. And you didn't have to take a train for half a day and exile yourself to the middle of the Scottish wilderness to visit this one.

Alexandra clicked her tongue, but didn't hiss.

"Unfortunately, I was given to understand that whichever education establishment ended up chosen, it would never be the biggest problem. That 'honour' belongs to the clash of magic and electricity."

The Champion of the Morrigan had had several explosive memories of it.

When visiting Dudley and his friends, she had more often than not fried an electronic device without intending to. Sometimes, her magical aura was sufficient to achieve that feat. Having the power of a Lady of Magic had its advantages, but not when you wanted to avoid washing machines and other electronics malfunctioning.

"That is true," the Acting-Headmaster of the future 'not-Hogwarts' answered very seriously. "And I understand many, many parties are already on the move to solve this huge problem."

"I'm sure you won't be surprised if I tell you Fred and George Weasley are busy with all kinds of experiments, Professor."

They both chuckled this time.

"I am not," the Charms Master answered. "I have heard of the name they proposed for the 'final product', as it is. 'Magitek', is it?"

"Rumours spread fast," Alexandra smirked.

They weren't the only ones, of course. In fact, Alexandra was pretty sure the Exchequer's representatives were only financing some parties because everyone expected them too. An organisation intelligent enough to want the destruction of the Statute had undoubtedly known what problems electricity-powered devices and magical spells' coexistence would generate.

"But enough about problems for today," Flitwick said in his usual cheerful tone. "We have a tour prepared for us, and teachers and students to speak with. Are you ready?"

"As long as they happen to limit the numbers of cameras and autographs, I am," Alexandra retorted. "These days, I feel like I am the return of Gilderoy Lockhart."

The Head of House Ravenclaw chuckled louder, and they went on to discover Oxford University.

**1 March, *HMS Hydra*, Portsmouth Harbour, England**

The Admiral, Alexandra had to admit, looked very much like the pictures of 'salty sea dog' one expected from every sailor of Her Majesty's Navy.

And in a flamboyant display of irony, his name happened to be Granger.

No relation to Hermione, as far as both were aware.

Yes, she had asked.

Come on, wouldn't you have done the same in her place?

"I will send you the second Dreadnought early next week, Admiral. I could have done it earlier, but in the end, we decided teleporting it via a super-Portkey was for the best. The secret shipyard is...too close to rebellious elements of the Wizarding society."

"I was given the information about one Albus Dumbledore, Lady Protector." The high-ranking naval officer rubbed his tobacco pipe before lighting it. Fortunately for her sense of smell, the wind rapidly blew the smoke away...and not into her nostrils. Tobacco was really, really something she didn't like smelling. It always took hours for her senses to stop being overwhelmed by it. "Do you think he could destroy a Dreadnought by himself?"

"I think it would be...unlikely," the Champion of Death answered honestly. "Even if I wasn't there to defend the facilities, I could arrive in a hurry, and protect the warships. Unfortunately, while a Dreadnought is a very tough structure, the same can't be said about all the workers or the supporting infrastructure. Not to mention that if I'm forced to engage Albus Dumbledore myself, the collateral damage will be significant."

Westminster Bridge had collapsed with the Statute, and that was a battle against Galahad, not Albus Dumbledore.

It was true that the Defeater of Grindelwald was not the bloodthirsty monster the Apprentice of Ra was, and as such was unlikely to try to maximise the body count.

But when it was a duel where no rules held and your life was at stake, there were no gentlemen rules, no 'fair play', and no acts dirty enough that you could swear you would never, ever use it against your enemy.

This was why the facilities of Northern Scotland were going to be evacuated in the first place.

"Obviously, Dumbledore is a powerful enough wizard who doesn't care much about distance when it comes to teleportation," she informed the Admiral. "But his followers have far more limitations."

"I was given to understand he had intelligence-gathering problems during the last decades." Admiral Granger stopped the puffs of his tobacco pipe for a few heartbeats to talk.

Alexandra hesitated. While she had seen and spoken with the old wizard many times, the true personality hiding behind all the layers and the outrageous robes was kind of a mystery.

"I know he lived in a non-magical environment during his childhood," 'like me' went unsaid, "so I am pretty sure he can subscribe to one newspaper and read the news like everyone. And he is powerful enough to walk the streets of London and not be recognised as long as he doesn't do something stupid."

Magic could change the colour of your eyes, your hair, your skin colour, and many other things, or at least present the illusion you had changed. Add that the no-longer *de jure* Headmaster of Hogwarts was a Master of Transfiguration, and you could pretty much conjure every piece of cloth you had ever seen.

"This is not good news," Admiral Granger said with the usual level one could expect from a British Admiral. "And a reminder of how wonderful and terrible magic can truly be for our non-initiated eyes."

The warning, for it was one, was not subtle.

"My colleagues and I have questions, naturally."

"Of course, Admiral. What do you want to know?"

"Well, first, there is the little surprise where the artillery shells are vanishing from the armoury to reappear directly in the Ammunition Cage."

"It sounded simpler?" Alexandra tried to present her best innocent face.

It didn't really work.

"The hull under the waterline, the shipbuilders assured me, is so reinforced it can handle a nuclear blast with ease. Most of the hull will shrug off one hundred missiles without problem as long as proper safety procedures are respected."

Yeah, in hindsight, she may have gone a bit overboard with her Runes.

Maybe.

Possibly.

Certainly.

Oh screw it, it had been way too much fun, and the *HMS Hydra* had been able to trounce the opposition during the first major Statute-breaking battle.

"Is it a problem?" she once again asked innocently.

"Well," the Admiral removed his tobacco pipe from his mouth, something that spread a lot of smoke, of course. "I hope you are ready, Lady Protector, because now all our shipbuilders want to know how to replicate that for their own creations."

Suddenly, the growing crowd waiting not far from the Dreadnought suddenly didn't seem so amusing anymore...and that wasn't because they had brought so many cameras!

**1 March, Library of Alexandria, Exchequer Enclave**

It felt like she marched through the tunnels under the city for a few hours to reach the massive golden gates.

Still, you couldn't lie and say the journey wasn't worth it.

Once the cloaked guardian formally allowed her to enter, Alexandra was almost overwhelmed by the Library of Alexandria.

Any witch or wizard would have expected that after spending so long underground, the final destination would have been only lit by torches and candles, leaving everything in a sort of penumbra.

This wasn't the case.

The Library was illuminated like the sun was right over their heads – and it was not, Alexandra had gone into the tunnels past sunset – and as such her eyes missed no detail of the formidable edifice.

And what a magnificent thing it was.

The Egyptian and Greek styles had merged to present blue-painted pillars with walls and tablets covered in Hieroglyphs. In fact, the more you looked at it, the more you felt like tens of thousands of paint buckets had been used, including gold, white, red, and more.

There were tall sculptures of long-gone patrons and writers, made of bronze and marble. Some of them looked like they had been here before Alexander of Macedon tried to conquer the known world.

But quite clearly, the thing that astonished the mind was the sheer amount of lore gathered in a single place.

For all its faults and hidden caches, the Hogwarts Library had still been a reference point in her head up to this day.

Past that moment, the Champion of Death's judgement was 'bah'.

The Library of Alexandria was built on several levels. Alexandra could see seven from her current position.

And the first level alone must contain tens of thousands of well-preserved scrolls, certainly as many books as that, and quantities of other repositories of knowledge in diverse forms.

There had been no instruction on what to do, and so the young witch went to visit the alleys, strolling and examining the books she could recognise.

Mere minutes were enough to recognise the priceless value of some collections. Some Etruscan-carved marbles were absurdly huge and looked like they had been saved from the fall of the Roman Empire. The scrolls were even older. Many inscriptions to classify them revealed in a non-ambiguous manner that the writers were commissioned to preserve that knowledge when the Pharaohs still ruled as revered Dynasties.

And there were many manuscripts which were proclaimed to have been saved from the pyres the Pendragon line had ordered. Evidently, the Exchequer had saved more than some hopes from the ashes of Camlann.

Alexandra couldn't say how many minutes she spent examining this mountain of ancient literature.

All she knew was at some point, she felt attracted to a particular section of the Library.

It was on the Second Floor, and surprisingly, there was a lot of empty space there.

Or maybe it wasn't that surprising.

There was a large book, guarded by an enchanted statue representing...Osiris, yes.

And yes, she spoke of the now former King of the Exchequer.

His statue had been placed there, with the adornments of a Pharaoh.

Alexandra's eyes narrowed.

The book the statue guarded seemed to be made not of wood, but of metal.

Black metal, to be accurate.

But there was something else-

The wave of Death Magic took her by surprise.

By reflex she cast a shield, but the black-coloured cloud dissipated long before hitting her protection. The Runes which had been hidden under the rich blue carpets made sure of that.

"Wow, is that-"

"The *Book of the Dead*, yes," the Queen of the Exchequer announced her presence. "I thought you would be attracted to it. I was too, when I first visited the Library."

This...this wasn't exactly reassuring.

"It is..." the Ravenclaw Champion searched for the best words, "it feels ancient."

Morgane Rys'Ygraine of Avalon laughed.

"I certainly hope so. It was crafted in the finest Dark-purified metals of a long-gone era, by the first Champion of Anubis himself."

She didn't add 'Champion of Death', as that was unnecessary. There were flickers of emerald-tainted darkness coming from a gemstone on the cover which hadn't been there before.

"And what does it do?" Set had mentioned that artefact, and a mere glance could tell you it was not a third-rate artefact. No, it was an extremely powerful heirloom, one the likes of which hadn't been forged in centuries. "I am not a specialist of Egyptian mythology, but I know enough to guess it doesn't bring back the souls of the dead from the other side of the Veil."

"Indeed not," the Queen bared her fangs in an amused grin. "It allows a wizard or a witch to communicate with the souls who left this world, however."

Alexandra raised an eyebrow. She was pretty sure the *Book of the Dead* wasn't limiting itself to *that*.

So it was best to try another approach.

"The Lord of the Red Sands mentioned the book."

"Of course he did. The book proved to be a key asset in ensuring the defeat of many of his Champions."

Alexandra bit her lip, and then decided there was no point in delaying the question which burned her lips.

"Why didn't you deactivate the Black Pyramid? Its purpose is done. The Statute is broken. What has been done can't be reversed."

"Can't it?"

The two words were asked almost innocently.

But it was too deliberate. It was-

"You wanted to make the changes permanent." That was the only thing that made sense. "Thirteen Seals are activated, and there are, in theory, thirteen Champions at the end of the Quest."

And only two had really been reborn so far by the hand of their Powers: Lucrezia Sforza and Fleur Delacour. Desire and Life. Water and Fire. Water Jaguar and Phoenix.

But when Tlaloc and Prometheus had been awakened, in many ways, the end of the Old Cycle had come.

And with it-

Oh, hells.

It was the 'interesting question', wasn't it? When the snake ate its own tail, which came first, the Power...or the Champion?

"It would have been interesting to know all of that before I went on to smash an undead army." Alexandra took great care to remove everything that could be mistaken for a complaint.

"Would you have trusted me beforehand?"

Exchequer: 1. Alexandra: 0.

"We of the Dark always prefer for our Apprentices to burn their hands, so to speak, and learn the valuable lessons the hard way. Certainly, it teaches you a lot, and you avoid bashing your heads against the walls of the Pyramids like the Champions of the Light were content to do for millennia."

Evidently, seen like that...

Two notebooks appeared into the hands of the legendary vampire-sorceress. They looked quite plain and near-identical, though there was a powerful enchantment on them.

"An Apprenticeship Contract requires trust between you and me, Alexandra."

One of the notebooks found its way into her hands, and just opening it confirmed that yes, it was completely blank.

"The enchantment of the notebook-"

"The two are tied. You will ask your questions, and they will appear in my copy. And vice-versa, of course. Don't worry about the space, every one hundred pages, the conversations will be stored here, away from private eyes."

That was...efficient. As much as she wanted to, with the Tournament continuing, the Hydra Animagus admitted she couldn't afford to spend dozens of hours away from the Scuola Regina every day. And yeah, in hindsight, the Apprenticeship Contract required both parties to know what the other was willing and unwilling to do.

"Err...fine, I will write inside it. And the Library?"

"If it is your desire to have access to it, it will be granted," the Queen of the Exchequer said calmly. "Just stay away from the seventh floor. You shouldn't be able to access it with the level of wards and enchantments we cast, but I prefer to warn you nonetheless."

"The equivalent of the Restricted Section at Hogwarts?"

"Yes," Morgane replied curtly. "Except some of the books we have there are able to make any 'Restricted Section' of the most dangerous libraries look like inoffensive toys in comparison. We have relics from the moment the Wars of the Light and the Dark began here."

**1 March,** **Alexandra's Villa, Coliseum Valley, Lands of the Scuola Regina, Magical Republic of Venice**

Eleonora had waited for about fifteen minutes in the cold, and she was about to leave when Alexandra Potter arrived at the edge of the street, looking like she came directly from the river gondolas.

The Champion of Innocence had to admit, it suddenly made sense why no one answered.

"Next time leave a message," the green-eyed Champion told her with an apologetic smile. "I had other obligations tonight, and I would have visited you tomorrow morning. The weather is cold, I don't want you to end as a statue of ice, Eleonora."

"I don't have your regeneration abilities, but I am not *that* fragile, Alexandra."

"Point taken," the younger Champion nodded. "Come on, we will finish this conversation inside. Refreshments?"

"Some hot tea would be lovely," the Champion of Vesta nodded.

It took a few minutes for the drinks to be served, of course, and she wasn't surprised when her host decided to munch plenty of cookies – that she was offered too, of course. The more powerful the Animagus form, the more you needed to feed yourself. Magic did not create the extraordinary out of nothing.

"So," the top scorer of the Tournament refocused once half of the cookies had been devoured. "What earned me the honour of your visit at such a late hour?"

"I have arrived at a disturbing conclusion about the Fifth Task." Eleonora saw no need to try to speak in enigma; the other Champion would likely not like the irony. "There may very well be no Tournament Clue this time."

This earned her a shrug, one with a lot of cookie crumbs.

"It may be a bit early to arrive at that conclusion, no? I mean, personally, I was so busy today I really hadn't the time to search for the Tournament Clues, save for the most basic stuff."

"Your friends and allies searched for one across the open Coliseum sections and the rest of the school, yes, I am aware."

Alexandra Potter sighed.

"Discretion thou name is not Morag MacDougal."

"Don't forget that Lucrezia has a network of Succubae and non-Succubae spies at her beck and call." Eleonora grinned. "And they *gossip*."

The shiver of the Champion of the Morrigan, this time, seemed absolutely genuine.

"Speaking of Lucrezia?"

"Certainly busy having *fun* with muscular young males in her new temple-palace of Venice."

"As long as she doesn't sacrifice them on a modern variant of an Aztec altar...anyway, I am not going to throw stones there. The Fifth Task."

"Yes."

"There are more options that nobody has explored in a single day."

Eleonora had expected that.

"I suppose you think you have a chance tracking the brooms the Organising Committee of the Tournament purchased."

"Yes," the younger Champion sipped her tea, "ordering sixteen brooms isn't exactly something that leaves no witnesses."

"True, but do you have any idea how many Quidditch teams buy brooms by the dozens when a new season is about to begin?"

The green eyes became more skeptical.

"This Task was not the one they had prepared, they admitted it openly."

"Oh yes, but I'm sure they had already bought the brooms as contingency. In September. When every Quidditch team in existence is looking to replace its old flying models."

The girl who had been acclaimed as the Night Queen was not slow or stupid.

"You think we would find out eventually, but not in time for the Fifth Task."

"I don't think it is a coincidence that they limited the time between Announcement and Task," Eleonora agreed. "Give it a few months, and someone like Lucrezia or you would fatally have found out. Broom-makers babble, same as everyone else. But in ten days? We don't even have the faintest idea what type of broom we're supposed to search for!"

The broom of a Chaser Quidditch player, after all, was an entirely different breed of animal compared to something specialised in acrobatics or in low-altitude racing.

And with the Coliseum empty, there had been no clues about what type of broom the Judges had gone for.

"This is interesting," the British girl acknowledged. "But it doesn't really change the fact that in many ways, you're as much in the dark as I am."

Eleonora was on the receiving end of a grin...and the last cookie was thrown her way. She caught it effortlessly, naturally.

"And I'm sure you already knew it before deciding to knock at my door. Thus I feel the urge to ask: why did you decide to light my door at this hour?"

"The pun is horrible," Vesta's Chosen complained. "You don't believe I am doing it of the goodness of my heart?"

The Sword of Death snorted very loudly.

"Barring a few miracles, the Scuola Regina has won the interschool competition," the younger witch told her bluntly. "If you want to add the individual victory to your list of achievements, you need to remove the Dark Trio above you in the rankings. The gap is just too big for it to be otherwise. You didn't inform me of your limitations in the first place."

"All of that is true." First the admission, then the confession. "I would prefer to win a Task before the Summer Solstice. Except there is a massive obstacle standing in the way."

"Krum."

"Krum," the Champion of Innocence echoed. "And I told myself, who better to beat him than the Champion who decided that during the Third Task, trebuchets were a perfectly acceptable weapon to win?"

At least she got the Champion of Death to groan in embarrassment.

"I have a feeling no one is going to let me forget that as long as I am alive."

"Probably not. But as the saying goes, you thought outside the box for the Third Task. You can do it again."

"That would mean knowing what the rules for the Fifth Task are," Alexandra Potter frowned. "Or...oh."

Their eyes met, and they both arrived, it seemed, to the same unhappy conclusion.

"Leaving us free to make our own rules? Yes, they absolutely could do that."

The younger Champion clearly wasn't convinced.

"Come on, they will give us brooms, Eleonora. They can't change everything-"

"They didn't tell us in how many parts said brooms would be delivered to us."

The not-very-well-hidden hilarity would suddenly make a lot of sense. And by the way Alexandra Potter grimaced...she seemed to remember that important detail too.

"I really don't know much about assembling a broom," the new Lady Protector of the Isles admitted. "But I think this is where I say it's time to honour the oldest tradition of the Tournament."

"Cheating?" Eleonora asked just for confirmation.

"Cheating."

**Author's note**: Yes, cheating is the way. How much are the Champions going to cheat? You will discover it in the next chapter, *Fifth Task*.

More links for the story:

On P a treon: ww w. p a treon Antony444

On TV Tropes: ww w. tvtropes pmwiki / pmwiki .php/ Fanfic/ TheOddsWereNeverInMyFavour

Notable addition: The odds were never in my favour is now on Archive of Our Own, link is:

archive of ourown works / 51222748 / chapters / 129428554 (Antony444 is my profile name there too)