**Chapter 112**

**Victorious**

**22 February 1995, Venice**

For the end of the Carnival, the spectators and players were granted a very foggy morning.

The sky was grey, and Venice seemed to disappear into the morning mists.

It would have required far worse weather to convince all the magical and non-magical beings to not get out of their hostels and temporary residences.

The bells had not yet tolled to announce it was nine o'clock, but there were already so many groups in the streets leading to the Plaza di San Marco that it was quite crowded.

And judging by the flow of costumed men and women sallying out of the houses where they had slept for the night, this was just the beginning of the spectators' rush.

Then there was a flame on the horizon, and the Power of Fire began to burn once more. In reaction, the Power of Water washed over the entire city too. The canals were imbued with magic. The air changed, and Venice was granted new beautiful artifices. It was given new dangers too.

"Carnival or not, I think there will be far more people willing to visit Venice now that it is more or less floating in the middle of a magical lake surrounded by a crown of solidified lava."

"That's why House Sforza made sure to already impose quotas. And the big tourist ships are no longer authorised to be anywhere near the lagoon."

Alexandra gave a neutral glance to Blaise Zabini's face. As always, the emotions of the Slytherin were very difficult to read, assuming he felt them like the average Hogwarts student did, which was, in all likelihood, not the case.

"Lucrezia is not wasting any time," the Hydra Animagus declared with a small grin.

"Lucrezia. Not Fleur Delacour?"

Alexandra sniffed disdainfully.

"The Champion of Life is powerful, but not that cunning. You know better than I, I suppose, but the political manoeuvring with the big players of Venice and Italy on the magical side, and Rome on the non-magical side, is something a certain Succubus would do. Moreover, Delacour didn't even know something like that was coming one month ago."

And while most plans had not survived the sheer chaos and butchery of the Fourth Task, the art of preparing contingencies was still as important as ever. Lucrezia Sforza was prepared for it.

"Fire and Water will be equal within Venice," Blaise said sceptically. "That's why Sforza was forced to approve when Delacour told you not to return unless it was a day of Carnival."

"They will be *magically* equal," the Ravenclaw Champion agreed before adding the words which hurt. "They sure as hell won't be *politically* equal. House Sforza is playing in its very garden, and its Heiress was trained for situations like these. Delacour? Her father is the French Minister, and at her core, she was a fanatic."

"You don't think she should have been made the Champion of Fire."

"Is it that obvious?" Alexandra asked sarcastically.

"Yes."

The simple word was enough to sober her up.

"I don't like her," the Champion of the Morrigan admitted. "I understand why the Exchequer used her like they did, and the end justified the means. But I still don't trust her. And now I feel like Frodo having saved the Shire. Once again, Tolkien proved he knew what he was talking about. I wanted to save Venice when I departed for this knightly quest, and it was saved. I just won't be able to enjoy it, save when the Carnival is officially playing out in the lagoon."

Alexandra breathed out.

"But I doubt you came here just to speak with me of the intricacies of Fire, Water, and the complex political situation playing out in the Italian Peninsula, Blaise."

"I didn't," the Slytherin boy admitted. "I'm just surprised to see you here. The emergency meeting of the Wizengamot was supposed to begin at eight, and while I didn't intend to be there, I know you had plans for it. Your expensive green robe of sorceress does not look like it was made for the Carnival, at any rate."

"It was your mother's idea." Alexandra raised an eyebrow.

"Arriving late or the green robe?"

"Yes."

Blaise, extraordinarily, pouted.

"All right, keep your secrets. You look tense. Are you sure you aren't anxious?"

"Of course, I am," the young witch retorted. "There is a plan. That doesn't stop me from worrying about all the consequences I could have missed."

"True."

"Anyway, it's time." Alexandra told the Changelina to remove her watch. "See you in a few days, Blaise."

**22 February 1995, the Council Room of the Wizengamot, Ministry of Magic, London**

It was naive now, but yesterday, Neville had really hoped that with Voldemort and many of his last senior Death Eaters gone, the Wizengamot was going to be dominated by the Light.

On one point the Gryffindor young man had been right: several Lords of Ancient or Noble Houses had been marked Death Eaters. Macnair, the executioner, had not been noble-born, but Carrow, Warrington, Mulciber, Selwyn, Nott, and several others were.

They were all dead now.

Unfortunately, as his grandmother had informed him when they entered the lavishly decorated room, their Heirs had replaced them. Apparently, all of the Houses concerned had not been foolish enough to risk their successors in the Battle of Venice. Thus, aside from House Warrington, every Dark House was represented by a new Lord or Lady, and not a Regent. And House Warrington was an exception only because Cassius had been killed by a Cockatrice during the First Task. As a result, the future Lord or Lady of House Warrington was underage and needed a proxy for a few years.

But as the atmosphere in the ancient home of the Wizengamot proved, the presence of one more Dark House wouldn't have changed anything about the insults and loud accusations which were coming from every direction.

"He interfered in a matter of honour! This arrogant silver-bearded bastard MUST be-"

"HOW DARE YOU! Dumbledore saved us in 1945! You should be ashamed to-"

"The saviour? Please! As the Chief Warlock and Fudge's patron, this man has done more than anyone to be the gravedigger of Britain!"

"He is the only one who can save us from the Dark!"

"ORDER!" Acting Chief Warlock Tiberius Ogden shouted, his voice amplified magically several times, all the while the old white-haired wizard struck the wood of his desk several times with his gavel. "ORDER!"

For a few seconds, Neville believed Ogden was going to manage to silence the different wizards and witches who were busy shrieking and disagreeing so loudly.

But before this could happen, someone from the ranks of the Dark – Neville didn't know if there were Conservatives or Traditionalists, and he didn't care – muttered something a member of the Grey thought quite antagonistic, and the bickering resumed.

"We could have evicted Fudge if you hadn't voted against the motions of no-confidence!"

"And where were you when the Statute broke?"

"The Aurors' ranks are at their weakest in a century! Who is responsible for this situation if not the Light?"

After half a minute, Neville stopped trying to follow the insults and the angry repartees. There were too many of them, and a lot of the sentences made less and less sense, anyway.

Instead, the future Lord Longbottom watched the students he had reason to be wary about. Susan Bones was by her aunt's side, writing something on a parchment, not paying any attention to the proceedings. Daphne Greengrass was listening to a hard-faced wizard that had to be her father, as always presenting the persona of an Ice Queen to the world. Most Heirs and Heiresses generally followed that pattern. The only one who didn't was Draco Malfoy; the boy who had once wanted to be the Prince of Slytherin was smirking and paying attention to the insults raining around him. Yet with his father on one side and his mother on the other, the blonde Slytherin was limiting himself to show his amusement in a silent manner.

This led Neville to a very frightening question, really.

Where was Alexandra Potter?

The former Champion of Fate had thought the Ravenclaw serving Death would enter the Council Room and give orders to the Acting Chief Warlock, or at least try to: Neville knew that Tiberius Ogden was an old friend of the Headmaster, and he would not be easily intimidated.

Many of the Houses of the Light would resist too. Britain Lords and Ladies had not grovelled and prostrated themselves before Voldemort, they wouldn't do it before Alexandra Potter.

"ORDER!"

"Who are you to say whose traditions are obsolete, Murton?"

"I say what I want, when I want, Lexden!"

"I am of the opinion we must have a motion to choose a new Acting Chief Warlock! Let's vote!"

"Lord Ogden, as the Dean and Acting Chief Warlock of this august assembly, is clearly the wizard-"

"We need to call back Dumbledore at once! He must be summoned back to save us!"

"Yes! He must be dragged in chains, your saviour!"

"ORDER!"

"No! I will not shut up! I am speaking to you as my right of Lord-"

"ORDER!"

This was just madness and chaos. The Light, the Grey, and the Dark were bickering with each other, and sometimes the different factions inside the Light and the Dark were insulting their supposed allies too!

There was no appearance of control, no attempt for anyone but the Acting Chief Warlock to debate in a calm and respectful manner. And most of the important Grey Lords like MacDougal or Malfoy were simply ignoring the debates. What in the name of Merlin were they playing at? They were-

"I will use my magic as I desire!" Lord Sackville roared. Neville remembered this was the House which had been famous for replacing House Wilkes. "And if you don't like it-"

"ORDER!" There was more of the gavel hammering, and it didn't stop the shouts for a single second.

"WE NEED ALBUS DUMBLEDORE!" Lord Goldstein erupted.

"**Albus Dumbledore won't come**."

Suddenly, it was as if a terrible sensation of cold had drowned them in a heartbeat.

Neville felt his arms shake, and for all his attempts to control himself, he shivered.

It was like the air was burning with power.

Sometimes, when the Headmaster had arrived furious or glared at some Dark Wizard, Neville had felt power like this.

No, it was not similar. When he had felt magic like this, the Headmaster or the Archmage were mere steps away.

Neville turned his head back to the entrance.

And he gaped.

For a moment, Neville thought Morgana La Fay had come in person. Ra had shown him several paintings of the Dark Lady when he resided at Ca'Luce, and the outrageous green robe with the large cleavage was exactly the same. Long black hair was flowing freely upon her shoulders. Gold rings were upon her fingers, and a large gold necklace circled around her throat. Yet what attracted all attention was the green cloth. It was not here to hide anything; it was here to espouse and reveal. It was here to burn with magical power too.

But it was not Morgana La Fay, the thought came quickly. She was too young, and the Dark Lady had been wounded by Excalibur. She had lost her youth too-

But there was one other Champion of Death who was of her bloodline, no matter how distant.

It was Alexandra Potter. But what was she doing here, coming dressed like a young Morgana La Fay?

"Heiress Alexandra Potter!" Acting Chief Warlock Tiberius Ogden called her. "This is strongly irregular! The official introductions ended one hour ago!"

"Really?" The expression was neutral, as the Champion of Death began to slowly descend the steps leading to the Lords and Ladies' seats. "I was under the impression nothing of importance had been done, given how loud the conversations were."

There was a significant amount of chuckles, to Neville's consternation.

"Why are you here?" Tiberius Ogden seemed afraid and angry at the same time, and the words were grumbled, confrontational.

"Isn't it obvious, Acting Chief Warlock? I have come to the conclusion the Wizengamot is no longer capable of being the legislative power of Magical Britain. It was already paralysed for several months before the European Magical Tournament began, and if your conversations today are any indicator, the breaking of the Statute has made everything worse."

"And what would a *child* propose to remedy to it?" Ogden replied scornfully.

Immediately, Neville knew the Acting Chief Warlock had made a colossal mistake. Yes, Potter was young. But unlike the Headmaster's friend, she had proven capable of silencing the Wizengamot by sheer overwhelming power. Something Ogden had desperately tried to do for over an hour, and failed.

Whereas right now, most of the Wizengamot was staying quiet, trying not to do anything which would have the terrifying burning green eyes turn towards them.

"I thought it was evident. We have entered a period of great political instability, and there is a clear precedent to solve it. A precedent the Wizengamot voted on in 1653, if I'm not mistaken."

Neville frowned. What by Merlin's socks was she talking about?

The Acting Chief Warlock's face became a mask of hatred, however.

"This Act was declared illegal! The Wizengamot was compelled to vote on it by the Dark Lord Cromwell!"

What? No, this had to be a joke!

Alexandra Potter laughed.

"It's funny, according to the very transcripts of this chamber, your predecessor prostrated himself before him and gave him the title of 'Dark Lord Victorious'." The humour ended. The Champion of Death's expression was truly regal and worthy of Morgana La Fay herself. "The precedent is clear. The Statute is broken beyond any possibility of repairs, and clearly you have no power and influence left. Therefore I propose the Wizengamot formally bows to the inevitable and acknowledges me as the Lady Protector of the Isles."

Neville gaped, and he wasn't the only one. Potter wanted to be acknowledged as what?

"NO!"

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Alexandra had to admit, her magical guardian's plan was a masterpiece. Dressing like the Queen of the Exchequer in her youth was just genius; and waiting one hour for the Wizengamot to tear itself apart had exactly the effects Lady Stella Zabini had anticipated.

"NO!"

There was just Tiberius Ogden to care of.

On the outside, the Acting Chief Warlock looked very much the distinguished elder Lord, down to the elegant white moustache and the impeccable robes.

It really hid well the rot hiding inside.

"No!" the man repeated when she merely stared at him. "We are not going to tolerate a Black Witch ever again! You have murdered and massacred many upstanding wizards and witches, Heiress Potter! Britain will never tolerate someone so vile in the seat of Lady Protector."

"I'm really amazed," the Basilisk Slayer replied politely, "that you, of all wizards, managed to say *that* with a straight face."

"I am nothing like you!" Tiberius Ogden snarled.

"I agree. You are far worse than I ever will be." Alexandra gave the mental command to the Changelina, and in a heartbeat, a middle-sized book with a plain brown cover appeared in her hand. "Or did you forget this?"

The effect on Tiberius Ogden was just exquisite, it had to be said. In two seconds, all defiance was gone. All the bluster and the arrogance had vanished. His face was livid, and the old wizard looked like he was going to die of fear.

Alexandra turned back, and launched an evocation it had taken her three hours to prepare.

"Gem Ir Dominion!"

This was, in many ways, the Runic ancestor of the Geminio Charm.

Wizards being fundamentally lazy creatures, the Charm had rapidly relegated the Runes to the shadows of academics once it was invented. The power to evocate the Runic combination was quite high, though, she had to admit.

But it worked.

In a flash, copies of the book she held in her right hand were summoned in front of every member of the Wizengamot.

"For those who are unaware of what this is, esteemed Lords and Ladies, this book is the first edition, published exclusively in the Republic of the Netherlands, of a political doctrine that would be later called by the book's very title." Alexandra paused, showing no sign of the triumph she felt to be here and deliver the blow. "A doctrine called *For the Greater Good*. It was written by two wizards called Gellert Grindelwald and Albus Dumbledore, edited by their friend Elphias Doge, and the recommendation, necessary to publish in the Netherlands, came from a certain Tiberius Ogden."

The Wizengamot exploded in screams of denial, thunderous vociferations, and protests that everything was a fake.

Alexandra counted up to twenty, then decided the insanity had lasted long enough.

"**Silence**," she hissed, flaring her aura and using all the dread her Hydra power gave her. "Lord Greengrass, you have the floor."

"Thank you, Lady Potter." Daphne's father had a similar mask to his daughter; unfortunately, Alexandra knew it was very much for the wrong reasons. Alas, his leadership of the Dark Conservatives made him an unavoidable Lord to ally with right now. "I'm sure you are quite aware of the magnitude of these accusations."

"Of course I am, Lord Greengrass. And I assure you, so was Albus Dumbledore and his allies. By the end of 1933 and the rise of Gellert Grindelwald in Magical Prussia, three out of four of the accomplices began to realise how awful it would be for them to be tied with an aspirant Dark Lord. They decided to burn all the copies of this book's first edition they could get their hands upon. To their pleasant surprise, while Gellert Grindelwald had continued to publish *The Greater Good* in several different languages, the second and third editions had removed all culprit's names save his. Grindelwald wanted to be recognised as the sole and only author of this hateful philosophy. Unfortunately for them, the first edition had been sold for a decade in the Netherlands. Many books were burned, but many samples remained. One was purchased by Lady Cassiopeia Black, to give an amusing example."

In turn, this had given her the opportunity to read what was inside. Alexandra had almost vomited the first time she had read it. And even though she only used it to document the criminal mentality of its authors in the months afterwards, reading the pages of this abomination always made her feel dirty and tainted by something you couldn't clean, no matter how many Cleaning Charms you used.

"I recognise Lady Dowager Longbottom."

Lady Zabini had told her to pick someone who couldn't be accused to be Dark...Neville's redoubtable grandmother definitely fit the bill.

"You recognise, girl, that you are accusing the Defeater of Grindelwald and Grindelwald himself to have been *accomplices*."

Alexandra ignored the disrespectful tone and the 'girl' appellation. If she wanted, she could incinerate the old woman in a moment. But that wasn't the goal today. No, the objective was far greater than that.

"Yes?" she feigned surprise. "I don't know why anyone would be surprised, to be honest. It's not like Dumbledore really fought during the war against Grindelwald."

"Dumbledore saved us all!" a member of the Reformists screamed.

"No, no he didn't," Alexandra disagreed, using all her aura to silence the assembly. "By the time Dumbledore decided to finally make his move, Grindelwald was trapped inside Berlin with his last followers. All the Wizarding armies of Europe were converging to put an end to his reign of terror. I am not going to pretend a single wizard would have been able to deal with him, but this wouldn't have saved the Dark Lord. He was facing odds of a thousand against one. Grindelwald's loss was only a question of days. As such, I raise the question: did Albus Dumbledore act in a disinterested way to end the career of the genocidal tyrant? Or did he try to silence his former lover and accomplice before the Dark Lord began to sing in front of a tribunal who exactly had helped him formulate his genocidal doctrine?"

If the uproar had been bad enough, it was worse now.

Most surprisingly, Tiberius Ogden had recovered and drawn his wand, thinking she was suitably distracted.

Unfortunately for him, she was not.

It was ridiculously easy to seize his wand hand and use a tiny amount of Hydra strength.

Alexandra clenched her fist.

The wand broke.

The hand holding the focus followed it in short order.

Tiberius Ogden screamed in agony, and after a second, fell unconscious.

"Let us thank the Acting Chief Warlock for proving he and his predecessor were murderous hypocrites," the Basilisk Slayer added, trying to hide her joy as much as she could. "Lady Dowager Longbottom?"

"Albus Dumbledore is not the perfect Lord of the Light many in the Wizengamot wish him to be," the old witch conceded. "That does not give you the right to replace him, especially after what you did during the Tasks of the Venice Tournament."

That was a nice argument, yes. Unfortunately for the grandmother of the Boy-Who-Lived, it had an enormous flaw.

"Lady Dowager Longbottom, your memory seems too prompt to forget that it is Albus Dumbledore who manifested a desire to organise the Tri-Wizard Tournament again. It was the Headmaster of Hogwarts and the Chief Warlock of this very Wizengamot, two high positions he happened to be enjoying for decades, that gave the go-ahead for the participation of British students. Every student of history who had read of past Tournaments would have known this was going to be a bloodbath. The Tournament was cancelled because there were too many deaths, it was not a secret to anyone. Yet Albus Dumbledore decided the competition was going to resume. Yes, Hogwarts didn't host it once the negotiations were done, but he can't wash his hands of it and pretend innocence. I participated in the carnage, but it wasn't my idea to resume the slaughter of students in the first place. And of course, the less said about how unprepared Hogwarts students were for the Tournament Tasks, the better."

Augusta Longbottom sat back. She clearly didn't like Alexandra, but it seems she liked Dumbledore even less these days. And naturally there was little she could say against the painful truth.

"Evidently, that leaves the last point, one I think certain Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot failed to mention," Alexandra continued, feeling the moment was right for the death blow. "Albus Dumbledore, deliberately and knowingly, hired the Archmage Ra as one of his assistants for the European Magical Tournament. He deliberately let the leader of a Light terrorist organisation inside the school, a powerful wizard who had been known to brainwash children in the past so that they could act as sacrificial pawns in his wars against the Dark, whether they wanted it or not."

Obviously, it wasn't over. It couldn't be over, because they were humans, and humans very often disregarded logic.

"Yes, Lord Goldstein?"

"What Albus Dumbledore did, he did for the Light!"

It would be really funny, if it hadn't threatened to annihilate Europe, or at least to kill millions with a magical plague.

"If by 'Light', you mean tyranny, unthinking obedience, bigotry, transforming everyone into a raging fanatic, eradicating all branches of sorcery that do not conform to the ideals the Archmage and Dumbledore found good, and of course purging everyone and everything that might oppose the Army of Light and the Order of the Phoenix, then yes, I suppose Albus Dumbledore did it for the Light," Alexandra replied simply.

Needless to say, the overwhelming majority of the Wizengamot looked at Lord Goldstein with expressions ranging from horrified to hatred.

Alexandra made a slight nod to her magical guardian.

About ten seconds later, the Dutch Aurors entered the Wizengamot Council Room, promptly returning Tiberius Ogden to consciousness...but not before placing magic-suppressing manacles on his wrists.

"I am the Acting Chief Warlock!"

"And the Court of Holland has waited since 1945 for you to answer their summons, Lord Ogden," the Champion of Death noted. "It seems they have a few questions to ask you about *The Greater Good* and funding some extremist authors which all ended somehow playing a part in Grindelwald's War."

The white haired-wizard ceased struggling, and let himself be dragged away, utterly defeated.

The first goal, which had been to demolish and tear apart whatever good will Dumbledore and his allies had left, was successful.

The initial plan had worked.

Unfortunately, now the difficult part began.

"Now let us return to the most important subject I raised a few minutes ago. And yes, I speak of the motion to acknowledge me as Lady Protector of the Isles."

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Daphne had never forgotten how scary Alexandra could be when she wanted to be.

Really, everyone at Hogwarts with a brain had not forgotten how the Queen of the Exiled had stood above a Basilisk's corpse and raised her sword in triumph.

But clearly, judging by dozens of terrified faces today, there were many Wizengamot members who had chosen to ignore it utterly until Alexandra entered the Council Room.

Even her father was not insensible to it, which was a pleasant surprise.

Someone cleared his throat. The Greengrass Heiress saw it was Rufus Scrimgeour, the old Auror and war-hero in charge of the DMLE.

"Yes, Director?"

Daphne was going to say it: Alexandra's magical guardian had really worked a miracle today. It was really like they were facing a young Queen of the Exchequer in person.

"No one is going to deny your exploits were impressive, Lady Potter. But many of them were accomplished in specific circumstances. The Tasks of the European Magical Tournament were, to the exception of one, limited to the arena of a Coliseum. And while saving Venice was important, it didn't save the Statute of Secrecy. I am therefore disinclined to support what could be described as an illegal usurpation of Ministry authority. You are young, and you do not have the reach to fight the current and future threats Magical Britain will be forced to confront in the next years."

There was a flicker in the majestic green eyes, but that was all.

There was no sign of anger on the regal face Alexandra was showing to the Wizengamot.

"I see. And by current threats, Director, may I suppose you include among them the Shadow Blades Coven, the group of vampires fortified in Nottingham that so far, the DMLE has failed to expel for most of a year?"

There were, needless to say, plenty of excited whispers, as always when everyone scored a decisive blow in the political arena.

"Yes," to his credit, Rufus Scrimgeour growled but did not lie. "They are a grave threat, but the Aurors and Hit-Wizards of today simply do not have the manpower to deal with them. Their Thaumaturgy gives them enough time to evacuate their lairs when we try to raid them, and the area they exert control over is sufficiently large and populated for them to hide in."

"Awful," and Alexandra clicked her fingers.

The doors of the Council Room once again opened to let two goblins enter. The two Gringotts employees' expressions could have been really funny, if they were not clearly struggling to carry a heavy object hidden by a black cloak.

Once they were mere steps away from her, Alexandra made a silent nod and wandlessly levitated the hidden object...and the cloak fell.

There were many gasps and screams.

For once, they were justified. It wasn't every day someone brought a vampire's head trapped in a block of ice.

"May I present Victor Aemillius, Lords and Ladies?" Alexandra's voice was clearly feigning boredom. "He was a former prisoner of Azkaban, and until a few hours ago, he happened to be the Chief Coven Elder of the Shadow Blades."

This time, many of the representatives of centuries-old Ancient and Most Ancient Houses simply remained frozen on their seats.

Rufus Scrimgeour was also pale and sweating a bit. Clearly, the DMLE Director had not been warned, and he had not seen *that* coming.

Still, the man was not known as one of the best Aurors of his generation for nothing. He tried to retake control of the situation.

"The decapitation of the Shadow Blades is of course of great importance, but the rest of the Coven will not take this assassination quietly-"

"My apologies, Director, I should have made it clearer: I ambushed the entire Coven a few hours ago. Along with a few associates, we decided to invite ourselves to a vampire masquerade. According to the experts who were in charge of the unpleasant duty of counting the corpses, the minimal estimation is of one hundred and seventy-eight vampires sent back to a shallow grave in a permanent manner. Two hundred and eighty-two wererats joined them in *death*."

Rufus Scrimgeour used his cane to keep a dignified stance. Daphne really didn't blame him. He knew Alexandra was dangerous, but it was one thing to know it, and another to realise that if she decided to butcher the Wizengamot, Scrimgeour would not last more than a few seconds.

"I trust the DMLE will be pleased, after proper verification, to confirm the threat posed by the Coven of the Shadow Blades has been annihilated with this bloody masquerade."

"Yes," Scrimgeour's voice was weak, but some strength returned as the surprise passed. "The DMLE will...confirm."

And just like that, many Wizengamot members began to cheer. The most important step had been done; whether they realised it or not, the Champion of Ravenclaw had given orders to the DMLE, had proved that she could do their job better than them, and she had gotten away with it.

There were still many obstacles, but-

The poor doors of the Council Room, closed after the goblin duo's entrance, opened violently again.

"There she is, Albus!"

Tiberius Ogden had not stayed prisoner of the Dutch Aurors for very long, for he was once more walking into the Council Room.

But most of the attention Daphne gave him was limited, because Ogden was only the second man in a large column of twenty-plus wizards and witches.

The Order of the Phoenix had come in strength today.

And at its head, of course, wearing outrageously shiny and unfashionable silver-pink-purple Wizarding robes was the former Supreme Mugwump, ex-Chief Warlock, and Headmaster of Hogwarts.

Albus Dumbledore, it seemed, had felt sufficiently threatened to confront Alexandra in person.

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The first thought when she saw the self-proclaimed 'Defeater of Grindelwald' advance was that she had lost her bet. She would owe Susan a Galleon, and other parties several Sickles.

But it was only a fleeting thought.

"Surprised I was willing to come and challenge you, my dear girl?"

Alexandra sighed.

"Albus Dumbledore, you really are an imbecile, even by the standards of Gryffindor idiocy."

After all these years, it was really a relief to say it out loud.

There were several chuckles coming from all sections of the assembled Lords and Ladies.

"I wanted you to come," Alexandra explained. "I baited you. I revealed some of your darkest and ugliest secrets. I ruined your reputation. I arrested your former lover. I made sure you assaulted true Dutch Aurors, which will truly guarantee your influence on the continent will not recover for centuries. And you came."

"Something you are going to regret," his wand was pointed at her heart. A wand, she was able to perceive for the first time, was truly dripping with the Power of Death. So, the rumours had been true after all. "I did warn you: I will never let a Dark Lady rise, as long as I am alive."

"Once again, you arrive after the battle is lost," Alexandra replied politely, but with a good dose of sarcasm. "Just a question, Headmaster. This policy of not letting Dark Ladies rise apparently did not apply to the rise of Dark Lords, surely? I mean, you let Grindelwald burn half of Europe. You were unable to stop Voldemort's rise and muster of a significant militia force which would be eventually known as the Death Eaters."

"Do you think making me angry will convince me to spare you?" Dumbledore asked.

"No," Alexandra shook her head. "But you really shouldn't have wasted the time you had, Headmaster. Because I'm hardly the only threat you have to face in this Council Room."

The first member of the Order of the Phoenix's head exploded as she uttered the last word.

Bellatrix Black had waited under an Invisibility Cloak until it was time to play her role, and the time to act was now.

Of course, she was not the only one to cast spells. Many Aurors had been convinced to side with her, her magical guardian had made sure of that. And of course, there were plenty of Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot who hated Dumbledore with all their hearts. The Dark Houses, to name but a few, wanted his head in their trophy rooms.

There had been more impressive magical displays in the recent past, but Alexandra was willing to admit the onslaught was still incredibly impressive.

There had been somewhere between twenty and thirty members of the Order of the Phoenix to charge with their Lord into the Council Room.

By the time the damned Phoenix of Dumbledore arrived in a pyrotechnic display to save the day, only Dumbledore and Alastor Mad-Eye Moody were left standing, and the spells cast by Bellatrix Black prevented them from saving more of their wounded allies.

"This is not over, Alexandra."

"I am victorious, Dumbledore," the Hydra Animagus took great pleasure in replying. "And by the way, I found my family Pensieve in your lover's vault. Tell Elphias Doge I have confiscated his entire fortune as punishment."

There was a last feeble explosion of light, and Dumbledore and the old retired Auror disappeared.

"Summon the Healers," Alexandra ordered. "And please send someone to find the Dutch Aurors. Mister Tiberius Ogden is here, so they must have been attacked by Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore will return!" the white-haired wizard loudly exclaimed. The Acting Chief Warlock had his legs bloodied and cursed, something that had led to him kissing the carpet once more, but his wounds were clearly non-lethal. "He will return, and you will pay for that!"

"Thirty thousand Galleons," the Champion of Death replied.

"Excuse me?"

"That's the sum you convinced House Potter to loan you in 1980, a sum you never bothered to reimburse. I'm sure you had many good laughs that with the Lord Potter in Azkaban and the daughter forced to live with her non-magical relatives, you could forget the funds had never been considered a one-sided money transfer."

For the second time today, Alexandra was satisfied she had been able to make Tiberius Ogden look like a corpse without killing him.

"The problem when Ra launched an insurrection within Gringotts, was that a lot of records that should really have been kept hidden better fell into the claws of my allies." Alexandra raised an eyebrow. "I'm told there is enough interesting reading there for *years*."

"No, please! I have a family! I have a legacy to protect!"

"Your legacy will die," the Champion of the Morrigan promised him. "Lady Black? Clearly Lord Ogden is a prisoner willing to resort to extreme measures to escape his crimes. Once you leave this room, please break his other hand, and remove his legs."

"NO! PLEASE!"

"With pleasure," the former Death Eater had never been a Champion of any Power, but the mad glint in her dark eyes told Alexandra she really could have been a Champion of Chaos in her youth, she certainly had the inclination for it.

Alexandra would be lying if she said she didn't feel any pleasure seeing the lackey of Dumbledore get dragged towards the exit, powerless and this time about to be crippled for good.

Then her green eyes turned towards the rest of the men and women Dumbledore had summoned to plunge head-first into her trap.

Five or six were already dead, Bellatrix had attacked with lethal spells, but there were many who weren't.

And among them was a very recognisable young woman with pink hair.

As the Healers went to work, Alexandra decided the plan could wait for a few minutes. And besides, it wasn't like it could hurt her reputation among all the factions of the Wizengamot, no?

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It didn't hurt like the Cruciatus, but it was bad.

Tonks was doing her best to not scream, but she was close to breaking.

Everything hurt.

And as much as her body was in agony, what she was feeling in her heart and her head was far worse.

They had waited for them.

The knowledge was filling her like a sea of poisons.

They had waited for them. They had been mouse-trapped like they were children throwing a tantrum.

This had not been a battle, this was just a spanking.

The Dark Lady had not even drawn her wand.

By itself, this would already have been enough to feel despair.

But there was worse.

When the time had come to draw their wands, everything Dumbledore had told them had been a lie. The Wizengamot Lords and Ladies had not shouted their defiance. Most had remained silent and immobile. And those who decided to act had attacked them!

They should never have come here today. They should have-

Green heels appeared in front of her, and while a couple of Healers began to work upon her, Tonks braced herself for what was coming.

"You have curious frequentations, cousin."

"Shut up and let me die in peace, Black Witch."

"It would really be a waste of your talents, cousin. And the ravens of the Morrigan have yet to arrive on your shoulders. It is not yet time for you to cross the Veil."

Oh yeah, Alexandra Potter was the Champion of Death. This was bloody terrifying and totally not reassuring.

"And what? You want me to polish your new ballroom shoes?"

"Cousin, since you all mindlessly obeyed Dumbledore and charged here without asking yourself a single time if it was a trap, I think respectfully you should seriously wonder which side is polishing the shoes of their Lord."

This time, it was definitely not the pain of her physical wounds which made the young Metamorphmagus grimace.

"No Dark Lady must sit upon the throne of Britain," she found in herself the stubbornness to resist.

She heard a loud sigh in return.

"They really brainwashed you well, I see. But don't worry, cousin."

Tonks prepared for the worst. Did Alexandra Potter, for all her young age, have a spell to transform her into a mindless slave? A Dark Curse even more powerful than the Imperius?

"I forgive you."

That-

"WHAT?" She realised too late she had shouted the word aloud. A torrent of laughter came from the Wizengamot seats.

"I forgive you." Tonks heard the amusement in the voice of the younger witch. "You are my cousin, and in better times, maybe your mother Andromeda would have been my magical guardian? Family is important, and I have no enmities against her. So yes, I forgive you."

"But you...but you..." Her head hurt, and nothing made sense anymore. "This didn't stop you from maiming Leo Black! And he was your cousin!"

"He also tried to kill me several times, including a memorable attempt which sent many of my Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff friends poisoned to the infirmary wing." Ah, she had forgotten that detail. "And at the end, he wanted to be known as Galahad. He didn't want to be part of House Black."

Tonks heard a shrug, which felt oddly distant.

"You can't-"

"Sleep, cousin. And when you wake up, think about what House Black can do for you, now that Dumbledore betrayed your trust and abandoned you to die in a trap he led you into."

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A lot of the Lords present were busy whispering as she returned to her original position.

"Now that we have dealt with the interlude proposed by the Order of the Phoenix," Alexandra told them in a voice of command, "let us speak of the necessary actions for the survival of Magical Britain."

"We could survive without the Dark in power!" Lord Goldstein snarled. His rage quickly turned to terror, however, as she began to use a wandless Charm to strangle him slowly.

"I didn't give you permission to speak, Lord Goldstein," the Champion of Death coldly informed him. "Do so again, and your House will have to find itself a new Lord. Am I clear?"

The middle-aged wizard nodded his head desperately, and Alexandra cancelled her Charm.

"As I was saying before being so rudely interrupted," Alexandra continued in her 'Morgana voice', "it is completely shameful how little has been accomplished since the Statute of Secrecy separated the magical and non-magical world. When Cromwell stood before this very assembly, the wizards and witches of this land could boast a number close to seventy-five thousand. Our non-magical neighbours had a number inferior to six million. More than three hundred years passed, and what can be seen? There are around one hundred and thirty thousand wizards and witches living in the British Isles. In the same amount of time, the population of non-magical England alone grew above forty million."

The last witch to bear the Potter name glared at the assembly.

"Does it sound to you like breaking all ties with the humans who couldn't wield magic was a good policy, my Lords and Ladies?"

And as much as Alexandra had been tempted to blame it on the Army of Light or the Exchequer, the fact was, neither Osiris nor Ra had unleashed a true war on British soil in the last three centuries. The British magicals had been far more capable of butchering each other without any guidance from more powerful patrons. They could be blamed for the prejudices against Light and Dark terrorists, but Britain wizards and witches had had a choice.

"No matter how many of them there are, we are superior! We have magic!"

Alexandra wasn't able to turn fast enough to see which idiot had decided to open his mouth, but she was certain it had come from the Light side of the Wizengamot.

"Really?" She didn't bother to hide how nonsensical she found the idea. "Let's be quite honest, my Lords. Unlike the non-magical population, the wizards and witches of these isles represent only a small fraction of the magical population. The rest, I think you will find out, you have often been busy relegating to second-class citizens; assuming you considered them citizens at all and didn't place them into small preserves after exterminating most of the population. In other words, thanks to the guidance of the Light, you have a number of magical species which dream of bathing in wizard blood if given the chance."

"That isn't true! We are-"

This time Alexandra struck without warning.

There was a big crack, and the wizard who had shouted fell dead.

The Veil shivered, and Death had its due.

"Vampires, werewolves, skinchangers in general, centaurs, and I won't bother listing them all because we would still be there tomorrow," Alexandra continued without showing a sign she had just killed someone. "Thanks to Ra, we can also praise our ancestors for the extermination of the Elder Dragons and their most powerful descendants, meaning we deliberately deprived ourselves of the services of a race which could have been our most powerful allies in case a conflict opened."

A lot of it she could only mitigate the damage, as the Shadow Blades had proven.

For all the flaws of the wizards and witches, Alexandra was one of them. But the potion she had prepared would definitely be an unpleasant-tasting one for them.

"The first step, and in many ways one which should have been absolutely done by this Wizengamot without my intervention, is to resurrect an ancient tradition of the days of pre-Statute. It is necessary to name a Royal Mage, to directly serve as liaison between the Queen and the Lady Protector of the Isles."

A large part of the Dark and the Grey showed expressions which made clear they were quite supportive of the idea. Alas, as was predictable, the Light factions were far less convinced.

"Yes, Lady Dowager Longbottom?"

"Is it really necessary?" the old witch asked bluntly, evidently not impressed by her powers or the blow she had inflicted to the Order of the Phoenix. "You could have proclaimed yourself as Queen."

"If I do that, the non-magical population is going to eat you alive," Alexandra retorted in the same tone. "You are too weak, too divided. Most of the Muggle-born students will gladly betray you for a chance at the power you've denied them for centuries. And personally, I have no intention to claim the Crown. The title is empty and the number of precedents attached to it is bigger than a mountain. I would have my hands tied the moment I took the oaths. In addition to that minor issue, I would likely have to deal with constant rebellions and insurrections against my rule."

The Champion of Death didn't say it out loud, but it went without saying that killing the troublemakers of the Wizarding World would not generate the same difficulties. By the way many Lords and Ladies paled, the silent message had been well received.

"This is why today I am going to make the Queen of non-magical Britain an offer she won't be able to refuse," the future Apprentice of Morgane Rys'Ygraine Avalon spoke in the same imperious voice. "And the deal will be sweetened by the gift of Galahad's crippled carcass. Westminster wants to judge him for all their citizens he killed, and who I am to blame them? Yes, Lord Montague?"

"Forgive me, Lady Potter, but...the non-magical government doesn't have the death penalty, unless I'm greatly mistaken?"

Of all the comments made today, this was easily the most surprising. Alexandra wasn't even aware the House of Montague had maintained ties or spied on the non-magical world. Really, the more you lived, the more you learned.

"They don't."

"Thank you for the confirmation." And the brown-haired Lord sat back satisfied.

There were plenty of whispers after that, obviously. Many had realized, apparently, that, no, Alexandra sending the mad lackey of Ra to a non-magical tribunal was certainly not an act of mercy. They would have to interrogate him, to get him out of his magical coma. They would judge him, the families of the victims would want to make sure he knew how much they hated him.

Galahad, or whatever he wanted to be known by the end, was going to live for long months. And with each hour, with each day, he would endure an extremely long agony until his body released his soul. And after that, Death would claim him.

The next person to demand permission to speak brought a smile to her lips.

"Yes, Lady Bones."

"I think I was sleeping, like everyone else during Binns' class." The remark brought general hilarity to every part of the chamber. "What are the duties of a Royal Mage?"

"That is a good question, thank you," the green-eyed witch told her girlfriend. "Before Cromwell reformed the title and not for the better, the Royal Mage was the bridge between the two societies. He or she advised the sovereign of the non-magical population, both on magical and non-magical issues. In case members of the Royal Family fell ill, it was his prerogative to negotiate the services of Healers and other specialists to intervene. When the King or the Queen desired it, the Royal Mage's duty was to faithfully present them to the Wizengamot and ensure an adequate response was taken to avoid complications of a regrettable nature."

"It sounds like a very complicated and time-consuming job," Susan remarked.

"It is, and for evident reasons, it is one that requires the skills of a consummate politician."

Susan sat back.

Alexandra breathed in, and then decided there was no reason to delay giving some of her enemies the bad news.

"For these reasons and plenty which I have not said, I intend to nominate Lady Narcissa Malfoy as the Royal Mage."

This time, even a significant amount of intimidation was not enough to stop the thunderous roar which engulfed the Council Room of the Wizengamot.

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Neville gaped for many seconds.

Again.

She had done it again.

Some part of him was willing to beat his own head against the nearest wooden object. No wonder Greengrass had been so amused when he asked if the plan was to make one of the Malfoys the new Minister of Magic.

It was unprecedented; after all, no matter how 'traditional' it supposedly was, the fact was that most of these titles had faded into oblivion in the last three centuries.

The Statute had made sure of that.

"Influence," his grandmother grumbled. "She's going to give House Malfoy the influence they always wanted."

"Can we do something?"

"Your Headmaster tried to stop her," his father's mother replied grimly. "She didn't bother drawing her wand. Does that answer your question?"

Yes, yes it did.

There were ten minutes of debate, if you could call it that. In reality, it was more Lord Greengrass, Lady Zabini, and Regent Amelia Bones voicing their support for Lady Malfoy.

The vote came immediately after.

Neville had known it was going to be bad.

His worst predictions came short of the reality. The red lights – signalling the opposition to the motion – could be counted on two hands, literally. There were only eight of them. White lights, for neutrality votes, were more numerous, but when they were counted, there were only twenty-six of them. The rest was green lights, support for the motion.

Hundreds of green lights.

Neville didn't know how high the threshold was for the motion to pass, but it was clear that unless unanimity was necessary, there was no hope left.

"Lady Narcissa Malfoy of the Most Noble House is therefore the new Royal Mage of the British Isles," Alexandra Potter announced herself. "Obviously, the nomination has to be confirmed by Her Majesty the Queen of the British Kingdom. Nevertheless, congratulations, Lady Malfoy."

"Thank you, Lady Protector," the mother of Draco Malfoy curtsied.

"You aren't our Lady Protector! There has been no vote to give you that title, and even if we did, no one would support you! One Cromwell was enough! We aren't going to support the reincarnation of Morgana la Fay!"

Plenty of whispers arrived to his ears, but most Wizengamot members waited in silence as Lord Smith had risen to challenge the Champion of Death. Lord Louth had just died for the 'crime' of interrupting Alexandra Potter, what was he thinking?

"First, Lord Smith, I can't possibly the reincarnation of Morgane Rys'Ygraine Avalon." The regal expression didn't vary one iota. "It would be very difficult, since she is still walking on this side of the Veil."

Zacharias' father froze in horror, and he was far from the only one. Neville winced internally. In hindsight, Ra and Dumbledore keeping that secret was a very serious mistake.

"I concede the second point was more accurate. There hasn't been a vote, *yet*. We are going to correct that mistake immediately."

Yeah, Potter was a Ravenclaw, and the Ravenclaws were big about regulations and procedures. Though given what had just happened with the vote to name Lady Narcissa Malfoy to the position of Royal Mage, the hope this vote would be any different was really praying for a miracle of Fate.

In the last days, Neville had not been able to find out a single instance of the Power intervening in the Light's favour. Not since Alexandra Potter had made sure his title of Champion of Fate turned to ashes and dust.

"Third," and suddenly the air burned in green lightning, "one Cromwell clearly wasn't enough, since I am forced to listen to your stupidities after giving out several warnings. I didn't give you permission to speak, Lord Smith."

There was a bright flash of emerald.

Neville closed his eyes.

When he reopened his eyes, Lord Smith, known to be one of the purist members of the Light among the Wizengamot, was gone. What had replaced him-

Neville looked away.

It was so badly burned there was no way anyone could survive that.

Bellatrix Lestrange summoned several black-cloaked wizards and witches, who evacuated the corpse and cleaned up the damage the Black Witch had caused.

"I think we have wasted enough time. Lord MacDougal, you can open the debate."

Like for the Royal Mage, the 'debate' was just a formality.

But when the voices of support stopped praising her, there wasn't a single red light to vote against Alexandra Potter.

The Dark Lady had won.

**22 February 1995, the Lady Protector's Office, Ministry of Magic, London**

In a perfect world, she would have organised a party with all her friends.

This wasn't a perfect world.

The office she had inherited from the Dark Lord Victorious had been sealed for over three centuries, with naturally all the bad effects you could imagine on the things that had been forgotten here. The Wizengamot Lords and Ladies, now that she couldn't keep her eyes upon them, had likely fled home to prepare ridiculous conspiracies that would in time blow up in their faces.

And the morning was almost over, meaning there was another critical event arriving soon. Fortunately, this one was likely going to include fewer deaths than the emergency session which had just officially ended.

"I have only a few minutes left before I have to go to the audience with her Majesty." Alexandra told the DMLE Head, who, like an old soldier, had refused the seat she had offered him. "So if you have important questions to ask, Director Scrimgeour, please ask them now."

"Very well." With his long hair flowing like a mane, Rufus Scrimgeour really looked like an old lion, though he at least didn't make the noises one would associate with a feline. "I suppose my first question is simple: do you intend to reign over the British Isles for as long as you live?"

Alexandra didn't hesitate.

"No. I intend to stay Lady Protector for ten years, the time for the current crises to be dealt with."

"Crises?" the veteran Auror raised white eyebrows. "I would have thought the breaking of the Statute and everything associated with it counted for one."

"There's Apophis too."

The Head of the DMLE flinched, which was remarkably sane on his part.

"We all thought the Battle of Venice was the end of this monster."

"Then the 'we' you speak of was in error," Alexandra replied quickly and bluntly. "Ra tried to stab us in the back again, and his brother Osiris had no choice but to sacrifice himself to give us time. The problem is that the Dark Sun, which serves as Apophis' prison, is just delaying the inevitable. We have a maximum of seven years, and probably as little as three."

"I..." the voice suddenly failed Rufus Scrimgeour for several seconds, "I see. Your request for ten years of power suddenly sounds far more reasonable."

This was not a request, and they both knew it very well.

"Yes. As far as I am concerned, the ten years to come will certainly be enough to crush the major threats and rebuild from the ruins of the Statute."

"And if you fail?" the old wizard asked politely.

"If I fail, I think I don't deserve to be Lady Protector."

For a good minute, Rufus Scrimgeour watched her like a hawk, not a lion.

Alexandra's green eyes didn't turn away.

Ultimately, the DMLE Director nodded.

"I suppose you are the best candidate we can hope for, despite technically being underage."

Someone more sarcastic and less in control would have pointed out that being underage had never prevented the monsters from targeting her.

"How many *traditional* nominations will there be in the coming days?"

"A lot," Alexandra replied honestly. "I intend to weaken the powers associated with the office of the Minister. Given all the problems Fudge created, I also think it is extremely necessary to impose a clear separation between the executive, legislative, and judicial power the authorities of Magical Britain have at their disposal."

"You realise, of course, that Cromwell did the exact contrary."

"I am aware, Director Scrimgeour. But I am not Cromwell. I am not going to enforce religious decrees and other peculiar habits like he did." Alexandra bared her teeth. "Though I suppose while he was competent enough to die in his bed and of natural causes, I would vastly prefer that when I finally leave this world, angry crowds don't immediately gather and begin to break everything I've built before desecrating my earthly possessions."

The older wizard grimaced.

"Many acts against Cromwell's corpse were done because they feared he may return."

"No," Alexandra corrected. "That's the official reason they gave for their actions, but I assure you, if they had really believed Cromwell was in a position to come back, they would never have found the audacity within their hearts to strike. Cromwell terrified them way too much."

Ironically enough, this had certainly turned the Dark Lord Victorious into one of the most successful examples the Exchequer and Dark Lords and Ladies had. Ironic, yes, because Cromwell had never been associated with the Exchequer. At the time, the Army of Light and their nemeses were busy massacring each other in India and South America.

However, Cromwell's triumph was likely one of the reasons Ra had decided to go for the nuclear option, aka the Statute of Secrecy. After all, if the non-magical population didn't immediately revolt when a Dark Lord took control of a country, then the non-magical population couldn't be trusted to side with the Light, clearly.

Alexandra breathed out.

"There will be more nominations tomorrow," the Lady Protector continued in a more serene voice. "We will begin with the Minister; thanks to Fudge's stupidity, the last months made sure the bureaucracy and the executive have been headless. It's time to change that. If you have more questions, Lady Stella Zabini will be happy to answer them; she's now my Head of the Protector's Council."

And the Slytherin Lamia was ecstatic at the idea of demolishing many of the vile and bigoted laws Fudge and Dumbledore had passed in the last decades. Some Light Lords were going to have heart attacks when they realised that no, Alexandra sending the Black Widow their way was not going to be good news for them.

"And Albus Dumbledore?"

Alexandra smiled.

"Do you know the common point smart Slytherins and Ravenclaws have, Director Scrimgeour?"

"I can't pretend I know the answer. So no, Lady Protector."

"We can be really patient, as long as we're sure we will sink our fangs into the flesh of our prey at the right place and the right time."

**22 February 1995, Regent's Park, London**

It went without saying Morag didn't resist making a proper introduction when Alexandra arrived.

"All Hail the Lady Protector of the Isles! How gloriously dark will be her reign!"

"Ha. Ha. Ha." Her friend rolled her eyes. "I'm sure you spent one hour repeating it to have the most dramatic effect."

"You can't prove it!" Morag replied with a big grin.

Alexandra huffed loudly.

"I see you changed out of your very remarkable and elegant clothes of the Wizengamot session."

"Morag, I am not going to present myself before the Queen with a green robe espousing every part of my body."

"Why by the Powers not?" Of course, the MacDougal Heiress' grin may have answered her question by itself.

Alexandra huffed again.

"You know very well why, oh mischievous Ravenclaw. There are already tens of thousands of people in front of Buckingham Palace. Clearly, the secret of this audience wasn't a secret at all. I'm not going to walk in front of a crowd with such revealing clothes. I'm not Lucrezia Sforza, thank you very much."

"Are you sure? In my opinion, the Lady Protector dost protest too much."

"I have no idea what you talk about," the Hydra Animagus replied defensively, adjusting her black cloak, which had been decorated with a silver Hydra.

"Now that's a lie. We both know that if Susan had told you to dress like that and escort her through the crowds, you would have done it."

There was no reply, which was an answer by itself, she supposed.

Alas, the reason behind the silence might not be embarrassment; Lyre de Male-Foi and Scylla Yaxley had just arrived via a long-range Portkey.

Not to be too insistent, but the two younger witches looked rather nauseous.

"That's why I told you some days ago that you are going to need teleportation lessons by Professor Alexandra Potter," a smug Ravenclaw witch with green eyes told them.

"Yes, yes, we don't have your talent with Apparition, Lady Protector," the Slytherin girl grumbled.

Alexandra raised an eyebrow, and Lyre sighed.

"You were right."

Morag of course chuckled, and Alexandra raised her eyes in the direction of the dark clouds which had decided to make this day's weather a rather capricious one.

"Please avoid remarks like that one, Morag is going to spend hours laughing that I have an inflated head, and likely overgrown ankles too."

"I would never dare," Morag lied in a pious manner.

Alexandra huffed for the third time, in likely the same amount of minutes.

"Anyway. What was I right about?"

"The usual suspects ran to Hogwarts so they could kiss the ugly shoes of Dumbledore, of course." Lyre shrugged. "We couldn't see everything because we had to stay far outside the limit of the wards, but the habit of certain wizards to wear absurdly colourful robes somewhat makes up for it."

"Dumbledore looked really, really angry," Scylla added with a vicious grin. "I think that if the hypocritical Headmaster could have killed you after what his Wizengamot followers reported, he would have."

Her friend blinked, considered it, and visibly discarded the matter as it was no big problem.

"Albus Dumbledore was my enemy long before I passed through the gates of Hogwarts for the first time," Alexandra said calmly. "Nothing has changed in that regard, Statute or no Statute. The major alteration is that I will be a priority target for him now."

"You could have duelled him in the Wizengamot Council Room," Scylla pointed out forcefully.

"I could have," Alexandra admitted. "But this would have served no purpose, assuming I was certain to win, which was far from the case."

"No purpose? This is Albus Dumbledore!"

This time, Alexandra's eyes were far more thoughtful. Morag knew her enough to recognise it immediately.

"Scylla, if you really want to sit on the Yaxley seat tomorrow, you will have to be more attentive to the things I say in the Exiled Councils I invite you to. What was the purpose of this morning?"

"To make sure the majority of the Wizengamot recognised you as the legitimate Lady Protector of Magical Britain, to delegitimize most of the opposition by the Light's power before it could wage war, and to name the Royal Mage of your choice," the girl who had been Ginny Weasley once upon a time recited dutifully.

"Exactly," Alexandra noted. "Nowhere did I mention I wanted to make Dumbledore a martyr of the Light today. And they would have made him a martyr, of that I am completely sure."

Morag hadn't a doubt about it either. Besides, Alexandra would likely have asked Lyudmila Romanov for a favour too, for a battle of that magnitude. And the battle would have destroyed the Council Room and a good part of the Ministry.

"But you couldn't be sure he would come," Lyre spoke.

"No, and I owe Susan a Galleon, the Weasley Twins two Sickles, and many other gamblers some smaller sums," the new Lady Protector grumbled. "Remind me the next time to never bet against the Gryffindor legendary impulsivity."

"Well, you threatened one of his lovers."

"Tiberius Ogden, Elphias Doge, and Gellert Grindelwald," Alexandra shook her head in what was genuine disappointment. "I am not a hypocrite. I really don't care that Albus Dumbledore loves men. But if he was to enjoy carnal relationships with other wizards, couldn't he enjoy them with people who had at least some significant ethics which didn't involve killing millions of people?"

Morag couldn't help it, Alexandra's tone was incredibly dramatic. The red-haired Ravenclaw chuckled.

"There's a reason Lust was a powerful and redoubted Power. Oh, it's Desire now, I almost forgot."

"Yes, it's Desire." Alexandra nodded. "Let's walk a bit, and Lyre, finish your report with all the funny anecdotes, I need to avoid looking stressed for the royal audience."

**22 February 1995, Buckingham Palace, London**

Once again, the moment she arrived in front of the Royal Palace, Alexandra was almost blinded by all the flashes.

Then there was the roar coming from the crowd.

Because yes, there was really a lot of men and women waiting from them.

Some of it was the security detail, of course. Say what you want of the non-magical government, but they weren't going to let the Queen and most of the key people in charge stay vulnerable to potential magical attackers once the Statute was officially broken.

But the guards – and no, she wasn't speaking of those in crimson with their comically large, furred headgear – were outnumbered almost one hundred to one by the spectators and the press.

Which explained the flashes, by the way.

Some of them even shouted for her to do a magic trick at once.

Alexandra chuckled and turned her back to them, beginning to walk towards the Palace, Lady Narcissa Malfoy to her side.

"Many are going to be disappointed, Lady Protector."

Alexandra controlled herself not to huff, because unlike with her friends, the title had not been uttered for the sake of humour.

"I know, but they will have to deal with it. I didn't come to open a circus. If I wanted to be gawked at all day, I would organise a magical performance in one of London's parks. And in all honesty, I really don't feel like it. Most of my free time is already going to be invested in politics and dealing with the messes Fudge was unable or unwilling to solve."

"A good policy," the blonde pureblood witch nodded, before changing the subject as more security personnel began to check they were exactly who they were pretending to be. "Did you come to this Palace before, per chance?"

"I'm afraid not," Alexandra answered. "I saw it from the outside several times, but some difficulties with my former guardians resulted in me not being included for the school excursions most non-magical children of my age went on. I visited the most prestigious museums of London on my own with some of my friends in the last years."

"Then it should be an interesting experience for you." A small reminder that contrary to what had been said to the Wizengamot, Alexandra had already sent the mother of Draco to Buckingham Palace yesterday to prepare the audience.

The green-eyed witch wasn't about to disagree.

After passing the various security checkpoints, they were escorted across many rooms which very much justified the word 'Palace'.

"The carpets are very nice."

"Only the carpets?"

"The chandeliers and the golden decorations aren't too bad," the Champion of Death conceded. "I fear I was a bit too spoiled by the months spent at the Scuola Regina to be overwhelmed by the atmosphere."

When you lived in a luxury villa all year, studied in what could have been the most beautiful Palace of the Venetian Renaissance, and were invited to Ca'Sforza, the standards of marvel naturally increased as a consequence.

"Understandable. Is there anything that you find important?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," Alexandra said seriously. "Unless I'm greatly mistaken, they've begun to emplace wards somewhere nearby."

The taste, so to speak, was really faint and subtle. No doubt the security detail had made sure to deactivate them long before they arrived. Alas for them, Alexandra's Hydra senses were ridiculous, even by the standards of the Wizarding World.

"And now that I know what I am looking for, I think they carved a few Runes per room. A crude but sophisticated alert system."

"They didn't waste any time," Narcissa Malfoy commented neutrally.

The rest of their 'improvised touristic visit' was spent in silence. To be fair, there were many things to admire. The stairs were not made of glass like at Ca'Sforza, but they were fairly majestic. They also were given plenty of majestic red carpets to walk upon.

The progression ended as they were introduced inside a great suite whose walls were covered in paintings. The walls were a rich yellow, and the furniture had a foundation of golden flowers on white fields.

The Queen was present, of course. So was the Prime Minister. The biggest surprise was that Cornelius Fudge was present too.

Of course, the man looked like an overripe fruit. His face wasn't purple, but it must have taken exactly that sort of colour a few minutes ago, for his face to be so red right now.

They were announced by a herald, of course.

Interestingly, her title in the man's mouth had become 'Lady Magical Protector of England, Scotland, Wales, and North Ireland, by the Grace of Her Majesty...'

Not a minute of conversation, and politics had already started in earnest.

Thus when Lady Narcissa curtsied, Alexandra stopped walking, but didn't bow.

The Prime Minister cleared his throat.

"You may not be aware of the custom, Lady Alexandra Potter, but it is the custom-"

"Mr Prime Minister, your Majesty," the Archmage Slayer began respectfully, "Death has the greatest respect for the way you discharge your mortal duties. But Her Champions do not bow so easily. I bowed before the Avatar of Darkness, for he saved my life, and his power defied imagination."

Of course, politics being politics, Lady Zabini had warned her she had to make concessions. Something about not destroying more bridges after Westminster; and yes, her magical guardian could make bad puns too.

"I acknowledge the legitimacy of the non-magical government ruling in your name, Your Majesty, and I swear on my magic I am not going to overthrow it or exert malicious influence upon it for as long as I am Lady Protector. But I do not bow."

And yes, it was a magical oath. Alexandra didn't give them often, but today, it was really necessary.

"We appreciate it." The Queen was old, but needless to say, there was nothing weak about her mental acuity. Many Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot hadn't half of the piercing gaze that was now directed at her. "However, we regret the burden of an adult fell on shoulders as young as yours. Both as a Queen and as a mother, we don't like knowing the Ministry of Magic has erred enough that child soldiers were necessary to save our kingdom."

Alexandra didn't have an answer ready, and maybe that was for the better. For a moment, acidic ideas played out on her tongue. Ra had engineered a series of wars which had always made sure Champions of the Dark had violent childhoods, and that was when they lived long enough to have one in the first place.

One could argue they were child soldiers, yes. The alternative was acknowledging they had never been given the choice to be children before war came for them.

And in the end, Alexandra decided the best policy here was not to speak at all.

"We have taken the liberty to bring to this audience the former Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge."

"Former?" Fudge gasped, clearly unable to grasp how much things had changed. "Former? I will have you know, your Majesty, only the Wizengamot-"

"Only the Wizengamot can throw you out, yes," Alexandra interrupted him. "And they did."

Fudge sneered. Alexandra had almost never seen him do so, and she had to admit, it had a lot of common points with Tiberius Ogden. All the rot behind the foolish mask could now be examined.

"Lady Narcissa, you are not going to let this nonsensical audience continue-"

Something in the new Royal Mage's eyes must have given a hint, even to someone as stupid as Fudge, that continuing on this path would end very, very badly. For him.

"The Wizengamot session today was short, your Majesty," Alexandra addressed the Queen, ignoring the blustering idiot. "But barring unexpected circumstances, the debate and the vote for a new Minister should take place tomorrow. In the days after that, this will allow Lady Malfoy, acting in her duties as Royal Mage, and the rest of the Ministry of Magic to coordinate more efficiently with the office of the Prime Minister."

"This is good news," the Prime Minister spoke. "And who is the candidate you support, Lady Protector?"

"Lady Amelia Bones," Alexandra didn't bother wasting a few seconds by pretending she was impartial in the affair. "She was the Director of Magical Law and Enforcement, the equivalent of your Minister of Interior, before Mister Fudge realised that her being incorruptible by the standards of the magical society would ensure his downfall."

"That isn't-"

"Don't interrupt, please." Alexandra commanded.

Fudge had at least a few brain cells left; he shut up.

"And you believe Lady Bones can reform the Ministry of Magic with your support to face the challenges presented by the challenging events which took place in the last weeks."

"I believe, your Majesty, that Lady Amelia Bones represents my best chance to achieve it." Alexandra gave a disgusted glance at Fudge. "All the alternative candidates have proven corrupt beyond redemption, incompetent, willing to enforce a caste social system based on blood purity, intolerant towards the men and women who don't have magic...or all four at once."

And as much as Alexandra would have wanted it to be an exaggeration, it wasn't.

"My Ministry isn't corrupt!"

You had two guesses to wonder who had chosen to open his stupid mouth, and the first one didn't count.

Alexandra breathed out before speaking again.

"Your Majesty, I have already assigned a Special Questor to investigate the bribery accusations which were directed at former Minister Fudge and his administration. Obviously, the work began only yesterday, and Mrs Umbridge is only one person."

"Obviously," the Prime Minister answered for the Queen. "I suppose it is too early to have a confirmation one way or another."

"Oh, Mister Prime Minister, I should have been more accurate with my previous declaration. We already have enough evidence to support at least ninety-seven charges of bribery, embezzlement, issuing false calls for public tenders, and more. In all likelihood, the first act of the new Minister tomorrow will be to seize all the assets ever owned by Mister Cornelius Fudge here, just to make sure we can properly investigate where some of the massive sums he stole from the Ministry went."

"And assuming at the end of the judiciary process he is found guilty, where do you intend to imprison him?" the Prime Minister asked. "Speaking as a citizen of this country, I was completely appalled that the Ministry of Magic was willing to let its prisoners be tortured by *soul-sucking demons*."

Oh for this one, Alexandra was going to throw all the previous administrations under the Magical Bus, so to speak.

"To be honest, I didn't understand why the Ministry was willing to close its eyes on the matter. There are other methods to keep criminals prisoner, and most other Ministries of Magic on the continent were furious at Minister Fudge and his predecessors for allowing these sessions of torture to continue."

Seriously, the Dementors could be killed, and it wasn't like she was the first one to achieve it in history.

"I destroyed most of Azkaban along with the Dementors, so in many ways, the matter is moot," the Champion of Death continued. "But you can rest assured that I won't allow another Azkaban to be built under my watch. I suppose the Ministry will need to build another prison, but it will be one where prisoners will be treated in a humane fashion and treated to be rehabilitated."

"We would feel more comfortable if the Crown was given custody of these criminals," the Queen said in a voice of iron.

Alexandra could hazard a good guess that recent and not-so-recent miscarriages of justice had arrived at the Prime Minister and the Queen's ears.

"In theory, it would avoid certain accusations of torture and not giving prisoners proper trials," Alexandra admitted, "but in practise, there are massive obstacles. At the risk of being blunt, your Majesty, you don't have a prison capable of stopping a skilled wizard or witch from escaping on his first day of imprisonment."

"Weren't you telling us that the Ministry of Magic shares the same problem?"

Okay, the Ravenclaw had to admit, she had asked for this one.

"The details could be discussed later," the Prime Minister went in to support his sovereign, "but we would be willing to support half of the funding necessary for this new prison in exchange for many oversight procedures."

"And to make sure your magical neighbours don't carry egregious miscarriages of justice," Alexandra said neutrally.

"Yes," the Prime Minister confirmed it earnestly. "Of all the problems many newspapers have managed to find out since the secrecy barrier fell, this one has been a ticking bomb under our feet."

This was going to cause big problems with the Wizengamot, Alexandra knew. Many Dark and Grey Houses would like it, of course: they had had many relatives sent to Azkaban in trials which were completely dishonest and unfair. The Light was going to hate it, of course, though several Houses would support it. Some Reformists had wanted to close Azkaban for decades, and on that front they had been willing to argue loudly against their nominal leader, one Albus Dumbledore.

In the end, Azkaban had been more fitting to be the citadel of a Nazgûl or Sauron himself, not a prison in the real world.

"I can't promise I will accept all the conditions your office will want me to implement," Alexandra said cautiously, "but I am willing to read your proposals. And once a new Minister of Magic is nominated," as Amelia Bones had been Head of the DMLE, her experience would be critical, "I will know what I can afford to push in front of the Wizengamot."

"We heard you killed two of this Council's members, in addition to the creation of the trap for the criminal Albus Dumbledore." If the Queen was angry or disappointed, there was no sign of it on her face.

"I didn't choose those two troublemakers randomly," Alexandra sighed inside her mind. "And no matter how much I terrify several members of the so-called 'Light factions', I still need a clear majority in the Wizengamot to enforce reforms and new laws. At the moment, I have plenty of supporters among the Grey and Dark ones, going from the Moderates to the Traditionalists. It is a numerous and powerful coalition of different ideologies."

And she intended to increase its strength in due time. Scylla was to officially make her debut tomorrow; it should have been today, but there had been delays. And there were more measures that should solidify the alliance of the factions into a proper power block.

"But no matter how powerful I am, there are still limits. I can duel a majority of them victoriously. I can't convince tens of thousands of wizards and witches to support me if they are forced to swallow insults and the destruction of everything they value."

At some point, there had to be constraints and boundaries.

Otherwise, she would really be no better than Albus Dumbledore, who had held several important positions since 1945 and never shown an inclination to relinquish them unless he was forced to.

"We understand, and we are willing to watch for now, as long as the reports coming from our Royal Mage are sufficiently documented."

It was a relief, but there was a 'for now' that Alexandra would have preferred there not to be.

"Now that these subjects have been answered to our satisfaction, we would like to have your personal recount on the events which changed the world at Venice."

**Author's note**: For the record, barging into a Wizengamot meeting when you don't have any idea of what your political opponents have prepared is a very, very bad idea. Just saying.

For the very first time since Cromwell, the Dark has really scored a powerful victory. Of course, with the Statute over, the question remains if they can consolidate it and keep it in the long-term...

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